

# Itinerary & Optionals

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## DAY 1 SAY HELLO TO HO CHI MINH CITY

The scents of jasmine and steady hoots from Ho Chi Minh's busy streets are never far as you embark on an intoxicating adventure incorporating two of South East Asia's most exciting cities. Upon arrival in Vietnam's largest city, formerly known as Saigon, transfer to your hotel and spend the rest of the day recovering from your journey, or get a small taste of what's in store on your own. Later this evening, meet your Travel Director and fellow travellers for a Welcome Reception with drinks and local appetisers.

MEAL(S)	HOTEL
Welcome Reception	Sofitel Saigon Plaza

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## DAY 2 EXPLORE HO CHI MINH CITY

Ho Chi Minh's colonial past is revealed this morning during a leisurely walking tour through its grand boulevards. Admire the elegant French colonial-era buildings and high-end boutiques that dot Dong Khoi Street and see the splendidly restored exteriors of the Opera House. Your next stop is the former CIA residential block where helicopters frantically evacuated the remaining US citizens in 1975 as tanks fast approached the city. Continue your walk with views of Notre Dame Cathedral, a red brick edifice with twin spires constructed from materials imported from France. Then, head across the square to visit the 19th century Central Post Office, an elegant French colonial structure transporting you back to a time when the city was a key player in Indochina. Travel by coach to the Reunification Palace for a visit to the former headquarters of the Saigon Government and then on to the War Remnants Museum to gain a perspective of the war through the eyes of the Vietnamese. After a day of sightseeing, return to your hotel for an afternoon at leisure or consider joining an Optional Experience to delve into Saigon's art scene, learning from a museum curator and a local artist.

MEAL(S)
Breakfast

### OPTIONAL EXPERIENCES

#### Saigon Street Eats

Experience an evening strolling the vibrant streets of the city whilst sampling some of the legendary street food. Visit a local coffee shop with your Travel Director for a briefing before setting out to discover some of the best street food. Join the queue at a local banh mi for some of the best Vietnamese baguettes and then continue on to a banh cuon eatery (steamed rice flour crepe filled with pork), a dish originally from Northern Vietnam, but now popular throughout the country. Later sample banh trang nuong, a pizza-like snack from Dalat loaded with interesting toppings and then indulge your sweet tooth at a nearby dessert stall selling delicious chuoï nep nuong (grilled banana with coconut milk). Your final stop will be at a busy eatery famous for its fresh grilled seafood best washed down with a cold local beer. The price shown is in US dollars.

Adult Price: **USD40.0\***

\* The Optionals and pricing listed here are a guideline only and subject to change.

#### A Sense of Art

Visit the Fine Arts Museum and be welcomed by a local art curator for a glimpse of the local art scene in Vietnam ranging from traditional to contemporary art. Afterwards, head to Saigon Salon, a new contemporary art space housed in a lovingly restored French colonial building. There will be a short introduction about Vietnamese art history and the influence of international art and artists in Vietnam. Then enjoy a special cocktail which has been served to French artists since the 18th and 19th centuries before returning to the hotel. The price shown is in US dollars.

Adult Price: **USD109.0**

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## DAY 3 VISIT THE CU CHI TUNNELS

Start your day with a journey by speedboat along the Saigon River to the famous Cu Chi Tunnels. As you leave the city behind, glimpse the changing faces of Vietnam – from the glittering skyscrapers and busy commercial centres to the green paddy fields and tiny villages that skirt the river banks. Descend into an underground world of subterfuge and hardship, learning how the Vietcong guerrilla fighters used these impossibly narrow and dark tunnels as communication routes, storage facilities for food and weapon caches, as well as hospitals and living quarters throughout the war. Connect With Locals next, visiting an organic farm to learn about the benefits of natural medicine made from the local organic vegetables,

herbs, spices and mushrooms. Wander through the lush green fields before joining the family in their home for an exclusive Be My Guest lunch. Over some of their favourite family dishes, exchange stories and gain insights into how their business is providing a livelihood for many local farmers. Next, enjoy a MAKE TRAVEL MATTER® Experience visit to the HCMC Blind Centre where children gather together to learn how to play music and use the computer under the guidance of volunteers. The centre was founded by blind musician Mr. Dao Khanh Truong who spent most of his life caring for and teaching the children life skills and music. Later, return to Ho Chi Minh City for a free evening and perhaps choose to see an optional show, or maybe visit one of the rooftop bars for which the city is famous, gaining a bird's eye view of the pulsating streets below.

#### **MEAL(S)**

Breakfast  
Be My Guest

#### **OPTIONAL EXPERIENCES**

##### **AO Show**

Late afternoon departure from the hotel to see the A O Show - a combination of arts highlighting the peaceful country life and poetic scenery of Vietnam. The show is special in the way it contains episodes of Vietnamese traditional folk games, dances and circus acts performed against the background of traditional and modern music combined with artistic lighting. Bamboo pipes and baskets are used throughout the show as set decorations and the traditional daily activities of villagers and festive celebrations are demonstrated by the performers. Transfer back to your hotel after the show. The price shown is in US dollars.

Adult Price: **USD30.0\***

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## **DAY 4 A DAY TO DISCOVER HO CHI MINH CITY**

A leisurely start to your day could see you linger over a cup of smoky oolong tea or make an early start with an optional walking tour through the city's lively outdoor markets to feel what life is like for the residents of Ho Chi Minh City. This afternoon, you'll visit Chinatown and the beautiful Thien Hau Pagoda built by the Cantonese community in the early 19th century to honour the Goddess of the Sea. Dive Into Culture and make a wish, writing your deepest desires on a small card and attaching it to one of the incense coils like the locals do. Visit Binh Tay Market, constructed by the French in the 1880s in the heart of Chinese community in Saigon, to rub shoulders with the locals who visit the market to buy fresh fruit and vegetables, spices, meat and seafood from regions across Vietnam. Continuing to FITO, the first museum of traditional medicine in Vietnam, you'll gain an insightful glimpse into the history and application of traditional medicine in everyday life. Afterwards, Dive Into Culture during a walking tour of Chinatown with its many herbal medicine shops and learn how herbs are combined for traditional therapies. Later this evening, you'll join your Travel Director and fellow travellers for a memorable dinner of traditional Vietnamese specialties in a local restaurant.

#### **MEAL(S)**

Breakfast  
Regional Dinner

#### **OPTIONAL EXPERIENCES**

##### **Live Like a Local**

This morning experience the crowded street coffee bars and the lively local outdoor markets where the locals shop for their daily needs. Your first stop is a Vietnamese bread stall which is believed to be the first bread stall in Saigon before taking a walk through the narrow alleyways and make a stop for a cup of tea or coffee in Saigon's oldest café. This coffee shop, now in its 78th year of operation, is something of a Saigon landmark. Meet the owner for a talk to learn how she makes coffee using a traditional method before continuing through the winding alleyways to the nearby street markets. Observe how people bargain for fresh vegetables, seafood and other local food. Carry on to the "flower alleys" - the biggest flower market in Saigon. Take the opportunity to see the colorful blossoms, and interact with the sellers. Stop at some vendors to try some favourite Saigonese snacks and desserts such as sponge cakes and sweet soups before heading back to your hotel. The price shown is in US dollars.

Adult Price: **USD30.0\***

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## **DAY 5 JOURNEY TO BANGKOK**

Leave Vietnam behind for the bustling City of Angels. After your short flight to Bangkok, meet your Thai Travel Director, who you'll join for dinner at a local restaurant featuring some of the city's favourite delicacies.

**MEAL(S)**

Breakfast  
Regional Dinner

**HOTEL**

Shangri-La

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## DAY 6 SEE THE SIGHTS OF BANGKOK

We start the day with a visit to Bangkok's iconic Grand Palace. Its gilded spires served as a magnificent backdrop for the official residence of the Kings of Thailand from the 18th to the mid-20th century. Our next stop is Wat Ratchanatdaram Worawihan, a UNESCO-listed royal temple renowned for its pyramid-like structure and stunning views of the main temple area of Bangkok and the Golden Mount. Stroll along the open-air walkway and admire the city skyline before joining your travel companions for lunch in a traditional Royal Thai Cuisine restaurant with classic Thai décor and views of the Democracy Monument. This afternoon, Dive Into Culture during a visit to a local community which produces Thai silk for the famous Jim Thompson factory. As you stroll along a colourful canal through the community, you'll pass a tailor-made suit factory, open-air goldsmiths and man-made silver houses. Take a moment to observe how talented villagers colour and weave the delicate silk used to create beautiful garments and accessories. Learn how the American businessman helped revive the Thai silk industry in the 1950s by supplying fine Thai silk to overseas fashion houses. His silk company and the once-dyeing cottage industry continue to flourish today. Explore Jim Thompson House, tastefully decorated with Asian art and curios including Buddha images, ceramics and antique furniture. Then, return to the hotel for an evening at leisure or consider joining our recommended Optional Experience.

**MEAL(S)**

Breakfast  
Lunch

**OPTIONAL EXPERIENCES**

### Dinner Cruise on The Loy Nava (with drinks)

Experience Bangkok at its best while cruising along the historic Chao Phraya River, aboard the "Loy Nava", a 40-year-old antique rice barge which was entirely re-built and beautifully restored to its former glory. On board, you will be welcomed by traditionally dressed hostesses with a rose water sprinkling ceremony. With traditional Kim music playing in the background savour Thailand's finest regional specialties, whilst passing some of Bangkok's most famous cultural and majestic landmarks. Price includes dinner, tea/coffee, four alcoholic drinks and bottled water. The price shown is in Thai Bhat.

Adult Price: **THB2800.0\***

\* The Optionals and pricing listed here are a guideline only and subject to change.

### Dinner Cruise on The Loy Nava (without drinks)

Experience Bangkok at its best while cruising along the historic Chao Phraya River, aboard the "Loy Nava", a 40-year-old antique rice barge which was entirely re-built and beautifully restored to its former glory. On board, you will be welcomed by traditionally dressed hostesses with a rose water sprinkling ceremony. With traditional Kim music playing in the background savour Thailand's finest regional specialties, whilst passing some of Bangkok's most famous cultural and majestic landmarks. Price includes dinner, tea/coffee and bottled water. The price shown is in Thai Bhat.

Adult Price: **THB1900.0\***

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## DAY 7 THAI CUISINE AND COOKING EXPERIENCE

We leave the high-rises behind this morning and venture beyond the city buzz for a tranquil encounter with rural Thailand. Meet our Local Specialist. Explore local Thai culture, joining them for a visit to a Buddhist Temple, then continue to a nearby market, located on the banks of Tha Chin River and renowned for its extensive variety of vegetables, fruit and Thai snacks. Dive Into Culture as you shop together learning about the local produce as your Thai host introduces you to their preferred vendors in the market. Continue down river, sailing past local homes and lush vegetation as you make your way to your host's riverside home and restaurant. Here you'll learn about Thai herbs and spices as you watch a cooking demonstration in the open air. Try your hand at making your own Thai dishes using their favourite recipes and afterwards sample the dishes you have helped to prepare. After lunch, return to your hotel and spend the rest of the afternoon and evening at leisure.

**MEAL(S)**

Breakfast  
Lunch

**OPTIONAL EXPERIENCES**

## Bangkok by Night

Depart the hotel by local tuk-tuk heading to Chinatown for an insight into how the Chinese community has preserved their cultural traditions, celebrations and identities for over two centuries. On arrival leave the tuk-tuks for a short walking tour of the area with the chance to try some local snacks from the various street food vendors. We make a stop at a local Dim Sum restaurant to try this tasty Chinese delicacy for dinner washed down with local beer. Back in the tuk tuk head to Pak Klong Talad Market, best visited at night when it has fresh deliveries of flowers, fruit, vegetables and spices. The area emerges as a kaleidoscope of bright, blooming colour as vendors and consumers take to the floor to trade in jasmine, lotus and roses – amongst other things. Before returning to your hotel, pass by many more magnificent temples and famous sites all beautifully lit up at night. The price shown is in Thai Bhat.

Adult Price: **THB2850.0\***

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## DAY 8 MARVEL AT THE MAE KLONG RAILWAY MARKET

An early start this morning sees us Dive Into Culture during a scenic journey by train, past salt and rice paddies, right into the Mae Klong railway market. Colourful stalls are laid out on both sides of the railway tracks. When the train comes through, the tents and goods are moved from the rails at lightening speed and returned just as quickly once the train has sped past, leaving astounded visitors doubting whether there was ever a train in the first place. Disembark from the train and explore the market on your own before boarding a traditional Thai long-tail boat. Journey through small side canals, watching the locals go about their day-to-day, and into the Mae Klong River. On arrival at the famous Damnoen Saduak floating market, witness an astounding array of boats selling fresh produce, souvenirs and delicious Thai food. There's more to see when you visit a local open-air Khao Lam producer (sticky rice cooked in a bamboo tube) where you'll learn how this tasty Thai sweet dish is made. Enticed by the aroma of coconut and sugar, you may wish to purchase some for yourself as an afternoon treat later. Arrive back at the hotel and enjoy a final free afternoon in Bangkok, exploring the sights on your terms. As the sun begins to set over the enchanting Thai capital, head up river for a Farewell Dinner in an atmospheric Thai riverside restaurant with views of the magnificent Wat Arun.

### MEAL(S)

Breakfast  
Farewell Dinner

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## DAY 9 FAREWELL BANGKOK

Transfer to Bangkok International Airport for your onward flight.

### MEAL(S)

Breakfast