TOUR CODE

TH6

ADVENTURESABROAD

SOUTHEAST ASIA ROUNDUP

15 days

Updated 09/02/2013

Day 1 *Arrival in Bangkok*

Arrive in Bangkok, Thailand.

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

Day 2 *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 3 *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 4 *Luang Prabang: Kuang Si Waterfall*

Today we have an excursion to Kuang Si Waterfall, a beautiful multi-tiered falls located 30 km from Luang Prabang. There is a flight of steps which one has to climb to reach a pool half way to the top. From there, you can look down to the pool below. Many local people come to Kuang Si for picnicking. Our journey to / from the falls is scenic and interesting, passing through small villages and rice fields.

We return to Luang Prabang and have an afternoon at leisure.

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

Day 5 *Luang Prabang, Laos - Hanoi, Vietnam - Halong Bay*

Today we fly to Hanoi and transfer by road to Halong Bay.

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.

Overnight at Halong City. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Halong Bay Cruise - Hanoi*

This morning we have a 4-hour cruise on Halong Bay. We'll stop along the way to visit one of the limestone caves in the area. As we cruise our boat staff will serve you a sumptuous local seafood lunch on boat. On our leisurely cruise back to Halong, we stop to visit the floating fishing village and learn about the fishermen's daily life and legends about the bay.

We transfer by road back to Hanoi. This evening we'll have a cyclo ride through the Old Quarter of Hanoi.

Overnight in Hanoi. Meal plan: Breakfast and lunch.

Day 7 *Hanoi: City Tour - Da Nang - Hoi An*

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.

Later we transfer to the airport for our flight to Da Nang. On arrival in Da Nang we transfer by road to Hoi An.

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

Day 8 *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 9 *Hoi An - Hue*

Today we travel by road to Hue. En route we visit the Cham Museum in Da Nang.

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

This afternoon we tour the Citadel, a fortress surrounded by a moat that has a 10 km (6 mile) perimeter. At the Forbidden Purple City we can see the remains of the former home of the emperors. The city is built on the same principles as the Forbidden Palace in Peking (Beijing). It is enclosed by 7-10 m (23-33 foot) thick outer walls (Kinh Thanh), 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 and incessant conflict but also by natural disasters such as floods which in the mid 19th century, inundated the city to a depth of several metres. The complex has undergone partial restoration with the aid of UNESCO.

Overnight in Hue. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Hue: Perfume River & Imperial Tomb - Saigon*

We begin our day by motorised sampan 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. Later we visit one of the nearby Imperial tombs.

Later we transfer to Hue airport for our flight to Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City).

Overnight in Saigon. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Saigon: Cu Chi Tunnels & War Remnants Museum*

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 to the War Remnants Museum (formerly the War Crimes Museum). The visit here is a sobering experience with its countless photographs and exhibits. We also see 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.

Overnight in Saigon. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Saigon, Vietnam - Phnom Penh, Cambodia*

Today we fly to Phnom Penh and have a tour of this city on arrival.

This is the capital and largest city in Cambodia. Engineered by the French, the city 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.

We visit 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." Later, there may be some free time to roam in the central market of Tuol Tum Pong.

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

Day 13 *Phnom Penh - Siem Reap & Angkor Wat*

Today we fly to Siem Reap, gateway for Angkor Wat / Angkor Thom. On arrival we have a tour of the South Gate of Angkor Tom, Bayon Temple, Ba Poon, the Elephant Terrace and the Leper Temple.

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

Day 14 *Angkor Wat & 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 also visit Ta Prohm, in its natural overgrown setting.

This afternoon we visit the magnificent grounds of the splendidly preserved 12th century temple of Angkor Wat. Considered the best example of ancient Khmer architectural, it is the largest and most impressive of all Cambodian monuments and generally regarded as one of the finest religious structures in the world. The construction mirrors the concept of the ancient universe and its bas relief carvings and intricate murals tell a fascinating story of life over 800 years ago. The "Apsaras", or Heavenly Dancers, have lost none of their grace and beauty as they dance frozen in time on the walls.

PLEASE NOTE: Due to weather, flight times and other scheduling considerations, the order in which Siem Reap area sightseeing is accomplished may change at the discretion of your Tour Leader.

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

Day 15 *Departure*

Departure from Siem Reap.

BON VOYAGE! Meal plan: Breakfast.