



## 2012 Vietnam & Laos Explorer - Deluxe

### 15 days / 14 nights

#### Highlights

Saigon, Cu Chi Tunnels, Mekong Delta, Hue, Hoi An, Hanoi's Old Quarter, Halong Bay, Vientiane, atmospheric Luang Prabang, Pak Ou Caves, Kuang Si Falls, Lao cooking class

#### Vietnam & Laos Explorer - Deluxe

Vietnam's treasures are as unique as they are captivating, and you will be introduced to something different every day on our 'Highlights of Vietnam'. Fly between major centres on this journey to make the most of your experience, and enjoy time to relax in the country's best cafés, indulge in fantastic market shopping, and dine on some of the best food in Asia.

Laos is one of Asia's most magical destinations. From the gilded monasteries in the quiet capital of Vientiane to the deeply spiritual and naturally beautiful town of Luang Prabang, you will meet some of the continent's most hospitable and gracious hosts. Whether your interests are peaked by religious iconography, mountain and waterfall backdrops or incredible shopping at a hilltribe night market, the 'Highlights of Laos' are sure to captivate you.

The quality of accommodation is a real highlight of this trip and includes stays in a mix of historically famous properties and luxuriously designed hotels, with five-star facilities and fantastic locations. Where there are no international five-star hotels available, we have chosen our favourite deluxe properties in town.

All road travel is in comfortable minibuses or mid-sized coaches. Your journey is escorted by both a Western tour leader, based on a minimum of seven travellers, and a local English-speaking guide in each location. Groups are never more than 16 travellers in size.

#### Tour grading - Easy

Suitable for travellers with an average level of fitness and independent mobility. The tour involves walking over uneven surfaces and climbing stairs, in the heat. There are four internal flights, rides on several small boats. You will need to be able to board and disembark boats independently, sometimes between muddy or slippery banks. There are some long road journeys (up to four hours). The tour of Luang Prabang's UNESCO-listed area will be on foot, as we feel this is the most pleasant way to absorb the atmosphere of this charming town.

While accommodation is 4-5 star, this is not 'sanitised' travel; by day you will walk through markets and villages, meet local people, and sample local food.

#### What's included

- 14 nights accommodation
- Breakfast daily, three lunches, and one dinner
- Three domestic flights; 1 international flight from Hanoi to Vientiane
- Tour arrival and departure transfers
- All road transport in modern, air-conditioned vehicles (touring in Luang Prabang by foot and tuk-tuk)
- All sightseeing as specified, including entrance fees
- Expert Western tour leader (group size seven minimum) and local guides throughout

#### Climate

Vietnam can be experienced at any time of the year. In general, North Vietnam experiences two seasons; summer and winter. Summers are dry and warm, averaging 25-33 degrees Celsius (77-91 degrees Fahrenheit). Winters (October to March) can be cool with temperatures in Hanoi averaging 10-20 degrees Celsius (50-68 degrees Fahrenheit) in January. Some winter months experience a light, drizzling rain. In Central and South Vietnam, the 'dry' season runs from November to May. Temperatures average between 22-30 degrees Celsius (72-86 degrees Fahrenheit). The 'wet' season is characterised by a brief shower late in the afternoon with temperatures from 25-33 degrees Celsius (77-91 degrees Fahrenheit).

Laos experiences two distinct seasons, wet and dry. The dry season generally runs from November to March and it's a bit cooler this time of year. The wet season, April to October, is a great time to experience lush countryside and occasional cooling afternoon showers which rarely affect travel. Bring a layer of warm clothing when travelling to the North between November and February.

#### Itinerary

##### DAY 1 - ARRIVE SAIGON

Upon arrival in Saigon you will be met and transferred to your hotel. Tonight meet your tour leader (or local guide) for welcome drinks and a tour briefing.

##### CARAVELLE - 3 nights

##### DAY 2 - SAIGON

See the sights of old and new Saigon in the central 'French quarter' and the Chinatown district, then visit Cu Chi Tunnels.

##### DAY 3 - MEKONG DELTA

Explore the Mekong Delta's canals, orchards and towns by boat and interact with the friendly locals.

##### DAY 4 - SAIGON TO HUE

Fly to Hue, Vietnam's former imperial capital. Wander the last empire's Forbidden City - the Citadel and visit Thien Mu Pagoda. Visit the workers of Spiral Foundation.

##### LA RESIDENCE HOTEL & SPA - 1 night

##### DAY 5 - HUE TO HOI AN

Visit the tomb of the former Nguyen Dynasty Emperor - Tu Duc before driving south to nearby Hoi An. Enjoy the architecture, local delicacies and friendly locals that make Hoi An a true Vietnam highlight on an afternoon walking tour and market tour with the students of 'Streets' organisation.

##### LIFE HERITAGE RESORT - 2 nights

##### DAY 6 - HOI AN

Today is at leisure to enjoy Hoi An with its many galleries, tailor shops and restaurants.

##### DAY 7 - HOI AN TO HALONG BAY

Free time before you fly to Hanoi. On arrival, transfer to Halong City.

##### NOVOTEL HA LONG BAY HOTEL - 1 night

##### DAY 8 - HALONG BAY TO HANOI

Spend the morning cruising the spectacular Halong Bay, with its thousands of limestone islets that rise out of the sea, and

enjoy a sumptuous seafood lunch onboard. In the afternoon journey to Hanoi before an evening theatrical water puppet performance.

#### **SOFITEL METROPOLE - 2 nights**

##### **DAY 9 - HANOI**

Discover the Old Quarter by cyclo, then explore Hanoi with visits to historic Ba Dinh Square, the infamous Hoa Lo (Hanoi Hilton) prison and the peaceful Temple of Literature, then, the remainder of the day is at leisure.

##### **DAY 10 - HANOI TO VIENTIANE**

Fly to the sleepy Lao capital city, where you will be transferred to your hotel. Choose to either explore the waterfront area of the Mekong or relax by the hotel pool this afternoon.

#### **GREEN PARK - 2 nights**

##### **DAY 11 - VIENTIANE**

Spend the day exploring the capital's most famous landmarks and temples, then pay a visit to a fair-trade silk weaving organization. In the afternoon, visit the COPE Centre and cap off your day with a traditional Lao *Baci* welcome and blessing ceremony.

##### **DAY 12 - VIENTIANE TO LUANG PRABANG**

Fly to Luang Prabang this morning. Spend the afternoon walking around the city's many beautiful wats. In the evening participate in a cooking class of traditional Lao cuisine where you have the chance to taste your own creation.

#### **LUANG SAY RESIDENCE - 3 nights**

##### **DAY 13 - LUANG PRABANG**

Visit the National Museum, then on to the Traditional Arts & Ethnology Centre, where you will gain insight into Laos' ethnic groups. Travel up river by slow boat to visit Pak Ou (thousand Buddha) caves, enjoying a picnic lunch en route. Return mid-afternoon for some free time to relax.

##### **DAY 14 - LUANG PRABANG**

Rise early to witness monks perform the morning alms tradition. Visit a local market then drive to the beautiful Kuang Si falls for swimming. Finish off the day with a game of petanque and sunset drinks on the famous Mekong River.

##### **DAY 15 - LUANG PRABANG**

Today you will be transferred to the airport for your onward journey

#### **Hotel brief**

##### **Saigon - CARAVELLE**

Located in the heart of Saigon, the Caravelle provides modern comfort and international service levels. The popular Saigon Saigon bar, which features great city views and the Reflections restaurant feature some of the city's best dining

##### **Hue - LA RESIDENCE HOTEL AND SPA**

This former French Governor's Residence has recently been rebuilt and features 1930s Art Deco style furnishings. It sits right on the banks of the Perfume River with views across to the Citadel and features a lovely garden and pool. Four-star.

##### **Hoi An - LIFE HERITAGE RESORT**

A Travel Indochina favourite - just a minutes' walk from Hoi An Ancient Town. All rooms are large, stylishly furnished with all the facilities including pool. Four-star.

##### **Halong City - NOVOTEL**

Just opened in late 2008, this brand new, 4 star+ deluxe property is easily the best in town. Beautifully designed rooms with excellent facilities

##### **Hanoi - SOFITEL METROPOLE**

Originally opened in 1901, this landmark heritage hotel boasts superbly appointed rooms in Art Deco style. Nice central pool and superb dining options.

##### **Vientiane - GREEN PARK HOTEL**

This Deluxe property offers sleek rooms and modern amenities, with a swimming pool set amidst peaceful tropical gardens.

##### **Luang Prabang - LUANG SAY RESIDENCE**

Reflecting colonial life in the pioneer era, this hotel features spacious and exquisitely-appointed suites with carefully landscaped gardens and surrounding mountain views.

#### **Visa requirements**

All persons entering Vietnam require a visa. Travellers need a tourist visa which cannot be issued on arrival unless prior arrangements have been made. Please note normal tourist visas are valid for single entry only. More detailed visa information is available in our pre-departure information. It is your responsibility to make sure that visa requirements are fulfilled.

All foreign tourists to Laos must possess a valid visa. Visas for most nationalities can be issued on arrival at Vientiane, Luang Prabang and Pakse airports. Visas are valid for 30 days and cost between 30 USD and 42 USD depending on nationality. More detailed visa information is available in our pre-departure information. It is your responsibility to make sure that visa requirements are fulfilled.

#### **Health issues**

Good medical advice usually recommends vaccinations/prophylactics in advance of travel to Vietnam and Laos. We suggest that you consult with your doctor to discuss health care needs specific to your holiday.

#### **Travel insurance**

You must be comprehensively insured as a condition of travelling with Travel Indochina. Insurance should include cover for personal accident and medical expenses, evacuation and repatriation, baggage loss, and cancellation or curtailment of your holiday. Your booking will not be confirmed if you cannot confirm possession of appropriate insurance, and our ground operations have the right to prevent you from travelling in the event that you cannot present your insurance details at the start of the tour. Your travel agent can organise travel insurance for you.

#### **Recommended reading**

- River of Time - Jon Swain
- World Food Vietnam - Richard Sterling
- A Bright Shining Lie - Neil Sheehan
- Ho Chi Minh - William J. Duiker
- Shadows and Wind - Robert Templar
- The Sorrow of War: A Novel of North Vietnam - Bao Ninh
- Stalking the Elephant Kings - Chris Kremmer
- Bamboo Palace - Chris Kremmer
- Ant Egg Soup - Natacha du Pont de Be
- Culture Shock: Laos - Stephen Mansfield
- The Ravens: Pilots of the Secret War - Christopher Robbins
- Shooting at the Moon - Robert Wagner
- A Dragon Apparent - Norman Lewis
- The Rough Guide to Laos - Jeff Cranmer and Stevin Martin
- A Brief History of Laos - Grant Evans

#### **A responsible Travel Indochina**

Travel Indochina practices a thorough, realistic responsible travel policy, full details of which can be found on our website. Our policy includes our downloadable 'Tread Lightly' booklet, full of useful pointers which will make you a more 'responsible' traveller in Asia.

#### **Pre and post tour arrangements**

If you would like to book pre or post tour hotel arrangements or are interested in doing additional quality touring before or after your Small Group Journey, either contact Travel Indochina or your local travel agent.

#### **What next**

Once your booking has been confirmed and you have paid in full you will receive a detailed itinerary for this tour, detailing day by day arrangements, as well as a pre-departure guide

containing valuable information designed to help you get the most out of your holiday.

### **About Travel Indochina**

Travel Indochina has been operating Small Group Journeys to Asia since 1993. Based in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, our idea is simple - escape the tourist traps to explore the essence of Asia's history, culture, natural beauty and most importantly, Asia's people. Another feature is the quality, character and location of our accommodation. Our travellers enjoy the combination of well thought out itineraries, tasteful accommodation, insightful Western and local leaders, value for money, and our experience and base in the region.

### **Disclaimer**

Information in this document was correct at the time of its preparation. Travel Indochina reserves the right to make itinerary changes as operational or other circumstances require.