

Vietnam and Cambodia Women-only Tour 2014

Itinerary dates: March 23 – April 5, 2014

Tour Leader: Joslin Fritz

Highlights

- * Overnight on a traditional wood junk houseboat in Halong Bay
- * Take a batik class taught by a Hmong woman
- * Explore Hanoi's street food with a local, passionate foodie guide
- * Visit hilltribe villages in Vietnam's northern mountains
- * Take a hands-on Vietnamese cooking class in Hoi An
- * Explore Saigon on the back of a Vespa scooter!

Itinerary

Day 1

March 23, 2014 – Arrival in Hanoi (Meal: D)

Upon arrival in Hanoi, a tour guide and driver will meet you at the airport and transfer you to your hotel.

Depending upon your arrival time (and many flights DO arrive late at night), you may have a **welcome dinner** at a fine local restaurant. Overnight in Hanoi at [Santa Barbara Hotel](#) or similar.

Day 2

March 24, 2014 – Hanoi (Meals: B, L)

On this first full day in Vietnam, you'll have the morning free to sleep in, relax, or wander the streets of Hanoi.

You'll then meet with the group and have lunch at a **French/Vietnamese restaurant**, Hoa Sua, a training place for Vietnamese disadvantaged youth. The food is wonderful and the service delightful.

Afterward, you'll go to **Hanoi's Old Quarter**, also known as the '36 streets.' Here, you'll enjoy a walking tour through charming **Hang Be Market** and around **Hoan Kiem Lake**. This bustling area of narrow streets and alleys is home to literally thousands of small businesses and shopkeepers. It's a great place to explore with plenty of photo opportunities!

You'll then continue to the **Temple of Literature**, built in 1076 and Vietnam's first national university. If time (and the lines) permit, you'll also visit **Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum** and his house on stilts (where he lived until 1969) as well as the One Pillar Pagoda. Overnight in Hanoi at [Santa Barbara Hotel](#) or similar.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** Hanoi is a dynamic and cosmopolitan city that's very different than Saigon. **Wide tree-lined streets** and **coffee shops** can be found throughout. While it lacks the entrepreneurship that permeates Saigon, it's **quite charming**.

Day 3

March 25, 2014 – Hanoi – Halong Bay (Meals: B, L, D)

Following breakfast, you'll depart for the 3.5-hour drive to **Halong Bay**, including a stop for refreshments.

Upon arrival, you'll check in at the boat and get ready for your **overnight journey**. Lunch will be served on board as you cruise throughout Halong Bay. You'll see **rock formations** with such names as Sail, Dog, and Dinh Huong (incense pot). Toward the end of the day, you'll anchor for the night as the **sun sets** and then have a cooking demonstration and dinner on board the boat. Overnight on Pelican Boat.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** Halong Bay is a **beautiful, peaceful respite** from Vietnam's cities. You'll enjoy a freshly prepared **dinner under the stars** and have a chance to really unplug.

Day 4

March 26, 2014 – Halong Bay – Hanoi (Meals: B, L)

Today you'll wake up early and have the chance to take a Tai Chi lesson on deck. You'll then have a light breakfast before heading out to visit the **Surprise Cave**, which will be a short hike to one of widest grottoes in Halong Bay. So large is it that the **Viet Cong used this as a hiding place** during the American-Vietnam War. You'll then board the boat and, on the way back to the dock, have brunch as your boat weaves through the magnificent rock formations. Upon disembarkation, your driver will meet you for the **transfer back to Hanoi**. After check-in at your hotel, you'll have **free time in the afternoon** and dinner will be on your own to explore the many restaurants in Hanoi. Overnight in Hanoi at [Santa Barbara Hotel](#) or similar.

Day 5

March 27, 2014 – Hanoi – Lao Cai (Meals: B, D)

This morning, you'll take a **walking street food tour** including Hanoi's best culinary spots. A local hospitality industry insider with an enormous passion for his country's food and culture, will be your guide. His many hours of trawling the street stalls and markets have made him a **genuine, local authority** on Hanoi's food scene.

The tour will take you through the **Old Quarter**, by the Thanh Ha market, onward through the streets of the Old Quarter and to Dong Xuan – all while you are sampling local treats such as pho tieu and bun dau. The tour finishes up with **cake stalls and Vietnamese coffee**.

After this "lunch" of samples, you'll go to the fascinating **54 Traditions gallery** where you'll learn how to **batik your own crafts!** The afternoon will be spent here with a **Hmong woman** and you'll have a chance to ask questions about her way of life (and share your own).

In the early evening (7:30 p.m.) after dinner, you'll transfer to the Hanoi Train Station for the overnight train ride to Lao Cai. Overnight on the train in a comfortable sleeper compartment.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** Learn **Hmong batik craftwork** in a 2-hour batik session. You'll be shown how to create **splendid and colorful patterns** on clothes that you can take home as a reminder of this memorable day. This half day visit is a rare opportunity to befriend a Hmong!

Day 6

March 28, 2014 – Lao Cai – Sapa – Lao Chai – Sa Seng (Meals: B, L)

Upon arrival in the border town of Lao Cai, you'll go to the former hill station of **Sapa**.

After departing the train, you'll drive about 5 miles to Lao Chai to visit a local family. They will teach you the process of **spinning hemp from bark into yarn, weaving cloth** on a loom, and **dying cloth** using natural, traditional methods. You can try your hand at "waterproofing" and shining cloth using the traditional method of honeycomb "stones."

Afterward, you'll drive about 30 minutes to **Hang Da**, the starting point for a **hike to Sa Seng**. This walk is mostly downhill and takes you along a dirt road set in a narrow valley lush with greenery and a sparkling river.

Black H'mong homes are clustered along the way and you will see families working their fields. Along the way, your guide will show you **medicinal and fragrant herbs** that grow freely. You'll then enjoy a prepared picnic lunch by the river.

In the mid-afternoon, a vehicle will meet you to transport you back to Sapa.

In the late afternoon, you'll have some free time to enjoy the town of Sapa. Overnight in Sapa at [Sunny Mountain Hotel](#) or similar.

 **HIGHLIGHT!** In the Sapa region, you'll be entranced by the **ethnic-minority groups** that still maintain a traditional way of life, including speaking their **own language** and **wearing intricately embroidered, colorful clothing**. Flashes of shining silver jewelery from the necks and wrists of indigo-clad Hmong and the scarlet hues of the turbans worn by the Red Dao can be seen.

Day 7

March 29, 2014 – Sapa – Hanoi (Meals: B, L)

On this day, you'll have breakfast before driving to visit the local market at Can Cau. You'll see mostly **Flower Hmong**, however **Phu La, Black Dao, Tay, and Nung hilltribe groups** also gather here. The market offers a variety of local products not be found in other areas – this includes an interesting animal market where pot-bellied pigs, cows, and buffaloes can be seen.

Continue your tour with a short walk to a **hilltribe village**. Here you'll have the opportunity to visit some local homes to understand more about the daily life of these tribes as well as their culture and traditions. In the late afternoon, transfer back to **Lao Cai** before taking the **night train to Hanoi**. In Lao Cai you'll have use of a hotel room so you can freshen up before the overnight train trip.

Overnight on the train in a comfortable sleeper compartment.

Day 8

March 30, 2014 – Hanoi – Danang – Hoi An – (Meals: B, L)

You'll arrive early in Hanoi where a hotel will be available to freshen up before you transfer to the airport for your **flight to Danang**.

Upon arrival, you'll transfer directly to the small town of **Hoi An** and check in at your hotel. You'll have the morning to relax and freshen up after your long journey.

Lunch will be at a local restaurant and in the afternoon you'll enjoy **Hoi An with a walking tour**. Discover the **charming**, old-world trading port of **narrow streets, traditional houses**, former merchants' homes, the town's

iconic 400-year old **Japanese Covered Bridge**, and the colorful market where an array of fresh ingredients are on offer.

Dinner is on your own (with plenty of options) and overnight in Hoi An at the historic [Hoi An Historic Hotel](#) or similar.

Day 9

March 31, 2014 – Hoi An (Meal: B)

Become more familiar with the art of Vietnamese cooking with a start to finish **cooking course at Morning Glory Restaurant**. This 4-hour class includes a **market tour**, an overview of ingredients common in Vietnamese food, and a **hands-on cooking class** that ends with each participant making their own multi-course meal. It is a great way to see all the nooks and crannies of a Vietnamese market and understand the secrets behind Vietnamese cooking.

In the afternoon, you'll experience a special tour with the **Lifestart Foundation** and enjoy a fun, interactive workshop learning traditional **Vietnamese painting and lantern making**. Lifestart Foundation is a registered, non-profit charity organization helping the disadvantaged create a community, learn life skills, and obtain vocational livelihoods through handicrafts.

Overnight in Hoi An at the his [Hoi An Historic Hotel](#) or similar.



HIGHLIGHT! As part of the **WanderTours Giving Program**, you'll **visit Lifestart Foundation** and learn about how this organization is helping Vietnamese, especially women, learn sustainable skills so they can make a living on their own. A donation will be made on behalf of the the group.

Day 10

April 1, 2014 – Hoi An (Meal: B)

Today, prepare yourself for a fun and unusual experience... **working in a rice field!** Your guide and driver will pick you up at the hotel (in a vehicle), and take you to the trailhead where you'll take a **short bicycle ride** through rice paddies into the countryside (a vehicle can be arranged for those preferring not to cycle). You'll arrive at a **farm** where you'll visit with the owners and learn about **steps of rice cultivation**. You'll then **don traditional farming clothes and conical hats** for sun protection. As part of the adventure, you'll **ride a water buffalo** and learn the how to plough, rake, carry water into the rice field, sow, pull up the rice seedlings, transplant rice, etc. Afterward, return to the house and learn how to **make pancakes** that you will be able to enjoy. You'll also learn how to **cook rice in the traditional way**. Enjoy lunch with the host family with an early afternoon return.

You'll have the afternoon free. There are plenty of things to see and do around Hoi An (like have **clothes tailored** or **rent a bicycle**) OR, you can simply relax.

Overnight in Hoi An at the [Hoi An Historic Hotel](#) or similar.

Day 11

April 2, 2014 – Hoi An – Saigon (Meals: B, L, D)

In the morning, you'll transfer to Danang Airport for the short flight to **bustling Saigon** (officially called Ho Chi Minh City but many still call it Saigon). You'll start your full-day city tour in **Cholon**, the Chinatown district, to discover the area's **markets, shops**, and the **Cantonese Thien Hau Pagoda**.

Next, you'll visit Vietnam's first traditional medicine museum, the **FITO Museum**, which displays an amazing collection of 3,000 items **pertinent to traditional Vietnamese medicine** including implements used to prepare indigenous herbal remedies.

You'll then head back to the city center to visit **Ben Thanh Market**, where an incredible display of fresh produce is offered as well as meats, souvenirs, clothes, and other goods.

In the afternoon, you'll visit the **History Museum** and the former **Presidential Palace**. Depending on time, you might see other major sights including: the **Old Saigon Post Office**, **Dong Khoi Street**, the **Continental Hotel**, the **Opera House**, and **City Hall**.

In the evening, you'll experience the night life of Saigon the way locals do, from the **back of a vintage Vespa scooter!** Throughout the tour, you'll stop to taste some of Saigon's best **authentic street food** and even stop at a traditional "bia hoi" (beer bar) for dinner and drinks. You'll end the night with a visit to a **Vietnamese-style coffee shop** and then stop in at one of the many **local clubs**, where the new generation of Vietnamese unwind and flaunt their unique style. (This night adventure ends at about 10:00 p.m.)

Overnight in Saigon at [Au Lac 2 Hotel](#) or similar.

★ **HIGHLIGHT!** Saigon is filled with **young, active people** who developed this into the financial and entrepreneurial capital of the country. Soak up the energy or just relax with a **fantastic cup of local coffee** at an outdoor cafe.

Day 12

April 3, 2014 – Saigon (Meals: B, L)

After breakfast, you'll head off for a short drive to a **vibrant flower market**. Open day and night, this market sells flowers from all over Vietnam. You'll have a chance to walk through small alleys and meander through **countless flower stalls** for some great photos.

Next, you'll leave the quiet freshness of the flower market and delve into a **bustling local market**. You'll discover different types of **local products** such as vegetables, fruits, meat, fish, rice, clothes, and jewelry, giving you a **glimpse into daily Saigonese life**.

In the late morning, you'll visit the **home of two experts in traditional Vietnamese music**. You'll learn about the unique and interesting instruments they use and they'll then give a short performance.

After lunch at a local restaurant, you'll continue the afternoon with a one-hour drive to **Binh Duong Province** where your first stop will be the **Hoi Khanh Pagoda**. This is the oldest pagoda in the province and it has a long, interesting history from its demolition during colonization to its recent, most beautiful attraction – a **52-meter long laying Buddha** that is the longest statue in Vietnam. You'll then visit **Dai Hung pottery village** to see how they make clay pots according. Afterward, it is back to the vehicle for the last stop at Lang Tre Phu An, an **eco-bamboo center** where you will learn about the different kinds of bamboo in Vietnam and how local people use it. Overnight in Saigon at [Au Lac 2 Hotel](#) or similar.

Day 13

April 4, 2014 – Saigon – Mekong Delta (Meals: B, L, D)

This morning, you'll leave Saigon for the 2-hour drive to the delta town of **Cai Be**. Upon arrival, you'll board your **overnight boat for a cruise**. Start at the **Cai Be floating market**, where traders work the river and some

have been living on these waters for generations. After visiting the market, continue **cruising the rivers** of the delta where lunch will be served en-route, along the way admiring the scenery and the daily life of the local villagers. Dinner and overnight on board your boat on the Mekong Delta.

Day 14

April 5, 2014 – Mekong Delta – Saigon – Flight home (or onward to Siem Reap) (Meal: B)

Crossing the Mekong on the way to Cai Rang Floating Market, you'll take in traditional sights such as **rice barges**, **wooden ship building yards**, and even **fruit drying** along the Mekong's banks. After paying a visit to the colorful floating market, check-out and disembark before the return to Saigon.

You'll have free time until you transfer to the airport for a return back home (late check out is approximately \$50) OR onward to Siem Reap, Cambodia. If you are going onward to Cambodia, the add-on includes overnight in Siem Reap on Day 14.



Add-on Option: Siem Reap, Cambodia

Cambodia add-on cost includes 4 nights in Siem Reap.

Day 14

April 5, 2014

Upon arrival in **Siem Reap**, you'll be greeted at the airport by your guide and transferred to the hotel. Overnight in Siem Reap at [Casa Angkor Hotel](#) or similar.

Day 15

April 6, 2014 – Siem Reap (Meals: B, L)

After breakfast, the group will head out to the early-Angkor era temples of the **Roluos Group**, about 10 miles outside of Siem Reap. The beautiful surrounding countryside with its paddy fields and sugar palm trees is very typical for Cambodia – enjoy the beauty on a **cow cart ride** to Roluos Pagoda, a great and fun way to get in touch with rural Cambodia and its friendly people. Here, in a small contemporary pagoda, **Buddhist monks** will organize a **private blessing ceremony** for you, wishing you health and a safe journey – a very special experience!

Continue for an interesting boat trip on **Tonlé Sap Lake**. This lake is **Southeast Asia's largest freshwater lake** with its size varying greatly depending on the season. You'll board a local boat and visit **Kompong Phluck**, a village where you will see **houses on stilts** that are submerged when Tonlé Sap Lake swells. Enjoy a tasty picnic lunch served in a **floating house** and enjoy the views as the local community goes about its daily life.

Relax a little after lunch before returning to Siem Reap. In the afternoon, you'll be **pampered with a deeply relaxing spa treatment** at Bodia Spa.

Overnight in Siem Reap at [Casa Angkor Hotel](#) or similar.

Day 16

April 7, 2014 – Siem Reap (Meal: B)

On this morning, you'll continue your exploration of the temples with a visit to **Bayon**. This 12th century masterpiece is a study in **grandeur** and is well-known for its **54 towers with enigmatic faces** representing the 54 provinces of the Great Khmer Empire.

You'll explore **Ta Prohm Temple**, unique in that it has been left largely as it was found: overgrown by jungle trees and vines, with many parts of the temple crumbling to the ground. This makes Ta Prohm one of the most **picturesque and memorable** of the Angkor temples.

To avoid the heat of the day, you'll take a break for lunch (on your own) back at the hotel or in town and rest before heading out for the afternoon.

After your break, you'll visit famous **Angkor Wat**. Built during the early 12th century, the walls are covered with **stone carvings and bas-reliefs** depicting Hindu mythology. Moreover, Angkor Wat is well known for the more than **2,000 Apsara dancers** decorating the temple. Construction is thought to have taken around thirty years of intensive labor.

After a wonderful tour at Angkor Wat, you'll take an Angkor Gondola paddle boat at the moat of the Angkor Thom compound, while watching a spectacular sunset at **Prasat Chroung Temple**. **Cocktails, champagne, canapés and soft drinks** will be available on the boat, as your boat paddles slowly along the ancient moat.

Overnight in Siem Reap at [Casa Angkor Hotel](#) or similar.

Day 17

April 8, 2014 – Siem Reap (Meals: B, L)

Today, you'll discover the secrets of authentic Khmer cuisine in a **half-day cooking class** at Cassia Restaurant. Begin with a guided trip to the **local market** where you will learn about Cambodian vegetables, herbs, and other ingredients before returning to the classroom for a hands-on culinary experience.

After your lunch of Khmer food, you'll head off to visit the gem of the Angkor area, the pretty temple of **Banteay Srei**. The so-called "Citadel of the Women" remains the **best preserved temple in Cambodia**. It displays some of the finest examples of classical Khmer art as this small temple is noted for its truly remarkable fine bas-reliefs.

Afterward, you'll visit the **Golden Silk Farm** where you can witness the entire process of high quality silk creation. On the way back to Siem Reap, you'll have a chance to **stop at communities** where your guide will help you interact with the locals to learn about their way of life. Seize the opportunity to taste palm wine, palm sugar, and other popular local produce.

Overnight in Siem Reap at [Casa Angkor Hotel](#) or similar.

Day 18

April 9, 2014 – Siem Reap – Depart (Meal: B)

On this, your last day of the tour, spend the morning exploring **Siem Reap's colorful markets**. Visit Artisans d'Angkor, established in 1992 in order to support Cambodian arts and crafts and to help young people find work in their local villages by helping them continue the practice of traditional arts. Discover how wood and stone carvings, lacquering, gilding, and silk paintings are created.

You'll visit a number of artists' studios including those of expat and Cambodian artists who are keeping **traditional arts and crafts** alive (including painting, lacquerware and fine sculptures) in the the country.

You'll then return to Siem Reap where you can enjoy some time at leisure until your transfer to the airport for your departure flight.

**** Itinerary subject to change without notice.**