Tour Code
SE10

ADVENTURESABROAD

SOUTHEAST ASIA EXPLORER

Thailand, Cambodia & Vietnam

20 days

Created on: 17 Nov, 2026

Day 1 Arrival in Bangkok

Arrival in Bangkok, Thailand's capital and largest city. Founded in 1782 by King Rama I, Bangkok (or Krung Thep, "City of Angels," in Thai) sits on the Chao Phraya River about 25 kilometres (15 miles) from the Gulf of Thailand. The city blends traditional culture with contemporary urban life — ornate Buddhist temples stand alongside modern skyscrapers, while street markets operate in the shadow of air-conditioned shopping centres.

Bangkok serves as Thailand's political, economic, and cultural heart, home to approximately 10 million people in the greater metropolitan area. The city's architecture reflects its history, with royal palaces and temples dating from the late 18th century coexisting with colonial-era buildings and contemporary development.

This evening we meet our Tour Leader and fellow travellers for a welcome dinner.

Overnight in Bangkok.

Included Meal(s): Dinner

Day 2 Bangkok: City Exploration

Our Bangkok exploration begins at the Grand Palace, situated on the Chao Phraya River. Construction started in 1782 under King Rama I, and the complex covers over 1.5 square kilometres (0.9 square miles). The palace served as the official residence of Thai kings until 1925, though it remains the ceremonial and spiritual centre of the Thai kingdom.

Within the palace grounds sits Wat Phra Kaeo, home to the Emerald Buddha, Thailand's most sacred Buddhist image. Despite its name, the 75-centimetre (30-inch) statue is carved from green jade rather than emerald. The image's history spans centuries and countries — since its discovery in the 15th century, it has resided in Lampang, Chiang Rai, and two locations in Laos (Luang Prabang and Vientiane) before King Rama I brought it to Bangkok in 1784.

This afternoon we visit Wat Pho, also known as the Temple of the Reclining Buddha. Founded in the 16th century and extensively renovated in the 1780s, Wat Pho ranks as Bangkok's largest and oldest temple. The main attraction is the 46-metre (150-foot) long, 15-metre (49-foot) high gold-plated reclining Buddha, whose feet display intricate mother-of-pearl inlay work depicting the 108 auspicious characteristics of the Buddha. The temple grounds also contain over 1,000 bronze Buddha images rescued from Ayutthaya and Sukhothai by Rama I's brother after those cities fell into ruin.

We cross the Chao Phraya River by boat to visit Wat Arun, the Temple of the Dawn. Built in the early 19th century during King Rama II's reign, the temple's central prang (tower) rises 81 metres (265 feet), making it Bangkok's tallest temple structure. The tower is covered with fragments of Chinese porcelain, creating a shimmering effect best appreciated from a distance. The temple takes its name from Aruna, the Hindu god of dawn. Four satellite prangs contain statues of the Buddha at important life stages: at birth (north), in meditation (east), preaching his first sermon (south), and entering Nirvana (west).

Overnight in Bangkok.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Bangkok - Fly to Chiang Rai

Today we fly to Chiang Rai, capital of Thailand's northernmost province. Founded in 1262 by King Mengrai, Chiang Rai served as the first capital of the Lanna Kingdom before that honour passed to Chiang Mai. The city's location near the borders of Myanmar and Laos has given it historical importance as a crossroads of cultures and trade routes.

The surrounding region is home to several ethnic minority groups, including Karen, Hmong, Akha, Lisu, and Lahu peoples, whose villages dot

the mountains. The landscape differs markedly from central Thailand — mountains covered in forest, tea plantations on hillsides, and the Mekong River forming the border with Laos to the north.

Evidence of the city's historic importance can be seen in monuments such as Wat Phra Kaeo, where the Emerald Buddha was discovered in 1434 when lightning struck the temple's chedi, revealing the jade statue hidden within plaster. The temple's current replica, presented in 1991, allows visitors to appreciate the significance of the original, now housed in Bangkok.

Depending on our flight time, we may begin our sightseeing programme upon arrival.

Overnight in Chiang Rai.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Chiang Rai Touring

We begin at Wat Phra Kaeo, Chiang Rai's most revered temple. According to legend, lightning struck and cracked the chedi in 1436, revealing a plaster-covered statue that contained the Emerald Buddha. The jade image remained here until King Tilokarat of Chiang Mai attempted to bring it to his capital in 1468 — legend says the elephants carrying the Buddha repeatedly walked toward Lampang instead, which the king interpreted as a divine sign, so the statue remained there for the next three decades.

The temple dates from the 13th century and features a fine bot (ordination hall) decorated with elaborate woodcarving. The Phra Chao Lang Thong, one of the largest surviving bronze statues from the early Lanna period, stands as testament to the artistic achievements of the era. A replica of the Emerald Buddha, presented in 1991, now occupies the place of honour.

This afternoon we take a boat trip on the Maekok River to visit a hill tribe village. The mountains surrounding Chiang Rai are home to several ethnic minority groups — Karen, Hmong, Akha, Lisu, and others — whose ancestors migrated from southern China and Tibet over centuries. Each community maintains distinct language, traditional dress, and cultural practices, though increasing integration with Thai society is gradually reshaping village life. Our visit offers a glimpse into daily rhythms in these communities, followed by the Hill Tribe Education Centre, where displays of traditional clothing, tools, and cultural artifacts from each group provide helpful context for what we've seen.

Overnight in Chiang Rai.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Chiang Rai - Chiang Mai

Today we travel by road to Chiang Mai, Thailand's second-largest city and the cultural capital of the north. Founded in 1296 by King Mengrai as the capital of the Lanna Kingdom, Chiang Mai served as an independent city-state until it came under Siamese control in the late 18th century. The city sits in a valley at 310 metres (1,020 feet) elevation, surrounded by mountains that reach over 2,000 metres (6,560 feet).

After settling into our hotel, we participate in a Thai cooking class, learning to prepare authentic northern Thai cuisine. Northern Thai food differs from the cuisine of Bangkok and central Thailand — it shows influences from Myanmar and Yunnan, with dishes often featuring pork, sticky rice, and fermented ingredients rather than the coconut-based curries common in the south.

Our class begins at a local market, where we learn to identify Thai ingredients: varieties of basil, lemongrass, galangal (similar to ginger), Thai aubergines, and the essential fish sauce and shrimp paste. We then prepare several dishes under guidance from our instructor, learning techniques for creating curry pastes, balancing the fundamental Thai flavours (sweet, sour, salty, and spicy), and achieving the proper textures. Dishes typically include a curry, a stir-fry, and a soup. At the end of the lesson, we enjoy the meal we've prepared.

Overnight in Chiang Mai.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Chiang Mai Area Touring

Today we explore Chiang Mai and its surroundings. The city contains over 300 Buddhist temples, many built during the Lanna Kingdom period (13th-18th centuries) in a distinctive architectural style that differs from central Thai temple design. Lanna temples typically feature multi-tiered roofs with elaborate carved wooden decorations, and often display Burmese artistic influences reflecting historical connections between the two regions.

We focus on the old quarter within the ancient moat, where traditional wooden houses and temples cluster along narrow lanes. At Wat Phra Singh, one of Chiang Mai's most important temples, we visit the main chedi (stupa) built in 1345 to house the ashes of King Kam Fu. The Viharn Lai Kam, a masterpiece of Lanna architecture, contains one of Thailand's three sacred Phra Singh Buddha images. The viharn's interior walls display vibrant murals depicting daily life during the late 19th century — merchants conducting business, children playing, farmers working in rice fields, and various social activities that provide a visual record of the period.

We also visit Chiang Mai's Arts and Cultural Centre, housed in a restored colonial-era building. The centre's exhibitions cover the city's history from its founding through the present, including displays on traditional crafts, the Lanna Kingdom's political structure, and the region's ethnic diversity.

Overnight in Chiang Mai.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Chiang Mai Area Touring

This morning we visit an orchid farm in the Mae Sa Valley, where the Mae Sa River creates a series of small waterfalls as it descends from Doi Suthep mountain. The valley's climate — warm temperatures with high humidity — proves ideal for orchid cultivation, and numerous farms grow both native species and hybrids for export and domestic sale.

We continue to an elephant conservation centre, where we learn about the changing role of elephants in Thai society. Historically, elephants served multiple functions in Southeast Asia: as vehicles for royalty, as essential workers in logging and agriculture, and as animals of war. The white elephant held particular significance — these rare individuals (not actually white, but showing specific skin discolourations) became symbols of royal power and prosperity.

Thailand's logging industry employed thousands of elephants through the mid-20th century. When the government banned commercial logging in 1989 following severe floods caused by deforestation, many elephants and their mahouts (handlers) lost their livelihoods. Some elephants were released into the wild, where they came into conflict with farmers; others were put to work in tourism, often under poor conditions.

The conservation centre we visit works to provide proper care for elephants while preserving the traditional relationship between elephants and mahouts. We observe how mahouts train and care for their animals, learn about elephant behaviour and biology, and understand the challenges facing elephant conservation in modern Thailand. The centre also participates in breeding programmes and veterinary care for working elephants throughout the region.

Overnight in Chiang Mai.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Chiang Mai, Thailand - Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Today we fly to Phnom Penh, likely connecting through Bangkok. Cambodia's capital sits at the confluence of the Mekong, Tonle Sap, and Bassac rivers, a location that has made it strategically important for centuries. The city served as the Khmer royal capital from the 15th century (with interruptions), becoming the permanent capital in 1866.

French colonists, who controlled Cambodia from 1863 to 1953, transformed Phnom Penh with tree-lined boulevards, colonial mansions, and administrative buildings designed to evoke Parisian elegance. The city earned the nickname "Pearl of Asia" for its architecture and atmosphere. However, the Khmer Rouge forcibly evacuated the entire urban population in 1975, and when Vietnamese forces drove them out in 1979, they found an abandoned city. Phnom Penh has recovered, though many colonial buildings remain in deteriorating condition.

The city's name comes from Wat Phnom ("Temple on a Hill"), a Buddhist temple built on an artificial mound. Legend holds that in 1372, a wealthy woman named Penh found several Buddha statues washed ashore and had the hill built to house them.

Flight times permitting, we may begin our sightseeing programme upon arrival.

Overnight in Phnom Penh.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Phnom Penh: Tuol Sleng Prison & City Tour

Today we confront Cambodia's traumatic recent history, beginning at Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum. This former high school was converted by the Khmer Rouge into Security Prison 21 (S-21), the regime's largest torture and interrogation centre. Between 1975 and 1979, approximately 20,000 people passed through Tuol Sleng — political prisoners, intellectuals, suspected dissidents, ethnic Vietnamese and Chinese, and eventually Khmer Rouge members accused of treachery. Prisoners were photographed upon arrival, interrogated under torture to produce false confessions, and then transported to execution sites. Only seven prisoners survived.

The buildings remain largely as they were found in January 1979. Classrooms became tiny cells or torture chambers, their transformation documented by thousands of black and white photographs that line the walls — prisoners' faces showing fear, defiance, or resignation. The museum serves as both memorial and historical record.

We continue to Choeung Ek, one of nearly 400 "Killing Fields" where the Khmer Rouge executed prisoners. Located 17 kilometres (11 miles) from the city, Choeung Ek served as the primary execution ground for Tuol Sleng prisoners. Approximately 17,000 people were killed here. A tall stupa now houses over 5,000 skulls exhumed from mass graves.

Returning to Phnom Penh, we visit the National Museum, which houses one of the world's largest collections of Khmer art. The collection includes over 14,000 objects spanning prehistoric times through the Angkorian period and beyond. Stone sculptures from Angkor and pre-Angkorian sites form the centrepiece — standing Buddhas, dancing apsaras, lingams, and architectural elements demonstrate the evolution of Khmer artistic styles over more than 1,000 years. The museum building, constructed between 1917 and 1924, takes design inspiration from Khmer temple architecture.

We walk to the Royal Palace, the official residence of Cambodia's king since the 1860s. We visit the Throne Hall and Silver Pagoda. The Silver Pagoda, named for its floor of 5,000 silver tiles, houses Cambodia's most sacred Buddha images, including an emerald Buddha and a life-sized gold Buddha encrusted with diamonds.

We conclude at Wat Phnom, the temple that gives the city its name. Built in 1372 and rebuilt several times since, the temple sits atop a 27-metre (89-foot) artificial hill and remains an active place of worship.

Overnight in Phnom Penh.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Phnom Penh - Fly to Siem Reap

Today we fly to Siem Reap, gateway to the temples of Angkor. The town remained little more than a village when French explorers arrived in the 19th century. Henri Mouhot's widely publicized accounts of Angkor, published in 1860, drew Western attention to the ruins, though local Khmer and Buddhist monks never abandoned the site. Siem Reap has since grown into a tourist centre serving the archaeological complex.

The temples of Angkor represent the remains of the Khmer Empire, which dominated mainland Southeast Asia from the 9th to 15th centuries. At its height under King Jayavarman VII (ruled 1181-1218), the empire controlled territory from present-day Myanmar to Vietnam and from southern China to the Malay Peninsula. Angkor itself may have been the world's largest pre-industrial city, with populations estimated at over one million.

Depending on flight times, we may begin our sightseeing programme upon arrival.

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

Overnight in Siem Reap.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Siem Reap: Rolous Group, Chao Srei Vibol & Angkor Wat

Our morning begins with a walk from central Siem Reap (tuk-tuks available for those preferring not to walk), passing local schools and villages and crossing rice fields to reach the Roluos temple group. These temples represent the Khmer civilization's earliest major constructions, dating from the late 9th century when the site served as Hariharalaya, the first capital of the Khmer Empire under King Indravarman I.

We explore three main temples, each dedicated to the Hindu god Shiva. Preah Ko (Sacred Bull), built in 880, features six brick towers on a raised platform and displays some of Angkor's finest early stone carving. Bakong, constructed in 881, represents the first Khmer temple built entirely of stone rather than brick. Its pyramid structure, rising in five tiers, established the template for later temple mountains including Angkor Wat. Lolei, built on an artificial island in a now-dry reservoir, completed the complex in 893.

This afternoon we visit Chao Srei Vibol, a small 12th-century temple atop a hill that receives few visitors. The central sanctuary remains unrestored, with trees growing from the stones and galleries open to the forest. The peaceful setting and lack of crowds make this an ideal spot for contemplating Angkor's relationship with the jungle that once reclaimed these monuments.

In the mid-afternoon we proceed to Angkor Wat, visiting during the less crowded later hours. We enter through the eastern gate — Ta Kou — the approach used by priests rather than pilgrims, arriving at the temple from the direction the sun rises over it. It's a quieter, less-trafficked entry that rewards patience: the galleries open gradually rather than all at once, and the scale of what the Khmers built registers differently when you're not moving with the crowd.

Overnight in Siem Reap.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Siem Reap: Angkor Archaeological Park

Today we travel to Banteay Srei, often called the jewel of Angkor. Built in AD 967, this temple stands apart from Angkor's other monuments in several ways. Unlike the massive royal projects we've been exploring, Banteay Srei was commissioned by Yajnavaraha, a Brahman priest and spiritual advisor to King Jayavarman V. The temple's name means "Citadel of Women" or "Citadel of Beauty" — a reference to the delicate artistry of its carvings.

Built on a smaller scale and constructed from fine-grained pink sandstone, Banteay Srei allowed artisans to create extraordinarily detailed relief work. The lintels, pediments, and standing figures display craftsmanship unmatched elsewhere in the Angkor complex, with scenes from Hindu epics rendered in miniature precision. The temple was one of the first restored by French archaeologists using anastylosis — carefully dismantling and rebuilding structures using original stones.

Around midday we visit a village within the Angkor Archaeological Park where residents maintain traditional ways of life. We learn about the customs and culture of people living among these ancient monuments and, depending on the season, may observe rice planting, roof weaving with palm leaves, vegetable harvesting, or other agricultural activities.

Our final visit today is to Angkor Thom during the less crowded late afternoon. The fortified city, built by King Jayavarman VII in the late 12th century, served as the Khmer Empire's capital. We enter through the South Gate, where giant stone faces gaze in four directions, and proceed to Bayon Temple at the city's centre. Famous for its 54 towers bearing serene stone faces — likely representing the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara or perhaps the king himself — Bayon creates a labyrinth of galleries and courtyards.

We also visit Baphuon temple-mountain, the Elephant Terrace (used for royal ceremonies), and the Terrace of the Leper King, both showcasing the engineering and artistic achievements of Angkor's builders. The Elephant Terrace extends over 300 metres (984 feet) and would have supported wooden pavilions where the king reviewed parades and ceremonies. The Terrace of the Leper King takes its name from a 15th-century statue found at the site, though scholars debate whether the figure represents a king or the Hindu god of death, Yama.

Overnight in Siem Reap.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Siem Reap, Cambodia - Fly to Da Nang, Vietnam - Hoi An

Today we fly to Da Nang and continue by road to Hoi An. Da Nang sits on a peninsula where the Han River flows into the South China Sea. Flight time permitting, we may be able to detour past the Marble Mountains, a cluster of five limestone peaks with marble outcrops. These mountains hold religious significance for both Buddhists and followers of traditional Vietnamese beliefs, with caves housing shrines and statues. At the mountains' base, artisans craft marble objects — stone quarrying has continued for centuries, though authorities now restrict extraction to protect the site.

We continue to Hoi An, one of Vietnam's most atmospheric towns. By the late 19th century, the Thu Bon River had silted up enough that larger ships could no longer reach Hoi An, and trade shifted to Da Nang. It was, by any measure, an economic defeat — and yet that quiet abandonment proved to be the town's salvation. Without the pressure to modernize, Hoi An's old buildings simply stayed. More than 1,000 timber-frame structures survive today in a town centre that still reflects the layout of a 15th-century Southeast Asian trading port, earning UNESCO World Heritage designation in 1999. Japanese, Chinese, Dutch, Portuguese, and French merchants once moved through these streets; the architecture they left behind — distinctive in every block — is the reason we're here.

The town's location on the Thu Bon River, several kilometres from the coast, protected it from coastal storms that frequently damaged other ports. However, by the late 19th century, the river's silting made it inaccessible to larger ships, and trade shifted to Da Nang. This decline ironically preserved Hoi An — without economic pressure to modernize, the old buildings survived largely intact.

Upon arrival, flight times permitting, we'll have an informal orientation tour of this compact old town.

Overnight in Hoi An.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Hoi An: Walking Tour & Boat Trip

Today we explore Hoi An's old town on foot, discovering architecture that blends Vietnamese, Chinese, Japanese, and French influences. The town's wealth came from trade in ceramics, silk, pepper, and cinnamon, and successful merchants built elaborate houses that still line the streets

Hoi An's Japanese Covered Bridge, dating to the 18th century, represents one of Vietnam's most iconic structures. The bridge connects what were historically the Japanese and Chinese quarters. On its northern side, a small temple serves as protection for sailors — the bridge was funded by the Japanese community but has been maintained by Chinese and Vietnamese residents over the centuries, symbolizing the town's multicultural heritage.

The Tran Family Temple has remained in the same family for 15 generations. Built in 1802 in a style combining Chinese and Japanese influences, the temple serves both as an ancestral shrine and family home. The architecture features carved wooden panels, curved tile roofs, and a layout following traditional Vietnamese feng shui principles.

We visit a Chinese Assembly Hall, built by merchants from specific Chinese provinces as meeting places and temples. Hoi An has several such halls, each serving immigrants from different regions — Fujian, Cantonese, Hainanese, and others. The halls' ornate decorations honour Chinese deities and historical figures.

At the Central Market, vendors sell fresh produce, spices, and prepared foods. The market operates daily, supplying both residents and the town's restaurants. Hoi An's culinary reputation draws visitors for dishes like cao lau (noodles unique to Hoi An made with water from a specific well), white rose dumplings, and banh mi sandwiches.

We take a boat trip on the Thu Bon River, which remains essential to the region's economy and transportation more than 500 years after merchants first navigated it. The river supports fishing, agriculture, and tourism, with traditional wooden boats now carrying visitors rather than porcelain and spices.

Overnight in Hoi An.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Hoi An: My Son Cham Dynasty Complex

This morning we visit My Son (pronounced "mee-sohn"), a UNESCO World Heritage Site comprising over 70 architectural works from the Cham Dynasty. The Chams controlled much of central Vietnam from the 2nd to 15th centuries, establishing a Hindu kingdom influenced by Indian culture through maritime trade. My Son served as the dynasty's spiritual centre and burial ground for Cham royalty.

Construction at My Son began in the 4th century and continued for nearly 1,000 years, creating a complex of brick towers and sanctuaries dedicated primarily to Shiva. The Cham builders developed sophisticated techniques for creating bricks that bonded so tightly that researchers still debate the construction methods. Unlike the stone temples of Angkor, Cham structures used brick almost exclusively, with stone reserved for decorative elements.

The site's remote location in a mountain-ringed valley protected it for centuries after the Cham kingdom's decline. However, the Vietnam War brought devastating damage — American forces bombed My Son in 1969. Many structures were destroyed, though enough survived to demonstrate the Chams' architectural achievements. The remaining towers, carved sandstone lintels, and lingam shrines reveal clear influences from Indian Hindu temple design, adapted to local materials and aesthetics. My Son's forested setting creates a contemplative atmosphere. The site receives far fewer visitors than Angkor, allowing time to examine details and imagine the complex during its centuries as a living religious centre.

We return to Hoi An in the early afternoon. The remainder of the day is yours — and Hoi An rewards unhurried exploration. The riverside fills with activity as the light softens toward evening: cafés spill onto the street, lanterns come on in the old quarter, and the tailors — for which Hoi An is justifiably famous — can turn a fabric choice into a finished garment in as little as 24 hours. After the quietude of My Son, it's a gentle re-entry into one of Southeast Asia's most enjoyable towns.

Overnight in Hoi An.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 16 Hoi An - Da Nang - Fly to Hanoi - Ninh Binh

Today we fly to Hanoi and continue by road to Ninh Binh Province, approximately 100 kilometres (62 miles) south of the capital. The region is often called "Halong Bay on land" for its karst limestone landscape — the same geological formations that create Halong Bay's seascape here rise from rice fields and river valleys.

After lunch we visit Hoa Lu, which served as Vietnam's capital during the Dinh Dynasty (968-980) and early Le Dynasty (980-1009). We visit temples dedicated to these dynasties' rulers, set among karst peaks that provided natural fortifications. The location's defensibility made it an ideal capital during this period of frequent conflict with Chinese forces to the north.

We continue to the Trang An eco-tourism complex and Hang Mua Cave. A climb of 450 steps brings us to a viewpoint overlooking the karst landscape, rice fields, and waterways below. The panorama reveals how geological processes over millions of years created this terrain — an ancient coral reef uplifted by tectonic forces, then eroded by water into the peaks and valleys we see today. The region gained UNESCO World Heritage designation in 2014 under the name Trang An Landscape Complex, recognized for both its natural beauty and archaeological significance.

Overnight in Tam Coc.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 17 Ninh Binh - Lan Ha Bay Overnight Cruise

This morning we journey to Lan Ha Bay, passing through the Red River Delta with its rice fields at various stages of cultivation. Lan Ha Bay, lying south and east of Cat Ba Town, comprises approximately 300 karst islands and limestone outcrops. Being farther from Halong City than the more famous Halong Bay, Lan Ha receives fewer tourist boats, creating a more secluded atmosphere.

We arrive at Dinh Vu port around midday and board our overnight boat. Lunch is served as we cruise toward Lan Ha Bay, entering a seascape of limestone karst peaks rising from emerald waters. These formations began as coral reefs millions of years ago; tectonic uplift and erosion created the landscape we see today.

During the afternoon we explore hidden lagoons and floating villages, observing how communities have adapted to life on the water. We have opportunities to swim or kayak among the limestone cliffs, paddling through channels barely wider than the kayak. The scale of the karst formations becomes particularly apparent at water level.

As evening approaches, we drop anchor in an isolated area. Under clear skies, the upper deck offers excellent stargazing away from city lights, while the bay's calm waters reflect the sunset's colours.

Note: As with all maritime experiences, the cruise itinerary may be adjusted to suit weather and sea conditions. Your Tour Leader will ensure you make the most of whatever the bay offers — and Lan Ha Bay rarely disappoints.

Overnight on board.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 18 Lan Ha Bay - Hanoi

Those interested may participate in a tai chi class on deck before breakfast, practicing gentle movements as the sun rises over the karst landscape.

This morning we explore a cave system featuring thousands of stalactites and stalagmites formed over millions of years by water slowly depositing calcium carbonate. The formations create columns, curtains, and fantastical shapes that appear throughout the cave chambers.

We cruise back through the karst peaks, returning to Tuan Chau Marina by late morning. Around noon we disembark and drive to Hanoi, arriving mid-afternoon.

Later this afternoon we explore Hanoi's Old Quarter, also known as the "Quarter of 36 Streets." This ancient commercial district developed between the 11th and 18th centuries, with streets organized by trade guilds — Hang Bac (Silver Street), Hang Ma (Paper Street), and so on. Many streets still specialize in particular goods. The narrow shophouses, typically just 3-5 metres (10-16 feet) wide but extending deep into the block, represent traditional Vietnamese urban architecture.

This evening we attend a water puppet show, an art form unique to Vietnam that originated in the Red River Delta. Puppeteers stand waist-deep in water behind a screen, manipulating wooden puppets that appear to move across the water's surface. The performance, accompanied by traditional instruments, depicts rural life, legends, and historical tales.

Overnight in Hanoi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 19 Hanoi City Touring

Today we explore Hanoi's historic highlights, witnessing a capital city where tree-lined boulevards, lakes, parks, belle époque villas, and Buddhist temples create a distinctive urban landscape.

We begin at the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum, the final resting place of Vietnam's most iconic leader. The building, constructed from materials gathered from across Vietnam, closely follows the design of Lenin's Mausoleum in Moscow. Ho Chi Minh's preserved body lies in a glass case, and the site serves as a place of pilgrimage for Vietnamese visitors. The mausoleum periodically closes for maintenance, in which case we view it from the exterior only.

We continue to Ho Chi Minh's Stilt House behind the Presidential Palace. Despite his position as President of North Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh chose to live in this modest two-room house built in traditional style, elevated on wooden pillars. The building, constructed from polished and lacquered wood, demonstrates his commitment to simplicity — a stark contrast to the grandiose Presidential Palace nearby, which he never occupied.

The One Pillar Pagoda, originally built in 1049, represents one of Vietnam's most distinctive temples. The lotus-shaped structure rises from a square pool on a single stone pillar, rebuilt after French forces destroyed the original in 1954. The design symbolizes a lotus blossom emerging from muddy water.

At the Ethnology Museum, one of Vietnam's finest museums, we gain insight into the country's 54 ethnic minority groups. The indoor galleries display traditional clothing, tools, and cultural artifacts, while the outdoor section features full-scale reconstructions of minority housing styles.

We visit the Temple of Literature, established in 1076 as Vietnam's first national university. For nearly 700 years, this Confucian institution educated the sons of mandarins and, later, commoners who passed rigorous examinations. Stone stelae mounted on turtle pedestals record the names of successful examination candidates from 1442 to 1779.

We conclude at Hoa Lo Prison Museum, known to American prisoners of war as the "Hanoi Hilton." French colonists built this prison in the late 19th century to house Vietnamese political prisoners and revolutionaries. During the Vietnam War, North Vietnam held captured American pilots here. The museum presents both periods of the prison's history.

Overnight in Hanoi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 20 Departure

Departure from Hanoi.

BON VOYAGE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast