

SOUTHEAST ASIA IN A NUTSHELL

Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand

17 DAYS

WELCOME TO HANOI AND OUR STARTING HOTEL

Hanoi is an ancient, bustling city of more than 9 million inhabitants. It makes the perfect starting gateway for travellers beginning a Southeast Asia journey. It's a walkable introduction to Vietnamese culture, cuisine and history that blends French colonial architecture with ancient temples and the bustling energy of the Old Quarter's narrow streets, street food stalls and hidden cafés.

Our starting hotel is the wonderful Sofitel Legend Metropole, located in the charming French Quarter near the serene Hoan Kiem Lake. First opened at the turn of the 20th century, the hotel is recognized as Hanoi's legendary landmark for its continuing contribution to the history and heritage of the city, both in times of war and peace.

Prior to the American War (Vietnam War), Graham Greene, Charlie Chaplin, Somerset Maugham and Noel Coward were frequently listed among the hotel's famous guests.

During the war, the Metropole was one of the few hotels in Hanoi that was allowed to house foreign visitors, so it became the base for many foreign correspondents, diplomats and notable figures such as Joan Baez and Jane Fonda. As well, the hotel housed the Australian Embassy.

The hotel has an underground bunker that was built in 1965 to shelter the guests from US bombing raids and it remained in use through the war during bombing campaigns. The bunker itself was forgotten for decades after it was sealed at the end of the war in 1975 and was only rediscovered by chance during a 2011 renovation of the hotel's Bamboo Bar. It's now part of a "Path of History" tour for hotel guests.

This beautiful hotel is renowned for its refined accommodation and its exceptional service, and our guests and staff continually tell us that this is one of their favourite hotels in the whole world.

Our tour leader will check in to the hotel a few days before any of our guests arrive and will meet with our suppliers and guides to ensure that all trip arrangements are in order.

MONDAY **HANOI, VIETNAM – START DAY OF THE TOUR** **NOV 15, 2027**

Regardless of your chosen arrival date and time, you will be met at the airport and transferred to the hotel.

There are no planned tour activities or group get-togethers today.

This particular day is identified as "Day 1" of the tour, however some of our guests may have arrived earlier into Hanoi in order to give themselves more time to get over jet lag and fatigue as a result of the long flight through 12 time zones. We continue to recommend that all our guests avoid being too active on the day of arrival.

For guests who have arrived early

- Breakfast is available this morning in the hotel.
- Since this is a free day, some of you may wish to do some light independent exploring in Hanoi today. To help you, our tour leader will hold an optional, short get-together in the hotel after breakfast to cover the layout of the city, locations of parks, lakes and restaurants, transportation options, traffic safety and other items of interest.
- Lunch and dinner on your own today.

For guests who are arriving today

Once you clear customs in the Hanoi Noi Bai airport, you will be met by our representatives and transferred downtown to the hotel, regardless of your arrival time.

The tour leader will welcome you at the hotel and will assist with the check-in process if required.

Note that the hotel rooms may not be ready until 14:00-15:00. Please consider this carefully prior to firming up your incoming flight time when finalizing your international air tickets. It is

always best to plan to arrive in the starting city between noon and 9 pm.

The rest of the day is free.

Overnight at the Sofitel Legend Metropole Hotel.

TUESDAY HANOI (B, L, D)**NOV 16**

Prior to breakfast, early birds may wish to enjoy a short walk over to Hoan Kiem Lake just around sunrise. If you are here at the right time, you'll find people doing their morning exercises – some may be practicing some form of Tai Chi while others may jog or play badminton. Photographers will find many subjects.

At an appropriate time, enjoy breakfast at the hotel.

After breakfast, we begin our exploration of this amazing city by visiting the interesting Museum of Ethnology. The museum is packed full of information detailing traditional Vietnamese ways of life, from religious events to the symbolic rituals of all the Vietnamese ethnic groups, providing a rich tapestry of the cultural melting pot existing in Vietnam.

The main exhibition hall features displays of everyday objects representing lifestyles of each group as well as a research center, a library and an auditorium. The second exhibition hall showcases the many cultural practices and civilizations across much of Southeast Asia.

The magnificent outdoor display area contains a variety of Vietnamese homes as full-scale replicas, with great attention paid to the varying architectural styles set within the authentic and tranquil gardens. There are also additional leisure displays including theatre and calligraphy.

After spending some time at the museum, we will enjoy a simple “Pho” lunch together at a local restaurant.

After lunch, we will return to the hotel. This will give everyone a few extra hours of free time in the afternoon to shake off any remaining jetlag by relaxing at the pool or having a quick nap.

Later this afternoon the tour leader will hold a short “**SE Asia Orientation**” session at the hotel to cover important items related to the entire upcoming trip. This will include personal safety and security, money matters, daily activities, day packs, traffic patterns, food and beverages, transportation, luggage considerations and much more.

We highly recommend that everyone attend this session.

Afterwards, please join us for this evening's complementary happy hour in the hotel bar and then our “Welcome to Vietnam” dinner.

Overnight at the Sofitel Legend Metropole Hotel.

WEDNESDAY HANOI (B, L)**NOV 17**

Breakfast at the hotel.

Today, we concentrate on more of Hanoi's interesting sites.

We will begin by visiting the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum.

Ho Chi Minh is the founding figure of modern Vietnam, the leader of the independence movement against France and later the figurehead of North Vietnam during the American war. Seeing his embalmed body lying in state will give you a direct sense of how deeply he's revered as a national symbol, even decades after his death (1969).

We will also visit Ho's former residences, will walk by the Presidential Palace and will visit the One Pillar Pagoda.

We will follow that up by taking a walk through Hanoi's Temple of Literature. Originally built as a university in 1070 that was dedicated to Confucius, the building is extremely well-preserved and is a superb example of traditional-style Vietnamese architecture.

Lunch today will be included at one of our favourite Hanoi restaurants.

In the afternoon, we will visit parts of the Hoa Lo prison, the famous “Hanoi Hilton” where John McCain and many other American soldiers spent more than five years as a prisoners of war.

We'll then ride cyclos through the warren of small streets to take a closer look at Old Hanoi and we'll finish off with a live performance of the famous Vietnamese Water Puppets.

The exact timing and order of all activities throughout the day will be open to adjustment by our guide as required.

Free for dinner tonight. The tour leader will have suggestions.

Overnight at the Sofitel Legend Metropole Hotel.

**THURSDAY
NOV 18** **HANOI TO HA LONG BAY, VIETNAM (B, L, D)**

Breakfast at the hotel.

Today, after breakfast, we leave Hanoi and drive about 165 km east to the Ha Long Bay area. The picturesque bay has more than 3,000 limestone islets rising from the emerald sea.

We will arrive at the Tuan Chau Marina around 11:30 and will transfer by tender to our boat for check-in on the overnight cruise as we begin a short, but unique journey to explore one of the new natural wonders of the Ha Long Bay area, Lan Ha Bay.

The cruise will begin shortly after boarding and lunch will be served.

In the early afternoon, you can relax on the sun deck and soak in the beautiful scenery. You will also have time to enjoy the facilities on board and perhaps take a plunge in the pool.

When reaching the first anchorage spot at Viet Hai Village on Cat Ba Island, we can either hop on bikes or use the electric transport for a tour along small paved roads towards a village nestled in a valley. Here, we'll meet local inhabitants doing their daily work and will visit their homes and the village school.

Back on-board, the chef will offer a cooking demonstration of authentic Vietnamese food and you will certainly be welcome to join in.

As the sun sets, we will arrive at a tranquil anchor spot for the night. In this hidden place, under the stars, we'll enjoy cocktail hour and can chat about the day's adventures.

Then a delicious dinner is served in the restaurant.

Afterwards, you may wind down at the bar or kick back in what is probably the most unusual cinema you have ever visited.

Alternately, our on-board team may offer a chance for you to have some fun fishing for squid before retiring to your room for the night.

Overnight aboard our cruise boat.

**FRIDAY
NOV 19** **HALONG BAY TO HOI AN, VIETNAM (B, D)**

You are certainly welcome to start your day with an optional Tai Chi session on the sundeck as the sun rises, followed by a light pre-breakfast nibble in the restaurant prior to our stop at Frog Lake, a secluded spot which is perfect for a morning excursion.

Here, where the cliffs stretch vertically out of the water among the tree-topped islets, you will have the chance to either simply relax and take in the scenery or go for a swim or perhaps to explore this marine landscape by kayak.

Back on board, we fill up with hearty breakfast while we cruise back to the pier. We can savour the last moments of this unique journey while relaxing on comfy sun chairs on the terrace deck.

We then arrive back at Tuan Chau Island around 11 am, where we disembark and take our transfer to Noi Bai Airport to check in for our afternoon flight to Danang.

There are a few restaurants in the airport where you can grab something for lunch if you wish.

Upon arrival in Danang, we will drive southbound through the city and along the coast to our hotel in the town of Hoi An, where we check in for a two-night stay.

The hotel is a beautifully-designed property immediately adjacent to the old town and only a short rickshaw ride from the southern part of China Beach.

Hoi An has a population of about 90,000 and is a former harbour town of the Champa people on the estuary of the Thu Bon river. It was an important ancient trading centre, where Chinese from various provinces as well as Japanese, Dutch and Indians settled.

In 1999, the old town was declared a World Heritage site by UNESCO as a well-preserved example of a Southeast Asian trading port of the 15th to 19th centuries whose buildings

display a unique blend of local and foreign influences.

This evening, we have drinks and dinner together at one of our favourite restaurants.

Overnight at the Anantara Hoi An Resort.

SATURDAY **HOI AN, VIETNAM (B, L)**

NOV 20

Breakfast at the hotel.

Today we join our guide for a closer look at the area in and around Hoi An.

We will likely begin by visiting the outskirts of the town to meet some of the local farmers and fishermen who will show us many aspects of their excellent contributions.

Lunch at the farm.

After we return back to town, we'll take a leisurely walking tour of the old town visiting some of the local sites including Chinese temples, historic houses and the famous Japanese Bridge.

We then return to the hotel by late afternoon.

Free for dinner. Your tour leader will have some nearby recommendations.

Overnight at the Anantara Hoi An Resort.

SUNDAY **HOI AN, VIETNAM TO SIEM REAP (ANGKOR), CAMBODIA (B, D)**

NOV 21

Breakfast at the hotel.

Later this morning we return to the Danang airport and board our flight to Siem Reap, Cambodia.

Upon arrival, we transfer to our hotel.

Siem Reap, is the town which supports the incredible Angkor temple complex, the most famous archaeological site in Southeast Asia.

Angkor was the site of a series of capital cities of the Khmer empire for much of the period from the 9th century to the 15th century. The ruins are located amid forests and farmland to the north of the Great Lake (Tonle Sap) and comprise the UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The temples of the Angkor area number over one thousand, ranging in scale from nondescript piles of brick rubble to the collection of unique temples in the city of Angkor Thom to the magnificent Angkor Wat, the world's largest religious monument.

Because the weather here can be very hot at mid-day, try to limit your sightseeing activities to early morning and late afternoon.

Our hotel started as a very cute 18-room guest house. But in 2012 Cambodian businessman Sokoun Chanpreda and architect Bill Bensley renovated the guesthouse and turned it into a boutique hotel with thirty-nine rooms.

This provided the perfect base for a hotel school which welcomes thirty young adults as student employees every year. You will meet many of them during your stay.

It also launched the Shinta Mani Foundation, which empowers Cambodians to help themselves. The Foundation has allowed for the building of over a hundred homes, 1500 water wells, as well as the distribution of water filters, loans, and even healthcare and a seed bank. Part of the hotel room cost goes toward contributions to the Foundation.

Free afternoon.

We'll enjoy a happy-hour and simple dinner together this evening at the hotel.

Overnight at the Shinta Mani Hotel.

MONDAY **SIEM REAP, CAMBODIA (B, L, D)**

NOV 22

Breakfast at the hotel.

This morning, we will visit the last capital city of the Khmer Empire - Angkor Thom - built in the 12th century and deserted most likely during the 16th century.

Your visit will include the South Gate with its huge statues depicting the churning of the ocean of milk, the Bayon temple, unique for its 54 towers decorated with 216 smiling faces of Avolokitesvara, the Baphuon, a pyramidal representation of Mount Meru, the Terrace of the Elephants used by Jayavarman VII to watch his victorious army return and the Terrace

of the Leper King, who's statue was formerly thought to represent a legendary "leper king," but is now considered to represent Yama – the Lord of the Dead. It is also believed the terrace itself might have functioned as a royal cremation platform.

Bayon Temple is currently undergoing minor renovations, and as a result, access to the top-most level is currently restricted. However, the site remains open to visitors, offering a captivating glimpse into Cambodia's rich history and architectural marvels. The lower levels still provide an enriching experience, showcasing the temple's intricate carvings and majestic architecture.

You will also visit the famous Ta Prohm temple, a beautiful jungle temple that nature seems to have taken over. As you explore the temple's crumbling ruins, you'll see trees growing out of the walls and roofs, their roots twisting and turning around the ancient stone structures. Ta Prohm has been relatively untouched since it was discovered and has retained much of its mystery, making it a must-see for any visitor to Cambodia.

Back to the hotel for lunch.

Later this afternoon, visit the most famous temple - Angkor Wat - the world's largest religious monument named a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1992. The 12th-century temple complex spreads over 81 hectares. Its five towers symbolize Meru's five peaks, the enclosed wall representing the mountains at the world's edge, and the surrounding moat as the ocean beyond.

Note: During the visit to the Bakan tower of Angkor Wat temple, visitors must wear proper attire, covering shoulders and knees, as this temple is still considered a sacred site (no shorts, miniskirt, or short trousers).

Transfer back to our hotel.

We'll enjoy another happy-hour and simple dinner together tonight in Pub Street.

Overnight at the Shinta Mani Hotel.

TUESDAY
NOV 23

SIEM REAP (B)

Breakfast at the hotel.

This is an entirely free 'rejuvenation' day.

No planned activities. Enjoy!

Free for lunch and dinner.

Overnight at the Shinta Mani Hotel.

WEDNESDAY
NOV 24

SIEM REAP (B)

Breakfast at the hotel.

This morning, we drive to the village of Mechrey on the famous Tonle Sap, Southeast Asia's largest freshwater lake.

Here, we'll take a memorable boat cruise to a nearby floating village and glimpse the everyday life of the locals who live on the lake in floating shacks.

For most of the year, the lake is relatively small, approximately only one meter deep, with an area of 2,700 square km. However, during the monsoon season, the water is pushed up from the Mekong River into the lake, resulting in an increased area of 16,000 square km and a depth of up to nine meters, ultimately flooding nearby fields and forests.

The floodplain provides a perfect breeding ground for fish. The livelihood of most of the local community depends mainly on fishing and Tonle Sap accounts for 75% of Cambodia's annual inland fish catch.

On our way back to Siem Reap, we take time to visit the Artisans Silk Farm in Puok district, where we can examine the entire silk-making process from the mulberry bush to the finished product.

We then transfer back to the hotel. You will have some time this afternoon to get organized for tomorrow's flight to Laos.

Free for dinner.

Overnight at the Shinta Mani Hotel.

**THURSDAY
NOV 25** **SIEM REAP, CAMBODIA TO LUANG PRABANG, LAOS (B, D)**

Breakfast at the hotel.

This morning we'll check out of the hotel and return to the Siem Reap airport to board our flight to northern Laos.

Upon arrival in Luang Prabang late this afternoon, we will be met at the airport and transferred to our hotel where we check in for a three-night stay overlooking the mighty Mekong River.

This evening, we'll enjoy dinner together at one of our favourite restaurants.

Overnight at the Belle Rive Hotel.

**FRIDAY
NOV 26** **LUANG PRABANG, LAOS (B, L)**

Breakfast at the hotel.

Today we will spend the morning visiting the Living Land Farm, a local farm situated in an idyllic countryside setting surrounded by mountains in the middle of ancient rice terraces.

Here you will see how rice is grown and experience the life of a rice farmer. You can try your hand at some of the activities. You'll meet some real Lao people and three of their buffalos, namely Susan, Bentley & Betty.

You'll also enjoy lunch at the farm before returning to the hotel.

This afternoon, we plan to take a local vehicle to visit the beautiful Kuang Si Forest Waterfalls for an hour or so. You can certainly bring your bathing suit and enjoy a swim in the beautiful pools if you wish. We then return to the hotel.

Free for dinner tonight.

After dinner, you will have a chance to walk through the amazing night market and perhaps buy a few souvenirs!

Overnight at the Belle Rive Hotel.

**SATURDAY
NOV 27** **LUANG PRABANG, LAOS (B, L)**

Breakfast at the hotel.

Today we will spend about five hours at a local elephant camp, about 45 minutes outside of town. Here, we will enjoy:

- An in-depth introduction and an elephant health check;
- Elephant riding in the forest;
- Elephant bathing in the Mekong river; and.
- Elephant feeding.

Upon arrival, you will visit the mahout (elephant handler) village in the camp and observe their daily routine as you see a demonstration of an elephant health check. Your guide will explain all about the elephants while they examine the elephant's eyes, ears, mouth and feet. You'll learn how to estimate the weight of an elephant by measuring the body.

You will then learn the name of the elephant that will become your personal partner today and learn how to introduce yourself to your elephant and how to mount your elephant to ride bareback. You will then ride your elephant and explore the jungle paths. Experience how powerful elephant mobility is in the dense vegetation and sloping jungle terrain. After passing through the jungle, your elephant will enjoy plunging into the Mekong River. Here, you can help your elephant cool off and bathe in the river.

Finally, you can feed your elephant with organic vegetables and fruits.

We will then be offered a delicious buffet lunch at the restaurant overlooking the Mekong River, with elephants roaming free around us.

We then return to our hotel around 2 pm.

The rest of the afternoon is free to walk around town and perhaps enjoy a Lao traditional massage.

Free for dinner.

Overnight at the Belle Rive Hotel.

SUNDAY LUANG PRABANG, LAOS TO BANGKOK, THAILAND (B, D)**NOV 28**

Breakfast at the hotel.

This morning is free to enjoy as you wish.

Around noon, we transfer to the airport for our flight to Bangkok.

Upon arrival late this afternoon, we transfer to the beautiful Millennium Hilton Hotel.

Bangkok is one of Asia's most distinctive and captivating destinations and the Millennium Hilton Hotel is an especially beautiful landmark. Located on the banks of the mighty Chao Phraya River in the heart of the city, the hotel is renowned for its sweeping views, infinity pool, spa and rooftop bar.

We will be checked in as Club Guests and will receive exclusive access to the Executive Lounge, an inviting 27th floor destination for socializing, relaxing and ending our journey with class. The lounge offers beautiful breakfast choices each morning, all-day beverages as well as cocktails and canapés each evening. Most of our guests find that the evening food and drink is often substantial enough to serve as dinner.

We invite everyone to join the group in the lounge tonight.

Overnight at the Millennium Hilton Hotel.

MONDAY BANGKOK, THAILAND (B, D)**NOV 29**

Breakfast at the hotel.

This morning, after breakfast, we will board our private long-tail wooden boat at the hotel pier and make our way along the Chao Phraya river before entering into Bangkok's back canals.

Here we slowly cruise along the "klongs" and get a glimpse of the serene and simple lifestyle of the riverbank dwellers. This picturesque view is what earned Bangkok the title of "Venice of the East".

From here we then cruise back into the Chao Phraya river, dock on the east bank and take a short walk over to Bangkok's magnificent Grand Palace and its captivating Temple of the Emerald Buddha.

Whether or not you are an avid photographer, this site will offer countless photo opportunities wherever you look.

After our visit, we will then return to the hotel.

Free for lunch.

We have not included any additional sightseeing activities in Bangkok in order to give everyone some free time to enjoy the city as they wish.

This afternoon, we will offer an optional **"Bangkok at a Glance"** session for those who may wish to do some independent exploring in Bangkok tomorrow. The tour leader will cover the layout of the city, transportation systems, traffic safety and other items of interest. He/she will also cover several examples of optional Bangkok activities which can be easily undertaken on your own.

This evening, we'll enjoy happy hour with complementary cocktails in the lounge and a magnificent view of the beautiful Chao Phraya river.

At an appropriate time, we'll enjoy a "farewell" Thai dinner together.

Overnight at the Millennium Hilton.

TUESDAY BANGKOK (B, D)**NOV 30**

Breakfast at the hotel.

This final day will be totally free of activities so you will have time to take on last-minute sightseeing or shopping activity, or simply to relax at the hotel.

You may choose to visit Bangkok's shopping centres, outdoor parks and squares, Jim Thompson's shop, Thompson's House, Silom Road, museums, etc.

You can also take some time at the hotel this afternoon where you can get organized for tomorrow's flight home.

There are no group activities this evening, but it is likely that all of us will meet in the lounge

for cocktails and canapés, as usual.
Please enjoy your final evening in Bangkok!
Overnight at the Millennium Hilton.

WEDNESDAY BANGKOK DEPARTURE (B)**DEC 1**

Breakfast at the hotel.
Regardless of your departure time today, your transfer to the Bangkok airport will be arranged at an appropriate time.
Have a great trip home!

- End of tour -