Indochina Exploration 17 Days
Designed for Wofford College by Thu

Itinerary: Tentative
Day 1: Ho Chi Minh City arrival (D, GP)
Arriving at Tan Son Nhat airport in Ho Chi Minh City, you’ll be met and driven to your hotel. You will have a group dinner and spend the night in Ho Chi Minh City.

Day 2: Ho Chi Minh City orientation (B, L, G)
After breakfast, at 9.00am your guide will arrive to show you around Ho Chi Minh City. You’ll visit the Reunification Hall – an early colonial masterpiece constructed to accommodate the Governor – general of Indochina. The Museum of War Remnants provides a very partial, but riveting, perspective of the ‘American War’: not for the squeamish!

After lunch, you’ll also call in Reunification Hall followed by a walking tour in the Dong Khoi area including Diamond Plaza, Post Office, Notre Dame, Opera House, Rex Hotel and City Hall. You’ll then return your hotel for freshen up or wander around the huge Ben Thanh market, one of the liveliest areas of Ho Chi Minh City, is packed with every conceivable commodity. You’ll spend the night in Ho Chi Minh City.

Day 3: Discovery Vietnam Agriculture in Cu Chi tunnels (B, L, G)
After breakfast, you will be picked up and driven to Agricultural Villages. On arrival you will be visiting the farm of mushroom and learn how to plan mushroom as well as benefits of it; followed by a visit to vegetable garden with plenty types of vegetable, herbs, spices plans and learn of their roles in Vietnamese cuisine and medicine. Before lunch time, you will join with local farmers to learn to make the soil and how do they grow up the seeds, as well as practise to plan the seeds in the garden. After that, you will join a cooking class which teach you how to make spring roll and take part in a Cooking Challenges among team members, which will be quite fun.

In the afternoon, you will visit the rice paper making village nearby and then visit the famous Cu Chi tunnels, a Byzantine maze of underground passages, chambers, rooms and booby traps used by both the Vietminh and the Viet Cong to suddenly materialise as if from nowhere, launch a lightning ambush, and vanish equally rapidly. Late afternoon, you’ll return to Ho Chi Minh City.

Day 4: Ho Chi Minh City/Vinh Long/Ut Trinh homestay (B, L, D, G)
After escaping from Ho Chi Minh City’s urban sprawl, you’ll travel to Vinh Long. On the way you’ll call in at the beautiful and ancient Cao Dai temple in Vinh Long. The program will start at Vinh Long pier. The boat will take you to visit the brick kilns where you can see how the local people create beautiful potteries from clay. Then, we visit nursery garden for you to contact the real famous farmers – Mr Tiger or his son who is very successful in Vietnam agriculture. We will enjoy some kinds of fruits from his garden & homemade rice wine.

Later, the rowing boat will take you deeper into the countryside on smaller canals and to enjoy the peaceful time. It is so interesting to see traditional houses made of wood and palm tree leaves and see some activities of the local farmers with an opportunity to make contacts with them and see how they catch fish... You will also have chance to swim in the river (with life jacket). Check in enthusiastic Ut Trinh home-stay where you will have chance to cook some dishes with the owners.
You enjoy dinner and have cup of tea or rice wine when talking together. You can ask the locals about the culture, people, and history of this island. You will spend the night homestay in Vinh Long.

**Day 5: Vinh Long/Ho Chi Minh City/Hanoi (B, L, G)**

In the morning, a boat cruise will take you to Cai Be to visit the floating market. Next will be a visit to some traditional cottage industries - a workshop making the huge coffins unique to the Mekong is particularly interesting. Transfer to have bicycles for 1 - 2 hours exploring the famous village of Hoa Loc mango where you will be biking on small beautiful roads.

Lunch will be provided on boat and, in the afternoon, you’ll return to Ho Chi Minh City. On arrival Ho Chi Minh City, you will take an evening flight to Hanoi. You will spend the night in Hanoi.

**Day 6: Hanoi Orientation/Exploring Hanoi Old Quarter with HFTGs (B, L, D, G)**

At 9.00, your guide will take you to the Temple of Literature, the first university in Vietnam dating back to the 11th century, and a popular attraction, as well as Ho Chi Minh’s Mausoleum and Hoa Lo prison (the “Hanoi Hilton” as American POW's called it).

In the afternoon, you will meet students from the organisation Hanoi Free Tour Guides, whose mission is to provide an opportunity for visitors to interact with local people and provide an insight into Vietnamese culture. They will accompany you for a fascinating delve into the life of Hanoi’s Old Quarter (including Hoan Kiem lake and Ngoc Son temple), French Quarter discovering interesting local haunts within the area’s diverse mixture of architectural styles and a quick Vietnamese language class in one hour.

Travelling with the student tour guides, you will have a unique and friendly opportunity to discover the real Hanoi through the inside knowledge and eyes of its local fraternity. They will be on hand to describe the ways and traditions of local daily life along the way, answering your questions and, if you wish, introducing you to people and situations of interest. You will also have an opportunity to visit the street markets, sample the local street foods and drink in the small food stalls/restaurants and shops so characteristic of the Old Quarter.

In the evening, you’ll have tickets for a performance of traditional Water Puppetry (an art form unique to northern Vietnam, and an interesting, light-hearted introduction to its rural culture) and then have a group dinner at a good restaurant in a colonial building.

We’ll arrange your programme to avoid the busy times at popular destinations, but if there’s anything you particularly want to see, let us know.

**Day 7: Hanoi/Mindfulness in Dinh Quan Pagoda ½ day/Dinner at a local home (B, L, D, G)**

Today, you’ll study of Vietnamese Buddhism at Dinh Quan Pagoda, where you will have chance to speak with the monks, local followers and join a ‘Mindfulness’ class. Mindfulness is the practice of being aware - aware of your mind, your heart, your body, and the world around you. According to the devotees of mindfulness, by bringing awareness to these centres you are able to function more clearly and effectively. Your mind becomes less cluttered, your heart becomes free, your body receives proper attention, and the world can be faced openly. The day will feature basic instructions for beginners, different kinds of meditation practice (such as sitting and walking meditation, eating meditation), and a talk with opportunities for questions and answers. A vegetarian lunch will be arranged at the pagoda after the class. The afternoon will be free at your leisure.

In the evening, at 18.00 you will be picked up to a local family (your group can be divided into two groups to visit two families). On arrival, the host will welcome and lead you around the house, introduce the history of the house and the family, the functions of the rooms, especially the...
ancestor altar and the worship room. At the same time, the family also prepares and gradually arranges the food for dinner; you can join this cooking process or observe the way the host makes dinner. During dinner, you will talk with the family and be introduced about the history and meaning of the typical dishes. The menu includes the traditional Vietnamese dishes such as stir-fried water morning glory, roasted sesame and peanut, spring rolls, and some stir-fried dishes of bean sprouts, etc. After dining time, you and the family will sit in the living room, have a talk and enjoy traditional tea and sweets. The host introduces Vietnamese Tea Culture, shows the family photo album or family traditions. After that, you will be driven to your hotel for overnight accommodation.

Day 8: Hanoi/Ha Long Bay Kayaking (B, L, D, G)
After breakfast, the time will be yours to enjoy the natural sightseeing before leaving for Ha Long Bay, one of the most spectacular UNESCO World Heritage Areas and the world’s largest marine limestone ‘karst’ landscape. There you'll board a wooden junk to take you through Bai Tu Long Bay area. You'll explore Lom Bo are and be charmed by the outstanding masterpiece of the Mother Nature. You’ll dock to visit one of the less visited caves in the Bay - Me Cung cave, climb up and see the panoramic view of the bay from above then enjoy swimming in the crystal water of the peaceful Bay (weather permitted).

In the evening, you’ll savor an amazing dinner in Fairy cave (or Drum cave) with extremely delicious food which is not only impressed by its incredible taste, but also by great fruit and vegetable carving performance. You'll spend the night on boat.

For your Ha Long excursion, you'll board the deluxe La Fairy Cruise - a newly wooden boat in Ha Long bay. It's based on the model of the old Chinese court vessels with two barge sails, a wide transom and a rectangular superstructure. The boat has 11 cabins with 7 twin/double bedded cabins, 2 triple cabins and 2 connecting cabin which is available for maximum 26 people. All cabins are air-conditioned and have windows overlooking the bay. The floor area of each cabin is about 15m². The cabins are furnished with two twin beds or a double queen size bed. The interior panelling, floor and furniture are made of hard wood. The cabin has a wardrobe, pillows, white cotton sheets, and an en-suite toilet and shower with a good selection of toiletries. All meals, usually based on fresh seafood, will be provided on board. Kayaking is available and included in the price.

Day 9: Ha Long Bay/Hanoi/Luang Prabang, Laos (Brunch, D, G)
You’ll wake in the fresh air of the bay with a Tai Chi session on the large sundeck (beginner welcome!). Spend the early morning relaxing while cruising in Bai Tu Long bay. After breakfast, you'll visit Yung Vieng fishing village: taking a bamboo boat, get closer to the characteristic landforms and learn more about the local life or kayaking through the hidden beauty of the Bay. You'll participate in a cooking demonstration and enjoy buffet lunch before docking at around 12.00 noon, whereupon you’ll leave for Hanoi.

You’ll be arriving Noi Bai airport in Hanoi by late afternoon for checking the evening flight to Luang Prabang at 18.50. On arrival Luang Prabang at 19.50, you will be met and transferred to your hotel. Luang Prabang has been claimed by UNESCO to be ’the best preserved city in South East Asia’. You will have a late group dinner in Luang Prabang. Overnight in Luang Prabang.

Day 10: Luang Prabang Orientation tour (B, L, G)
After breakfast, you will visit the Royal Palace Museum which hosts a range of interesting artifacts and a guided audio tour. We then begin our temple tour taking in some of the cities most beautiful, including the magnificent Wat Xiengthong, with its roofs sweeping low to the ground, representing the classical Luang Prabang style and Wat Visoun known as ‘The Water Melon Stupa’ due to its shape. Before lunch we have a chance to visit the silversmith workshop.
In the afternoon, you will visit the weaving and textile villages of Ban Xangkhong and Ban Xienglek. We visit the excellent Arts and Ethnology Centre gives us a further insight into the ethnic mix and culture of Laos. Our final stop of the day is a climb Mt Phousi, which offers a spectacular sunset and a panoramic view over Luang Prabang and the Mekong River. Your overnight accommodation will be in Luang Prabang.

**Day 11: Luang Prabang/Pak Ou Cave/Kuang Si Waterfall (B, L, G)**

An optional early start gives you the fantastic opportunity to participate in the daily morning ritual of saffron-clad monks collecting offerings of Alms from the faithful residents. This procession is very unique in Laos, being the only Buddhist nation still preserving the tradition. Afterwards, we have the option of visiting the local morning market, before returning to the hotel for breakfast.

After breakfast, you will board a cruise upstream on the Mekong River, which gives us a panoramic view of the tranquil countryside. Your first stop is the village of Ban Muangkham where we start a short walking around the village for learning the daily activities and then continue cruise up the Mekong to discover the Famous Pak Ou Caves, two linked caves crammed with thousands of gold lacquered Buddha statues of various shapes and sizes left by pilgrims. In the afternoon we transfer by road to the beautiful Kuang Si Waterfall where you can cool off with a refreshing swim in the pools or walk along the forest trails. You will then return to Luang Prabang by early evening in time for a sunset view over the Mekong.

**Day 12: Luang Prabang Elephant Experience (B, L, G)**

This morning your local tour guide from "Elephant village" will await you in front of your hotel at about 8:30. Together with your local guide you will proceed to drive out of Luang Prabang to the Elephant Park Project area and the "Elephant Village" about 15 km out of town and in the middle of a green, natural surrounding just on the banks of the Nam Khan river. Here you will be introduced to our protected Asian Elephants and go out for a scenic ride in the natural setting along the river and hills. Enjoy the new perspective and the wonderful nature as well as the tranquility on this 1 hour ride through which you support the rescue of our former logging Elephants.

A stunning landscape, tranquility and lush nature gives you a relaxed stay on the back of the Elephant. Lean back in your seat and enjoy the fact that you have just been helping those endangered creatures. On the ride you make your way through forests and along the Nam Khan river. A short boat ride will bring you to the amazing Tad Sae waterfalls (not in dry season). Here you can hang out and relax for a while in the refreshing cascades. Back to the Elephant Village you will enjoy a buffet lunch. After that you will have a transfer back into Luang Prabang for overnight accommodation.

**Day 13: Luang Prabang/Siem Reap, Cambodia (B, D, G)**

The day will be free at your leisure in Luang Prabang until being transferred to the airport for your flight to Siem Reap. On arrival, you will be picked-up and driven to your hotel. You will have a group dinner today and spend the night in Siem Reap.

**Day 14: Angkor Thom/Angkor Wat/Ta Prohm (B, L, G)**

Early breakfast at hotel then you'll leaving to temple at 7h30am, Your day will be devoted to the Temple complex, of which Angkor Wat is a key element. You'll begin with a visit to Angkor Thom, starting with the Bayon, a bizarre structure of several architectural changes reflecting a switch from Hinduism (the foundations) to Buddhism (the superstructure).

Your next visit will be to the Elephant and Leper King Terraces followed by the Baphoun Temple, which is now finishing after an eight-year multi-million dollar restoration programme. Then Royal Palace, Phimeanakah, Elephant Terrace, and Terrace of the Leper King, before heading back to
Angkor Wat Giant Hindo temple, the largest, and for most people, the most impressive temple in the complex.

Return to downtown for Lunch and relax at your hotel, You’ll re-explore our again by 3h30pm and you’ll visit the magnificent Ta Prohm, strangled by massive tree roots and typical of the condition of the whole complex when it was discovered in 1860 by French naturalist Henri Mouhot. Then you’ll direct to Pre Rup temple where you’ll spend the rest of evening with sunset view. Return back to downtown for your overnight accommodation.

Day 15: Siem Reap free (B)
The day will be free at your leisure in Siem Reap.

Alternative option 1: Tonle Sap Lake ½ day (G)
You’ll be pick up and driven to Siem Reap River, for a boat trip on Tonle Sap Lake to visit the village of Kompong Pluk, where you can ‘go native’ aboard a dugout canoe for a paddle through the flooded forest near the village. You’ll then return to the hotel to freshen up and if time permit, your guide will pick you up at hotel then transfer to the “Chantiers-Ecole, Les Artisans d’Angkor”, a vocational training center, which revives the classic Cambodian techniques and styles of wood and stone carving and polychromy. Then stroll through the Old Market afterward...

Kampong Pluk is a cluster of three villages of stilted houses built within the flood-plain of Tonle Sap about 16km southeast of Siem Reap. The villages are primarily Khmer and have about 3000 inhabitants between them.

Alternative Option 2: Banteay Srei temple and Landmine museum ½ day (G)
You’ll pick up and leave Siem Reap visit to Banteay Srey Temple which displays some of the finest examples of classical Khmer art with some of the most beautiful, deep and intricate carvings, and Bantey Samre which has been admirably restored. and return with stop visit at sugar palm village where you have chance to taste home made sugar palm before drop at Landmine museum that they focus on educating the visitors about the dangers of landmines, where they came from, who laid them, how they work, and their presence in Cambodia. One mine means one life impacted and those odds are still far too high in Cambodia. Return to Siem Reap downtown and drop off at hotel.

Day 16: Siem Reap free/afternoon flight to Ho Chi Minh City (B, G)
Your time will be your own until your driver arrives at your hotel to take you to Siem Reap airport for the regional flight to Ho Chi Minh City.

Day 17: Ho Chi Minh City Departure (B, G)
Your time will be your own until your driver arrives at your hotel to take you to Ho Chi Minh City airport for your departure flight.