

# CENTRAL & SOUTHERN VIETNAM



## ITINERARY: 12 days / 11 nights

This trip starts and ends in Ho Chi Min City (Saigon)



### **Day 1**

Arrival day in Ho Chi Min City (HCMC; erstwhile Saigon) Vietnam's southern capital. We shall have transferred to our downtown hotel, The Reverie Saigon (3 nights), a member of The Leading Hotels of the World. Check in is after 14:00h and the rest of the day is at leisure. Dinner at our hotel and an early night.

### **Day 2**

Day spent exploring this fascinating city on foot. We visit a community park, where the locals exercise early in the morning and we enjoy a refreshing iced coffee at an unusual cafe. We savour a traditional Vietnamese noodle soup at a local eatery before exploring the colourful back alleys of Saigon's Chinatown. We discover hidden historical gems, including secret bunkers and the former Revolutionary Headquarters. We stroll back through central Saigon and enjoy a local lunch. Dinner out.

### **Day 3**

Travel by private speedboat along the Saigon River to the Cu Chi Tunnels, the Viet Cong's base of operations for the Tét Offensive in 1968, for a guided exploration of this extensive historic underground network. We then cruise

downstream to a tranquil riverside retreat for a refined lunch in a peaceful setting. In the afternoon we return by speedboat, observing rural life along the river banks.

### **Day 4**

Today we transfer to Can Tho, the largest city in the Mekong delta, where we lodge at the Victoria Can Tho Resort (2 nights). In the afternoon we visit the historic Can Tho Prison to hear stories of struggles, we explore a nearby Khmer temple where we shall sit with a monk for a blessing and offering. We stroll along De Tham Street, famous for its street food, including a renowned mung bean and shrimp snack at a Khmer-Chinese eatery. On our way back to the wharf we pass by the busy Old Market area with its outdoor vendors and scenic views of Bassac boats.

### **Day 5**

We spend the day exploring Can Tho's rural surroundings: vibrant markets, scenic villages, past tropical fruit gardens filled with durian, mangosteen, and jackfruit, followed by a short stop at a Khmer Theravada temple to witness traditional ceremonies and light an incense for your wishes. After lunch, we can continue exploring villages or return to our hotel.



### **Day 6**

Early departure for the lively and colourful Cai Rang Floating Market, a highlight of the region. We also visit a traditional rice noodle factory where they are handmade and to taste them fresh, and discover a bamboo craft village. Later we transfer from Can Tho to Saigon to catch a flight to Hue where we lodge at Azerai La Residence Hue (2 nights), located on the banks of the Perfume River and with views of the Citadel and Forbidden City.

### **Day 7**

The day is spent exploring Hue, the old imperial capital. We hear families' histories about the city's relationship with the arts, and explore locales and side streets that are often overlooked. Travel along the peaceful and clean Perfume River by boat to experience the bronze workshops of Phuong Duc. We lunch at a secluded spot overlooking the outer wall of the Imperial City before visiting this UNESCO WHS in the afternoon. We end our tour with a special encounter with a princess from the House of Nguyen, Vietnam's the last dynasty. Tonight a special banquet dinner is hosted for us by a royal descendant at her home.

### **Day 8**

Today is a travel day between Hue and Hoi An. We shall traverse the dramatic Hai Van Pass, famous for its sweeping mountain vistas and panoramic ocean views. Upon arrival in Da Nang, visit the Museum of Cham Sculpture, which opened in 1915, it is one of the best in the country. The Cham people were seafarers from Borneo who established the powerful kingdom of Champa in central and southern Vietnam, from the 2nd to the 19th century. Masterful maritime traders and skilled architects, they were influenced by Indian culture (Hinduism and later Islam) before being gradually annexed by the Vietnamese and largely disappearing as a sovereign state by 1832. Then, visit the Marble Mountains, a well-known pilgrimage site with peaks, caves, tunnels, and temples. The mountains are home to many Buddhist sanctuaries and places of worship, some in limestone caves. Once in Hoi An we check-in at the wonderful Namia River Retreat (3 nights).

### **Day 9**

We begin with a scenic drive to Tra Nhieu, a peaceful fishing village, only 5 kilometres from Hoi An. Upon arrival, we are greeted by a local fisherman and invited into his home. Board a traditional wooden boat, try our hand at catching fish and shrimp using age-old techniques. Then, hop into a round basket boat for a fun challenge of paddling through calm waters. Afterward, we stroll through the village to observe rural life. We are invited to a local's home to learn about traditional farming in their backyard fields and join their family to cook authentic Vietnamese dishes for lunch. We finish lunch with a cup of Vietnamese drip coffee.

### **Day 10**

We start our walking tour at Hoi An Central Market. Although it is an all-day market, arriving early means seeing the best produce, avoiding the crowds, and watching the market vendors prepare for the day. Hoi An is a remarkably preserved UNESCO WH trading port in central Vietnam. Famous for its atmospheric yellow-walled alleys, lantern-lit evenings, custom tailoring, and incredible street food, the pedestrian-friendly Ancient Town sits along the Thu Bon River. Traders from Japan, Korea and Western colonial powers frequented it and have left a great architectural legacy. We explore the seemingly endless maze of alleyways, visit a number of local workshops, important cultural sites, and see how the locals spend their days. After passing over the famous Japanese Covered Bridge we continue to a local family who will show us the skills required to make handmade lantern. Finally, we return through the old town to a local restaurant where we can try Cao Lau, a local noodle specialty, a perfect way to end a busy morning of exploring Hoi An's sights.

### **Day 11**

A transfer takes us to Da Nang airport for a flight back to Saigon, where we stay our final night at The Reverie Hotel. After lunch we have a free afternoon to explore independently or make the most of our hotel's facilities.

### **Day 12**

After breakfast transfer to Ho Chi Min City's Airport for your flights home.

