

# EXPLORE!

**BEST SELLER**

**Grand Tour of South East Asia**  
35 days

Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam - Trip code QBLB



## Grand Tour of South East Asia

Travel by local transport from Thailand and into Cambodia taking in intricate Angkor temples and colonial architecture en route. Take sleeper trains the length of energetic Vietnam before slowing the pace down on a longtail boat through sleepy Laos. Crossing into Northern Thailand and then into Burma, we traverse this mystical land by road, river and rail before ending in the old capital of Rangoon.

## Trip highlights

- ★ **Siem Reap** - Explore the mystical jungle temples of Angkor
- ★ **Hanoi** - Get lost in the bustling narrow streets of the Old Quarter
- ★ **Luang Prabang** - Chill out in this sleepy riverside town
- ★ **Inle Lake** - Discover the distinct one-legged rowing styles of Inle's fisherman
- ★ **Bagan** - Uncover 1,000 year old temples on the vast plains of Bagan

### ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

#### Standard

Our standard, mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service, often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en suite facilities.

**TRIP PACE:****Moderate**

Moderate pace tours are ideal if you want a holiday which combines exciting activities and experiences with plenty of time to relax and unwind. Typically you'll be active and busy for part of the day but then also have time to rest and recharge your batteries.

**GROUP SIZE:****10 - 16**

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

# Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

## DAY 1 - Join tour in Bangkok

Arrive Bangkok and check-in at the hotel. If your flight time allows you may choose to take an optional cruise along the city's Klongs (canals) in a traditional longtail boat. This is the ideal way to explore Bangkok's network of meandering waterways that branch off from the main channel of the Chao Phraya River. The excursion will also include visits to the Royal Barge Museum and the iconic Wat Arun, the Temple of the Dawn, which was built to represent the towering slopes of Mount Meru, the home to the gods of Khmer mythology.

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 Meals Provided: None

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## DAY 2 - Journey overland to Siem Reap

This morning we make an early start with a train ride before boarding a scheduled bus service to the Cambodian city of Siem Reap. Operated as a through service, travellers will nevertheless change vehicles once in Cambodia. Your Thai leader will accompany you to the border and you will then meet your Cambodian Tour leader to continue your journey by local bus to Siem Reap.



**Accommodation: Xing Angkor Hotel** (or similar)

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Simple Hotel

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Swimming pool available

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Single room available

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 Meals Provided: Breakfast

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## DAY 3 - In Siem Reap; free time to discover the temples of Angkor

Today is left free to explore the incredible jungle temple complex of the Angkor period, whose history covers some 600 years, from the 9th through to the 15th centuries. No activities or excursions have been included in Siem Reap and your time here is very much your own, although your tour leader will be more than happy to help organise any visits that you wish. Two of the best ways to explore are by bicycle or striking a deal with one of the many tuk tuks that ply their trade here. Obvious choices are the magnificent complex of Angkor Wat, without doubt one of the most incredible of the jungle sites, the fortified city of Angkor Thom (home to the Bayon, with its mysterious giant faces) and the wonderfully overgrown and atmospheric Ta Prohm, set amidst tangled tree roots and lush jungle and famous as the setting for some of the Lara Croft film Tomb Raider. Other possibilities include taking to the waters of the Roluos River, to visit the floating villages and local wat at Kompong Phluk and explore the flooded forest and great lake of Tonle Sap (the largest freshwater lake in SE Asia, covering nearly a seventh of Cambodia's entire landmass). Those wishing to gain a little understanding of Cambodia's more recent past might like to seek out the fascinating Landmine Museum just to the south of Banteay Srei Temple. Set up in 1997 by a former Khmer Rouge soldier, the museum offers support for countless victims of landmines, as well as providing visitors with a poignant reminder of one of the country's most violent and tragic periods.



**Accommodation: Xing Angkor Hotel** (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

## DAY 4 - In Siem Reap; free time to explore Angkor further

Today is left free to explore the incredible jungle temple complex of Angkor.



**Accommodation: Xing Angkor Hotel** (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

## DAY 5 - Public Bus past rural villages to Battambang

Today we travel by public bus from Siem Reap onto Battambang, a journey of approximately 3 hours. Battambang lies along a route that has seen countless Thai and the Khmer Rouge soldiers wind their way north and south, either in the pursuit of conquest, or in the case of the Khmer Rouge to escape the invading Vietnamese in 1979. The town is, surprisingly, Cambodia's second largest, a factor that has done little to detract from its laid-back feel, enhanced by a wealth of colonial villas and leafy streets. Depending upon our arrival time there may be an opportunity to explore this afternoon, taking in its traditional temples and French-colonial

architecture.



**Accommodation: Asia Hotel Battambang** (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

## DAY 6 - Drive to Phnom Penh; orientation walk in the city

A public bus takes us on to the Cambodian capital this morning, the 6-hour journey getting us to the city in time for an afternoon's orientation tour. Phnom Penh sits at the confluence of the Sap, Mekong and Bassac Rivers, a charming testament to the country's ancient and colonial past, with tree lined boulevards and colonial villas dotted amongst the reminders of its turbulent history. The Cambodian capital since the mid 15th century, Phnom Penh's origins lie in the legend of 4 statues of Buddha, washed on the shores of the Mekong and discovered by a woman named Penh, which were later housed in the 14th century Wat Phnom, located on a small hill at the northern end of the city. On arrival there should be time to freshen up, after which you may join your tour leader on a short walking tour of the city.



**Accommodation: Townview 2 Hotel** (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

## DAY 7 - In Phnom Penh; free time to visit the Killing Fields

Today has been left free for you to continue exploring this fascinating city at your own pace. Options include the National Museum, with its impressive collection of Angkor statues and the impressive French built Royal Palace, whose spectacular pagoda style structure is without doubt one of Phnom Penh's most impressive sights. A replica of King Norodom's old wooden palace, the building presents an ostentatious display of elaborate Khmer architecture, with golden nagas, orange, sapphire and green tiles and scenes from the Ramayana painted on the ceiling. The Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and the 'Killing Fields' of Choeung Ek provide gruesome testaments to life under the Khmer Rouge and Pol Pot, the skull filled glass tower a vivid memorial to the 17,000 men, women and children who were murdered there between 1975-1978. You should be aware that by their very nature Tuol Sleng and the 'Killing Fields' can be a distressing experience for some people. You might like to take a trip along the Mekong, or perhaps visit some of the capital's numerous markets, such as the old Russian Market of Psar Toul Tom Pong, renowned for its textiles, jewellery and antiques. Of course you may just prefer to wander Phnom Penh's vibrant streets, soaking up the atmosphere and perhaps enjoying a drink in one of the city's old colonial riverfront bars.



**Accommodation: Townview 2 Hotel** (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available

## DAY 8 - Drive to Ho Chi Minh City; orientation walk of Old Saigon

Transferring to the bus station this morning, we catch the non-stop public bus to Ho Chi Minh City, an unescorted journey of some 6.5 hours that gets into the city in time to meet up with our Vietnamese tour leader. We cross the border at Bavet (Cambodia) and Moc Bai (Vietnam). Lying to the north of the Mekong Delta, on the banks of the Saigon River and still unofficially referred to as 'Saigon', the city today is the largest in Vietnam, an eclectic mix of the traditional and the new, where pagodas and markets compete alongside the trappings of Vietnam's newly discovered entrepreneurial spirit. Depending upon our arrival time we plan to make a short orientation tour on foot around the city, taking in some of its more obvious highlights, including the prominent Hotel de Ville, whose ornate grandeur is today the home of the city's People's Committee, as well as the Romanesque Notre Dame Cathedral and the impressive French style edifice that is the GPO building (should our arrival time render this option impossible, then we will do the tour tomorrow morning instead).



**Accommodation:** *Good Vibes Boutique Hotel* (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



## DAY 9 - In Ho Chi Minh City; free time to visit Cu Chi Tunnels or Mekong Delta

Today is free for you to choose from a number of options. You may wish to visit the remarkable Reunification Palace and the emotive War Remnants Museum, which contains a fascinating, and at times chilling reminder of the cost of what the Vietnamese refer to as the American War. Or perhaps browse the bustling stalls of the Binh Tay Market, the largest wholesale market in southern Vietnam and a fabulous place to stroll and meet the locals.



**Accommodation:** *Good Vibes Boutique Hotel* (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



**Meals Provided:** Breakfast

## DAY 10 - Free day; overnight train to Nha Trang

This morning you'll meet with the rest of the tour passengers for our Good Morning Vietnam Tour and continue the trip with them. Today sees an opportunity to journey down into the Mekong Delta and explore the fertile hinterlands that lie sandwiched between the South China Sea and the Gulf of Thailand. Heading down towards the town of My Tho takes you into a region where the orchids, lychees and coconut palms that are grown in the delta are bartered at breakneck speed and taking to the waters you have a chance to enjoy the timeless tableau of river life that has continued pretty much unchanged for generations, visiting local villages and floating along the narrow tree-lined canals of the Mekong. There will be an opportunity to take lunch on one of the islands, before

returning to My Tho by boat to make the return journey back to Ho Chi Minh City. This evening the group transfers to the city's train station by taxi, in order to catch the overnight train to Nha Trang.



### Accommodation: Overnight train Saigon to Nha Trang



Simple Overnight Train



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 11 - Arrive Nha Trang; free time

Early this morning we arrive in Nha Trang and transfer to the hotel. Given the early hour of our arrival, dayrooms are provided to freshen up prior to our own rooms becoming available. The day has been left free to explore Nha Trang at your own leisure and the town's picturesque location, amidst a golden landscape of white beaches and blue waters, makes it an ideal spot to enjoy some quality beach time. Other options include a relaxing mud bath, or perhaps a boat trip out to the islands that lie offshore with the chance for snorkelling. Those looking for something a little more active might like to consider a trip by bicycle to explore the nearby Cham Towers and the old part of the town. Probably Nha Trang's most iconic attraction, the Po Nagar Cham Towers span a period of some 500 years and present a haunting reminder of the long forgotten kingdom that once ruled these lands through their divine kings. Only 4 of the original 10 towers remain (many were destroyed during the intense fighting of the Vietnam War), but nonetheless they conjure up an impressive feeling of power and mystery and, along with the remnants of Nha Trang's past and the captivating sights of its fishing villages present an enthralling introduction to the town.



### Accommodation: Aria Hotel (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

## DAY 12 - Full day in Nha Trang; overnight train to Danang

Another full day in Nha Trang offers the chance to continue with some personal sightseeing, or perhaps enjoy a little more of the beach, before we transfer to the railway station for an overnight train to Danang.



### Accommodation: Overnight train from Nha Trang to Danang



Simple Overnight Train



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 13 - Arrive Danang. Drive to Hoi An via China Beach

On arrival in Danang we will continue our journey by charter bus to Hoi An. On our way we pass the popular beach resort of My Khe, better known as China Beach, an area that during the Vietnam War was popular with the American GIs on RnR. Given the early hour of our arrival at the hotel we might not be able to check-in so we plan to store our bags, have breakfast (not included) then embark on a walking tour of Hoi An. First colonized by the Portuguese in the 16th century, by the 17th and 18th centuries Hoi An had become one of the busiest international trading posts in southeast Asia and, even today, it still retains the engaging charm of a medieval port, with many of its old buildings superbly preserved. Highlights include the Phuc Kien Assembly Hall, a pagoda dedicated to the worship of Buddha originally built by the Vietnamese people in the 16th century and the 400 year old Japanese covered bridge. We end at the colourful riverside market, a perfect setting for exploring, the rest of the day is free to enjoy as you wish.



**Accommodation: Acacia Heritage Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

## DAY 14 - Free in Hoi An

Today is free to wander through the historic heart of this World Heritage Site at your leisure. An early morning visit to the fish market presents a riot of noise and colour that is perfect for some great photo opportunities and some choice local interaction. You might also like to pay a visit to the Japanese Bridge, Hoi An's emblematic symbol, believed to have been constructed to quell the violent rumblings of a restless monster, or perhaps explore the traditional wooden houses and Chinese temples that line the streets. There are numerous tailors shops in Hoi An providing an incredibly cheap and quick service and almost all visitors have at least one item made before they depart. Hoi An is also a great place to hire a bicycle as the roads are relatively quiet. There's a good beach just a few kilometres from the town or alternatively why not set out to explore nearby villages. Cooking classes are yet another option available in this popular travellers hangout.



**Accommodation: Acacia Heritage Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 15 - Public bus to Hue via Hai Van Pass

This morning sees us heading along the coastal road towards the historic setting of Hué, crossing part of the Truong Son Mountains and travelling via the Hai Van (Sea Cloud) Pass. This stunningly scenic region once marked the boundary between Vietnam and the Champa Kingdom to the south and the journey should get us into the old imperial city around lunchtime, after which the rest of the day is free for personal exploration. Once the capital of Vietnam and an inspiration for poets and artists alike for centuries, Hué is



divided by the waters of the Perfume River, which separate the city's 19th century citadel from the suburbs that radiate from the eastern shore and, even today, its easy air of leisurely ambience makes it one of the most engaging cities in the country to explore.



### Accommodation: Thanh Lich Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 16 - In Hue; overnight train to Hanoi

With the better part of the day to enjoy the city, Hué offers a wealth of options to make the most of your time here. You could pay a visit to the iconic Thien Mu Pagoda, home to the oldest monastery in the city, whose 21m high tower has become something of a symbol for Hué. Dedicated to the Manushi-Buddha, the existing temple was constructed in the middle years of the 19th century, under the auspices of the Emperor Thieu Tri, and within its confines you can find a number of superb Buddhist statues, as well as an enormous cast bell that weighs in at over 2000kg and is reputed to be audible over 10km away. Another alternative is to spend some time exploring the Old Citadel that dominates the left bank of the Perfumed River. Built by the Nguyen dynasty (Vietnam's ruling emperors from the early 1800s to 1945), the Citadel has formal moats and impressive ramparts that were constructed to be an exact copy of the Forbidden City in Beijing. During the bloody conflicts of the Vietnam War, Hué was the site of some of the most destructive fighting of the Tet Offensive, most of the Inner City being totally destroyed during the month-long battle in 1968. The vast outer walls and the West Wing remain though and provide an eloquent reminder of the palace's former glory. Farther afield, amongst the forested landscapes of the Perfume Valley, you can find the Royal Tombs of the Nguyen kings, the unique mausoleums of the emperors that provide an ideal destination to explore by bicycle. Later this afternoon we will then head for the railway station to board the overnight train north to Hanoi, Vietnam's vibrant and historic capital.



### Accommodation: Overnight Train from Hue to Hanoi



Simple Overnight Train



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 17 - Arrive Hanoi; drive to Halong Bay and explore by junk

Arriving in Hanoi in the early hours of this morning we disembark the train and transfer by road towards the Bay of Tonkin on Vietnam's northeast coast. Our destination is the breathtaking setting of Halong Bay one of Vietnam's, and indeed Southeast Asia's, most spectacular natural attractions, whose staggering beauty has seen it listed as one of the eight natural wonders of the world. A UNESCO World Heritage site, Halong Bay presents a quite extraordinary vista of hundreds of limestone islands (over 1600 at last count) that rise from the jade green waters of the bay like the scales of some great submerged dragon. Indeed Halong means 'where the dragon descends to the sea' and local legends tells of a time when this rugged landscape was created by the pounding tail of a mighty dragon as he ran from the mountains into the glittering waters of the bay below. On arrival we will board our junk and set sail, threading our way through a flotilla of boats, junks and wooden sampans as they ply their way across the gentle waters of the bay. The plan for today is to sail through this stunning seascape, stopping off to swim and visit some of the limestone caverns that pepper the landscape. Later this evening we disembark from our boat and transfer to our hotel in the Bay.



## DAY 18 - Return to Hanoi; orientation walk of Old City

Returning back to Hanoi your tour leader will then take those that wish on a short orientation tour of the city, wandering the streets of the city's Old Quarter, whose narrow streets are named after the various crafts and specialities of the city's artisans: Paper Street, Silk Street, Basket Street etc. This practice dates back to the 13th century, when the city's original 36 guilds established themselves here, adopting a street each to differentiate them from their neighbours. The maze of alleys and streets present a fascinating venue to explore on foot and the area is known for its interesting 'tube' houses, where the narrow frontages give way to long rooms that stretch back from streets, whose pavements are littered with food sellers tempting passers by with all manner of noodles, snacks and stir-fried delights from shoulder panniers. Later today there may be a chance to witness a remarkable performance of traditional water puppetry, a practice that dates back to the 15th century and is deeply ingrained into the cultural lives of the peoples of the Red River Delta. Set on a flooded stage, the stories tell tales of legendary heroes and everyday life, with dragons and unicorns sharing the stage with ducks and frogs, and even fireworks and naval battles.



**Accommodation: Flower Hotel** (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

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## DAY 19 - In Hanoi; free time

Architecturally styled like a French provincial town, with tree-lined boulevards and substantial low-built houses, Hanoi is a wonderfully nostalgic city to enjoy and amongst its more interesting sights are the charming One-Pillar Pagoda, the Temple of Literature and the Presidential Palace. Ho Chi Minh was a spartan-living and scholarly man, who chose not to live in the Presidential Palace itself, but instead preferred a simple teak 2-storied stilt-house specially built for him in the grounds. You can visit his museum and this austere mausoleum, said to resemble that of Lenin in Moscow, or perhaps taking another walk through the engaging streets of its Old Quarter. The city's French Quarter is a great place to explore by bicycle, its grandiose colonial architecture offering up a rich contrast to the more frenetic pace of the old city, whilst those looking to discover something more of the colonial wars might like to pay a visit to the Museum of Vietnamese Revolution or the Military History Museum.



**Accommodation: Flower Hotel** (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

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## DAY 20 - Morning flight to Luang Prabang (Laos)

This morning we fly to Luang Prabang. The remainder of the day is free to enjoy this lovely riverside town at your own pace. Home

to the impressive Thad Makmo stupa (Buddhist shrine) and the beautifully ornate Wat Xieng Thong, Luang Prabang has a wealth of architectural highlights that include both traditional Laotian style and French colonial buildings. Perhaps you would like to try your hand at Lao cooking or riding an elephant; or simply relax with a coffee or a Beer Lao in one of the riverside bars and watch the world go lazily by.



**Accommodation: Villa Kieng Kham Hotel** (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 21 - In Luang Prabang

Today is also free. There is opportunity to explore further afield with an excursion to Kuang Si Falls, a stunning three-tiered waterfall with the opportunity for swimming.



**Accommodation: Villa Kieng Kham Hotel** (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 22 - Slow boat on Mekong River; Overnight Pakbeng

Today we board a slowboat to take us along the Mekong towards Thailand. Running from the Tibetan plateau, through Laos and Cambodia and finally meeting the sea through the Mekong Delta of Vietnam the Mekong River is the life blood of this region. By boat we can watch as the scenery changes, as we pass thick forested hills and riverine forests, along with glimpses of local life on the banks. We have the chance to stop off at Pak Ou caves, a shrine crammed full of Buddha images of all sizes and styles. We disembark to overnight in Pakbeng on the banks of the river.



**Accommodation: Phetsokxai Hotel** (or similar)



Simple Hotel



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 23 - Continue by boat, cross border to Chiang Khong (Thailand); Drive to Chiang Rai

We continue on our boat journey enjoying the landscape as we go. When we reach the Thai border at Chiang Khong we are met by a new tour leader. We drive around 2 hours to Chiang Rai in the far north of Thailand very close to both the Laos and Burmese

borders, in the area known as The Golden Triangle. This evening we recommend a visit to the night market to discover some of Thailand's delicious street food.



**Accommodation: Diamond Park Inn Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 24 - Drive to Chiang Mai via White Temple

Today we make the 3 hour journey to Chiang Mai visiting Wat Rong Khun, otherwise known as The White Temple, along the way. This is an unusual and quirky Buddhist temple as it is was designed by a contemporary artist who began construction in 1998. On arrival in Chiang Mai the remainder of the day is left free to make your first impressions of the city.



**Accommodation: Park Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 25 - In Chiang Mai; Orientation walk

This morning we take an orientation walk of the Old Town and see some of the many temples and the ancient city walls, as well as visit the market. This afternoon there is the option to drive out to Doi Suthep temple, and enjoy great views of Chiang Mai from its vantage point on the hill. This evening we pay a visit to the night market and bazaar, where there is plenty of opportunity for shopping.



**Accommodation: Park Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 26 - Morning free for optionals in Chiang Mai; afternoon drive to Chiang Rai

There are a range of optional activities to enjoy this morning, including visiting the beautiful Doi Suthep temple which towers over the city, having a relaxing Thai massage at one of the city's many parlours, or just taking a leisurely stroll along Chiang Mai's quiet streets, taking in its many temples. This afternoon we head out of the city, where the buildings soon give way to picturesque rice fields and undulating forested hills as we head for Chiang Rai. This afternoon is free to explore the quiet streets of Chiang Rai, a cultural melting pot of different ethnic groups.



**Accommodation: Diamond Park Inn Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 27 - Cross the border into Burma, fly to Heho, drive to Inle Lake

This morning we set off after breakfast for the Thai/Burmese border. Before reaching the border we visit the infamous 'Golden Triangle', where the borders of Thailand, Laos and Burma meet at the confluence of two rivers - the Ruak River and the mighty Mekong. This area was known for being one of the premier opium growing regions in the world in its heyday, and the borders formed a major smuggling and drug trafficking route. We plan to stop at a view point where can take in the three countries, before visiting the Opium Museum to add context to what we are seeing. We will then continue on to the border, and after completing the border formalities, will cross into Burma and meet our Burmese leader where we have chance to explore Tachileik market, a sprawling bazaar that sits right on the border. After lunching at one of the local stalls we continue onto the airport for our short flight to Heho, the gateway to Inle Lake. We plan to arrive at Inle Lake in the late afternoon in time to witness the sun set into the calm and serene waters of the lake.



**Accommodation: Hupin Nyaung Schwe Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 28 - Morning cruise by longtail boat on Inle Lake, free afternoon to explore

Inle Lake enjoys a picturesque, moderately high-altitude setting on the Shan Plateau, surrounded by hills and home to the Intha people, as well as some Shan, Taungyo, Pa-o and Danu ethnicities. Local communities are devout Buddhists that live in simple houses of wood and woven bamboo, raised above the water on stilts. They are mostly fishermen, skilled artisans and self-sufficient farmers, whose vegetables are grown on floating gardens made of grass and seaweed.

The local fishermen are known for practicing a distinctive rowing style which involves standing at the stern of their boat on one leg and wrapping the other leg around the oar. We spend time this morning amongst these village communities and visit their cottage industry workshops, admiring their talents for silk and cotton weaving, as well as the rolling of traditional Cheroots (Burmese

cigars).

This afternoon has been left free to relax and enjoy our peaceful surroundings. There is also the chance to take an optional visit to Indein Village. Located up a small creek in the western part of the lake, Indein Village plays host to a vast complex of about 1,000 stupas of varying sizes, built between the 17th and 18th centuries.



### Accommodation: Hupin Nyaung Schwe Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 29 - Public bus through rural Burmese villages to Bagan

Today we take an adventurous journey across central Burma as we catch our express bus to Bagan. This service is mainly used by locals and perhaps a couple of backpackers, so it is a great opportunity to engage with curious and friendly locals. The route takes us through rural Burma, where the scenery seems almost ever-changing as we make our way to Bagan. The road first winds its way up to the scenic hill station of Kalaw, before dropping down past swathes of lush countryside and through many small villages before hitting the central dry zone, where the trees give way to vast dry and arid plains. There will be opportunities to stop, stretch your legs and take a comfort break, and perhaps have a quick look around some of the local markets we pass en-route. The seats on the bus are pre-assigned, and the cabin is air-conditioned. Today's total journey should take around eight hours, and subject to local conditions, we plan to arrive into Bagan in the late afternoon.



### Accommodation: Thazin Garden Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 30 - Discover the 1000 year old temples of Bagan

As the stand-out highlight of the trip for a large proportion of our customers, many report that their photos do not do justice to Bagan's magnificence and scale. Without doubt one of the world's premier archaeological wonders, its vast plain is studded with literally thousands of 1,000 year-old temples and stupas. From the 9th to 13th centuries, Bagan was the capital of the Kingdom of Pagan - a precursor of modern Burma. During the height of its success between the 11th and 13th centuries, over 10,000 buildings were constructed here, of which over 2,200 still remain. Its sheer magnitude can be realised when you consider that there are more temples, stupas and pagodas on this Manhattan Island-sized plain than there are medieval cathedrals in Europe.

We set out this morning to discover these marvels of ancient architecture, and with so many to choose from we plan to focus on some of the most iconic and distinctive. These include Shwezigon - a prototype of later Burmese stupas; Wetkyi-in-Gubyaukgyi - a 13th century cave temple with some interesting frescoes and Ananda Pagoda - one of the finest, largest and best preserved in Old Bagan. We are also likely to visit Ananda ok Kyaung - a former monastery with spectacular 18th century wall paintings.

This afternoon has been left free for further optional sightseeing, where we can explore the Sulamani Temple, built by King Narapatisithu in 1183, and the towering Dhammayangyi Temple which showcases some of the finest brickwork in all of Bagan. Our afternoon in Bagan draws to a close as our local guide takes us to the upper terraces of the one of the temples to witness the sun set over the vast templed plains of Bagan.



**Accommodation: Thazin Garden Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 31 - Overnight cruise up the Irrawaddy River to Mandalay

Today we board our privately chartered vessel for a leisurely cruise along Burma's most well-known river, the Irrawaddy. The boat travels at a gentle pace, allowing us to enjoy the passing scenery and spot friendly locals waving at us as we pass. There will be chances to stop along the way, including a stop at Yandabo, a small settlement known for its intricate potteries. We plan to moor alongside a small village in the evening where we will rest for the night. We overnight aboard the boat, where padded mattresses are laid out along the top tier of the boat, the sleeping is communal and all bedding is provided, along with a mosquito net. It is a basic but rewarding experience, sleeping out under the stars with the gentle rocking of the Irrawaddy and the sounds of nature as your evening's soundtrack.



**Accommodation: Overnight Cruise from Bagan to Mandalay** (or similar)



Simple Boat



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 32 - Morning visit to Mingun village, afternoon arrival in Mandalay

After a leisurely river-side breakfast we continue upstream to Mingun village, and the ruins of the unfinished Mingun Pahtodawgyi (pagoda) which, had it been completed, would have been the largest pagoda in the world. Undertaken by King Bodawpaya in 1790, the work on the monument ceased with the king's death in 1890. Nearby we also visit the giant 90 tonnes bronze Mingun Bell. We then continue upriver to Mandalay, where we disembark and transfer to our hotel, with the rest of the day free to spend at leisure.

This afternoon there is the option to explore some of this old capital's major highlights, including the world's largest book at the Kuthodaw Pagoda and the intricate wooden majesty of the Shwenanda (Golden Palace) Monastery. There will also be the opportunity to visit some craft shops where you can observe traditional and skilled gold-leaf making, tapestry making and wood carving as well as the fascinating jade market. If time allows we will then head up Mandalay Hill for sunset and views across the river and over the city.




**Accommodation: Victoria Palace Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available

 Single room available

 Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 33 - Free day to explore Mandalay; overnight train to Rangoon

Today has been left free to explore Mandalay at your leisure, or perhaps take an optional tour to the ancient cities of Amarapura and Inwa. We will first head to the formal royal capital of Amarapura where we explore the Mahagandayon Monastery, a school teaching ancient Buddhist traditions to the young monks of today. We then journey out to the beautiful U-Bein bridge, intricately made from teakwood and, at 1.2 km, it is the longest of its kind in the world. After some time marvelling at this centuries-old structure, we continue onto Inwa, another one of Burma's old royal capitals. Here we discover the 'leaning tower of Ava' and the elegant teakwood monastery of Bagaya Kyaung.

Later this evening we transfer to the train station in time to catch our overnight express train to Rangoon. Accommodation on the train will be in a lockable 4 berth cabins with a rotating ceiling fan. Pillows and top sheets are provided, but a sleeping sheet/sleeping bag is recommended as it can get cool at night. Toilets are located at each end of the carriage, and there is a restaurant coach on board where drinks and snacks can be bought. The going is slow, and you should expect a bumpy ride, but in return you are rewarded with wonderful views of the Burmese countryside and villages, and a chance to travel like the locals do.



**Accommodation: Overnight train from Mandalay to Yangon**



Simple Overnight Train

 Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 34 - Discover the sights of Rangoon; free afternoon

We start this morning with a traditional breakfast in a tea shop not far from the train station. This buzzing diner is where 'Yangoners' come to catch up with friends and enjoy a traditional breakfast of fried rice, eggs and coffee before starting their day. After dropping our bags at the hotel, we take to the streets of Rangoon on a walking tour showcasing the city's rich colonial architecture and bustling street markets. The walk takes us past the lakes and parks that provided the city's alternative name as the 'Garden city of the East', before visiting the Scott (Bogyoke) Market famous for its expertly made handicrafts and gemstones including rubies and jade. The highlight though, has to be a visit to the magnificent Shwedagon Pagoda, the most revered Buddhist temple in Burma, whose golden stupa dominates the city skyline.

The afternoon has been left free to soak up the warm atmosphere of this friendly city, or to indulge in some last minute souvenir shopping.



**Accommodation: Panda Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available

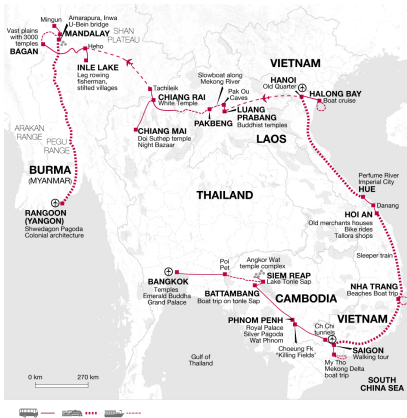
 Meals Provided: Breakfast



# DAY 35 - Trip ends in Rangoon

Trip ends after breakfast

 Meals Provided: Breakfast



## Why book this trip

This trip offers the opportunity to explore all five countries of mainland Indochina, combining our 'Indochina Encounter', 'Simply Vietnam', 'Backroads of Hanoi to Bangkok' and 'Rivers, Roads and Rail to Rangoon' trips. This trip uses simple accommodation and makes use of South-East Asia's vast array of public transport options, allowing for an exciting and rewarding way to explore this characterful and colourful region.

## What's included?



### Included meals

Breakfast: 26  
Lunch: 1



### Transport

Boat  
Public Bus  
Taxi  
Train



### Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader(s)  
Driver(s)



### Accommodation

1 nights simple boat  
14 nights simple hotel  
13 nights standard hotel  
4 nights simple overnight train

## Trip information

### Country information

#### Cambodia

##### Climate

Cambodia is a hot and tropical country, being hottest in April and coolest in January (still high 20s). Although rainfall is at its

maximum in October, Phnom Penh and Siem Reap receive very little rain compared to the coastal areas, and when it does rain it tends to be in the form of sporadic mid afternoon downpours. There is normally very little rain between December and March.

**Time difference to GMT**

+7

**Plugs**

2 Pin Round

**Religion**

Buddhism

**Language**

Khmer

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## Thailand

**Climate**

Generally hot with high humidity. There is some rainfall from April to September with most days being hot (around 33 Degrees) and a light breeze on the islands. If it does rain, it will be more of a heavy tropical downpour that lasts a few hours. Additional information and climate charts can be accessed at <http://www.explore.co.uk/weather>.

**Time difference to GMT**

+7

**Plugs**

2 Pin Round

**Religion**

Buddhism

**Language**

Thai

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## Vietnam

**Climate**

As Vietnam is a long, narrow country from north to south climate conditions vary considerably. The climate can be divided into three distinct patterns between the north, central and south regions. The climate in the north is generally humid and subtropical, although the winter months from November to March can be colder with temperatures from 10 - 15 degrees. Summer months, May to September can be quite hot with temperatures from 30 - 35 degrees. Meanwhile south Vietnam enjoys a tropical climate all year round, with little variation throughout the year (around 27 - 32 degrees), however May to November is the rainy season when short, heavy downpours are quite frequent. Central Vietnam lies somewhere in between. The coastal strip is usually dry and hotter from April to October while November to March is wetter and cooler. A light rain jacket and small umbrella are recommended year round.

**Time difference to GMT**

+7

**Plugs**

2 Pin Round

**Religion**

Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism

**Language**

Vietnamese

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## Budgeting and packing

## Optional activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are

correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations. Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

Bangkok - Long tailed klong boat trip including Royal Barge museum and Wat Arun US\$ 20; Grand Palace (entrance fee only) US\$17; Wat Po (entrance fee only) US\$3.50

Siem Reap - One day Angkor Temples pass US\$ 20; Bicycle/rickshaw hire approximately US\$ 15-20 per day; Land Mines Museum US\$ 5; Banteay Srei and Banteay Sunrise visit to Angkor US\$ 48; Half day cruise on Tonle Sap Lake US\$ 30; Blessing ceremony at local monastery US\$33

Phnom Penh - Royal Palace US\$ 7; National Museum US\$ 3; Visit to Tuol Sleng & the Killing Fields US\$ 15; Private blessing US\$34; Private cooking class US\$36; Koh Dach Island US\$78

Ho Chi Minh City - Half day Cu Chi tunnels (includes transport) US\$ 30; Half day city tour US\$18; Cu Chi and half day city tour US\$ 43; Mekong Delta day trip to Ben Tre US\$ 55; Reunification Palace US\$ 2

The prices stated are based on a minimum number of participants (usually 5-6). Please be aware that the optional excursions can run with fewer people but the price may be higher. Likewise, a slightly reduced price may be applicable where the participation greater. These excursions are generally run via our agent in the country. Local companies may offer similar excursions at a cheaper price. Should you want to use these companies please be aware that a lower price may mean that not all costs are included (entrance fees etc.) or services will not operate at the same safety and quality standards.

## Clothing

Pack essentially for hot weather. Bear in mind that the region is tropical (humid) and that days can be very hot. Lightweight rainwear or an umbrella is advisable at any time of the year, but especially between May and October. Casual clothes are the most practical (something with long sleeves, and long trousers for evenings). Bear in mind that 'short' shorts are generally unacceptable and a sunhat is essential. Shorts, vests, revealing or casual clothes and open backed sandals are not permitted in the Grand Palace in Bangkok.

## Footwear

Comfortable shoes and sandals/trainers for relaxing.

## Luggage

20kg

## Luggage: On tour

One main piece and a daypack. Remember - you are expected to carry your own luggage and as we use local buses throughout this tour you might have to carry your baggage quite a distance in bus stations. Please also be aware that temperatures may be tropical.

## Equipment

A torch, water bottle, insect repellent and high factor sunscreen are all essential, as are good quality sunglasses and a lip salve with sun protection. Don't forget your swim wear!

## Tipping

### Explore leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

### Local crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognised part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided.

In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour. Accordingly you should allow US\$30.

## Country Information

### Cambodia

### Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

**Lunch price**

£6

**Dinner price**

£10.00 - 12.00

**Beer price**

£1.3

**Water price**

£0.6

## Foreign Exchange

**Local currency**

Riel.

**Recommended Currency For Exchange**

In Cambodia, US\$ is the most commonly used currency (small denomination notes are easier to use).

**Where To Exchange**

Large towns.

**ATM Availability**

There are ATMs in most towns and cities.

**Credit Card Acceptance**

Credit cards are accepted in some large shops and restaurants in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap.

**Travellers Cheques**

They can be hard to change outside of Siem Reap and Phnom Penh; we recommend them for emergencies only.

## Thailand

### Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

**Dinner price**

£4.00 - 8.00

**Beer price**

£1.5

**Water price**

£0.5

### Foreign Exchange

**Local currency**

Thai Baht

**Recommended Currency For Exchange**

We recommend that you bring your money in GBP or US\$.

**Where To Exchange**

Most major towns and on the islands - your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival.

**ATM Availability**

ATMs are available in Bangkok but are limited on the islands.

**Credit Card Acceptance**

Major stores and restaurants.

**Travellers Cheques**

Can be exchanged at banks and exchange offices throughout the tour although rates may not be as favourable.

# Vietnam

## Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

**Dinner price**

£9

**Beer price**

£2.00 - 4.00

**Water price**

£0.5

## Foreign Exchange

**Local currency**

Dong.

**Recommended Currency For Exchange**

Carry your money in US\$ Dollars cash. You can also take GBP but US\$ are easier to exchange. (Dollar bills can be used in some hotels and shops; change is often given in local currency).

**Where To Exchange**

Most towns.

**ATM Availability**

There are ATMs virtually everywhere in Vietnam and in Cambodia, though we also recommend bringing cash.

**Credit Card Acceptance**

Credit card's are widely accepted throughout Vietnam

**Travellers Cheques**

Travellers cheques are not recommended as they can be difficult to exchange

## Transport, Accommodation & Meals

### Transport Information

Boat, Public Bus, Taxi, Train

### Accommodation notes

**Booking a Single Room**

All of our group tours are planned and operated on a twin-share basis, meaning that the standard cost is based either on individual travellers sharing accommodation with another group member of the same sex, or people who book together sharing accommodation. Please refer to the tour notes where the single room option availability is detailed on a night by night basis for this tour, and the price for the available nights is detailed on the dates & prices tab by departure date. For Self-Guided trips the Single Room supplement offers the option of a single room each and is charged per person. The Single Room supplement also applies to the third person in a party of three that will be accommodated in a single room.

On this tour we have opted for simple, basic and clean accommodation that provides value for money and a warm welcome. All hotel rooms have air-conditioning and attached bathrooms. Expect rooms to be furnished in a no frills manner and be prepared for both electricity supply and plumbing standards to be somewhat erratic.

## Essential Information

## FCO Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice click here.

For more information from Explore about travel advice, click here

### Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

## Price Guarantee

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

## Visa and Passport Information

Thailand: Visas are not required by UK, Australian, New Zealand, US and Canadian citizens for a stay of less than 30 days. All passports must have at least 6 months validity remaining on entry to Thailand. Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office.

Cambodia: A single visa is required by UK, New Zealand, Australian, USA & Canadian citizens and can be obtained on arrival. A passport sized photograph for immigration will also be required. Alternatively you can now obtain an e-visa prior to departure from [www.mfaic.gov.kh](http://www.mfaic.gov.kh)

Vietnam: Until 30th June 2021 'British Citizen' passport holders can visit Vietnam for up to 15 days without a visa. A visa will be required if you enter after this date or if you wish to re-enter within 30 days of your departure.

For visits of up to 30 days, you can get an e-visa before you travel from <https://evisa.xuatnhapcanh.gov.vn/>

For visits of longer than 30 days you must get a visa from the nearest Vietnamese embassy before travelling to Vietnam. If you want to make a second visit within 30 days of leaving Vietnam, you'll need to get a multiple entry visa to re-enter.

Please note that it is a pre-requisite for entry into Vietnam that your passport is valid for a minimum of 6 months from your date of entry

All visa related issues including information for other nationalities should be confirmed with the relevant Embassy prior to departure.

Laos: A single visa is required by UK, New Zealand, Australian, US & Canadian citizens and can be obtained on arrival. The visa on arrival costs 30USD for New Zealand and Australian citizens, 35USD for UK & US citizens and 42USD for Canadian citizens. For other nationalities the price varies between US\$30-42. One passport sized photo is required to arrange this.

Burma: An e-visa is required to enter Burma and must be arranged prior to travel through the following website: <http://evisa.moip.gov.mm/>. Visas are valid for 90 days from issue and allow a 28-day, single-entry visit.

All visa related issues including information for other nationalities should be confirmed with the relevant Embassy prior to departure. You should confirm all visa related questions with the relevant Embassy prior to departure.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See [www.travcour.com](http://www.travcour.com) to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, with the correct validity for your chosen destination.

## Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our [Essential Information](#) and [Booking Conditions](#).

## Transfers

[Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.](#)

### Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

### **Joining Tour Abroad**

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Polar, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer click [here](#)

## **Insurance**

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. The cost of many of our Polar Voyages will exceed the capped amount covered by standard insurance premiums and you will be required to pay an additional premium to cover the full value of your trip. Please ensure that you are covered for the full amount of your holiday cost, as insufficient cover could invalidate a claim under the policy. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

## **Flight information**

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. Read more about them [here](#).

### **Flight Information**

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

### **Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore**

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

## **Cambodia**

### **Vaccinations**

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against malaria, infectious hepatitis, tetanus, typhoid, diphtheria and polio. Consult your GP regarding tablets advised for malaria. Though not compulsory, travellers may wish to immunise themselves against Japanese encephalitis. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at [Explore Travel Health](#) and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.

## **Thailand**

### **Vaccinations**

Nothing compulsory, we recommend protection against malaria, typhoid, tetanus, diphtheria, polio and infectious hepatitis. Although not compulsory, travellers may also wish to immunise themselves against Japanese encephalitis. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on Malaria and Zika Virus. Please take preventative measures to avoid mosquito bites - these include mosquito repellent as well as long trousers and long sleeve shirts to cover up when necessary. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at [Explore Travel Health](#) and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.

## **Vietnam**

### **Vaccinations**

Nothing compulsory, we recommend protection against malaria, typhoid, tetanus, diphtheria, polio and hepatitis A. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on Malaria and Zika Virus. Although not compulsory travellers may also wish to immunise themselves



against Japanese encephalitis. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at [Explore Travel Health](#) and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.

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