

Time Out

Beijing

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Tony Leung on movies,
magic and revenge

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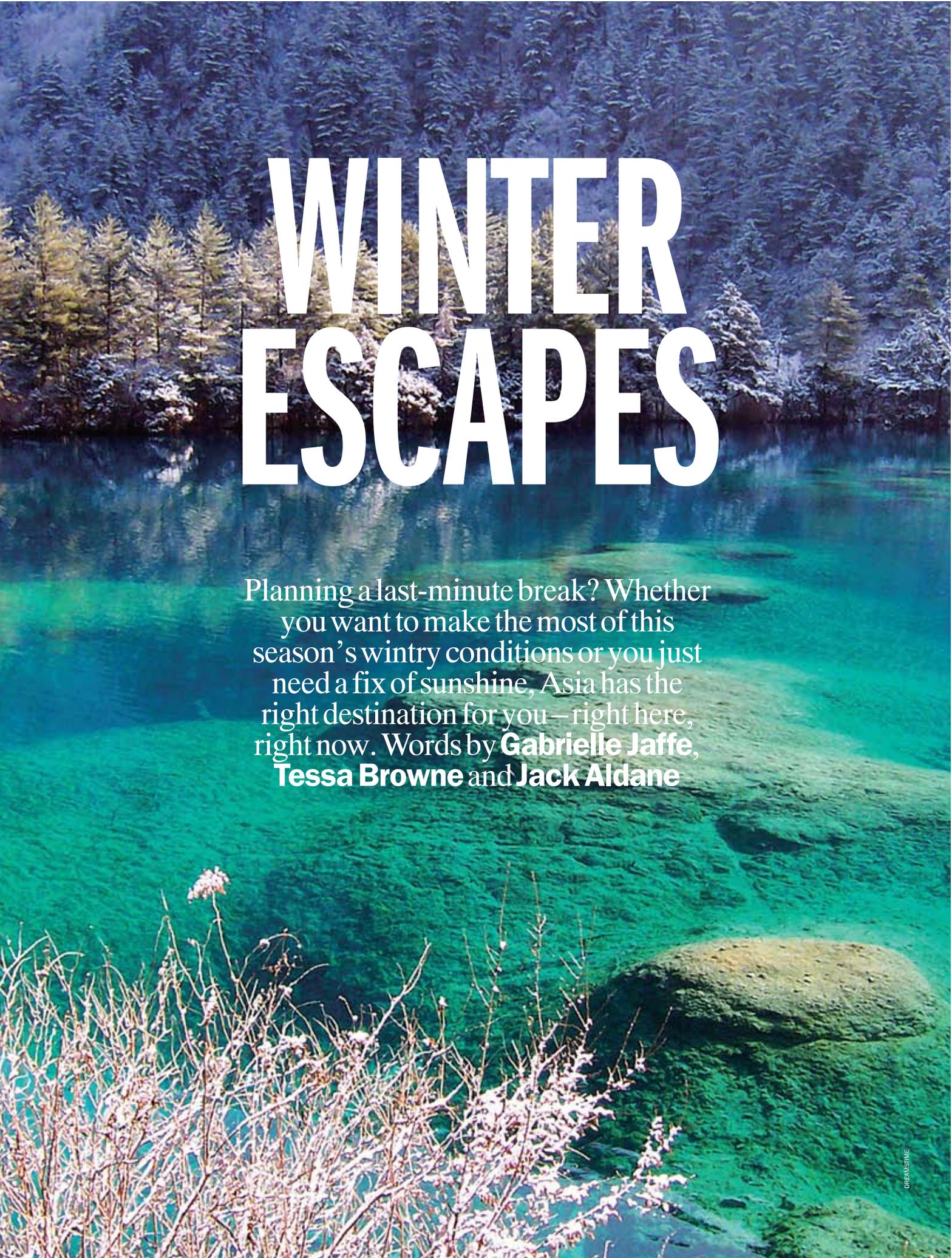
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WINTER ESCAPES

Planning a last-minute break? Whether you want to make the most of this season's wintry conditions or you just need a fix of sunshine, Asia has the right destination for you – right here, right now. Words by **Gabrielle Jaffe**, **Tessa Browne** and **Jack Aldane**



Chilling out Top: Tangalle's coast; bottom: sunset in Con Dao; opposite page: Jiuzhaigou National Park

Where to stay Ganesh Garden offers individual cabanas right on Tangalle's Marakolliya beach from 125RMB per night. The staff can organise fishing, boating, snorkelling and turtle-watching trips. Or, for luxury in a historic setting, try Maya Villas. This tasteful conversion of a 110-year-old property, a short distance inland from Tangalle, is set in two acres of lush gardens. With a top chef who'll prepare picnics, yoga instructors on demand, sports facilities and a 20m swimming pool, this retreat is sure to help you unwind. Until February 28, Maya Villas is offering *Time Out* readers a 50 per cent discount on third night bookings (regular double-room rate from 1,750RMB per night). To take advantage of this offer, email mayatangalle@gmail.com, quoting 'Time Out Beijing' in the subject line.

Hainan, China

Why go? China's only tropical island is blessed with around 300 days of sunshine a year and average temperatures that, even in January, only drop to 21°C. It's on the same latitude as Hawaii and boasts a similarly idyllic, sandy coastline, lush forests and warm waters. With direct flights from Beijing and no need to worry about additional visas, it's no wonder so many Beijingers escape here during winter. Although around 26 million travellers visit the island every year, you can still find secluded spots – the island is the size of Belgium, after all.

How to get there There are around a dozen flights daily from Beijing to Sanya Airport (in the south of the island) and almost as many to Haikou Airport (in the north). Air China, Hainan Airlines and China Southern all operate on the island and offer return flights from Beijing from 3,110RMB. Alternatively, consider the 35-hour train to Sanya from Beijing West Station (hard sleepers from 1,450RMB return).

Where to stay If you can afford it, the new St Regis Sanya offers access to Yalong Bay's upscale beaches, which are less crowded than Sanya's main stretch. The hotel also features a tennis court, swimming pools, a spa and its own private yacht club. Until March 31, you can enjoy three nights for the price of two, with limousine airport transfer and a free daily lunch or dinner. Add an extra night for a free daily, hour-long spa treatment (to book, select 'Debut Offer' at www.tiny.cc/sanya; two nights for two people in a double costs 5,068RMB including service charge and taxes). Or you can find bike rental, clean rooms and 24-hour hot water and A/C at Sanya Raintree Hostel (dorm beds 40RMB per night; privates from 168RMB). The owner organises outings to places most tourists don't see, including the island's mountainous interior and surf trips to secluded beaches.

Con Dao Islands, Vietnam

Why go? Perhaps Vietnam's best-kept secret, this tropical archipelago is all turquoise waters, empty beaches and lush inland forests dotted with purple bougainvillea trees. It's the kind of place where you can sit back on the veranda of a French colonial-era mansion, enjoying a *banh mi* sandwich while looking out at the sunset across the bay. Mercifully, the islands have managed to escape the onslaught of *Lonely Planet*-wielding backpackers and motorcycle-mad mainland Vietnamese. Nature-lovers will also like that more than 80 per cent of Con Dao is preserved as a marine and national park.

How to get there Flights from Beijing to Ho Chi Minh City take around five hours and cost from 4,095RMB return with Air China or Vietnam Airlines. Flights from Ho Chi Minh City to Con Dao take 45 minutes, cost 755RMB for return tickets and run three times daily with Vietnam Airlines.

Where to stay Accommodation options on Con Dao are few and, as a result, happily secluded. Con Dao Seatravel Resort has 12 basic but clean bungalows set on its own private beach. Rooms cost from 380RMB, including breakfast and airport pick-up. The only high-end option on the archipelago is the five-star Six Senses resort. And high-end it most certainly is: each of its 50 villas has its own bathroom, living room and private infinity pool – all open-air – while the resort itself offers guests the chance to dive, enjoy watersports, take a boat out to nearby uninhabited

“Tangalle is one of the world's best places to spot blue whales”



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islets, and indulge in a spa treatment or cookery lessons. The resort can also organise barbecues in your villa or a romantic picnic on a secluded beach. For stays booked before March 31, *Time Out* readers can enjoy a 25 per cent discount (one-bedroom, 194sqm villas start at 4,515RMB per night including discount). To take advantage of this, mention the *Time Out* offer when emailing dos-condao@sixsenses.com.

Southern coast, Sri Lanka

Why go? If row upon row of sun loungers and parasols is your idea of beach hell, make your way to the wild, untamed shores of southern Sri Lanka. The entire coastline is made up of seemingly endless bays, interrupted only by wind-bent palms, but the town of Tangalle and its environs make a particularly good base. This area is one of the world's best places to spot blue whales, sperm whales and spinner dolphins and, on nearby Rekawa beach, you can go on a night safari to see marine turtles nesting.

Tangalle is also located less than two hours from both the wild elephants in Udawalawe National Park and the historic fort town of Galle, which holds a literary festival every January.

How to get there Emirates flies daily from Beijing to Colombo, via Dubai, from 3,965RMB return. Tangalle is about a five-and-a-half-hour drive from Colombo International Airport. Alternatively, bus No 32 can be taken from the Pettah Bus stand in central Colombo. The journey by bus from here will take at least six hours.



Cold comfort Top: natural wonders at Jiuzhaigou National Park; below: the moon rises over Jade Dragon Snow Mountain

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Jiuzhaigou National Park, Sichuan, China

Why go? With its fairytale landscape of pine forests, perennially snow-lashed mountains and lakes so blue you'd swear they'd been Photoshopped, it's no wonder that Jiuzhaigou National Park in Western Sichuan attracts 2.5 million tourists each year. Visit in January or February and you'll have to wrap up warm (average temperatures fall below 0°C). But you'll be rewarded with cheaper accommodation, fewer crowded trails and the Narnia-like sight of frozen waterfalls, their droplets suspended in mid-air.

How to get there Air China, Sichuan Airlines and Hainan Airlines all fly from Beijing to Jiuzhai Huanglong Airport via Chengdu, from 3,770RMB return. The park is a two-hour drive from there. Alternatively, buses depart from Chengdu daily and take around 12 hours. Bursts of heavy snowfall can affect roads and flights, so prepare to be flexible with your travel times.

Where to stay Try a home-stay with a Tibetan family at Zhuo Ma's; 175RMB per night gets you a private room with a shared bathroom, and breakfast, lunch and dinner with the family. You can also learn to cook hearty Tibetan fare with the owner's brother. Or, if you've got money to burn, the Sheraton is one of a select few top international hotels in the area. It's just under a mile from the park entrance, features a sauna and spa to warm you up after a day spent outside, and is offering a

special winter package, including a two-night stay with breakfast, airport pick-up and one complimentary dinner for 920RMB per person (1,150RMB during the Spring Festival period) until March 31. To book, see www.sheraton.com.

Hakuba, Japan

Why go? It was the base for the 1998 Winter Olympics and offers access to several world-class ski resorts, but the town of Hakuba still has a charming, village feel to it. With only a few restaurants and bars, the focus is on breathtaking scenery rather than the après-ski, but there are always the Japanese *onsen* hot springs for post-slope fun. Sure, there's better powder to be had on Japan's Hokkaido island, but Hakuba is easier and cheaper to get to from Tokyo's Narita and Haneda airports.

How to get there Round-trip tickets from Beijing to Tokyo Narita Airport with Air China cost from 3,091RMB; return tickets to Tokyo Haneda cost from 3,047RMB. You can take a prebooked Chuo Taxi from both Narita (980RMB) and Haneda (900RMB) straight to Hakuba; it takes around six hours.

Where to stay K's House is a small chain of cosy and clean hostels in Japan. At the Hakuba branch, you'll find dorms (beds from 240RMB per night); private, Western-style, twin en suite rooms (655RMB); and private en suite Japanese-style *tatami* rooms (890RMB), plus access to a communal



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lounge, a well-equipped kitchen and Wi-Fi. They also provide a free pick-up service from Hakuba's Kamishiro train station and Hakuba Goryu bus station. Alternatively, pay 1,020RMB per night at Bears Den Mountain Lodge for an en suite twin room with under-floor heating. As the lodge is situated just 300 metres from the Goryu lifts, you can ski right up to the front door before soaking in the open-air hot tub and enjoying views of the surrounding mountains.

Jade Dragon Snow Mountain and Lijiang, Yunnan, China

Why go? Jade Dragon Snow Mountain is actually a mini range of several peaks that make for a dramatic vista when seen from the nearby town of Lijiang. But, rising all the way up to 5,596m, the mountains themselves offer even more impressive views should you dare to ascend them. Few of the thousands that visit the Unesco-listed Lijiang in winter do; taking the cable car up to the highest viewing deck at 4,506m in temperatures of -20°C is too much for some. Should you rise to it, you'll see not only the spectacular countryside below, but also the twinkling blue delights of Jade Dragon's glaciers. Plus, there's some decent hot chocolate at the summit's café, too.

How to get there Air China, Chengdu Airlines, China Eastern and China Southern fly from Beijing to Lijiang via Kunming or Chengdu from 2,555RMB. Alternatively, trains and buses from Kunming depart several times a day; both take around eight to nine hours. Once in Lijiang, the No 7 bus will take you from Hongtaiyang Square to Jade Dragon Snow Mountain. But do beware of fake 'No 7s'!

Where to stay Lijiang has more hotels and hostels than you can shake your backpack at. But if you're looking for a little quiet, bed down at Nguluko Guesthouse in Yuhu village (100RMB per night), by Jade Lake, at the foot of the mountain. This charming place is run by a woman called Lushan, who is also a conservationist and can tell you lots about the area's wildlife. To book, call 0888 139 8883 8431 or email lushanhe@gmail.com. Elsewhere, the Banyan Tree Lijiang Resort (actually set a few kilometres outside Lijiang, in open farmland) offers yoga lessons, fine views of the mountains and private outdoor Jacuzzis for the villa rooms (suites from 1,840RMB per night, or 1,656RMB if you book two weeks in advance).

All plane fares are inclusive of taxes.