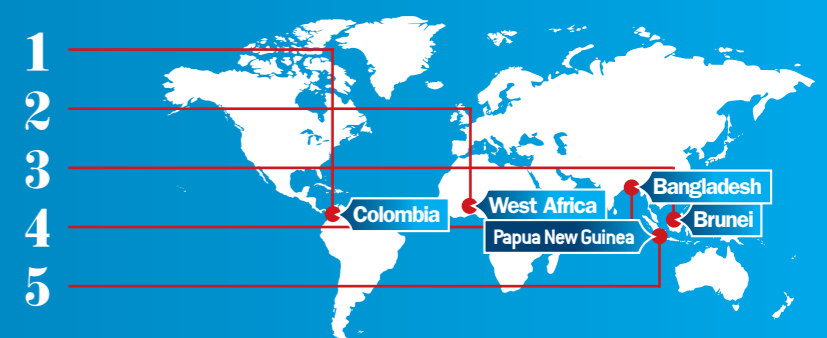




Here's our pick of the best trips we can find. These five fantastic choices will give you plenty of inspiration for your next adventure. Get amongst it!



1 Cartagena and the Carnival – Travel the Unknown

WHAT: From violent to vibrant, former drug baron Pablo Escobar's stomping ground is loaded with colour, culture, crazy-Colombian (locumbian) charisma and cracking good times. Discover the cosmopolitan city of Bogota before heading to the country's crown jewel, Cartagena. Be blown away by colonial architecture then crank up the heat at the highlight—Carnaval de Barranquilla. Gyrate your hips to pulsating rhythms; be intoxicated by the beauties of Barranquilla (where Shakira hails from). Spend the next day recuperating in a mud volcano.

WHERE: The once renowned cocaine capital of the world, Colombia. Shake your booty from Bogota to party towns

Cartagena and Barranquilla on the Caribbean coast.

WHEN: Check for dates of this seven-day extravaganza, but carnival kicks off four days before Ash Wednesday: 5-8 March 2011.

WHY: Colombia's rep for danger, drug deals and down-right dirty play is flawed. Yes, the country was the headquarters for copious drug cartels and kidnap-happy guerrillas, but bad press has failed to mention its remarkable turnaround. Imagine sweating it up with all those hot, friendly and sexy bodies! This top traveller destination will spread quicker than rifle fire – it'd be a crime not to get lost there.

HOW: Travel the Unknown for about A\$1912. Better yet, grab four or more of your mates and get 5 per cent off. www.traveltheunknown.com



2 The Voodoo Trail – GAP Adventures

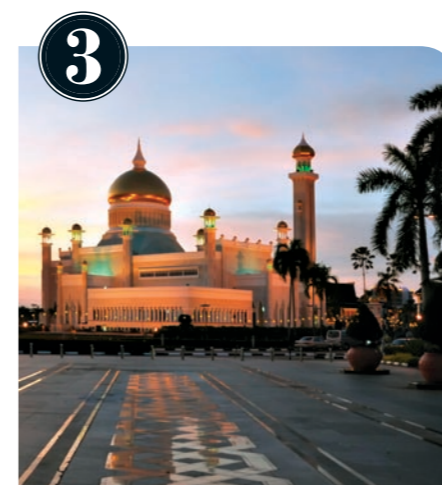
WHAT: Start with magical potions at the fetish markets of Lome, Togo's capital. Then brave the Kpalime region, where you'll invoke the voodoo spirit witnessing dances, trances and possession. Then cross the border into remote Benin and meet the King of Guen. Tour the regions around Banfora, and dice with death at a dramatic Bwa Mask celebration before wrapping up at Ouagadougou.

WHERE: Where very few travellers venture – the secluded villages and towns of Benin, Burkina Faso and Togo in West Africa.

WHEN: These sixteen-day tours run every month. Next one starts 25 September 2010.

WHY: This is an awe-inspiring experience with some of the most authentic cultural interaction going. You'll get the inside know-how on sacrifices, private rituals, and everything 'black magic'. Understanding the complex and rich religious beliefs that give meaning and order to these people's lives guarantees you insider bragging rights.

HOW: This trip from Gap Adventures goes for A\$3509. www.gapadventures.com.au



3 Brunei Unveiled – Kumuka Tours

WHAT: Marvel at golden-domed mosques and sprawling slit villages in Bandar Seri Begawan. Zip to Ulu Temburong National Park for a canopy walk, where you'll spot hornbills and listen to gibbons calling across the treetops. Trek to Sg Apan waterfall for a dip, then head back to the city for a cruise through the mangroves in search of wild Proboscis monkeys. Rest up by the South China Sea with some unique Teh Tarik tea.

WHERE: The tiny Islamic sultanate of Brunei, located between Sabah and Sarawak in Borneo, Malaysia.

WHEN: This is a seven-day trip that runs regularly each month. Check Kumuka's website for dates.

WHY: One of Asia's best kept secrets. Most foreigners skip through on route to Europe. This speck of a country is blessed with underground riches, and above ground it boasts the most pristine rainforest in all of Borneo. It's not a mini Dubai. Rather, a fusion of majestic opulence and quaint charm that quietly sucks you in.

HOW: Kumuka Tours have a special offer for A\$1598, saving A\$177. www.kumukatours.com.au



4 Bangladesh Explore – Best of Asia Overland

WHAT: From tiger spotting in the wild mangrove swamps of Sundarbans, to tea-sipping and tribal dances in Srimangal. Get friendly with the most warm-hearted people you'll ever meet as you explore boisterous markets and long-forgotten relics from Buddhist kingdoms and Hindu temples. After the sweeping beaches of Cox's Bazar and the mind-blowing archaeological sites of Bogra, you'll sit back in a comfy chair taking in the neon-pink sky as you roll through the finish line in Dhaka.

WHERE: Top to bottom Bangladesh, starting in Kolkata, India.

WHEN: This sixteen-day overland adventure departs on 31 October 2010.

WHY: Get well and truly off track in a style that few tours offer. BOA is based in Kathmandu and specially built all-terrain trucks come equipped with camera charging points and kitchens. And if that's not enough, you could win a free trip in 2010. (See BOA's website for details.)

HOW: Get this Best of Asia Overland journey for approximately A\$1440 for a twin share/double, including A\$380 kitty that covers local expenses. www.boa-overland.com



5 Alotau Canoe and Kundu Festival – Trans Niugini Tours

WHAT: Kick off in Gurney amid tiny atolls, coral reefs, volcanic islands, swaying palms and white beaches. Glimpse into PNG's history at the little-known Canoe and Kundu Festival – a vibrant showcase of war canoes and beating drums. Skip to the Tari Valley where you'll be awestruck by dense tropical jungle and jagged limestone peaks. Wake up to the chattering of Lorikeets and Eclectus Parrots in Karawari, before learning the customs of the mysterious Melpa tribe.

WHERE: The stunning highlands and Sepik areas of eastern Papua New Guinea.

WHEN: An eleven-day tour running 5-15 November 2010.

WHY: With limited tourism infrastructure, travelling in PNG can feel like you're stepping into the great unknown. Numerous cultures and the country's striking natural beauty provide fascinating DIY-travel experiences. Better yet, this is an unescorted tour meaning you're met by a local guide at each point, but you still have the flexibility and freedom that independent travel is all about.

HOW: Go with Trans Niugini Tours from A\$4832. www.pngtours.com