

Vietnam & Cambodia: Trails of Indochina

Tour-Only Itinerary

You'll encounter time-forgotten Khmer ruins half hidden by huge silk-cotton trees in the jungles of Cambodia. Meet local children while strolling through remote coastal villages surrounded by rice paddies. Savor the fresh herbs and pungent spices of Indochine cuisine, a delicious punch of rich, complex flavors and delicate aromatics. Connect with local cultures during visits to a Vietnamese school, a night market in Siem Reap, and a floating fishing village hidden among the limestone karsts of Halong Bay. Last, but by no means least, crown your experience with a comprehensive tour of Angkor Wat, the largest religious monument in the world. Enrich your travels with the insider perspectives of Vietnamese and Cambodian guides eager to share the nuances of their cultures.

Highlights

With your knowledgeable guides, explore the royal city of Angkor Thom, a complex of towering temples and intricately carved terraces created by the “god-king” Jayavarman around AD 800.

Delight in the humorous, musical, and magical performance of the Thang Long Water Puppets, an art whose origins date back to the 11th century.

Enjoy the traditional music and dance of Cambodia during a live performance by young students from Cambodia Living Arts, an organization supporting the revival of Khmer traditions.

Activity Level

This tour is one of our Guided Walking Adventures, rated easy to moderate, with a range of 3 to 5 miles per day. You walk on a variety of terrain including country dirt roads, cement paths, bustling city streets, and forest trails, some with rocks and exposed roots. Some days involve walking up many steps to access temples. There is a fairly fast pace on the days when you are visiting the cities and sites within those cities, however, these days are balanced by the more relaxed pace when walking in the countryside.

DAY 1

Join your *Vietnam & Cambodia: Trails of Indochina* tour

Walking tour of Hanoi's Old Quarter; 1-2 miles, easy. Hoan Kiem Lake; 2 miles, easy

Today you enjoy an orientation to the tree-lined streets of Hanoi, resplendent with French colonial architecture, including the recently restored Opera House. You head into Hanoi's Old Quarter and stroll through the Ancient Quarter or 36 Streets District. This densely populated corner of the city was once a center of commerce where goods were sold under the street name of a particular guild. Still a thriving community of sellers today, the neighborhood has retained traditional street names such as Sugar Street, Tin Street, and Paper Street. Ancient homes and temples are interspersed with stores in this souvenir hunter's paradise! In the afternoon you may choose between free time at your deluxe hotel or a walk around Hoan Kiem Lake, located in the very center of the city and known as Lake of the Restored Sword from the legend that surrounds it.

Early this evening you enjoy the wonderful Thang Long Water Puppet Show. This amazing art form originated over one thousand years ago in the Red River Delta. The performers who operate the puppets have to spend over an hour in the water, and the result is an intriguing show full of local tales about ancient legends, romance, farming, fishing, and children playing. After the show, you head out to the Wild Lotus Restaurant for a dinner of delicious Vietnamese specialties.

PLEASE NOTE: You are required to obtain a visa prior to your arrival in Vietnam. Please do so as soon as possible to ensure you have it in ample time. The visa for Cambodia can be obtained upon arrival.

DAY 2

Halong Bay; Visit Dark and Bright Lagoon

After a delicious breakfast, you depart Hanoi and head for fantastical Halong Bay, 600 square miles studded with almost 2,000 jutting, lushly forested limestone islands, or karsts. This transfer takes approximately four hours, including a short break along the way. After boarding the junk, you enjoy a welcome cocktail followed by a cruise briefing and al fresco lunch as the Bhaya heads to Bai Tu Long Bay, passing the towns of Hon Gai and Cam Pha, Oan Lagoon, Mat Quy (Monster Head) and Am Tich (Teapot) Islets. Those who wish may visit Dark and Bright Lagoon via rowboat before returning to the junk for a Vietnamese cooking demonstration on the sundeck, followed by a sumptuous seafood dinner.

DAY 3

Cat Ba Island: Viet Hai Village

3-5 miles, easy to moderate

Sip coffee as the junk sets sail to Cat Ba Island, home to the Cat Ba National Park. Your walk follows a quiet, dirt road surrounded by thick forest and gently ascends to the tiny village of Viet Hai, home to a small community that produces many of the organic vegetables served on your junk! Upon arrival learn about the community's efforts to protect the Cat Ba langur, endemic to the island and one of the most endangered primates in the world. After a break in the shade, you continue through the village to visit a primary school and a small cave, or return to the junk via a local *tuk-tuk* taxi. While easy, this walk can feel more challenging due to the heat and lack of shade. Those who do not wish to walk today may enjoy more time on the boat, swimming, kayaking, or perhaps indulging in a massage (not included in the tour price). A sunset cocktail is followed by a dinner of freshly caught seafood, delicately seasoned and served in the dining room. The lights from the other boats anchored in the area reflect in the calm waters and provide a unique, intimate atmosphere.

DAY 4

Visit to Sung Sot Grotto

Sung Sot Grotto consists of two chambers, one being similar to a wide theater hall, where many stalactites

hang from the high ceiling, and a second chamber that is so immense it could hold thousands of people at one time. At the deepest point of the grotto, a “royal garden” appears, with a clear pond and a fascinating landscape that resembles small mountains. Many birds and plants (benjamin figs, cycads, and centenary banyan trees) live here. After this visit, head back to the junk and enjoy a delicious brunch. Later, you disembark at Halong Pier and transfer back to Hanoi, where you board your flight to Danang. Upon arrival, you drive to Hoi An and check into your hotel, where you have time to freshen up before a dinner of delightful Vietnamese cuisine.

DAY 5

Cam Thanh and Cam Chau villages; Guided tour of Hoi An

4 miles, easy to moderate; 2 miles, easy

This morning choose between a stroll through the early morning market or a visit to a seamstress where fabric can be made into a garment in one day (you may bring your own or purchase it from their impressive displays). Afterwards, walk through the villages of Cam Thanh and Cam Chau, winding between rice paddies and organic gardens where there may be a chance to stop at a local school and visit with the children. Lunch is on your own today, allowing you time to either enjoy the hotel's lovely swimming pool (perhaps dining pool-side) or venture into Hoi An.

After lunch, continue on to the wonderful old part of Hoi An, where your guide shares amazing insights into the history of this area. Hoi An was an international trading center from the 17th to the 19th century, frequented by merchants from China, Japan, India, and Holland. The winding narrow streets and old Chinese-style buildings of its historic center are remarkably intact and have earned it UNESCO World Heritage site status. Particularly fascinating is the Japanese covered bridge, built by 17th century Japanese colonists with its Buddhist temple on one side. You may venture inside a former merchant's house as well as shops, courtyards, and temples, eventually reaching Hoi An's colorful central market, its stalls brimming over with tropical produce. This evening, gather for dinner at Brothers Café Restaurant, overlooking the Hoi An River and surrounded by lush gardens.

DAY 6

Cam Ha Village to An Bang Beach

4 miles, easy

This morning's initial destination is a small fishing village far removed from the hustle and bustle of the modern world. The relaxing walk to Cam Ha follows a palm-lined trail along the broad De Vong River, passing small homes, vegetable gardens, and shrimp farms; from here, you continue on a quiet unpaved road to An Bang Beach for a simple lunch of fresh-caught fish.

After lunch there's time to relax on the beach or at the hotel, where you may opt for a complimentary spa massage in the late afternoon or early evening. Dinner is on your own; enjoy exploring Hoi An's charming streets to discover a special restaurant for your evening meal.

DAY 7

Royal city of Angkor Thom

1-2 miles, easy

After a wonderful buffet breakfast of muesli, traditional noodle soup, fresh fruits, eggs, and pastries, you pack for your transfer to Siem Reap. On arrival, you are met at the airport by your local Cambodian guide and then transferred to your hotel. From here, take a tuk-tuk to the gate at Bayon, where you begin your walk to explore the mysterious royal city of Angkor Thom. Stroll along the trail to the Terrace of the Elephants and the Terrace of the Leper King. Wander through the narrow alleyways and see the city's awe-inspiring fifty tower temple. The enormous stone sculptures reveal enigmatic faces from a remote era. Continue on to Takeo Temple, a towering but plainly decorated structure dedicated to Shiva. Known in its time as the "mountain with golden peaks," it was the first temple to be constructed wholly of sandstone. Dinner tonight is at the hotel, featuring some of Cambodia's most delicious cuisine.

DAY 8

K'bal Spean Trail; Afternoon visit to Ta Prohm

3 miles, moderate

This morning you depart early from the hotel in order to beat the heat. Transfer to K'bal Spean, which is

situated on the southwestern slopes of the Kulen Hills and within Phnom Kulen National Park. It was here in 802 AD that King Jayavarman declared himself the god-king and broke away from the Java kingdom. This is the birthplace of the Angkor kingdom and modern Cambodia. You follow a trail through a quiet forest, where at the top you find the K'bal Spean site and riverbed, which is covered with sculptures of lingas, the symbol of the god Shiva's supreme essence. This amazing Hindu site, referred to as the "River of a Thousand Lingas," predates Angkor Wat by roughly two hundred years, making it one of the most ancient sites in the region. Along your route you may discover a lovely waterfall and great views of the valley below. Lunch today is in a local restaurant at the foot of K'bal Spean which has great views over the area.

In the afternoon you visit Ta Prohm, a site nearly lost in the deep jungle growing around it. The overgrown vegetation combined with the temple's remains create a somewhat haunted and exotic landscape. Enormous tree roots, pushing between the stone blocks of the temple in a sort of embrace, emphasize the legend of a "lost city." Intentionally left partially unrestored, the site's towers and alleyways have become entangled in massive fig and silk-cotton trees, offering ample photo opportunities of temple ruins juxtaposed against unfettered nature.

Later, you may choose between a dip in the hotel's swimming pool or an optional visit to the Conservation d'Angkor Center, a storage area holding over 5000 sculptures that originally stood within temples across the Angkor area. Dinner is at a local restaurant, which serves some of the best authentic Cambodian food in the area.

DAY 9

Visit of Angkor Wat

1 mile, easy

This morning you rise very early in order to beat the crowds for an exploration of Angkor Wat—the enormous and intricately carved Khmer ruins—one of the world's architectural wonders. A product of the Khmer civilization, the temple was constructed between the 9th and 13th centuries. Strolling its extensive alleys and courtyards, you see many small shrines still in use by the local residents living near the ancient site. Housed in the main temple are hundreds of fine carvings of Apsaras, depicted from Hindu mythology.

After this remarkable visit to Angkor Wat, you bid farewell to your travel companions before a complimentary transfer takes you to the airport for your onward travels.

What's Included

Tour Only

Experienced, friendly and knowledgeable guides. On this tour there will be a Vietnamese Country Walkers guide with you throughout the tour plus local guides in Halong Bay, Hoi An, and Siem Reap.

All meals included, except one lunch and one dinner.

Local wine and/or beer included with dinner.

All accommodations while on tour

Transportation from the meeting point to the departure point

Internal airfare

Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary

Destination information (weather, visa requirements, etc.) and other travel assistance available 24/7 provided by One Call International

The unbeatable and cumulative experience of the Country Walkers staff