

Wonders of Indochina

**Saigon, Phnom Penh, Siem Reap (Angkor Wat), Luang
Prabang, Hanoi, and Halong Bay**

15 Days (Tour Code – WIC)

Access China Tours®

Small Group and Private Fine Touring in China & Asia

Wonders of Indochina

Indochina is composed of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia and it is a fascinating region to travel and to explore. **VIETNAM** is a country of natural beauty and charming cultures. It offers a unique blend of the East and West with plenty of sights, sounds and smell. Vietnam cuisine is a gourmet delight with a mixture of Chinese, French and a little Thai and is one of the most sophisticated cuisines in Asia. **CAMBODIA** is a small, unique kingdom with a rich history and fascinating heritage of Buddhist art and architecture. Common motifs in Khmer sculpture are apsaras (celestial nymphs), which have become a symbol of the Khmer culture. **LAOS** is a landlocked country, which comprises mostly of mountains and plateaus, thus offering visitors numerous opportunities to explore nature. With a much smaller population and less modernization, Laos is a great destination to feel the “otherworldliness”.

Your exploration starts in southern Vietnam. A vibrant metropolis, **Saigon** teems with energy, activity and motion. Everywhere you look, you see the meeting of traditional and modern life. The emerging modern skyline stands cheek by jowl with colonial buildings and traditional temples. Outside on the streets, young professionals zip by on motorcycles, chatting on cell phones; inside the quiet temple courtyards, worshippers pray amidst clouds of incense.

Fly to the capital of Cambodia **Phnom Penh**, a chaotic, energetic and always fascinating city. Graceful tree-lined boulevards and riverfront promenades are reminders of bygone eras; today they teem with life and activity, as motorcycles weave in and out of traffic, vendors hawk their wares, and pedestrians go about their business. Cambodia is quickly catching up with its neighboring ASEAN countries.

A short flight gets you to **Siem Reap**. Near Siem Reap, the crowning jewel of Khmer art and architecture – **ANGKOR WAT** is the national symbol and the highlight of any visit to Cambodia, or even Southeast Asia. The largest, best preserved, and most religiously significant of the Angkor temples, Angkor impresses visitors both by its sheer scale and beautifully proportioned layout, as well as the delicate artistry of its carvings.

Take a hop north by air into Laos. Set between the Nam Khan and Mekong rivers, **Luang Prabang** is an enchanting town filled with historic temples and colonial style buildings. The atmosphere here is so tranquil and peaceful that many would contemplate staying on. The entire town was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1995.

Travel eastward via flight to the modern-day capital of Vietnam. **Hanoi** still retains the mystery and charm of past centuries. Narrow lanes and traditional shop houses invite exploration by cyclo (pedi cab), while its many beautiful public spaces - lakes, parks, tree-lined boulevards and monuments - give the city an air of elegance and harmony with nature unique among Asian capitals. Legacies of Chinese and French influence are evident in many parts of the city.

A gorgeous drive through the Red River Delta takes you from Hanoi to your boat in **Halong Bay**. A day spent cruising gently between the imposing limestone islets is hard to beat, but an evening spent watching the stars come out over the bay is a truly magical experience. You get both, plus kayaking and swimming in the turquoise water of Halong Bay.

Tour ends in Hanoi, from where you fly home.

Itinerary Summary

- Day 01 → **Saigon** Arrive in Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) on [your own international flight](#) today; met by your local guide and transfer to hotel for check-in; stay three nights in [Park Hyatt Saigon \(deluxe room\)](#)
- Day 02 **Saigon** Begin your tour of this exciting city with a stroll along DONG KHOI STREET in the historic center, formerly known as the Rue Catinat, the main shopping thoroughfare and heart of old colonial Saigon. Pass by classic European-style landmarks such as the ornate CITY HALL (HOTEL DE VILLE), the old OPERA HOUSE (both may only be viewed from the outside), and pay a quick visit to the neo-Romanesque NOTRE DAME CATHEDRAL and the CENTRAL POST OFFICE.
- Afterwards, dive into modern history with a tour of the REUNIFICATION PALACE. Formerly the Independence Palace of the South Vietnamese president, this 60s style building was famously stormed by tanks on April 30, 1975 signifying the fall of South Vietnam. It has been preserved in its original state, and the original tanks remain on display near the entrance gates. Continue to the harrowing WAR REMNANTS MUSEUM, which comprehensively documents the travails of the long Vietnam- American War. Inside are detailed photographic exhibitions; outside is a collection of tanks, planes and weapons. A powerful experience, this museum is guaranteed to provoke strong emotions. Afterwards, drive to the historic center to visit EMPEROR OF JADE PAGODA.
- In the afternoon, head out to CHOLON (CHINATOWN). Explore the highlights of this fascinating area, beginning with a brief visit to BINH TAY MARKET, the vast wholesale market selling every kind of good from dried foods to T shirts to electronics. Continue to THIEN HAU PAGODA, build by the Cantonese congregation and dedicated to the heavenly goddess. End your tour at the central BEN THANH MARKET, where vendors display a vast array of goods and handicrafts.
- Day 03 **Saigon** Excursion to My Tho with a boat trip to Mekong River Islands from Saigon, transfer to My Tho, a bustling town in the rich agricultural region of the Mekong Delta and visit the VINH TRANG PAGODA, a beautiful temple and a sanctuary for orphans and other needy children. Afterwards board a local boat to explore the MEKONG RIVER ISLANDS, stopping at a fruit orchard to enjoy fruit and tea while listening to local music and THOI SON islet. The trip also includes a brief sampan ride through the tiny waterways that thread the island.
- Day 04 → **Phnom Penh** Morning excursion to Cu Chi Tunnels. Never discovered by American forces, the CU CHI TUNNELS were an important Vietcong base during the American War. Stretching over 200 km, this incredible underground network, dug by hand out of hard laterite, connected command posts, hospitals, shelter and weapon factories. Today, you can walk through the

area and learn about the day-to-day life of the VC, see the cleverly disguised entrances and elaborate booby-traps, and even venture inside the tunnels, some of which have been modified to accommodate tourists.

Later in the day, transfer to Saigon Airport and fly to Phnom Penh, capital of Cambodia. Upon arrival in Phnom Penh, transfer to hotel for check-in.

Stay two nights in [InterContinental Phnom Penh Hotel \(deluxe room\)](#).

Day 05 Phnom Penh Start your tour with an insight into Cambodia's cultural heritage with a visit to the ROYAL PALACE, still the official residence of King Norodom Sihanouk and the adjacent SILVER PAGODA, also known as the Pagoda of the Emerald Buddha. Continue to the elegant NATIONAL MUSEUM, which contains a comprehensive collection of Khmer Art. Finally, explore the modern-day city, visiting one of Phnom Penh's two great markets, the CENTRAL MARKET, located in a distinctive domed Art Deco building (Central Market is currently under construction but can be visited as usual), OR the sprawling RUSSIAN MARKET, a labyrinth of stalls selling everything from CDs and DVDs to silks, crafts, jewelry and more.

Just outside Phnom Penh, in a peaceful rural setting, the KILLING FIELDS OF CHOEUING EK provide a stark reminder of the atrocities under the Pol Pot Regime. Thousands of people were killed here between the years of 1975 and 1978 and buried in mass graves.

Learn about a chapter from Cambodia's more recent, tragic, past at the TUOL SLENG MUSEUM (Museum of Genocide). Formerly the Tuol Svay Prey High School, in 1975, this became the interrogation and torture facility for the Khmer Rouge Regime - at that time known as Security Prison 21, or simply S-21. Kept largely unchanged, this prison now showcases photographs and exhibits about the thousands of victims that passed through these doors - only seven of whom came out alive.

Day 06 → Siem Reap Transfer to Phnom Penh Airport and fly to Siem Reap. A historic city in the central plains of Cambodia. Upon arrival, you are met and transfer to hotel for check-in. Later in the evening, enjoy a characteristic dinner in Amazon Angkor Restaurant.

Stay for 3 nights in [Raffles Grand Hotel d'Angkor \(landmark room\)](#).

Day 07 Siem Reap To approach the Angkor Wat, first cross the vast moat, continuing along a broad causeway lined with naga balustrades. As you enter the main building, ascend through a series of galleries and courtyard before reaching the central sanctuary, which offers beautiful views back over the causeway and across the surrounding countryside. On the way, stop to enjoy the intricate stone carvings that adorn nearly every surface, with some 1,700 Apsaras, or celestial dancers, sculpted into the walls. Along the outer gallery walls run the longest continuous bas-relief in the world, which narrates stories from Hindu mythology.

Angkor Wat is stunning at any time of the day, but sunrise and sunset are especially beautiful times to watch the play of light on the stones.

PREAH KHAN: a temple built by King Jayavarman VII with towered enclosures and shoulder-hugging corridors in a jungle setting. Preah Khan

covers a very large area but the temple itself is enclosed within a rectangular wall of around 700 by 800 meters.

Seemingly miniature in comparison to the other Angkor temples, BANTEAY SREI is considered to be the jewel of classical Khmer art. Built in pink sandstone, the walls are covered in exquisitely preserved carvings of unusual delicacy. Because of its small size, fairy-like atmosphere and extraordinary examples of Khmer sculpture, this temple is often a favorite with visitors.

Watch the sunset over the Cambodian countryside from the upper terraces of an ancient Angkorian temple.

Day 08 **Siem Reap**

The fortified city of ANGKOR THOM covers an area of 10 square km. Enclosed by a wall and wide moats, the city includes many of Angkor's most popular sights. Enter by the monumental SOUTH GATE over a causeway lined on either side by statues of demons and gods, each carrying a giant naga. Continue to the TERRACE OF THE ELEPHANTS and the TERRACE OF THE LEPER KINGS, former spaces for public ceremonies, both adorned with dramatic bas reliefs. Visit the ruined BAPHUON, ROYAL ENCLOSURE and PHIMEANAKAS before continuing to the mysterious BAYON TEMPLE. In this temple, one of the most popular and compelling in Angkor, explore the galleries of beautifully preserved bas reliefs and ascend narrow stairs to reach the central sanctuary, where you will find giant stone faces smiling enigmatically down at you from every angle.

PRASAT KRAVAN: the five brick towers were built for Hindu worship in 921 and are notable for the bas-reliefs cut into the bricks on the interior walls. A massive Buddhist temple dating from the second half of the 12th century, BANTEAY KDEI is surrounded by four concentric walls, the outer walls measuring 500 by 700 meters.

SRAS SRANG: a basin opposite of Banteay Kdei measuring 800 by 400 meters with a tiny island in the middle where only the stone base remains of what was once a wooden temple. TA PROHM: one of the most popular attractions of Angkor as much of the jungle has not been cleared and it looks very much as most of the Angkor monuments would have appeared when European explorers first stumbled across them.

TA KEO: built by Jayavarman V who ruled from 968 to 1001, it was the first Angkorian monument built entirely of sandstone and was dedicated to Shiva. The summit of the central tower is 50 meters high and is surrounded by four lower towers.

THOMMANON: temple which mirrors Chau Say Tevoda (just to the north), as it was built around the same time and has a similar plan. It is also dedicated to Shiva and Vishnu. CHAU SAY TEVODA: built during the second quarter of the 12th century opposite of Thommanon, it was dedicated to Shiva and Vishnu.

Day 09 → **Luang Prabang** Enjoy a relaxed morning in your hotel with breakfast. Transfer to airport for a flight from Siem Reap to Luang Prabang, Laos. Upon arrival, met and transfer to hotel.

Set between the Nam Khan and Mekong rivers, Luang Prabang is an

enchanted town filled with historic temples and colonial style buildings. Begin your tour with WAT VISOUN (Wat Wisunalat). The oldest living temple in Luang Prabang, Wat Visoun dates back to 1513 and contains a collection of antique wooden Buddhas. Visit the nearby WAT AHAM before continuing to WAT XIENG THONG, the crowning jewel of all the monasteries and temples in the city. Its many ornate buildings feature exquisite mosaic and gold-stenciled murals.

From there, stroll down the main street (Wat Street) of Luang Prabang. Time permitting, stop at some of the many temples that line its sides, including WAT SIBOUNHEUANG, WAT SI MOUNGKHOUN, WAT SOP and WAT SENE.

Visit Mount Phousi for sunset. Climb the hillside stairs to the small temples atop PHOU SI, the 100m high hill which sits in the middle of the town, offering beautiful views over the temples and river.

Stay for two nights in [Le Residence Phou Vao \(deluxe garden view\)](#).

Day 10 Luang Prabang Morning excursion to Tham Pak Ou Cave. Travel down the Mekong River to the steep limestone cliffs overlooking the Mekong and Nam Ou rivers, home to the THAM PAK OU CAVES. These extraordinary caves are filled with Buddha images of every style and material imaginable. On the return journey, stop at BAN XANG HAI VILLAGE, a local village famous for the production of lao lao, the local rice wine whisky.

Afternoon excursion to KUANG SI WATERFALL. On the way, visit minorities village of Ban Muang Khai. Continue by car to Kuang Si Waterfall, located in a perfect natural setting near Luang Prabang, this multi-tiered waterfall tumbles over limestone formations into a series of turquoise pools. Enjoy swimming in the clear water or just relaxing in the natural environment. Continue to BAN THA PENE, a nearby Khmu village, before returning to Luang Prabang by vehicle.

Day 11 → Hanoi Continue your sightseeing in Luang Prabang this morning. Visit a LOCAL MARKET to see the bustle and activity of buying and selling of produce and other daily necessities. Continue to the NATIONAL MUSEUM (ROYAL PALACE), a modest but graceful building which combines traditional Lao and French beaux-arts motifs. This turn-of-the century royal residence has been preserved as it was when the royal family last lived here and provides unique insights into the history of Laos. (Closed on Tuesdays). Afterwards, visit WAT MAI.

Transfer to airport and fly to Hanoi, Vietnam. Upon arrival, met by your guide and transfer to hotel for check-in.

Start your tour at the miniature ONE PILLAR PAGODA. Dating from the 11th century, this monument was rebuilt after being destroyed by the French in 1954. Today it stands near the vast HO CHI MINH MEMORIAL COMPLEX, a lovely park setting which is home to Ho Chi Minh's final resting place, as well as a museum and other memorials. Begin at the HO CHI MINH MAUSOLEUM, where visitors can pay respects to the embalmed body of Ho Chi Minh. *(The Mausoleum is closed in the afternoons, on Mondays and Fridays, and closes annually in October and November for*

restoration). Continue through the park to HO CHI MINH'S STILT HOUSE, the simple two-room dwelling where Ho Chi Minh lived from 1948 until his final days. Preserved in the same condition as during his life, it may be viewed through the windows.

Overnight stay in [Sofitel Plaza Hanoi \(corner view room\)](#).

Day 12 🚗 Halong Bay By vehicle from Hanoi to Halong Bay. Welcome on board of **Halong Ginger** and set sail through the bay while lunch is served. Passage into the magical bay, where thousands of sculpted limestone islands rise from the waves like dragons teeth.

After lunch, take a short trek to a nearby summit for a panoramic view of the bay dotted with Halong Ginger golden sails, go swimming on a quite beach or sunbathing on the sundeck. Later afternoon, visit an interesting fishing village with opportunity to interact with fishermen who have been living in the bay for almost three generations. At sunset time, kayak or simply take a bamboo row boat to discover a water tunnel with many coral reefs in a scenic lagoon. Back on board Halong Ginger, enjoy cocktails while watching sunset and later unwind at Ginger restaurant.

Overnight on [Halong Ginger \(deluxe cabin\)](#). <B-L-D>

Day 13 🚗 Hanoi Greet the day with a morning Tai Chi exercise with an opportunity to view the sunrise over the bay. After breakfast, visit beautiful limestone grotto then back to the boat for a final glimpse of the Halong Bay while cruising back to the dock at 11:30 hrs.

By vehicle from Halong to Hanoi with sightseeing at Bat Trang (Ceramic Village) located about 12km southeast of Hanoi. The village was founded in the 16th century and features over 800 family-operated and industrial kilns fired with wood and coal. They specialized in large-scale pottery and porcelain production using traditional methods. Upon arrival, an amazing view of all pottery and ceramic showrooms scattering all over the village. Stop at a small family factory to see how they manufacture their products. Watch the artisans form, paint and glaze their products and you will have a chance to practice your talent with wet clay and a mould. Or you can join the drawing class in the factory.

Arrive in Hanoi City and check in the landmark Metropole. Stay for two nights in [Sofitel Metropole Hanoi \(premium room\)](#). <B-L>

Day 14 Hanoi Begin your day visiting the TEMPLE OF LITERATURE, a peaceful series of walled courtyards and graceful gateways, and one of the best surviving examples of traditional Vietnamese architecture. Founded in 1070 and dedicated to Confucius, this was also the site of Vietnam's first university.

Afterwards, head to HOAN KIEM LAKE, located in heart of Hanoi, which contains an islet with the tiny TORTOISE PAGODA. En route, pass other colonial landmarks such as the magnificent OPERA HOUSE (may be seen from the outside only) and ST JOSEPH'S CATHEDRAL. From the lake, begin exploring the OLD QUARTER by CYCLO. This fascinating network of narrow alleys and shop houses is also known as 'The 36 Streets,' each street being named after the merchandise traditionally sold there, ranging from

fabrics to crafts to medicines to tombstones. A handicraft-lover's paradise and an endlessly interesting place to explore local life. The cyclo ride lasts approximately one hour.

In the afternoon, visit one of Hanoi's famous museums, either the HISTORY MUSEUM or the MUSEUM OF ETHNOLOGY.

Once the museum of the Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient, the HISTORY MUSEUM is housed in an elegant building from the 1930s and includes exhibits spanning the entirety of Vietnam's history including prehistory, proto-Vietnamese civilizations, the Dong Son Culture, the Oc-Eo Culture and the Khmer Kingdoms.

The alternative to the visit of History Museum is The MUSEUM OF ETHNOLOGY (close on Monday), which brings to life the astonishing ethnic diversity in Vietnam, with art and artifacts from the 54 different ethnic groups that inhabit the country. Inside the museum are detailed descriptions of minority groups, with examples of their traditional clothing and way of life. Outside are faithful reconstructions of traditional longhouses, cemeteries and other distinctive ethnic buildings.

You will enjoy some time for your own exploration and shopping.

Day 15 → depart transfer to airport for **your own** homebound flight. Service ends.

Changes to Itinerary: Access China Tours has made all possible attempts to ensure the accuracy of tour itineraries. Circumstances beyond our control may occur. We reserve the right to change itineraries, sightseeing activities, and common carriers, and to substitute hotels when necessary. Service of a similar category and standard will be maintained if such changes are made. The Service Voucher in your last pre-departure packet will provide the operational itinerary summary, final transport and hotel information.

Tour Land Price Inclusions & Exclusions

What's Included in Tour Land Price:

- Luxury/deluxe class hotel accommodations, double occupancy
- Coach class intra-region domestic air and ground transportation while on tour
- All tour related hotel and transportation taxes
- Arrival and departure transfers on tour dates
- Transfers and luggage (1 piece of 50 pounds per person) handling
- Pre-departure information packets
- All sightseeing, activities, and cultural events listed in the itinerary
- All breakfasts and some lunches, dinners as specified in the itinerary
- Service of a private English-speaking local tour guide in each city except in Putao
- Private, clean, and newer vehicles with air-conditioning and professional driver except in Putao

What's Not Included in Tour Land Prices:

- International air tickets and visa processing
- Most lunches and dinners
- Trip cancellation, baggage, accident, and medical insurance
- Gratuities to guides and drivers
- Items not listed and/or specified as included in the itinerary

Cancellation Policy: All cancellation notices must be received in writing and will become effective as of the date of receipt by *Access China Tours*. We assess cancellation fees of all tours according to the following schedule:

70 days or more prior to departure *	\$200 per person
69 to 50 days prior to departure *	\$400 per person
49 to 30 days prior to departure *	\$600 per person
29 to 15 days prior to departure *	\$800 per person

* Plus any charges assessed by government agencies, land suppliers, cruise companies and airlines.

Within 14 days of departure100% forfeiture of the tour price per person

Access China Tours will not grant partial refunds for any unused trip arrangements after the trip has commenced or any refunds to participants who do not complete any portion of the itinerary. Any airline tickets issued are subject to the carrier's refund and cancellation policy. **We strongly recommend you purchase trip cancellation/interruption insurance to protect your travel investment.** *Access China Tours* reserves the right to cancel any tour(s) that has only one traveler. In this case, we will try to find an alternative tour for tour participants. If this is not acceptable, all money paid will be refunded in full and this will constitute full and final settlement for the client. However, *Access China Tours* will not be responsible for any expenses incurred by tour participants (e.g., non-refundable "advance purchase" air tickets, insurance & medical expenses, passport and visa expenses, etc.).

If a tour is forced to be cancelled due to government's travel warnings, declared or undeclared wars, hostilities, civil disturbances, strike, riot, epidemic, and quarantines, *Access China Tours* will refund all participants' payment less any irretrievable expenses and loss (visa fees, airline penalties, communication cost, and non-refundable booking cost, etc.)