



The Best of Indochine

An Insider's Look at Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos

November 7 - 21, 2024 (15 days)

With Trip Leader Cathy Ann Taylor you'll gain tremendous insights on this fascinating, insider's perspective of the wondrous lands of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos—the sparkling gems of Southeast Asia. Cultural encounters abound as we hike to mountain - and riverside ethnic villages, cycle the winding back roads of the serene countryside, and paddle kayaks across a tranquil lake dotted with lovely islets. We'll also participate in a Baci ceremony that marks important events and occasions, watch locals “make merit” with orange-robed monks in an alms-giving ceremony, and take in the ancient cultural monuments of these distant lands—their temples, pagodas, and architectural masterpieces, including the otherworldly temples of Angkor in Cambodia. A highlight (actually, many!) is sampling the delicious food of this region—signature dishes including Hanoi's *Cha Ca La Vong* and Hoi An's *Cao Lau*. Our accommodations are in lovely hotels, including three nights at Avana Retreat, a luxury resort nestled in the forests and surrounded by verdant rice paddies, hills, valleys, and waterfalls.

TRIP DETAILS

Easy to moderate walking, hiking, cycling, and kayaking excursions, cultural explorations ▶ 14 nights charming hotels

ITINERARY

(You will need to leave the U.S. one to two days early in order to arrive in Hanoi on Day 1.)

Day 1, November 7 ▶ Arrive in Hanoi, Vietnam

Arrive in Hanoi, where you will be met and transferred to your hotel, La Siesta Premium Hang Be. This hotel, overlooking a lively street in Hanoi's Old Quarter, exudes classic charm with Asian touches and is an ideal place to begin our adventure. (Note: Check-in at the hotel is available from 2:00 pm.) The remainder of the day is free to rest and recover from jet lag. Meet with your trip leader and the group at 5:00 pm for a trip briefing and orientation.

Meals on your own...La Siesta Premium Hang Be



Day 2, November 8 ▶ Explore Hanoi

We begin our day of discovery of this bustling capital city with a visit to the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum, the final resting place of "Uncle Ho," the Communist revolutionary and former president of North Vietnam. Here we'll visit his traditional stilt house, where he lived from 1958-1969. (Note: the museum is periodically closed for maintenance between mid-September and mid-December.) We'll also see the One Pillar Pagoda, a historic



Buddhist temple built in the 11th century. Lunch is at a local restaurant where we can try *Cha Ca La Vong*, a famous Hanoi dish of white fish marinated in turmeric and prepared tableside. In the afternoon, we visit the Confucian Temple of Literature (Van Mieu in Vietnamese), the first university of Vietnam. Built in 1070 by the emperor Ly Thanh Tong, the university was first opened for princes and mandarins exclusively. With its ancient courtyards, altars, and roofs, Van Mieu is a very fine example of Vietnamese architecture. Then, we'll learn what

makes the Old Quarter of Hanoi such a captivating place as we take a culinary tour, sampling many Vietnamese specialties such as *banh cuon* (steamed rolled rice pancake) and *banh mi*, the famous Vietnamese sandwich. To top it off, we'll stop at a *bia hoi* (beer club) on Ta Hien Street to taste the fresh Vietnamese beer that is popular with locals and tourists alike. For dessert, we'll stroll along the shores of Hoan Kiem Lake and pick up a tasty ice cream. The remainder of the evening is on your own—you might want to experience some of the local night life! Overnight at hotel.
B,L,D...La Siesta Premium Hang Be

Day 3, November 9 ▶ Hanoi – Kayaking at Ba Khan Lake – Avana Retreat, Mai Chau

This morning we head out of Hanoi, following a route that takes us through the charming countryside and into a landscape of low mountains. Along the way we stop at Ba Khan Lake, where we'll enjoy a two-hour kayaking excursion on the lake's calm waters, taking in the impressive scenery of islands, islets, and the green range of mountains. After our paddle, we'll stop for lunch at a local home that sports an idyllic view of the lake before continuing to Avana



Retreat, an absolutely lovely oasis deep in the forest with nature all around. In the evening, we stroll to a waterfall located within the hotel property and follow a path to a small platform located next to the waterfall—the enchanting setting for our special Welcome Dinner! (Driving details: total of 100 miles, 4 hours.)

B,L,D...Avana Retreat



Day 4, November 10 ▶ Tau Na village – Hike – Avana Retreat

A short drive brings us to Tau Na village, the home of Hmong ethnic people. From here we'll head out on a moderate hike that ascends a mountainside and then continues through a beautiful meadow dotted with Hmong stilt houses where colorfully-clad Hmong children play while their parents work in the garden. As we walk along the winding red dirt roads, we'll see buffalos roaming their own trails before we head back down to Tau Na for a picnic lunch and the opportunity to rest and soak up the tranquil mountain atmosphere. Return to the hotel for dinner and overnight. (Driving details: total of 9 miles, 1 hour/Hiking details: 7 hours – 8.5 miles / elevation gain and loss of 1,800 feet.)
B,L,D...Avana Retreat



Day 5, November 11 ▶ Morning Walk – Avana Retreat

Today's easy walk leads right from our resort, and we'll enjoy taking in panoramas of the picturesque countryside as well as feel the peace emanating from the majestic green forests, the deserted country roads, and the verdant rice paddy fields. We'll meander through local villages and get an insight into local life. Lunch back at the resort, and the rest of day is at your leisure to enjoy the complimentary activities at the retreat. There is a spa offering soothing holistic treatments, and the grounds offer



serene paths, koi ponds, and an outdoor “Cloud Pool” to discover. (Hiking details: 2.5 hours, 4 miles, elevation gain and loss of 650 feet.)

B,L,D...Avana Retreat

Day 6, November 12 ▶ Fly to Danang – Hoi An

After breakfast, we return to the Hanoi Airport for our afternoon flight to Danang. Upon arrival, transfer to La Siesta Hoi An Resort & Spa, a boutique resort close to the Old Town. Dinner is on your own this evening—our hotel has several inviting restaurants and bars. (Driving details: 4 hours Mai Chau to Hanoi/30 minutes Danang to Hoi An.)

B,L...La Siesta Hoi An Resort & Spa



Day 7, November 13 ▶ Explore Hoi An – Culinary Experience

Hoi An is recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site for its ancient well-preserved streets and houses. The town features an assemblage of Vietnamese, Japanese, Chinese, and French architecture elements, which can be seen from the famous Japanese Bridge, the Chinese Temple, and the Tan Ky trading house, originally the property of a rich Vietnamese merchant 200 years ago and carefully preserved ever since. Our epicurean discovery of this city takes us along the bustling streets, weaving in and

out of tiny alleys as we go, and we’ll stop to try the delicious Hoi An specialty—white rose dumpling, made from translucent white dough filled with spiced minced shrimp or pork. We reach a hidden banh mi shop before enjoying *Cao Lau*, Hoi An’s signature noodle dish, on the way to Ba Le Well, one of about 80 ancient wells in Hoi An. In the small alleys in the old town, we’ll visit a

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wonton shop, where we can indulge in this iconic dish, beloved by locals. Our final stop of this epicurean experience is at a cafe where we enjoy fresh Vietnamese coffee. The remainder of the day is free to explore on your own. Dinner at Morning Glory Restaurant and overnight at La Siesta Hoi An Resort & Spa.

B,L,D...La Siesta Hoi An Resort & Spa



Day 8, November 14 ▶ Hoi An – Cycling Tour

Mounting our bikes, we set out right from the hotel and cycle to Hoi An’s Old Town, where the exclusion of cars allows us to enjoy the area’s beauty in peace as we make our way along narrow streets and alleys. After taking in the sights and sounds of this culturally rich area, we head to a small village, where, surrounded by towering areca trees, we can take a break and try some delicious grilled seafood and coconut rice. After a brief rest, we cross a bridge to the other side of the Thu Bon River, where we visit the mat weaving village of Dong Binh, yet another tranquil enclave in the countryside. We’ll also stop at a carpenter’s village to have a look at the incredible, hand-crafted furniture produced here before boarding a local ferry to return to the Old Town. From there we cycle toward the charming village of Tra Que, famous for many kinds of vegetables, but especially for its deliciously aromatic herbs. We’ll pay a visit to our local host in Tra Que, who will provide a private space and a well-deserved foot massage along with a lovely lunch. We return to the city after lunch and have time for a rest before setting out for more sightseeing in Hoi An’s Old Town on your own. Dinner is on your own this evening. (Cycling tour: 22 miles on flat terrain, 5.5 hours including stops, visits, and lunch break.)

B,L...La Siesta Hoi An Resort & Spa



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Day 9, November 15 ▶ Danang – Siem Reap, Cambodia

The morning is free to relax or get in some last-minute sightseeing on your own. After lunch at a local restaurant, we transfer to the airport for the flight to Siem Reap, arriving in the evening. Dinner is on your own. Overnight at Jaya House River Park, a 36-room retreat set along the Siem Reap River and just a five-minute tuk-tuk ride from the center of town.

B,L...Jaya House River Park



Day 10, November 16 ▶ Siem Reap – Temples of Angkor

Siem Reap is home to the ethereal temples of Angkor. At dawn, the sun rises directly behind Angkor Wat, creating otherworldly hues of purple, red, orange, and yellow, and we'll get an early start to capture this magical moment. Angkor Wat is a huge, wondrous architectural masterpiece, the Khmer's grandest temple complex, and it will impress you not just by its structural elements but also by its artistic detail of carved bas-reliefs. We then visit Ta Prohm, a temple that seems almost consumed by the tropical vegetation that surrounds it.

After a rigorous morning of temple explorations around the majestic Angkor Archaeological Park, we find our way to the peaceful Cambodian countryside, where we stop on the edge of a large field, an ancient Baray that stays green all year round, a perfect spot for a picnic lunch and to relax and escape the heat and crowds.

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In the afternoon, we visit Angkor Thom, “the big city.” We admire the massive smiling faces of the Bayon temple, carved in stone. Built around the 12th and 13th centuries, this amazing edifice is surrounded by 54 towers, each of them adorned with four faces. After visiting Bayon we travel to the Baphuon, a temple mountain built in the 11th century, whose restoration, led by French architects, ended not so long ago. We then walk along the Terrace of the Elephants, which with its length of nearly a thousand feet was used for royal audiences and public ceremonies. We continue our visit at the Terrace of the Leper King, built in the 12th century and adorned with magnificent Apsara sculptures.

Located in the Angkor complex, Srah Srang Baray (pond), is a reservoir used for royal baths during the ancient Khmer Empire- this 800 meter long reservoir offers beautiful reflections of the sun at sunset. Here we enjoy a sunset aperitif in a charming Khmer timber house. The house offers an authentic and comfortable atmosphere, with furniture and decorations made from local materials, along with a tropical garden and beautiful views of the reservoir.

After this very full day of discovery, we head back to our hotel, located a few miles from the temples of Angkor and Siem Reap. Our hotel is a peaceful retreat and we’ll relax with a drink and some appetizers as we recount the events of the day. As the sun sets in a soft glow of hues, the day gives way to dusk and we savor what may be just the perfect day. Dinner is on your own.
B,L...Jaya House River Park



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This morning we board a boat to explore the complex and biodiversity-rich Tonle Sap, a huge lake that is Southeast Asia’s largest waterbird breeding colony. The bird sanctuary is important for eight species of bird: the spot-billed pelican, greater adjutant, lesser adjutant, milky stork, painted stork, black-headed ibis, Oriental darter, and grey-headed fish-eagle. Thousands of commoner waterbirds also breed here, and more than 150 species have been recorded. During our two- to four-hour visit, we discover the unique livelihoods of those living on the lake, where literally everything

floats, from the pagoda to the school to the pharmacy! We’ll enjoy lunch in a floating restaurant managed by a local NGO, and visit a handicraft workshop where a villager will teach us the traditional way of creating a colorful household item from the water hyacinth plant. We return to the mainland and head to Siem Reap for overnight.

B,L...Jaya House River Park

Day 12, November 18 ▶ Siem Reap – Luang Prabang, Laos – Baci Ceremony

Around 20 miles to the north of Angkor runs a river worthy of a fairy tale. The bed of Kbal Spean, or “the river of a thousand lingas,” is said to have been sculpted in the 11th century by a group of hermits. A 45-minute jungle walk brings us to the first of the lingas, a combination of phallic and fertility symbols that give the river its name. Farther along, some divinity scenes are carved on the rocks. On our return journey to Siem Reap, we visit Banteay Srei, “The Women’s Citadel.” It’s not one of the larger temples of the Angkor complex, but its pink sandstone edifice sports incredible and detailed carvings. We return to Siem Reap and head directly to the airport for our flight to

Luang Prabang, Laos. After checking into our hotel, we head to a local house for a Baci “Soukhouan” ceremony, a common cultural tradition in Laos used to mark significant life events including weddings, funerals, births, illnesses, farewells before long journeys, and other significant achievements or misfortunes. We will have the privilege of engaging in this sacred experience. The ceremony usually takes place among a handful of people, with one or two recipients, the officiate, and a few assistants. During the ceremony, the officiating person recalls the souls—according to Lao belief each human being has 32 souls—to attract beneficial influences, and then ties a cotton string around the wrists of the participants, symbolizing prosperity and good luck. The focus is on the rectification of the souls, and realignment of personal energies. Afterwards, we watch a presentation of the famous Lao dance and traditional music and enjoy dinner at the local house. Overnight at Angsana Maison Souvannaphoum, a colonial-style mansion that once belonged to a prince. It’s just a five-minute walk from the Mekong River and the local Night Market.
B,L,D...Angsana Maison Souvannaphoum



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Day 13, November 19 ▶ Luang Prabang

In the very early morning, we head to Vat Nong temple to see the Tak Bath ceremony, during which devoted residents of Luang Prabang kneel on the sidewalk, bearing food in their hands, which they offer to monks as they walk by in a procession of orange robes. We'll be drawn deep into the culturally significant moments, as they take place in a peaceful and respectful ambience, with no words exchanged between the monks and those making the offerings. After this humbling experience, we'll go to a local market—a very lively place to be in the morning, to say the least! We return to the hotel for breakfast.

Luang Prabang, set at the confluence of the Mekong and Nam Khan rivers and at the foot of an age-old mountain range, is one of the most beautiful cities in Southeast Asia. Our discovery of Luang Prabang by tuk-tuk will most certainly take us into its most emblematic temples, to the top of Phousi Mountain, sacred to the Lao people, into the city center, and to the Hmong market. Our guided tour takes us to Vat Visoun, the oldest temple in the city, the splendid Royal Palace Museum,



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and the temples of Vat Xieng Thong (“Temple of the Golden City”), built in the 16th century and one of the most important monasteries in Laos. We then board a local motorboat to travel on the Mekong River, lined with steep karst cliffs and small villages, to the Pak Ou caves, the most famous Buddhist site around Luang Prabang. Along the way we’ll have the opportunity to observe the life lived on its banks. We reach the caves, set inside a steep rock face, and climb the stairs to the entrance, where thousands of Buddha sculptures await our discovery! Return to the city by boat with a chance to witness sunset on the way back. Dinner at a local restaurant. Overnight at hotel. B,L,D...Angsana Maison Souvannaphoum



Day 14, November 20 ▶ Luang Prabang

Today we head to the Hmong ethnic community of Ban Long Lao Kao, where we can visit and take in the sights of the village. From here we walk to the famous Kuang Sy waterfalls, passing through vegetable gardens, rice fields, and forests shaded by hardwood trees, including rosewood and ebony. After arriving at Kuang Sy, a three-tier waterfall cascading 200 feet down a steep hillside, we’ll enjoy a delicious lunch at a local house. We can take a rest (or even a dip in the falls!) before heading back to Luang Prabang. On the way back, we visit Ock Pop Tok Weaving Craft Center, with its traditional Lao handicrafts. Here we have the chance to discover the beauty and secrets of Lao textiles, learn the steps of the silk weaving and natural dyeing processes, and observe first-hand the workers creating the handicrafts. This evening we celebrate our wonderful experiences of this corner of the world with a festive Farewell Dinner at Manda de Laos, known for its authentic Lao cuisine. (Hiking details: 5 miles. 3.5-5 hours.)

B,L,D...Angsana Maison Souvannaphoum



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Day 15, November 21 ▶ Depart

Transfer to the airport and depart on homeward-bound flights via Hanoi.
B...

LAND COST

\$8,795 per person (10-11 members)

\$9,095 per person (8-9 members)

\$9,495 per person (5-7 members)

\$1745 single supplement

Rates quoted are per person, based on sharing double accommodations.

*Should you choose to pay with credit card there will be a service charge of 3.5%, the fee we incur from the bank.

Note—Prices listed are subject to change. We are occasionally faced with unavoidable cost increases or currency fluctuations that we cannot absorb. We will, however, do everything we can to keep prices the same as published.

Single Supplement—If you wish to share accommodations, we'll try to match you up with a roommate.

LAND COST INCLUDES...

- Expert leadership
- Accommodations in deluxe and luxury hotels
- Meals as noted (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner)
- Entrance fees and sightseeing as noted
- Ground transportation
- Boat, kayak, and cycle rental as mentioned in the itinerary
- Airport transfers as per itinerary
- Internal airfare ((Hanoi-Danang/Danang-Siem Reap/Siem Reap-Luang Prabang/Luang Prabang-Hanoi)
- Tips to local guides and drivers

LAND COST DOES NOT INCLUDE...

International airfare to/from Hanoi, Vietnam; trip insurance (we strongly recommend you purchase to include emergency evacuation and trip cancellation); optional tipping to the trip leader; excess baggage charges; cost of medical immunizations; visa fees; and items of a personal nature when on your own (sodas, alcoholic beverages, laundry, etc.).

TRIP PAYMENT SCHEDULE

At time of reservation25% of land cost
120 days prior to departure25% of land cost
90 days prior to departure.....Balance

CANCELLATION FEE SCHEDULE

From time of reservation
until 90 days prior to departure.....25% of land cost
89-60 days prior to departure.....50% of land cost
59 days or fewer prior to departure.....100% of land cost

EXPERT LEADERSHIP

Expert leadership is the key to every successful trip. Cattara attracts knowledgeable and gifted leaders who are passionate about guiding trips and truly enjoy sharing the experience with others. They understand the cultures and traditions they work in and are a fountain of information. In addition to making sure everything runs smoothly and safely, Cattara guides enhance your experience by being educators, companions, and the best of friends.

TRIP LEADER



Cathy Ann Taylor, a high altitude trekking & cultural guide for the last 34 years will be leading this trip. Cathy Ann has trekked all over Nepal, Tibet, India, and Bhutan, with well over 200 trips in the Himalayas (she still considers the Himalayas her “second home”)! She has also hiked extensively in the European Alps (Tour du Mont Blanc—six times, Tour of Monte Rosa, The Haute Route, Gran Paradiso, Scotland—three times, and the Dolomites—three times), the Georgian Caucasus—six times, South America (19 trips in Peru, 5 in Patagonia), Antarctica—two times, Kilimanjaro—one time, Morocco—four times, The Great Walk of Africa Kenya—two times, and Uganda & Rwanda—seven times, Cambodia—five times, Vietnam—three times, Laos—one time. A devout hiker and mountain biker, she leaves no trail undiscovered, and her passion for the mountains, caring nature, and boundless energy are renowned. Her experience, knowledge, positive attitude (she can find the good in anything!), and her wonderful rapport with the local staff will enhance your experience. With the help of caring and like-minded individuals she has been able to manage the sponsorship of nineteen remote village children, all of whom are in boarding school in Nepal or in universities in India, Nepal, and the United States. She consistently gets rave reviews from members of her groups and has quite a following. Cathy Ann is active in the Breast Cancer Prevention Partners and has participated in sixteen expeditions, including Mount McKinley, Mount Cho Oyu, Mount Fuji, Mount Shasta, and Mount Rainier, which helped increase awareness of breast cancer. Cat’s special trekking program, Sacred Treks, benefits Breast Cancer Prevention Partners (formerly the Breast Cancer Fund). Past trips include Bhutan, Mont Blanc, Peru, Everest, Ladakh, Mustang, Georgian Caucasus, Sikkim, Dolomites, Cordillera Blanca, and Annapurna Sanctuary treks (she has raised \$1.6M to date!). Cathy Ann has also been active in the American Himalayan Foundation and has helped raised \$30,000 for their STOP Girl Trafficking project. She has also raised over \$20,000 for Lama Pasang’s Himalayan Children’s Care Home which houses 87 children from Mustang, Nepal. Cathy Ann is also involved in fundraising for the National MS Society and has raised over \$80,000 for the organization. She has also reached the summit of Ama Dablam (22,500’) in Nepal, Island Peak (20,305’) in Nepal, and Argentina’s Aconcagua (22,834’), the highest peak in South America. Cathy Ann received an honorable mention in *Hooked on the Outdoors* magazine’s Outdoor Person of the Year Awards, and also received a letter of recognition for her fundraising and environmental work from former Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi.

PHYSICAL EXPECTATIONS

This is an overland cultural adventure, brimming with active excursions including easy to moderate walks and hikes to ethnic villages, kayaking on a serene lake, and cycling back roads of the countryside. Travel can be wearing, and you will derive more enjoyment out of any trip if you are in good physical condition.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

You will need a passport valid for at least six months beyond the date of completion of the trip, and if you are a US citizen, **you will need visas for all three countries**—Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos

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(citizens of countries other than the US should check with the consulates of the individual countries).

Vietnam

Visas for Vietnam cannot be obtained upon arrival—you must obtain your visa prior to departure. You can apply for an Electronic Visa (e-visa) through the Vietnam Government website: <https://evisa.xuatnhapcanh.gov.vn/>. The current fee is \$25 per person for a single-entry e-visa, or \$50 per person for a multiple-entry visa. The length of stay is valid for up to 90 days from the date you arrive in Vietnam, for either single or multiple entry. The e-visa is valid for 6 months. Be sure to print the e-visa and bring it with you on your trip.

Cambodia

You can obtain your Electronic Visa (e-visa) prior to arrival, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation of Cambodia: <https://www.mfaic.gov.kh/>. The current e-visa fee is \$37 per person and is valid for single-entry. The length of stay is for 30 days from the date you arrive in Cambodia and once issued, the e-visa is valid for 3 months. you will also need to print the e-visa and bring it with you on your trip. Note: It is possible to get a Cambodia visa on arrival at the Siem Reap airport, instead of prior to arrival, but the visa issuance line can be very long, which will keep the rest of the group waiting.

Laos

You can obtain your visa upon arrival at the Luang Prabang airport. The current visa fee is \$36 per person, and one passport photo is required. This fee must be paid in US cash, so please bring this with you. You can also obtain your Electronic Visa (e-visa) prior to arrival through the Lao Government e-visa website: <https://laoevisa.gov.la/index>. The current fee is \$36 per person. The length of stay is for 30 days from the date you arrive in Laos. Once issued, the e-Visa is valid for 60 days. Print it out and bring it with you on the trip.

Thailand (if you are planning to visit Thailand in conjunction with your trip)

US citizens do not need a visa for Thailand for a stay of 30 days or less.

Note—It's a good idea to make a photocopy of the photo page of your passport and carry it separately from your passport. If your passport is lost or stolen, a photocopy will help the local consulate speed up authorization for replacement. You may be asked for your papers not only upon departure but at various times during the trip. If you are carrying a customs form, please always keep it in a safe place, perhaps in your pouch along with your other valuables (we do not recommend carrying it in the passport because we often must submit the passport at hotels, where reception clerks can easily lose the form). You should also plan to carry your vaccination cards with you.

AIR TRAVEL

Airfare is not included in the land cost of the trip. For air reservations, please contact the airlines directly, either by phone or via the Internet. Plan your arrival in Hanoi on the morning of Day 1. Some flights arrive in the evening, so you should schedule your arrival the evening before Day 1 if that is the case. Departure flights out of Hanoi should be scheduled after 10:00 pm.

Many travelers elect to use their “frequent flyer” miles when traveling, but please check with us before purchasing or obtaining your tickets. We need to verify your arrival and departure schedule and ensure we have enough participants to operate the trip. Note—Names on air tickets and passports must match exactly!

MEDICAL MATTERS

No vaccinations are currently required to enter Vietnam, Cambodia, or Laos, but immunizations for typhoid, tetanus, hepatitis A, and polio are *recommended*. There is some risk of transmission of malaria in Laos. For further malaria information, consult your doctor or the CDC Malaria Hotline: 888-232-3228. These regulations and recommendations change frequently, so please check with your local health department or the CDC for more information (www.cdc.gov). Please advise us of any pre-existing medical conditions that may affect your health on the trip (recent injuries or surgeries, chronic illnesses, etc.). We recommend you bring your own personal first-aid kit, pain killers, and allergy medicines if you are prone to allergic reactions (especially epi-pens if you are allergic to bee stings). Moleskin or Second Skin for blisters is also recommended, as well as Band-Aids and antibiotic ointment. Consult your doctor about bringing other medications, such as antibiotics like Cipro, Azithromycin, or Loperamide-Imodium. The trip leader will also carry a basic kit for emergencies but will not have any prescription medications. Do not drink the tap water in the hotels as it frequently contains bacteria that will cause stomach problems. One of the most important things while traveling is to keep hydrated with plenty of water. You are much more prone to discomfort when you don't drink enough liquids.

MONEY MATTERS

The currency in **Vietnam** is the dong. You will need to change some US dollars into dong or withdraw dong at an ATM (there are many at Vietnam airports). You can also change money at hotel reception desks.

The official currency in **Cambodia** is the riel, but US dollars are commonly used.

The currency in **Laos** is the kip, but US dollars are also commonly used and accepted everywhere.

ATM machines are widely available in Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia. VISA and MasterCard credit cards are accepted in most larger shops, hotels, and restaurants in these countries. You should bring enough money for any dinners on your own, souvenirs you may buy, plus a few items like aperitifs, extra beverages, and the like (most of your meals are included in the cost of the trip). Depending on how much of a shopper you are, \$500-\$600 should be plenty for incidentals and souvenirs. You should bring an additional amount for optional gratuities to the trip leader and hotel/restaurant staff. At least US \$650 is recommended for the trip leader (presenting this personally rather than collectively gives you the opportunity to say thank you individually and is greatly appreciated.). At least \$1 for hotel bellman/staff and wait staff per person.

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WEATHER & CLIMATE

November is an ideal time to visit Southeast Asia, with dryer and slightly cooler weather. In Vietnam, daytime temperatures range from the low to high 70s to 80s and nighttime temperatures are in the low to mid-60s to 70s. Temperatures in Cambodia and Laos are generally about 10 degrees warmer, both during the day and at night. Check www.weather.com for the most up-to-date weather information.

WHILE ON THE TRIP

Electricity

All three countries have 220/230-volt current and a range of plug types. Most newer electronic appliances do not need a converter, but you will need a plug adapter.

Telephone

The international dialing code Vietnam is 84, Cambodia is 855, and Laos is 856. Please contact your cell phone company for specific instructions for international use.

Email & Internet Access

Internet access is available at all our hotels.

Time Zones

All three countries are Greenwich Mean Time plus seven hours. That means that Hanoi is 12 hours ahead of New York and 15 hours ahead of California.

WHAT TO BRING: CLOTHING & EQUIPMENT LIST

Packing Notes

It's best to go as light as possible and take only the essentials. Excess baggage can be a burden, not only to you but to support personnel. Always bring all irreplaceable items, such as camera, medications, important documentation, and hiking shoes/boots in your carryon luggage.

Luggage

- Duffel bag, large enough to hold your clothes and gear (about 3,200-3,600 cubic inches). A wheeled duffel is OK. It should have a full-length zipper (for easy access) and be sturdy.
- Daypack with a capacity of 2,000 to 2,500 cubic inches, with a good, padded waist belt. It can double as your carryon bag.
- Spare roll-up duffel (optional). This is essential if you wish to bring home those great souvenirs! It should be lockable.

Clothing Notes

We haven't included quantities for each item listed. Clothing should be lightweight and easy to dry. Use your own judgment, based on the expected weather conditions, your personal needs, and the overall weight restrictions for your luggage.

Underwear

- Regular underwear. Synthetics are easier to wash and dry.

Socks

- Casual socks (synthetic for easy washing and drying) that are suitable for walking (not hiking) shoes.
- Lightweight hiking socks (synthetic or wool/synthetic).

Shirts

- Light-weight long-sleeved, synthetic or wool shirts.
- Short-sleeved synthetic T-shirts.

Pants

- Full-length synthetic hiking pants. The kind with zip-off legs are also useful.
- Hiking shorts.
- Casual pants, shirts, skirts, dresses for non-hiking activities.

Outerwear

- Medium-weight jacket of synthetic fabric, such as fleece or down.

Head Gear

- Sun hat with wide brim, preferably with a chin strap to keep it from blowing off, or baseball cap.
- Bandanna or BUFF. A generally useful item—it will keep your neck from getting sunburned and can double as a hand towel in the field.

Footwear

Please break new boots in well before the trip.

- Light hiking boots/shoes with padded ankle, good arch support, and lug sole for traction.
- Comfortable walking shoes to wear while in towns or to put on at the end of the day.
- Sandals for casual days

Other Items

- Water bottles (1) 1- or 1.5-quart capacity.
- Pair of binoculars
- Toiletry kit—soap, toothbrush, etc.
- Purell hand sanitizer for quick hand washing and hygiene (a must!).

- Personal medical kit, including blister protection, malaria prophylaxis, traveler’s diarrhea medication.
- Ace bandage or brace if you’re prone to sore knees or ankles.
- Sunglasses (100% UVA/URB protected).
- Spare pair of prescription glasses, prescription sunglasses, or contact lenses. If you wear contact lenses, plan to bring along a pair of glasses to use in case of eye irritation.
- Sunscreen lotion and lipstick of SPF 25 or higher.
- Insect repellent
- Small padlocks or combination locks for your duffels.
- Earplugs—good if you have a roommate that snores!
- Swimsuit

Optional Travel Accessories

- Camera and plenty of memory cards.
- Repair kit with needle, thread, and safety pins.
- Powdered electrolyte mixes for your water.
- Reading and writing material.

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