

# Beating the heat with 'coolcations'

Asian holidaymakers seek out new destinations as global temperatures rise

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**CHENNAI, India** As temperatures rise across the globe, driven by climate change and global warming, many Asian travelers are deserting beaches and tropical islands for vacations in cooler locations from Scandinavia to Vietnam.

Data from Google Trends shows a 100% global increase in the search term "cooler holidays" over the 12 months to May 8. Booking.com, a travel website, also says that 2024 will be a year of travel to cooler climates, while the U.S.-based luxury travel network Virtuoso notes that 82% of its customers are considering cooler destinations this year.

Dubbed "coolcations" in the travel industry, this new trend means taking a vacation that avoids suffocating heat. Instead of heading to the beaches of Thailand or Bali, many tourists are traveling to places such as Alaska, Norway and Canada -- all of which also provide a more exotic travel experience for Asian travelers, including opportunities for trying new activities such as sledging, skiing or whale watching. Closer to home, Thais are among Southeast Asians who have flocked to Japan's mountains on the northern island of Hokkaido.

Anita Das, an advertising professional in the Indian city of Bengaluru, took a trip to see the northern lights in Norway last year with her family and calls it the trip of a lifetime. "Staying



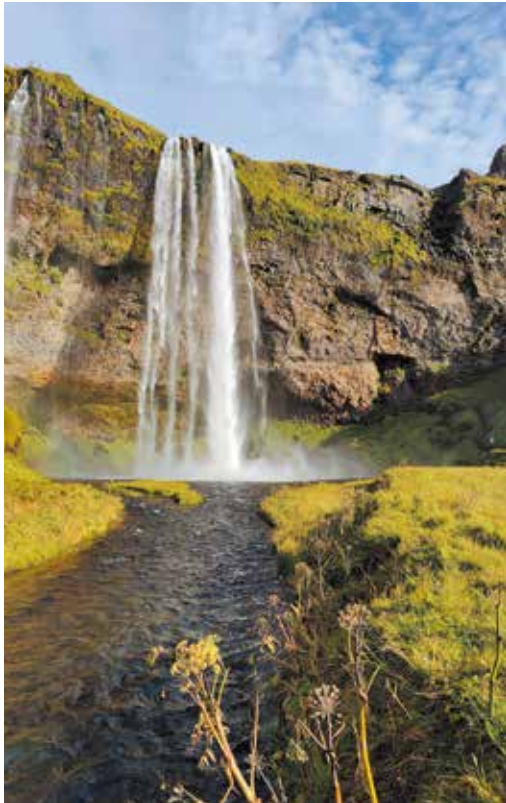
Photos by Kalpana Sunder

at a transparent igloo hotel and looking out at the landscapes was like a dream," says Das.

Many of these Northern Hemisphere locations are better known globally as winter destinations, but summer trips benefit from extremely long hours of daylight -- Oslo gets 19 hours in July, for example, providing plenty of time for vacation experiences.

Loveleen Multani Arun, founder-director of Panache World, a travel design studio based in Bengaluru, says that traveling to cool places in summer is deeply ingrained in the minds of many Asians. Indians for example, have a long history of summer trips to high-altitude locations such as Simla, Darjeeling and Kandy. These so-called hill stations were patronized by British colonial administrators and their





Far left: University professor Natasa Slak Valek finds respite from the scorching heat of her native UAE in the mountains near the U.S. city of Seattle.

Middle: Iceland's icy waterfalls are a bracing contrast to the tropical beaches traditionally favored by vacationers.

Left: Asian holidaymakers are increasingly seeking out destinations that offer a special brand of exoticism.

Iceland is a popular retreat for travelers seeking cooler climates and spectacular landscapes.

aristocratic Indian predecessors but have been replaced in recent years by European destinations such as Switzerland.

For Asians who have never seen snow-covered mountains, glaciers and high-altitude lakes, favorite holiday spots that are now emerging include destinations such as Banff in Canada, nestled in the Rocky Mountains, Queenstown on New Zealand's South Island, and Norway, with its spectacular mountains and breathtaking fjords. Hiking, kayaking, snowshoeing and wildlife spotting are becoming vacation activities for many Asians, while some coolcations also offer water-centric activities such as wild swimming and cold-water plunges.

Greenland, with its huge icebergs and sparsely populated land, Finnish Lapland with its reindeer and husky rides, cozy saunas, ice hotels and Santa Claus Village, and Iceland, with its frozen waterfalls, geothermal spas, glaciers, lava fields and ice caves, are also popular places for coolcating by Asian tourists.

"Indian overnights to Finland are booming," says Sara Sodhi Juneja, country manager of Visit Finland India. The northern lights, Christmas celebrations, Santa Claus and special accommodations such as glass huts are of interest to Asians, as is the clean nature of Finland.

"Indians are getting more and more exposed to coolcations through social media and are keen to experience activities out of their traditional comfort zone," says Juneja, adding that

Finland is a favorite destination for coolcations, with its Santa Claus Village, husky rides, lakes and saunas.



Bollywood stars such as Sonakshi Sinha and Deepthi Bhatnagar have also chosen Lapland as the destination for winter holidays.

Natasa Slak Valek, a university professor who lives in the permanently scorching United Arab Emirates, says cool locations such as Seattle, in the northwestern U.S., also provide a reviving change from the local climate.

"Last summer, [the U.S.] was burning with extremely high temperatures, but in Seattle it was a really nice summer temperature," says Valek, adding that she thinks travel behavior is likely to continue changing as global temperatures

rise. "In the past, everybody wanted a summer vacation by the sea," she says. "Now people prefer mountains."

Many Asians, especially those with smaller budgets, are focusing on cool spots within the continent such as Sapa, in northern Vietnam, a premier trekking hot spot that offers lush greenery and the chance to meet people from the country's hill tribe minorities. Other coolcation destinations in Asia include Tagaytay, a Philippine city that lies only a couple of hours' drive from Manila, and the Cameron Highlands in Malaysia, an elevated district about 200 kilometers north of Kuala Lumpur that is dotted with organic farms and tea plantations.

"I love escaping to cold places with my family," says Mohan Das, an information technology worker in Bengaluru (who is not related to Anita Das). "Though it means packing more thermal wear, waterproof layers, boots, caps and more, it's exciting to experience the beauty of cold weather."

"We have traveled to Iceland, Canada and Switzerland for holidays in the past. Riding the Glacier Express in Switzerland, seeing the northern lights in Iceland, sighting a bear in the wild in Canada, are all special experiences that we treasure. Cold weather also makes us more active and energetic, and we can pack in activities, unlike hot weather which saps our energy."

Apoorva Mohan, 30, a recruitment professional in Singapore, says she chooses vacation destinations such as Australia, Hong Kong and Europe where her family can experience different seasons. "This year we are planning to go to Norway to experience autumn, where it will be hopefully comfortable to do some hiking, outdoor activities. We are planning a trip to Japan in the winter."



▲ A whale-watching boat in Iceland: Other popular water-centric activities include wild swimming and cold-water plunges.

There are, of course, ways to keep cool that are less costly for Asian tourists than traveling to Europe or North America. One possibility that is popular for travelers with children is to find a hotel or resort that can be relied on to keep the heat at bay. For example, the Venetian Macao, a resort hotel in the self-governing Chinese territory of Macao, has more than 3,100 suites, a casino, a canal network, a theater and a shopping mall. The Marina Bay Sands in Singapore also offers entertainment, shopping and restaurants under one air-conditioned roof.

Another alternative is vacations or holidays focused on life after sundown. For example, the Hyatt hotel and resort group runs a program in the U.S. called Tourism After Dark that offers nighttime experiences such as stargazing, astrophotography, ghost tours and visits to art exhibitions. Cruise ships also offer a way of escaping the heat -- the number of companies offering polar excursions is rising, with itineraries increasingly taking in remote destinations such as Svalbard in Norway, and Canada's Baffin Island.

The growing popularity of cooler vacations is likely to deliver an economic boost to these remote areas but may also have a deleterious impact on delicate ecosystems. Also, some experts think that Northern Hemisphere destinations are likely to face increasing competition from Southern Hemisphere destinations as the coolcation trend matures, which could refocus environmental concern on places such as Australia, New Zealand and Argentina. A record 105,331 people visited Antarctica over the 2022-23 southern season, according to the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators.

"With changing weather patterns and global warming ... Europe is now losing its sheen, as we have seen it hit with heat wave after heat wave and most hotels ill-equipped to handle it," says Panache World's Arun. "I see a new trend and travel patterns changing, and more people opting for the Southern Hemisphere during the summer." **N**



▶ Cool-weather seekers can be found on the streets of Bergen, Norway, where the nearby fjords are a big draw.



▶ Valek takes a break from the heat in the northern Indian city of Dharamshala.