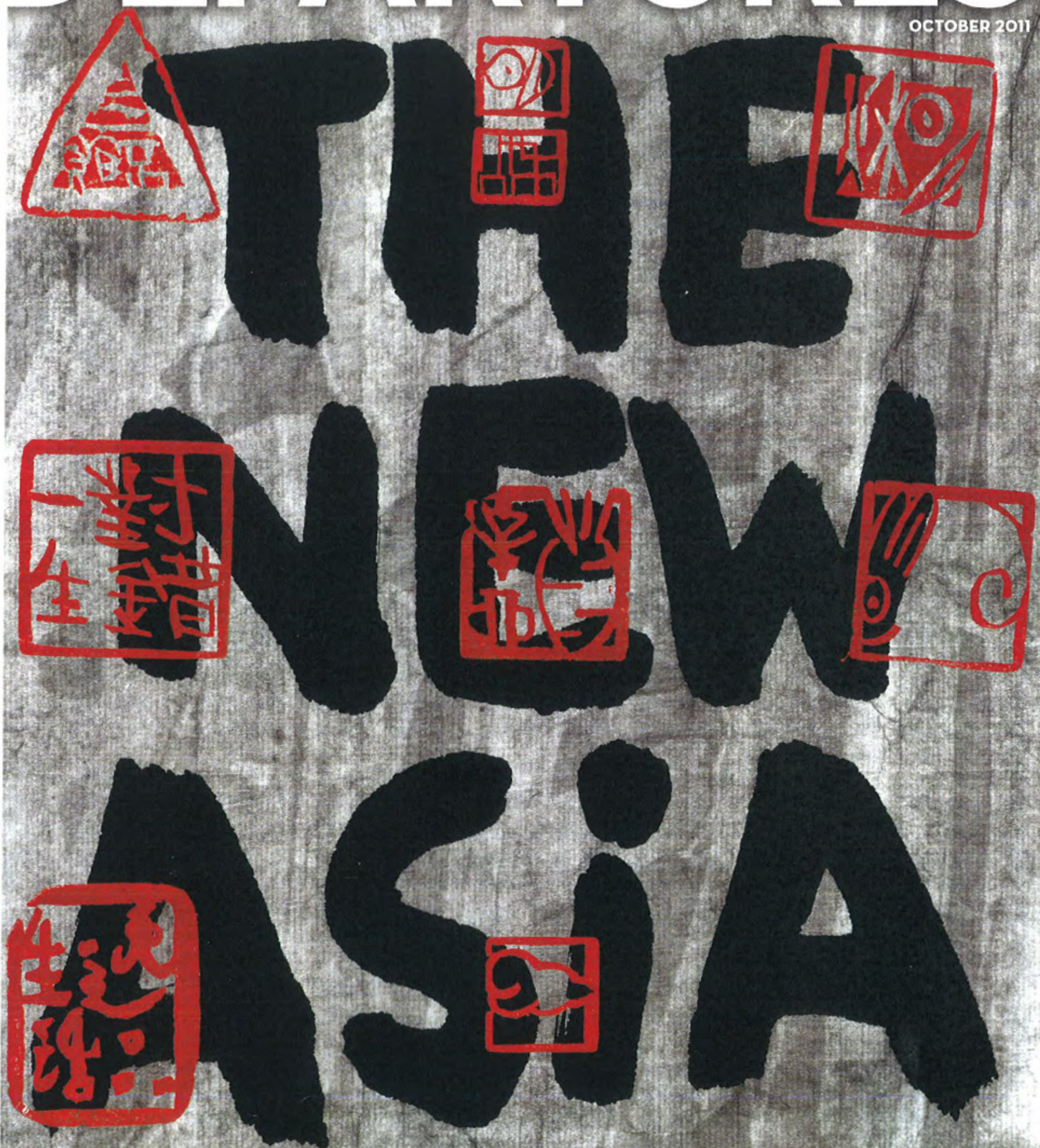


DEPARTURES

OCTOBER 2011



Special
Tear-out
Section

THE *INSIDER'S* GUIDE

ASIA MAP | ITINERARIES | CRUISING | FLIGHTS | TRAVEL HEALTH





- Bangkok -

BROWN + HUDSON

For the open-minded and curious, this outfitter delivers an itinerary that is far from humdrum.

The day we first spoke to **Philippe Brown**, founder of London-based Brown + Hudson, about creating an itinerary for our quick three-day stopover in Bangkok, he had just returned from Afghanistan, one of the many countries in the Middle East, Europe, South America, Asia, Africa and Australasia his company covers. Before setting out on his own, Brown worked with outfitters like Canada's Butterfield & Robinson, creating logistically complex biking and walking trips that have made him uniquely skilled at crafting meticulously detailed itineraries and delivering them personally. Though most would not retain Brown + Hudson for just a three-day jaunt (it specializes in longer, bigger excursions), we found its ability to deliver a truly bespoke experience enlightening and culturally insightful in a city that has become clichéd with *The Hangover Part II* scenarios. "We don't restrict ourselves to the standard menu of touristic things to do," says Brown. "We dig like truffle pigs and present an itinerary that meets each individual's needs, wishes, desires, expectations."

Our own discovery of Bangkok had us avoiding the check-listed Wat Pho temple, filled with people jockeying for a photo in front of the reclining Buddha, and heading instead to Wat Rajabophit Sathit Maha Simaram, a royal temple restored by Thailand's fifth king and where the seventh king is buried. Here we sat with two monks who explained why they chose to wear the orange robes and then led us into the Ordination Hall, not open to the public, to see where ordinary people are inducted. We received a by-appointment-only tour with the curator of one of Bangkok's most important private art collections and visited with locals living in the slums of Klong Toey who have established a philanthropic initiative called Helping Hands. Over those three days, Brown + Hudson proved exemplary in staying flexible and seamlessly fulfilling last minute, out-of-the-ordinary requests. Prices based on itinerary and customization; 44-203/358-0110; brownandhudson.com.

—DEBORAH FRANK

- Cruising -

SAIL AWAY, SAIL AWAY

Five Asia itineraries that cater to the sailing specialist as well as the cruise tyro.

Starting in Bangkok and ending 25 days later in Beijing, **OCEANIA CRUISES'** Imperial Interludes winds its way across the China Sea—both the South and East—to the Yellow Sea. It's a perfect Pan-Asian tour, with generous two-day stops at Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, Hong Kong and Shanghai. Trip starts at \$6,000; departs February 28; oceaniacruises.com.

From pagodas to skyscrapers, **CRYSTAL CRUISES'** 16-day Temples and Dynasties tour, aboard the 1,070-passenger Crystal Serenity, visits ports both large—it starts in Singapore and ends in Hong Kong, with stops in Ho Chi Minh City and Bangkok—and small. A call in Chan May, Vietnam, offers exploration of Hue, the country's beautiful dynastic capital. Trip starts at \$12,060; departs February 26; crystalcruises.com.

CELEBRITY CRUISES plies Southeast Asia's old trade routes in two late-year itineraries. Aboard the Celebrity Millennium, the 2,034-guest ship that will be dry-docked in early 2012 for a massive renovation, passengers can start in Singapore and head north to Hong Kong or catch the southbound cruise. Both itineraries stop in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. Trips start at \$1,600; depart in December; celebritycruises.com.

From Asia to the antipodes, **REGENT SEVEN SEAS CRUISES** offers a 17-night journey starting in Singapore, skimming Bali, then curving across the Timor Sea to Australia's eastern coast. The voyage—aboard the appropriately named all-suite ship Voyager—ends in Sydney, with equal time devoted to both continents' destinations. Trip starts at \$11,300; departs January 6; rss.com.

For those who prefer their journeys directed by sports, **AZAMARA CLUB CRUISES** offers golf-centric trips that jump from green to green across Asia. But even its non-putting itineraries, like a late-2012 jaunt from Singapore to Hong Kong, offer plenty of time to find fairways in Bangkok (three nights) and Ho Chi Minh City (another three). Trips start at \$4,000; departs December 23; azamaracruises.com.

