

EXPLORE!

TRIP NOTES



Jewels of Indochina (HIC 2017)



TRIPDURATION
27
DAYS



Tour Style: Classic
Tour Pace: Moderate

Tour Type: Small Groups
Accommodation
Grade: Standard

Trip Code: HIC

Trip Highlights - Jewels of Indochina

- ✓ Luang Prabang - Sleepy French Colonial riverside town with over 30 gilded temples
- ✓ Hanoi - Wander through the bustling narrow streets of the Old Quarter lined with shop-houses
- ✓ Halong Bay - Traditional junk boat cruise through one of the most breathtaking limestone landscapes in South East Asia
- ✓ Hoi An - Charming ancient merchant's town on the banks of the Thu Bon River
- ✓ Siem Reap - Gateway to the iconic and awe-inspiring Khmer temples of Angkor

Trip Essentials

Accommodation: 4 nights Simple Hotel
2 nights Standard Bungalow
17 nights Standard Hotel
1 night Simple Overnight Train
1 night Simple Homestay

Included Meals: 24 breakfasts, 2 lunches, 1 dinner

Start Point: Join trip: Vientiane
End Point: Trip ends: Siem Reap
Transport: Bus, Train, Boat, Flight
Countries: Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos

Jewels Of Indochina

This comprehensive trip through Indochina takes us into Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia. We experience river life as we cruise to vast caves and beautiful waterfalls in Laos. In Vietnam we travel from north to south, discovering the jungle clad islands of Halong Bay, the old city of Hanoi and the Imperial citadel in Hue. Crossing into Cambodia we visit the incredible temple complex of Angkor.

Why Book this trip

This four week trip is ideal for travellers with extended holiday time who want to see the highlights of the Indochina region. This trip takes you through Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia showcasing the best of each diverse destination along the way. Ideal for lovers of history and culture this adventure holiday will give you a great insight into the regions turbulent past and a flavour for how different each country is, while endeavouring to experience local life along the way.

Suitability

We've given each of our tours a comfort rating and a tour pace, walking or cycling grade to give you a general idea about the level of activity on each tour and the standard of accommodation you will be staying in at the end of your day's adventure.

Often you'll stay in different styles of accommodation during your tour; so we make an average rating across the entire tour. For more information on where you'll stay each night, please refer to the day by day tour itinerary.

Accommodation Grade: Standard

Our mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en-suite facilities.

Tour Style: Classic

Packed with adventure, these tours offer inspiring destinations and authentic travel experiences at a reasonable price. Using all kinds of transport and accommodation, we'll take you off the beaten track to discover the true heart of the people and places you visit.

Tour Pace: Moderate

These moderately paced tours provide some busy days with plenty of experiences to enjoy, as well as time to relax along the way.

Your trip itinerary

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested.

DAY 1 Join tour in Vientiane

Arrive Vientiane and check-in at the hotel. Located on the banks of the Mekong River, the Laos capital is a friendly town. Find weathered French Colonial mansions, stunning temples and steaming noodle stalls. A Beer Lao by the river at sunset is the best way to end the day and start your adventure.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available



 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 2 In Vientiane, explore the Lao capital; free afternoon

This morning we include a sightseeing tour around the city. This is a low-built, red roofed attractive capital city, with a slight French feel to it. We explore some of the best sights including the Victory Gate (a Triumphal Arch with good views of the town), the That Luang stupa (said to contain a hair of the Buddha) and Sisaket Wat, packed with fine Buddha images.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 3 Fly to Luang Prabang. Drive to Nong Khiaw

This morning we leave Vientiane, flying north to Luang Prabang and then driving on to the scenic town of Nong Khiaw. The condition of the roads in this part of the country is very much dependent on the weather and we should be prepared for some landslides and delays. The scenery however is spectacular - it's mostly forested with 'slash and burn' cultivation very much in evidence, along with the many hilltribe villages along the way. Slash and burn usually takes place in April and May, when rural fires can be witnessed and smoke can fill the air often drifting into nearby towns and creating a hazy sky. We plan to arrive in Nong Khiaw in the early evening where you'll then be able to have dinner and relax in this sleepy river-side town.

Overnight: **Standard Bungalow**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 4 In Nong Khiaw, visit ethnic villages and explore the Nam Ou River

Nong Khiaw is a small settlement located upon the banks of the gentle Nam Ou River, overshadowed on all sides by towering limestone karsts and lush forested hills. We have a full day exploring the local villages and landscapes today. We'll take a longboat upriver to the remote villages of Ban Sop Jam and Muang Ngoi Neu, where we will be able to chat to the locals and learn a little about the traditional way of life in this rural part of Laos. We'll then head out on an easy walk of around two hours, taking us in to the heart of the countryside with gorgeous limestone cliffs, mountains and paddy fields before our boats take us back downstream to Nong Khiaw.

Overnight: **Standard Bungalow**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 6 Explore Luang Prabang; Excursion on Mekong River to Ock Pop Tok craft centre

Today we'll really get to have a closer look at Luang Prabang. All the main sights of interest are close together and we'll have a chance to walk around the various wats (temples) including the splendid Wat Xieng Thong (the Golden Temple built in 1559), which is strikingly decorated in brilliant red and gold designs, with an imposing tiled roof and mosaic dragon motifs. We'll also visit Wat Sen and the Royal Palace Museum. Afterwards we'll hire tuk tuks to take us to the Ock Pop Tok living craft centre, a project setup to employ and empower local craftspeople and artisans. There's a wide range of high quality textiles on display and you'll get to see the incredible skills with which they're made. Returning to the town centre the rest of the day is left free for personal exploration.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 7 From Luang Prabang, visit Kuang Si Waterfalls; free afternoon

This morning we travel by bus to the beautiful Kuang Si Waterfalls, approximately 45 minutes from Luang Prabang. Passing forested hills and several ethnic minority villages we arrive at the limestone falls that cascade into several clear pools below. Returning to Luang Prabang, there is an opportunity to take an afternoon bicycle trip (optional) to the Lao Loum village at Ban Phanom. Approximately 6 km from Luang Prabang, the road gently undulates through cultivated scenery and arrives at a well-kept scenic village on the banks of the Nam Khan River. We will spend time meeting the locals and learning a little more about the everyday life of rural Lao before returning to Luang Prabang for a well earned 'Beer Lao'.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 8 In Luang Prabang, free morning; fly to Hanoi, evening walk in Old Quarter

This morning is left free for further exploration of Luang Prabang. In the afternoon, we fly to Hanoi in Vietnam. This evening you can take a walk through the bustling streets and markets of the Old Quarter. The shops themselves have very narrow frontages, but are actually quite deep; they are known locally as 'tube' shops, while on the pavement food vendors sell noodles, snacks and stir-fries from shoulder panniers.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 9 Discover the sights of Hanoi including the Old Quarter

This morning we make a tour of the main sights of Hanoi. Architecturally styled like a French provincial town with tree-lined boulevards and substantial low-built houses the city is wonderfully nostalgic. Among the interesting sights are the charming One-Pillar Pagoda, Confucius Temple and the Presidential Palace. Ho Chi Minh himself, a spartan-living and scholarly man, chose not to live in the Presidential Palace; he preferred instead a simple teak stilt-house specially built for him in the grounds. This walk through the narrow lanes of the fascinating Old Quarter, where the streets are named after various crafts or specialties: Paper Street, Silk Street, Basket Street and so on. The shops themselves have very narrow frontages but are actually quite deep; they are known locally as tube shops. On the pavements food sellers sell noodles, snacks and stir-fries from shoulder panniers. The smell of food mixes with the smell of incense from small temples dotted around.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 10 Free time in Hanoi, then drive to Halong Bay

We have some free time in Hanoi this morning perhaps to visit some of the many museums or Ho Chi Minh's austere mausoleum, which resembles Lenin's in Moscow. Afterwards we drive out towards the iconic Halong Bay in the Gulf of Tonkin. Thousands of jagged limestone islands rise out of the jade green waters like the hairy scales of a submerged dragon. In fact Halong means: 'Where the dragon descends to the sea'. As legend has it the rugged seascape was created by the pounding tail of a dragon as he ran from the mountains into the sea, carving the islands in his wake.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 11 Cruise Halong Bay; from Hanoi overnight train to Hué

This morning we enjoy the romantic scenery of Halong Bay on a cruise amongst the islands. We'll have the chance to stop at a grotto beneath towering cliffs and perhaps visit a beach. It is interesting to see the curious assortment of tourist boats, traditional junks and wooden sampans gliding through the waters. We enjoy a seafood lunch on board the boat, before returning to a hotel in Hanoi to freshen up before boarding the Reunification Express to Hué.

Overnight: **Simple Overnight Train**

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 12 In Hué; boat along Perfume River to Thien Mu Pagoda

We arrive in Hué, one of the great cultural and religious centres of Vietnam, a quietly impressive place. The Perfume River divides the city in two and has been the inspiration for poets and painters for many centuries. This afternoon we plan to take a trip by boat along the Perfume River from Hué to the Thien Mu Pagoda. This serene temple is the oldest in Hué and also the symbol of the city.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 13 In Hué, visit the Imperial Citadel; free afternoon

This morning we appreciate Hué's fascinating history with a visit to the Imperial Citadel. Located on the left bank is the river, this palace was built by the Nguyen dynasty, Vietnam's ruling emperors from the early 1800s to 1945. The Citadel has formal moats and impressive ramparts that were constructed by 20,000 men and was a copy of the Forbidden City in Beijing. Although most of the inner

part of the city was totally destroyed during the month-long Tet Offensive in 1968, the vast outer walls and the west wing remain an eloquent reminder of the palace's former glory. The remainder of the day is free to perhaps explore some of the outlying Tombs of the Emperors by bicycle.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 14 Scenic drive via Danang to Hoi An

We enjoy a scenic drive across the spectacular Col des Nuages, otherwise known as the Hai Van Pass en route observing rural scenes of thatched, wooden houses and lime-green rice paddies as well as enjoying panoramic sea views. Pausing in Danang, once the centre of the Kingdom of Champa (2nd century AD - 1720) we visit the Cham Museum, home to a fine collection of Cham sculptures. Our next stop is at the nearby five peaks of the Marble Mountains, said to represent the five elements of water, wood, fire, gold and earth. Naturally formed grottoes have been transformed into heavily carved Buddhist sanctuaries. A torch is useful to explore some of the caves and grottos. A short distance from the mountains we find the white sands of My Khe Beach (nicknamed China Beach by American troops)- an ideal spot for a brief rest. Finally we reach our destination - the UNESCO World Heritage town of Hoi An.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 15 Free day to explore Hoi An; optional visit to My Lai

The historic, merchant town of Hoi An had become one of the busiest international trading ports of Southeast Asia by the 17th and 18th centuries. First colonised by the Portuguese in the 16th century it still retains its medieval charm today, with many of its old buildings superbly preserved. The day is free to explore at leisure. You may choose to visit the Japanese Bridge or some of Chinese temples and meeting halls in the Old Town. There are many shops, bars and restaurants in this charming town and is a great place to buy souvenirs, have clothing tailored or simply watch the world go by in a riverside café. You may wish to take an optional excursion out the site of the My Lai village massacre memorial. The massacre was a significant turning point in the American War and the horrific story is told through a very emotive exhibition of photography.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 16 Visit to ancient My Son; free afternoon in Hoi An

A further day is spent based in this lovely historic town. This morning we take an excursion to the holiest and most evocative of Vietnam's Cham sites, My Son. The Chams were dynastic lords who rejected the authority of China in 2AD and established their own kingdom. Although they benefited from strong sea links with the rest of Southeast Asia the kingdom's interior could not supply sufficient food for a strong military force. For 1000 years they managed to stave off attacks by the Vietnamese and Chinese, before being overcome by the Vietnamese in the 15th century. Travel along the track that leads to the site is slow and bumpy through wooded hills, but the site is certainly impressive with several groupings of Cham temples to be visited. Nowhere are the fine masonry skills of the Chams more evident than at My Son, despite the fact that much of the site was bombed in the 1960s. The afternoon is free to enjoy Hoi An further. The beach is only a short drive by taxi alternatively a boat trip on the river as the late afternoon sun lights up the riverfront is a treat.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

Single Room Available


Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 17 Fly to Ho Chi Minh City; drive to Mekong Delta

After a short drive to Danang Airport we fly to Ho Chi Minh City, from where we drive further south to Ben Tre in the Mekong Delta. Surrounded with lush and fertile land the area is home to small villages and swaying coconut palms. We take a local ferry to a nearby village, which we explore by trishaw. Later we board sampans, which are small Chinese wooden boats, and cruise along the narrow canals that shoot off the main vein of the Mekong River. After lunch at a local house we have some free time to explore the area further. Finally we return to Ben Tre by boat where we spend the night in a local homestay, with shared facilities and dorm-style accommodation.

Overnight: **Simple Homestay**

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

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DAY 18 Mekong Delta cruise, then drive to Ho Chi Minh City

We spend the morning exploring the Nuoc Trong canal in the Mekong Delta, meeting some hard working locals, perhaps with time to see coconut processing and trading. We also have options to walk or cycle along the canal to explore further. Later on we drive back to Ho Chi Minh City.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 19 In Ho Chi Minh City; explore Old Saigon, free afternoon

This morning we walk around the central sights of Old Saigon, now District 1 of Ho Chi Minh City. We see the Notre Dame Cathedral and the GPO building as well as some of the old French Colonial hotels such as The Rex. We then drive to the Independence Palace (renamed the Reunification Hall) and the graphic War Remnants Museum. The afternoon is free for you to explore the city further at your leisure, perhaps with a visit to the huge Ben Thanh market.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 20 From Ho Chi Minh City, visit Cu Chi Tunnels

This morning we take a short drive out of the city to the infamous Cu Chi Tunnels, which formed an incredible underground command base for 10,000 Viet Cong troops and were a major part of the 1968 Tet Offensive. The site is a fascinating insight into the resourcefulness of the Vietnamese. There is the opportunity to crawl through a small specially adapted section of the tunnels should you wish to sample the claustrophobic conditions the Viet Cong lived in. Afterwards we bid farewell to our tour leader who continues back to Ho Chi Minh City while you continue by road into Cambodia. Border formalities take place at Moc Bai (Vietnam) and Bavet (Cambodia) crossing point. Our final destination is Phnom Penh, Cambodia's capital.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 21 Discover the sights of Phnom Penh; free afternoon

Phnom Penh took over from Angkor as Cambodia's capital city in the 1440s. It is now a lively city with many French colonial buildings and plenty to see. Accompanied by a local guide we visit the National Museum, a treasure trove of beautifully preserved carvings and lintels rescued from Angkor; the emotive Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, formerly a high school that became the Khmer Rouge's main torture and interrogation centre; and the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek - the memorial stupa is a glass tower filled with human skulls - a gruesome reminder of the scale of Pol Pot's atrocities. This afternoon we visit the Royal Palace and Silver Pagoda as well as the temple of Wat Phnom before having some free time in the city.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 22 Free day in Phnom Penh; optional visit to Silk Island

Today is free allowing you the opportunity to explore the city or its surrounds further. Optional excursions close to the city include a trip to Silk Island, Chiso Mountain or the abandoned Royal City of Oudong. Each of these excursions are half a day in duration and may be combined, your tour leader will discuss in more detail. Silk Island or Koh Dach is reached by a short boat journey along the Mekong where the majority of villagers on the island earn a living through producing handicrafts. It is a great opportunity to learn more about traditional ways of life and interact with locals as you learn about silk weaving, woodcarving, pottery, painting, and jewellery making. Chiso Mountain (380m), located in Sia village about 62 km south of Phnom Penh, is topped by the ruins of an 11th century Khmer Brahmanic Temple with fine views of the surrounding paddy fields. Oudong is about an hour north of the capital and offers the opportunity to explore attractive historic temples and stupas.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 23 Drive to Siem Reap; cruise on Tonle Sap Lake

This morning we make an early start for our drive to Siem Reap, stopping somewhere for lunch on the way. Later in the day we journey to nearby Tonle Sap Lake where we board our charter boat for a leisurely cruise through the fascinating floating village of Chong Kneas, where we see stilt houses, floating markets and an array of boats.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 24 From Siem Reap, explore Angkor temples with sunset

Our exact programme over the next three days may change slightly at our local guide's discretion (to avoid crowds, coincide with sunsets, etc.). Angkor was actually a series of cities, built between the 9th and the 13th centuries by the Khmer kings, with a population of 750,000 in its heyday. The Angkor complex is spread out over some 155 square kilometres, scattered with magnificent carved stone temples, elegant sculptures and incredible bas reliefs. We visit the Rolous group, which are some of the earliest temples. In the afternoon we visit the temples of Banteay Srei, a small but beautiful temples with exquisite carvings. We end the day at East Mebon, with a visit to Pre Rup temple for sunset.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 25 From Siem Reap, explore Angkor Thom

We continue our exploration with a visit to the temples of King Jayavarman VII, reputedly Angkor's greatest king. The fortified city of Angkor Thom, which he built at the end of the 12th century is enclosed by a square wall with five monumental gates decorated with stone elephant trunks. Originally, crocodiles inhabited the moat and huge statues of 54 different gods protected each gate. The city contains another of Angkor's true gems - The Bayon. Although not as impressive as Angkor Wat from a distance, The Bayon is nevertheless incredible for its maze of corridors, gothic style towers and magical central temples. We'll explore The Terrace of the Elephants and the Leper King, the Baphuon and Phimeanakas, and some of the surrounding temples such as Preah Khan.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 26 From Siem Reap, explore Ta Prohm and Angkor Wat

On our final day we make a visit to the 2nd Angkor capital that includes the temples of Prasat Kravan, Banteay Kdei and Takeo. A highlight for many is a visit to the atmospheric temple of Ta Prohm, where the film Tomb Raider was filmed, lying half consumed by the jungle. We leave the best known and most breathtaking of all the sights, Angkor Wat, to the end - where we stay until the sun sets on the last night of our adventure.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 27 Tour ends in Siem Reap

Tour ends after breakfast. If you have time you may choose to browse the old market for some last minute bargains, or enjoy afternoon tea at The Foreign Correspondent's Club.

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

Accommodation and Meals

Food & Drink

Included meals: 24 breakfasts, 2 lunches, 1 dinner included in the price of this trip. Please be prepared to pay for non-included meals. Please note that costs for drinks and meals can vary depending on location.

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Budgeting for your Trip

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the trip price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Vietnam

Lunch £: 5.00 - 7.00

Dinner £: 9.00

Cambodia

Lunch £: 6.00

Dinner £: 10.00 - 12.00

Laos

Lunch £: 2.00 - 4.00

Dinner £: 6.00

Drink

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Vietnam

Bottle of Beer £: 2.00 - 4.00

Water £: 0.50

Cambodia

Bottle of Beer £: 1.30

Water £: 0.60

Laos

Bottle of Beer £: 0.75

Water £: 0.75 - 1.50

Other Sightseeing & Activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations.

Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

Optional Excursions

Vientiane - Buddha park US\$8

Hanoi - Water Puppets from US\$4

Hue - Trip to Royal Tombs US\$9; trip to countryside from US\$12; cooking course from US\$24

Hoi An - Cookery class from US\$24; trip to My Lai from US\$12

Ho Chi Minh City - Trip to Mekong Delta from US\$15

Siem Reap - Blessing ceremony at local monastery US\$33; Scenic helicopter flight over Angkor temples from US\$202

Phnom Penh - Private blessing US\$34; Private cooking class US\$36; Koh Dach Island US\$78

The prices stated are based on a minimum number of participants (usually 5-6). Please be aware that the optional excursions can run with fewer people but the price may be higher. Likewise, a slightly reduced price may be applicable where the participation is greater. These excursions are generally run via our agent in the country. Local companies may offer similar excursions at a cheaper price. Should you want to use these companies please be aware that a lower price may mean that not all costs are included (entrance fees etc.) or services will not operate at the same safety and quality standards.

Tipping - Tour Leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Tipping - Local Crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognized part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour.

Accordingly, you should allow US\$ 30.

Foreign Exchange

Vietnam

ATM Availability: There are ATMs virtually everywhere in Vietnam and in Cambodia, though we also recommend bringing cash.

Credit Card Acceptance: Some shops in Hanoi, and Hoi An. The occasional restaurant.

Travellers Cheques: Travellers cheques can usually be changed in the towns, but only during bank opening hours.

Local Currency: Dong.

Recommended Currency for Exchange: Carry your money in US\$ Dollars cash. You can also take GBP but US\$ are easier to exchange. (Dollar bills can be used in some hotels and shops; change is often given in local currency).

Where to Exchange: Most towns.

Cambodia

ATM Availability: There are ATMs in most towns and cities.

Credit Card Acceptance: Credit cards are accepted in some large shops and restaurants in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap.

Travellers Cheques: They can be hard to change outside of Siem Reap and Phnom Penh; we recommend them for emergencies only.

Local Currency: Riel.

Recommended Currency for Exchange: In Cambodia, US\$ is the most commonly used currency (small denomination notes are easier to use).

Where to Exchange: Large towns.

Laos

ATM Availability: ATMs are available in most major towns and cities including Vientiane, Luang Prabang, Vang Vieng and Savannekhet.

Credit Card Acceptance: There is very limited credit card use.

Travellers Cheques: Travellers cheques are exchangeable only in the main towns.

Local Currency: Kip.

Recommended Currency for Exchange: US\$ are the easiest to exchange in Laos.

Where to Exchange: All major currencies and travellers cheques are exchangeable in the main towns.

Joining your Trip

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found on our website at www.explore.co.uk, in the tour specific dates and prices section.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer. For more information please refer to <https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers>.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer please refer to <https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers>.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Important Information

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

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DIRECT TRAVEL INSURANCE



Travel Insurance is essential. If you have not already arranged cover, please contact our recommended Travel Insurance providers www.campbellirvinedirect.com/Explore who offer Travel Insurance specifically designed to cover travel with Explore or call **Campbell Irvine Direct** on Tel: 020 7938 1734

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Travel Aware

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office Advice follow the link at www.explore.co.uk/travel-safety

We strongly advise that you register with the FCO to receive updates to the travel advice for your chosen destination. A hard copy of the current FCO Travel Advice for your chosen destination is available by contacting cr@explore.co.uk or 01252 379438.

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Visa Information

Laos: A single visa is required by UK, New Zealand, Australian, US & Canadian citizens and can be obtained on arrival. The visa on arrival costs 30USD for New Zealand and Australian citizens, 35USD for UK & US citizens and 42USD for Canadian citizens. For other nationalities the price varies between US\$30-42. One passport sized photo is required to arrange this.

Vietnam: Until 30th June 2018 'British Citizen' passport holders can visit Vietnam for up to 15 days without a visa. A visa will be required if you enter after this date or if you wish to re-enter within 30 days of your departure.

For visits of up to 30 days, you can get an e-visa before you travel from <https://evisa.xuatnhapcanh.gov.vn/>

For visits of longer than 30 days you must get a visa from the nearest Vietnamese embassy before travelling to Vietnam. If you want to make a second visit within 30 days of leaving Vietnam, you'll need to get a multiple entry visa to re-enter.

Please note that it is a pre-requisite for entry into Vietnam that your passport is valid for a minimum of 6 months from your date of entry

All visa related issues including information for other nationalities should be confirmed with the relevant Embassy prior to departure.

Cambodia: A single visa is required by UK, New Zealand, Australian, USA & Canadian citizens and can be obtained on arrival. The current cost is 30 USD, a passport sized photograph for immigration will also be required. Alternatively, you can arrange your visa

in advance in the form of an e-Visa. To make your application, and for more information contact the Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs direct at www.mfaic.gov.kh.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on **0208 5431846**.

Vaccinations & Protection

Vietnam

Nothing compulsory, we recommend protection against malaria, typhoid, tetanus, diphtheria, polio and hepatitis A. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on Malaria and Zika Virus. Although not compulsory travellers may also wish to immunise themselves against Japanese encephalitis. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/> and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed before departure.

Cambodia

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against malaria, infectious hepatitis, tetanus, typhoid, diphtheria and polio. Consult your GP regarding tablets advised for malaria. Though not compulsory, travellers may wish to immunise themselves against Japanese encephalitis. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/> and from your local healthcare provider.

Laos

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against malaria, typhoid, tetanus, diphtheria, polio and hepatitis A. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on different prophylaxis available against malaria. Although not compulsory, travellers may wish to immunise themselves against Japanese encephalitis. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/> and from your local healthcare provider.

Preparing for your Trip

Climate

Vietnam

As Vietnam is a long, narrow country from north to south climate conditions vary considerably. The climate can be divided into three distinct patterns between the north, central and south regions. The climate in the north is generally humid and subtropical, although the winter months from November to March can be colder with temperatures from 10 - 15 degrees. Summer months, May to September can be quite hot with temperatures from 30 - 35 degrees. Meanwhile south Vietnam enjoys a tropical climate all year round, with little variation throughout the year (around 27 - 32 degrees), however May to November is the rainy season when short, heavy downpours are quite frequent. Central Vietnam lies somewhere in between. The coastal strip is usually dry and hotter from April to October while November to March is wetter and cooler. A light rain jacket and small umbrella are recommended year round.

Cambodia

Cambodia is a hot and tropical country, being hottest in April and coolest in January (still high 20s). Although rainfall is at its maximum in October, Phnom Penh and Siem Reap receive very little rain compared to the coastal areas, and when it does rain it tends to be in the form of sporadic mid afternoon downpours. There is normally very little rain between December and March.

Laos

The area of Laos and Thailand is tropical 'cool' from November to February, (15 to 27 Degrees Centigrade); 'hot' from March to May (up to 38 Degrees); 'wet' from June to October (rainy, hot and muggy). Bangkok and lowland areas are sticky all year round, but the northern highlands (Luang Prabang) are more temperate with a drier heat. The so-called 'cool' season can get very cold in the uplands at night and in the morning, bring a fleece.

Clothing

From December through to February warmer clothing is needed for the North. Days are hot and humid. Lightweight rainwear essential at all times. The northern region is cold at night during the winter.

Equipment

Even though bed linen is provided on the train journey, you may want to bring your own sleeping sheet (it can be purchased in Hanoi); torch, and don't forget mosquito repellent (no need for a mosquito net as when necessary, it is provided).

Footwear

Comfortable shoes, trainers and sandals.

Luggage: On Tour

One main lockable bag/case, an overnight bag for your trips to Halong Bay and the Mekong delta when your main luggage is left behind and a daypack. Please remember that you are expected to carry your own luggage so don't overload yourself.

Luggage allowance on trip: 20kg

General Information

Country details

Vietnam

Population: 90,549,390

Size of Country: 331,698 sq km

Major Language: Vietnamese

Religion: Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism

Time Difference to GMT: +7

Cambodia

Population: 14,805,358

Size of Country: 181,035 sq km

Major Language: Khmer

Religion: Buddhism

Time Difference to GMT: +7

Laos

Population: 6,800,000

Size of Country: 236,800 sq km

Major Language: Lao

Religion: Buddhist

Time Difference to GMT: +7

Electric Supply & Plugs

Vietnam

2 Pin Round

Cambodia

2 Pin Round

Laos

2 Pin Flat

Why Choose Explore

We've been creating award-winning pioneering adventure holidays for over 30 years, earning the trust of thousands of delighted customers, who feel safe in our hands. Our tour leaders have expert local knowledge and our tours are designed to take you off the beaten track to see the most exotic, inspiring and dramatic places in the world.

- With over 30 years' experience, we are passionate about what we do.
- Pioneering small group adventures, self-guided, private journeys & tailor-made holidays.
- Award-winning tour leaders who you can trust.
- Responsible travel is and always has been one of the driving principles of Explore.

Our adventure holidays are full of exciting things to see and do, exploring in small groups travelling by bus, boat, plane, rickshaw, camel, or any number of unusual forms of transport. Often you will stay in family-run hotels and village houses and enjoy authentic local cuisine. In this way, it's easy to discover the true heart of the people and the place you travel to – and make some new friends along the way. Each tour is uniquely different, so please feel free to browse through our tours to see what may whet your appetite.

Cool Earth

Explore are proud to support Cool Earth in their effort to reduce global carbon dioxide levels through the prevention of deforestation in the South America rainforest. Cool Earth focus on areas in immediate danger of deforestation, supporting local communities to be forest guardians. To date 350,000 acres of rainforest has been protected. Saving rainforest also protects rare animals and plants, allows local forest communities to maintain their way of life, and protects a major source of oxygen and fresh water. When you travel on an Explore holiday we make a donation to Cool Earth that exceeds the impact of our customers flights each year.

Earth Matters

We are passionate about sustainable travel and work hard to create tours where your holiday delivers real benefits to the local communities. We minimise our impact by travelling in small groups, respecting local cultures, reducing waste and offsetting 100% of the CO2 from our flights.

When you travel with Explore, you are directly contributing to local economies and helping empower the people you meet. We currently support a range of charities and good causes, including: Toilet Twinning (helping to flush away poverty), Lone Buffalo Foundation (a community project based in Laos providing creative skills for young people) and have recently supported women's cooperatives in Borneo and Morocco. We are a member of Tourism Concern's Ethical Tour Operator Group (www.tourismconcern.org.uk) and support their campaign for fair and ethical tourism. We also care passionately about the world's wildlife and actively support and promote the Born Free Organisation and Mahouts Elephant Foundation.

Booking Your Holiday

Peace of mind - book with confidence

You can book your Explore holiday with confidence, as all monies paid to us for your trip are fully protected. Explore is a fully bonded tour operator licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and by ABTOT.

The air holiday packages (Tours including flights) that we advertise are ATOL protected, since we hold an Air Travel Organiser's Licence granted by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is ATOL 2595. In addition, As a member of the Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited (ABTOT), Explore has provided a bond to meet the requirements of the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992. Please note that packages booked outside the UK are only protected when purchased directly with Explore.

Reserving your place

To reserve your place on this tour you will need to check availability on the Explore website or through our dedicated call centre based in the UK where you can. Our tours can fill up quickly so you are advised to book as early as possible. If your chosen date is 'Available' or 'Guaranteed' we will be able to provisionally hold you a space for up to 48 hours.

For Self-Guided holidays and Private Journeys simply choose your date of travel and let us know so we can confirm all ground services.

The easiest way to confirm your booking is through our website. When you are ready to book, we normally require a 10% non-refundable deposit, but for some holidays this may be more to cover such items as permit fees, internal flights or other non-refundable services. If your travel starts within 60 days of booking, full payment will be required at the time of booking

100% No Surcharge Guarantee

The price paid for our holidays is no longer subject to change. Once booked and confirmed we will guarantee the price you pay will not increase, whatever the circumstances. You will not be approached to pay fuel surcharges unlike the vast majority of other adventure tour operators. The price guarantee applies to all new bookings departing between 1st January 2016 and 31st December 2017.

Trip Itinerary Versions

Itinerary details may vary depending on departure date and alternative itineraries for this tour may exist. Please refer to the dates and prices page on our website to check which itinerary operates on each departure date.

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes.

Please note: 2017 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing in 2017. 2018/19 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing from 1st January to 31st December 2018.

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