



# Walk in Asia

Crossing the streets and walking on sidewalks in Southeast Asia can be tricky, sometimes even treacherous, for newcomers. Here are some hacks to become a 'street-smart' pedestrian

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**T**raffic conditions when you travel are never the same as those at home. Letting a taxi or *tuk-tuk* drive you around is ideal, and so is relying on your feet. But walking the streets of Asia is not as simple as putting one foot in front of the other – it can be a calculated move, depending on where you are.

### HOW TO CROSS THE ROAD

Most travellers have heard stories about tourists navigating Vietnam's capital, Hanoi. Newcomers congregate at corners of busy intersections, waiting for

breaks in traffic so they can cross the street; those breaks never come. After nervously watching endless streams of cyclos and motorcycles, the brave ones finally make it to the other side by shadowing a local crossing the street.

With lanes and rules often ignored, Asia's traffic may seem chaotic to you. The key is to be consistent wherever you walk. Cross streets at a steady pace. Don't run. Don't stop. Don't turn back. Be confident and don't hesitate. Drivers will simply

weave around you as if you are a rock in a swiftly moving stream of water.

### EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

Stay on sidewalks, assuming they exist. But you will also need to circumnavigate parked motorcycles, signs advertising excursions, food carts with lines of hungry customers, and fellow tourists hogging the sidewalk. When you do, don't forget the most important rule of walking in Asia: never step off a curb without triple checking that it is safe.

Particularly in Cambodia, where drivers of two-wheeled vehicles like to create an extra lane next to the curb, usually going the opposite direction of traffic on that side of the street.

### BEWARE OF OTHER HAZARDS

● Rain gutters – often uncovered – line the streets of many cities, such as Malaysia's Georgetown. Sidewalks are popular for motorcycle parking; you're often forced to walk on the road. Exercise caution to make sure you don't step into a water-filled ditch two feet below street level.

● Be especially careful when walking in the evenings, as streetlights may be non-existent. I once took an evening stroll along the river in Siem Reap, Cambodia after a day exploring the Angkor temples. In the dim light, I almost didn't notice that the sidewalk ended in a 10-foot drop into the river. The car bridge didn't extend to the sidewalk, and there was no light, sign or barrier preventing unobservant pedestrians from a serious fall.

● In tourist areas, most dogs will ignore you. But you'll be of great interest to monkeys who know that tourists often carry food in their bags and pockets, and they'll



jump on you to steal it. The worst offenders are in Bali's Sacred Monkey Forest Sanctuary.

### NOT JUST ABOUT SAFETY

● A major sidewalk obstacle is street touts soliciting your tour, hotel and restaurant business. They can be annoying and will likely overcharge you. To show you're not interested, don't worry about being rude, just keep walking and don't make eye contact.

● You can also protect others when walking. Yield the way to

monks; it shows respect. Women in particular should be cautious to never touch a monk's robes. Keep arm-swinging to a minimum in crowded markets.

● Don't forget that local people are trying to go about their business while crowds of tourists are leisurely shopping and snapping photos. Be mindful of others around you. Leave room on the sidewalk for people to pass you. If you must stop for a photo or to check your phone, step to the side to avoid creating a pedestrian traffic jam.



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