

History Tour (12 days) Vietnam & Cambodia



This 12-day tour is designed for history buffs, Australian Vietnam War veterans, and educators interested in Vietnam's and Cambodia's ancient and contemporary histories.

Beginning in the Vietnamese capital city of Hanoi, we take in the most significant historical and cultural attractions before heading to the central provinces. Here we visit the former Imperial capital of Hue city and the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). Next, we fly south to bustling Ho Chi Minh City and take an excursion to Long Tan Cross Memorial to explore Australia's main military base during the Vietnam War – Nui Dat.

Departing Vietnam, we land in Cambodia's capital city, Phnom Penh, to learn about the Khmer Rouge regime and French colonial influences before travelling to Siem Reap to visit the magnificent Temples of Angkor.

This trip is intended to highlight the two countries' very distinct cultures while showcasing the regions' less-visited sites, rural attractions, welcoming hospitality, and friendly people.

Day 1

Arrive Hanoi (Vietnam)

Upon arrival at Hanoi's International Airport, we are greeted and escorted to our hotel, where our group leader briefs us on our itinerary and answers any questions we may have.

Hanoi is one of Southeast Asia's most beautiful cities, a living organism that breathes life and vitality into all who visit, offering ample opportunity to enjoy Vietnamese cuisine and view famous landmarks that are part of Vietnam's colourful history. After dinner, we enjoy a short, guided walking tour for those who feel up to it. (meals: dinner)

Day 2

Hanoi



Hitting the streets after breakfast, we set out to visit the Temple of Literature, Vietnam's first university founded in 1070, where we see classical architecture and gain an understanding of this city's 1,000 years of history. There is no better way to see the capital's historic Old Quarter than electric carts as we take in the sights, sounds and smells of goods being traded and transported.

Early afternoon we venture out to visit Hoa Lo Prison Museum. The French originally built the prison in 1896 to hold political revolutionaries. Decades later, it was nicknamed the 'Hanoi Hilton' by the American aviators shot down over Vietnam and incarcerated there during the

1960s war years. Famous prisoners included Truong Trinh, the former General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam, and Peter Peterson, a U.S. pilot shot down over Vietnam, who later became the first Ambassador to Vietnam after diplomatic relations normalised. Perhaps the most famous American prisoner was another former pilot, John McCain III, who ran for the US presidency in 2000.

Meandering through the laneways of Ngoc Ha commune, we pass through this residential area of the city that was once rice fields. Our intended destination is B52 Lake, the site of an American B52 aircraft shot down in December 1972, before the American War, as it is often called in Vietnam, ended in one of the final bombing raids. There is some free time for independent exploration. In the evening, we enjoy dinner followed by Hanoi's famed Water Puppet Troupe performance. (meals: breakfast, dinner)

Day 3

Hanoi - Hue



No trip to Hanoi would be complete without a visit to the imposing Soviet-style Mausoleum, the final resting place of President Ho Chi Minh. Ho Chi Minh is credited with being the father of modern Vietnam. As a young man, 'Uncle Ho,' as he is affectionately referred to, grew up deeply resentful of the French colonists who had ruled Vietnam since the late 1890s. He subsequently became the country's key resistance leader, overseeing a period of conflict and turmoil that finally resulted in the expulsion of the French from Vietnam in 1954. Tragically, this event created the vacuum catalyst for American intervention in Vietnam,

leading to two decades of war. Ho Chi Minh was never to see his country free of foreign rule, passing away in 1969, six years before the American War ended. Following the war's conclusion in 1975, Ho Chi Minh's embalmed body was returned from the jungle and placed in this Mausoleum, his final resting place.

For our last activity in Hanoi, we saddle up as pillion passengers for a fun and eventful motorbike ride. Our experienced drivers take us around the city, cruising over the 100-year-old French Colonial Long Bien Bridge. Initially called the Paul Doumer Bridge after the French Governor-General at the time, the bridge was constructed using the cantilever method. We ride around Truc Bac Lake, West Lake and the beautiful tree-lined Thanh Nien Street, voted one of Vietnam's most beautiful streets. There is time to explore the city, perhaps taking in an art gallery, meandering through the bustling alleyways, or sitting at a street-side café

watching the residents go about their daily lives.

Late afternoon we fly to Hue City, located in Vietnam's central provinces, and enjoy a short time wandering the city's riverside esplanade. (meals: breakfast)

Day 4

Hue



We explore this sleepy city at a leisurely pace taking in Thien Mu Pagoda and the moated ruins of the famous Imperial Citadel. As we are guided through the partially restored, partially destroyed Citadel complex, we learn about the royal traditions of the Nguyen Emperors, the two-week Tet Offensive battle in 1969 and South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem. Our expert guide also explains the significance of Hue during the early French Colonial years (1854-1883). Here we find out why the last King of Vietnam, Bao Dao, abdicated in 1945, under pressure from the rise of the communist movement, ending the 143-year reign of the Nguyen Dynasty

and reign of the last monarch of Vietnam.

We venture into the countryside, exploring markets and remote villages. Our fascinating excursion takes us to several of Hue's hidden treasures, including Cau Ngoi Bridge and the Coliseum, once used for elephant and tiger fighting. We also stop, seeing incense sticks made from sandalwood mixed with numerous fragrances. Tonight, we taste a range of Hue delicacies in a restored villa fit for royalty. (meals: breakfast, dinner)

Day 5

Hue - The Demilitarized Zone



Today's early departure takes us north through Quang Tri province as we make our way to the Khe Sanh Combat Base near the Laotian border. The famous siege of Khe Sanh occurred January-July 1968, pitting American Marines and South Vietnamese soldiers (ARVN) against North Vietnamese main forces. After six months of intense fighting, the Americans and South Vietnamese evacuated the firebase, leaving the North Vietnamese unopposed to take control of the site. Situated on a raised plateau and surrounded by mountains, this former American airfield/firebase was still littered with shrapnel and craters until the 2000s. Today, the site houses

an insightful museum with dozens of abandoned tanks, aircraft and cannons dotted around the gardens. The bus journey to Khe Sanh will take us through the former Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), a 6-kilometre strip of land straddling both sides of the 17th parallel that formed a 'no-go' buffer zone border during the war. We pass famous firebases, including C3, Cam Lo, Doc Mieu, and the Razor Back. Eventually, we cross the Ben Hai River, traversing to what was once North Vietnam.

We continue our drive north to visit the lesser-known Vinh Moc war tunnels hidden along a remote coastal region of the province. Our local specialist guide explains the impacts of the heavy bombing in the surrounding area. This 3-levelled tunnel complex was the home to many North Vietnamese soldiers, was a weapons storage facility, and saw 16 children born in the tunnel hospital. We climb down into the tunnels to see first-hand the hardships endured. Travelling back to Hue late afternoon, we stop at a Catholic church that reveals the scars of war with its bullet-ridden walls and a collapsed roof.

The DMZ / Khe Sanh tour will take approximately 10 hours, including all stops and lunch. An alternative option is a shorter DMZ tour of 7-8 hours, taking in the former 17th Parallel, Doc Mieu Fire Support Base and the Vinh Moc Tunnels (leaving out Khe Sanh Combat Base). (meals: breakfast, dinner)

Day 6

Ho Chi Minh City

A short morning flight takes us to dynamic Ho Chi Minh City, the powerhouse of the south and a place with a fascinating past. This afternoon we enjoy a walking tour of this bustling city with its vast local markets. The city of 'Saigon' has a high population density, unregulated infrastructure and sprawling residential and retail districts. This afternoon we visit the War Remnants Museum to learn about the war. We travel a short distance to see the French Colonial City Post Office and Notre Dame Cathedral and we explore Chinatown. Tonight, we enjoy a drink at one of the rooftop bars once frequented by foreign journalists during the war years. (meals: breakfast, dinner)

Day 7 – Option 1

Long Tan - Nui Dat



This morning we travel to Vung Tau province, situated on the east coast, where the Australian Task Force (1ATF) and 1st Australian Logistical and Support Group (1ASLG) were located during the war. Upon arrival, we explore Nui Dat, the former site of Australia's most significant operational base in Vietnam. We have time to climb SAS Hill and walk along the old Luscombe Airfield built by Australian engineers in 1966. We tour other areas of former Australian operations, including the Horseshoe Fire Support Base and the Long Hai Hills.

We move to the site of the Long Tan Cross Memorial. Here we learn more about the battle of Long Tan, Australia's single bloodiest day during the

war, where 108 Australian soldiers were ambushed by over 2,000 North Vietnamese Army and local guerrilla soldiers.

Mid-afternoon, we visit Long Phuoc Tunnels and have an opportunity to talk to former soldiers about their memories of working in these war tunnels, often evading Australian patrols. Throughout the day, enlarged historic photos and maps will show Australian soldiers in action and life at 'the Dat'. Making the return trip to Ho Chi Minh City, we have time to reflect, before dining at one of the city's local outdoor barbeque restaurants. (meals: breakfast, lunch)

Day 7 – Option 2

Cu Chi Tunnels



We depart our hotel and travel to Cu Chi Tunnels - once home to the country's communist guerrillas in their struggle against the French and Americans. We climb into the tunnels seeing first-hand the challenging conditions the local communist guerrillas endured. This area of South Vietnam witnessed fierce fighting during the war with America and was also the site of an extensive air defoliation program, the results of which are still visible. Our expert local guide shows us the many ingenious boobytraps made of local materials and explains how the guerrilla soldiers evaded the Americans, including improvised techniques such as

underground smokeless cooking fires, camouflaged door entrances and termite nest escape hatches. We watch a fascinating 30-minute propaganda video applauding the skills of Viet Cong guerrillas thwarting the Americans. On our return trip to Ho Chi Minh City, there is time to wander through Chinatown experiencing the huge wholesale markets, ancient pagodas, and traditional Chinese medicine shops. (meals: breakfast, lunch) (A few months prior to travel, the group must unanimously decide on Option 1 or 2)

Day 8

Ho Chi Minh City - Phnom Penh



This morning we visit the Reunification Palace, where South Vietnam ran the war effort against the North Vietnamese communists until 30 April 1975. We head down into the underground map room, tour the control centre and see the escape helipad on the rooftop. Passing the original tanks that crashed through the Palace gates to end the war, we then transfer to the airport with our tour leader for a short flight to Phnom Penh in Cambodia.

The skyline of Phnom Penh changed dramatically during the French Colonial period when the French replaced the cluster of pagodas and

wooden structures along the riverfront. At the height of the colonial period, Phnom Penh was reputed to be the most beautiful city in French Indochina – a beauty lost during the war years.

Upon arrival, we notice a sharp change in culture, infrastructure and development levels between Vietnam and Cambodia. This afternoon we take a short trip to Wat Phnom, where we learn exactly how this city came about its name. Time permitting, we visit the Central Market to understand better what daily life looks like for residents. After dinner, we take a neon-lit and horn-honking tuk-tuk ride around the city to see historical monuments, the Prime Minister's residence, and the glitzy entertainment precinct of Diamond Island. (meals: breakfast, lunch)

Day 9

Phnom Penh



This morning we visit the infamous Tuol Sleng Prison and the 'Killing Fields' – both stark reminders of Cambodia's tragic recent history during the Khmer Rouge reign, 1975-1979. During this brief time, a former teacher called Pol Pot instituted a reign of terror over the country. He implemented a plan to turn Cambodia into an agriculture-based society, systematically emptying the cities and forcibly moving the people on to collective farms where they performed hard labour. Over a fifth of the country's population is estimated to have perished by overwork, starvation, and execution during this time.

Our first stop is the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum. Here, 14,000 high-ranking Khmer Rouge officials and other suspected traitors were interrogated and tortured until they confessed to being an enemy of the state. The prison, named Tuol Sleng (or S21), had strict rules to be obeyed without question. Everyone within the prison lived in constant fear, including the prison staff. This prison was part of the regime's mechanism to return Cambodian society to 'Year Zero' by completely deconstructing modern society and killing nearly all traitors and intellectuals.

The second stop is the mass burial grounds of Choeung Ek, more commonly known as the 'Killing Fields', located 14 kilometres outside the city. Once prisoners had confessed to being traitors, in groups of 20-30, they were loaded, blindfolded, into trucks and driven under cover of darkness to the burial site, where they were executed one by one. Our guide explains the events that took place here and how and why this could have occurred. We also learn of the political relationship between Cambodia and Vietnam involving the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia from 1979-89.

Late afternoon we take a private boat cruise on the Mekong River to enjoy panoramic views of the Phnom Penh skyline. The Mekong River is the most crucial water source in Southeast Asia and is essential to Laos' and Vietnam's economies and Cambodia's thriving fishing industry. In the late 1850s, the French saw the Mekong River as a possible trading route into China; thus, the French chose to colonise Cambodia, Vietnam, and Laos. (meals: breakfast, lunch)

Day 10

Phnom Penh - Siem Reap

This morning, we head to the Silver Pagoda and Royal Palace, learning of French colonial influences, the Cambodian Royal Family, and King Sihanouk's recent cremation in front of the Palace (February 2013). We transfer to the airport and take a short flight to Siem Reap, the gateway to the temples of Angkor. This afternoon we learn about sandstone, lacquer and wood crafts whilst visiting an artisan village using age-old techniques. We relax at our hotel pool before walking to the Night Market. Instead of walking home, we enjoy a tuk-tuk orientation tour of the town, then head out to a well-known picnic spot where street stalls sell all manner of delicacies and snacks. (meals: breakfast, lunch)

Day 11

Siem Reap



After breakfast, we set out to visit the magnificent Angkor temples. These temples were built by the Khmer civilisation between 802 and 1431 AD. From Angkor, the Khmer kings ruled over a vast domain reaching from Vietnam to China to the Bay of Bengal. The structures one sees at Angkor today are the surviving remains of a grand metropolis whose other buildings (palaces, public buildings, and houses) were built of wood and have long since decayed. The growth of the Khmer empire can, in part, be attributed to the excellent harnessing of water reservoirs to ensure there were year-round crops. This led to a constant income stream affording the Khmer Empire the capacity to build up its military might and the resources

available across hundreds of years to build impressive temple structures.

We explore the imposing Angkor Thom Temple and then the Bayon Temple with its famous faces representing one of the former kings. We also explore the most imposing temple of them all – Angkor Wat. Time permitting, we walk through the maze-like corridors of the beautiful Ta Prohm Temple, famous for its tapestry of trees intertwined within the temple structure. This evening we enjoy a traditional Apsara dance performance over dinner. (meals: breakfast, lunch)

Day 12

Tonle Sap Lake - Depart Siem Reap



This morning's early start allows us to experience the serenity of Cambodia's massive Tonle Sap Lake and get in and amongst floating Cambodian and Vietnamese fishing villages. This excursion gives us an insight into life on and around the edge of the lake, from where millions of people live and eke out a living. The inhabitants, who rarely step foot on land, fled to this remote region of the lake after the war ended.

In the afternoon there is free time to relax poolside, enjoy some shopping or explore the city's attractions at leisure, including visiting Siem Reap's Cultural Park or the War Museum to see a variety of military hardware supplied by the Soviet block and the Americans. Our tour leader then escorts us to the airport and waves us farewell. (meals: breakfast)

Summary

Grading

Moderate; To get the most out of this trip, you need to be in good health. However, anyone with a good level of fitness will be able to take part. Some outdoor activities include physical exertion, and there may be long periods of exposure to the elements. You will be expected to walk every day and carry your luggage for short distances. The itinerary may include bike riding, climbing steps and trekking. If your itinerary includes community service work of any description, you will be expected to work diligently during this component. Conditions here may be basic with simple accommodation and bathroom facilities. Suitable packing lists will be provided to match the content of the itinerary.

Accommodation

Private tours/family tours: Accommodation is based on a double/twin share arrangement. If you are travelling alone, you will be paired up with someone of the same gender. If you choose not to share or are the odd numbered person on tour, a single supplement is payable.

For children under 12 years of age, it may be possible for one child to share with parents (depending on hotel regulations and availability of extra beds/rollaway beds)

Transport

Depending on the tour, modes of transport may include modern air-conditioned private coach, boat, train, plane.

Your Tour Leader

A tour leader accompanies all group tours. Your tour leader is the person who most influences the success of your trip. They have been meticulously trained and are very experienced in running tours. Every tour leader is locally employed, therefore they are the best person to showcase their country and culture. Their expertise and knowledge creates an insightful and authentic experience of the region. They are with you throughout your trip from breakfast time until the group returns to the hotel in the evening. They are contactable 24/7.

For more information on the role of the tour leader, local guides and accompanying teachers, please refer to our website.

Group Size

Private tours/family tours: Minimum group size is 12. There are no maximum participant numbers on any tour.

Land Trip Cost and Details

Cost per traveller from A\$ 1,950

Based on a minimum of 12 travellers

**Smaller or larger group sizes priced on application*

Inclusions

- All accommodation, transport, activities, entrance costs and other programs as described in the itinerary
- Professional Edventure Travel tour leader throughout the trip & additional specialist guides
- Extensive destination-specific risk management and assessment
- Meals (and drinking water) as listed in the itinerary
- 24-hour **IN COUNTRY** support
- Pre-departure support, briefings and planning meetings
- Tips for tour leaders, local guides & drivers

Exclusions

- International flights to/from Vietnam
- International flights to/from Travel Visa costs (if required)
- Spending money
- Travel insurance

Contact details

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