GRAND TOUR OF INDOCHINA

Classic Tour | 28 Days | Physical Level 2

Saigon – Hoi An – Hue – Hanoi – Mai Chau – Halong Bay – Luang Prabang – Vang Vieng – Vientiane – Phnom Penh – Siem Reap

A once-in-a-lifetime adventure offering an in-depth look at three fascinating countries. Tribal villages, karst-studded waters and mesmerising landscapes await you on this month-long journey of discovery.

- Discover the Mekong Delta
- See local life in charming Hoi An
- Marvel at Hue's Imperial Citadel
- Walk Mai Chau's rice terraces
- Practice Tai Chi in Halong Bay
- Witness sacred Takbat
- Be captivated by Angkor

TOUR MAP

GRAND TOUR OF INDOCHINA INCLUSIONS:

- Return international economy flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation
- All meals – 25 breakfasts (B), 24 lunches (L), 25 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
- Laos e-visa fees for New Zealand passport holders
- Cambodia e-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 2:

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 Tour of Indochina' is rated as a **physical level 2** tour. A good level of fitness is required as you need to be comfortable walking for 2-3 hours and covering longer distances. Walking or other activities such as cycling will be at a gentle pace and will involve straightforward terrain.

- On most days, there will be sightseeing on foot for extended periods of time
- There will be some gentle hiking in the rice terrace region of Mai Chau
- Throughout the tour, you will be required to get on and off varying sizes of 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.

JOINING YOUR TOUR:

The tour is 28 days in duration including international flights or 26 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 Saigon and end the tour on Day 27 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 local conditions dictate. 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 Saigon Meals: D

Fly to Saigon, where you will be met at the airport Arrivals Hall by your Local Guide or National Escort. Together with all other group members who may be arriving at a similar time, you will transfer 45 minutes to your hotel and check into your room or store any luggage if arriving before the check-in time. There is no sightseeing today.

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

Saigon – Officially renamed Ho Chi Minh City, but still locally known by its older name of Saigon, this exuberant city is driving Vietnam forward into the modern world but is also a treasure trove of fascinating heritage. It was a major base of the American military during the Vietnam War, and was the seat of the South Vietnam government until the events that led to the country's reunification. Today, the old mixes seamlessly with the new.

Day 3: Saigon Meals: B, L D

Confront the reality of guerrilla warfare at the Cu Chi Tunnels. These cramped tunnels were central to some of the war's strategic operations, including the famous 1968 Tet Offensive.

This afternoon, explore modern day Saigon (HCMC) with its heady mix of local culture and colonial influences. We pass the Notre Dame Cathedral, visit the impressive Central Post Office, see the Reunification Palace, and spend some time in reflection at the poignant War Remnants Museum.

Destination Information

Cu Chi Tunnels – 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. Sightseeing here involves two hours on foot on uneven mud paths through the bush and, if you choose, crouching to walk through a short section of the tunnels. You will also see recreations of some of the infamous bamboo traps of the Viet Cong.

Notre Dame Cathedral – Influenced by French design and built between 1863 and 1880, the red brick exterior and 60-metre bell towers overlook downtown Saigon.

Central Post Office – Located next to the Notre-Dame Cathedral, the Central Post Office building was constructed during the French colonial period in the late 19th century. Its grand architecture shows Gothic and Renaissance influences.

Reunification Palace – Built on the site of the former Norodom Palace, this was the home and workplace of the President of South Vietnam during the Vietnam War. It 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.

Day 4: Mekong Delta

Meals: B, L, D

Drive 2 and a half hours down to the picturesque province of Ben Tre situated along the mighty Mekong. This area is known as the 'Rice Basket of Vietnam', because its rich and fertile lands produce large amounts of rice, coconuts, vegetables, and tropical fruit. Spend the day cruising and exploring these waterways by traditional Sampan boat.

Sightseeing involves hopping on and off these boats, often on unsteady and slippery surfaces, sometimes without handrails or assistance.

Destination Information

Mekong Delta – This densely populated region is Vietnam's most productive area in terms of agriculture and fishing. Its fertile farmland has earned it the nickname 'the rice bowl of Vietnam'. It was considered a part of Cambodia until at least the 15th century, with growing incursions and control by the Cham and Vietnamese throughout the 16th and 18th centuries. In the 1860s, it became part of Cochinchina (France's first colony in Vietnam) and later Indochina. After the Vietnam War, Cambodia's Khmer Rouge attempted to recapture the Delta, triggering a Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia that led to the fall of the Khmer Rouge.

Day 5: Saigon – Hoi An Meals: B, L, D

Fly 1 hour and 20 minutes to Danang, and transfer 45 minutes to the ancient town of Hoi An for your 3-night stay.

This afternoon, take a walking tour of Hoi An's beautifully traditional Old Town, with its network of lantern-lit streets, small bridges, and cheerful yellow houses. See Tan Ky, a traditional house occupied by descendants of the same merchant family that originally built it over 200 years ago. Visit Quan Cong Chinese Temple and stop to admire the pink-hued Japanese Covered Bridge, constructed in the 1590s.

Then, take part in an artisanal lantern-making workshop, where expert local craftspeople will introduce you to the time-honoured techniques behind one of the region's most cherished traditions, as you create your own silk lantern.

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, prosperous merchants from China, Japan, France and Portugal settled here, resulting in a distinctive blend of culture, cuisine, religion and architecture.

Day 6: Hoi An Meals: B, L, D

This morning, visit Tra Que, a local community farming project just outside of Hoi An. Here, multiple farming families have come together to create a co-operative herb and vegetable farm, which supplies most of the local restaurants. Learn the traditional methods the farmers use to plant, fertilise, and harvest the crop, then try your hand at raking the ground and sowing seeds.

The remainder of the afternoon is at leisure to shop, head to the beach, or perhaps visit one of Hoi An's famous express tailors or sandal-makers – known for their ability to whip up high-quality tailored clothing and deliver it to your hotel in as little as 24 hours.

This evening, enjoy the captivating Teh Dar Show, a spectacular blend of acrobatics, contemporary dance and live tribal music inspired by the cultural traditions and untamed landscapes of Vietnam's Central Highlands.

Day 7: **Hoi An at leisure** Meals: B, L, D

Today is at leisure for you to explore the ancient town, or head to the beach and relax.

Day 8: **Hoi An – Hue** Meals: B, L, D

This morning, drive approximately 4 hours north to Hue – a journey that will take you over the famously scenic Hai Van Pass.

The scholarly city of Hue is the embodiment of Vietnam's dynamic past, wearing its history on its sleeve. Upon arrival, head to the Tomb of Emperor Minh Mang to explore this opulent and exotic resting place, laid out in formal Chinese style.

Destination Information

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

Royal Tomb of Minh Mang – Emperor Minh Mang reigned in the Nguyen Dynasty, the last of the Vietnamese dynasties, from 1820-1840. The construction of his tomb was completed after his death and is said to have taken approximately 10,000 workers to complete. The complex comprises of almost 40 monuments and is surrounded by gardens and pools, making it one of the more beautiful tombs in Vietnam.

Day 9: Hue Meals: B, L, D

After breakfast, visit the Imperial Citadel and the Forbidden Purple City. These fascinating sites are still being restored many years after the destruction caused by street fighting and bombing during the American War in Vietnam.

Later, drive to the outskirts of Hue to visit one of its traditional garden houses. This afternoon, enjoy an hour-long cruise along the Perfume River to the Thien Mu Pagoda. Explore here before returning to Hue for dinner.

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 10: Hue - Hanoi Meals: B, L, D

This morning, fly 1 hour and 20 minutes to the charming city of Hanoi. First stop will be the Ho Chi Minh Quarter, then pass Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum. Finally, see the Humble House on Stilts and the One Pillar Pagoda.

Please note: As you have multiple stops in Hanoi, your guide may vary the order of touring for you to have the best possible experience of the city. No touring will be missed. Please be aware that domestic flight schedules can vary.

Destination Information

Hanoi - With a population of approximately four million, Hanoi is a charming and richly historic city of lakes, shaded boulevards and leafy open parks. The centre is an architectural museum piece housing groups of ochre coloured buildings with an air of the provincial French towns of the 1930s; a "Paris of the Orient" as people have called it.

Ho Chi Minh Quarter - Dedicated to 'the father of modern Vietnam'. Ho Chi Minh first declared independence from French rule in 1945. His Mausoleum stands in Ba Dinh Square.

One Pillar Pagoda - Rebuilt in 1955 after damage during the French evacuation, the pagoda is made of wood and sits on a single pillar. Designed to reflect the shape of a lotus flower emerging from the water, it has become a popular spot for locals to enjoy the tranquil surroundings.

Humble House on Stilts - In the grounds of the Presidential Palace sits the 2 storey wooden home of Ho Chi Minh who ruled Vietnam from here until his death in 1969.

Day 11: Hanoi – Mai Chau Meals: B, L, D

This morning, visit the Museum of Ethnology Temple of Literature, Hanoi's first university, before you take the picturesque mountain road to Mai Chau. This afternoon, take a gentle trek out to see the rice fields. Visit the White Thai community villages of Pom Coong and Lac.

A smaller overnight bag is recommended for your trip to Mai Chau. Main luggage will be left in safe storage at the hotel in Hanoi and picked up on your return. Please wear sturdy walking shoes as the mountain trails can be slippery when wet.

Destination Information

Temple of Literature - Hanoi's first university dating back to 1070 and a historical centre of learning, now dedicated to Confucian worship.

Pom Coong - The village of Pom Coong is made up of some 70 stilt houses in the Thai tradition, built from bamboo or wood, and raised about two metres above the ground on solid wooden pillars.

Day 12: Mai Chau Meals: B, L, D

Drive higher into the mountains to visit the H'mong hill tribe village of Xa Linh, a mixture of modern and traditional thatched wooden buildings sitting 1000 metres above sea level.

Hiking times are approximate and depend on the group. Hikes are weather dependent and sensible footwear is essential. If conditions require, the hike will be moved to the morning of the following day.

Day 13: Mai Chau – Hanoi Meals: B, L, D

Return to Hanoi along the scenic mountain route. You will stay in Hanoi overnight.

Day 14: Halong Bay Cruise Meals: B, L, D

Transfer around 2 and a half hours to Halong, where you will take an overnight cruise to the far-most corners of the bay by boat. Enjoy lunch on board as you cruise out into the bay, stopping to anchor for an afternoon of activities (subject to change due to weather conditions). Excursions may include visiting underground caves on the islands, gentle kayaking, or visiting the bay's island beaches. End the day on deck with a drink in hand, watching the sun set over the bay, before retiring to your cabin for the night.

You will need to pack a smaller overnight bag for your trip to Halong Bay. Main luggage will be left in safe storage at the hotel in Hanoi and picked up on your return.

Please note: Weather conditions such as mist, fog, wind, rain, and storms may delay the departure time of your cruise, or in some cases your cruise may be cancelled. Notifications of any delays or cancellations may not be known until your group's arrival in Halong Bay. If your cruise is cancelled after your arrival in Halong Bay, you will have lunch in Halong City and return to Hanoi. If notification of the cruise cancellation is given prior to your departure for Halong Bay an alternative day trip will be arranged to Hoa Lu and Tam Coc or 'Halong Bay on Land', an area located approximately 2 hours from Hanoi. Our guides will make every effort to inform the group at the earliest possible moment should there be any itinerary changes.

Day 15: Halong Bay – Hanoi Meals: B, L, D

Spend the morning sailing through Halong Bay. After brunch, disembark your cruise and return to Hanoi for an afternoon at leisure.

Day 16: Hanoi – Luang Prabang Meals: B, L, D

Discover more sights of Hanoi this morning. Experience an exhilarating cyclo ride through Hanoi's Old Quarter. Each cyclo takes one passenger and is operated by a cycle driver behind the carriage. Wrap up your cyclo ride with a strong Vietnamese coffee at a café overlooking Hoan Kiem Lake - an important site in Vietnamese folklore.

This evening, say goodbye to Vietnam, transferring to the airport for your 1-hour flight to Luang Prabang.

Destination Information

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

Luang Prabang - The former royal capital and seat of government, Luang Prabang lost its status as capital after the Pathet Lao overthrew the Royal Government at the end of the Laotian Civil War in 1975. In 1995, it was listed by UNESCO for its unique, well-preserved architecture, which blends cultural heritage with the French colonial influence of the 19th and 20th centuries. Each morning, the monks of Luang Prabang's many monasteries walk through the streets, collecting alms in a ritual called Takbat.

Day 17: Luang Prabang Meals: B, L, D

Rise early this morning to witness Takbat, a Buddhist ceremony before climbing Phousi Hill for panoramic views of the city. Visit Wat Xieng Thong before boarding a boat to cruise the mighty Mekong up to the sacred caves of Pak Ou, known for the hundreds of miniature Buddha sculptures that reside within. Return to Luang Prabang via a local village, stopping to observe the daily life of the local people.

Destination Information

Phousi Hill – A 100 metre high hill in the centre of the old town of Luang Prabang. It lies in the heart of the old town peninsula and is bordered on one side by the Mekong River and on the other side by the Nam Khan River. The hill is a local religious site and houses several Buddhist shrines. Halfway up the hill, overlooking the Nam Khan is Wat Tham Phou Si, a Buddhist temple. At the summit of the hill, overlooking the town and surrounding countryside, is Wat Chom Si, which is also a Buddhist temple and is a highlight of Luang Prabang.

Pak Ou Caves – Near Pak Ou (mouth of the Ou river), the Tham Ting (lower cave) and the Tham Theung (upper cave) are caves overlooking the Mekong River, 25 kilometres to the north of Luang Prabang, Laos. They are a group of two caves on the west side of the Mekong River, about two hours upstream from the centre of Luang Prabang. The caves are noted for their miniature Buddha sculptures. Hundreds of very small and mostly damaged wooden Buddhist figures are laid out over the wall shelves. They take many different positions, including meditation, teaching, peace, rain, and reclining (nirvana).

Wat Xieng Thong – A Buddhist temple (wat), located on the northern tip of the peninsula of Luang Prabang, Laos. Wat Xieng Thong is one of the most important Lao monasteries and remains a significant monument to the spirit of religion, royalty and traditional art. There are over 20 structures on the grounds, including shrines, pavilions and residences, in addition to its gardens of various flowers, ornamental shrubs and trees.

Day 18: Luang Prabang Meals: B, L, D

This morning, visit the National Museum, housed in the former Royal Palace. Admire the Crown Jewels of Laos, on display in the mirrored Throne Room. From here, drive 1 hour to the beautiful Kuang Si Waterfall. Sightseeing at the waterfall will involve around 1 hour of light walking. Electric shuttles may be available to transport visitors to the falls.

It is possible to take a swim in the river near the falls; if you wish to do this, please remember to bring along your swimsuit and a towel. Changing rooms are available on site. Return to Luang Prabang, stopping at Ban Na Ouane village and Ock Pop Tok Weaving Centre.

Day 19: Luang Prabang – Vang Vieng Meals: B, L, D

Fly to Vientiane. Transfer 1 hour and 45 minutes through the scenic countryside to Vang Vieng, a town beautifully set in a spectacular karst landscape.

Day 20: Vang Vieng Meals: B, L, D

Visit the Tham Chang Cave before taking a walk through the dramatic countryside, where limestone karsts dominate the skyline. Admire the peaceful Nam Song River, which cuts through the valley of rice fields, and enjoy a walk along its banks.

Day 21: Vientiane Meals: B, L, D

Drive back to Vientiane. A delightfully quaint city, Vientiane feels more like a friendly backwater than a chaotic capital. Spend the afternoon exploring That Luang Stupa, Wat Si Saket, and Wat Phra Keo. Continue your sightseeing at the Patuxai Victory Monument, resembling Paris' Arc de Triomphe. Sightseeing today involves around 2 to 3 hours on foot.

Destination Information

That Luang Stupa – A large gold-covered Buddhist stupa in the centre of Vientiane.

Wat Si Saket – Wat Si Saket is a Buddhist wat built in 1818 on the order of King Anouvong (Sethathirath V.) It was built in the 'Siamese style' of Buddhist architecture, with a surrounding terrace and an ornate fivetiered roof, rather than in the Lao style. This may have kept it safe, since the armies of Siam that sacked Vientiane following Anouvong's rebellion in 1827 used the compound as their HQ and lodgings. It may be the oldest temple still standing in Vientiane. The French colonial government restored Wat Si Saket in 1924 and 1930. Wat Si Saket features a cloister wall with more than 2,000 ceramic and silver Buddha images.

Patuxai Victory Monument – A war monument in the centre of Vientiane. It was built between 1957 and 1968 and is dedicated to those who fought for independence from France.

Day 22: Vientiane – Phnom Penh Meals: B, L, D

Take a 90-minute flight to Phnom Penh. Enjoy a sightseeing tour of the city this afternoon, spending around 3 hours exploring on foot, visiting the Royal Palace, Silver Pagoda, and National Museum.

Destination Information

Phnom Penh – The capital of the Kingdom of Cambodia is built around four river arms formed by a sharp curve in the Mekong River, near the junctions of the Bassac and the Tonle Sap tributaries. This charming city has a pleasant blend of oriental and colonial architecture, but reminders of a troubled past are also evident.

The Royal Palace – Built in 1866 by the French, these ornate buildings are the official residence of the reigning Cambodian royal family and King Sihamoni.

Silver Pagoda – This concrete and marble structure includes a floor with over 5,000 silver tiles, each a kilo in weight. Famous artefacts include a 90 kilogram solid gold Buddha, made in 1907, and the Emerald Buddha; opinions differ as to whether the latter is made of emerald, jade, or French Baccarat Crystal.

Day 23: Phnom Penh Meals: B, L, D

Reflect on Cambodia's recent history with a visit to the Tuol Sleng Museum, where you will learn about the suffering of the Khmer people under the brutal Khmer Rouge regime of the 1970s. The visit to the Tuol Sleng Museum involves 1 hour on foot. This museum is also the site of the former S21 prison used by the Khmer Rouge and commemorates the atrocities that occurred here during the regime of Pol Pot. Today, these Killing Fields are a memorial site for quiet reflection.

The visit is educational but can be emotional; you will be given time to explore on your own. Afterwards, return to Phnom Penh for lunch.

You may like to visit the Central Market to browse shops or enjoy a stroll along the riverfront before dinner at a local restaurant this evening.

Destination Information

Tuol Sleng Museum - This former school was used by the Khmer Rouge as a detention and torture centre in the late 1970s. Today this building houses paintings and photographs of the victims. You can see the crude cells built in the classrooms and the torture devices used to extract confessions by the regime.

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.

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 24: Phnom Penh – Siem Reap Meals: B, L, D

Transfer to the airport for your 45-minute flight to Siem Reap. Continue to Banteay Srei, a 10th-century temple famous for its pink sandstone architecture and astonishingly fine carving. This is a Hindu temple dedicated to Shiva and is considered by many to be the 'jewel in the crown' of Angkorian art. The temple is cut from pink sandstone and contains some of the finest stone carvings in the world.

This evening, watch a rollicking performance by graduates of the PHARE Cambodian Circus. This is an NGO which transforms the lives of disadvantaged youths through vocational arts training. The project offers them an education and a career, while reviving arts that were almost lost under the strict anti-performance laws of the Khmer Rouge.

Destination Information

Siem Reap - Siem Reap is a bustling tourist destination due to its proximity to both the ancient Khmer national capital city of Angkor as well as Tonle Sap Lake. Angkor Wat is one of the main attractions and is the world's largest religious monument, in addition to being the spiritual and cultural heart of Cambodia.

Day 25: Angkor Wat & Angkor Thom — Meals: B, L, D

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.

This evening, take a cruise on the moat of Angkor Thom, enjoying a refreshing drink as the sun sets.

Please note: The Central Tower of the Angkor Wat complex is closed on Buddhist holidays. If you wish to ascend this tower, you may be required to wait in the queue alongside all other visitors. The ability to do this will be determined based on the group's schedule.

Destination Information

Angkor Wat - The state temple of Angkor Wat was built by the Khmer King Suryavarman II in the early 12th century and was originally dedicated to the Hindu god Vishnu. It fell to the Chams in 1177. A later king, Jayavarman VII, converted Angkor Wat to a Buddhist site. With its well-preserved decorative flourishes, extensive bas-relief and multiple tiers, Angkor Wat showcases Khmer classical architecture at its grandest.

Angkor Thom - The last capital of the Angkor (Khmer) Empire. After Angkor Wat was sacked by the Chams in 1177, the empire was subsequently restored by a new king, Jayavarman VII, who built Angkor Thom a few kilometres north of Angkor Wat. Look out for the Elephant Terrace and the Terrace of the Leper King - giant viewing platforms in Angkor Thom used for public royal ceremonies.

The Bayon - Built by King Jayavarman VII, the Bayon was the state temple at the heart of the city of Angkor Thom. Its beautifully crafted central towers are decorated with faces representing Jayavarman VII. The Bayon's stone galleries display extraordinary bas-reliefs incorporating over 11,000 figures.

Ta Prohm - The ancient Buddhist monastery of Ta Prohm is one of the most atmospheric sites in the whole Angkor archaeological park. It was built in 1186 by King Jayavarman VII, slightly to the east of his new capital, Angkor Thom. Swallowed by the jungle, it is dominated by the strangler figs and Kapok trees that have entwined themselves around the ruins. Originally dedicated to Sri Jayarajacudamani, the mother of the king, it was made famous by the film Tomb Raider. For many, Ta Prohm is the most enduring memory of visiting Angkor.

Day 26: Tonle Sap Lake — Meals: B, L, D

Enjoy a morning cruise on Tonle Sap Lake, visiting a local village and observing the way of life of these lake communities. In the high-water season (August to February), you will also visit Kampong Khleang, a unique village on stilts. In the low water season (March to July), you will visit Chong Kneas, a floating village.

On your way back to Siem Reap, stop by the SATCHA social enterprise, before enjoying this evening's farewell dinner with an Apsara Dance Show.

Destination Information

The SATCHA Handicraft Centre - A social enterprise showcasing traditional Cambodian art. Local creators are supported with materials and training to produce their crafts such as intricate bamboo weavings and wood carvings, with many of the handicrafts available to purchase from the shop.

Days 27-28: Depart Siem Reap — Meals: B

Fly home, arriving the following day.

Please note: Only breakfast is provided on the group's day of departure. Check-out is usually at noon – please contact our Reservations team if you would like to pre-book 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.

Laos: New Zealand passport holders require a visa to enter Laos. 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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). In Laos – where roads are often narrow, steep, or poorly maintained – smaller vans or minibuses are frequently required. Depending on group size, in areas where large coaches cannot operate, the group may be split into separate vehicles. 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.

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 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. Tet/Lunar New Year usually fall in January or February each year. 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 Laos, holidays include International Women's Day - 8th March and Laos New Year Holiday 14th – 16th April. In Cambodia: Khmer New Year is 14th – 16th April every year, the King's birthday is 13th - 15th May and the Water festival is between 10th – 12th November.

GROUP SIZE:

Our groups will be accompanied by a National Escort. There will usually be no more than 28 travellers in each 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.

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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