

Vietnam and Cambodia Women-only Tour 2016

Itinerary dates: March 20 – April 2, 2015

Tour Leader: Patricia Andersson

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!
- * Take the Cambodia add-on and experience the temples of Angkor Wat
- * Returning WanderTours participants receive a 5% discount on the land costs

Itinerary

Day 1

Sunday, March 20, 2016 – Arrival in Hanoi

Meal: Dinner

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 [Chalcedony Hotel](#) or similar.

Day 2

Monday, March 21, 2016 – Hanoi

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch


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

We'll meet up as a 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, we'll go to **Hanoi's Old Quarter**, also known as the "36 Streets." Here, we'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!

We'll then continue to the **Temple of Literature**, built in 1076 and Vietnam's first national university. If time (and the lines) permit, we'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 [Chalcedony Hotel](#) or similar.

 **HIGHLIGHT!** Hanoi is a dynamic and cosmopolitan city that's very different from 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

Tuesday, March 22, 2016 – Hanoi – Halong Bay

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

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

Upon arrival, we'll check in at the boat and get ready for our **overnight journey**. Lunch will be served on board as we cruise throughout Halong Bay. We'll see **rock formations** with such names as Sail, Dog and Dinh Huong (incense pot). Toward the end of the day, we'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

Wednesday, March 23, 2016 – Hanoi

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

We'll wake up early and have the chance to take a Tai Chi lesson on deck followed by a light breakfast before heading out to visit the **Surprise Cave**. To get to Surprise Cave, we'll take a short hike. This is one of the widest grottoes in Halong Bay, so large that the **Viet Cong used this as a hiding place** during the American-Vietnam War. We'll then board the boat and, on the way back to the dock, have brunch while the boat weaves through the magnificent rock formations. Upon disembarkation, our driver will meet us for the transfer back to Hanoi.

After check-in at the 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 [Chalcedony Hotel](#) or similar.

Day 5

Thursday, March 24, 2016 – Hanoi – Lao Cai

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

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

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

After this "lunch" of samples, we'll go to the fascinating **54 Traditions gallery** where we'll learn how to **create batiks!** 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).

After dinner, we'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 two-hour 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

Friday, March 25, 2016 – Lao Cai – Sapa – Lao Chai – Sa Seng

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

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

After departing the train, we'll drive about five miles to Lao Chai to visit a local family. They will teach us 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, we'll drive about 30 minutes to **Hang Da**, the starting point for a **hike to Sa Seng**. This walk is mostly downhill along a dirt road set in a narrow valley, lush with greenery and a sparkling river.

Black Hmong homes are clustered along the way and we will see families working their fields. Our guide will show us **medicinal and fragrant herbs** that grow freely in the area. We'll then enjoy a prepared picnic lunch by the river.

In the mid-afternoon, a vehicle will meet us to transport us back to 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 jewelry 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

Saturday, March 26, 2016 – Sapa – Hanoi

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

We'll have breakfast before driving to visit the local market at Can Cau. We'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 found in other areas, including an interesting animal market where pot-bellied pigs, cows and buffaloes are sold.

After lunch, you'll have some time on your own before we transfer back to **Lao Cai** where we'll then take the **night train to Hanoi**. In Lao Cai, we'll have use of a hotel room before the overnight train trip.

Overnight on the train in a comfortable sleeper compartment.

Day 8

Sunday, March 27, 2016 – Hanoi – Da Nang – Hoi An

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

We'll arrive early in Hanoi where a hotel will be available to freshen up before we transfer to the airport for the **flight to Da Nang**.

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 after your long journey.

Lunch will be at a local restaurant and in the afternoon we'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 [Hoi An Historic Hotel](#) or similar.

Day 9

Monday, March 28, 2016 – Hoi An

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Become more familiar with the art of Vietnamese cooking with a start-to-finish **cooking course at Morning Glory Restaurant**. This four-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 her 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, we'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 helping the disadvantaged create a community, learn life skills and obtain vocational livelihoods through handicrafts.

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



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

Day 10

Tuesday, March 29, 2016 – Hoi An

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Today, prepare yourself for a fun and unusual experience...**working in a rice field!** Our guide and driver will pick us up at the hotel, and take us to the trailhead where we'll take a **short bicycle ride** through rice paddies into the countryside (a vehicle can be arranged for those preferring not to cycle). We'll arrive at a **farm** where we'll visit with the owners and learn about the **steps of rice cultivation**. We'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 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. We'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

Wednesday, March 30, 2016 – Hoi An – Saigon

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

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


Next, we'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.

We'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, we'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, we'll experience the night life of Saigon the way locals do, from the **back of a vintage Vespa scooter!** Throughout the tour, we'll stop to taste some of Saigon's best **street food** and even stop at a traditional "bia hoi" (beer bar) for dinner and drinks. We'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

Thursday, March 31, 2016 – Saigon

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

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

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

In the late morning, we'll visit the **home of two experts in traditional Vietnamese music**. We'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 have the afternoon to yourself to discover Saigon on your own – an easy city in which to walk.

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

Day 13

Friday, April 1, 2016 – Saigon – Mekong Delta

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

This morning, we'll leave Saigon for the delta town of Can Tho where we'll board an **overnight boat for a cruise**. Once onboard, we'll head upstream on the Hau River and transfer to longboats in order to get to the village of That Not where we'll explore by foot.

While **cruising the rivers** of the delta, we'll be able to admire the scenery and the daily life of the local villagers.

We'll return to the boat by dusk, in time for a lovely sunset. We'll then head to Can Tho and have a peaceful overnight stay on the river.

Dinner and overnight on board [Bassac Cruise boat](#) on the Mekong Delta.

Day 14

Saturday, April 2, 2016 – Mekong Delta – Saigon – flight home (or onward to Siem Reap)

Meal: Breakfast

Crossing the Mekong on the way to Cai Rang Floating Market, we'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.

If you're flying home from Saigon, schedule your flight for no earlier than late afternoon to provide sufficient time to check in.

If you are traveling onward to Cambodia, you'll have free time until you transfer to the airport for the flight to Siem Reap. 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 four nights in Siem Reap.

Day 14

Saturday, April 2, 2016 – Mekong Delta – Saigon – flight to Siem Reap

Meal: Breakfast

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 [La Residence Blanc D'Angkor](#) or similar.

Day 15

Sunday, April 3, 2016 – Siem Reap

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

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 surrounding countryside with its paddy fields and sugar palm trees is very typical for Cambodia – we'll 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. We'll board a local boat and visit **Kompong Phluck**, a village where we 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, we'll be **pampered with a deeply relaxing spa treatment** at Bodia Spa.

Overnight in Siem Reap at [La Residence Blanc D'Angkor](#) or similar.

Day 16

Monday, April 4, 2016 – Siem Reap

Meal: Breakfast

We'll continue our 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.

We'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, we'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 our break, we'll regroup to 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 30 years of intensive labor.

After a tour at Angkor Wat, we'll take an Angkor Gondola paddleboat 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.

Overnight in Siem Reap at [La Residence Blanc D'Angkor](#) or similar.

Day 17

Tuesday, April 5, 2016 – Siem Reap

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Today, we'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 we will learn about Cambodian vegetables, herbs and other ingredients before returning to the classroom for a hands-on culinary experience.

After our lunch of Khmer food, we'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 bas-reliefs.

Next, we'll visit the **Golden Silk Farm** where we'll witness the entire process of silk creation. On the way back to Siem Reap, we'll have a chance to **stop at communities** where our guide will help us all 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 [La Residence Blanc D'Angkor](#) or similar.

Day 18

Wednesday, April 6, 2016 – Siem Reap – Depart

Meal: Breakfast

On our 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. Discover how wood and stone carvings, lacquering, gilding and silk paintings are created.

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