Tour Code
XVTC

ADVENTURESABROAD

VIETNAM & CAMBODIA

A Walking Adventure Featuring Hill Country, Waterfalls, Villages & Ruins

14 days

Created on: 28 Mar, 2024

Day 1 Arrival in Hanoi

Welcome to Vietnam!

Today we arrive in Hanoi with the remainder of the day at leisure.

Hanoi is an attractive city with lakes, fine boulevards, and flourishing parks, as well as a public center 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. This evening we convene for a welcome dinner to kick of our exciting journey.

Overnight in Hanoi.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

Day 2 Hanoi City Touring

Today we depart on a full day tour of Hanoi, which will have sections on foot, and visits requiring vehicles.

We begin today's tour with a walk past the Mausoleum of Ho Chi Minh, a site of pilgrimage. 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 CE. Its construction and decor illustrate 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 CE. The temple is lotus-shaped and is situated in the middle of a water-lily pond. From here we visit Museum of Ethnology, which brings to life the astonishing ethnic diversity in Vietnam, with art and artifacts from the 54 different ethnic groups that inhabit the country. Inside the museum are detailed descriptions of minority groups, with examples of their traditional clothing and way of life. Outside are faithful reconstructions of traditional longhouses, cemeteries and other distinctive ethnic buildings.

In the afternoon we visit Hoan Kiem Lake, Ngoc Son Temple and an islet with the tiny Tortoise Pagoda. En route, we pass other colonial landmarks such as the magnificent Opera House (from outside only) and St Joseph's Cathedral. After our tour we return to the hotel; due to the length of our full day (and tomorrow) and the lingering effect of jetlag, we include lunch instead of dinner this evening.

Walking summary: We expect to be on our feet a good chunk of the day, walking about 10km (6 mi) overall. Surfaces are mostly flat and paved and feature some stairs and uneven surfaces.

Overnight in Hanoi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 3 Hanoi - Mai Chau via Hoa Binh, Mo Luong Cave, White Villages

This morning we board our coach and depart for Mai Chau, a scenic town about 4hrs west of Hanoi, where the Ben Lac people, originally from Thailand, have settled. The route takes us through some of northern Vietnam's most picturesque scenery, with mountain roads carved through lush foliage, overlooking stunning panoramas. We stop in Hoa Binh to visit the Muong Cultural Space, dedicated to the heritage and culture of the Muong -- Vietnam's third largest ethnic group. On arrival in Mai Chau, we check-in to our hotel with some free time to arrange our own lunches.

In the afternoon, we visit the enormous main chamber of Mo Luong Cave. In this dramatic setting we hear the legend of the cave as well as a little of the history of Vietnam. We then take a walking tour through local White Thai Villages set in tranquil Mai Chau countryside. This is a chance to learn something of the life of Vietnam's White Thai ethnic minority and experience their warm hospitality and get a rare glimpse inside their traditional stilt houses. We will also explore the local rice fields and learn about traditional rice growing methods that are still

used today.

Walking summary: 7km (4 mi), 1.5-2 total hours of leisurely walking on paved and natural surfaces, mostly flat with some stairs.

Overnight in Mai Chau.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 4 Activities from Mai Chau: Mai Chau Valley Walking Tour, White Villages

Today we depart on a full-day walking excursion to the Mai Chau Valley. Our exploration is unhurried and leisurely, visiting more of the peaceful White Thai villages, first Na Phon and then Na Meo. Our walk will take us among farmers working the fields, alongside enormous black buffalo, and through scenic mountain landscapes. As we walk through the villages, there are opportunities to interact with friendly locals, and perhaps peek inside their homes. En route we will take a light lunch.

Walking summary: This is our biggest distance day thus far, at a total of +/- 10km (6 mi) with 300/400m ascent/descent – approx 3 hours of actual walking, leisurely-though-steady, with stops for refreshment, lunch, sightseeing.

Overnight in Mai Chau.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 5 Mai Chau - Son La: Hâ€™Mong Hilltribe Walk, Visit Tea Plantation, Prison

This morning we drive to Son La via a 2-hour fairly easy hike through two Hilltribe Villages, Sa Linh and Pa Co, which are inhabited by H'mong hill tribes. Located 1000m (3,300 ft) above sea level, the villages are surrounded by fruit trees. Watching for occasional glimpses of wildlife as we traverse the green mountains, it takes about 40mins to drive up to the higher elevation of Sa Linh. From here it is a 5km (3 mi) walk to Pa Co. The villages are located in the Black and Flower H'mong tribal areas. On finishing our hike, we take lunch in a local restaurant en route on our return to Son La. On the way we pass by Moc Chau, where we stop to visit a Tea Plantation for more understanding about Vietnamese traditional tea. Upon arrival in Son La City, if time permits, we can visit the site of Son La Prison, built by the French colonists in 1908 to jail Vietnamese revolutionaries.

Walking summary: 5km (3 mi), total +/-2 hours on paved and reasonably smooth, undulating natural paths.

Overnight in Son La.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 6 Son La Tribal Walking Tour - Drive Lai Chau via Pu Sam Cap Cave

After breakfast we depart by coach to our morning tribal walking tour, where we explore more of the minority groups in the Son La area and view the amazing mountain system as it sweeps towards Lai Chau. After our walk we take lunch in a local restaurant, then depart by coach for Lai Chau. En route we visit Pu Sam Cap Cave, the most famous caves in Lai Chau, discovered in 2006. These caves consist of a complex system with three main chambers which will surprise the visitor with their pristine beauty. After our visit we transfer to our hotel for check in and dinner.

Walking Summary: 4km (3 mi), 150m (500 ft) descent – approx 2 hours walking, leisurely pace.

Overnight in Lai Chau.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 7 From Lai Chau - Full-day Sin Suoi Ho Waterfalls Hike

We have an early start this morning as we drive 1hr to Sin Suoi Ho, a Hmong village located 1500m (4,900 ft) above sea level. The village is famous locally for the planting of about 20,000 orchids. We start our day's hike from the village accompanied by a local guide. We then hike, first to the Heart Waterfall, then to nearby Love Waterfall These beautifully situated and picturesque waterfalls are a popular sight for locals and visitors alike. After our walk, we continue our drive to Lai Chau and our hotel for check in. Dinner is served at the hotel this evening.

Walking Summary: 9.6km (6 mi) – 100m (330 ft) ascent/descent, approx 5 hours leisurley walking on mostly well-maintained, undulating natural surfaces.

Overnight in Lai Chau.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 8 Lai Chau Walking - Drive to Sapa via Heavenâ€™s Gate Pass

This morning after breakfast we depart by coach to Hon Village, populated by the Lu ethnic minority, who have preserved their tradition and lifestyle intact. Here we take a walk to explore the region. After our visit, we continue to Sapa via Tram Ton (Heaven's Gate) Pass, the highest mountain pass in Vietnam at 2047m (6,715 ft). From here on a clear day we can enjoy breathtaking views of the Fansipan Mountain Range, including Mount Fanispan, at 3143m (10,300 ft) the highest mountain in Vietnam. From here we proceed to Ta Giang Phinh Valley inhabited by the Black Hmong tribe, which we briefly explore. Finally, we arrive at Sapa, famous for its towering peaks and steep terraces, and check into our hotel for dinner and overnight.

Walking summary: 4.2km (2.5 miles) – 150/50m (500/164 ft) ascent/descent – approx 1.5 hours walking: leisurely on undulating paved and natural surfaces.

Overnight in Sapa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 9 Activities from Sapa: Hmong & Tavan Villages

After breakfast we are met by a local guide and driver for a short transfer to Cat Cat Village. Our walks today are the longest of our tour, and starts from Cat Cat and follows the trail by way of a waterfall and local hydroelectric project before continuing through picturesque rice terraces. We eventually arrive in Y Linh Ho, a prosperous village of the Black Hmong minority. Here we pause for a light lunch. In the afternoon we head toward the Muong Hoa Valley, passing through Lao Chai, then Tavan village which houses a population of the Giay tribal minority. Return to Sapa by road.

Walking Summary: Total 12km (8 mi) in sections – 400/200m (1300/650 ft) ascent/descent – approx 5 hours actual walking: leisurely on undulating paved/cobbled and natural surfaces.

Overnight in Sapa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 10 Sapa - Morning Red Dzao & Black Hâ€™mong Walk - Drive Hanoi

This morning we drive a short distance southeast of Sapa town to Ta Phin, a large valley, surrounded by high mountains covered by pine forest. Ta Phin commune is home to the Red Dzao and Black H'mong ethnic tribes. Although living close to each other for decades, these two ethnic peoples are very different. The H'mong are thought to be cheerful and open minded while the Red Dzao have a reputation for being economical and reserved.

We take an easy walk on the inter-village paths around the valley, paying visits to H'mong hamlets scattered from the bottom of the valley to

higher mountain slopes. We walk to a Red Dzao village in which we meet groups of women making handicrafts includes embroidered clothes, handbags, and more. We then return to Ta Phin, regain our coach and drive back to Hanoi. On arrival we check into our hotel. The balance of the day is at leisure. Due to the length of our day and possibility of an early start tomorrow, dinner is on your own this evening.

Walk Summary: 4.8k (3 mi) – 120/50m (400/165 ft) ascent/descent – approx.: 1.5 hours leisurely walking, surfaces much like previous walks.

Overnight in Hanoi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 11 Hanoi, Vietnam - Siem Reap, Cambodia: Afternoon Walking Tour

This morning we transfer to Hanoi airport for our flight to Siem Reap, Cambodia. On arrival, we are met and transfer to our hotel for check-in and a break for lunch.

This afternoon we depart on a Siem Reap walking tour. We first stroll to the centre of town and the glorious Wat Damnak Buddhist Monastery. This magnificent pagoda and its lush surrounding grounds offer peace and tranquillity in the heart of the temple complex. With huge historical significance, the grounds of Wat Damnak contain Cambodia's largest public library outside of Phnom Penh. We see monks, students, and locals studying in contemplative silence. Next we visit the ancient and beautiful Wat Preah Prom Rath. Built more than 500 years ago, this pagoda has huge grounds filled with numerous statues and sculptures. The oldest part of the site is the impressive front gate with Bayon style carvings similar to those found in Angkor Wat -- a taster of the Angkor ruins without leaving the city. Next, we visit the Royal Residence, set in lush parkland grounds running alongside the river, which also contain Yeay Tep Shrine and Preah Ang Chek. These verdant royal parklands are home to hundreds of towering, ancient trees which provide shelter for numerous butterflies and huge fruit bats that wake at dusk to search for food. Later we explore the bustling Psar Chas (Old Market), constructed in the 1920s. This colourful and expansive market has a wonderfully frenetic pace and is the perfect place to pick up Cambodian artworks, information about the country's Khmer heritage, and a multitude of souvenirs. After our tour we return to the hotel with the balance of the day leisure.

Walking Summary: A light day in distance and time, with in-town walking, paved surfaces, some steops, and plenty of stops.

Overnight in Siem Reap.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Full Day Temple Touring: Ankor Thom, Bayon, Terrace Elephants, Ta Prohm, Angkor Wat

Today we depart on a full day temple tour (with vehicle support) to visit the most important of the many temples that surround Siem Reap. We spend much of the day on foot exploring Siem Reap's jungle-bound edifices, a major highlight of tour.

We start with a visit to the South Gate of Angkor Thom, where statues of the gods of good and evil line the entrance. Our next stop is Bayon, known for the hundreds of smiling faces that grace the towers. The bas reliefs are impressive and tell stories of daily life and great battles fought between the Khmers and ancient Thais. We move on to Phimeanakas, shaped a bit like a pyramid with two ponds in the rear, which were once used for religious rituals, and today serve as swimming pools for Khmer children. Walk to the top of the temple for impressive views of the Angkor complex and see the rows of trunks that form the wall of the Terrace of the Elephants, a platform from which King Jayavarman surveyed his army. Close by is the Terrace of Leper Kings.

Then it's a short drive to one of the most loved temples of all -- Ta Prohm. This small crumbling temple is held together by giant tree roots giving it a magical feel. We return to Siem Reap for lunch and to escape the hot sun. Then later in the afternoon we explore the magnificent Angkor Wat, the world's largest religious monument. This spectacular temple is a massive three-tiered pyramid, rising 65m from the ground and crowned by five towers. It's the national symbol of Cambodia and proudly appears on the country's flag. We end our day with sunset views over the jungle from the top of Pre Rup Temple before returning to Siem Reap. Due to the fullness of our day, we will leave dinner up to you this evening.

Walking Summary: An ambitious full day of flat ground leisurely walking, with some steps/stairs on paved, cobbled, and natural surfaces. 9.6k (6miles) total for the day – approx 5 hours walking total, broken up by guided sightseeing stops and free time at the various sites, and breaks for refreshment.

Overnight in Siem Reap.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

Day 13 From Siem Reap: Full-day Excursion to Sap Lake & Chansar Village

This morning we drive to the shore of the Tonle Sap Lake, where we embark on a cruise to Kompong Phluk, an isolated Khmer community of three villages built on wooden stilts rising from six to eight metres high. The community has about 3,000 inhabitants who farm fish and vegetables on floating platforms. During our visit, our boat traverses mangrove forests, a unique ecosystem that survives on flooded soil for some months of each year. Mangroves also play host for a variety of wildlife -- keep an eye out for birds, especially the rare crab-eating macaques!

Back on land we continue driving to the small village of Chansar, which we explore on foot. (3.2k/2miles – approx.: 2 hours walking: leisurely). After our visit, en route back to Siem Reap, we stop at a Buddhist temple. On arrival at our hotel, the balance of the day is at leisure. Farewell dinner in local restaurant. This evening we gather in the foyer and depart for a local restaurant for our farewell dinner. We then transfer back to the hotel and enjoy a farewell dinner.

Walking Summary: At Chansar Village, 3.2km (2 mi) – approx 2 hours leisurely walking, flat and varried surfaces.

Overnight in Siem Reap.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 14 Departure from Siem Reap

Transfer to Siem Reap airport for international departures.

FOND FAREWELL!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast