Tour Code
VN1

ADVENTURESABROAD

VIETNAM

A Cultural Odyssey

15 days

Created on: 29 Mar, 2024

Day 1 Arrive in Hanoi

Arrive in Hanoi; transfer to our hotel.

Hanoi, located on the banks of the Red River (Song Hong), is an attractive city with lakes, fine boulevards, flourishing parks, and a public centre that is an architectural museum piece. Rich in history, this is one of the most ancient capitals in the world. Hanoi is like a living museum; a fascinating glimpse into a city of old, yet oozing with the energy and pace of a modern metropolis.

Overnight in Hanoi.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Hanoi: City Exploration

Today we enjoy a full day of sightseeing in Hanoi, and as we visit the historic highlights you will witness a capital city packed with tree-lined boulevards, lakes and parks, belle époque villas and beautiful temples.

We will start at the Mausoleum of Ho Chi Minh, a site of pilgrimage and the final resting place of the most iconic and popular leader of Vietnam. The building was constructed from materials gathered from all over Vietnam and is modelled closely on Lenin's Mausoleum. (*From time to time the building is closed to visitors; possibly an outside viewing only).

We continue on to the Ho Chi Minh stilt house. For most of his tenure as President of North Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh lived in this modest stilt house behind the grandiose Presidential Palace. 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, one of Vietnam's most iconic temples. Originally built in 1049, the temple is lotus-shaped and is situated in the middle of a water-lily pond.

Our visit to the Ethnology Museum (one of Vietnam's finest) provides us with an insight to the lives of the peoples found primarily in the high country. Dedicated to the 54 ethnic minorities of Vietnam the museum is packed full of information detailing traditional Vietnamese ways of life. 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.

Today we finish 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.

Overnight in Hanoi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Hanoi - Red River Delta & Tam Coc

This morning we will drive to Ninh Binh Province through the rural Red River Delta region. This part of Vietnam is often referred to as "Halong Bay on Land". Song Hong, the Red River, is northern Vietnam's largest river. The river rises in China's Yunnan province and flows 1175 km southeast through deep, narrow gorges to enter Vietnam and discharge into the Gulf of Tonkin via a great delta. The silt it carries is rich in iron oxide, making its water red and giving it its name.

After lunch we will enjoy a short drive to Yen Mac. Here we will meet with a local family and learn about the local village activities such as gardening, rice cultivation and production, and local handicraft work. People of the Red River Delta villages are self-sufficient and they grow an abundance of vegetables and fruit in private gardens, overflowing with a variety of crops such as tomatoes, eggplant, spinach, herbs,

papaya, longan and jackfruit. We will walk along the narrow village streets to see the local pagoda and the communal house; the relaxed atmosphere here lends well to interaction with local villagers.

We then drive to Hoa Lu, the ancient capital during the Dinh and Le dynasties. We'll visit the local temples and then drive across the Trang An Eco-tourism complex in order to reach the Hang Mua Cave. Here we can climb up the 450 steps to reach the summit for a panoramic view of the surrounding area.

Overnight in Tam Coc.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 4 Tam Coc - Lan Ha Bay Overnight Cruise

In the morning embark on a journey to Lan Ha Bay (an extension of Ha Long Bay); all the while absorbing the incredible beauty of The Red River Delta and colourful rice fields throughout the journey. Lying south and east of Cat Ba Town, Lan Ha Bay is made up of approximately 300 or so karst islands and limestone outcrops. Due to being a fair distance from Halong City, fewer tourist boats venture here, meaning Lan Ha Bay has a more isolated appeal.

We will receive a warm welcome as we arrive at the Dinh Vu port around noon. Here we will board our overnight boat. A mouth-watering lunch will be served as we cruise to Lan Ha Bay.

During our afternoon cruising we will witness the phenomenal and awe-inspiring scenery around Lan Ha Bay. We will explore hidden lagoons and floating villages, and you will have the chance to swim or kayak at the foot of the verdant giant stones. We later drop anchor in an isolated area for the evening and enjoy the peaceful ambience of the bay. Under clear skies, the upper deck offers a great vista from which you can admire the beauty of the Lan Ha sunset.

Overnight on board.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 5 Lan Ha Bay - Hanoi

Before enjoying breakfast, those who wish to can participate in a Tai Chi class on deck under the rise of the Southeast Asian sun. This morning we will explore an impressive cave engulfed with thousands of stalactites and stalagmites. We slowly cruise back through the majestic karst peeks heading back to the pier.

Around noon we will disembark at Dinh Vu port and drive back to Hanoi. We will arrive in the mid-afternoon and will transfer to our hotel. Later this afternoon we will enjoy a walking tour of Hanoi's Old Quarter, also known as the 'Quarter of 36 Streets'.

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

Overnight in Hanoi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 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. Our route takes us through the nearby Marble Mountains; a cluster of five limestone peaks with marble outcrops known for their beauty and their caves. At the foot of Marble Mountain one finds an important religious site for the Chams as well as many artisans crafting fine marble objects.

Our destination today is perhaps one of the most charming and atmospheric towns in Vietnam - Hoi An. The ancient town of Hoi An is an

exceptionally well-preserved example of a South-East Asian trading port dating from the 15th to the 19th century. The town centre here is small enough to get around easily on foot. On arrival, flight times permitting, we'll have an informal orientation tour of this charming town.

Overnight in Hoi An.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Hoi An: Walking Tour & Boat Trip

Today we will venture out on foot and discover many of the highlights of this UNESCO protected town – including the old-town architecture, Buddhist shrines, French colonial houses, art galleries and old canals. This was once a prominent Vietnamese trading port for porcelain, pepper, silk and cinnamon, and the city offers a true mix of Vietnamese, Japanese, Chinese, and French architectural feats.

The oldest parts of town are teeming with beautifully-restored houses, shops, and temples, offering sightseeing opportunities you won't find in other cities in Vietnam. One of Vietnam's most iconic attractions, Hoi An's Japanese covered bridge dates back to the 18th century and is a beautiful historical piece of Japanese architecture. On its north side there is a pagoda, Japanese in style, which serves as protection for sailors. The Tran Family Temple has survived for 15 generations, and here we will see the fusion between both the Chinese and Japanese styles.

During our time here today we will visit the Chinese Assembly Hall, the Central Market and we will enjoy a boat trip on the Thu Bon River. This river is still essential to the region more than 500 years after it was first navigated, and it remains essential to local food production and transport.

Overnight in Hoi An.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 From Hoi An: My Son Cham Dynasty Complex

This morning we will visit the UNESCO 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 an intellectual and religious centre and is a 'must visit' as one of Vietnam's most extensive and most important Cham Sites. The forested and lush setting, and general peacefulness of this little visited site make this an excellent excursion.

We later return to Hoi An in time for a late lunch and the balance of the day is free for you to explore at leisure. The Hoi An riverside was a prominent stop amongst foreign traders between the 16th and 18th centuries due to its location on the banks of Thu Bon River, and today this part of the old town is still the most popular gathering spot day and night.

Overnight in Hoi An.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Hoi An - Da Nang - Hue

Today we travel to Hue. Our route to Hue takes us via Da Nang where we visit the Cham Museum - housing the largest display of Cham art anywhere in the world. Many of the exhibits are considered masterpieces of their field, and at present the museum houses over 250 stone and terracotta sculptural works.

Shortly after our 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 as it weaves through breathtaking mountains overlooking a stunning coastline.

The riverfront town of 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.

During our time in Hue we will enjoy a "cyclo" ride through the old city and market. These three-wheel bicycle taxis first appeared in Vietnam during the French colonial period.

Overnight in Hue.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Hue: Area Tour/Citadel Visit

There is no better way to start the day than with a motorized boat journey 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 part of Vietnam has a long and illustrious history as it used to be one of the main royal capitals of the country. This afternoon we tour the Hue 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), 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Hue - Ho Chi Minh City

Today we fly from Hue to Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), the captivating city of culture and commerce. This cosmopolitan metropolis vibrates with energy and innovation. The old blends with the new in Ho Chi Minh City, defining it as one of the most diverse locations on the winding course of the great Mekong River.

This afternoon we visit some of the city's highlights, including the Reunification Palace, formerly the site of Norodom Palace, the residence of the French governor-general of Indochina. A visit here provides a fascinating glimpse into the turbulent times of the Vietnam War as well as a look at the architectural influences which inspired some of Vietnam's revered architecture – from French and English, to Japanese and Chinese.

We then proceed to Cholon, or Chinatown, an area inhabited by Vietnamese of Chinese origin and one of the most vibrant parts of the city today.

Overnight in Ho Chi Minh City.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Ho Chi Minh City: Cu Chi Tunnels & War Remnants Museum

This morning we travel outside of Saigon to the Cu Chi Tunnels - easily one of the most recognizable symbols of the Vietnam War. The tunnels were dug with simple tools and bare hands during the French occupation in the 1940s, and further expanded during the Vietnam War in the 1960s to provide refuge and a defensive advantage over the American soldiers. Despite all the bombings in their town, the Cu Chi people were able to continue their lives beneath the soil, where they slept, ate, planned attacks, healed their sick, and taught their young. The

site has over 120km of underground tunnels, with trapdoors, living areas, kitchens, storage facilities, armoury, hospitals, and command centres. Today there are sections of the tunnels which visitors can crawl through (not recommended for the claustrophobic).

From here we will continue back to the city and head to the War Remnants Museum - the most comprehensive wartime documentation centre in Vietnam. The exhibits and descriptions here may be one-sided, with many exhibits containing a heavy dose of anti-American propaganda, but they do graphically portray the horrors of the war.

Overnight in Ho Chi Minh City.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Ho Chi Minh City - Cao Dai Temple - Mekong Delta

Our destination today is the Mekong Delta, where the Mekong River approaches and empties into the sea through a network of tributaries.*

On our way to the Mekong 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 Ho Chi Minh City.

Overnight in hotel in Cantho region (Mekong Delta).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Mekong Delta - Ho Chi Minh City / Colonial Quarter

Early this morning we will have a covered boat ride on the Delta - an ideal way to explore the attractions of the magic waterways of the Mekong region. Here we can have a candid glimpse into the lives of the local people selling, buying, and exchanging goods from their boats. Due to its mostly flat terrain and few forested areas, almost two-thirds of the region's land can be used for agriculture. The Mekong Delta is also Vietnam's most important fishing region.

After our morning exploration we connect again with our bus for our drive back to Ho Chi Minh City. This afternoon we will complete any city sightseeing that was not accomplished earlier. At some point during out tour we will visit the city's charming Colonial Quarter. Here we find 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. The Cathedral, situated in the aptly-named Paris Square, is among the largest Catholic vestiges in Vietnam, and is still frequented by many locals despite much of the country now practising the Buddhist faith.

Overnight in Ho Chi Minh City.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Departure

Departure from Ho Chi Minh (Saigon/SGN).

HEN GAP LAI!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast