GRAND MEKONG ODYSSEY

Classic Tour | 26 Days | Physical Level 1

Hanoi – Ninh Binh – 2N Halong Bay Cruise – Hue – Hoi An – Saigon – 7N Victoria Mekong Cruise – Siem Reap

With two cruises, a breathtaking coastal rail journey and even a meeting with a war veteran, this itinerary showcases Vietnam and Cambodia at their most personal and authentic.

- Spend two nights cruising Halong Bay
- Cruise the Mekong for 7 nights
- Experience one of the world's most scenic train rides
- Meet a Vietnamese war veteran at the Cu Chi Tunnels
- Walk in the rainforest of Cuc Phuong National Park
- Spend two nights in breathtaking Ninh Binh, known as 'Halong Bay on Land'

TOUR MAP

GRAND MEKONG ODYSSEY TOUR INCLUSIONS:

- Return international economy flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation
- All meals – 23 breakfasts (B), 22 lunches (L), 23 dinners (D)
- All sightseeing and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English speaking National Escort (if your group is 10 or more passengers) or Local Guides
- Vietnam e-visa fees for New Zealand passport holders
- Cambodia visa fees for New Zealand passport holders
- Specialist advice from our experienced travel consultants
- Comprehensive travel guides
- Safe and secure with IATA

The only things you may have to pay for are personal expenditures e.g., drinks, optional excursions or shows, insurance of any kind, tipping, early check in or late checkout and other items not specified on the itinerary.

CLASSIC TOURS:

These tours are designed for those who wish to see the iconic sites and magnificent treasures of Southeast Asia on an excellent value group tour whilst travelling with like-minded people. The tours are on a fully inclusive basis so you will travel with the assurance that all your arrangements are taken care of. You will be accompanied by our dedicated and professional National Escorts and local guides, whose unparalleled knowledge will turn your holiday into an unforgettable experience.

PHYSICAL LEVEL 1:

All our tours feature a physical rating to help you select the right holiday for you. To travel on any of our tours requires unaided mobility and the ability to stroll around the sights.

'Grand Mekong Odyssey' is rated as a **physical level 1** tour. A reasonable level of fitness is required, and you should expect to be on your feet for much of the day. You will be getting on and off coaches and boats and walking around the sights, often including steps, plus occasional longer walks.

- There will be sightseeing on foot for both short and extended periods of time, often on uneven surfaces.
- You will be required to get on and off small boats without assistance.

Of course, our National Escorts and local guides will always endeavour to provide the highest level of service and assistance; however, they cannot be expected to cater for customers who are unfit to complete the itinerary.

If you require any more information about the pace of our tours, please contact our reservations team who will be happy to answer your questions.

JOINING YOUR TOUR:

The tour is 26 days in duration including international flights or 24 days in duration based on 'Land Only'.

Travellers booked on a 'Land Only' package, the price includes your arrival/departure airport transfers if arriving/departing on the start and conclusion date of your tour. Please advise your international flight times to our reservations team.

Join the tour on Day 2 in Hanoi and end the tour on Day 25 in Siem Reap. Please refer to your final itinerary for more specific meeting instructions pertaining to your departure.

ITINERARY CHANGES:

We intend to adhere to the day-to-day itinerary as printed; however, the order of events or sightseeing may change as we look to improve our tours, or as dictated by local conditions. In these circumstances, we will endeavour to make the best possible arrangements whilst maintaining the integrity of your trip.

DETAILED ITINERARY

Days 1-2: Fly overnight to Hanoi Meals: D

Fly overnight to Hanoi, Vietnam's leafy capital city. Meet your guide for your transfer to the hotel. Depending on your time of arrival, the rest of the day is yours to start soaking up the local culture ahead of this evening's welcome dinner and guide briefing.

Early check-in is not included. Additional nights before and after your tour can be arranged. Please contact our Reservations team to book.

Destination Information

Hanoi – The history of this fascinating Vietnamese capital is visible at every turn; a blend of French neoclassical architecture, imperial temples, and post-war apartment complexes, interspersed with green parks and leafy boulevards. At its heart is the picturesque Hoan Kiem Lake, where locals come to meet, play sports, or enjoy a stroll and an ice cream.

Day 3: Hanoi Through The Ages Meals: B, L, D

Today, enjoy an introduction to Vietnamese history at the Ethnology Museum; a fascinating window into Vietnam's indigenous groups. See tribal antiques and full-scale replicas of ancient longhouses and stilt houses. Continue to the Confucian Temple of Literature before lunch.

This afternoon, take a cyclo tour of the Old Quarter's historic streets before exploring the colonial architecture of the French Quarter on foot.

Destination Information

Ethnology Museum – A fascinating museum, built in the shape of a bronze drum, the symbol of Vietnamese culture. Inside are exhibits on tribal clothing, jewellery, weapons, musical instruments and religion. In the grounds are a number of life-size replica stilt houses and longhouses.

Temple of Literature –This atmospheric temple, dedicated to Confucius, was built in 1080. It is home to Hanoi's oldest university.

Old Quarter – A maze of streets weaving through Hanoi and dating back to the 13th century. Each street specializes in merchants and artisans selling their wares of silk, silver, wood and more.

French Quarter – Grand boulevards and architectural gems abound in this distinctly colonial district, found just to the south of the Old Quarter. Buttery yellow buildings with red roofs, green shutters and wrought iron balconies evoke a Parisian atmosphere. Highlights include the Hanoi Opera House, modelled after the original in Paris.

Day 4: Wartime Hanoi Meals: B, L, D

Visit the Ho Chi Minh Quarter for an insight into the Vietnam War. Visit the Humble House on Stilts, where Ho Chi Minh lived in the grounds of the Presidential Palace, and see his Mausoleum in Ba Dinh Square. Stop to see the wreckage of an American B-52 bomber plane, still visible in the lake where it was shot down in 1972.

Later, immerse yourself in a bygone era with a visit to a 1980s apartment-turned-teahouse, where you will hear about life in the difficult post-war subsidy period.

Destination Information

Ba Dinh Square – Ba Dinh Square was named after a Vietnamese uprising against colonial rule in the 1880s. It was here that President Ho Chi Minh read the Proclamation of Independence in 1945, when North Vietnam declared its independent status. It had previously been part of French Indochina, though it was under Japanese control for a number of months in 1945. Its dominant landmarks are Ho Chi Minh's mausoleum, where his body lies embalmed and on display, and the National Assembly Building.

Presidential Palace – This yellow, distinctly European building was built by the French as the Palace of the Governor-General of Indochina in the early 1900s. When Vietnam achieved independence, President Ho Chi Minh refused to live in the grand structure, instead building the Humble House on Stilts in its grounds. He used the Palace only to receive guests; it is still used for major political meetings.

Humble House on Stilts – The two-storey wooden home of Ho Chi Minh, who ruled Vietnam from here until his death in 1969. A carp pond sits on one side, with a fruit garden on the other.

Subsidy Period – The subsidy era was based on a centrally planned economy, when all production and distribution was organised by the government. It was a period of struggle, scarcity and rationing.

Day 5: Ninh Binh Meals: B, L, D

This morning, travel to Chuong Village, known for its traditional Nón Lá craftsmanship, and join local artisans for a hands-on introduction to conical hat making. Continue for two hours through the scenic Vietnamese countryside to reach Ninh Binh, famously known as 'Halong Bay on land' thanks to its dramatic limestone karst mountains, jutting up from flat green plains and paddy fields. Stop to visit the ruined citadel of Hoa Lu, the tenth century capital of the north Vietnam kingdom of Dai Viet.

This afternoon, enjoy a relaxing boat trip through the scenic riverscapes, stopping to explore prehistoric caves before checking in at your hotel.

Destination Information

Ninh Binh Province – This mountainous province is part of the Red River Delta, lying between the Red and Ma Rivers, and criss-crossed by other waterways such as the Ngo Dong River.

Day 6: Cuc Phuong National Park — Meals: B, L, D

Begin the day at Four Paws Bear Sanctuary. Learn the stories of these bears, rescued from the illegal pet and bile industries, and hear how they have been given a second chance in life. Enjoy a fresh lunch at the sanctuary, made from ingredients grown on site.

This afternoon, head into Cuc Phuong National Park and hear all about the local wildlife on a short stroll in the rainforest. Return to the hotel.

Destination Information

Four Paws Bear Sanctuary – Four Paws Ninh Binh opened in 2017 and currently has over 40 Asiatic black bears rescued from illegal bile farms and poachers across Vietnam. The bears here have 24-hour access to indoor and outdoor enclosures, wading pools, platforms and dens.

Cuc Phuong National Park – Established in 1962, Cuc Phuong is the oldest national park in Vietnam, and still the largest. Birds and macaques abound, with a dramatic butterfly season in April and May. It is believed that clouded leopards live deep within the forest here. The symbol of the park is a Delacour's langur, an endangered endemic species found only in Vietnam.

Day 7: Ninh Binh – Halong Bay — Meals: B, L, D

Drive to Halong Bay and embark on a two-night scenic cruise through this famous UNESCO-listed bay known for its emerald waters and towering limestone islands. Enjoy lunch on board as you cruise out into the bay, stopping to anchor for an afternoon of activities (which are subject to change due to cruise selection and weather conditions).

Sightseeing may include kayaking in a hidden bay or visiting underground caves on the islands, which require climbing up and down steps inside and outside of the caves. End the day on deck with a drink in hand to watch the sunset over the bay followed by a freshly prepared dinner, before retiring to your cabin for the night.

Please note: Weather conditions may delay the departure time of your cruise, or in rare cases, your cruise may be cancelled. Notifications of any delays or cancellations may not be known until your group's arrival in Halong Bay.

Day 8: Halong Bay Meals: B, L, D

See the bay through a local's eyes! The local fishermen will row you through their floating village, where many families have lived for generations. Later, head to one of the bay's beaches for a chance to sunbathe on the sands.

Day 9: Halong Bay – Hue Meals: B, L, D

Rise early for Tai Chi on deck as the sun rises over Halong Bay. Visit one of the bay's largest caves before cruising back to port after brunch.

Disembark and fly to Hue, a charming city and once the seat of emperors.

Destination Information

Hue – Having been the imperial capital from 1802 until 1945, when the last emperor abdicated, Hue is still regarded as a centre of Vietnamese culture and religion. The city is dominated by the Imperial Citadel, modelled on the Forbidden City in China. There are many wonderful pagodas and temples of high significance here, along with the Grand Tombs of the Nguyen Emperors.

Day 10: Imperial Hue Meals: B, L, D

Discover Hue's imperial history, beginning at the Imperial Citadel and Forbidden Purple City. Continue to Thien Mu Pagoda, the symbol of the city.

After lunch, visit the Royal Tomb of Minh Mang before a leisurely cruise along the Perfume River.

Destination Information

Imperial Citadel – A walled fortress accompanied by cannons, artilleries and surrounded by a moat for protection. Inside the Citadel are numerous gates, courtyards and the Forbidden Purple City.

Forbidden Purple City – Constructed for the personal use of the Imperial family, their concubines and eunuchs. This royal structure is still being restored many years after the destruction caused by street fighting and bombing during the American war in Vietnam, but retains its historic atmosphere.

Thien Mu Pagoda – This seven-storey octagonal tower is built on a hillock overlooking the Perfume River. Dating back to 1601, it is Hue's oldest and most beautiful pagoda, and considered the unofficial symbol of the city. Wander the grounds, where bonsai, ponds and the smell of incense set a peaceful backdrop.

Day 11: Hue – Danang Train

Meals: B, L, D

The 64-mile railway journey from Hue to Danang is considered one of the best in the world. Three hours of scenic coastline await, with beautiful tropical beaches on one side and dramatic mountain scenery on the other.

On arrival in Danang, transfer to the wonderfully traditional town of Hoi An. The afternoon is at leisure to explore the Old Town's charming shops and boutiques before dinner. With its charming yellow buildings and vivid silk lanterns, a stroll through this traditional town feels like stepping back in time.

Day 12: Hoi An

Meals: B, L, D

Head out on a walking tour of Hoi An's Old Town, with visits including Chua Ong Pagoda, a 200-year-old merchant house, and the spectacular Japanese Covered Bridge.

Afterwards, continue into Hoi An's peaceful countryside to visit an organic farming community. Here you can enjoy the lush green landscapes and stroll through the gardens to see the farmers at work. You will even have an opportunity to try the techniques for yourself!

Destination Information

Hoi An – Perhaps more than any other place in Vietnam, Hoi An retains the feel of centuries past. Once known as Faifo, Hoi An was an influential port along the Silk Road. For over 500 years, merchants from China, Japan, France and Portugal settled in the prosperous town, resulting in a distinctive blend of culture, cuisine, religion and architecture.

Japanese Covered Bridge – First constructed in the 1590s to link the Japanese and Chinese quarters of the town, this iconic pink-hued bridge has been restored to its former splendour.

Tra Que Vegetable Village – Located just outside Hoi An, this co-operative project is a first-choice supplier for most local restaurants, growing delicious herbs and vegetables using traditional techniques. Their secret Is in the fertiliser: natural seaweed from a local lagoon.

Day 13: Hoi An – Saigon Meals: B, L, D

Fly to Saigon, perhaps Vietnam's most evocative city. Here, French colonial architecture rubs shoulders with gleaming skyscrapers. Though it has officially been renamed Ho Chi Minh City, many locals still refer to it as Saigon.

Embark on a city tour to explore the city's heady mix of local culture and colonial influences. See the Notre-Dame Cathedral and visit the Central Post Office, the Reunification Palace and the poignant War Remnants Museum. The latter is an emotional visit; you will be given time to explore independently.

Destination Information

Notre-Dame Cathedral – The 60-metre bell towers of Saigon's Notre-Dame Cathedral overlook downtown Saigon. It was consecrated in 1880 by the Roman Catholic Church to provide religious services for French colonialists. All the building materials were imported from France, including the red bricks, which came from Toulouse and have retained their vivid colour.

Central Post Office – This colonial-era landmark, constructed in the late 19th century, stands beside the Notre-Dame Cathedral. Its Gothic and neoclassical design is strongly reminiscent of 20th century European train stations.

Reunification Palace – A major landmark of the city. It was the home and workplace of the President of South Vietnam, and was the site of the end of the Vietnam War during the Fall of Saigon on 30th April 1975, when a North Vietnamese Army tank crashed through its gates.

War Remnants Museum – A large museum displaying military equipment, poignant photographs and international news articles relating to the Vietnam War.

Day 14: Cu Chi Tunnels & Veteran Meals: B, L, D

Today includes a poignant visit to the Cu Chi Tunnels, followed by a special meeting with a Vietnamese war veteran.

Drive out of the city to the Cu Chi site. Sightseeing here involves two hours on foot on wide but uneven paths through the forest, seeing examples of reconstructed bamboo traps, Viet Cong kitchens, and tunnel entrances. Should you choose, you will also have the opportunity to spend a few minutes underground, on a short, crouched walk through an example section of the tunnel network.

Afterwards, your guide will introduce you to a Vietnamese war veteran, who will tell you about his personal experiences as a Communist soldier during the war, offering an authentic insight into the experience and hardships of war. You will be able to ask some questions; we ask guests to be respectful of the individual regardless of your political views.

Afterwards, visit a local organic farm for a freshly-made lunch. On your return to Saigon, any time before dinner is at leisure to explore the city.

Please note: Depending on the individual veteran available on the day of your visit, it is likely that your guide will need to act as a translator. Due to the age and health of the veterans, a specific individual cannot be guaranteed.

Destination Information

Cu Chi Tunnels – The tunnels of Cu Chi are an immense network of connecting underground passages and rooms, and are part of a much larger network of tunnels that underlie much of the country. The Cu Chi tunnels were the location of several military campaigns during the Vietnam War and were the Viet Cong's base of operations for the Tet Offensive in 1968. The tunnels were used by Viet Cong soldiers as hiding spots during combat, as well as serving as communication and supply routes, hospitals, food and weapon caches and living quarters for fighters.

Day 15: Embark the Victoria Mekong in Can Tho Meals: B, L, D

Drive from Saigon to Can Tho, a town in the heart of the Mekong Delta. Here, embark the Victoria Mekong for your seven-night cruise. Enjoy a welcome cocktail on deck as the ship sets sail. As day turns into night, enjoy a Southern Vietnamese folk music performance and a welcome dinner to officially welcome you to the Victoria Mekong, your home for the next seven nights.

All 35 cabins on the Victoria Mekong are outward facing, with French balconies. During your week-long cruise, complimentary beer and soft drinks are available from the bar and at mealtimes, house wine is included at dinner.

Day 16: Long Xuyen & Tiger Island Meals: B, L, D

Hop in a tender boat for an extended visit to Long Xuyen's captivating floating market and gain a deeper insight into daily life along the river. Farmers from across the Delta converge here, selling fruit and vegetables to locals and wholesale alike.

Return to the ship for lunch in the ship's panoramic Claypot Restaurant, with floor-to-ceiling windows offering a view of the delta. This afternoon, tender to Tiger Island for a walk through rice fields and gardens, visit local plant pot makers, and hear the story behind 'Mr. Tiger's Temple'.

Day 17: Phu Tan & Tan Chau Meals: B, L, D

Enjoy a leisurely breakfast in Phu Tan, the capital of An Giang Province in the Mekong Delta. Tender ashore in Phu Tan and visit a craft village famous for hand-making Ca Rang clay stoves. Used for hundreds of years by the Southern Vietnamese, these stoves have a unique design which allows them to block the wind, retain heat, and keep ash from dispersing.

Enjoy lunch on board as you cruise towards Tan Chau, then take a tender to explore a floating village and see how locals farm freshwater fish beneath their stilt houses. This evening, experience a thrilling Vietnamese lion dance on the sky deck before dinner!

Day 18: Into Cambodia Meals: B, L, D

Enjoy onboard activities such as a ship's tour or minigolf tournament as the ship crosses the border into Cambodia. Relax in the lounge bar or infinity pool as you admire the passing scenery.

Arrive into Phnom Penh late this afternoon. If you like, head ashore independently and enjoy a wander in this fascinating capital city. Return to the ship and enjoy a lively Apsara dance performance on board.

Day 19: Phnom Penh Meals: B, L, D

Hop on a cyclo and head to the elaborate Royal Palace, Silver Pagoda and National Museum. Later, drive into the countryside to pay respects at the Killing Fields, where the Khmer Rouge executed over 1 million victims in the 1970s. Today, it is a memorial site for peaceful reflection.

Return to the city and end the afternoon in style with a signature cocktail at Raffles Hotel Le Royal before returning to the ship for dinner.

Destination Information

Royal Palace – The ornate roofs of the Royal Palace are the most striking feature of Phnom Penh's skyline, constructed in the ornate Khmer style and glittering with gold. The palace has been the official residence of Cambodia's monarchs since its construction in the 1860s.

Silver Pagoda – The Silver Pagoda is part of the Royal Palace complex, and is also known as the Temple of the Emerald Buddha thanks to the precious statue displayed there. Its rich decoration includes silver tiles, Italian marble, and murals of the Reamker (Cambodia's national epic, a Buddhist tale similar to the Hindu Ramayana).

Wat Phnom – A hilltop temple and the heart of the city. Locals come here to pray for good luck and success.

Khmer Rouge – A totalitarian group of revolutionaries who seized and held power in Cambodia from April 1975 to January 1979. The Khmer Rouge turned Cambodia into a military dictatorship in which all rights, arts and intellectual pursuits were abolished. Approximately 2 million Cambodians (nearly 25% of the population) were killed in labour camps, prisons and mass execution sites. They continued their guerilla warfare for many years after the Vietnamese forces invaded and overthrew them in 1979.

Pol Pot – Born Saloth Sar, Pol Pot was one of the most brutal dictators in world history. He created the Khmer Rouge as a guerilla force, and organised the Phnom Penh coup in 1975, installing himself as prime minister.

Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum – This former secondary school was seized by the Khmer Rouge in 1976 and turned into the brutal S-21 prison; one of almost 200 such prisons operated by the Khmer Rouge and Santebal (secret police). An estimated 20,000 people were imprisoned and tortured here between 1976-79. Today, the museum commemorates the atrocities that occurred here during the regime of Pol Pot.

Choeung Ek Killing Fields – This orchard was the site of one of the Khmer Rouge's largest mass execution sites. Today, it is a memorial site with a Buddhist stupa at the centre. Be aware that the memorial stupa contains victims' skulls, which are visible; it can be avoided if you prefer.

Day 20: Oudong & Silk Island Meals: B, L, D

Enjoy a walking tour of Koh Chen village, where you will meet a local copper and silversmith, before continuing to the country's former capital, Oudong.

Visit Buddhist monks at a local meditation centre before taking a tuk-tuk to Silk Island to learn about the process of silk weaving from worm to loom.

Day 21: Angkor Ban & Kampong Cham Meals: B, L, D

Explore the laid-back village of Angkor Ban with its wooden stilt houses. Cruise to Kampong Cham and enjoy a walking tour along the river before returning to the ship for dinner.

Day 22: Drive to Siem Reap Meals: B, L, D

Disembark and take a half-day drive through lush Cambodian countryside to reach Siem Reap, the gateway to Angkor. Enjoy lunch before an afternoon at leisure.

Day 23: Explore Angkor Meals: B, L, D

The UNESCO-managed Angkor complex boasts over 1,000 temples, and was the seat of the colossal Khmer Empire from the 9th to the 14th centuries.

We spend the morning at the city of Angkor Thom, built by Jayavarman VII during his restoration of the Angkorian Empire in the late 12th century. Here, sights include the enigmatic Bayon, the Elephant Terrace and the Terrace of the Leper King. One of the most evocative ruins here is to the monastery temple of Ta Prohm, enveloped in a labyrinth of jungle just outside Angkor Thom.

Enjoy lunch before devoting the afternoon to the fascinating and awe-inspiring temple complex of Angkor Wat, the largest religious monument in the world. It predates the city of Angkor Thom, and is considered to be Cambodia's spiritual heart. Later, return to Angkor Thom to enjoy the sunset from its moat, with a refreshing drink in hand.

Destination Information

Angkor Thom – (lit. 'Great City') This was the last capital of the Khmer empire, established by Buddhist King Jayavarman VII in the 12th century. This walled city covers an area of 9 square kilometres and encompasses many temples.

The Bayon – A late 12th century state temple at the centre of Angkor Thom. Its beautifully-crafted central towers are decorated with four opposing faces representing the Buddha, and probably modelled after the founder, King Jayavarman. Bayon's stone galleries display extraordinary bas-reliefs incorporating over 11,000 figures.

Elephant Terrace and Terrace of the Leper King – These giant viewing platforms were used for public ceremonies, which served as a base for the King's grand audience hall. The Elephant Terrace is named for the carved elephant parade on its eastern side. To the north is the Terrace of the Leper King, named for a statue found there.

Ta Prohm – One of Angkor Thom's most atmospheric ruins, swallowed by the roots of the jungle, Ta Prohm has several towers, closed courtyards and narrow corridors to explore. Originally dedicated to Sri Jayarajacudamani, the mother of the king who established Angkor Thom, it was made famous by the film Tomb Raider.

Angkor Wat – This 12th century temple complex is the largest religious monument in the world. Surrounded by a 190-metre moat and taking 30 years to build, Angkor Wat showcases the Khmer civilisation at its grandest. With its fascinating decorative flourishes, extensive bas-relief and multiple tiers, it is the best-preserved temple within the complex. Angkor temples were traditionally dedicated to the Hindu god Shiva, but Angkor Wat broke tradition in that it was originally dedicated to Vishnu, and was later reworked as a Buddhist temple.

Day 24: Organic Cooking Class Meals: B, L, D

Join a morning cooking class at an organic farm. Pick up supplies at the local market, then head to the farm to pick some organic ingredients. Your chef will guide you in creating a traditional Khmer lunch before an afternoon at leisure.

The afternoon is at leisure to relax or explore Siem Reap independently. Tuk-tuks are readily available for visitors to Siem Reap. This evening, rejoin your group for your farewell dinner.

Days 25-26: Departure Meals: B

Fly home to New Zealand, arriving the following day.

Please note: Only breakfast is provided on the group's day of departure; no refund will be given for meals missed. Check out is usually at noon – please contact our Reservations team if you would like to prebook Late Checkout.

TRAVEL INFORMATION

VISAS:

Vietnam: New Zealand passport holders require a visa to enter Vietnam. For Wendy Wu Tours group tours, the cost of the e-Visa is included and we will send you the application details prior to departure.

Cambodia: New Zealand passport holders must obtain an e-Visa in advance to enter Cambodia. For Wendy Wu Tours group tours, the cost of the e-Visa is included. An online immigration arrival form must be completed before entry – details will be provided in your final documentation.

Boat entry tours only: As an e-Visa is not valid for entry by boat, a physical visa will be placed in your passport prior to departure. Your passport will be with our visa agents for 2-4 weeks. The cost of this visa is included.

Please be advised that your passport must have at least six months validity left on it when you arrive back in New Zealand.

Please note the visa procedures and requirements may change at any time. These changes are often made by the relevant embassy or consulate; Wendy Wu Tours acts as a third party and has no influence on the process of a visa.

INSURANCE:

We strongly recommend that you take out a policy as soon as you pay your deposit. Wendy Wu Tours cannot in any way be made liable for any additional cost incurred by the customer on any tour due to the customer not having adequate travel insurance.

We also encourage all customers to take a copy of their travel insurance documents (especially relevant international contact numbers) with them while on tour. We advise that you check the inclusions and procedures for lodging claims prior to your departure. These documents should be stored separately from the original.

TRANSPORT:

Coaches: Coaches with air conditioning are used on our group tours for city sightseeing, short excursions to the countryside and longer transfers where necessary. However, minibuses may be used for smaller groups (under 10 passengers).

Roads in Southeast Asia have generally improved over recent years, but traffic and/or weather conditions may extend driving times. Road construction work usually covers an enormous section of road - not just one or two kilometres as you may be used to. For this reason, the timings listed in the itinerary are approximations only.

Planes: Internal flights are based on economy class, with reputable airlines.

ACCOMMODATION:

Your accommodation is selected for convenience of location, comfort or character, and can range from a business hotel in one city to a family run guesthouse in a smaller town. In more remote areas, accommodation may be of a lower standard and may not have all western amenities. Hotels are generally rated as local three to four-star standard, but please note that there is no international classification system for hotels and differences in facilities and quality do exist between New Zealand and Southeast Asia. All group tour hotels have private western bathroom facilities, air conditioning, TV and telephone. Plumbing and electricity supplies can be erratic and quite often the power in hotel rooms is turned off while guests are out of the room. If you experience any difficulty, please speak to your National Escort or Local Guide. Rest assured that all hotels used by Wendy Wu Tours are regularly inspected by our staff and our partners to ensure that standards meet your needs.

EATING IN SOUTHEAST ASIA:

Southeast Asia is home to an incredibly rich food history. The local cuisine is known for its intense flavours, spices and some of the freshest ingredients you can find. In general, meals include either rice or noodles and are packed full of flavour. Lemongrass, ginger, lime leaves, coriander, fish sauce and soy sauce are used in many local dishes. Whilst Southeast Asian food has a reputation for being hot and spicy, each region actually has its own distinct characteristics. Vietnam, for example, is perhaps best known for its fresh and aromatic dishes – relying heavily on flavours from fresh herbs such as mint, basil and dill.

When dining in Southeast Asia, although some restaurants have adopted a western approach to dining, expect some restaurants to follow the traditional communal style of eating. Typically, this will mean each diner has their own small bowl and may serve themselves from a variety of shared dishes. At some local restaurants, appetizers and main courses might be served when they are ready instead of following a particular order.

Determining when it is appropriate to use chopsticks, forks or spoons can be challenging for some travellers, even other Asians, as each country has different customs. In Vietnam, dishes are normally placed in the centre and people serve food for themselves with their own chopsticks and bowl. Usually, chopsticks or other utensils are provided to scoop the food into your bowl to prevent your own chopsticks from touching the food that remains on the table. Dining in Southeast Asia is fairly casual with not too many rules. Leaving food on the plate is not considered rude.

SOUVENIRS:

We want to be able to give you an opportunity to buy souvenirs, so we include some stops at museums or exhibitions which demonstrate a craft or product unique to that region with pieces available to buy. We understand that souvenir hunting is not for everyone, so we aim to take you to places, which hold local interest. We trust you will enjoy these opportunities to learn about local arts and crafts and understand their historical and cultural importance.

DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHEAST ASIA:

Although Southeast Asia is developing quickly, it still lacks the international standards of civil infrastructure and tourist facilities. Concepts of personal responsibility are also different to those in New Zealand. Consequently, tourist and public facilities may not uphold the same safety standards as in New Zealand; for example, you may see a hole in the road without a warning sign or safety barricade. All of our suppliers meet local safety standards as a minimum. We want you to have an enjoyable holiday, so we ask that you take extra care, use your common sense, refer to notices and follow advice from your National Escort or Local Guides.

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS:

If you are travelling within the below Cambodian and Vietnamese Public Holidays, please note that celebrations can last a couple of days and during these times some businesses will be closed and coach, air and train travel may be affected. Tourist attractions will be open but may be crowded. In Vietnam, Tet Holiday is 29th January 2025 & 17th February 2026; International Labour Day is on 1st May every year; Reunification Day is on 30th April every year and National Independence Day is on 2nd September every year. In Cambodia Khmer New Year is 14th – 16th April every year, the King's birthday is 14th - 15th May and the Water festival is between 14th – 16th November in 2024 and between 4th – 6th November in 2025.

GROUP SIZE:

Most of our groups consist of 10 travellers or more and will be accompanied by a national escort. There will usually be no more than 24 travellers in a Victoria Mekong group, although you may encounter other Wendy Wu tour groups while you are travelling.

All our departures are guaranteed to operate with a minimum of 8 travellers booked (unless cancelled due to factors beyond our control). However, at our discretion we may operate departures with a smaller group size as we try to operate advertised departures wherever it is viable to do so. For groups with fewer than 10 travellers, departures will operate with local guides, instead of a National Escort.

LUGGAGE:

All travellers are limited to two items of luggage each: a suitcase with a maximum weight of 20kg and one piece of hand luggage with a maximum weight of 5kg. It is essential that your luggage is lockable.

TIPPING POLICY:

Tipping while on holiday is common in most parts of the world and Southeast Asia is no exception. However, it is not always clear who it is appropriate to tip and how much. Furthermore, travellers may not have the right amounts of cash available at the right time. In order to avoid any inconvenience Wendy Wu Tours operates a tipping policy where a stated amount is given to your National Escort at the beginning of your tour and tips are disbursed to local guides and drivers throughout your tour. The amount is designed to be at a reasonable level for travellers while being fair to the local people and includes a gratuity for the National Escort.

If you are travelling in a smaller group with local guides only, then tipping is paid in each destination. To be fair to the guides we ask for slightly higher amounts per traveller with small groups.

We generally find that most customers appreciate the convenience of our tipping policy, but we do recognize that it may not suit everyone. However, as this is a group tour, we ask that everyone follows the same protocol to be fair to other group members and to ensure smooth operation of your tour.

VACCINATIONS AND YOUR HEALTH:

Wendy Wu does not give specific health advice, but we do recommend you see your doctor at least six weeks prior to travel for advice and to allow time for any necessary vaccinations. Please remember to take your itinerary with you. Safe travel has a comprehensive website that you may also find useful www.safetravel.govt.nz

BEFORE YOU LEAVE:

We strongly recommend registering your travel plans with www.safetravel.govt.nz as in the event of an emergency, New Zealand Consular assistance will be more readily available.

Up until the day you travel, it is vital you keep up to date and familiarised with the entry requirements as these can change at short notice. You are personally responsible for completing any entry forms, conducting any covid tests (if necessary), etc and adhering to countries' specific entry requirements. You can also access the New Zealand Government's travel advisory service for up-to-date information about your destination on the same website.

AFTER YOUR BOOKING:

Once you have booked with Wendy Wu Tours, you will receive a confirmation invoice. If a visa is required, our Visa Department will be in touch with the paperwork and next steps. Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately 2-3 weeks prior to departure.

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