



## 2012 Indochina Explorer

19 days / 18 nights

### Highlights

Phnom Penh, Siem Reap, Angkor Wat, Saigon, Cu Chi, Mekong Delta, Hue, Hoi An, Hanoi, Halong Bay, Vientiane, Luang Prabang

### Indochina Explorer

As day breaks in Asia experience monks, markets and more. From sleepy riverside towns and villages to bustling urban metropolises, your imagination will be stirred by Indochina's gems. Begin in Cambodia, where Angkor Wat is sure to captivate you, and continue to Vietnam to experience her most important highlights from south to north. End your holiday in Laos, the area's least-visited, yet most atmospheric destination. From quiet waterways to buzzing streams of motorbikes, you won't soon forget your experience on our all-encompassing Explorer.

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

It is suitable for people who have an average level of fitness and independent mobility. The tour involves walking, sometimes over uneven surfaces, and stair climbing in the heat. There are six flights during the tour; four domestic, one from Cambodia to Vietnam and one from Vietnam to Laos. There are also rides on several small boats, tuk-tuks and samlors (both types of pedi-cabs). 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) on occasionally rough roads.

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

### What's included

- 18 nights accommodation
- Breakfast daily, three lunches, and one dinner
- Four domestic flights; two international flights (Siem Reap to Saigon; Hanoi to Vientiane)
- Tour arrival and departure transfers
- All road transport in modern, air-conditioned vehicles (Angkor temple touring and Luang Prabang town touring by tuk-tuk)
- All sightseeing as specified, including entrance fees
- Expert Western tour leader (group size seven minimum) and local guides throughout

### Climate

'Indochina Explorer' can be undertaken at any time of the year. In general, Laos and North Vietnam experience 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 and Cambodia, 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).

### Itinerary

#### DAY 1 - ARRIVE PHNOM PENH

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

**SUNWAY HOTEL - 2 nights**

#### DAY 2 - PHNOM PENH

Explore the Royal Palace, Silver Pagoda and National Museum. Visit the Childsafe Centre and later learn about the Khmer Rouge at Toul Sleng and The Killing Fields.

#### DAY 3 - PHNOM PENH TO SIEM REAP

Fly to Siem Reap, gateway to Angkor and take a boat ride on Tonle Sap Lake.

**SOMADEVI ANGKOR HOTEL - 2 nights**

#### DAY 4 - SIEM REAP

Explore Angkor Wat by tuk-tuk then board a regular vehicle for the outer-lying temples of Banteay Srei, Ta Prohm and more.

#### DAY 5 - SIEM REAP TO SAIGON

Today you will fly from Siem Reap to Saigon and check into your hotel. The remainder of the day is at leisure for you to relax or begin exploration of Saigon's bustling city streets.

**DUXTON HOTEL - 3 nights**

#### DAY 6 - SAIGON

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

#### DAY 7 - MEKONG DELTA

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

#### DAY 8 - 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.

**SAIGON MORIN - 1 night**

#### DAY 9 - 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 and market tour with the students of 'Streets' organisation.

**HOI AN HISTORIC HOTEL - 2 nights**

#### DAY 10 - HOI AN

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

#### DAY 11 - HOI AN TO HALONG BAY

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

**ROYAL LOTUS HOTEL - 1 night**

#### **DAY 12 - HALONG BAY TO HANOI**

Spend the morning cruising the spectacular Halong Bay, with its thousands of limestone islets that rise out of the sea, as you enjoy a sumptuous seafood lunch onboard. In the afternoon journey to Hanoi before an evening theatrical water puppet performance.

**SILK PATH HOTEL - 2 nights**

#### **DAY 13 - HANOI**

Discover the Old Quarter on a walking tour, 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 14 - 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.

**MERCURE VIENTIANE - 2 nights**

#### **DAY 15 - 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 16 - 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.

**SALA PRABANG - 3 nights**

#### **DAY 17 - 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 18 - LUANG PRABANG**

Rise early to witness of 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 19 - LUANG PRABANG**

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

#### **Hotel brief**

##### **Phnom Penh - SUNWAY HOTEL**

Located near Wat Phnom, a good four-star hotel that is central and close to riverfront cafes and restaurants.

##### **Siem Reap - SOMADEVI ANGKOR HOTEL**

Comfortable three-star hotel with excellent pool and good rooms. Close to town and the temples.

##### **Saigon - DUXTON HOTEL**

Fantastic location, very good service and facilities including pool. A comfortable, internationally managed four-star property.

##### **Hoi An - HOI AN HISTORIC HOTEL**

Fantastic location just on the edge of Hoi An's old town. Recent renovations make for good facilities including a nice pool and new spa centre. Three-star.

##### **Hue - SAIGON MORIN**

This former French colonial property boasts large, comfortable rooms. Opposite the Perfume River in the heart of the south bank, the hotel features a lovely internal courtyard with *al fresco* restaurant and pool.

##### **Halong City - ROYAL LOTUS HOTEL**

Located on the edge of town and one of the better options in Halong City. Very comfortable with modern facilities including a pool and 3 restaurants. Three to four-star.

##### **Hanoi- SILK PATH HOTEL**

Great location in the old quarter of Hanoi. All rooms are of a modern design with all amenities. Four star.

##### **Vientiane - MERCURE**

Comfortable, well-maintained 3.5-star hotel with excellent facilities and 24 hour service. Nice pool, gym and bar area.

##### **Luang Prabang - SALA PRABANG**

Not a hotel per se, but a converted series of historic houses with rustic charm, clustered together in the heart of Luang Prabang. Rooms do not have extra amenities such as television, phone, or mini-bar, but with its restored original buildings, this accommodation has great character and is unbeatable in terms of location and atmosphere.

#### **Visa requirements**

All persons entering Cambodia require a visa. Tourist visas for Cambodia can be obtained on arrival at air and land borders for a cost of 20 USD.

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.

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 Cambodia, 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**

- Gecko Tales - Carol Livingston
- River of Time - Jon Swain
- A Brief History of Cambodia - David Chandler
- Travels in Siam, Cambodia, Laos & Annam - Henri Mouhot
- Cambodia, Report from a Stricken Land - Henry Kamm
- The Gate - Françoise Bizot
- 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 Bie
- 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
- 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.