TOUR CODE

SE4

ADVENTURESABROAD

THAILAND, LAOS, VIETNAM & CAMBODIA

34 days

Updated 06/03/2013

Day 1 *Arrival in Bangkok*

Arrive in Bangkok, Thailand.

Overnight in Bangkok (airport area). Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Bangkok: City Tour*

This morning we will visit the Grand Palace situated on the Chao Phraya River. Started in 1782, the complex is a collection of buildings covering over 1.5 sq km (0.9 sq mile). Within the grounds we visit Wat Phra Kaeo, known for the venerated Emerald Buddha. Sitting on a golden altar, it is carved from green jade and is only 75 cm (30 inches) high! Since its discovery in the 15th Century, the Emerald Buddha has known many homes, including Lampang, Chiang Rai and two locations in Laos, Luang Prabang and Vientiane.

We will start our afternoon with a visit to Wat Pho also known as the Temple of the Reclining Buddha. The temple is the largest in Bangkok and it is 200 years old. On its grounds, we will see the tremendous 46m (150 foot) long, 15 m (49 foot) high gold-plated reclining Buddha. The sole of his feet have detailed work of mother-of-pearl. Wat Pho also has more than 1,000 bronze images from Ayutthaya and Sukhothai rescued by Rama I's brother.

We will continue our day by crossing the "khlong" (river) by boat in order to visit Wat Arun, or the Temple of the Dawn. It was built in the early 19th Century and its tower is the highest in Thailand measuring 81m (265 feet). The tower, or "prang," is covered with pieces of Chinese porcelain and its beauty is appreciated from a distance. The temple gained its name from the Indian god of dawn, Aruna. Here there are superb statues of the Buddha at the most important stages of his life: at birth (north), in meditation (east), preaching his first sermon (south) and entering Nirvana (west).

Overnight in Bangkok. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Bangkok - Pitsanolok - Sukhothai - Chiang Mai*

Today we fly to Pitsanolok, the birthplace of King Naresuan the Great of Ayuthaya (reign: AD 1590-1605), and his brother Prince Ekathosarot. Phitsanulok has long been an important center for political and strategic reasons, and a major center of recruitment when Ayuthaya waged war with Burma. It was the capital of Thailand for 25 years during the 1448-1488 reign of Ayuthayaos King Boromtrailokanat.

On arrival, we are met by our bus and begin our sightseeing, including the monastery of Wat Phra Si Rattana Mahathat, commonly called by the inhabitants as "Wat Yai." This is the most important monastery of Pitsanulok, located at the foot of Naresuan Bridge on the city side of the river. The monastery was built in the reign of Phra Maha Thamma Racha I (Phraya Lithai) In AD 1357. It houses the Phra Buddha Chinnarat regarded as the most beautiful Buddha image in Thailand.

We continue to Sukhothai where we visit the Ramkhamhueng National Museum, an excellent introduction to the historic city, including much in the Sukhothai style. From here we proceed to Wat Mahatat, dominated by a 14th Century lotus-bud tower and encircled by a moat. Some of the best architectural ornamentation is found in the main tower. We also visit the remains of the Royal Palace.

We continue to Chiang Mai, arriving late afternoon.

Overnight in Chiang Mai. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Chiang Mai: City Tour*

Today we have a tour of Chiang Mai and the surrounding area.

Chiang Mai has over 300 temples, and its old quarter set within a 2 sq km moat, has retained many of its traditional wooden houses. At the main sanctuary of the Buddhist temple is a tower constructed in 1345 to house the ashes of King Kam Fu and the beautiful Viharn Lai Kam. This wooden structure is a marvelous example of Lanna architecture. Inside the temple there sits one of Thailand's three Phra Singh (or Sihing images). The setting of the image is enhanced by a colourful mural that is action-packed with scenes showing piggyback fights, merchants, fishermen and children playing.

Later we will visit the National Museum, home to a glorious collection of Buddhist images. We also visit Doi Suthep, which dominates the skyline to the west of Chiang Mai, characterized by the eagles-nest temple of Wat Phra That Doi Suthep. This is Northern Thailand's holiest shrine and one of Thailand's most important place of pilgrimage. The view on a clear day extends over a seemingly infinite plain, making Chiang Mai look surprisingly compact.

Overnight in Chiang Mai. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Chiang Mai - Mae Sa Valley - Chiang Mai*

We have a morning visit to the Mae Sa Elephant Rehabilitation Centre and an orchid farm. The road we travel today passes through the narrow valley of the Mae Sa River that tumbles down numerous cascades. The natural beauty of the area and closeness to the city has attracted orchid farms, elephants camps and resorts with impressive gardens.

As the national animal of Thailand, the elephant has a special place in Thai lore. Elephants were once numerous, ranging over extensive forest habitats that covered much of Northern Thailand till the middle of this century. In former times, the animals were the equivalent of a battle tank, an off-road vehicle and a ten-wheel truck. The symbol of kingship since ancient times, a white elephant required such elaborate care that a gift of one from a king was enough to bring ruination to an over-ambitious courtier; hence the English expression a "white elephant".

Ironically, ordinary elephants have become "white elephants" to poor mahouts who are no longer able to find work for their animals logging in the hills and have to abandon them. The abandoned beasts are unable to find sufficient open land and have been destroying crops. As a result they are hunted and shot. The conservation centre was set up to redress the situation; we will see a demonstration whereby mahouts have the animals show their skills and learn about some of the many traditional roles the elephant has played in Thailand since the days of old Siam. We include an exciting one hour elephant ride.

Overnight in Chiang Mai. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Chiang Mai - Chiang Rai: Hill Tribe Village*

This morning we travel from Chiang Mai to Chiang Rai, founded in 1262 by King Mengrai. He decided that the site, in a basin between mountains, would be ideal for the new capital of the Lanna Kingdom. However, the capital was transferred to Chiang Mai only 34 years later and Chiang Rai declined in importance. Today it is known as the "Gateway to the Golden Triangle." With its varied ethnic groups and beautiful surrounding scenery, Chiang Rai, the capital of Thailand's northernmost province, feels far removed from Bangkok or even Chiang Mai. Evidence of the town's historic importance can be seen in monuments such as Wat Phra Kaeo even though modern development is becoming increasingly prominent.

We visit Wat Phra Kaeo, the city's most revered temple. According to legend, lightning struck and cracked the chedi in 1436, revealing a plaster cast statue encasing the Emerald Buddha (actually made of jadeite). Today, Thailand's most holy Buddha image is housed in Bangkok; a replica, presented in 1991, is now kept here. The wat dates from the 13th century and is also notable for its fine bot, decorated with elaborate woodcarving, and the Phra Chao Lang Thong, one of the largest surviving bronze statues from the early Lanna period.

This afternoon we will take a boat trip on the Maekok River and visit a local Hill Tribe village. The rugged, forested limestone hills of northern Thailand are home to a melange of some of the most interesting indigenous peoples in the world. The Lao, Karen, Hmong (or Meo), Mien, Lahu, Akha and Lisu minorities are a fascinating example of a vibrant pre-industrial way of life. They originated in Tibet and south China and live on the migration route that the Thai people themselves traveled 1,000 years ago. At some point during our visit to Chiang Rai, we wil pay a visit to the Hill Tribe Education Center where we can see typical clothing worn by each tribe. We will also be able to see different folk implements and other anthropological exhibits.

Overnight in Chiang Rai. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Chiang Rai - Golden Triangle - Chiang Rai*

We have a full day trip to the famous Golden Triangle where the borders of Laos, Burma, and Thailand come together. We travel to Mae Sai, Thailand's northern-most town near the Burma border; you can watch Thai and Burmese locals walking across the bridge separating the two countries. There are excellent opportunities to buy Burmese handicrafts at reasonable prices. From Mae Sai we drive to the heart of the Golden Triangle where the Ruak and Mekong rivers meet. You can stand on a hilltop and enjoy views over Burma, Laos, Thailand and the mighty Mekong. We visit Chiang Saen where evidence of the original 13th century city can still be seen on the banks of the river, a tranquil spot with charming old temples and finely carved figures.

Later we return to Chiang Rai.

Overnight in Chiang Rai. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Chiang Rai - Bangkok*

Today we fly from Chiang Rai to Bangkok.

Overnight in Bangkok. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Bangkok, Thailand - Luang Prabang, Laos*

Today we fly to Luang Prabang, Laos, a World Heritage Site.

In the 14th century, this city was established as the royal capital by Fa Ngoum, the first monarch of Lan Xang, the "Land of a Million Elephants." By this time, the city had already been the seat of local kingdoms for 600 years. According to legend, the site of the town was chosen by two resident hermits and was originally known as Xieng Thong --"Copper Tree City".

We have an orientation of this charming town, with its one main street lined with colonial era buildings housing shops and cafes. We have a chance to explore the town on foot and to climb to the top of Phu Si Hill. Looking directly downwards you can see that the former royal palace has a cruciform ground plan. We finish at Ban Phanom, a 300 year old weaving village is where shawls and sarongs are made from silk and cotton. The people in this area were originally from South China and were traditionally the King's weavers, soldiers and palace servants. The inhabitants make sarongs with dragon motifs, and shawls which are often dyed an indigo colour using a natural dye extract from a local plant. Some of the cloth woven in the village is embroidered with delicate silver and gold thread. Girls are taught from a very young age the skills which have been handed down from their forebears in Xishuangbanna District in China's Yunnan Province.

NOTE: The order of our sightseeing in Luang Prabang may vary depending on flight schedules that are subject to change.

Overnight in Luang Prabang. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Luang Prabang Area*

An early departure today takes to the Mekong River for a boat journey to visit the Pak Ou Caves. The boat is long and quite large, covered, with comfortable seat cushions, life jackets and a WC.

The Pak Ou Caves are two clefts in the side of a mountain stuffed with thousands of old Buddha images. The site has long been sacred for the Lao, even prior to Buddhism, when they worshipped spirits. The lower cave has over 4,000 images, ranging from 3 inches to 9 feet tall, stuck into nooks and crannies. The upper cave's Buddha images are placed far back into the cliff, so it's handy to have a flashlight. A real highlight of a trip to the caves is the breathtaking view of the mountains, villages, and fishermen during the 2-hour boat ride.

We return to Luang Prabang and visit the Royal Palace, a museum containing a collection of 15th-17th century Buddha statues including the significant Golden Buddha. The last member of the Lao royalty to live here was Sisavang Vong's son, Crown Prince Sisavang Vatthana. The private chapel is one of the most interesting wings of the palace. Here you will see the priceless gold Phra Bang Buddha in Abhayamudra (dispelling fear). It is made from 90% pure gold and is said to weigh 50 kg (110 lb).

We finish with a tour of the 16th-century Wat Xieng Thong with its richly decorated wooden interior. Wat Mai is another old temple of classic Luang Prabang design with gracefully curved roofs. We see many 400 year old wooden Buddha statues at Wat Wisunalat.

Overnight in Luang Prabang. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Luang Prabang - Xieng Khouang (Plain of Jars) - Phonsavan*

Today we travel by road to Xieng Khouang and the Plain of Jars.

Overnight in Phonsavan. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *The Plain of Jars*

In the 18th and at the beginning of the 19th century, Xieng Khouang was the center of a kingdom of the Hmong (Meo). In 1832, it was conquered by the Vietnamese, annexing the entire region. The town of Xieng Khouang was totally destroyed during the Vietnam War. Even though it has been rebuilt in 1975, the name Xieng Khouang is now primarily used in reference to the province of the same name.

The highlight of our visit here is the "Plain of Jars." Scattered over the plain are hundreds of enormous limestone jars, each about 1 to 2.5 metres high, with a diameter of about 1 meter. There is still no explanation as to how the clay jars found their way onto the plain, nor what purpose they served. Archaeologists have come up with the wildest theories, among them a claim declaring them brewery cauldrons. More likely, the jars are enormous urns. Many jars were destroyed or damaged during the Vietnam War, when American planes bombed positions of the communist Pathet Lao.

Overnight in Phonsavan. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Phonsavan - Vang Vieng*

Today we travel by road to Vang Vieng, a small village nestled in a scenic bend in the Nam Song River and surrounded by breathtaking limestone scenery. This is rapidly becoming Laos's premier destination for eco-tourism. The outcrops have inspired many Lao legends and stories in Lao literature and are known as "Phou Suan Mon Nang Eua", meaning "Silk Tree Garden Mountains of the Princess". The area also contains an extensive network of caves some of which are outlets for underground streams.

The latter part of our drive is truly spectacular -- limestone cliffs and sheer drops. About 20 kms before Vang Vieng, we'll stop at a bridge with a lovely view of karsts. There's also an attractive immediately before the bridge.

Overnight in Vang Vieng. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Vang Vieng - Viangchan*

Today we travel by road to Viangchan (Vientiane), the capital of Laos.

Overnight in Viangchan. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 15 *Viangchan, Laos - Hanoi, Vietnam*

Today we fly from Viangchan to Hanoi.

Hanoi is a lovely city with lakes, fine boulevards and flourishing parks, as well as having a public centre that is an architectural museum piece. Hanoi is situated on the right bank of the Red River (Song Hong) which is spanned by two bridges, the old Long Bien Bridge and the new Chuong Duong bridge.

In the centre of downtown Hanoi is Hoan Kiem Lake (also called the Lake of the Restored Sword or the Small Lake.) Emperor Le Thai To (1428-1433), following a momentous victory against an army of invading Ming Chinese, was sailing on the lake when a golden turtle snapped at (and broke off) the tip of his sword, so signifying that its work was done. There is a modest tower (the Tortoise Tower) commemorating the event on an islet in the southern part of the

lake. In fact, the lake does contain large turtles; one captured in 1968 was reputed to have weighed 250 kg (552 pounds). The park that surrounds the lake is used by the residents of the city every morning for jogging and tai chi (Chinese shadow boxing) and is regarded by locals as one of the city's beauty spots. When the French arrived in Hanoi at the end of the 19th century, the lake was an unhealthy lagoon surrounded by so many huts that it was impossible to see the shore.

Overnight in Hanoi. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 16 *Hanoi - Halong Bay: Huong Hai Junk Cruise*

This morning we depart for Halong Bay. The route today, via Haiphong, will be our first opportunity to see rural Vietnam. We will arrive at Halong Bay in the early afternoon. Halong Bay, located in the Gulf of Tonkin, covers an area of 1500 square km. With more than a thousand limestone peaks soaring from its crystalline emerald water this area is one of the natural wonders of Vietnam and now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The islands are dotted with innumerable white sandy beaches and grottoes created by wind and waves. The name Halong means "where the dragon descends into the sea". Legend has it that the islands of Halong Bay were created by a great dragon who lived in the mountains.

On arrival at Halong Bay we will board our Huong Hai Junk cruise and enjoy a welcome drink. The Huong Hai ('Ocean Flavours') junks are unique, 'antique' (replica) accommodations that are scrupulously clean, fully-crewed and comfortable. Our junk/s are large boats with private bath, air conditioning and fan, and plenty of deck space. An onboard chef prepares delicious, local seafood dishes (non-seafood dishes available).

After lunch on board we will cruise among the islands, stopping at a couple that have interesting cave features (some involve stairs). We enjoy sunset and then dinner on board.

Overnight Junk cruise. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 17 *Halong Bay - Hanoi*

Fishermen at Halong mount fan-shaped Chinese junk sails on their boats, the same sort of sails once deployed by pirates in these waters. Junks have been used for centuries by the Chinese, Japanese and Javanese for fishing and transportation, and often as living quarters; a junk commonly includes a deck, high masts, and several cotton sails.

Halong is one of the last places where junk sails are still handmade by families of sail makers. Coarse cotton panels are sewn together with silk thread -- every seam sewn by hand. To discourage rot and mildew, the completed sail is dipped in a liquid that comes from a beetroot-like member of the yam family. The sail is dipped and dried three or four times; a process that gives its dark red-tan colour.

Early this morning, after breakfast on board, we cruise to visit Hang Luon Cave by small bamboo boat. We check out at around 10 am, enjoy brunch on board before disembarking and departing for Hanoi at around noon. Upon arrival we'll visit Hanoi's Old Quarter, also known as the 'Quarter of 36 Streets', where we enjoy a leisurely walking tour.

Overnight in Hanoi. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 18 *Hanoi: City Tour*

Today we have a full day of sightseeing, starting with the Hoa Lo Prison Museum, known to American prisoners of war

as the Hanoi Hilton. This museum was a prison used by the French colonists in Vietnam for political prisoners and later by North Vietnam for prisoners of war during the American / Vietnam War.

We also see the Mausoleum of Ho Chi Minh, a site of pilgrimage (the building has been closed to visitors of late; probably an outside viewing only). The building was constructed from materials gathered from all over Vietnam. Modeled closely on Lenin's Mausoleum, Ho Chi Minh lies at rest in this Vietnamese version.

We continue to the house on stilts, where Ho Chi Minh lived and worked from 1958 to 1969. Its construction and decor illustrates the importance of simplicity and modesty to this Vietnamese revolutionary. The building is elegantly crafted with lacquered and polished wood, following the model of a traditional communal house on stilts.

We will also admire the elegance of the One Pillar Pagoda, originally built in 1049. The temple is lotus-shaped and is situated in the middle of a water-lily pond.

We continue to the new Ethnology Museum, one of Vietnam's finest. Dedicated to the ethnic minorities of Vietnam, this museum provides educational displays and descriptions and provides a real insight to peoples found primarily in the high country.

Next is the Temple of Literature, the site of the first national university dating back to 1076 and one of Hanoi's best-preserved ancient sites. From here we walk to the Fine Arts Museum, housed within a large colonial building, where we will see contemporary Vietnamese art and handicrafts.

Tonight we will enjoy a (+/- one hour) water puppet show. This is a fantastic art form unique to Vietnam and derives from the Red River Delta area.

Overnight in Hanoi. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 19 *Hanoi - Mai Chau - Hanoi*

Located in Hoa Binh Province, about three hours drive southwest of Hanoi, Mai Chau is home to many ethnic minority peoples. The road winds through a splendid vista of mountainous scenery until we reach a valley surrounded by a lush landscape and stilt houses inhabited mainly by the White Thai ethnic group, distantly related to tribes in Thailand, Laos and China. Upon arrival, we walk through typical villages to discover the rustic life of these mountainous people. We also learn about the traditional craft of brocade making. We'll enjoy a traditional lunch (included) at a local restaurant in a hamlet, with a chance to taste the country’s finest rice wine with a local family. Transfer back to Hanoi.

Overnight in Hanoi. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 20 *Hanoi - Da Nang - Hoi An*

Today we fly to Da Nang and continue by road to Hoi An.

Da Nang is situated on a peninsula at the point where the Han River flows into the South China Sea. We pass through the nearby Marble Mountains; five limestone peaks with marble outcrops known for their beauty and their caves. At the foot of Marble Mountain, an important religious site for the Chams, you can see many artisans crafting fine marble objects. Our destination is one of the most charming towns in Vietnam -- Hoi An. The ancient town of Hoi An (formerly Faifo) lies 32 km (20 miles) south of Da Nang on the banks of the Thu Bon River.

Overnight in Hoi An. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 21 *Hoi An: Walking Tour*

Today we will be able to soak in the atmosphere of this small town (a World Heritage Site) on a walking tour. The unique architecture, the temples, the market will make Hoi An one of the highlights of your trip.

The Japanese Covered Bridge was built in the 16th century, perhaps even earlier. On its north side there is a pagoda, Japanese in style, which protects sailors. Its popular name reflects a long-standing belief that is was built by the Japanese, although no documentary evidence exists to support this. At the Tran Family Temple we will see the fusion between both the Chinese and Japanese styles. This temple has survived for 15 generations.

Overnight in Hoi An. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 22 *Hoi An - My Son - Hoi An*

This morning we visit the World Heritage Site of My Son ("mee-sohn"), a large complex of religious relics that comprises more than 70 architectural works from the obscure Cham Dynasty (2nd-15th century). The Chams were "Indianised" during commercial trading relations and adopted Hinduism (which can clearly be seen in the Temple designs). My Son served as a intellectual and religious centre and is a must visit as one of Vietnam's most important Cham Sites. The forested, mountain setting and general peacefulness of this little visited site make this an excellent excursion.

Return to Hoi An with the balance of the day at leisure.

Overnight in Hoi An. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 23 *Hoi An - Da Nang - Hue*

Today we travel to Hue via Da Nang where we visit the Cham Museum* which houses the largest display of Cham art anywhere in the world. Shortly after departure from Da Nang we will pass through the Truong Son Mountains, the former border between North Vietnam and South Vietnam. Hai Van Pass, or literally "Pass of the Ocean Clouds," offers spectacular scenery.

Hue was the capital of the old Nguyen dynasty and traditionally one of Vietnam's cultural, religious and educational centers. Here there are splendid tombs of the emperors, several stunning pagodas and the citadel that houses the forbidden Purple City, situated on the banks of the Perfume River.

Overnight in Hue. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 24 *Hue: Area Tour*

We begin our day by motorised boat down the Perfume River to visit the delightful Thien Mu Pagoda, considered to be the finest pagoda in Hue. It was built in 1601 after an old woman appeared to Nguyen Hoang, the governor of Hue, and said that the site had supernatural significance.

This afternoon we tour the Citadel, a fortress surrounded by a moat that has a six-mile perimeter. At the Forbidden Purple City we can see the remains of the former home of the emperors. The Imperial City is built on the same

principles as the Forbidden City in Beijing. It is enclosed by thick outer walls (Kinh Thanh) of 23-33 feet, along with moats, canals and towers. There are ten gates, which pierce the four walls of the citadel, although many are in poor condition. The city has not only been damaged by war, but also by natural disasters such as floods, which inundated the city in the mid-nineteenth century to a depth of several feet. The complex has undergone partial restoration with the aid of UNESCO.

This evening we will enjoy a special, private dinner in a beautiful, restored royal home in Hue. The home is now owned by descendants of the Hue royal family.

Overnight in Hue. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 25 *Hue - Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City)*

Today we fly from Hue to Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City), the business and tourist centre of Vietnam.

This afternoon we visit some of the city's highlights, including the Reunification Hall, formerly the site of Norodom Palace, the residence of the French governor-general of Indochina. On 30 April 1975, NVA tanks smashed down the first gates and took control of Saigon. We then proceed to Cholon, or Chinatown, an area inhabited by Vietnamese of Chinese origin. This area is one of the most vibrant in the city.

Overnight in Saigon. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 26 *Saigon - Cu Chi Tunnels - Saigon*

This morning we will visit the intriguing tunnels of Cu Chi, a complex underground system that housed 10,000 people during the height of the war and contained sleeping quarters, hospitals and schools.

From here we will continue on to the War Remnants Museum (formerly the War Crimes Museum). The visit here is a sobering experience with its countless photographs and exhibits.

Overnight in Saigon. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 27 *Saigon - Cao Dai - Mekong Delta*

On our way to the Delta, we will stop at one of the many Cao Dai temples.* This hybrid religion took root in southern Vietnam during the 1920's after Ngo Van Chieu, a civil servant, was visited by 'Cao Dai' or the 'Supreme Being'. The Cao Dai later told Ngo in a seance that he was to be symbolized by a giant eye. Being a humanist religion, it quickly gained support of a large following of dispossessed peasants. Today there is thought to be about 2,000,000 adherents and 1,000 Cao Dai temples.

A four-hour drive south takes us to the fertile delta of the meandering Mekong River, the southernmost region of Vietnam. Often referred to as the rice bowl of Vietnam, producing three crops of rice per year, the fertile Mekong Delta is also famous for its tropical fruits and flowers. The Delta area is the end of a 4500 km / 2,812 mi journey the Mekong River makes after travelling through six countries. Traditional transportation in the Delta is by boat, via a vast network of canals and channels. Boating along these canals and visiting the floating markets is a fascinating experience.

* Please pack an overnight for the trip to the Mekong Delta. Large baggage will be securely stored in Saigon.

Overnight in hotel in Cantho region (Mekong Delta). Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 28 *Mekong Delta - Saigon*

Early this morning we will have a covered boat ride on the delta where we can have a candid glimpse into the lives of the local people selling, buying, and exchanging goods from their boats.

We meet our bus (at a different point from where we left it) for our drive back to Saigon. This afternoon we may accomplished Saigon area sightseeing not accomplished earlier due to flight times. At some point during out tour we will drive past the Notre Dame Cathedral and adjacent Post Office. Both of these buildings were constructed by the French in the 1880s and display architectural characteristics typical of that time period.

Overnight in Saigon. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 29 *Saigon, Vietnam - Phnom Penh, Cambodia*

Today we fly from Saigon to Phnom Penh, the capital and largest city in Cambodia.

Engineered by the French, Phnom Penh was once filled with beautiful tree-lined streets and colonial mansions. Today many of the old buildings exist, although they are in a severe state of disrepair.

Depending on the time of our arrival, we may accomplish some of the sightseeing as described tomorrow, today upon arrival.

Overnight in Phnom Penh. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 30 *Phnom Penh: Tuol Sleng Prison & City Tour*

Today we tour Phnom Penh and its surrounds.

We begin with a visit to the infamous Tuol Sleng Prison, now a museum illustrating the atrocities committed by Pol Pot during the 1970s, and the nearby Choeung Ek, aka the "Killing Fields." The buildings at Tuol Sleng are preserved as they were left when the Khmer Rouge were driven out in 1979. The regime kept extensive records, including thousands of photographs. Several rooms of the museum are now lined, floor to ceiling, with black and white photographs of some of the estimated 20,000 prisoners who passed through the prison.

Back in town, we visit the National Museum, which houses one of the world's largest collections of Khmer art, including sculpture, ceramics, bronzes, and ethnographic objects. The museum's collection includes over 14,000 items, from prehistoric times to periods before, during, and after the Khmer Empire, which at its height stretched from Thailand, across present-day Cambodia, to southern Vietnam. The Museum buildings, inspired by Khmer temple architecture, were constructed between 1917 and 1924.

We then walk the short distance to the Royal Palace and Silver Pagoda. We also stop in at Wat Phnom, a magnificent temple overlooking the town, said to be the spot whereupon the city was originally founded.

Overnight in Phnom Penh. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 31 *Phnom Penh - Beng Mealea - Siem Reap & Angkor Wat*

Today we travel by road to Siem Reap, gateway for Angkor Wat / Angkor Thom.

En route to Siem Reap, we will stop at the ruined temple of Beng Mealea, almost the same size as Angkor Wat but reclaimed by nature a millennium after it was first built. Beng Mealea is special because it's one of the Angkor temples that's been left to be reclaimed by nature, unlike most of the other temples which were restored by the French in the 1800s after centuries of neglect. If you want a sense of what it was like for the first French explorers when they discovered Angkor, this would be the nearest you'll get to it.

We continue the short distance to Siem Reap and check in to our hotel. Later we wander the magnificent grounds of the splendidly preserved 12th Century temple of Angkor Wat. Considered the best example of ancient Khmer architecture, it is the largest and most impressive of all
Cambodian monuments and generally regarded as one of the finest religious structures in the world. We will also be visiting the South Gate of Angkor Thom, Bayon Temple, Baphuon, the Elephant Terrace and the Terrace of the Leper King.

NOTE: The order of Siem Reap sightseeing may vary at the discretion of your Tour Leader.

Ovgernight in Siem Reap. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 32 *Siem Reap: Angkor Thom*

Today is dedicated to seeing the remaining highlights of the Petit Circuit -- Angkor Thom (Bayon), with its haunting images of the God-like Avalokitesvara and its magnificent murals, and Sras Srang (Pool of Ablutions), Ta Keo (the first Khmer temple built entirely of sandstone) and Ta Prohm, in its natural overgrown setting.

We will also see much of the Grand Circuit, including the great temple of Preah Khan and the brick sanctuaries of Pre Rup. It is not hard to imagine how this vast complex, covering several square kilometers, with carefully engineered canals and reservoirs to control flood waters and survive droughts, was once (by some estimates), the largest city in the world, housing as many as one million inhabitants.

Overnight in Siem Reap. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 33 *Siem Reap: Banteay Srei*

Today we visit some temples a little farther afield, including the exquisitely carved Banteay Srei.

Banteay Srei is something of an anomaly. It wasn't built by a king, but rather a spiritual teacher, Yajnavaraha, the Brahman of King Jayavarman V, in AD 967. At that time it was called Tribhuvana Mahesvara, and stood in a town called Isvarapura. The name Banteay Srei means the "Citadel of Women", and is one of the first temples to be restored by the French.

We will also have time to have a boat excursion on Tonle Sap Lake.

Overnight in Siem Reap. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 34 *Departure*

Departure from Siem Reap.

BON VOYAGE! Meal plan: Breakfast.