



## Mekong Odyssey Dossier

Classic Tour | 20 Days | Physical Level 1

Hanoi - Halong Bay - Hue - Hoi An - Saigon – 7N Mekong Cruise – Siem Reap

Featuring a relaxing 7-night cruise on the mighty Mekong, not only is this tour perfect for the cruise lover, it also explores the charming cities, natural wonders and cultural treasures of both Vietnam and Cambodia.

- Explore Hanoi's Old Quarter by rickshaw
- Wake to a Halong Bay sunrise
- Sample local cuisine in Hanoi
- Master Vietnamese cuisine in Hoi An
- Enjoy a 7-night Mekong river cruise
- Discover the wonders of Angkor
- Visit a floating village in Tonle Sap
- Experience PHARE – the Cambodian Circus



### Mekong Odyssey inclusions:

- Return international economy flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation
- All meals
- All sightseeing and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English speaking National Escort (if your group is 10 or more passengers) or Local Guides
- Cambodia visa fees for Australian passport holders (please see visa section below for further information on Vietnam visas)
- Specialist advice from our experienced travel consultants
- Comprehensive travel guides

*The only thing you may have to pay for are personal expenditure e.g. drinks, optional excursions or shows, insurance of any kind, customary tipping, early check in or late checkout and other items not specified on the itinerary.*

### Classic Tours:

These tours are designed for those who wish to see the iconic sites and magnificent treasures of South East Asia on an excellent value group tour whilst travelling with like-minded people. The tours are on a fully-inclusive basis so you'll travel with the assurance that all your arrangements are taken care of. You will be accompanied by our dedicated and professional National Escorts and local guides, whose unparalleled knowledge will turn your holiday into an unforgettable experience.

### Physical Level 1:

All our tours feature a physical rating to help you select the right holiday for you. To travel on any of our tours requires unaided mobility and the ability to stroll around the sights.

'Mekong Odyssey' is rated as a **physical level 1** tour. A reasonable level of fitness is required but it's more about spending time on your feet rather than covering large distances. You'll be getting on and off coaches and boats, walking around the sights and climbing some steps.

- There will be sightseeing on foot for both short and extended periods of time
- Throughout the tour you will be required to get on and off varying sizes of boats without assistance

Of course, our National Escorts and local guides will always endeavour to provide the highest level of service and assistance; however, they cannot be expected to cater for customers who are unfit to complete the itinerary.

### Country Profile: Vietnam and Cambodia

**Cambodia** - Cambodia is blessed with unspoilt beaches and beautiful colonial cities like Phnom Penh, Battambang and Kep. In Siem Reap, the breathtaking temples of Angkor are regarded as the heart and soul of Cambodia. Many visitors may never intend to go beyond these magnificent temples; however, they will soon become captivated by other parts of this friendly country.

**Vietnam** - Vietnam is a country of breath-taking natural beauty with an incredible modern-day history that quickly becomes addictive. It has experienced war and a bloody revolution in the past 100 years, but the revolution now underway is peaceful and prosperous. The speed of the modern-day changes is making Vietnam

the absorbing and gripping place that it is today. Vietnam has something to offer everyone, so whether you are a culture vulture, thrill seeker or just looking to relax and take in the beaches, Vietnam will not disappoint.

### Joining Your Tour

The tour is 20 days in duration including international flights. Please note that depending on flight schedules passengers may arrive/depart on Day 2.

Travellers booked on 'Land Only, the price includes visa fees and your arrival/departure airport transfers if arriving/departing on the start and conclusion date of your tour. Please advise your international flight times to reservations. Join the tour on day one in Hanoi and end the tour on Day 19 in Siem Reap. Please refer to your final itinerary for more specific meeting instructions pertaining to your departure.

### Itinerary Changes

It is our intention to adhere to the day-to-day itinerary as printed; however, the order of events or sightseeing may change as we look to improve our tours or as local conditions dictate. In these circumstances we will make the best possible arrangements maintaining the integrity of your trip.

- The Notre Dame Cathedral will be under restorations until 2023. During this time customers are unable to enter the Cathedral; however, they can view it from the outside.
- The uppermost level of Bayon Temple will be undergoing restorations from January 2020 and may last several years. During this maintenance period passengers will be unable to access this area but can continue to enjoy the impressive architecture from the lower two levels.

#### **2020 changes:**

- Touring order of Hue and Hoi An has been rearranged. The group will fly to Hoi An from Saigon, and then on to Hue.



## Itinerary – Mekong Odyssey

### Day 1: Hanoi

Fly to Hanoi where you will be met at the airport in the arrival hall by your Local Guide or National Escort. Together with all other group members who may be arriving at a similar time, you will transfer 45 minutes to your hotel and check into your room or store any luggage if your room is not ready yet. There is no sightseeing today.



#### Destination Information

**Hanoi** - With a population of approximately four million, Hanoi is a charming and richly historic city of lakes, shaded boulevards and leafy open parks. The centre is an architectural museum piece housing groups of ochre coloured buildings holding the air of provincial French towns of the 1930s, a “Paris of the Orient” as people have called it.

### Day 2: Hanoi

Discover the sights of Hanoi today. First stop will be Ba Dinh Square, passing by Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum, followed by the Humble House on Stilts and the One Pillar Pagoda. Next drive to the serene Temple of Literature, Hanoi's first university. Later experience an exhilarating cyclo ride through Hanoi's Old Quarter. Each cyclo takes one passenger and is operated by a cycle driver behind the carriage. Wrap up your cyclo ride with a strong Vietnamese coffee at a café overlooking Hoan Kiem Lake - an important symbol of Vietnamese folklore. This evening take a culinary adventure, sampling street food in the Old Quarter for dinner.



#### Destination Information

**Ho Chi Minh Quarter** - Dedicated to the father of modern Vietnam and where Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum stands in Ba Dinh Square. Ho Chi Minh first declared independence from French rule in 1945.

**One Pillar Pagoda** - Rebuilt in 1955 after damage during the French evacuation, the pagoda is made of wood and sits on a single pillar. Designed to reflect the shape of a lotus flower emerging from the water, it has become a popular spot for locals to enjoy the tranquil surroundings.

**Humble House on Stilts** - In the grounds of the Presidential Palace sits the 2 storey wooden home of Ho Chi Minh who ruled Vietnam from here until his death in 1969.

**Temple of Literature** - Hanoi's first university dating back to 1070 and a historical centre of learning, now dedicated to Confucian worship.

**Hanoi Old Quarter** - A maze of streets weaving through Hanoi and dating back to the 13th century. Each street specialises in merchants and artisans selling their wares of silk, silver, wood and more.

### Day 3: Halong Bay

Drive 4 hours today from Hanoi to Halong, where you will take an overnight cruise to the far-most corners of the bay by boat. There is usually a crowd of boats at the docks; however, the cruise itself will be scenic and relaxing.

Enjoy lunch on board as you cruise out into the bay, stopping to anchor for an afternoon of activities (which are subject to change due to cruise selection and weather conditions). Sightseeing includes visiting underground caves on the islands, which require climbing up and down steps inside and outside of the caves. End the day on deck with a drink in hand

to watch the sunset over the bay followed by a freshly prepared dinner, before retiring to your cabin for the night.



*You will need to pack a smaller overnight bag for your trip to Halong Bay. Main luggage will be left in safe storage at the hotel in Hanoi and picked up your return.*

*Please note: Weather conditions such as mist, fog, wind, rain and storms may delay the departure time of your cruise, or in some cases your cruise may be cancelled. Notifications of any delays or cancellations may not be known until your group's arrival in Halong Bay. If your cruise is cancelled after your arrival in Halong Bay, you will have lunch in Halong City and return to Hanoi. If notification of the cruise cancellation is given prior to your departure for Halong Bay an alternative day trip will be arranged to Hoa Lu and Tam Coc or 'Halong Bay on Land', an area located approximately 2 hours from Hanoi. Our guides will make every effort to inform the group at the earliest possible moment should there be any itinerary changes.*

#### **Destination Information**

**Halong Bay** - Compared to the landscape of the limestone islets of Guilin in China and Krabi in southern Thailand, Halong Bay shares a common border with China in the north and harbours some of the most stunning scenery in Vietnam. Unique rock sculptures jut out dramatically from the clear emerald waters of the Gulf of Tonkin and numerous grottoes have created an enchanting, timeless world, looking out onto the horizon with the sails of the junks and sampans completing the picture.

### Day 4: Halong Bay – Hoi An

Spend the morning sailing through Halong Bay. After an early lunch (or brunch meal) disembark your cruise and return to Hanoi. Here you will transfer to the airport for your onward flight. Fly 1 hour and 20 minutes to Danang and transfer to Hoi An.

#### **Destination Information**

**Hoi An** - Perhaps more than any other place in Vietnam, Hoi An retains the feel of centuries past. Once known as Faifo, Hoi An was an influential port along the Silk Road. For over 500 years merchants from China, Japan, France and Portugal settled in the prosperous town resulting in a distinctive blend of culture, cuisine, religion and architecture.

## Day 5: Hoi An

After breakfast; enjoy a light walking tour of Hoi An's centre, including one of Hoi An's oldest homes, built over 200 years ago and still occupied by the descendants of the merchant family that originally built it, the Quan Cong Chinese Temple and the Japanese Covered Bridge. Also visit the Reaching Out Arts and Crafts Workshop, before heading to the local market. Here you will pick up fresh produce for a cooking class, where you will be taught some local recipes.

### Destination Information

**Japanese Covered Bridge** - First constructed in the 1590s to link the Japanese and Chinese quarters of the town. This iconic pink hued bridge has been restored to its former splendour.

**Reaching Out** – Provides opportunities for people with disabilities to learn skills and gain meaningful employment. The arts and crafts workshop provides a platform for local people to showcase their talents.

## Day 6: Hoi An - Hue

This morning; travel approximately 3 hours to the town of Hue. Hue is the epitome of Vietnam's dynamic past and considered a scholarly city. Visit the Imperial Citadel and the Forbidden Purple City which is still being restored many years after the destruction caused by street fighting and bombing during the American War in Vietnam. Explore the Royal Tomb of Minh Mang; the complex comprises of almost 40 monuments and is surrounded by gardens and pools, making it one of the most beautiful tombs.



### Destination Information

**Hue** - Having been the imperial capital from 1802 until 1945 after the last emperor abdicated; Hue is still regarded as the centre of Vietnam's culture and religion. The city is dominated by the Imperial Citadel that is modelled on the Forbidden City in China. There are many wonderful pagodas and temples of high significance and it contains the Grand Tombs of the Nguyen Emperors.

**Imperial Citadel** - A walled fortress accompanied by cannons, artilleries and surrounded by a moat for protection. Inside the Citadel are numerous gates, courtyards and the Forbidden Purple City.

**Forbidden Purple City** - Constructed for personal use by the Imperial family, their concubines and eunuchs. This royal structure is still being restored many years after the destruction caused by street fighting and bombing during the American war in Vietnam. Wander the grounds and foundations whilst viewing the remaining woodwork and architecture.

**Royal Tomb of Minh Mang** - Emperor Minh Mang reigned in the Nguyen Dynasty, the last of the Vietnamese dynasties, from 1820-1840. The construction of his tomb was completed after his death and is said to have taken approximately 10,000 workers to complete. The complex comprises of almost 40 monuments and is surrounded by gardens and pools, making it one of the more beautiful tombs in Vietnam.

## Day 7: Hue - Saigon

Visit the Thien Mu Pagoda this morning before an early afternoon flight of 1 hours and 25 minutes to Saigon.

### Destination Information

**Thien Mu Pagoda** - This seven-storey octagonal tower built on a hillock, overlooking the Perfume River is Hue's oldest and most beautiful pagoda. Wander the grounds where bonsai, ponds and the smell of incense set a peaceful backdrop.

**Saigon** - The exuberant city of Saigon is driving Vietnam forward into the modern world but is also a treasure trove of fascinating heritage. During the 1960s and early 1970s, Saigon was the Pearl of the Orient, which flourished under the American occupation. In more recent times, it was the seat of the South Vietnam government until the events that led to the country's reunification. Today, the old mixes seamlessly with the new and you can wander through timeless alleys to incense-infused temples before catching up with the present in designer malls beneath sleek skyscrapers.

## Day 8: Saigon

Confront the reality of guerrilla warfare at the Cu Chi Tunnels. The cramped tunnels were central to a few of the war's strategic operations, including the famous 1968 Tet Offensive, and they did not escape damage. American B52 bombers dropped hundreds of missiles leaving huge tell-tale craters behind. The Cu Chi experience can be emotional for some visitors, but it offers a fascinating window into the hardship and traumas of war. Sightseeing involves 2 hours on foot on uneven mud paths through the bush and, if you choose, crawling through some of the tunnels. See Notre Dame Cathedral and visit the Central Post Office, the Reunification Palace, the chilling War Remnants Museum and the bustling Ben Thanh Market.



*Please note: The Notre Dame Cathedral will be under renovation until 2023. During this time, we are unable to enter the Cathedral; however, we can view it from the outside.*

### Destination Information

**Cu Chi** - the tunnels of Cu Chi are an immense network of connecting underground tunnels located in the Cu Chi district of Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), Vietnam, and are part of a much larger network of tunnels that underlie much of the country. The Cu Chi tunnels were the location of several military campaigns during the Vietnam War, and were the Viet Cong's base of operations for the Tet Offensive in 1968. The tunnels were used by Viet Cong soldiers as hiding spots during combat, as well as serving as communication and supply routes, hospitals, food and weapon caches and living quarters for numerous North Vietnamese fighters. The tunnel systems were of great importance to the Viet Cong in their resistance to American forces, and helped to counter the growing American military effort.

**Notre Dame Cathedral** - Influenced by French design and built between 1863 and 1880, the red brick exterior and 60-metre bell towers overlook downtown Saigon.

**Central Post Office** - Located next to the Notre-Dame Cathedral. The Central Post Office building was constructed in the late 19th century. It counts Gothic, Renaissance and French influences and was designed by Auguste Henri Vildieu and Alfred Foulhoux, but is often erroneously credited as being the work of Gustave Eiffel.



**Reunification Palace** - Built on the site of the former Norodom Palace, is a landmark in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. It was designed by architect Ngô Viết Thụ and was the home and workplace of the President of South Vietnam during the Vietnam War. It was the site of the end of the Vietnam War during the Fall of Saigon on 30th April 1975, when a North Vietnamese Army tank crashed through its gates.

**War Remnants Museum** - Comprised of numerous buildings displaying military equipment, photographs and artefacts relating to the Vietnam War from 1961-1975. This museum illustrates a harrowing period in this nation's history.

### Day 9: Saigon – Mekong River Cruise

Transfer to the meeting hotel in Saigon where you will say goodbye to your National Escort and be picked up for your cruise by your local guide from Mekong Prestige. Drive 2 hours to My Tho this morning, where you will board your elegant cruise vessel for a 7-night cruise up the Mekong River. Sit on the sun deck and sip your welcome cocktail before dining on delicious local cuisine.



#### Destination Information

**Mekong River** – The 7<sup>th</sup> longest river in Asia and the heart of Southeast Asia civilisation, there is no tapestry of river life as fascinating and varied as the Mekong.

### Day 10: Mekong River Cruise

Take a morning trip around Cai Be's floating market and visit the French Gothic Cathedral. Take an exciting Sampan boat excursion to Sa Dec via Vinh Long, along canals and backwaters and see the local market, a brick factory and the ancient house of Mr Huynh Thuy Le, a famous French novelist. Visit to a Caodaist Temple and stroll through the colorful local market.

### Day 11: Mekong River Cruise

After having your breakfast on board, you will see the real life of Vietnamese people along the Mekong River by visiting a fishing farm in Tan Chau on the Ban Sac River. Continue on a walking tour to handicraft villages where locals make woven mats and raw silk. Enjoy a fun rickshaw ride round the beautiful town, and later head back to the pier for lunch, complete the formalities at the Cambodian border, and then sail up the Mekong river to Phnom Penh.



### Day 12: Mekong River Cruise

After breakfast, be captivated by a comprehensive lecture on Cambodia's modern history. This will be followed by a city tour of this dynamic, historical capital city of Cambodia which has managed to preserve huge slices of its French colonial allure. Sightseeing in the morning will include visiting the dazzling white and gold edifice of the Royal Palace and the Silver Pagoda, and witnessing exceptionally beautiful Khmer craft at the National Museum. In the afternoon, take a short excursion to visit the former High School "S21", converted to a detention centre under the Red Khmer's rule between 1975 and 1979, followed by a visit to Wat Phnom after which the city was named. This evening, experience an Apsara dance performance during a barbeque dinner on the sundeck.



### Day 13: Mekong River Cruise

Early morning sail from Phnom Penh to Koh Chong, which is located on the Mekong River and is famous for its silk weaving. Visit the village for a morning walk at leisure and a visit to the local workshop. The excursion also includes a visit to a Pagoda and a meeting in a primary school to chat with pupils. Cruise past the Mekong's timeless villages and river life with extensive fishing activities. Return to Phnom Penh and have the afternoon at leisure for a discovery of the city on your own and shopping at the Russian Market or drink coffee along the Mekong River Bank.

### Day 14: Mekong River Cruise

Today the ship will sail up to Oudong and you can enjoy the stunning views along the river bank. Arrive in Oudong in the early afternoon, 40 kilometres from Phnom Penh. Between 1618 and 1866, Oudong was the capital city of Cambodia. Erected on a hilltop, this city houses numerous stupas, dating to the last Khmer Kings. See the Vipassana Dhura Pagoda, a place of meditation for Buddhist Monks. Afterwards, your bus departs for Kampong Tralach to visit the very charming Vihara of the Wat Kampong Leu Pagoda dating back to the last century, to see the beautiful wall paintings. Return to the ship by ox-drawn carriage.

### Day 15: Mekong River Cruise

Have buffet breakfast on board, then sail on the Tonle Sap River which connects the Mekong River to the Tonle Lake – the biggest fresh water lake in Asia. Arrive at Kampong Chhnang, located approximately 90 km from Phnom Penh. This is a busy rural port town with bustling markets. We will take a motor boat to visit real Khmer villagers. The life of the entire population is connected to the river with local people using the canal system which criss-crosses this little town. Go ashore to stroll through the scenic market.



### Day 16: Mekong River Cruise – Siem Reap

This morning; disembark from your cruise vessel and meet your new Cambodian National Escort. Take the shuttle bus for approximately 5 hours to Siem Reap stopping en route to visit a local village and school. Arriving at the drop off point in Siem Reap you will be picked up and transferred to your hotel to store your luggage. Continue on to Banteay Srei to explore fascinating Hindu temple. Later board a boat to view the sunset from the moat of Angkor Thom.



#### Destination Information

**Banteay Srei** - A Hindu temple dedicated to Shiva and considered by many to be the 'Jewel in the Crown' of Angkorian art. The temple is cut from stone of a pinkish hue and contains some of the finest stone carvings in the world.

### Day 17: Siem Reap

Spanning from the 9th to 15th century, the Angkor complex with over 1,000 temples was the seat of the thriving Khmer Empire. UNESCO manages the complex and to enter, your group will drive approximately 6km out of town to the main entrance gate to get your entrance passes, which you must carry with you. If you choose to climb at any site, you must be able to climb and descend without assistance. Begin at the city of Angkor Thom and the enigmatic Bayon, the Elephant Terrace and the Terrace of the Leper King, before continuing to the temple of Ta Prohm, enveloped in a labyrinth of jungle. This afternoon is devoted to the fascinating and awe-inspiring Angkor Wat. This evening, watch a performance by the PHARE Cambodian Circus, an NGO which teaches street children to become internationally renowned circus artists.



*Please note: The Central Tower of the Angkor Wat complex is closed on Buddhist holidays and on all other days has a limited number of visitors allowed at any given time, under regulations from UNESCO. If you wish to visit this tower, you will be required to wait in the queue alongside all other visitors. The ability to do this will be determined upon the groups' schedule.*

*The uppermost level of Bayon Temple will be undergoing restorations from January 2020 and may last several years. During this maintenance period passengers will be unable to access this area but can continue to enjoy the impressive architecture from the lower two levels.*

**Destination Information**

**Ta Prohm** - Swallowed by the jungle where Strangler Figs and Kapok Trees have entwined themselves around the ruins. Undoubtedly, the most atmospheric ruin at Angkor with several towers, closed courtyards and narrow corridors to explore.

**Angkor Thom** - This fortified city is flanked by a row of 54 stone figures on each side, which leads you through a 23-meter imposing stone entrance gate to the various temples inside.

**Bayon** - Beautifully crafted central towers, decorated with four opposing faces representing King Jayavarman VII. Bayon's stone galleries display extraordinary bas-reliefs incorporating over 11,000 figures.

**Elephant Terrace and Terrace of the Leper King** - Giant viewing platforms used for public ceremonies, which served as a base for the King's grand audience hall.

**Angkor Wat** - Surrounded by a 190-meter moat and taking 30 years to build, Angkor Wat represents the Khmer civilisation at its grandest. With its fascinating decorative flourishes, extensive bas-relief and multiple tiers, it is the best-preserved temple within the complex.

**Day 18: Siem Reap**

Today explore the less visited Beng Mealea, a mysterious temple completely overrun by the jungle where you will explore on foot for approximately an hour and half. In the high water season, you will also visit Kompong Khleang a unique village on stilts. In the lower water season, you will visit Chong Kneas floating village. Return to Siem Reap via a Cambodian artistry assembly - Les Artisan D'Angkor before arriving back at your hotel this evening. Enjoy dinner while watching an Apsara dance performance.

**Destination Information**

**Beng Mealea** - Dating from the 11th century, this sprawling temple covers over one square kilometre. Largely overrun by vegetation and constructed in a distinctly Angkor Wat-style, Beng Mealea precedes and may even have served as a 'prototype' for Angkor Wat.

**Artisan D'Angkor** - Established in 1998, this community workshop teaches the unique arts of painting, silk weaving, wood and stone carving in traditional Cambodian style to local young people.

**Days 19-20: Depart Siem Reap**

Any time before your flight is free at your leisure today. You will be transferred 1 hour from the hotel to the airport this evening for your flight to Australia, arriving home the following day.

Late check-out is not included in our South East Asia group tours. If you wish to book a late check-out for your final day, please contact our reservations department who can confirm additional pricing and make this arrangement for you, subject to availability at the hotel.

## Mekong Odyssey Travel Information

### Visas

Entry visas are required by all visitors to Cambodia and Vietnam and Wendy Wu Tours Visa Department can assist you with the process of obtaining a visa.

We will supply you with all paperwork and submit the visa application on your behalf. Visas for Vietnam are issued with specific start and expiry dates which are based on the dates stated on the visa application form. Travel must be completed within those dates. Please be advised that your passport must have at least six months validity left on it when you arrive back into Australia.

Visa application forms and all relevant documentation are due in our office **60 days prior to departure**; if received after this, urgent visa processing fees will apply. Also, please note we do not accept passports and visa applications within 30 days prior to departure. Passports will be returned with your Final Documentation **four weeks prior to your group tour's scheduled departure**. If you require your passport to be returned earlier, a \$15AUD courier fee will apply.

### Insurance

We strongly encourage all customers to take a copy of their travel insurance documents (especially relevant international contact numbers) with them while on tour. We advise that you check the inclusions and procedures for lodging claims prior to your departure. These documents should be stored separately from the originals.

### Eating in South East Asia

Southeast Asia is home to an incredibly rich food history. The local cuisine is known for its intense flavours, spices and some of the freshest ingredients you can find. In general, meals include either rice or noodles and are packed full of flavour. Lemongrass, ginger, lime leaves, coriander, fish sauce and soy sauce are used in most local dishes. Whilst Southeast Asian food has a reputation for being hot and spicy, each region actually has its own distinct characteristics. Vietnam, for example, is perhaps best known for its fresh and aromatic dishes – relying heavily on flavours from fresh herbs such as mint, basil and dill.

Your itinerary has been carefully crafted to introduce you to a range of local dishes and we hope that you enjoy the culinary adventure ahead. All meals (excluding drinks) are included in our fully inclusive group tours from dinner on the day of your groups' arrival until breakfast on your day of departure. When dining in Southeast Asia, although some restaurants have adopted a western approach to dining, expect some restaurants to follow the traditional communal style of eating. Typically, this will mean each diner has their own small bowl and may serve themselves from a variety of shared dishes. At some local restaurants, appetizers and main courses might be served when they are ready instead of following a particular order.

Determining when it's appropriate to use chopsticks, forks or spoons can be challenging for some travellers, even other Asians, as each country has different customs. In Vietnam, dishes are normally placed in the centre and people serve food for themselves with their own chopsticks and bowl. In Thailand and some other countries in Southeast Asia, fork and spoon are used for most dishes and chopsticks are typically provided to eat noodles. Usually chopsticks or other utensils are provided to scoop the food into your bowl to prevent your own chopsticks from touching the food that remains on the table. Dining in Southeast Asia is fairly casual with not too many rules. Leaving food on the plate is not considered rude.



Please refer to your travel guide for more information on Southeast Asian cuisine, including information for travellers with restricted diets.

### Accommodation

Your accommodation is selected for convenience of location, comfort or character, and can range from a business hotel in one city to a family run guesthouse in a smaller town. In more remote areas, accommodation may be of a lower standard and may not have all western amenities. Hotels are generally rated as local three to four-star standard, but please note that there is no international classification system for hotels and differences in facilities and quality do exist between Australia and South East Asia. All group tour hotels have private western bathroom facilities, air conditioning, TV and telephone. Plumbing and electricity supplies can be erratic and quite often the power in hotel rooms is turned off while guests are out of the room. If you experience any difficulty, please speak to your National Escort/Local Guide. Rest assured that all hotels used by Wendy Wu Tours are regularly inspected by our staff and our partners to ensure that standards meet your needs. Please note that double bed requests can be made at time of booking but can't be guaranteed.

**Solo travellers:** If you are a solo traveller and willing to share a room, you will not have to pay a single supplement for any hotel rooms. During the overnight Mekong/ Irrawaddy cruise section of this tour, if we cannot find another solo traveller for you to share with, you will be required to pay a supplement - this payment will be taken when settling your final balance of the holiday. Willing to share single travellers booking within 75 days of the first day of a group tour will be subject to availability. If no suitable match is available at time of booking you will be required to pay all single supplements.

### Transport

**Coaches:** Coaches with air conditioning are used on our group tours for city sightseeing, short excursions to the countryside and longer transfers where necessary. **However, mini buses may be used for smaller groups (under 10 passengers).**

Roads in South East Asia have generally improved over recent years, but traffic and/or weather conditions may extend driving times. Road construction work usually covers an enormous section of road - not just one or two kilometres as you may be used to. For this reason, the timings listed in the itinerary are approximations only.

**Seatbelts:** Please note that seatbelts are not compulsory by law in South East Asia and therefore the local people largely choose not to wear them. For this reason, some vehicles may not be fitted with seatbelts or they may be hidden underneath protective seat covers. It is recommended that where seatbelts are available customers must use them and remain seated at all times while the vehicle is moving. If you have any concerns, please notify your National Escort/Local Guides.

**Cruise:** On this tour, you will spend seven nights aboard a Mekong Prestige. All cabins have private bathrooms with shower and toiletries, air conditioning, an in-room safe and amenities such as hairdryer and slippers. The cabins do not have minibars, televisions or phones, encouraging you to enjoy the river views from the deck. All cabins have direct access to the promenade deck.

**Air:** Internal flights are based on economy class, with reputable airlines. Pre-flight seat allocation is not available on international and internal flight sectors.

### Development in South East Asia

Although South East Asia is developing quickly, it still lacks the international standards of civil infrastructure and tourist facilities. Concepts of personal responsibility are also different to those in Australia. Consequently, tourist and public facilities may not uphold the same safety standards as in Australia; for example, you may see a hole in the road without a warning sign or safety barricade. All of our suppliers meet local safety standards as a minimum. We want you to have an enjoyable holiday so we ask that you take extra care, use your common sense, refer to notices and follow advice from your National Escort or Local Guides.

### Vietnamese & Cambodia public holidays

If you are travelling within the below Vietnamese Public Holidays please note that celebrations can last a couple of days and during these times some businesses will be closed and coach, air and train travel may be affected. Tourist attractions will be open, but may be crowded. Tet Holiday is between 24<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> January, International Labour Day is on 1<sup>st</sup> May every year, Reunification Day is on 30<sup>th</sup> April every year and National Independence Day is on 2<sup>nd</sup> September every year. In Cambodia: Khmer New Year is 13<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> April every year, the King's birthday is 13<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup> May and the Water festival is between 30<sup>th</sup> October – 2<sup>nd</sup> November.

### Souvenirs

We want to be able to give you an opportunity to buy souvenirs, so we include some stops at museums or exhibitions which demonstrates a craft or product unique to that region with pieces available to buy. We understand that souvenir hunting is not for everyone, so we aim to take you to places, which hold local interest. We trust you will enjoy these opportunities to learn about local arts and crafts and understand their historical and cultural importance.

### Group Size

Most of our groups consist of 10 travellers or more and will be accompanied by a national escort. There will usually be no more than 28 travellers in each group although you may encounter other Wendy Wu tour groups while you are travelling.

All our departures are guaranteed to operate with a minimum of 8 travellers booked (unless cancelled due to factors beyond our control). However, at our discretion we may operate departures with a smaller group size as we try to operate advertised departures wherever it is viable to do so. For groups with fewer than 10 travellers, departures will operate with local guides only.

### Tipping Policy

Local tipping is customary in Asia. However, this can often lead to awkwardness in knowing when it is appropriate to tip and how much, as well as ensuring you have a suitable amount of change available at the time. For your convenience, with years of experiences in providing the best customer service, Wendy Wu Tours operates a kitty system on our Group Tours so your National Escort will look after this aspect of your trip for you. It also ensures that the amounts paid are reasonable for you but still fair for the local people. The amount is stated on each Group Tour page will be advised again on your final documentation. Tipping is in US Dollars and will be collected by your National Escort on arrival and distributed throughout the tour on your behalf. Any additional tipping on any of our tours is welcomed at your discretion. Further guidance for tipping contributions will be outlined in your final documentation.

We generally find that most customers appreciate the convenience of our tipping policy, but we do recognize that it may not suit everyone. However, as this is a group tour we ask that everyone follows the same protocol to be fair to other group members and to ensure smooth operation of your tour.

### Packing list and Climate

Please refer to our website or brochure for detailed temperature charts.

You will find a complete packing list and a helpful climate chart in the 'Suggested Packing List', which will be included in the pre-departure information link sent within your deposit documentation. Seasonal weather patterns can be quite unpredictable. Up to the minute information on worldwide weather can be found on [www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com)

### Luggage

All travellers are limited to two items of luggage each; a suitcase with a maximum weight of 20kg and one piece of hand luggage with a maximum weight of five kilograms. It is essential that your luggage is lockable.

### Exchanging Cash

It is highly recommended that extra care and attention is paid when exchanging money when travelling outside major cities in Vietnam. US Dollars are easily exchanged throughout Cambodia and Vietnam, however other currencies such as Australian Dollars can generally be exchanged in hotels and airports provided notes are new and undamaged. US Dollars should be from the new series from the year 2003 onwards. Old series notes can be difficult to exchange, apart from in some national banks in Vietnam, such as Vietcombank. We suggest for your convenience that you ensure your US Dollars are from the new series to avoid any difficulties exchanging money during your trip.

We suggest exchanging your money before travelling to remote areas and smaller towns, as exchange facilities can be limited. Your National Escort will remind you to do this before departure.

### Personal Expenses & Optional Tours

**Personal Expense** - You will need to take some extra money to cover drinks, laundry and souvenirs, plus any additional sightseeing that may be offered to you. Based on the advice of previous customers an approximate amount of \$250AUD per person, per week should be sufficient; however, for those that can't resist a bargain or may wish to participate in all of the optional excursions, consider allocating a higher amount.

Optional tours may be offered in each city you visit during your tour at an additional cost. These are not included in the standard itinerary and will only be available if time permits. Each option will be arranged locally by your National Escort/Local Guide.

### Climbing Steps

Sightseeing at nearly all of the palaces, fortresses and some temples involves climbing quite a number of steps. These palaces were built to provide defense against potential invaders so nearly all of them stand on top of a hill, while the interiors have layers of narrow hallways and steps to slow down the advance of enemies once they were inside. The steps tend to be quite large, not level and sometimes without handrails. Hindu and Buddhist temples or pagodas also tend to be built at an elevation, as this is the most auspicious position according to ancient beliefs. This means you sometimes need to walk from the bus park to the entrance, and/or need to climb some steps inside.

People with knee or hip injuries, who have poor balance or are otherwise unable to complete these activities independently should consider the suitability of this itinerary carefully.

### Cultural Difference

Cambodia and Vietnam have many religions, cultures and histories. Please be considerate of the local beliefs and customs and dress with consideration.

### Appropriate Dress

When visiting temples or mosques, both men and women should dress in conservative, non-revealing clothing. Full-length trousers with a shirt or t-shirt for men; and pants or skirts well below the knee with a top that covers the shoulders and upper arms for women. Women might also consider carrying a 'modesty shawl' in their daypack – this could be a sarong or light scarf – which they can wear over their shoulders and heads to feel more comfortable while sightseeing at mosques.

Religious sites and homes throughout South East Asia – for Hindus, Muslims or Buddhists to name a few – require all visitors to remove their shoes to enter. Even if you then need to walk outdoors, over hot or rough ground, you will not be allowed to wear shoes. You will often find shoe storage rooms near the entrance of a site where it is customary to leave your shoes near the entrance. Occasionally there are 'shoe minders' who will offer to keep your shoes safe for a 'tip' – this is not compulsory, so each customer can choose to tip for this service or not. If you do not want to remove your shoes, you will have to remain outside.

We recommend shoes that easily slip on and off and carry a pair of thick socks in your daypack, which you can wear to protect your feet from any rough or hot surfaces. The following itinerary will indicate when you need to consider this.

### Vaccinations and Your Health

We recommend that you contact either your GP or Travelvax (1300 360 164) for advice on vaccinations and travel health. Travelvax has a comprehensive website that you may also find useful [www.travelvax.com.au](http://www.travelvax.com.au)

### Before You Leave

We strongly recommend registering your travel plans with [www.smartraveller.gov.au](http://www.smartraveller.gov.au) as in the event of an emergency, Australian Consular assistance will be more readily available. You can also access the Australian Government's travel advisory service for up to date information about your destination on the same website.

### After your booking

Once you have booked with Wendy Wu Tours, you will receive a confirmation invoice followed by deposit documentation, which includes a visa application form (if applicable), and a help sheet. Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately 2-3 weeks prior to departure.

**Last updated: 19 December 2019**