

## SOUTHEAST ASIA

*Spend time with Sea Gypsies living on the ocean and be heli-dropped into a dense forest to discover a little-known village.*

Avoiding paths that have been most likely well-trodden by Lonely Planet authors, backpackers, locals, or the mass of Asian travelers, London-based **Brown + Hudson** ([brownandhudson.com](http://brownandhudson.com)) makes it a point with every itinerary it creates to visit the nonobvious—the unknown, formerly uninteresting or under-invested places. “There are a gazillion off-the-beaten-path places in Asia,” says Philippe Brown, founder of the super-bespoke travel consultancy, “but their narratives have yet to be written.”

To create that narrative, Brown starts with the clients: “How they travel, what they get from it, how they prepare mentally, how they can better experience places, and how to make memories last longer, to name but a few.” As such, Brown + Hudson does not have any Asia packages or “product” to talk about, and its website will not yield many insights to detailed itineraries. “Being true to bespoke,” explains Brown, “all we have are ideas.” And those ideas are unlike any others.

To spend time with the people of Kirirom National Park in the south of Thailand, for example, Brown + Hudson will heli-drop or motorcycle clients into the dense forest where superhuman locals scale 100-foot cluster bean trees, unassisted, to fetch the prized bean stalks and send them hurtling down to the forest floor on long ropes. The outfitter will construct a temporary village home out of canvas and netting with plumbing and heating for clients to stay in and then invite villagers to attend “a good old-fashioned party that only Thailand can throw: slay a few pigs, cook up a feast, and in the morning see this death-defying



agro-art rarely witnessed by outsiders,” says Brown.

If something more cerebral and philanthropic is desired, time with a Vietnamese thought leader like Chuck Searcy can be put on the agenda. Searcy is a leader in demining and unexploded ordnance (UXO) removal. “He has a long-term partnership with fashion brand Tom’s Shoes to distribute shoes to needy people in Quang Tri, the province along the DMZ. Quang Tri has the largest UXO problem anywhere in Vietnam,” explains Brown.

It’s this rapport that Brown + Hudson creates between its clients and the people of the countries they visit that makes their trips truly unique and bespoke. “These days we seem to involve fewer and fewer ‘travel people’ in the journeys we create,” says Brown. “Meeting experts, authors, architects, expats, journalists, artists, or NGO workers is much more interesting and memorable. It tends to be a meeting of equals.” >

—Deborah Frank

