

Overseas Adventure Travel®

THE LEADER IN CUSTOMIZED SMALL GROUP ADVENTURES SINCE 1978

Your O.A.T. Adventure Travel Planning Guide®



Ancient Kingdoms: Thailand, Laos,
Cambodia & Vietnam

2026

Overseas Adventure Travel®

347 Congress Street, Boston, MA 02210

Dear Traveler,

I am thrilled that you are considering exploring the world with O.A.T. There are so many wonderful destinations to discover, and the itinerary described inside is a perfect way to fulfill a travel dream.

When you join us, you will slip seamlessly into local life as you explore off the beaten path in your small group. Like all our itineraries, this one is designed to give you an intimate understanding of your destination, not just a superficial view. You will get to know community leaders and try your hand at local trades during your *A Day in the Life* experience, share traditional fare and lively conversation during a Home-Hosted Visit, discuss the Controversial Topics impacting everyday life, and visit sites supported by Grand Circle Foundation. And if you choose to travel solo, you will enjoy all these cultural experiences at an unmatched value, with our FREE Single Supplements—just one of the reasons we continue to be the leader in solo travel.

To ensure you experience the true culture and feel supported every step of the way, we provide the services of a local Trip Experience Leader from the beginning of your adventure to the end. Along with introducing you to the history and culture of their homeland, these friendly experts will gladly help you out with any special requests to make your trip even more special. You can also rely on the seasoned team at our regional office, who are ready to help 24/7 in case any unexpected circumstances arise.

Plus, you can put your own personal stamp on your trip, like the **87% of our travelers who customize their experience**. Perhaps you will choose to see more of your destination by adding an optional trip extension to your itinerary. You can also arrive a few days early to explore independently and get acclimated, customize your air itinerary, and more.

I hope you find this Travel Planning Guide helpful. If you have any further questions, do not hesitate to contact one of our Travel Counselors at **1-800-955-1925**.

Warm regards,



Harriet R. Lewis
Chair
Overseas Adventure Travel

CONTENTS

ANCIENT KINGDOMS: THAILAND, LAOS, CAMBODIA & VIETNAM

Your Adventure at a Glance:

Where You're Going, What it Costs,
and What's Included **4**

Your Detailed Day-To-Day Itinerary **6**

Pre-Trip Extension **20**

Post-Trip Extension **25**

ESSENTIAL TRAVEL INFORMATION

Travel Documents & Entry Requirements... **30**

Rigors, Vaccines & General Health **33**

Money Matters: Local Currency &
Tipping Guidelines..... **37**

Air, Optional Tours & Staying in Touch **40**

Packing: What to Bring & Luggage Limits... **43**

Climate & Average Temperatures **49**

ABOUT YOUR DESTINATIONS: CULTURE, ETIQUETTE & MORE

The Culture of Southeast Asia **52**

Shopping: What to Buy, Customs,
Shipping & More **57**

DEMOGRAPHICS & HISTORY

Thailand..... **60**

Laos..... **62**

Cambodia **63**

Vietnam **65**

RESOURCES

Suggested Reading **68**

Suggested Films & Videos **70**

Useful Websites **72**

Useful Apps **73**



Mekong River Delta, Laos

Ancient Kingdoms: Thailand, Laos, Cambodia & Vietnam

Small Group Adventure

Thailand: Bangkok | **Laos:** Luang Prabang, Mekong River Cruise, Vientiane | **Cambodia:** Phnom Penh, Angkor Wat | **Vietnam:** Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon)

Small groups of no more than 16 travelers, guaranteed

20 days starting from \$4,795

including international airfare

Single Supplement: **FREE**

For departure dates & prices, visit www.oattravel.com/lvc2026pricing

Veer off Southeast Asia's trodden paths to uncover the glory days of lost empires—and immerse yourself in the vibrant cultures that have emerged in their wakes. On this in-depth journey through four countries, explore UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Bangkok, Luang Prabang, and Angkor Wat; cruise the Mekong; and tour dazzling temples and haunting ruins. Along the way, you'll meet locals in their villages and schools; savor exotic cuisines; and discover the Indochina peninsula's most alluring locales.

IT'S INCLUDED

- 18 nights accommodation
- International airfare, airport transfers, government taxes, fees, and airline fuel surcharges unless you choose to make your own air arrangements
- All land transportation and 3 internal flights
- 40 meals—18 breakfasts, 15 lunches, and 8 dinners (including 1 Home-Hosted Dinner)
- 23 small group activities
- Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader
- Gratuities for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters
- 5% Frequent Traveler Credit toward your next adventure

Prices are accurate as of the date of this publishing and are subject to change.

Ancient Kingdoms: Thailand, Laos, Cambodia & Vietnam



ITINERARY SUMMARY

DAYS	DESTINATION
1	Fly to Bangkok, Thailand
2-5	Bangkok
6-8	Fly to Luang Prabang, Laos
9-10	Train to Vientiane
11-12	Fly to Phnom Penh, Cambodia
13-15	Siem Reap • Angkor Wat
16-19	Fly to Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), Vietnam
20	Return to U.S.

WHAT TO EXPECT

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Moderate

Pacing: 6 locations in 19 days with some early mornings

Physical requirements: You must be able to walk 3 miles unassisted and participate in 5-7 hours of physical activities each day. Travel over some bumpy, unpaved roads; climb uneven stairways at ancient ruins; and walk over uneven ground.

Flight Time: Travel time will be 20-27 hours and will most likely have one or two connections

View all physical requirements at www.oattravel.com/lvc

SOUTHEAST ASIA: THE O.A.T. DIFFERENCE

Unbeatable Value: Travel at the lowest price and per diems in the industry.

People-to-People Experiences: Give alms to local Buddhist monks before seeing the daily routines of the Laotian villagers during our **A Day in the Life** experience, which also includes a visit to local school supported in part by **Grand Circle Foundation**.

O.A.T. Exclusives: Watch traditional Khmer dances performed by local students at the Champey Academy of Arts, an organization that few American tour operators visit. You'll also meet with locals to discuss issues impacting Southeast Asia, including the Khmer Rouge genocide tribunals. Plus, we'll sit down to a special, intimate meal with a local family who lives on the outskirts of Vientiane during a **Home-Hosted Dinner**.

CUSTOMIZE YOUR ADVENTURE

OPTIONAL EXTENSIONS

Thailand: Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai & the River Kwai

PRE-TRIP: 8 nights from **\$1,595**

Northern Vietnam: From Hanoi to the Hill Tribes of Sapa

POST-TRIP: 7 nights from **\$1,495**

ARRIVE EARLY

We recommend that you relax after a long flight or explore more in depth before your trip. Prices shown include accommodations and private airport transfer.

- Arrive early in **Bangkok** before your Northern Thailand pre-trip extension or before your main adventure from **\$120** per room, per night

Ancient Kingdoms: Thailand, Laos, Cambodia & Vietnam

YOUR DETAILED ITINERARY

BEGIN YOUR ADVENTURE WITH AN OPTIONAL PRE-TRIP EXTENSION

8 nights in *Thailand: Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai & the River Kwai*

Day 1 Depart U.S.

Day 2 Arrive in Bangkok, Thailand

Day 3 Fly to Chiang Mai

Day 4 Chiang Mai • Visit local village • Waterfall hike

Day 5 Chiang Mai • Karen hill tribe village visit • Elephant care center visit

Day 6 Chiang Mai • Visit Wat Rong Khun • Overland to Chiang Rai

Day 7 Chiang Rai • Golden Triangle • Visit Opium Museum

Day 8 Fly to Bangkok • Overland to Kanchanaburi • River Kwai bridge walk

Day 9 Discover Hellfire Pass • Boat ride on the River Kwai

Day 10 Transfer to Bangkok • Join main trip

Day 1 Depart U.S.

Fly overnight to Bangkok, Thailand.

Day 2 Arrive Bangkok, Thailand

- Destination: Bangkok
- Accommodations: Evergreen Laurel Hotel or similar

Evening: Arrive in Bangkok, where you will be met at the airport by an O.A.T. representative, and transfer to our hotel. Upon arrival, you'll meet other travelers who arrived early in Bangkok before the main adventure. Tonight, you can rest at your hotel before exploring the city tomorrow.

Day 3 Discover Bangkok • Cooking demonstration

- Destination: Bangkok
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Evergreen Laurel Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: You'll meet your small group for a Welcome Briefing at the hotel. During this briefing, we will introduce ourselves and review our itinerary in more detail (including any changes that may need to occur).

We'll then drive to the Ruan Khun Yai house, located on the banks of the Bangkok Noi Canal. Here, we'll enjoy an O.A.T.-exclusive lesson on how to prepare traditional curry paste.

Lunch: At the Ruan Khun Yai house.

Afternoon: Our hosts will lead us on a tour around their house and share insight into their daily lives. Then, later this afternoon, we'll set off on an orientation walk around the vicinity of our hotel with our Trip Experience Leader. He or she will point out restaurants and sites you may want to visit during your free time here. During our walk, we'll stop to try some local street snacks and drinks. This is also a great opportunity to practice *wai*, the traditional way to greet locals by pressing your hands together and bowing.

Dinner: On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader can provide recommendations on the best locales for whatever your preferences are. You may seek out a restaurant that serves traditional dishes like *som tum*, a typical salad made with green papaya and various spices. Or, for a more mild dish, perhaps you'll try *tom kha kai*, a refreshing soup that uses coconut milk to tame the kick of chilis that are also in this dish.

Evening: You are free to return to your room to rest before our explorations tomorrow, or you may venture back out to experience Bangkok's nightlife.

Day 4 Explore Bangkok • Visit Grand Palace • Conversation with university student • Chaopraya River dinner cruise

- Destination: Bangkok
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Evergreen Laurel Hotel or similar

Activity Note: The Grand Palace has a strict dress code. Men should wear pants, women should wear pants or long skirts that cover

their knees, and both men and women should cover their shoulders. It is also recommended to wear shoes that you can easily remove as you'll need to take your shoes off before entering the Royal Chapel.

The university is closed to the public during semester examinations in May, July, and December, as well as for public holidays. If your visit falls on one of these days, you will participate in a conversation with a local activist about the struggle for freedom of expression at the hotel.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll explore Bangkok's crown jewel—the Grand Palace of Thailand, a sprawling compound of ceremonial halls, gilded spires, and ornate buildings. The city's defining landmark since 1782, the palace became the centerpiece of a new Thai capital called Krung Thep (City of Angels), known outside of Thailand as Bangkok. It was King Mongkut (or Rama IV) who ruled from this palace, expanded trade with the West, and was romanticized in the musical *The King and I*. The focal point of the palace is the Emerald Buddha. Carved out of jade and adorned with gold, the Emerald Buddha made a dramatic appearance in 1434, when it was found hidden in a temple stupa. Since 1785, the Emerald Buddha—the most highly revered image of the Buddha—has resided in the Royal Chapel of the Grand Palace.

Next, we'll meet with a local student to discuss freedom of expression in Thailand.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Free for independent discoveries. *Tuk-tuks* will be available to transport us back to our hotel. If you're interested in exploring on your own, our Trip Experience Leader would be happy to tell you your *tuk-tuk* driver where you're headed.

Shortly before dinner, we'll gather at our hotel and drive to the pier where we'll board a private, traditional, wooden rice barge for a cruise on the Chaophraya River.

Dinner: During our cruise, we'll enjoy a memorable Welcome Dinner—exclusive to our O.A.T. group.

Evening: Free to relax or explore.

Day 5 Ayutthaya • Boat ride on Pa Sak river

- Destination: Bangkok
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Evergreen Laurel Hotel or similar

Activity Note: Because Ayutthaya is a religious site, visitors are asked to abide by the dress code. Men should wear knee-length shorts and women should wear knee-length shorts or skirts.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Drive to the ancient city of Ayutthaya, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that was once home to 33 kings from many different dynasties. The capital of Siam from 1353 to 1767, the city was once a place of such fabulous wealth that early travelers described its “2,000 spires clad in gold.” While here, we'll see the preserved temple ruins of Phra Sri Sanphet.

Next, we'll drive to a nearby village, where we'll learn to make *roti samai*, a local delicacy consisting of cotton candy wrapped in a crêpe. After our hands-on learning opportunity, we'll depart for the pier, where we'll board a boat and enjoy a cruise along the Pa Sak river.

Lunch: At a local restaurant for lunch.

Afternoon: Depart for Bangkok. The rest of the afternoon is free for your own discoveries.

Dinner: On your own. Perhaps you'll seek out a traditional dish like green papaya salad, a light, refreshing bite made with peanuts and dried shrimp. Or for something a little more familiar, you might try a fusion restaurant, where Thai flavors meet Western ingredients.

Evening: At leisure.

Day 6 Bangkok • Fly to Luang Prabang, Laos

- Destination: Luang Prabang
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Sada Hotel Luang Prabang or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Fly to Luang Prabang, Laos. The ancient, royal capital of Laos is located on a peninsula between the Mekong and Khan rivers with green mountains all around. Recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, this is considered one of Southeast Asia's best-preserved small towns.

Upon arrival, we'll take a bus ride to the edge of the town. Since large coaches aren't allowed in the inner city, we'll use *jumbos*, the local mode of transport that are similar to *tuk-tuks*.

Lunch: At a local bakery.

Afternoon: We'll check in to our hotel. Enjoy some time to explore on your own this afternoon. Along with its scenic setting, Luang Prabang is famous for the more than 30 active temples and hundreds of architectural treasures that reside here. It will be like a journey into the distant past as we mingle with monks and local people heading to markets and going about their daily business.

Later, we'll take *jumbos* to a nearby night market. From there, we'll enjoy an orientation walk along the Mekong River before arriving at a local ferry station.

Dinner: At a local restaurant.

Evening: Enjoy free time at the hotel. If you want to continue exploring the city this evening, you may choose to stay in the center of town where you can browse the stalls of Luang Prabang's night market. Here, you'll find everything from clothes and jewelry to handcrafted purses, pottery, and artwork. *Jumbos* typically wait along the edge of the market where you can grab one to take back to the hotel.

Day 7 Cruise the Mekong River • Village visit • Explore Pak Ou Cave

- Destination: Luang Prabang
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Sada Hotel Luang Prabang or similar

Activity Note: To access the Pak Ou Cave, you'll need to walk up steep stairs.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll board *jumbos* and drive to the Royal Pier where we'll board a traditional wooden boat. We start our day on an excursion along one of the longest rivers in the world. The Mekong River, or "mother of all rivers," supports some 90 million people who produce rice on the surrounding 54,000 square miles of land. Also home to more species of giant fish than any other river, this majestic waterway is said to produce balls of light along its surface, which the locals attribute to the Phaya Naga, or Mekong Dragons.

We'll eventually stop at Muangkham Village, an O.A.T.-exclusive experience. During our time in this small rural village located on the

shores of the Mekong, we'll have the chance to interact with some of the locals, and we'll help one villager prepare a traditional snack. First, we'll watch them demonstrate how to prepare dried river weed before we have the chance to help make this tasty treat ourselves. Later, we'll head back to our boat and continue on to the Pak Ou Cave. The cave, hidden in the underside of a cliff, is filled with thousands of Buddha icons.

Lunch: On the boat.

Afternoon: We arrive back at the pier, where you can take a *jumbo* back to the hotel. Or, you may choose to stay in town where you can walk around to admire the French architecture, pop into a bakery for an afternoon snack, or visit the Wat Xieng Thong royal temple, the city's oldest.

Dinner: At a local restaurant.

Evening: We'll take a *jumbo* back to the hotel. If you choose to participate in the alms-giving ceremony early tomorrow morning, you may want to retire to your room to get some sleep, or perhaps you'll grab a cocktail at the hotel's bar and sit out on the patio.

Day 8 Alms-giving ceremony • A Day in the Life of a local village • Grand Circle Foundation visit: Village school

- Destination: Luang Prabang
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Sada Hotel Luang Prabang or similar

Activity Note: The local school we may visit is closed on Saturdays and Sundays.

Early morning: You may rise very early to participate in an ancient Buddhist tradition: alms-giving to local monks. This is a quintessential part of Laotian culture and is considered to be a highlight of this adventure for many travelers. In the quiet of early

morning, we'll take a *jumbo* ride to an area where we'll wait for hundreds of monks to parade solemnly and single-file through the streets of Luang Prabang, collecting food offerings from us and the locals. Dressed in traditional Lao orange robes, the monks provide a sense of calm to the inhabitants of the city each morning.

Then, we'll make our way to a nearby market, where we'll enjoy a light, local breakfast before heading into the stalls to purchase ingredients for our lunch with a village chief later today. The chief's family will prepare several Lao specialties for us, and in return, we'll treat our hosts to a taste of America. It's up to your small group to decide what dish you'll prepare.

Breakfast: At the hotel for those who don't participate in the alms-giving ceremony.

Morning: Drive to one of two neighboring villages, where we'll enjoy an O.A.T.-exclusive: ***A Day in the Life*** experience. The specific village you'll visit depends on your individual departure; however, both villages are quite similar, with fewer than 500 residents apiece, representing three different ethnic groups. While nearly 80% of residents live in homes made of wood and concrete, villagers from the Hmong and Khmu tribes typically live in more modest accommodations, with bamboo walls and thatched roofs. The majority of the villagers earn their living by farming.

Upon arrival, we'll be greeted by the village chief, an elected official who is responsible for overseeing village administration. While the chief earns a small salary in this role, he also supplements his income by working, as most of his neighbors do, on his farm or in the local general store. We'll begin getting acquainted with daily life here during a walking tour led by the chief. As we stroll, we'll meet and mingle with any residents we encounter, such as basket weavers or rice pounders.

Our walk concludes at the village school, which is supported by **Grand Circle Foundation** as part of the *World Classroom* initiative.

Grand Circle Foundation

Tin Keo Village School

Total donated: **\$30,276**

Partner since: **2012**

Nonsaath Village School

Total donated: **\$27,760**

Partner since: **2015**

Since 2012, more than \$27,000 has been donated to each of the village schools we visit on this adventure—thanks to our travelers' generosity. As we'll learn from the chief during our tour of the school, the donations have been used to install electricity, add ceiling fans, paint the interior and exterior of the building, build toilets, and add a playground and a library room.

Because these village schools are so small—with no more than 20 elementary-aged students each—one teacher is responsible for all grade levels. We'll have the opportunity to meet the teacher this morning and engage in conversation about the education system in Laos. We'll also have the chance to interact with some of the students. They speak very little English, so you may be encouraged to help them with a language lesson. You might also participate in outdoor activities or listen as the children perform a traditional song.

After our school visit concludes, we'll make our way to a nearby community whose residents are members of the Hmong hill tribe, an indigenous people of Laos' northern highlands that make up the largest hill tribe group in Laos. Here, we'll visit the home of a local shaman to learn about the local way of life—from ceremonial traditions and natural health remedies to traditional clothing, tools, and musical instruments.

Lunch: We'll make our way to the village chief's home for lunch. After, we'll gather around the table with the chief, his wife, and several children and grandchildren to enjoy the food we've prepared.

Afternoon: After bidding farewell to the chief's family, we'll visit the village's weaving center, which is supported in part by **Grand Circle Foundation**. Here, we'll see the local women create handcrafted textiles, and you'll have a chance to try your own hand at weaving. The traditional weaving techniques and patterns are passed down through the generations from mother to daughter. Many families even keep their own silk worms, who produce the silk that is then woven into complex patterns.

Dinner: On your own. You may ask your Trip Experience Leader where you can find a restaurant that serves traditional dishes, like one made with black sticky rice. Similar to the white rice that we're accustomed to, black rice has a hint of natural sweetness to it so it is sometimes incorporated into desserts.

Evening: On your own—you may retire to your room to rest before tomorrow's explorations. Or, you may take a *jumbo* to the night market to grab any last-minute souvenirs.

Day 9 High-speed train to Vientiane • Home-Hosted Dinner

- Destination: Vientiane
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Sabaidee @ Lao Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: You have most of the morning to relax before we leave for the train station. We'll stop along the way at a local bakery.

Upon arrival at the station, board the train for Laos' easy-going capital of Vientiane.

Lunch: On your own. We recommend grabbing lunch from the on-site bakery and eating onboard the train.

Afternoon: Arrive in Vientiane. Home to nearly one million residents, Vientiane is Laos' economic engine. While commercial trading and tourism have long been the city's economic backbone, Vientiane has experienced a boom in recent years as a result of foreign investment. Despite its growing influence and population, the city still retains a small-town feel: Laundry dries in the sun on French-style balconies, and street vendors spread out their wares on blankets and banana leaves.

Upon arrival at the hotel, the remainder of the afternoon is yours to settle in or explore independently.

Dinner: We'll re-convene in the hotel lobby, where we'll meet members of the families we'll be joining for our **Home-Hosted Dinner** this evening. All of our host families live in either the Saysetha district or the Sikhottabong district. Upon arrival, we'll meet the rest of the family, enjoy a tour of the home, and begin our cultural conversations. Our hosts will also invite us to help them prepare dishes for dinner, which may include *tam mark houn*, a traditional green papaya salad made with lime and garlic, and *laab*, a spicy minced pork salad with mint.

Evening: We'll return to the hotel, where you may retire to your room to rest before tomorrow's explorations, or you may take advantage of the hotel's outdoor bar and lounge area.

Day 10 Vientiane • Conversation about unexploded bombs • Meet a Buddhist monk • C.O.P.E. Center tour • Optional puppet show and dinner tour

- Destination: Vientiane
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Sabaidee @ Lao Hotel or similar

Activity Note: Men should wear knee-length shorts and women should wear knee-length shorts or skirts for the Wat Sisaket visit.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Set out to explore some of the famous city landmarks of Vientiane. Pronounced “Vieng Chan,” the capital of Laos is a slow-paced, friendly city of some 600,000 people. First, we’ll visit Wat Sisaket, the oldest Buddhist monastery in Laos featuring more than 6,800 images of the seated Buddha in wood, stone, and bronze. We’ll have the special opportunity to sit down with a Buddhist monk to learn about why men in Southeast Asia become monks and what their daily routines are like.

Then, we’ll arrive at our next destination: the C.O.P.E. Center (Cooperative Orthotic and Prosthetic Enterprise), a non-government organization that supports victims of bombs that were dropped over Laos during the Vietnam War, but failed to detonate on impact. Since 1973, more than 20,000 civilians have been injured or killed by these unexploded bombs. As we’ll learn from the staff members who greet us this morning, C.O.P.E.’s mission is to provide prostheses and physical rehabilitation to survivors and to educate visitors about this crisis. Today, the majority of these munitions are buried under peoples’ homes or in farmlands. Because the economy of Laos is largely agrarian, tens of thousands of Laotians face considerable risk whenever they work the fields, and farmers who are wounded

by bombs often lose their livelihoods. During our time here, we’ll sit down with a bomb victim to learn about this tragic topic.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: We’ll take a short walk back to our hotel, where you’ll have free time to make your own discoveries.

Later, you might like to join our optional tour to a local puppet theater, where we’ll witness a show and learn about this cherished art form. We’ll also visit a nearby war monument.

Dinner: On your own for those who don’t join the optional tour. You may seek out a restaurant that serves Laos’ national dish, *laap*. This popular, and simple, meal is made of minced meat, garlic, onion, and fish sauce. Your Trip Experience Leader will recommend his or her favorite spots. For those who join our optional tour, lunch will be included at a local restaurant.

Evening: On your own—you are free to return to your room to rest before your explorations tomorrow, or you may venture out to experience Vientiane’s nightlife.

Day 11 Vientiane • Fly to Phnom Penh, Cambodia • Visit the Champey Academy of Arts

- Destination: Phnom Penh
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Capri Hotel by Fraser or similar

Activity note: The Champey Academy of Arts is closed Sundays and public holidays. If your visit falls on one of these days, you may visit the academy on Day 12.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Fly to Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Lunch: On your own at the airport.

Afternoon: Upon arrival, we'll transfer to our hotel, stopping along the way at the Champey Academy of Arts, an opportunity exclusive to O.A.T. travelers, as few American tour companies go here.

The Champey Academy strives to preserve Khmer culture, and while here, a group of students will show us some traditional dances that showcase the history of their country. Then, it'll be our turn to try out some moves as the children teach us a traditional dance. We'll also view some of the handcrafted goods and artwork that the students produce here.

Dinner: At a local restaurant.

Evening: You have the freedom to spend the rest of your evening as you wish, whether you want to retire to your room to rest before tomorrow's discoveries or join your fellow travelers for a nightcap in the hotel bar.

Day 12 Phnom Penh • Visit Killing Fields of Choeung Ek & Tuol Sleng Prison Museum

- Destination: Phnom Penh
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Capri Hotel by Fraser or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Depart for the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek—a grim reminder of Cambodia's bloody past under Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge. It is almost inconceivable to confront the nature of true evil here in this gentle land, but the Buddhist memorial at Choeung Ek commemorates the 1.7 million victims (about 25% of Cambodia's population at the time) of the 1975–79 genocide. This execution site is one of many throughout Cambodia.

The Khmer Rouge came to power under the Marxist leader Pol Pot, who sought to turn Cambodia into a socialist, agrarian republic. Anyone who opposed those aims—and in particular, Cambodian intellectuals—was rounded up, imprisoned, and murdered.

During our time here, we'll walk through the Killing Fields before we head to the Tuol Sleng Prison Museum. We'll learn about the atrocities committed here, where more than 10,000 prisoners were held before they were led to the Killing Fields. Out of the thousands of victims that were imprisoned in Tuol Sleng, there were only seven survivors.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: You have the rest of the day to make your own discoveries. You may take a *remork* to Phnom Penh's riverfront park to take in the sights and sounds of the city. Locals regularly have aerobic dance classes at the park, which you can join, or you can take a relaxing stroll along the edge of the water.

Dinner: On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader can provide recommendations if you'd like to venture out for Cambodian favorites like *amok*, a thick and flavorful curry typically made with fish, garlic, coconut milk, and more.

Evening: On your own—you may want to retire to your room to get some sleep before our early start tomorrow morning, or perhaps you'll visit the Elephant Bar at Raffles Hotel Le Royal where you can grab a drink and explore this fascinating hotel. Built in the late 1920s, the hotel was frequented by journalists and foreign diplomats—Jacqueline Kennedy even stayed here.

Day 13 Phnom Penh • Overland to Siem Reap • Local interaction

- Destination: Siem Reap
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Regency Angkor Hotel or similar

Activity note: Our overland transfer to Siem Reap will take approximately eight hours, with included stops for lunch and activities en route.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Today we'll drive to Siem Reap. During our journey, we'll pass through the Kampong Cham and Kampong Thom provinces where we'll pass scenes of everyday life. We'll see expansive landscapes of rice fields and towering palm trees where farmers tend to their crops and Brahman cows and water buffalo graze.

Depending on availability, we may stop at the home of a local woman who hunts for tarantulas, cooks them, and sells them at her village's market. We'll have the opportunity to learn about her unique profession before we trek into the forest surrounding her home to hunt for tarantulas with her.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Continue driving to our next stop: Kampong Kdei Bridge. Built around 1,000 years ago, the structure holds its title as the world's longest corbelled arch bridge.

We arrive in Siem Reap later this afternoon and head to the hotel to drop our bags off. Shortly after, we'll set off on an orientation walk to acquaint ourselves with the area.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: On your own—you may retire to your room to get some sleep before our early start tomorrow. Or, perhaps you and your fellow travelers will head to the hotel's outdoor bar for a nightcap to discuss your discoveries thus far.

Day 14 Siem Reap • Visit a floating village • Explore Angkor

- Destination: Siem Reap
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Regency Angkor Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll drive to a local village where we'll ride in traditional buffalo-drawn carts in pairs. We'll take in scenes of daily life as we ride through the village before transferring to the pier. We'll take an exclusive, private boat to visit the nearby floating village, which is home to approximately 300 people. During our time exploring the village, we'll discover how this isolated community has built homes, gardens, and schools on the water before we stop at one of the homes to learn about their lives.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Take a couple of hours to rest back at the hotel or explore Siem Reap on your own before our group gathers later this afternoon for Angkor.

We'll get our first glimpse of Angkor today, a holy city that took centuries to build and whose scale is still breathtaking today—it sprawls across an area of roughly 96 square miles. The Khmer Empire aristocrats who built the temples and monuments here between AD 800–1200 were motivated by their Hindu and Buddhist beliefs. We'll visit the 12th-century Bayon temple where we'll be greeted by over 200 smiling faces. Hidden in plain sight of the structure's 54 stone towers are massive grinning heads that symbolize the spirit of one

of Cambodia's most beloved kings, Jayavarman VII. We'll also make a brief stop at the Terrace of the Elephants, where a series of almost life-sized bas-reliefs depict the huge beasts.

Dinner: On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader will be ready with recommendations for you, should you like to venture out to a local restaurant. You may choose to seek out a traditional dish like Khmer red curry, a classic curry made with coconut milk.

Evening: Enjoy free time this evening. You can retire to your room to get some sleep before our full day of exploring Angkor tomorrow, or you may take a *remork* to explore the charming shops and cafés of Siem Reap.

Day 15 Siem Reap • Explore Angkor Wat temples

- Destination: Siem Reap
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Regency Angkor Hotel or similar

Activity note: Visiting Angkor Wat involves walking outside in over 90–100 degree Fahrenheit heat for 2 miles on unpaved and uneven surfaces. It will also involve climbing 3 levels with 100 steps, partly without handrail, though participation in the entire climb is not mandatory. There is also the choice for travelers to hire private transport and a local guide for an additional cost. Additionally, Angkor Wat has a strict dress code. Men and women should wear pants or knee-length shorts, and cover their shoulders.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Set out for Angkor Wat, a masterpiece of Khmer architecture. Angkor Wat is a large pyramid temple, built between 1113 and 1150, surrounded by a great moat 570 feet wide. Note the bas-relief carvings throughout the temple, and take a moment to stand in the courtyard

of this temple whose towers represent Mount Meru, the center of all physical and spiritual universes and the home to many gods in Hindu and Buddhist mythologies.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Drive back to the hotel, where you'll have time to yourself before we set off to explore Ta Prohm. Unlike Angkor Wat, Ta Prohm has been left the way it was found, covered by a dense jungle of trees and roots, allowing you to discover this archaeological treasure just as it was found by the French in the mid-1800s. The site is most famous for its strangler fig trees whose roots seemingly drip down over Ta Prohm's temple and its appearance in the *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* movie.

Dinner: On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader can provide suggestions.

Evening: Your evening is on your own—you are free to rest in your room to prepare for tomorrow's discoveries, or reach out to your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations on things to do in the area.

Day 16 Siem Reap • Optional Banteay Srei tour • Fly to Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), Vietnam

- Destination: Ho Chi Minh City
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Muong Thanh Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Enjoy free time to make your own discoveries. Or you may choose to join our optional tour this morning to visit Banteay Srei, one of the oldest and best-preserved temple sites in Cambodia. Built in AD 967, Banteay Srei means "Citadel of Women," and is recognized as a tribute to female beauty. After visiting the

temple, we'll drive to a local village, where we'll meet with a Khmer noodle maker and learn the secrets of making the dish that is closest to the hearts of Cambodians.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: We'll spend our last couple of hours in Siem Reap at the Angkor National Museum where we'll trace the history of the Khmer empire through its comprehensive collection of relics that span from the pre-Angkor Period to the great Khmer kings, and more. Later this afternoon, we'll drive to the airport where we'll check in for our flight.

Dinner: On your own at the airport.

Evening: Fly to Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), and transfer to your hotel.

Day 17 Ho Chi Minh City • Mekong Delta discovery

- Destination: Ho Chi Minh City
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Muong Thanh Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Explore Vietnam's famous Mekong Delta. En route, we'll visit a hammock café for a taste of one of the country's most famous beverages: Vietnamese coffee. Vietnam is the second-largest coffee producer in the world after Brazil, and the most popular way to consume the bold, local brew is iced with sweetened condensed milk.

Upon arrival at My Tho, the gateway to the Mekong, we'll head to the dock where a motorized wooden rice barge will be waiting for us. During our cruise, we'll witness everyday life on both sides of the Mekong—from colorful fishing vessels to houses wading into the river on stilts. Our boat will pull into Vam

Xep, a natural canal that courses through a canopy of mangroves. We'll disembark for a brief visit to the home of a local family who lives along the canal's banks. Then, we'll board a private *sampan* for an O.A.T.-exclusive ride along the canal. *Sampans* are like local houseboats and are the traditional forms of transportation in the delta, built to navigate narrow channels and waterways that deep-hulled, motorized boats cannot.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Then, we'll walk to a coconut candy workshop to learn about making the sweet *keo dua* the region is known for. Following our lesson and tasting, a motorized boat will take us back to the pier, where our bus will be waiting to take us back to Ho Chi Minh. The balance of the day is free for your own discoveries. You may head to the War Remnants Museum where you can get a glimpse into the harsh realities of war and its effects on a society. You'll find an impressive collection of armored vehicles, bomb remnants, historical photos, and artillery weapons on display here.

Dinner: On your own—perhaps you and your fellow travelers will explore the area around the hotel in search of a restaurant where you can savor traditional cuisine. Perhaps you'll try a local favorite—such as *bahn tam bi*, thick tapioca noodles served with pickled vegetables, pork sausage, a meatball, and a dense coconut sauce.

Evening: You are free to explore more of this energetic city, return to your room to rest before your explorations tomorrow, or join fellow travelers in the main hotel area for a nightcap to discuss the day's activities.

Day 18 Ho Chi Minh City • Visit Independence Palace • Optional Saigon street food adventure tour

- Destination: Ho Chi Minh City
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Muong Thanh Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Depart for a city tour. Our first stop is the Catholic Cathedral of Notre Dame, where we'll admire the red-brick façade before discovering the Central Post Office. Then, we'll head to the Independence Palace, the home of the former president and site of the Fall of Saigon which ended the Vietnam War. We'll conclude our tour with a visit to a secret bunker used to house communities during the Vietnam War.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Free for your own discoveries. Perhaps you'll take the elevator up 49 floors of the Bitexco Financial Tower—the city's tallest building—where you can take in sweeping views of Ho Chi Minh City from the observation deck.

Or, you may wish to join our optional tour, which includes an introduction to various street foods throughout Saigon.

Dinner: On your own if you don't choose to join our optional tour. Ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations on some of the best places for local fare, like *bun bo nam bo*, a dry noodle dish that combines a symphony of flavors and textures.

Evening: On your own—you may retire to your room to rest before tomorrow's explorations. Or, perhaps you'll stroll down Nguyen Hue Street to get a true taste of the city's nightlife.

Day 19 Ho Chi Minh City • Visit Cu Chi Tunnels

- Destination: Ho Chi Minh City
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Muong Thanh Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Visit the Cu Chi Tunnels—a 125-mile-long underground maze where thousands of fighters and villagers hid and fought during the Vietnam War, referred to by locals as the “American War.” The South Vietnamese Communists, or Viet Cong, built this vast network of tunnels in and around the district of Cu Chi and worked continually over 25 years to expand the multi-level network. The tunnels—which include mess halls, meeting rooms, small factories, and vast ammunition stores—allowed the Viet Cong to control large areas near Saigon. Today, the Cu Chi Tunnels provide invaluable insight into the war era, and we'll get a unique glimpse of the site as we explore an area of the tunnels most American tourists don't typically visit.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

After our meal, we'll have the chance to interact with some villagers who were born and raised in Cu Chi. We'll learn how they made the unimaginable choice of which side to support during the war—the ‘enemy,’ or their own countrymen. They will share with us how they feel today about America, which will in turn help us to better understand their daily lives and their hopes for the future.

Afternoon: You're free to make your own discoveries. Perhaps you'll indulge your curiosity at the Maison Saigon Marou café. Discover the country's original chocolate maker and sample some of his sweet creations.

Dinner: We'll gather for a Farewell Dinner at a local restaurant.

Evening: On your own—you are free to return to your room to pack and rest before your return flight home tomorrow, or join fellow travelers in the main hotel area for a nightcap to discuss the highlights of your adventure.

Day 20 Return to U.S. or begin your post-trip extension

- Included Meals: Breakfast

Breakfast: Travelers who are returning home will enjoy a breakfast box provided by the hotel early this morning. Travelers who are joining us

on our post-trip extension to *Northern Vietnam: From Hanoi to the Hill Tribes of Sapa* will be served breakfast at the hotel.

Early morning: Travelers who are returning to the U.S. will depart the hotel this morning for their flight home.

Morning: Travelers joining us on our post-trip extension will depart for Hanoi later this morning.

END YOUR ADVENTURE WITH AN OPTIONAL POST-TRIP EXTENSION

7 nights in Northern Vietnam: From Hanoi to the Hill Tribes of Sapa

Day 1 Fly to Hanoi, Vietnam • Explore Old Quarter

Day 2 Duong Lam village • **Home-Hosted Lunch** • Conversation about turning private land into a cemetery

Day 3 Hanoi • Explore French Quarter • Visit Ho Chi Minh mausoleum • Optional Hanoi local life & food adventure

Day 4 Overland to Sapa • Visit Lao Cai

Day 5 Trek to Lao Chai and Ta Van Villages

Day 6 Transfer to Hanoi • Visit Sin Chai village • Vietnam-China border visit

Day 7 Hanoi

Day 8 Return to U.S.

OPTIONAL TOURS

During your trip you will be able to book optional tours directly with your Trip Experience Leader. He or she will ask you to confirm the payment for these tours by filling out a payment form. Optional tours can only be purchased with a credit or debit card. We accept Visa, MasterCard, and Discover credit cards. We also accept Visa and MasterCard debit cards, but it must be a debit card that allows you to sign for purchases.

In order to correctly process these charges, there can be a delay of 2–3 months from the date of your return for the charges to be posted to your account. Therefore we ask that you use a card that will not expire in the 2–3 months following your return.

Please note: Optional tour prices are listed in U.S. dollar estimates determined at the time of publication and are subject to change. Optional tours may vary.

Traditional Puppet Show, Jumbo Ride & Dinner

(Day 10 \$80 per person)

At a local theater, you'll watch a traditional Laotian puppet show, which typically depicts tales from local folklore. Then, take an exciting jumbo ride through the city's energetic streets, stopping to witness the iconic Patuxai war monument. After, we'll tap into Vientiane's culinary scene at a local restaurant where we'll enjoy dinner and toast to our discoveries.

Saigon Street Food Adventure

(Day 18 \$80 per person)

Depart by scooter for a culinary adventure through the streets of Saigon. First, you'll stop to try *banh mi*, a savory Vietnamese sandwich. Next you'll sample local seafood delicacies before rounding out your meal with a traditional dessert such as flan.

Banteay Srei

(Day 16 \$60 per person)

Visit Banteay Srei, one of the oldest and most beautifully preserved temple sites in Cambodia. Built in AD 967, Banteay Srei means "Citadel of Women," and is recognized as a tribute to female beauty. The structures here have been carved in painstaking detail out of sandstone with detail as intricate as a woven tapestry—a testament to the craft of the original artisans. The temple rises out of a tangle of forest some 20 miles from Angkor. This tour also offers a glimpse into the daily life of rural Cambodia, as we stop to visit a Khmer noodle maker.

PRE-TRIP

Thailand: Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai & the River Kwai

INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| » All internal transportation | » Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader |
| » 8 nights accommodation | » Gratuities for drivers and luggage porters |
| » 17 meals—8 breakfasts, 6 lunches, and 3 dinners | » All transfers |
| » 9 small group activities | |

PRE-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

Before your Ancient Kingdoms: Thailand, Laos, Cambodia & Vietnam adventure, experience another side of Thailand. On this extension, you'll dive into the country's World War II past during a visit to the original bridge on the River Kwai, which you'll see on foot and by boat. Then, venture up to northern Thailand where cultural treasures abound—from discovering the Golden Triangle's complicated history to meeting members of the Karen Long Neck Village, and experiencing the inner workings of an elephant care center.

Day 1 Depart U.S.

- Destination: Bangkok

Fly to Bangkok, Thailand.

Day 2 Arrive in Bangkok, Thailand

- Destination: Bangkok
- Accommodations: Evergreen Laurel Hotel or similar

Afternoon: Arrive in Bangkok this afternoon and transfer to our hotel, where we'll join travelers who arrived early in Bangkok before their pre-trip extension. The rest of the day is free for your own discoveries. You may choose to relax at the hotel, or explore Bangkok on your own.

Dinner: On your own—your Trip Experience Leader can provide you with restaurant recommendations. You may choose to find

a restaurant that serves traditional *tom yum goong*, a soup dish made with shrimp and a variety of spices.

Evening: Enjoy free time this evening. You may retire to your room to rest before tomorrow's travels, or you may choose to find a nearby bar where you can grab a drink with your fellow travelers.

Day 3 Fly to Chiang Mai

- Destination: Chiang Mai
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Amora Hotel Tapae or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Fly to Chiang Mai.

Lunch: On your own at the airport.

Afternoon: Upon arrival, transfer to the hotel and enjoy free time to settle in or explore on your own.

Later, we'll reconvene for an orientation walk around the vicinity of our hotel. Take this opportunity to ask any questions you may have about your new surroundings.

Dinner: At a local restaurant.

Evening: Free to retire to your room to rest or venture out to a bar where you can your fellow travelers can grab a drink together.

Day 4 Chiang Mai • Visit local village • Waterfall hike

- Destination: Chiang Mai
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Amora Hotel Tapae or similar

Activity Note: Hiking in Mae Kampong Village will involve walking for 2 hours on uneven surfaces in the woods, partly uphill with no handrail. Walking sticks are recommended.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Drive to a local village, where we'll meet with residents to learn about their traditions of basket and furniture production. Next, we'll head to the nearby village of Mae Kampong. Upon arrival, we'll depart for a short hike through the surrounding forest. Keep a lookout for native flora. Our hike concludes at the base of a stunning waterfall, where we'll have a chance to take a dip or simply revel in the pristine nature around us.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Enjoy free time to explore for the remainder of the day. You may wish to visit the Chiang Mai City Arts and Cultural Center to get a sense of the history here.

Dinner: On your own. You may ask our Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Evening: You are free to retire to your room to rest before our discoveries tomorrow. Or, you may choose to experience Chiang Mai's nightlife with your fellow travelers.

Day 5 Chiang Mai • Karen hill tribe village visit • Elephant care center visit

- Destination: Chiang Mai
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Amora Hotel Tapae or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll board pickup trucks and drive to the Karen Long Neck Village. During our time here, we'll discover this group's age-old traditions, including how the women of the village wear large rings around their necks to give the appearance of elongated necks. Next, we'll depart the village for a visit to a nearby elephant care center. Here, we'll meet a *mahout*, a local who takes care of the elephants, to learn more about these gentle giants, and we may even have a chance to feed and help bathe the elephants living at the center.

Lunch: At the elephant care center.

Afternoon: Drive back to the hotel, where you'll have free time to rest or venture out to explore on your own. You may choose to visit Suan Buak Haad Park where you can relax and people watch, or you can join in on one of the activities that the park hosts, including yoga.

Dinner: On your own. Your Trip Experience Leader can provide suggestions.

Evening: Free for your own discoveries. You can retire to your room to pack before we leave Chiang Mai tomorrow, or ask your Trip Experience Leader for recommendations.

Day 6 Chiang Mai • Visit Wat Rong Khun • Overland to Chiang Rai

- Destination: Chiang Rai
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Wiang Inn Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll head to Chiang Rai, stopping en route for a break, lunch, and also to visit the famous White Temple.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Arrive at Wat Rong Khun, commonly referred to as the "White Temple." This contemporary, and controversial, temple was constructed in 1997 by local artist Chalermchai Kositpipa. The striking all-white exterior is the least shocking aspect of this architectural treasure. Access the temple by crossing over a bridge that was built over a pit of reaching arms, meant to symbolize souls reaching up from hell. Then, step inside Wat Rong Khun where you'll see an interesting blend of Buddhist art and murals of pop culture icons, including Harry Potter and Michael Jackson. While photography is prohibited in this temple, it will surely be an experience that you won't forget.

Afterward, we'll continue on to Chiang Rai and check in to our hotel. Enjoy free time to start exploring on your own before we gather later for an orientation walk.

Dinner: On your own—you can ask our Trip Experience Leader for recommendations during our orientation walk. Perhaps you'll seek out a restaurant that serves *tom kha kai*, a sweet coconut soup made with chicken.

Evening: You are free to retire to your room to rest, or you may choose to find a bar in the city where you and your fellow travelers can grab a drink together and discuss your experience thus far.

Day 7 Chiang Rai • Golden Triangle • Visit Opium Museum

- Destination: Chiang Rai
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Wiang Inn Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Depart for the Golden Triangle. Upon arrival, we'll have the opportunity to see where the borders of Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar (Burma) meet as we walk along the Mekong River. Then, we'll visit the Opium Museum, where we'll get an in-depth look at the history of the opium industry in northern Thailand. At one time, the hill tribes in this region relied on the cultivation of opium for survival—including several bands of the Chinese nationalist followers of Chiang Kai Shek, who have been living here (somewhat in hiding and in dwindling numbers) since the Revolution. But times have changed. The government has established many programs to introduce more viable crops, and most of the people are law-abiding farmers.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Enjoy the rest of the afternoon on your own to make independent discoveries. Perhaps you'll visit the Baan Dam, or "Black House." This complex is actually made up of 15 buildings that were designed by the artist Thawan Duchanee to hold a large collection of taxidermy.

Dinner: On your own. Check with your Trip Experience Leader for suggestions.

Evening: On your own to explore Chiang Rai as you wish. Or, you may choose to stay at the hotel where you can retire to your room to pack before we leave Chiang Rai tomorrow.

Day 8 Fly to Bangkok • Overland to Kanchanaburi • River Kwai bridge walk

- Destination: Kanchanaburi
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hintok River Camp or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Fly to Bangkok. Upon arrival, we'll depart for the River Kwai, located in Kanchanaburi Province.

Lunch: At a local restaurant en route to the River Kwai.

Afternoon: The River Kwai is located in a green region where the riverside scenery belies its dramatic history, portrayed in the film *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. It was here that Allied prisoners of war (POW) and Asian conscripts were forced to build the infamous World War II railway. In the summer of 1942, World War II was raging across Europe and Asia. The Allies were rapidly capturing the sea routes to Burma, forcing the Japanese to develop an overland supply route from the east to support their troops. The Japanese decided that the most viable option was a railway that followed the River Kwai through the dense jungle on either side. About 200,000 Asian laborers and 61,000 Allied POWs built this 260-mile stretch of rail in abominable conditions—for every half-mile of track laid, 38 POWs perished.

During our visit, our Trip Experience Leader will share more of the history of this iconic site before we depart for our accommodations for the evening.

Dinner: At our camp.

Evening: On your own. Perhaps you'll retire to your room to get some sleep, or relax with fellow travelers.

Day 9 Discover Hellfire Pass • Boat ride on the River Kwai

- Destination: Kanchanaburi
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hintok River Camp

Breakfast: At the camp.

Morning: Set off for the Hellfire Pass Museum. Here, we'll trace the turbulent history of the "Death Railroad," followed by a visit to the former River Kwai Railway. The area is now peaceful, but many lives were lost during the construction of one of the most difficult sections of the railway. We'll have the chance to walk over the railway before driving to a nearby pier. Our small group will then board a longtail speedboat, and we'll see the infamous bridge from another perspective as we cruise on the River Kwai.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Drive back to camp, and enjoy free time this afternoon. You may choose to see Kanchanaburi from another perspective when you zip-line through the region's verdant forest. Or, perhaps you'll visit the Lawa Cave where you'll witness stalactites and stalagmites all around.

Dinner: At a local restaurant.

Evening: You are free to retire to your room or explore on your own.

Day 10 Transfer to Bangkok • Join main trip

- Destination: Bangkok
- Included Meals: Breakfast

Breakfast: A boxed breakfast at camp.

Morning: Transfer to your hotel in Bangkok and begin our *Ancient Kingdoms: Thailand, Laos, Cambodia & Vietnam* adventure.

POST-TRIP

Northern Vietnam: From Hanoi to the Hill Tribes of Sapa

INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| » All internal transportation | » Services of a local O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader |
| » 7 nights accommodation | » Gratuities for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters |
| » 15 meals—7 breakfasts, 6 lunches, and 2 dinners | » All transfers |
| » 9 small group activities | |

POST-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

See Northern Vietnam from two perspectives when we explore the region's exciting capital and scenic countryside. Feel the pulse of cosmopolitan Hanoi during a tour, then leave the city behind when we travel through spectacular landscapes, passing expansive rice fields and mountains cloaked in vegetation on our way to remote villages. We'll meet Vietnam's distinct hill tribes, including the Black H'mong tribe who is known for their weaving and indigo-dyeing, before capping off our discoveries back in Hanoi.

Day 1 Fly to Hanoi, Vietnam • Explore Old Quarter

- Destination: Hanoi
- Included Meals: Dinner
- Accommodations: Golden Lotus Hotel or similar

Morning: Fly to Hanoi, and transfer to your hotel.

Lunch: On your own. You may venture out in search of a restaurant that serves local dishes like *bánh mì*, a sandwich that combines French and Vietnamese influences.

Afternoon: Free to rest or explore independently.

Later, our group will gather for a trip briefing with Trip Experience Leader. We'll review our itinerary in more detail (including any changes that may need to occur).

After, we'll enjoy a walking tour of Hanoi's Old Quarter. While the Old Quarter boasts a modern appearance, its history can be traced back some 1,000 years when artisan workshops around the palace of Emperor Ly Thai To joined into guilds to safeguard their trade secrets. The guilds have disappeared, but the craftsmen here have held onto the tradition of grouping their shops by specialty on each street. The neighborhood's low-rise shops date back to the 15th century, with French shutters and balconies added during the early 20th century.

Dinner: At a local restaurant.

Evening: The rest of the evening is on your own. You may retire to your room to rest before tomorrow's discoveries. Or, you may relax on the hotel's terrace—weather permitting.

Day 2 Duong Lam village • Home-Hosted Lunch • Conversation about turning private land into a cemetery

- Destination: Hanoi
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Golden Lotus Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Drive to the ancient village of Duong Lam, the first Vietnamese village to be declared a national relic. This rural settlement is known for its wooden and laterite houses, which are approximately 400 years old. We'll walk around the village, stopping to collect ingredients at a local farm. Next, we'll continue on to one of the ancient houses, where we'll be welcomed by the owner. Here, we'll learn to make a few regional delicacies, which we'll enjoy for lunch.

Lunch: We'll enjoy a **Home-Hosted Lunch** with a local family and savor the flavors of our meal.

Afternoon: Following lunch, we'll bid our hosts farewell and take a short walk to the home of a local woman, where we'll discuss a contentious issue: private land being seized and converted to cemeteries.

Head back to Hanoi, where you'll have the rest of the day to make your own discoveries. You may choose visit the Vietnamese Women's Museum where you can trace evolution of women's roles here throughout history.

Dinner: On your own—you can venture out into the city to find dinner at a local restaurant this evening. You may want to find a place that serves traditional dishes like refreshing spring rolls, known as *goi cuon*. Or, you may stay at the hotel to have dinner.

Evening: Later, you may grab a cocktail at the bar with your fellow travelers to discuss today's discoveries.

Day 3 Hanoi • Explore French Quarter • Visit Ho Chi Minh mausoleum • Optional Hanoi local life & food adventure

- Destination: Hanoi
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Golden Lotus Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: We'll set off to explore more of Hanoi. We'll start today's tour in the French Quarter at the mausoleum of Ho Chi Minh, an impressive marble and granite structure that houses the preserved remains of Vietnam's beloved national leader. After exploring the Ho Chi Minh complex, we'll visit the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology. Here, we'll learn about the country's myriad ethnic groups.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: The rest of the day is free to make your own discoveries. Perhaps you'll visit the Temple of Literature, Vietnam's first university. Constructed in 1076 to honor Confucius and high-ranking scholars, its five grassy courtyards feature several architectural styles from this 1,000-year-old civilization. Or, you may visit the Hoa Lo Prison, also referred to as the "Hanoi Hilton." Hoa Lo was constructed during the French occupation of Vietnam in the 19th century and it was active until the late 20th century. Now the majority of the prison serves as a museum, which gives insight into its controversial history. Learn about the POWs that were held here and the overcrowding and unsanitary living conditions that they were subjected to.

Or, you might choose to join us on an optional Hanoi local life and food adventure through the lesser-known sections of the city. We'll explore aboard a unique form of transportation as we ride either a UAZ (a Russian military vehicle similar to a jeep) or a motorbike through the

narrow lanes of Hanoi's backstreets, viewing scenes of everyday life in city neighborhoods that tourists rarely visit.

This optional tour also features a visit to Hanoi's "Train Street", where shops and homes closely flank a narrow (and active) train track. We'll pause for refreshment, enjoying a drink as we observe the frantic rhythm of this neighborhood, where shoppers and diners sit a stone's throw away from passing locomotives. We'll also sample some of Hanoi's famous street food, including fresh local beer, and unique beverages like *cà phê trứng*—Vietnamese dessert coffee topped with a foam of egg yolk and condensed milk. Then, we'll cruise around different sections of the city before stopping at a casual local spot for dinner.

Dinner: Travelers on today's optional tour will have dinner at a casual local restaurant. Otherwise, dinner is on your own—your Trip Experience Leader can recommend a restaurant.

Evening: On your own. Travelers on the optional tour will arrive back at the hotel early this evening.

Day 4 Overland to Sapa • Visit Lao Cai

- Destination: Sapa
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Sapa Charm Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Journey to Sapa via Lao Cai, located at the heart of the Red and Nanxi rivers, bordering China.

Lunch: At a local restaurant in Lao Cai.

Afternoon: We'll continue our drive to Sapa, and check in to our hotel.

Later, we'll head out for an orientation walk, led by your Trip Experience Leader. Sapa is located a mile above sea level, and boasts a lush, vivid green landscape of rice paddies, forests, and waterfalls. The heart of the timber industry, Sapa is also the place where members of many hill tribes gather to socialize and sell their handcrafts. After, you'll have a few hours to yourself to settle in or start exploring on your own. Perhaps you'll ride in a cable car to the top of Fansipan Mountain to soak up views of the Muong Hoa Valley and the Hoang Lien Son Mountains.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: On your own—you are free to spend the rest of the evening as you wish. You may wish to retire to your room to rest before our explorations tomorrow.

Day 5 Trek to Lao Chai and Ta Van Villages

- Destination: Sapa
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Sapa Charm Hotel or similar

Activity Note: The hike will be about 3 hours walking mostly up and downhill on uneven terrain on a trail without a handrail. It will be wet and slippery during rainy days in January and February.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Head out for a hike on a nearby mountain slope. From this vantage point, we'll enjoy sweeping views of villages below, mountains beyond, and the meandering river. Our trek takes us down into the Lao Chai Village, home to 100 Black H'mong people. Recognized by their embroidered indigo clothing, the Black H'mong work and live off the land. They are also known for their hemp and brocade goods, which we'll notice in many places in and around Sapa.

Lunch: At a local restaurant in Sapa.

Afternoon: Free to explore. Choose to rest after the morning's activities, or continue exploring Sapa on your own. Perhaps you'll hike up Hamrong Mountain, stopping along a way at a mountainside garden that boasts over 6,000 orchids.

Dinner: On your own, whenever you'd like. Your Trip Experience Leader will be happy to provide recommendations for preferred dining options in Sapa. You may choose to seek out a classic Vietnamese dish like *bánh mì*, a sandwich that combines French and Vietnamese influence.

Evening: Free. Perhaps you'll enjoy a nighttime stroll through Sapa or a nightcap at the hotel bar.

Day 6 Transfer to Hanoi • Visit Sin Chai village • Vietnam-China border visit

- Destination: Hanoi
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Golden Lotus Hotel

Activity Note: The hike will be about 3 hours walking mostly up and downhill on uneven terrain on a trail without a handrail. It will be wet and slippery during rainy days in January and February.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Set off for Sin Chai. Located at the foot of Fansipan Mountain—"the roof of Indochina"—Sin Chai is home to an agricultural community of Black H'mong people, who preserve the practices of weaving and indigo-dyeing. We'll hike the rest of the way to the village. There, we'll visit with villagers, explore the local school, and help teachers cook lunch for their students.

Lunch: At a local restaurant in Lao Cai.

Afternoon: Depart for Hanoi, stopping en route at the border with China, where we'll see beyond to the Chinese village of Ha Kou across the river. Then, we'll continue on our journey to Hanoi and check in to our hotel.

Dinner: On your own. Check with your Trip Experience Leader for suggestions.

Evening: Free to explore or rest for the night.

Day 7 Hanoi

- Destination: Hanoi
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Golden Lotus Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Free to make your own discoveries. Perhaps you'll explore the Fine Arts Museum of Vietnam where a mix of historical pieces contrast more contemporary artwork.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Some travelers will transfer to the airport this afternoon or evening for their return flights home; others will fly out tomorrow morning.

Dinner: Enjoy dinner on your own—you're free to indulge in more local favorites. Perhaps you'll try a popular street food like *bánh trứng kẹp* (grilled egg, pork, and shrimp on rice paper). Your Trip Experience Leader can tell you where to find this "Vietnamese pizza."

Evening: On your own—your Trip Experience Leader is happy to provide you recommendations. Or, you may choose to retire to your room to pack if your flight leaves tomorrow morning.

Day 8 Return to U.S.

- Included Meals: Breakfast

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Travelers who did not depart yesterday evening will transfer to the airport for return flights to the U.S.

OPTIONAL TOUR

Hanoi Local Life & Food Adventure

(Day 3 \$70 per person)

Join us on an excursion through the backstreets of Hanoi to discover local life and cuisine in the lesser-known parts of the city. We'll explore aboard a unique form of transportation as we ride a vintage UAZ (a Russian military vehicle similar to a jeep) or a motorbike through the narrow lanes of Hanoi's backstreets, viewing scenes of life in city neighborhoods that tourists rarely visit.

We'll visit Hanoi's "Train Street", where shops and homes closely flank a narrow (and active) train track. We'll pause for refreshment, enjoying a drink as we observe the frantic rhythm of this neighborhood, where shoppers and diners sit a stone's throw away from passing locomotives.

Throughout our optional tour, we'll try samples of the city's famous street food specialties, such as delectable noodle dishes, fresh local beer, and unique concoctions like cà phê trứng—Vietnamese dessert coffee topped with a foam of egg yolk and condensed milk.

After making our way through various sections of the city, we'll conclude our discoveries at a local restaurant and sit down to a casual meal before returning to your hotel.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS & ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Your Passport

- Must be in good condition
- Must be valid for at least 6 months after your scheduled return to the U.S.
- Must have the required number of blank pages (details below)
- The blank pages must be labeled “Visas” at the top. Pages labeled “Amendments and Endorsements” are not acceptable

Need to Renew Your Passport?

Contact the National Passport Information Center (NPIC) at **1-877-487-2778**, or visit the U.S. Department of State’s official website at **www.travel.state.gov** for information on obtaining a new passport or renewing your existing passport. The U.S. Department of State allows for passport renewal by mail or, for applicable citizens, renewal online. We advise you review the process and requirements for online passport renewal on the official website.

You may also contact our recommended visa service company, PVS International, at **1-800-556-9990** for help with your passport.

Recommended Blank Pages

Please confirm that your passport has enough blank pages for this adventure.

- **Main trip only:** If you are taking only the main trip, you will need 9 blank passport pages.
- **Pre-trip extension to Thailand:** No additional pages needed.
- **Post-trip extension to Northern Vietnam:** No additional pages needed.
- **Stopover in Bangkok, Doha, Istanbul, or Singapore:** You will need to add 2 additional pages to the applicable total listed above.
- **Stopover in Denpasar, Dubai, Seoul, Taipei, or Tokyo:** You will need to add an additional page to the applicable total listed above.

IMPORTANT: Our regional office reports that some travelers on this adventure have been fined by local authorities for not having enough blank pages. At time of writing the fines were roughly \$50-\$80 and could happen in any and all of the countries on the trip. Please double-check your passport before you leave. The numbers we have given above may seem like a lot, but the goal is for you to have more blank pages than you actually need to complete the trip; this will help you avoid a fine.

Visas Required

We'll be sending you a detailed **Visa Packet with instructions, application forms, and fees about 100 days prior to your departure.** In the meantime, we're providing the information below as a guideline on what to expect. This information is for U.S. citizens only. All visas and fees are subject to change.

- **Thailand: No visa required.** For a U.S. citizen, a visa is not required for entry into Thailand on this adventure.
- **Vietnam: Visa required. Can only be obtained in advance.** You must obtain your visa for Vietnam before you leave home; it cannot be obtained on arrival.
- **Laos and Cambodia: Visas required. We recommend you obtain these in advance.** Although these visas may be obtained upon your arrival, we recommend you obtain them in advance. Entry requirements can change at any time; obtaining your visas in advance decreases the likelihood that you will encounter problems at the border and may protect you if entry requirements subsequently change.
- **Qatar (optional stopover only): Visa required.** For U.S. citizens, a free visa waiver can be obtained at arrival for a stay of 30 days or less as long as your passport is valid for the next 6 months and you have proof of a return flight.
- **U.A.E (optional stopover only): Visa required.** Currently, the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.) allows U.S. citizens to get a tourist visa free of charge on arrival in Dubai.
- **Indonesia, Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea, or Japan (optional stopovers only): No visas required.** A visa is not required for U.S. citizens for stays of up to 90 days.

Traveling Without a U.S. Passport?

If you are not a U.S. citizen, or if your passport is from any country other than the U.S., it is your responsibility to check with your local consulate, embassy, or a visa services company about visa requirements. We recommend the services of PVS International, a national visa service located in Washington D.C.; they can be reached at **1-800-556-9990** or **www.pvsinternational.org**.

Traveling With a Minor?

Some governments may require certain documentation for minors to enter and depart the country or to obtain a visa (if applicable). For further detail on the required documentation, please contact your local embassy or consulate.

Emergency Photocopies of Key Documents

We recommend you carry color photocopies of key documents including the photo page of your passport plus any applicable visas, air itinerary, credit cards (front and back), and an alternative form of ID. Add emergency phone numbers like your credit card company and the number for your travel protection plan. Store copies separate from the originals.

If you plan to email this information to yourself, please keep in mind that email is not always secure; consider using password protection or encryption. Also email is not always available worldwide. As an alternative, you could load these documents onto a flash drive instead, which can do double-duty as a place to backup photos during your trip.

Overseas Taxes & Fees

This tour may have taxes and fees that cannot be included in your airline ticket price because you are required to pay them in person onsite. All taxes are subject to change without notice and can be paid in cash (either U.S. or local currency).

RIGORS, VACCINES & GENERAL HEALTH

Is This Adventure Right for You?

Please review the information below prior to departing on this adventure. We reserve the right for our Trip Experience Leaders to modify participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their condition would adversely affect the health, safety, or enjoyment of themselves or of other travelers.

PACING

- 6 locations in 19 days with some early mornings

PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

- Not appropriate for travelers using wheelchairs, walkers, or other mobility aids
- You must be able to walk 3 miles unassisted and participate in 5-7 hours of physical activities each day
- Our activities include a 4-hour walk through 3 miles of Angkor Wat on uneven surfaces and up 300 non-consecutive steps on Day 15
- We reserve the right for Trip Experience Leaders to restrict participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their limitations impact the group's experience
- You may encounter animals on this trip. We make every effort to keep these encounters safe, however animals may behave unpredictably or dangerously at times. Please use caution when interacting with animals on this trip: Keep a safe distance, stay alert, and respect the animals

CLIMATE

- Tropical, with daytime temperatures reaching 95°F with high levels of humidity, especially between March-May
- Potential for heavy rains between July-October
- Average temperature is between 40-60°F from December-February, 90°F from February-October, and can reach over 100°F from March-August
- Humidity from March-August has an average of 70-85% with an average high of 80% through October

TERRAIN & TRANSPORTATION

- Travel over some bumpy, unpaved roads; climb uneven stairways at ancient ruins; and walk over uneven ground
- Travel primarily via air-conditioned 20-passenger coach (no toilet on board)

- Other modes of transportation include: ox cart; *tuk-tuks* (three-wheeled vehicles); *jumbos* (three-wheeled vehicles); *remork* (a trailer pulled by a motorcycle); motorbike taxi; motorized boat on the Mekong, which will require agility to embark; and a horse-drawn carriage ride on an optional trip extension
- One 8-hour bus ride, 3 internal flights with potential for delays, and 1 high-speed train
- One overland transfer of about eight hours in an air-conditioned bus, with included stops for lunch and activities en route

FLIGHT INFORMATION

- Travel time will be 20-27 hours and will most likely have two connections

ACCOMMODATIONS & FACILITIES

- All accommodations feature private baths and Western-style toilet facilities
- Outside of our accommodations, some public restrooms will be limited to Asian-style squat toilets

Steps to Take Before Your Trip

Before you leave on this adventure, we recommend the following:

- Check with the CDC for their recommendations for the countries you'll be visiting. You can contact them online at **www.cdc.gov/travel** or by phone at **1-800-232-4636**.
- Have a medical checkup with your doctor at least 6 weeks before your trip.
- Pick up any necessary medications, both prescription and over-the-counter.
- Have a dental and/or eye checkup. (Recommended, but less urgent)

No Vaccines Required

Recommended Vaccines

At the time of writing there were no required vaccines for this trip. The CDC recommends that all travelers be up to date on their routine vaccinations and on basic travel vaccines like Hepatitis A and Typhoid, but these are suggestions only. However, this could change in future so we encourage you to check with the CDC yourself before meeting with your doctor.

Medication Suggestions

- An antibiotic medication for gastrointestinal illness
- Prescription pain medication in the unlikely event of an injury in a remote location

- Anti-malaria medication—At time of writing, the CDC reported that the risk of malaria was low in Thailand and Vietnam, but was moderate in Laos and Cambodia. For this reason, the CDC suggested that travelers discuss an anti-malarial medication with their doctor. Anti-malarial medication can have strong side effects, so be certain to ask your doctor first.

Traveling with Medications

- **Pack medications in your carry-on bag** to avoid loss and to have them handy.
- **Keep medicines in their original, labeled containers** for a quicker security screen at the airport and a better experience if you get stopped by customs while overseas.
- **Bring copies of your prescriptions**, written using the generic drug name rather than a brand name to be prepared for any unforeseen loss of your medications.

We recommend checking with the State Department for medication restrictions by country: **travel.state.gov** (Go to “Find International Travel Information”, select “Country Information”, then enter the country into the search bar; if you don’t see any medications specifically mentioned under the “Health” section, then you can presume major U.S. brands should be OK).

Staying Healthy on Your Trip

Jet Lag Tips

- Start your trip well-rested.
- Begin a gradual transition to your new time zone before you leave or switch to your destination time zone when you get on the plane.
- Attempt to sleep and eat according to the new schedule.
- Avoid heavy eating and drinking caffeine or alcoholic beverages right before—and during—your flight.
- Drink plenty of water and/or fruit juice while flying
- Stretch your legs, neck, and back periodically while seated on the plane.
- After arrival, avoid the temptation to nap.
- Don’t push yourself to see a lot on your first day.
- Try to stay awake your first day until after dinner.

Allergies

If you have any serious allergies or dietary restrictions, we advise you to notify us at least 30 days prior to your departure. Please call our Travel Counselors at **1-800-221-0814**, and we will communicate them to our regional office. Every effort will be made to accommodate you.

Water

- Tap water on this adventure is not safe to drink, so we recommend you use only bottled water for drinking and brushing your teeth.
- Avoid drinks with ice or salads/fruits unless you first confirm that the ice is made with safe water or the salad/fruit has been washed in safe water. (Fruit you peel yourself should be fine.)
- Hot drinks made with water are safe if they have been boiled.
- Bottled water is readily available for purchase; just be sure to check that the cap is sealed properly before buying.
- Some previous travelers on this adventure have suggested bringing sachets of powdered electrolytes or powdered sports drink with you. If you feel dehydrated, you can mix them with bottled water, and this should help you re-hydrate quickly.

Food

- We've carefully chosen the restaurants for your group meals. Your Trip Experience Leader can suggest restaurants for meals you take on your own.
- When dining on your own, keep in mind that meats sold by street vendors may not have had proper refrigeration.
- Be cautious with non-pasteurized milk products—they may or may not upset your stomach.

Electricity Supply

A constant electricity supply cannot be guaranteed during overnight stays. Travelers dependent on electricity supply for health reasons (as in the case of those with sleep apnea) may want to consider a different O.A.T. adventure.

MONEY MATTERS: LOCAL CURRENCY & TIPPING GUIDELINES

Top Three Tips

- **Carry a mix of different types of payments**, such as U.S. dollars, local currency, an ATM card, and a credit card. Traveler's checks are not accepted in the countries you will be visiting.
- **U.S. dollars should be in excellent condition and dated 2006 or later.** Torn, worn, dirty, or taped U.S. bills may not be accepted.

Local Currency

For current exchange rates, please refer to an online converter tool like www.xe.com/currencyconverter, your bank, or the financial section of your newspaper.

Thailand: Thai Baht (THB)

Laos: Lao kip (LAK)

Cambodia: Cambodian Riel (KHR)

Vietnam: Vietnamese dong (₫)

How to Exchange Money

You can change money when you arrive at banks, most hotels, and money exchange offices. In some countries you do not even need to exchange money at all—you can use U.S. dollars. For information on what type of currency can be used on this trip, see the “Currency” section.

You can also obtain local currency from an ATM. Using a local ATM on an international network will allow you to withdraw money from your U.S. account in local currency; your bank at home will calculate the conversion rate and charge you in U.S. dollars.

Throughout the trip, your Trip Experience Leader can advise you of ATM availability and warn you before you enter areas where there are no ATMs, but will not be able to guarantee which ATM will take your card.

ATMs

When using the ATM, keep in mind that it may only accept cards from local banks, and may not allow cash advances on credit cards; you might need to try more than one ATM or more than one card. Many banks will charge a set fee or a percentage fee each time you use a foreign ATM. We recommend that you check with your bank before you depart. Don't forget to memorize the actual digits of your card's PIN number (many keypads at foreign ATMs do not include letters on their keys—they only display numbers.)

In most countries, ATMs are widely available in major cities. If you are in a rural location, it will likely be harder to find an ATM. If you are visiting a country that has different expectation for ATMs, they will be listed below.

Laos: ATMs can be hard to find in Laos, and the ones that are available may not take American cards.

Cambodia: ATMs are only somewhat available in Cambodia. You'll find them in large cities, but not out in rural areas or at archeological sites. Because U.S. dollars are in widespread use in Cambodia, most ATMs will give you dollars and not local currency.

Vietnam: ATMs are fairly common in Vietnam. Occasionally travelers report having to try more than one bank to find an ATM that works with their U.S.-based card.

Credit & Debit Cards

While traveling, most countries and major cities will accept credit cards. We suggest that you bring one or two, especially if you are planning a large purchase (artwork, jewelry). We also suggest that you bring more than one brand of card (i.e. Visa, MasterCard, American Express) if possible, as not all are accepted around the world. If you are visiting a country that does not commonly accept credit cards, they will be listed below.

Laos: Credit cards are rarely accepted.

Cambodia: Credit cards are somewhat accepted—you'll be able to use them in nicer hotels, shops, and restaurants but not at small businesses.

Vietnam: Credit cards are commonly accepted. However, some businesses in Vietnam do not accept them, so you should carry some cash on you.

Notify Card Providers of Upcoming Travel

Many credit card companies and banks have fraud alert departments that will freeze your card if they see suspicious charges—such as charges or withdrawals from another country. To avoid an accidental security block, it is a good idea to notify your credit card company and/or bank you will be using your cards abroad. You can do this by calling their customer service number a week or two before your departure. Some banks or credit card companies will also let you do this online.

You should also double-check what phone number you could call if you have a problem with a card while you are abroad. Don't assume you can use the 1-800 number printed on the back of your card—most 1 800 numbers don't work outside of the U.S.!

Tipping Guidelines

Of course, whether you tip, and how much, is always at your own discretion. But for those of you who have asked for tipping suggestions, we offer these guidelines:

- **O.A.T. Trip Experience Leader:** It is customary to express a personal “thank you” to your Trip Experience Leader at the end of your trip. As a guideline, many travelers give \$8–\$12 USD (or equivalent in local currency) per person for each day their Trip Experience Leader is with them. *Please note that these tips can only be in cash. If you are taking any of the optional extensions, your Trip Experience Leader during the extension(s) may not be the same as the one on your main trip.*
- **Housekeeping staff at hotels:** \$1–2 per room, per night
- **Waiters:** Tipping waiters is not common practice, but if the service is excellent you may leave about 10% of the bill in appreciation. Your Trip Experience Leader will handle any tips, if appropriate, for included meals.
- **Taxi drivers:** If you are taking a taxi by yourself, keep in mind that tipping is not common practice, but many people simply let the driver keep the change by rounding up the fare to the next whole number.
- **Your Trip Price Includes:** Gratuities are included for local guides, drivers, and luggage porters on your main trip, extensions, and all optional tours.

Please note: For your convenience, tips to O.A.T. staff can be paid in U.S. dollars or local currency. Please do not use personal or traveler’s checks for tips.

AIR, OPTIONAL TOURS & STAYING IN TOUCH

Land Only Travelers & Customized Air

Quick Definitions

- **Land Only:** You will be booking your own international flights. Airport transfers are not included.
- **Air-Inclusive:** You booked international air with us. Airport transfers are included as long as you didn't customize your trip's dates (see next bullet).
- **Arrive Early or Stopover (select adventures only):** If you chose one of these Customization options and purchased air through O.A.T, accommodations and airport transfers are included. However, if you chose one of our Customization options, but did not purchase air through O.A.T., accommodations are included, but airport transfers are not. If you chose one of our customization options, and purchase air through O.A.T. but not the accommodations, the airport transfers are not included. We have included transfer options below.
- **Customization on Your Own:** If you have not purchased air through O.A.T. and decided to arrive early, stay longer, or stop in a connecting city on your own, you are responsible for airport transfers and accommodations. For your convenience, a preliminary list of your included hotels is available on your My Planner at www.oattravel.com/myplanner under "My Reservations" to help you with selecting a hotel for your additional time.

Air Inclusive Travelers

If you have purchased international air with us, there are some points that may be helpful for you to know.

- **Flying with a Travel Companion:** If you're traveling with a companion from a different household, and both of you are beginning and ending your trip at the same airport on the same dates, let us know you'd like to travel together and we'll make every effort to arrange this (please note, however, that this is not always possible). If you request any changes to your flights, please be sure that both you and your companion tell us that you still want to fly together.
- **Selecting Your Seats:** If your airline allows pre-assigned seats, you will be able to select and view them directly from the airline's website after booking. Some airlines will not allow seat confirmation until your reservation is ticketed 45-30 days prior to departure, and/or they may charge a nominal fee. You may locate your itinerary on an airline's website utilizing the Record Locator Number found on the Air Itinerary in your My Planner.

Airport Transfers Can Be Purchased

For eligible flights, airport transfers may be purchased separately as an optional add-on, subject to availability. To be eligible, your flight(s) must meet the following requirements:

- You must fly into or fly home from the same airport as O.A.T. travelers who purchased included airfare.
- Your flight(s) must arrive/depart on the same day that the group arrives or departs.
- If you are arriving early, you must have arranged the hotels through our Arrive Early personalization option

Airport transfers can be purchased up to 45 days prior to your departure; they are not available for purchase onsite. To learn more, or purchase airport transfers, please call our Travel Counselors at **1-800-221-0814**.

If you don't meet the requirements above, you'll need to make your own transfer arrangements. We suggest the Rome to Rio website as a handy resource: www.rome2rio.com

Optional Tours

Optional tours are additional add-on tours that allow you to personalize your adventure by tailoring it to your tastes and needs. And if you decide not to join an optional tour? Then you'll have free time to relax or explore on your own—it's about options, not obligations.

What You Need to Know

- All optional tours are subject to change and availability.
- Optional tours that are reserved with your Trip Experience Leader can be paid for using credit/debit cards only. We accept MasterCard, Visa, and Discover credit cards; we can also take MasterCard or Visa debit cards as long as the card allows you to sign for purchases. (You won't be able to enter a PIN.)
- To ensure that you are charged in U.S. dollars, your payment will be processed by our U.S. headquarters in Boston. This process can take up to three months, so we ask that you only use a card that will still be valid three months after your trip is over. The charge may appear on your credit card statement as being from Boston, MA or may be labeled as "OPT Boston".
- Your Trip Experience Leader will give you details on the optional tours while you're on the trip. But if you'd like to look over descriptions of them earlier, you can do so at any time by referring to your Day-to-Day Itinerary (available online by signing into My Planner at www.oattravel.com/myplanner).

Communicating with Home from Abroad

To ensure you are available during your trip to friends and relatives at home, you will receive two copies of your hotel list, including phone numbers, with your Final Documents. One copy is for you to bring, and one to leave behind with friends or relatives in case they need to contact you during the trip.

Cell Phones

If you want to use your cell phone on the trip, check with your phone provider to see if your phone and service will work outside of the U.S. It may turn out to be cheaper to rent an international phone or buy a SIM card onsite. If you want to use a local SIM, just make certain your phone can accept one.

Calling Apps

We recommend you use WhatsApp while abroad to communicate home and with your Trip Experience Leader while onsite. You will need a Wi-Fi connection if you do not have international coverage. Other calling options include smartphone apps such as Skype or FaceTime. You will need a Wi-Fi connection for these apps and the calls may count towards your phone plan's data allowance. Many smartphones—and some tablets or laptops—come with one of these apps pre-installed or you can download them for free from the appropriate apps store.

Calling Cards and 1-800 Numbers

When calling the U.S. from a foreign country, a prepaid calling card can be useful because it circumvents unexpected charges from the hotel. Calling cards purchased locally are typically the best (less expensive, more likely to work with the local phones, etc.).

One reminder: Do not call U.S. 1-800 numbers outside the continental United States. This can result in costly long distance fees, since 1-800 numbers do not work outside the country.

How to Call Overseas

When calling overseas from the U.S., dial 011 for international exchange, then the country code (indicated by a plus sign: +), and then the number. Note that foreign phone numbers may not have the same number of digits as U.S. numbers; even within a country the number of digits can vary depending on the city and if the phone is a land line or cell phone.

Thailand: +66

Cambodia: +855

Laos: +856

Vietnam: +84

PACKING: WHAT TO BRING & LUGGAGE LIMITS

Luggage Limits

MAIN TRIP LIMITS	
Pieces per person	One checked bag and one carry-on per person.
Weight restrictions	Checked bag is limited to 44 lbs total . Carry-on is limited to 15 lbs total .
Size Restrictions	Standard airline size: checked luggage should not exceed 62 linear inches (length+ width + depth) and carry-on should not exceed 45 linear inches
Luggage Type	Duffel bag or soft-sided suitcase. Please do not bring a hard-sided (clamshell) suitcase.
TRIP EXTENSION(S) LIMITS	
Same as the main trip.	
REMARKS/SUGGESTIONS	
<p>Luggage rules: Luggage rules and limits are set by governmental and airline policy. Enforcement of the rules may include spot checks or may be inconsistent. However one thing is the same across the board: If you are found to have oversized or overweight luggage, you will be subject to additional fees, to be assessed by—and paid to—the airline in question.</p>	

Don't Forget:

- **These luggage limits may change.** If the airline(s) notify us of any changes, we will include an update in your Final Documents booklet.
- It's a good idea to reconfirm baggage restrictions and fees directly with the airline a week or so prior to departure. For your convenience, we maintain a list of the toll-free numbers for the most common airlines on our website in the FAQ section.
- **Baggage fees are not included in your trip price;** they are payable directly to the airlines.
- The luggage limits above are based on your regional flights, which may be less than your international flights. Even if your international airline offers a larger weight limit, you will need to pack according to the lower restrictions.

Your Luggage

- **Checked Luggage:** One duffel bag or suitcase. Look for one with heavy nylon fabric, wrap-around handles, built-in wheels, and a heavy duty lockable zipper. Please do not bring a rigid (plastic shell) suitcase.
- **Carry-on Bag:** You are allowed one carry-on bag per person. We suggest a tote or small backpack that can be used as both a carry-on bag for your flight and to carry your daily necessities—water bottle, camera, etc—during your daily activities.
- **Locks:** For flights that originate in the U.S., you can either use a TSA-approved lock or leave your luggage unlocked. Outside of the U.S. we strongly recommend locking your luggage as a theft-prevention measure.

Clothing Suggestions: Functional Tips

As you will experience a wide range of temperatures and weather conditions, we suggest several layers of clothing. If you like to hand-wash your clothes, look for fabrics that will dry out overnight. You can buy clothing designed especially for travel, with features like wrinkle-resistant fabric or built-in sun protection.

- **Footwear:** You'll be on your feet and walking a lot, sometimes over rough and slippery surfaces, so choose your footwear carefully. The soles of your shoes should offer good traction. You can find especially supportive shoes designed for walking. Light hiking boots might be useful for the ankle support, but they are optional.
- **December and January travel:** If you are traveling during December and January, please bring some warm clothing for Laos; average lows are in the 50–65 degree range.
- **Walking sticks:** Many past travelers have recommended bringing a folding walking stick, sold in most camping stores. An alternative is a folding ski pole. This is very useful when exploring ruins and trails that have no handrails.

Style Hints and Dress Codes

- **Dress on our trip is functional and casual.** The most formal you might need for a city evening would be a sport jacket with no tie for men, a dress and dressy sandals for women—but this is not necessary on this trip—the decision is yours.
- **Wearing shorts is acceptable in most places, except at some religious sites.** Specifically, shorts, knee-baring skirts, sleeveless shirts, and tank tops, are often forbidden in temples, so we suggest that you stick to trousers or a long skirt for temple visits. If you forget and wear shorts on a day that includes a temple visit, all is not lost—temples will generally loan cover-ups to visitors who are perceived as “too bare”—but you must cover up to go inside.
- **TIP:** *Both our regional staff and previous travelers on this adventure have recommended that you bring enough long trousers and sleeved shirts for at least 4–6 temple visits.*

- **It is common practice to remove your shoes inside the temple**, so consider a pair that you can get on/off easily and perhaps a couple extra pairs of socks. (Use these to replace the ones that will get extra dirty in the temples. Or you could designate a couple pairs as your “temple socks” and wear them more than once.)

Recommended Packing Lists

We have included suggestions from Trip Experience Leaders and former travelers to help you pack. These packing lists are only jumping-off points—they offer recommendations based on experience, but not requirements. Each travelers packing list may be different depending on the climate you are used to. We recommend using **www.weather.com** and consulting the “Climate” chapter of this handbook.

And don’t forget a reusable water bottle—you’ll need it to take advantage of any refills we offer as we are working to eliminate single-use plastic bottles on all of our trips.

Recommended Clothing

- ☐ Shirts: A mixture of short and long-sleeved shirts in a breathable fabric, like cotton or cotton-blend. Polo shirts are more versatile than T-shirts. For temple visits, you’ll want tops with sleeves (bare shoulders are considered inappropriate for religious sites).
- ☐ Trousers and/or jeans: Comfortable and loose fitting. No matter the time of year, you’ll want a few long trousers or jeans for temple visits. See “Style Hints and Dress Codes” for details.
- ☐ Walking shorts: A longer cut shows the more sensitivity to the local culture, which tends to be modest. Shorts are viewed as inappropriate for visiting a temple, so we suggest you stick to trousers or a long skirt (below the knee or longer) for temple visits. In a pinch you could wear one of the temple’s cover-ups.
- ☐ Shoes and socks: Shoes should be comfortable walking/ running shoes or low-cut hiking shoes, with arch support. A pair of sport sandals with secure ankle strap (such as Tevas) are recommended; flip-flops are not. Because it is common to remove your shoes inside the temples and local homes, bring at least one pair of shoes that you can get on/off easily. You might want a couple extra pairs of socks.
- ☐ Light cotton or wool sweater: Because motor coach air conditioning can be cold.
- ☐ Light rain jacket/windbreaker with hood
- ☐ Wide-brim sun hat
- ☐ Underwear and sleepwear
- ☐ Swimsuit

Seasonal Clothing Recommendations

For winter (December–February):

- ☐ Warm clothing for Laos—days are warm, but nights are cool. The average low temperature is in the range of 50–65 degrees F.

Essential Items

- ☐ Daily essentials: toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, hairbrush or comb, shaving items, deodorant, etc. Our hotels will provide the basics like soap and shampoo, but if you are sensitive to fragrances or new products, you may wish to bring your preferred brands.
- ☐ Spare eyeglasses/contact lenses
- ☐ Sunglasses, 100% UV block
- ☐ Sunscreen, SPF 30 or stronger
- ☐ Insect repellent with DEET (30–35% strength)
- ☐ Cold-water hand-wash laundry soap such as Woolite, plastic clothespins, sink stopper
- ☐ Light folding umbrella
- ☐ Packets of pocket-size tissues or small roll of toilet paper
- ☐ Moisturizer and sun-blocking lip balm
- ☐ Moist towelettes (not individual packets) and/or anti-bacterial “water-free” hand cleanser
- ☐ Flashlight or headlamp, extra batteries/bulb
- ☐ Electrical converter & plug adapter: see “A Word about Electricity” for details
- ☐ Camera gear with extra batteries or battery charger

Medicines & First Aid

- ☐ Your own prescription medicines
- ☐ Travel first aid kit: Band-Aids, headache and pain relief, laxatives and anti-diarrhea tablets, something for upset stomach. Maybe a cold remedy, moleskin foot pads, antibiotic cream, or allergy medication.

- ☐ Sachets of powdered electrolytes or powdered sports drink. If you feel dehydrated, you can mix them with bottled water, and this should help you rehydrate quickly.
- ☐ An antibiotic medication for gastrointestinal illness
- ☐ Optional: Prescription medicine to prevent malaria
- ☐ Optional: A strong prescription pain medication for rare emergency purposes
- ☐ Optional: Motion sickness medicine if you are susceptible

Home-Hosted Visits

Many of our adventures feature a visit with a local family, often as part of the *A Day in the Life* experience. It is customary, though not necessary, to return your hosts' generosity with a small gift. If you do bring a gift, we recommend that you bring something the whole family can enjoy, or something that represents your region, state, or hometown. Get creative and keep it small—peach jelly from Georgia, maple sugar candy from New England, orange blossom soap from California; something that can be used or used up is best. When choosing a gift, be certain to consider the local culture as well. For example, we do not recommend alcohol in Muslim countries because it is forbidden in Islam, and your hosts may be religious. Not all O.A.T. adventures include a Home-Hosted Visit; please check your final itinerary before you depart.

Electricity Abroad

When traveling overseas, the voltage is usually different and the plugs might not be the same shape.

Voltage

Electricity in Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam is 220–230 volts. In the U.S. it is 110 volts. Most of the things a traveler will want to plug in—battery chargers, smartphones, tablets or computers—can run off both 110 and 220–240. But you should check the item or the owner's guide first to confirm this before you plug it in. If you have something that needs 110 volts—like a shaver or a hairdryer—you can bring a transformer to change the current. (But transformers tend to burn out, so it might be better to leave whatever it is at home.)

Plugs

The shape of plugs will vary from country to country, and sometimes even within a country depending on when that building was built. To plug something from the U.S. into a local socket you'll need an adapter that fits between the plug and the socket. Because there are many different types of plugs in this region, it may be easier to purchase an all-in-one, universal adapter/converter combo. Versatile and lightweight, these can usually be found at your local electronics goods or hardware stores. Sometimes you can buy them at large retailers too, like Target or Walmart. If you forget to bring an adapter, you might also find them for sale at the airport when you arrive at your destination.

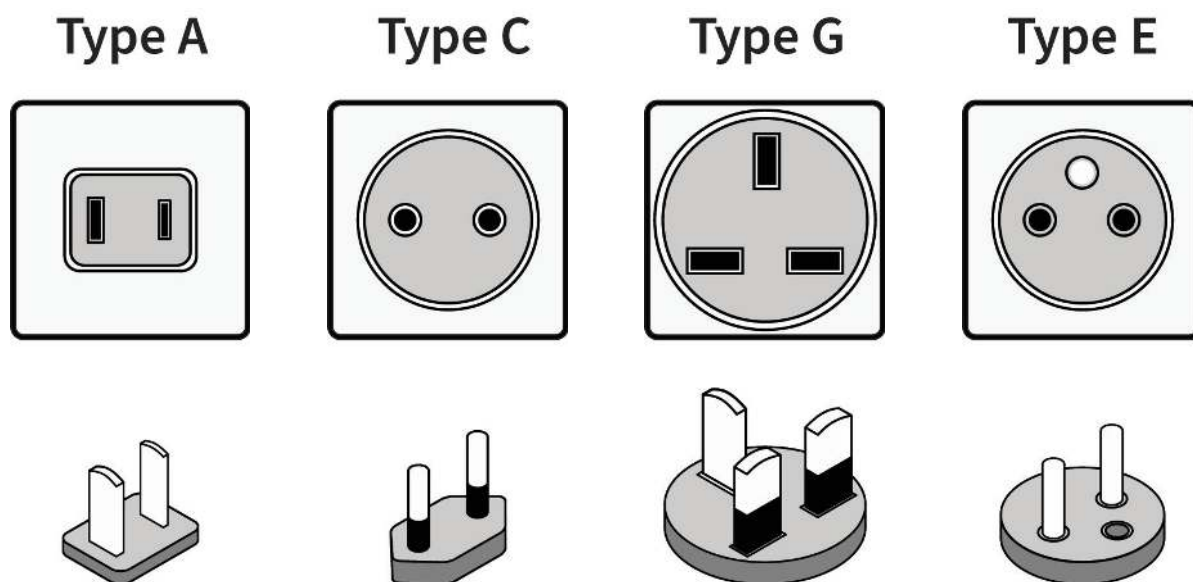
Different plug shapes are named by letters of the alphabet. Standard U.S. plugs are Type A and Type B. Here is the list of plugs for the countries on this trip:

Thailand: A and B (same as the U.S.) or C

Laos: A and B (same as the U.S.), C, E, or F

Cambodia: A (same as the U.S.), C, or G

Vietnam: A (same as the U.S.), C, or G



Availability

A constant electricity supply cannot be guaranteed during overnight stays. In some places, the electricity may be supplied by a generator, and lighting may not be as bright as you are used to. Travelers dependent on electricity supply (as in the case of those with sleep apnea) should consider a different adventure or ensure their apparatus has back-up battery power.

CLIMATE & AVERAGE TEMPERATURES

Thailand: Thailand's climate is tropical, high both in temperature and humidity, and dominated by monsoons. April and May are the hottest months of the year, when even the locals are moved to complain about the heat. June sees the beginning of the South West Monsoon, and brings with it the rainy season, which continues intermittently until the end of October. During this season, the air is warm and humid and the sky is typically overcast. From November to April, the air is much drier, with only a few days of rainfall per month. During the rainy season, and particularly from June to September, sunshine is limited to about five or six hours per day.

The north and northeast are generally cooler than Bangkok in winter, and hotter in summer. It will be warm during most of the trip. It gets hot in the sun at midday; in the north, it will cool down in the evening. Most of the country has abundant rainfall from May to October.

Laos: Laos has a typical tropical monsoon climate, but with some cool temperatures in winter. During the rainy season (May to October), the winds of the southwest monsoon deposit an average rainfall of between 50 and 90 inches. The dry season (November to April) is dominated by the northeast monsoon. December through February can be quite cool at night—lows can be in the 50s, even though daytime highs will be warm. Daytime highs increase to more than 90° F in March and stay that way through September. In October and November, the average temperature is in the 80s.

Cambodia: Cambodia's climate can generally be described as tropical with seasonal monsoons. There are two distinct seasons, the rainy and dry. Temperatures during the rainy season, between June and October, average 80–95°F. The dry season is characterized by cool months, November to February, with temperatures averaging 80–95°F and hot months, from March till May, which sees temperature range between 84–100°F.

Vietnam: Vietnam lies entirely within the tropics. It has wet and dry seasons, which vary from north to south and with elevation changes. In the south, temperatures are fairly constant throughout the year, ranging between 75° and 85° F. The dry season runs from November to April and the wet season from May to October. The hottest period is during April to August, before the rains have broken. In the north, there's also a short "winter" season, which runs from December to February. At this time, temperatures can drop to the 50s, with some drizzle. Typhoons are quite common in coastal areas between September and January.

Northern Vietnam: The climate in this region is cooler than the rest of the country. Summertime highs are usually in the 70s, although it can get hotter. But it's winter that surprises most travelers. From December–March the low temperatures can be in the 40s and the daytime high might only be in the 50s. So if you're traveling during these months, be sure to bring some warm clothing and/or clothing you can layer.

NOTE: If you are taking one of our optional stopovers before or after your OAT adventure, please be aware the climate and temperatures might be different from what you experienced during your tour. To prepare for weather differences and pack appropriate clothing, we recommend the following world weather sites:

- www.intellicast.com
- www.weather.com
- www.wunderground.com

Climate Averages & Online Forecast

The following charts reflect the **average** climate as opposed to exact weather conditions. This means they serve only as general indicators of what can reasonably be expected. An extreme heat wave or cold snap could fall outside these ranges. As your departure approaches, we encourage you to use **www.weather.com** for a more accurate forecast of the locations you visit.

Average Daily High/Low Temperatures (°F), Humidity & Monthly Rainfall

MONTH	BANGKOK, THAILAND			LUANG PRABANG, LAOS		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (avg)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
JAN	89 to 71	88 to 49	0.4	82 to 56	70	0.6
FEB	90 to 75	89 to 53	1.1	89 to 58	62	0.7
MAR	98 to 80	88 to 55	1.2	93 to 63	58	1.2
APR	104 to 95	86 to 56	2.8	96 to 69	58	4.3
MAY	92 to 80	87 to 62	7.5	95 to 73	62	6.4
JUN	91 to 80	85 to 64	6.0	93 to 74	71	9.1
JUL	90 to 78	86 to 64	6.2	90 to 74	71	9.1
AUG	90 to 78	87 to 66	7.4	90 to 74	78	11.8
SEP	89 to 77	91 to 68	12.6	91 to 73	72	6.5
OCT	89 to 77	92 to 67	9.1	89 to 69	71	3.1
NOV	88 to 74	87 to 58	2.3	85 to 64	70	1.2
DEC	87 to 70	84 to 49	0.4	81 to 59	71	0.5

MONTH	SIEM REAP, CAMBODIA			HO CHI MINH CITY, VIETNAM		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (avg)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
JAN	88 to 67	71	0.1	90-71	87 to 51	0.6
FEB	90 to 70	70	0.5	92-73	85 to 50	0.1
MAR	93 to 74	69	1.0	94-76	83 to 52	0.4
APR	94 to 76	68	2.5	95-79	83 to 56	2.0
MAY	93 to 76	75	5.9	94-78	86 to 65	8.4
JUN	91 to 76	79	7.0	91-77	89 to 71	12.2
JUL	89 to 75	81	7.9	90-76	90 to 70	11.6
AUG	89 to 75	82	7.9	90-76	91 to 71	10.7
SEP	87 to 75	84	10.6	89-76	92 to 72	13.5
OCT	87 to 73	84	9.3	89-75	92 to 73	10.3
NOV	87 to 71	80	3.4	87 to 74	89-74	4.7
DEC	86 to 67	75	0.6	89-72	87 to 58	1.8

MONTH	HANOI, VIETNAM			CHIANG MAI, THAILAND		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (avg)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
JAN	69-59	85	0.8	84 to 58	90 to 41	0.3
FEB	71-62	85	1.1	89 to 60	84 to 34	0.2
MAR	76-67	90	1.8	94 to 66	78 to 33	0.6
APR	83-72	90	3.6	97 to 73	78 to 38	1.8
MAY	91-77	85	7.2	93 to 75	83 to 52	6.0
JUN	94-81	85	9.0	90 to 76	86 to 60	5.3
JUL	93-80	85	10.1	89 to 75	88 to 63	6.6
AUG	91-79	90	11.7	88 to 75	90 to 65	8.9
SEP	90-78	85	9.9	88 to 74	91 to 64	9.9
OCT	85-73	80	5.8	88 to 72	90 to 60	5.2
NOV	80-68	80	1.8	85 to 67	90 to 53	1.7
DEC	71-59	80	0.5	82 to 59	90 to 45	0.6

ABOUT YOUR DESTINATIONS: CULTURE, ETIQUETTE & MORE

O.A.T. Trip Experience Leaders: A World of Difference

During your adventure, you'll be accompanied by one of our local, Trip Experience Leaders. All are fluent in English and possess the skills, certification, and experience necessary to ensure an enriching adventure. As locals of the regions you'll explore with them, our Trip Experience Leaders provide the kind of firsthand knowledge and insight that make local history, culture, and wildlife come alive. Coupled with their unbridled enthusiasm, caring personalities, and ability to bring diverse groups of travelers together, our Trip Experience Leaders ensure that your experience with O.A.T. is one you'll remember for a lifetime.

The Culture of Southeast Asia

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the four countries visited on your main Itinerary—Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam—is its cultural diversity. They vary greatly with regards to ethnicity, religion, culture, and traditions. The region is also home to hundreds of indigenous minorities, speaking unrelated languages employing many different alphabets. French Influences from the colonial period are still evident in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos—collectively once known as French Indochina—especially in the architecture and cuisine. As the only nation in Southeast Asia not to have been colonized by a European country, Thailand places a much greater emphasis on issues relating to patriotism and national pride.

If there is one cultural element that is shared by all countries in Southeast Asia, it may be the concept of “face.” One's reputation and honor are keystones of Southeast Asian society and is far removed from many in Western society who value people who are “brutally honest.” Causing someone to “lose face”—even unintentionally—can lead to awkward interactions. Face-saving often perplexes foreign visitors—especially when people tell you yes when they mean no. Or if you ask someone for directions, you discover they have pointed you somewhere wrong because, for them, this is preferable to admitting they don't know, which would be “losing face.” Or if you see the thoughtfully-chosen gift you brought appear to be brushed aside—what's really happening is the recipient wishes to open it in private in case it is not useful, too expensive, or any number of reasons that may cause him or her to lose face.

But generally, the people of Southeast Asia are very tolerant and understanding of foreign visitors who aren't aware of local cultural norms—unless it is something serious like disrespecting the monarchy in Thailand, for example. As a traveler in any country, however, one should always be aware of the potential impact one's actions might have on how others feel. Just an awareness of such a simple notion can lead to deeper and more enjoyable insights into local culture.

Religion and Religious Observances

Buddhism is the primary religion in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. The more conservative tradition called Theravada Buddhism is followed in Cambodia and Laos; while Confucian-influenced Mahayana Buddhism is the dominant form followed in Vietnam. Theravada Buddhism is also the primary religion in Thailand, although most Thais consider it more as a “way of life”

than a religion. Buddhism in Thailand also borrows elements from Hinduism and especially Animism—a noticeable manifestation of this is the small spirit houses containing daily offerings of food and flowers you often see outside homes and businesses throughout the country.

Festivals and religious celebrations vary widely across Southeast Asia and could be anything from a celebration rooted in Buddhism or the worshipping of ancestors to the major Christian holidays.

Points to Know

For the adventurous soul, the challenges of traveling in Southeast Asia—in addition to the region’s renowned hospitality—make it a uniquely rewarding destination. You should be prepared for dust, pollution, traffic and large crowds in cities. Poverty can be distressing for some travelers, as can the history we’ll revisit at the Cu Chi tunnels and the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek.

Meals

Our meals will be based on the local cuisine. Western foods will be available at breakfast, but otherwise we will experience the foods of Southeast Asia—many of them containing ingredients that are new and different to us. Some dishes are vegetarian, but please note that no special accommodations can be guaranteed for dietary restrictions. Your Trip Experience Leader can suggest restaurants for meals that are not included on your adventure.

Our Vehicles

We use a variety of transportation, making our travel between destinations part of the fun. We experience traditional land and water transportation as well, riding in a local wooden boat at a lake in Siem Reap, or trying an ox-cart ride with a Cambodian farmer. We take five fairly short flights within this trip, the longest taking two hours. Air scheduling in this region is not as reliable as in the U.S., and delays and routing changes are often part of the picture here. Our Trip Experience Leader will do everything possible to make the appropriate adjustments to our itinerary. We hope, that like most of our travelers, you take it in stride and develop an accepting and even lighthearted attitude. It’s part of the adventure.

Toilets

All of our hotels feature Western-style seated toilets. However, public restrooms outside of our hotels may be limited to Asian-style squat toilets. It is also common for the public restrooms in this region to run low on toilet paper and/or soap, so we suggest that you carry a small packet of tissues and something to clean your hands (wipes, hand sanitizer) when you are out and about.

Your International Flight: A Reminder

The “rule of thumb” is to check in for your international flights about three hours before departure.

If any of your flights leave just after midnight or in the early morning hours, you may need to check in before midnight, which is technically the day before. For example: If your flight leaves at 12:05 a.m. on May 2nd, you would want to arrive for check-in at 9 p.m. on May 1st. You can confirm the date and time of your international flight by referring to your preliminary air itinerary.

Images of the King of Thailand

In Thailand the king is held in high regard, to the point where even images of him are treated respectfully. The King's image is featured on the currency, so it is even important to avoid stepping on any coins that may have fallen.

Taking Photographs

When taking photos of people in most countries, be polite and ask permission to take a close-up. In many countries, you should not be taking photos of children or older women without permission. Do not take photographs of military personnel, military compounds, or other official institutions/personnel (such as police). This may result in the confiscation of your camera.

Please obey any signs regarding photos at museum or sites; the no-flash rule protects the fragile artifacts and artwork from damage by repeated exposure to light. Occasionally, there may also be a small fee levied by the museum or site for the privilege of taking photos.

Safety & Security

As you travel, exercise the same caution and awareness that you would in a large American city. Carry a one-day supply of cash, and your passport, in a travel pouch. Don't leave valuables unattended in your hotel room – use a room safe as needed. In any sort of puzzling street situation, try to keep one hand on your wallet or money belt.

Thai Cuisine

The variety of Thai food is truly amazing. It is a cuisine based on combining five main flavors: salty, sweet, sour, bitter, and spicy. Look forward to sampling meat, seafood, poultry, vegetable, noodle dishes (a Thai specialty), and often soup. Although certain regions of Thailand are known for their extremely fiery cuisine, not all of it is spicy—in fact, much of it is very sweet or quite subtly flavored. Meals in Thailand are often served family-style, with five or more main courses, so vegetarians are easily accommodated. However, please note that any and all special accommodations for dietary restrictions (like vegetarian) cannot be guaranteed. As in other Southeast Asian countries, rice is a key component of Thai cuisine and great care is taken in preparing it properly. Typical dishes include:

- **Guay Teow:** Translated to “noodle soup,” guay teow describes any type of noodle soup and can be made with chicken, pork, or beef using either rice or egg noodles. Wontons or meatballs may also be added to the broth along with condiments such as dried chili peppers, lime juice, and fish sauce.

- **Som Tam:** Spicy green papaya salad is a very popular Thai dish made from shredded green papaya, tomatoes, carrots, peanuts, dried shrimp, chilies, lime juice, and other ingredients mixed with a mortar and pestle to amplify the flavors.
- **Pad Thai:** One of Thailand's national dishes, many Westerners are already familiar with this fried noodle favorite which can be made with shrimp, chicken, or tofu.
- **Pad Krapow:** Fire up your taste buds for this popular dish made with either minced pork or chicken (or tofu) and stir fried with Thai basil and lots of chilies.
- **Panang:** This Thai curry dish is a bit on the mild side (*Gaeng Keow Wan*, or green curry, is on the other end of the heat scale) and is typically served with shrimp or vegetables.

Lao Cuisine

The ultimate staple of Lao cuisine is sticky rice. The Laotians eat more sticky rice than any other people in the world, and often refer to themselves as *luk khao niaow* ("children or descendants of sticky rice"). Meals typically include a soup dish, a grilled dish, a sauce, fresh raw greens, and a stew or mixed dish. Traditionally, most food is eaten by hand; spoons are used only for soups and white rice, and chopsticks are used only for noodles. Diners traditionally sit on a reed mat on the floor around a raised rattan platform called a *ka toke*. Lao foods have also influenced the cuisine of Cambodia and northern Thailand. Common dishes include:

- **Laap:** This "meat salad" involves fresh meat that is minced, then either fried quickly or served raw, mixed with fresh herbs, lime juice, and toasted sticky rice powder
- **Khao piak sen:** This iconic dish is a simple, satisfying bowl of rice noodles, and can be found on nearly every street corner in Laos
- **Or lam:** Prepared using pork fat and buffalo skin, and often includes *mai sakaan*, a unique ingredient best described in English as "spicy chili wood", a very fibrous herb meant to be chewed for flavor but not swallowed
- **Tum mak hoong:** Fresh and yummy are two best words to describe this green papaya salad, often served with sticky rice
- **Paaeng pet:** Raw duck blood, mixed with cooked minced duck and organs, and lots of herbs like mint, green onions and cilantro; bloody delicious

Cambodian Cuisine

Cambodian or Khmer cuisine features a lot of pickled and tangy flavors. Rice is served with most meals, as with many other Asian countries. However, it is less spicy than the cuisines of nearby Asian countries like Thailand. The typical Cambodian meal often features several small dishes alongside the main dish, served with rice and soup. **Hot chili** is usually served on the side, so the added spiciness is at the discretion of the diner. Here are some other dishes to try:

- **Fish amok:** This is one of the most popular dishes in Cambodia. It is fresh fish cooked in a rich, creamy curry-like sauce that mixes lemongrass, turmeric and coconut milk. It's often served wrapped in a banana leaf.
- **Banana blossom salad:** This light refreshing meal is made with stir-fried banana blossom with garlic, fried shallots, nuts, and herbs.
- **Red tree ants with beef:** This dish is just as it sounds—actual ants mixed with beef and served on a bowl of white rice topped with chili.
- **Nom banh chok:** This is a popular street food often eaten at breakfast consisting of thin rice noodles bathed in a green fish gravy, mixed with various fresh vegetables.
- **Bai sach chrouk:** This street food is grilled pork marinated in coconut milk and garlic.
- **Num kachay:** A snack made with rice flour and chopped chives and served with a sweet and spicy fish sauce.

Vietnamese Cuisine

Vietnam cuisine was shaped by myriad influences including France, China, India and Thailand, all of which combined to make a truly unique food scene. One of the key building blocks of Vietnamese cuisine—and of Vietnamese culture in general—is rice. Many kinds of meat, most commonly pork and fish, are also heavily featured. Dishes are flavored with basil, parsley, coriander, chilies, lemon grass, lime, and laksa leaf, meaning they can range from mild to very spicy. Peanuts are a common topping. Some typical dishes are:

- **Pho:** Pronounced “fuh,” this iconic soup is typically made with rice noodles and thinly sliced beef in a bone broth
- **Banh mi:** Vietnam's version of the sub sandwich, with meat (usually pork) and veggies served on crusty French-style bread. They are popular all over the country, but many say the best ones are found in Ho Chi Minh City and Hoi An.
- **Bun bo hue:** Similar to pho, but with flat vermicelli-like noodles instead of cylindrical noodles.
- **Vietnamese coffee:** Vietnam is also the second-largest producer of coffee beans worldwide, with as many coffee shops as that suggests. Try the *ca phe nau* (also called *ca phe sua*) which is a strong dark brew cut with sweet condensed milk.
- **Nuoc mam:** Vietnam's national condiment is a fermented fish sauce that is served with every meal.
- **Snacks:** Rice cakes and spring rolls are typical snacks, as is fruit. The Vietnamese grow and consume a variety of tropical fruits, including coconuts, bananas, melons, pineapples, lychees, mandarin oranges, and exotic items such as the green dragon fruit and the three-seeded cherry. Remember to stick to fruit with a peel or rind and avoid fruit washed in local tap water.

To get the most enjoyment from your trip, be open-minded about sampling different dishes and even using chopsticks. While we will make every effort to accommodate dietary restrictions, please note that choices may be limited and that special requests are not guaranteed.

Etiquette

Don't let the fine points of local customs worry you; locals know that visitors can't be expected to know every detail. Much of what is considered polite in this region is similar to what's polite in the U.S. But as a matter of interest, here are a few "finer points" that might surprise you:

- Body posture is important. Sprawling, resting your feet on furniture or chairs, or pointing your feet at someone are seen as impolite.
- In temples you may notice locals sitting on the floor with their feet tucked under them or in a cross-legged position. This is to avoid pointing their feet at the Buddha, which is rude.
- A woman may speak to a Buddhist monk, and a man may speak with a Buddhist nun, but generally the correct thing is to let them approach you.
- You may see people greeting one another with a bow of the head, and in some countries this will be accompanied with hands pressed together as in prayer. Traditionally, the deeper the bow, the more respect one is showing, with the greatest respect being towards elders and clergy. For you, a gentle western-style handshake is an acceptable greeting, but if you wish to try the more traditional head bow, that's OK too.
- Avoid wearing clothing imprinted with a Buddha logo or image as this may offend some of the locals.

Language Barrier

You can have some great 'conversations' with local people who do not speak English, even if you don't speak a word of the local language. Indeed, this non-verbal communication can be a highly rewarding part of travel. To break the ice, bring along some family photographs, or a few postcards of your hometown. If you want to meet kids, bring a puppet or other interactive toy. Your Trip Experience Leader can help get the ball rolling.

Shopping: What to Buy, Customs, Shipping & More

There may be scheduled visits to local shops during your adventure. There is no requirement to make a purchase during these stops, and any purchase made is a direct transaction with the shop in question, subject to the vendor's terms of purchase. O.A.T. is not responsible for purchases you make on your trip or for the shipment of your purchases.

Returns

If you discover an issue with an item, you should contact the vendor directly and expect that any resolution will take longer than it would in the U.S. We recommend that you keep a copy of all your receipts, invoices, or contracts, along with the shop's contact information. Keep in mind, local practice may vary from U.S. standards, so don't assume that you have a certain number of days after the purchase to speak up or that you are guaranteed a refund.

Crafts & Souvenirs

Thailand

Thailand offers a variety of fine craft items at good prices. Traditional souvenirs include hill tribe handicrafts, including elaborate jewelry, colorful textiles, bronzeware cutlery, celadon pottery, and Thai lacquerware. Bangkok is famous the world over for its street markets—Pratunam, Chatuchak Park, Khlong Toey, Sampheng (Chinatown), Banglamphu, and many more. Local products include hand-woven cottons, decorative items made of silver, teakwood carvings, and gems. The best bargains in gems are jade, rubies, and sapphires, but buy from reputable dealers only. Thai silk, renowned for its lush colors and pleasantly rough texture, is considered some of the best in the world and can be purchased in the fabric shops of Chiang Mai.

Note that larger department stores in Bangkok have fixed prices. Almost everywhere else bargaining is expected, especially at outdoor stalls.

Laos

When visiting Laos, souvenirs you will want to keep an eye out for include *sinh* (a traditional silk wraparound skirt), woven bamboo baskets, champasak coffee, wood carvings, tamarind candy, pottery, silver jewelry, bomb-made souvenirs, khun boron dolls, *thip khao* (or sticky rice basket), *saa* paper, and snake whiskey.

Cambodia

In popular tourist locations (like Siem Reap and Phnom Penh), and particular towns with handicraft specialties, handmade crafts such as silk clothing, stone or wood carvings, and silver jewelry are considered to be high-quality, traditional souvenirs. Many shops in Siem Reap and Phnom Penh are connected with organizations invested in reviving traditional Cambodian crafts and supporting disadvantaged or disabled locals. Other notable traditional souvenirs include hand-woven cotton, batik fabrics, woven mats, Mekong quilts, rice-paper prints, and betel nut boxes. For the food-lovers, Kampot pepper, pepper grown in Kampot and used by top chefs around the world, is a must have, available near everywhere in Cambodia. With the risk of fake Kampot pepper high due to its popularity, we recommend buying this souvenir straight from the source, at one of the many local farms.

Vietnam

Vietnam offers many fine craft items at good prices. Traditional souvenirs include silk, precious stones, hilltribe handicrafts, including elaborate jewelry, colorful textiles, and opium pipes, bronzeware cutlery, nielloware silver inlaid items, and lacquerware. Local products include hand-woven cottons, decorative items made of silver, teakwood carvings, and gems. The best bargains in gems are jade, rubies, and sapphires, but buy from reputable dealers only.

Merchants enjoy negotiating prices almost everywhere but if you make an offer you should be prepared to buy at that price. It is not unusual for the clerks in some stores in Vietnam to follow, assist, and advise you throughout the store—much as a personal shopper would do in the U.S. This is meant to be polite rather than pestering.

Note about antiquities: Think carefully before purchasing an expensive “antiquity.” It is illegal to remove antique furniture or ceramics from Vietnam. To complicate matters further, any item that looks old can only be exported with the written permission of the Antique Art Business Division of the government Fine Arts Department. Some stores will offer to arrange this for you, but this may be unreliable.

U.S. Customs Regulations & Shipping Charges

For all things related to U.S. Customs, the ultimate authority is the U.S. Bureau of Customs & Border Protection. Their website, www.cbp.gov has the answers to the most frequently asked questions. Or you can call them at **1-877-227-5511**.

The top three points to know are:

- At time of writing, your personal duty-free allowance is \$800 for items brought with you. Items totaling more than \$800 are subject to duty fees.
- **Items shipped home are always subject to duty when received in the U.S.** Even when the shop has offered to include shipping and duties in the price, this typically means shipping to the nearest customs facility and payment of the export duties—not door-to-door shipping or payment of the import duties. All additional duties or shipping charges would be your responsibility. Unless an item is small enough to send by parcel service (like FedEx), chances are you will need to arrange shipping or pick-up once the item is in the U.S. and will need to pay customs duties.
- It is illegal to import products made from endangered animal species. U.S. Customs & Border Protection will seize these items, as well as most furs, coral, tortoise shell, reptile skins, feathers, plants, and items made from animal skins.

DEMOGRAPHICS & HISTORY

Thailand

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 198,115 square miles
- **Capital:** Bangkok
- **Languages:** Thai, English (secondary language of the elite), and ethnic and regional dialects are spoken.
- **Ethnicities:** Thai 95.9%, Burmese 2%, other 2.2%
- **Location:** Thailand is bordered by Burma, Laos, Cambodia, and Malaysia
- **Geography:** Thailand is roughly the size of France or the state of Texas. The country has been described as a huge rice paddy interrupted by the sprawling metropolis of Bangkok. However, that assessment isn't entirely fair. In fact, the country's geography is actually quite varied, with a rich central plain, heavily forested mountains in the north, and a tropical rain forest along the southern peninsula.
- **Population:** 69,522,740 (estimate)
- **Religions:** Buddhist 93.6%, Muslim 4.9%, Christian 1.2%, other 0.2%, none 0.1% (2014 estimate)
- **Time zone:** Thailand is twelve hours ahead of U.S. EST. So when it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is 6pm in Bangkok.

National Holidays: Thailand

In addition to the holidays listed below, Thailand celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit www.timeanddate.com/holidays.

01/01 New Year's Day

February Magapuja Day (moves each year; see note above)

04/06 Chakri Day

04/13–4/17 Songkran

05/01 Labor Day

05/03 Coronation Day

May Visakha Puja (moves each year)

7/28 King Vajiralongkorn's Birthday

08/12 The Queen's Birthday/ Mother's Day

10/13 Passing of King Bhumibol

10/23 Chulalongkorn Day

12/05 Father's Day

12/10 Constitution Day

12/31 New Year's Eve

Thailand: A Brief History

Little is known about its earliest inhabitants, but a succession of tribal groups including the Mon and Khmer established powerful kingdoms in the region we now know as Thailand. In 1238 a Tai chieftain broke from the Khmer and established a kingdom at Sukhothai in the heart of modern-day Thailand. The Sukhothai was succeeded by the kingdom of Ayutthaya in the 14th century. Over the centuries, conflicts with Burma and other invaders eventually led to the reunification of Thailand under Chakri, who established his new capital in Bangkok in 1782.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, rather than its traditional enemies like the Khmers, Burma, and Vietnam, it was the European powers that threatened Thailand —especially the French and British, who were vying for colonies in Southeast Asia. But Thailand was rather fortunate, in that it ended up being the only country in the region to escape colonial rule entirely. This was due to an agreement between the French and British to keep it as a neutral territory between them. The Siamese Revolution in 1932 spelled the end of the absolute monarchy of the Ayutthaya Kingdom and established a constitutional monarchy largely overseen by the military—and a period of instability lasting some sixty years. At the time of World War II, military leaders chose to ally Thailand with Japan to avoid the fate of their Southeast Asian neighbors. And after the war, Thailand was able to maintain close ties with the United States by avoiding the communistic influences embraced by other neighbors.

With some 14 new constitutions written between 1932 and 1987, Thailand's progress in establishing a stable, democratic government in recent times has been erratic at best—with power shifting back and forth between civilian politicians and military governments. Crown Prince Maha Vajiralongkorn was elevated to the throne after the death of his father, King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the 9th King of the Chakri Dynasty, to become Thailand's newest monarch in 2016.

Laos

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 91,429 square miles
- **Capital:** Vientiane
- **Languages:** Lao is the official language; French, English, and various ethnic languages are also spoken.
- **Ethnicity:** Lao 55%, Khmou 11%, Hmong 8%, other (over 100 minor ethnic groups) 26%
- **Location:** Laos is bordered by Thailand, Vietnam, China, Cambodia, and Burma.
- **Geography:** Unlike many of its neighbors, Laos is somewhat sparsely populated. The rugged and difficult terrain makes farming a struggle, and while fishing is important along the rivers, Laos has no coastline. The Mekong River, an important source of commerce and transportation, runs through Laos and links the country to the outside.
- **Population:** 7,367,991 (estimate)
- **Religions:** Buddhist 67%, Christian 1.5%, other and unspecified 31.5%
- **Time Zone:** Laos is twelve hours ahead of U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is 6pm in Vientiane.

National Holidays: Laos

In addition to the holidays listed below, Laos celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit **www.timeanddate.com/holidays**.

01/01 New Year's Day

03/08 International Women's Day

04/13-04/16 Lao New Year

05/01 Labor Day/ May Day

06/01 Children's Day

11/14 That Luang Festival

12/02 National Day

Laos: A Brief History

People have lived in areas of Laos, the only landlocked country in Southeast Asia, for at least 10,000 years. Its original inhabitants are thought to have migrated from southern China settling in the fertile lands of the lower Mekong basin. In the middle of the 14th century a Lao prince named Fa Ngum, who had been exiled to Cambodia, returned to his ancestral home after converting to Buddhism and established Lan Xang, "the Kingdom of a Million Elephants."

After a couple of centuries of turmoil, the country got back on its feet early in the 16th century, a time when the capital was moved from Luang Prabang to Vientiane—mostly to guard against Burmese incursions. By late in the 18th century, a large portion of the country had been overrun by Thai forces. Then, in the 19th century, the Laos was annexed as part of French Indochina and

would remain under French rule until 1945—except for a short when the Japanese occupied Laos during WWII. After the war, the Americans helped establish the Royal Lao Army as the ruling power in Laos, primary as a countermeasure to the rise of the communist Pathet Lao. But by the 1960s, the country became embroiled in a civil war. And then, with the Pathet Laos fighting alongside communist North Vietnam against French-backed South Vietnam, the Vietnam War soon spilled over into Laos. And heavy bombing by the U.S. during those years has left behind countless undiscovered explosives in many parts of the country.

In 1975, the Lao People's Democratic Republic was established, forcing the king to abdicate. The Pathet Lao government took control and then in 1991, the Lao Constitution was implemented to shift the country away from orthodox socialism and toward a more liberal form of government. In June of 2012, Hillary Clinton became the first U.S. Secretary of State to visit Laos in over fifty years. As part of that historic visit the U.S. strengthened its commitment to clear the Laotian countryside from the unexploded cluster bombs dropped by the U.S. in the late 60s and early 70s.

Cambodia

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 69,898 square miles
- **Capital:** Phnom Penh
- **Languages:** Khmer is the official language; English and French are also spoken.
- **Location:** Cambodia is bordered by Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam.
- **Geography:** The ancient Khmer kingdom we now call Cambodia is a nation of 16.2 million people in a country about the size of Missouri. This is a country of geographical contrasts—the borders of Cambodia are mountainous and rugged, but a rich, alluvial plain dominates the center of the country. Here the Mekong River, the Tonle Sap River, and the Tonle Sap Lake create a prosperous farming and fishing region full of rice fields and fishing villages.
- **Population:** 16,915,269 (estimate)
- **Religion:** Buddhist 96.9%, Muslim 1.9%, other 0.4%, unspecified 0.8%
- **Time Zone:** Cambodia is on Indochina Time, twelve hours ahead of U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is 6pm in Phnom Penh.

National Holidays: Cambodia

In addition to the holidays listed below, Cambodia celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit www.timeanddate.com/holidays.

01/01 New Year's Day

01/07 Victory over Genocide Day

February (moves each year; see note above)
Meak Bochea

03/08 International Women Day

04/14–04/16 Khmer New Year

05/01 Labor Day

5/20 Day of Remembrance

09/24 Constitutional Day

10/15 Commemoration Day of King's Father

10/29 King's Coronation Day

November Water Festival (moves each year)

11/09 Independence Day

12/10 International Human Rights Day

Cambodia: A Brief History

Cambodia's historic roots were established between the 1st to the 6th centuries, when an India-influenced state called Funan ruled the landscapes. With the rise of King Jayavarman at the beginning of the 9th century, Funan gave way to the Angkor Empire, whose kings would dominate much of present-day Southeast Asia for the next 600 years.

Jayavarman and a succession of Khmer kings were responsible for building the Angkor temple complex, the most extensive concentration of religious temples in the world. Through the centuries, the almost constant state of war with Thailand and Vietnam would see the mighty Khmer empire slip into a steady decline. And by the mid-1800s, Cambodia, like most of Southeast Asia, came under the thumb of European colonial powers.

In 1863, Cambodia's King Norodom signed a Protectorate Treaty with France, who would go on to rule Cambodia until 1941 when the Japanese army expelled the French and instilled their own brand of terror to the populace. With the defeat of Japan and the end of World War II, the French returned to Cambodia. But by 1953 a strong local leader, King Sihanouk, had risen to power with the Khmer and sought independence for his country. King Sihanouk, who also established the People's Socialist Party, became the country's first prime minister. Sihanouk kept Cambodia neutral in the Vietnam War until 1965, when he broke with the U.S. and allowed North Vietnam and the Vietcong to use Cambodian territory.

In 1970, Sihanouk was deposed by one of his generals, Lon Noiest, who established a government in exile in China that supported the Cambodian revolutionary movement known as the Khmer Rouge—just as U.S. and South Vietnamese forces entered Cambodia to flush out Vietcong forces hiding there. For the next five years, as savage fighting spread throughout Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge gained land and power. In 1975 the capital at Phnom Penh fell to the Khmer Rouge, and their leader, Pol Pot, became the leader of Cambodia.

Three years of horror ensued as Pol Pot and his followers began a campaign of systematic genocide against the Cambodian people, with the aim of returning the country to the agrarian society of centuries before. In 1979, the Khmer Rouge were overthrown, and the Vietnamese-backed People's Republic of Kampuchea was established. The Vietnamese withdrew the last of their troops by 1989. Entering the 1990s U.N. peacekeeping efforts helped stabilize Cambodia, and in 1993 a constitution was adopted, general elections were held, and King Norodom Sihanouk returned to the throne. In 2004, ill health forced him to abdicate in favor of his son, Norodom Sihamoni, who currently reigns as a constitutional monarch not very different from the parliamentary system of Great Britain.

Vietnam

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 127,800 square miles
- **Capital:** Hanoi
- **Languages:** Vietnamese (official), English (increasingly favored as a second language), some French, Chinese, and Khmer; mountain area languages (Mon-Khmer and Malayo-Polynesian)
- **Ethnicities:** Kinh (Viet) 85.7%, Tay 1.9%, Thai 1.8%, Muong 1.5%, Khmer 1.5%, Mong 1.2%, Nung 1.1%, other 5.3%
- **Location:** Vietnam is bordered by the South China Sea ("the East Sea"), China, Laos, and Cambodia.
- **Geography:** It is about a thousand miles long and ranges in width from 30 miles in the central region to 400 miles in the north. There are five principle geographic areas. There are two mountainous areas, covered largely by forests or jungles: the Northern Highlands, located in the northwest, and the Annamite Range that extends from it down the western portion of the country towards Ho Chi Minh City. The two delta areas—the Red River Delta in the north and the Mekong Delta in the south—hold most of the country's population and also provide the majority of the country's farmland. The Coastal Lowlands, which lie between the delta areas, are also heavily populated.
- **Population:** 97,205,000 (estimate)
- **Religions:** Buddhist 9.3%, Catholic 6.7%, Hoa Hao 1.5%, Cao Dai 1.1%, Protestant 0.5%, Muslim 0.1%, none 80.8%. (Although Communists have discouraged the practice of religion, those who do practice are generally Buddhists.)
- **Time zone:** Vietnam is twelve hours ahead of U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is 6pm in Hanoi.

National Holidays: Vietnam

In addition to the holidays listed below, Vietnam celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit www.timeanddate.com/holidays.

01/01 New Year's Day

February Tet Lunar New Year (moves each year; see note above)

April Hung Kings Commemoration Day (moves each year; see note above)

04/30 Reunification Day

05/01 Labor Day

09/02 Independence Day

12/24 Christmas Eve

12/25 Christmas Day

12/31 New Year's Eve

Vietnam: A Brief History

Vietnam's earliest known residents were hunters and farmers who migrated into the area from the north and south. In 111 B.C., armies of China's Han dynasty conquered the region of present-day Vietnam and would go on to rule the region for more than a thousand years. It was not until A.D. 939 when the Vietnamese were finally able to oust the Chinese to begin self-rule while renaming the country Dai Co Viet. Powerful family dynasties went on to rule Vietnam for the next 900 years. Power struggles among feuding families in the north and south persisted until 1802, when Nguyen Anh unified the country and named it Vietnam, giving himself the title Emperor Gia Long.

After stiff resistance, Vietnam would finally fall to French colonial rule in 1884. Now part of French Indochina, Vietnam remained under French domination until 1940, when Germany occupied France during World War II and Germany's ally Japan took control of Vietnam. After Japan's defeat, in September 1945, the communist Vietminh led by Ho Chi Minh gained control of many regions of the country. Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnam an independent nation—the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. France re-asserted its claim on the region, and French forces regained control in the south. However, resistance from the Vietminh continued, and the Communists still controlled the north. By late 1946, the Indochina War was in full progress, continuing until 1954, when the French were defeated at Dien Bien Phu. In 1954, delegates to an international conference in Geneva agreed to a temporary division of Vietnam into two separate countries—North and South Vietnam. In 1955, elections were held in South Vietnam, and Ngo Dinh Diem was chosen leader. By 1957, the Vietminh in the south, now called the Viet Cong, had begun an armed revolt against Diem's government, supported by North Vietnam. More countries were drawn in as the fighting continued, including the U.S., which became deeply embroiled in the conflict by the late 1960s. The U.S.S.R. and China supported North Vietnam. In South Vietnam, a series of coups eventually brought army general Nguyen Van Thieu to power; he was then elected president in 1967. In North Vietnam, the Communist Party Politburo took over following Ho Chi Minh's death in 1969. The war ended in 1975 with the withdrawal of American troops. In 1976, the country was unified under the Communists as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, and Saigon was renamed Ho Chi Minh City.

More than three million Vietnamese had been killed in the decades of war, and the country's economy had been devastated. Many Vietnamese emigrated to the U.S. and other countries. In 1978, Vietnam severed its ties with China and aligned itself more closely with the Soviet Union. That same year, Vietnam drew China's wrath by invading Cambodia, an incursion that lasted into the 1980s. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the loss of its economic support, Vietnam began to liberalize its trade policies, allow private enterprise, and encourage foreign trade. From 1990 to 1997, Vietnam's economy grew rapidly. In 1994, the U.S. lifted its trade embargo, and in 1995, full diplomatic relations were restored.

RESOURCES

Suggested Reading

General Southeast Asia

A Traveller's History of Southeast Asia by J.M. Barwise and Nicholas J. White (2015, History) As compact history of a diverse region, this book packs a wealth of information into its well-written and well-organized pages. (And yes, the title has two “L”s; the series is British).

The River's Tale, A Year on the Mekong by Edward Gargan (2003, Travel Narrative) Describes in beautiful detail a year spend on the Mekong River during a 3,000-mile journey from its source in China through Tibet, Burma, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

What the Buddha Taught by Walpola Sri Rahula (1974, Religion) A succinct and accessible overview of Buddhism as it is practiced in Southeast Asia by an internationally recognized authority who just happens to also be a Buddhist monk.

Thailand

Patpong Sisters: An American Woman's View of the Bangkok Sex World by Cleo Odzer (2014, Sociology) An American anthropologist spent three years observing and getting to know the pimps, prostitutes, bar girls and bar boys—and their customers—of the Thailand's thriving \$4 billion sex industry.

The King Never Smiles: A Biography of Thailand's Bhumibol Adulyadej (2006, Biography). Banned in Thailand (and cannot be brought into the country), this extensively researched biography of the Thai king who ascended the throne in 1946 and was the world's longest serving monarch until his death in 2016 reveals the king's decisions during the entirety of his reign. While any critique of someone seen by his people as a living Buddha is bound to be controversial, the book is considered by many to be essential to an understanding of the political climate in present-day Thailand.

Bangkok 8 by John Burdett (2003, Detective Novel) Reminiscent of a film noir—gritty, suspenseful, and sometimes darkly funny—this book explores the underside of Thailand's capital through a series of mysterious deaths by snakebite. The detective, Sonchai Jitpleecheep, who is a member of the Royal Thai police, also stars in sequels like: ***Bangkok Tattoo*** and ***Bangkok Haunts***.

The Beach by Alex Garland (1998, Fiction) The bestselling novel taps into a common legend of young backpackers who come to Southeast Asia for the first time—discovering that unspoiled hidden beach paradise. But they soon find out that even in Thailand, Utopia is hard to find.

Anna and the King of Siam by Margaret Landon (1944, Biographical Novel) Some say the tale is more fanciful than true, but it certainly has endured. This is the classic account of a governess in mid-19th century Siam that inspired both the play and the film, *The King and I*.

Laos

Stalking the Elephant Kings, In Search of Laos by C. Kremmer, (1998, Mystery/Travelogue) When the Pathet Lao forced the last king of Laos to abdicate in 1975, it spelled the end of a 600-year-old monarchy. An Australian travel journalist searches for the truth behind the fate of the royal family while providing invaluable insights into Lao history and culture.

The Coroner's Lunch by Colin Cotterill (2017, Mystery) The first in an award-winning mystery series set in Laos featuring 70-something state coroner Dr. Siri Paiboun as the detective set in Laos a year after the 1975 Communist takeover.

The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down by Anne Fadiman (1998, Culture/Medicine) A sympathetic look at the culture clash between the Hmong parents of Lia, a child with epilepsy, and her American doctors.

Cambodia

A History of Cambodia by David Chandler (2018 4th Ed., History) A bit dry perhaps, but this acclaimed work is considered one of the best accounts of Cambodia's modern history, beginning in 1953 to the rise and fall of the Khmer Rouge, the death of the noxious Pol Pot in the late 1990s, and the return of peace to this lovely land.

Golden Bones, An Extraordinary Journey from Hell in Cambodia to a New Life in America by Sichan Siv (2009, Memoir) Deputy Ambassador to the UN during the Bush administration, Siv looks back on a remarkable life, from his privileged childhood in Pochentong to the murderous reign of Pol Pot, his escape from a work camp to freedom and, eventually, life in America.

First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers by Loung Ung (2000, Memoir) A personal account of Ung's experiences throughout the Khmer Rouge years as a survivor of the Pol Pot regime. At times an uncomfortable read, but very worthwhile and her story will stay with you for a long time. Ung's award-winning memoir was followed up by two more: *Lucky Child: A Daughter of Cambodia Reunites with the Sister She Left Behind* and *Lulu in the Sky: A Daughter of Cambodia Finds Love, Healing, and Double Happiness*.

Angkor, Cambodia's Wondrous Khmer Temples by Dawn Rooney (first published 1994 by Odyssey Books & Guides) This beautifully illustrated volume is considered by many as the indispensable guide to Khmer culture and history.

Vietnam

The Sympathizer by Viet Thanh Nguyen (2016, Fiction) The taut story of a double agent who secretly sympathizes with the Communist forces during the fall of the South Vietnamese government in 1975. A brilliant page-turner of a novel that won numerous awards including the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction.

Communion: A Culinary Journey Through Vietnam by Kim Fay (2012, Food). Part cookbook and part travelogue, this book follows Seattle native Kim Fay, who had lived in Vietnam for four years in the '90s, as she returns to Vietnam for a 5-week culinary safari from Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City. Beautiful, bold photographs and stories about the chefs accompany authentic recipes.

Last Night I Dreamed of Peace: The Diary of Dang Thuy Tram by Dang Thuy Tram (2008, Diary) As a young doctor working for the North Vietnamese Army, Dang Thuy Tram kept a diary of her experiences between the years 1968 and 1970 until she was killed by American forces near where she worked. Found by an American soldier, the diary was returned to her family and published for the first time almost 30 years later.

When Heaven and Earth Changed Places: A Vietnamese Woman's Journey from War to Peace by Le Ly Hayslip (1989, Memoir) The true-life story of a Vietnamese girl forced into the war (on both sides), where she faced constant danger, near starvation, and torture. A riveting, emotional, and brutally honest look at what it takes to survive a war. The sequel, ***Child of War, Woman of Peace*** describes the author's life in America after the war's end.

The Quiet American by Graham Greene (1956, Literature) Quite possibly the most famous novel set in Vietnam, and a classic love triangle too. A knowing British war correspondent and a hopeful American are caught up in both revolutionary politics and whirlwind romance in 1950s Saigon. Unfortunately, they both fall for the same Vietnamese woman.

Suggested Films & Videos

Thailand

The Impossible (2012, Drama) A family expecting to find a tropical paradise while vacationing in Thailand instead are in the fight for their lives when a huge wall of black water sweeps across the grounds of their hotel. Based on a true story of a family caught up in the devastating tsunami of December 26, 2004, the film stars Naomi Watts (who received a nomination for Best Actress) and Ewan McGregor.

The Beach (2000, Drama) Leonardo DiCaprio stars in this seductive thriller from director Danny Boyle. Based on the book of the same name, it's the story of an American backpacker in Thailand searching for an idyllic secret beach community described by a fellow traveler. But if and when he finds it, will it be a paradise or a purgatory?

The Bridge on the River Kwai (1957, Classic) The dramatic story of the dangerous construction of a railway bridge by British POWs under the control of the Japanese army during WWII.

The King and I (1956, Musical) A colorful and fun production of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical that is loosely based on the life of Anna Leonowens, the British governess to the King of Siam (modern-day Thailand). The same story also inspired two other (non-musical) movies: ***Anna and the King of Siam*** starring Irene Dunne and Rex Harrison (1946) and ***Anna and the King*** starring Jodie Foster and Chow Yun-Fat (1999).

Laos

Rescue Dawn (2006, Drama) Werner Herzog directed this brilliant film based on the true story of a German-born American fighter pilot (Dieter Dengler) who, on his first mission in Vietnam, is shot down over Laos and captured by the Pathet Lao. The POW drama is elevated by the mesmerizing performance by Christian Bale as Dieter.

Love is Forever (1982, Drama) Based on real events, *Love is Forever* follows an Australian journalist, John Everingham, as he documents the effects of the Vietnam War. While in Laos, Everingham falls in love with a local woman, Keo, who was sent to spy on him by the communist government. When Everingham ends up arrested and exiled to Thailand, he is willing to do anything to be reunited with the woman he loves.

Lost in Laos (2012, Drama/Adventure). Daniela and Paolo, having passed out and drifted away from civilization after partying on the Vang Vieng river, find themselves lost in the wilderness of Laos. The Italian couple end up being taken in by a rural village and experience a local Lao lifestyle they had missed in the whirl-wind of their party scene vacation.

Cambodia

Lara Croft: Tomb Raider (2001, Action/Adventure) This fanciful romp was filmed at several locations around the temple complex of Siem Reap, including Angkor Wat. Angelina Jolie was good in the role, but the real star of the film was the jungle temple of Ta Prohm, which tuk-tuk drivers and guidebooks alike just call it “Tomb Raider temple.” Significant parts of *Lord Jim*, the 1995 film starring Peter O’Toole, were also shot at Angkor Wat.

The Killing Fields (1984, Drama) Based on the work of New York Times reporter Sydney Schanberg (played by Sam Waterston) and his translator Dith Pran (played by Haing Ngor), this war drama explores the tragic rise of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. Ngor, who won Best Supporting Actor for his performance (the first and only Asian man thus far) and managed to survive three terms in Cambodian prison camps, was fatally shot in Los Angeles in 1996.

Vietnam

Anthony Bordain: No Reservations—Vietnam (2009, Travel/Food) Three episodes of the popular series were filmed in Vietnam and offer rich insights about life in modern-day Vietnam and regional cuisine from bustling Saigon to the countryside of Da Lat. Also worth viewing is Bordain’s **Parts Unknown: Hanoi** (2016) the classic episode featuring former U.S. President Barack Obama and Bordain sitting down together at a small restaurant in Hanoi enjoying beers and bun cha, a local specialty.

Good Morning Vietnam (1987, Comedy) While the irreverent humor of Armed Forces Radio Service host Adrian Cronauer (played by Robin Williams) amuses the troops stuck in 1965-era Vietnam, he clashes with the Army brass who try to censor his show.

Hearts and Minds (1974, Documentary) This landmark documentary offers an unflinching portrait of America’s involvement in the Vietnam War using newsreel footage and interviews. Many consider it the most important film ever made about this period.

Apocalypse Now (1979, Drama) Francis Ford Coppola's surreal Vietnam War epic was inspired by Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and stars Martin Sheen as an Army captain on a secret mission to track down a renegade Special Services colonel played by Marlon Brando.

The Quiet American (1958, Classic) A love triangle between a British journalist, a young Vietnamese woman, and a U.S. official, based on the Graham Greene novel—although Greene would disavow the film for flipping the book's message. Instead of a cautionary tale about foreign intervention, the film's focus is anticommunist advocacy of American power (Audie Murphy, the film's star, reportedly said he wouldn't have done the movie if it stuck to Greene's anti-American message). The 2002 remake starring Michael Caine and Brendan Fraser sticks much closer to Greene's novel and received widespread acclaim. It suffered bad timing though—Its "unpatriotic" message did not go over well with audiences after 9/11.

Useful Websites

Overseas Adventure Travel Frequently Asked Questions

www.oattravel.com/faq

International Health Information/CDC (Centers for Disease Control)

www.cdc.gov/travel

Electricity & Plugs

www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/plugs-and-sockets

Foreign Exchange Rates

www.xe.com/currencyconverter
www.oanda.com/converter/classic

ATM Locators

www.mastercard.com/atm
www.visa.com/atmlocator

World Weather

www.intellicast.com
www.weather.com
www.wunderground.com

Basic Travel Phrases (80 languages)

www.travlang.com/languages

Packing Tips

www.travelite.org

U.S. Customs & Border Protection

www.cbp.gov/travel

Transportation Security Administration (TSA)

www.tsa.gov

National Passport Information Center

www.travel.state.gov

Holidays Worldwide

www.timeanddate.com/holidays

Useful Apps

Flight Stats

Track departures, arrivals, and flight status

LoungeBuddy

Get access to premium airport lounges around the world

Timeshifter

Personalized tips for avoiding jetlag, based on neuroscience and your own data

GoogleMaps or Maps.me

Maps and directions anywhere in the world

Triposo

City guides, walking maps, and more – and it works offline

Rome2rio

Where to go, what to see, and what to do in more than 160 countries

Flush or Sit or Squat

Find a clean toilet anywhere

Uber or Bolt or Grab

Ride sharing around the world

Visa Plus and Mastercard Cirrus

ATM locations

Shows the location of the nearest ATM in your network

TunnelBear

Provides a secure VPN (virtual private network) that will encrypt your browsing data when you use a public WiFi network

What's App or Skype or Signal

WiFi calling anywhere in the world

Duolingo or FLuentU or Babbel

Learn dozens of foreign languages

Google Translate

Fast and simple translations

XE

Currency conversions

SizeGuide

Clothing and shoe sizes in all countries

Best Units Converter

Converts currency, mileage, weights, and many other units of measurement

Tourlina

For women only, it connects you with other female travelers

Happy Cow

Locate vegan and vegetarian eateries in 195 countries

Eatwith

Dine with locals all over the world

Meetup

Connects you with locals who share your interests

Skyview

Identifies constellations and heavenly bodies

Travello

Find travel friends on the road

ALIX for One

Created by and for women, it identifies solo-friendly dining spots in major international cities

TripWhistle

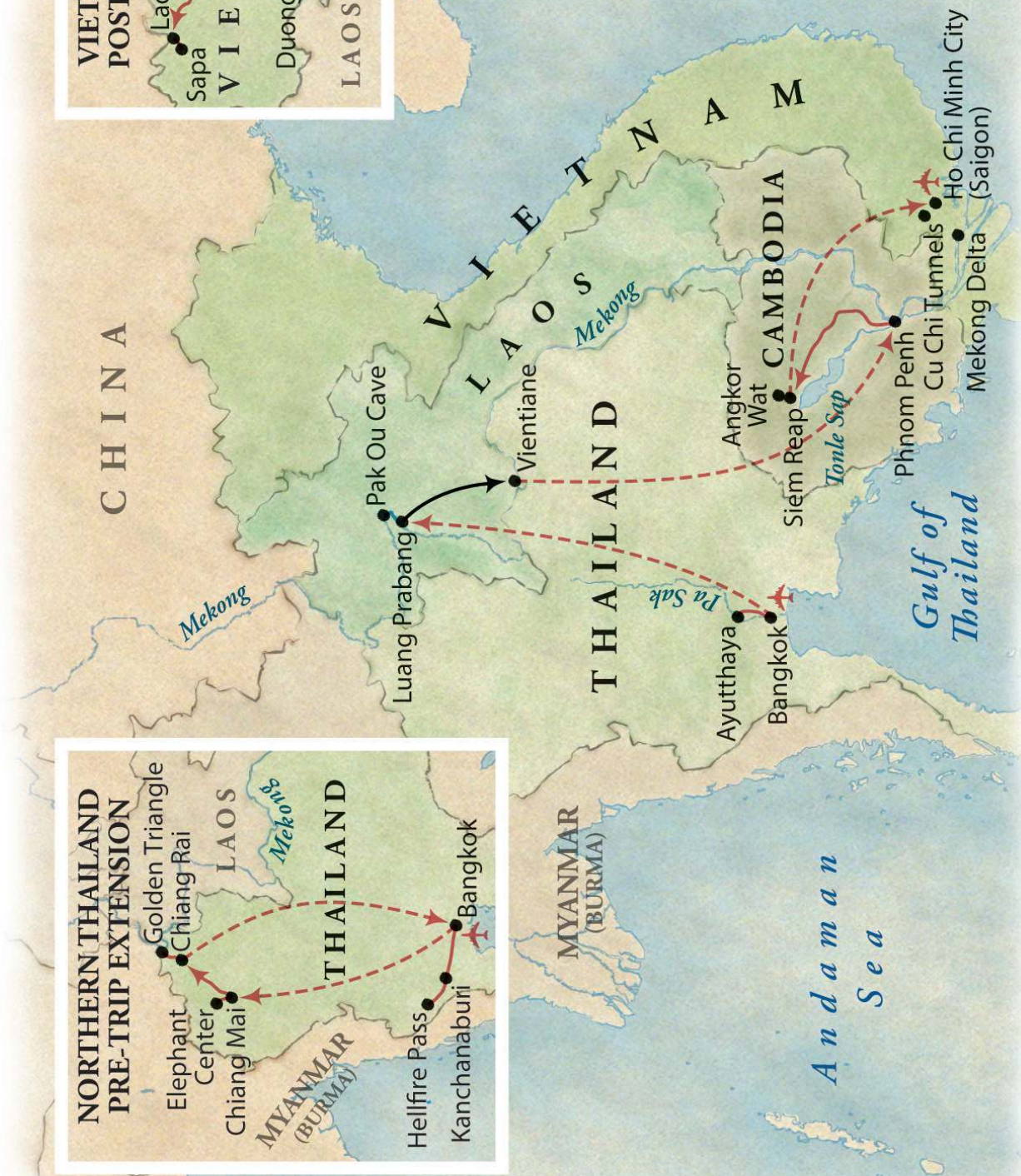
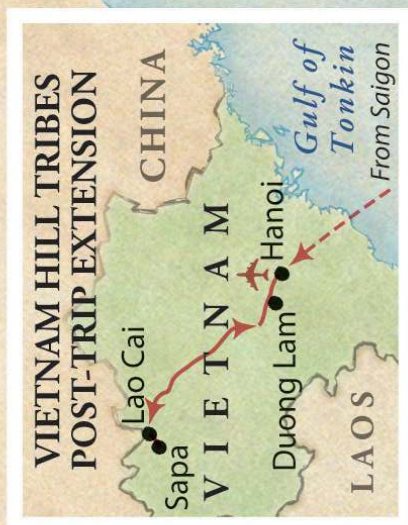
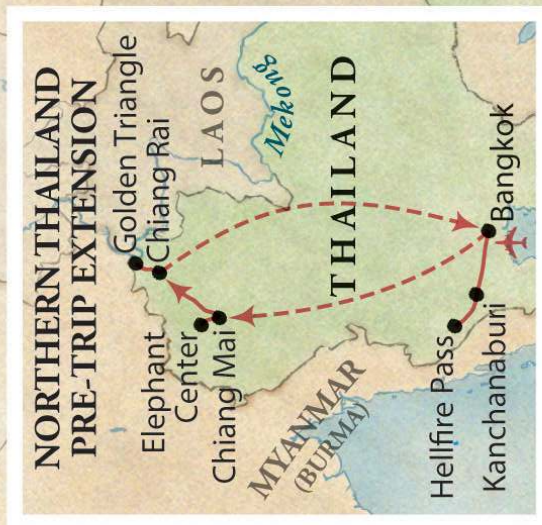
Maps your location and provides emergency numbers for police, medics, and more

GeoSure

Safely navigate neighborhoods around the world

Chirpey

For women only, connect with other women, find out what's safe, meet up, and more



SHARE YOUR TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

We invite you to share your videos, slideshows, and photos of your past O.A.T. adventures to help inspire your fellow travelers. Go to www.oattravel.com/myplanner to upload your photos or videos, and they may be featured on our website.

Most Popular Videos, Slideshows & Photos from our O.A.T. Adventures Created by O.A.T. Travelers



Submitted by Joy and Don Janke,
8-time travelers from Stevensville, MI



Submitted by Julia Schneider,
5-time traveler from Pinellas Park, FL



Submitted by Martin Schwartzman,
30-time traveler from Woodbury, NY



Submitted by Paul Stark, 17-time traveler
from Edina, MN



Submitted by David Fong, 16-time traveler
from Foster City, CA



Submitted by Steven dos Remedios,
23-time traveler from Oakland, CA



1-800-955-1925 | www.oattravel.com

CONNECT WITH US:  



World's Best
#4 Best Intimate-Ship
Ocean Cruise Line



Readers' Choice
Named to the Best
Tour Operators list



USA Today
#6 Best Educational
Tour Companies



"Best Tours"
Named one of the
"Best Tours"