



Mekong Explorer

Classic Tour | 22 Days | Physical Level 1

Hanoi – Halong Bay – Hue – Hoi An – Saigon – 4N Victoria Mekong Cruise –
Phnom Penh – Siem Reap

From spectacular Halong Bay and the treasures of old Hanoi, travel the length of this beautiful country, through Hue and Hoi An to the bright lights of Saigon, experiencing the authentic Vietnam all the way. Then, embark on a four-night cruise on the Mekong, relaxing onboard as you witness life on the river, finishing up in Cambodia to explore colonial Phnom Penh and magnificent Angkor temple complex.

- Explore Hanoi's vibrant Old Quarter
- Cruise the magnificent Halong Bay
- Indulge in a Royal dining experience in Hue
- Cross the breath-taking 'Golden Bridge'
- Be charmed by laid back Hoi An
- Test your senses at Noir in Saigon
- Relax on a 4-night deluxe Mekong cruise
- Visit captivating Phnom Penh
- Be inspired by spectacular Angkor temples
- Experience local life in Tonle Sap



Mekong Explorer tour inclusions:

- Return international economy flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation
- All meals
- All sightseeing and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English speaking National Escort (if your group is 10 or more passengers) or Local Guides
- Cambodia & Vietnam visa fees for New Zealand passport holders
- Specialist advice from our experienced travel consultants
- Comprehensive travel guides

The only thing you may have to pay for are personal expenditure 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 South-east Asia on an excellent value group tour whilst travelling with like-minded people. The tours are on a fully-inclusive basis so you'll 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.

'Mekong Explorer' is rated as a **physical level 1** tour. A reasonable level of fitness is required but it is more about spending time on your feet rather than covering large distances. You will be getting on and off coaches, walking around the sights and climbing some steps.

- 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.

Country Profile: Cambodia & Vietnam

Cambodia is blessed with unspoilt beaches and beautiful colonial cities like Phnom Penh, Battambang and Kep. In Siem Reap, the breath-taking temples of Angkor are regarded as the heart and soul of Cambodia. Many visitors may never intend to go beyond these magnificent temples; however, they will soon become captivated by other parts of this friendly country.

Vietnam is a country of breath-taking natural beauty with an incredible modern-day history that quickly becomes addictive. It has experienced war and a bloody revolution in the past 100 years, but the revolution now underway is peaceful and prosperous. The speed of the modern-day changes is making Vietnam the absorbing and gripping place that it is today.

Joining Your Tour

The tour is 22 days in duration including international flights. Please note that depending on flight schedules passengers may arrive/depart on Day 2.

Travellers booked on 'Land Only' packages, the price includes visa fees and your arrival/ departure airport transfers if arriving/departing on the start and conclusion date of your tour. Please advise your international flight times to reservations. Join the tour on Day two in Hanoi end the tour on Day 21 in Siem Reap. Please refer to your final itinerary for more specific meeting instructions pertaining to your departure.

Itinerary Changes

It is our intention 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 make the best possible arrangements maintaining the integrity of your trip.

- The Notre Dame Cathedral is currently undertaking restorations which will continue until 2023. During this time customers are unable to enter the Cathedral; however, they can view it from the outside.
- The uppermost level of Bayon Temple will be undergoing restorations from January 2020 and may last several years. During this maintenance period passengers will be unable to access this area but can continue to enjoy the impressive architecture from the lower two levels.

Itinerary – Mekong Explorer

Day 1-2: Hanoi

Fly overnight to Hanoi where you will be met at the airport in the 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 your room is not ready yet. There is no sightseeing today.



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 holding the air of provincial French towns of the 1930s, a “Paris of the Orient” as people have called it.

Day 3: Hanoi

Discover the sights of Hanoi today. Visit the Ho Chi Minh Quarter and Ho Chi Minh’s Mausoleum, followed by the Humble House on Stilts and the One Pillar Pagoda. Next drive to the serene Temple of Literature, Hanoi’s first university. Later 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. Stop for the opportunity to taste some traditional egg coffee, before proceeding to a late lunch. Tonight, attend The Quintessence of Tonkin show, an artistic open-air performance celebrating the rich history of northern Vietnam.



Please note: Ho Chi Minh’s Mausoleum is closed for entry on Mondays and Fridays every week and from September to December each year. During these times, we are unable to enter the Mausoleum; however, we can view it from the outside.

Destination Information

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

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.

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.

Day 4: Hanoi – Halong Bay

Drive around 2 and a half hours from Hanoi to Halong, where you will take an overnight cruise to the far-most corners of the bay by boat. Boarding your boat could involve navigating your way over and through other boats, moored between it and the dock, sometimes without handrails, ladders or assistance from staff.



Enjoy lunch on board as you cruise out into the bay, stopping to anchor for an afternoon of activities. Activities are subject to change due to cruise selection and weather conditions.

Sightseeing usually includes visiting underground caves on the islands which involves climbing up and down lots of steps. 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.

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 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.

Destination Information

Halong Bay - Compared to the landscape of the limestone islets of Guilin in China and Krabi in southern Thailand, Halong Bay shares a common border with China in the north and harbours some of the most stunning scenery in Vietnam. Unique rock sculptures jut out dramatically from the clear emerald waters of the Gulf of Tonkin and numerous grottoes have created an enchanting, timeless world, looking out onto the horizon with the sails of the junks and sampans completing the picture.

Day 5: Halong Bay - Hue

Spend the morning sailing through Halong Bay. After brunch return to Hanoi for your one -hour flight to Hue.

Destination Information

Hue - Having been the imperial capital from 1802 until 1945 after the last emperor abdicated; Hue is still regarded as the centre of Vietnam's culture and religion. The city is dominated by the Imperial Citadel that 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.

Day 6: Hue

This morning visit the Imperial Citadel containing the Forbidden Purple City which is still being restored many years after the destruction caused by street fighting and bombing during the American War in Vietnam. Visit the Royal Tomb of Minh Mang to explore the opulent and exotic resting place laid out in formal Chinese style. Continue with a cruise along the Perfume River to the Thien Mu Pagoda, Hue's oldest and most beautiful pagoda, built on a hillock overlooking the river. Boarding your cruise could involve navigating your way over and through other boats, moored between it and the dock, sometimes without handrails, ladders or assistance from staff. Finally, visit The Om Garden House and its owner, Mr Vinh. Explore the traditional 19th century Hue residence and listen to Mr Vinh's stories of his royal heritage before returning to your hotel.



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 personal use by 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. Wander the grounds and foundations whilst viewing the remaining woodwork and architecture.

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.

Thien Mu Pagoda - This seven-storey octagonal tower built on a hillock, overlooking the Perfume River is Hue's oldest and most beautiful pagoda. Wander the grounds where bonsai, ponds and the smell of incense set a peaceful backdrop.

Day 7: Hue – Hoi An

After breakfast, drive approximately 4 hours to Hoi An. This journey will take you over the scenic Hai Van Pass. Stop en-route at Ba Na Hills for lunch, visiting the Golden Bridge: a beautiful bridge held by gigantic stone hands with panoramic views.



Please note: To visit Ba Na Hills and the Golden Bridge, you will take a 30-minute cable car journey up the hill, with scenic views. There is a small altitude adjustment as it is at 1400m.

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.

Day 8: Hoi An

Visit a local community farming project just outside of Hoi An, Tra Que village, where the community has come together to create a large vegetable farm. After lunch at the local restaurant, 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. In the afternoon, enjoy a walking tour through the streets of Hoi An, arriving first at Chua Ong Pagoda. Next, pass by the 200-year old Tan Ky House and take a short break at the Japanese Covered Bridge - one of Hoi An's most iconic structures. Visit the Reaching Out Tea House, an establishment that aids locals with disabilities, for a rejuvenating cup of tea.



Destination Information

Tra Que Village - Located a few kilometres from Hoi An, this picturesque village is renowned for its agriculture. Witness local farming techniques and learn about different exotic Vietnamese produce.

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.

Reaching Out – Provides opportunities for people with disabilities to learn skills and gain meaningful employment. The arts and crafts workshop provides a platform for local people to showcase their talents.

Day 9: Hoi An – Saigon

Spend some time at leisure before flying to Saigon. After check-in, the rest of your day is at leisure.

Destination Information

Saigon - The exuberant city of Saigon is driving Vietnam forward into the modern world, but is also a treasure trove of fascinating heritage. During the 1960s and early 1970s, Saigon was the Pearl of the Orient, which flourished under the American occupation. In more recent times, it 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 and you can wander through timeless alleys to incense-infused temples before catching up with the present in designer malls beneath sleek skyscrapers.

Day 10: Saigon

Explore modern day Saigon with its heady mix of local culture and colonial influences. Start with the chilling War Remnants Museum and learn of the turmoil that once gripped the country. Explore further with an exhilarating cyclo ride through modern Vietnam. Each cyclo takes one passenger and is operated by a cycle driver behind the carriage. Pass by the Notre Dame Cathedral, the Central Post Office, and end your ride at the Reunification Palace.

Destination Information

War Remnants Museum - Comprised of numerous buildings displaying military equipment, photographs and artefacts relating to the Vietnam War from 1961-1975. This museum illustrates a harrowing period in this nation's history.

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

Central Post Office - Located next to the Notre-Dame Cathedral. The Central Post Office building was constructed in the late 19th century. It counts Gothic, Renaissance and French influences and was designed by Auguste Henri Vildieu and Alfred Foulhoux, but is often erroneously credited as being the work of Gustave Eiffel.

Reunification Palace - Built on the site of the former Norodom Palace, is a landmark in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. It was designed by architect Ngô Viết Thụ and 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 11: Saigon

Confront the reality of guerrilla warfare at the Cu Chi Tunnels. The cramped tunnels were central to a few of the war's strategic operations, including the famous 1968 Tet Offensive, and they did not escape damage. American B52 bombers dropped hundreds of missiles leaving huge tell-tale craters behind. The Cu Chi experience can be emotional for some visitors, but it offers a fascinating window into the hardship and traumas of war. Sightseeing here involves two hours on foot on uneven mud paths through the bush and, if you choose, crawling through some of the tunnels. After an afternoon at leisure, enjoy dinner in the dark at Noir.



Destination Information

Cu Chi - the tunnels of Cu Chi are an immense network of connecting underground tunnels located in the Cu Chi district of Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), Vietnam, 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 numerous North Vietnamese fighters. The tunnel systems were of great importance to the Viet Cong in their resistance to American forces and helped to counter the growing American military effort.

Noir Restaurant – A unique culinary experience, Noir is a restaurant where you dine in the dark and experience your food in new ways. Waiters with visual impairments become your eyes and guide you through a delicious meal to challenge your other four senses.

Day 12: Saigon – Victoria Mekong Cruise

After breakfast, transfer to the meeting hotel in Saigon where you will say goodbye to your National Escort and be picked up for your cruise by your local Victoria Mekong guide. Drive to Can Tho, stopping en route for a delicious local lunch. Board the Victoria Mekong which, after a welcome briefing, will cast off into the waters of the Mekong Delta. Relax with a sundowner on deck and sit down to a sumptuous gala dinner whilst enjoying a performance of Đờn ca tài tử - traditional music of the Mekong. Drop anchor at Tiger Island.



Destination Information

Mekong River – The 7th longest river in Asia and the heart of Southeast Asia civilisation, there is no tapestry of river life as fascinating and varied as the Mekong.

Victoria Mekong - Launched in December 2019, the Victoria Mekong is a contemporary 4-star river vessel cruising between the Mekong Delta and Cambodia's capital Phnom Penh. It offers 33 spacious, deluxe cabins and two luxurious VIP suites, while facilities on board include a cocktail pool, three bars, a restaurant and a spa with massage service. To put you right in the heart of local life, there are shore excursions with plenty of opportunities to interact with local people and their culture.

Day 13: Victoria Mekong Cruise

After breakfast tender ashore to visit the authentic Long Xuyen Floating Market and the An Giang Traditions Museum, with fascinating exhibits on Vietnamese, Chinese, Khmer and Cham cultures in the region. During lunch the ship sails on before anchoring near Tiger Island.

Head ashore by sampan and explore Tiger Island by “xe loi”, visiting a wood carver and cottage industries such as net weaving and incense makers. Visit a pagoda locally known as “Mr. Tiger’s Temple”, hear the story that won the island its name. Delta. Return on board in time for dinner and the evening’s.

Day 14: Victoria Mekong Cruise

Cast off early to arrive in Tan Chau. On arrival, head to shore to visit a colourful Cao Dai temple and a silk village, where you'll learn all about the traditional silk making process, by xe loi (local rickshaw) or you can explore the town by electric bike. Eat lunch back on the ship before more shore excursions around Tan Chau, with the option to take an exhilarating speedboat ride to Tra Su Forest. This evening features a thrilling lion dance performance!

Day 15: Victoria Mekong Cruise

Today, the Victoria Mekong will pass over the border into Cambodia and sail towards Phnom Penh. Spend a relaxed day enjoying the passing scenery and a wealth of onboard activities, such as lectures and cocktail making. In the late afternoon, dock at Phnom Penh's Sisowath Quay where, this evening, you will be entertained with a traditional Cambodian apsara performance by local children. Sip a farewell cocktail before a final gala dinner.

Day 16: Victoria Mekong Cruise – Phnom Penh

Enjoy breakfast in the restaurant before disembarking and bidding farewell to the Victoria Mekong and meet your new Cambodian National Escort. Board a cyclo and head from the pier into the heart of the city to visit the magnificent Royal Palace and Silver Pagoda before perusing the treasures of the National Museum. After a final stop at Wat Phnom, enjoy a cold glass of local beer with beautiful views over the riverfront.

Destination Information

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 weighing 1kg. Famous artefacts include a 90kg solid gold Buddha made in 1907 and an Emerald Buddha said to be made of baccarat crystal.

National Museum - Housing the world's finest collection of Khmer pottery, bronzes and sculptures dating from the 4th century.

Wat Phnom - Home to a hilltop temple that carries the cities namesake. Locals flock here to pray for good luck and success.

Day 17: Phnom Penh – Siem Reap

Reflect on the history of the city with a visit to the Tuol Sleng Museum and Killing Fields. The visit to the Tuol Sleng Museum involves one hour on foot. This museum commemorates the atrocities that occurred during the regime of Pol Pot. The transfer south-west to the Killing Fields will take 30 minutes. You will spend about an/one hour here on foot for a harrowing insight into Cambodia's tumultuous past.

Most people find it quite confronting and emotional so you will be given time to explore on your own. Later, transfer to the airport for your 45-minute flight to Siem Reap.

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.

Killing Fields - The emotional Killing Fields of Cheung Ek, made famous by the film of the same name. More than 17,000 civilians were killed and buried in mass graves here making this place a chilling reminder of the brutalities of the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime.

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. This huge complex of palaces and temples were built on the sprawling alluvial plain to the north of Tonle Sap.

Day 18: Siem Reap

Spanning from the 9th to 15th century with over 1,000 temples, the Angkor complex was the seat of the thriving Khmer Empire. UNESCO manages the complex. To enter, your group will drive approximately 6km out of town to the main entrance gate to get your entrance passes, which you must carry with you. If you choose to climb at any site, you must be able to climb and descend without assistance. Begin at the city of Angkor Thom and the enigmatic Bayon, the Elephant Terrace and the Terrace of the Leper King before continuing to the temple of Ta Prohm, enveloped in a labyrinth of jungle. This afternoon is devoted to the fascinating and awe-inspiring Angkor Wat. In the evening, relax on-board a boat and view the sunset on Angkor's moat.



Please note: The Central Tower of the Angkor Wat complex is closed on Buddhist holidays and on all other days has a limited number of visitors allowed at any given time, under regulations from UNESCO. If you wish to visit this tower, you will be required to wait in the queue alongside all other visitors. The ability to do this will be determined upon the groups' schedule.

Destination Information

Angkor Thom - This fortified city is flanked by a row of 54 stone figures on each side, which leads you through a 23-metre imposing stone entrance gate to the various temples inside.

Bayon - Beautifully crafted central towers, decorated with four opposing faces representing King Jayavarman VII. Bayon's stone galleries display extraordinary bas-reliefs incorporating over 11,000 figures.

Elephant Terrace and Terrace of the Leper King - Giant viewing platforms used for public ceremonies, which served as a base for the King's grand audience hall.

Ta Prohm - Swallowed by the jungle where Strangler Figs and Kapok Trees have entwined themselves around the ruins. Undoubtedly, the most atmospheric ruin at Angkor with several towers, closed courtyards and narrow corridors to explore.

Angkor Wat - Surrounded by a 190-metre moat and taking 30 years to build, Angkor Wat represents 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.

Day 19: Siem Reap

In the high-water season, drive to Kampong Phluk, a cluster of three villages of stilt houses built within the floodplain of the Tonle Sap lake. In the low water season, you will visit Chong Kneas floating village. Get a glimpse into local life at the home of a Khmer family. Return to Siem Reap to enjoy a performance by the PHARE Cambodian Circus, an NGO which teaches street children to become internationally renowned circus artists.



Day 20: Siem Reap

Today, travel by tuk tuk to a shared cooking lesson, where you will learn to prepare traditional Khmer dishes. The chef will teach you all about what goes into the local cuisine, as you create a delicious meal! Spend your afternoon at leisure before a farewell dinner.



Days 21-22: Depart Siem Reap

Today you will be transferred to the airport in time for your departing flight. Any time before your departure today is free at your leisure. Fly home to New Zealand, arriving the same or the following day.

Please note: Only breakfast is provided on the group's day of departure; no refund will be given for meals missed.

Late check-out is not included in our South East Asia group tours. If you wish to book a late check-out for your final day, please contact our Reservations department who can confirm additional pricing and make this arrangement for you, subject to availability at the hotel.

Mekong Explorer Travel Information

Visas

Entry visas are required by all visitors to Cambodia and Vietnam. Wendy Wu Tours Visa Department can assist you with the process of obtaining a visa. We will supply you with all paperwork if applicable and submit the visa application on your behalf. Please be advised that your passport must have at least six months validity left on it from the date of entry into Vietnam.

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. Currently a visa is required for New Zealand Passport holders. Your travel consultant will inform you if any changes are applicable prior to your departure.

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.

Eating in South East 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 most local dishes. Whilst Southeast Asian food has a reputation for being hot and spicy, each region has its own distinct characteristics.

Your itinerary has been carefully crafted to introduce you to a range of local dishes and we hope that you enjoy the culinary adventure ahead. All meals (excluding drinks) are included in our fully inclusive group tours from dinner on the day of your groups' arrival until breakfast on your day of departure.

Determining when it's appropriate to use chopsticks, forks or spoons can be challenging for some travellers, even other Asians, as each country has different customs. In Thailand and some other countries in Southeast Asia, a fork and spoon are used for most dishes while chopsticks are typically provided to eat noodles. 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.

Those with dietary requirements will be well catered for - just make sure to inform your booking agent of any specific requirements well in advance of your trip.

All the restaurants we visit will be researched and inspected regularly to ensure that they follow the strictest health, cleanliness, and safety guidelines.

All waiting staff will wear face masks and gloves and self-service buffets will be avoided in favour of à la carte dining, waiter-served meals, or waiter-assisted buffets. Hand sanitiser will be provided to the group before and after every food and beverage service.

Please read your travel guide, which you will receive with your final documents for more information about eating in Southeast Asia. We recommend that when it comes to Asia food, you stay open minded and try to be adventurous!

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/Local Guide. Rest assure that all hotels used by Wendy Wu Tours are regularly inspected by our staff and our partners to ensure that standards meet your needs.

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, mini buses 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.

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 you National Escort or Local Guides.

Cambodia and Vietnam 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 between 12th – 16th February 2021, Reunification Day is on 30th April every year, International Labour Day is on 1st May every year and National Independence Day is on 2nd September every year In Cambodia Khmer New Year is 13th – 17th April every year, the King's birthday is 13th - 15th May, and the Water festival is between 30th October – 1st November.

Group Size

The group size on our Classic Tours is on average 18 passengers, with a maximum group size of 18. You may encounter other Wendy Wu tour groups while you are travelling. On our group tours we operate a seat-and-a-half policy, allowing you to travel in greater comfort.

All our departures are guaranteed to operate with a minimum of 8 travellers booked (unless cancelled due to factors beyond our control). A national escort will accompany each group of 10 or more. 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.

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.

Souvenirs

We want to be able to give you an opportunity to buy souvenirs, so we include some stops at museums or exhibitions which demonstrates 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.

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 five kilograms. It is essential that your luggage is lockable.

Exchanging Cash

New Zealand Dollars can be easily exchanged in Southeast Asia, provided notes are undamaged. We suggest exchanging your money before travelling to remote areas and smaller towns, as exchange facilities can be limited. Your National Escort will remind you to do this before departure.

Personal Expenses & Optional Tours

Personal Expense - You will need to take some extra money to cover drinks, laundry and souvenirs, plus any additional sightseeing that may be offered to you. Based on the advice of previous customers an approximate amount of NZ\$250 per person, per week should be sufficient; however, for those that can't resist a bargain or may wish to participate in all of the optional excursions, consider allocating a higher amount.

Optional tours – Optional tours may be offered in each city you visit during your tour at an additional cost. These are not included in the standard itinerary and will only be available if time permits. Each option will be arranged locally by your National Escort/Local Guide.

Climbing Steps

Sightseeing at nearly all of the palaces, fortresses and some temples involves climbing quite a number of steps. These palaces were built to provide defense against potential invaders so nearly all of them stand on top of a hill, while the interiors have layers of narrow hallways and steps to slow down the advance of enemies once they were inside. The steps tend to be quite large, not level and sometimes without handrails. Hindu and Buddhist temples or pagodas also tend to be built at an elevation, as this is the most auspicious position according to ancient beliefs. This means you sometimes need to walk from the bus park to the entrance, and/or need to climb some steps inside. People with knee or hip injuries, who have poor balance or are otherwise unable to complete these activities independently should consider the suitability of this itinerary carefully.

Cultural Difference

Southeast Asia has many religions, cultures and histories. Please be considerate of the local beliefs and customs and dress with consideration.

Appropriate Dress

When visiting temples or mosques, both men and women should dress in conservative, non-revealing clothing. Full-length trousers with a shirt or t-shirt for men; and pants or skirts well below the knee with a top that covers the shoulders and upper arms for women. Women might also consider carrying a 'modesty shawl' in their daypack – this could be a sarong or light scarf – which they can wear over their shoulders and heads to feel more comfortable while sightseeing at mosques.

Religious sites and homes throughout Southeast Asia – for Hindus, Muslims or Buddhists to name a few – require all visitors to remove their shoes to enter. Even if you then need to walk outdoors, over hot or rough ground,

you will not be allowed to wear shoes. You will often find shoe storage rooms near the entrance of a site where it is customary to leave your shoes near the entrance. Occasionally there are 'shoe minders' who will offer to keep your shoes safe for a 'tip' – this is not compulsory, so each customer can choose to tip for this service or not. If you do not want to remove your shoes, you will have to remain outside.

We recommend shoes that easily slip on and off and carry a pair of thick socks in your daypack, which you can wear to protect your feet from any rough or hot surfaces. The above itinerary will indicate when you need to consider this.

Vaccinations and Your Health

We recommend that you contact either your Doctor or Health Centre for advice on vaccinations and travel health. Holiday Health has a comprehensive website that you may also find useful www.holidayhealth.co.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. 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 followed by deposit documentation, which includes a visa application form (if applicable). Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately 2-3 weeks prior to departure.

Last updated: November 2020