

For tours departing beyond 2007, itineraries may be subject to change. This will be confirmed by the publication of the 2008 brochure (issued in Oct 07).

**2007**  
Tour Dossier

**EXPLORE!**  
WORLDWIDE

LAOS • VIETNAM • CAMBODIA Dossier Ref. HIC

## Jewels of Indochina

Amended 18 Dec 2006. Valid from 01 Jan 2007 to 31 Dec 2007

### JOINING TOUR ABROAD

**Jewels of Indochina Ref. HIC**  
27 days/26 nights Land Only Vientiane to Siem Reap

Join Vientiane on Sunday (day 1)

End Siem Reap on Friday (day 27)

Clients booked on 'Land Only' arrangements should make their own way to the joining point in Vientiane. Please refer to separate 'Joining Instructions' for name and address of hotel and time of rendezvous with tour leader.

### GROUP TRAVEL FROM LONDON

**Jewels of Indochina Ref. HIC**  
29 days/28 nights Tour including Connecting Group Flights London-Vientiane & Siem Reap-London

Depart Saturday from London Heathrow Airport for overnight flight to Vientiane to arrive the following day Sunday (day 1 of Land Only itinerary).

Return Friday from Siem Reap (day 27 of Land Only itinerary) on overnight flight via Ho Chi Minh City to arrive London Heathrow on Saturday.

Passengers with non-group flights booked through Explore! should refer to their individual confirmation invoice for flight details. Transfers to and from the airport are not included unless purchased in addition to the tour package.

### SPECIAL HIGHLIGHTS

Among the many highlights featured on this tour, we particularly mention:

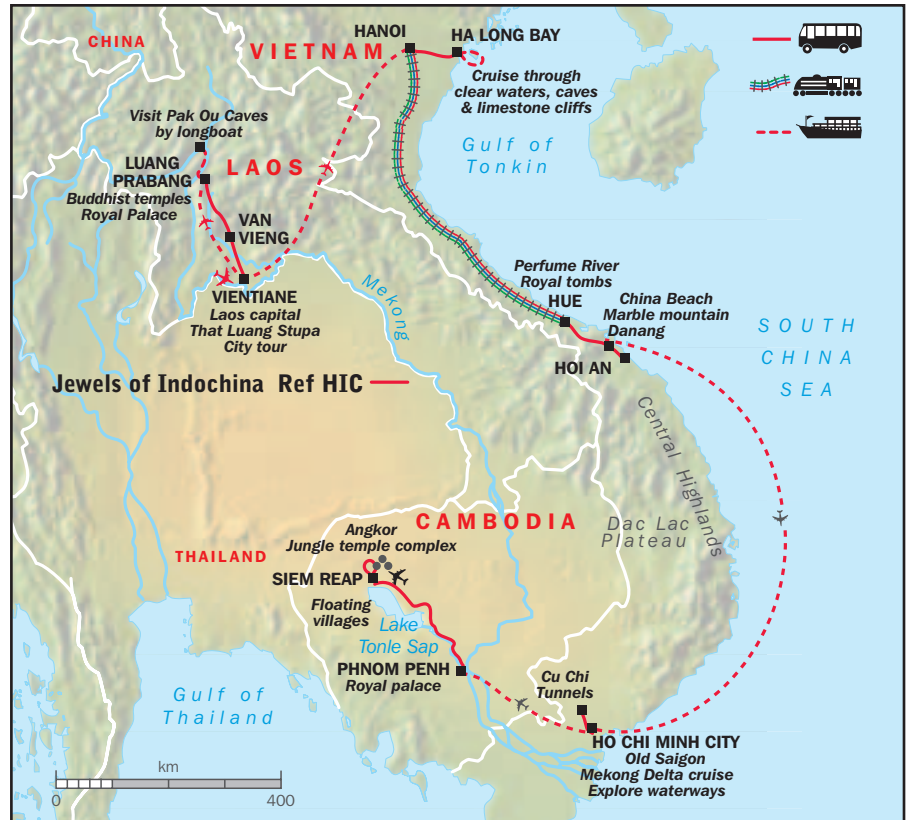
- \* **VIENTIANE** Explore the main city sights.
- \* **LUANG PRABANG** Walk to major sights. Boat trip on Mekong River to Pak Ou Caves.
- \* **HANOI** Main city sights & walk in the Old Quarter.
- \* **HA LONG BAY** Cruise in seascape.
- \* **HUE** Visit Museum and Old Citadel; boat trip on Perfume River.

### Climate Care

The biggest environmental impact of our holidays is the international flight due to the emissions produced by the aircraft's engines. At Explore we offset all the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions generated by our staff flights, thus making Explore 'climate neutral'. See the Explore website for more details.

### Earth Matters

- To cut down on waste plastic resulting from buying bottled water, why not consider taking your own water purification filter and water bottle with you on holiday? These are available from all good outdoors shops, or through the Explore Trader catalogue.
- This tour uses local tour leaders, which generates employment and allows you a unique insight into the local culture.



- \* **HOI AN** Portuguese merchant town, nearby Marble Mountains and 'China' Beach.
- \* **HO CHI MINH CITY (Saigon)** Visit major sights; full day trip to Cu Chi Tunnels.
- \* **PHNOM PENH** Sightseeing tour of city including Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek.
- \* **ANGKOR** Visit the stunning ruins of the ancient Khmer capital.

There are many highlights to our tour, such as Luang Prabang in Laos, a place of spellbinding beauty; the old Vietnamese cities of Hanoi and Hué which have preserved their essential 'ville Française' feeling and the Mekong Delta, where we spend one night in a homestay. In Cambodia we spend our time in and around both modern and ancient sites at Phnom Penh and Siem Reap.

### LAND ONLY ITINERARY

**Be Prepared:** While our intention is to adhere to the day-to-day route printed below, a degree of flexibility is built into the itinerary. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested.

You will be accompanied by different leaders in each country visited and note that in Vietnam you will be joining with an 'Inside Vietnam' (tour reference VN) group.

**Accommodation and Included Meals:** please find the key to our accommodation ratings overleaf, and note that included meals are indicated in the itinerary below and are shown on the day they are provided (B = breakfast, L = lunch, D = dinner).

**Day 1. Sunday. Join tour Vientiane**  
Join tour in Vientiane and check into hotel. **Overnight hotel H+.**

**Day 2. Fly Luang Prabang; sightseeing tour**  
Our flight to Luang Prabang, offers increasingly picturesque views as we approach the country's former capital. Situated among the rolling hills of the Upper Mekong river, 300m above sea level, this tranquil little town has a very beautiful setting. All the main sights of interest are close together, so this afternoon we walk around the various wats including the splendid Wat Xieng Thong (the Golden Temple built in 1559) which is strikingly decorated in brilliant red and gold designs, with an imposing tiled roof and mosaic dragon motifs. In the afternoon there is time to climb to the small temple on top of Mount Phousi and enjoy fine views over the town. **3 nights hotel H+ (included meals: B).**

**Day 3. In Luang Prabang; excursion on Mekong River to Pak Ou Caves**

Today we hire a longboat to travel up the Mekong River to the Pak Ou Caves. Along the way we stop at the riverside village of Xang Hai which specialises in brewing *lao-lao*, (rice whisky). Glutinous rice is boiled with yeast and left to ferment in large jars; eventually this muddy brew is strained and bottled for sale in Luang Prabang – try it if you dare! Arriving at Pak Ou, we climb steps up the limestone cliff to reach the sacred Buddhist caves. Although now abandoned by the monks, there is an altar for incense burning, flower offerings and numerous rock shelves crammed with Buddha images. The afternoon is left free for personal exploration. **(Included meals: B).**

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Page 1 of 4

#### Day 4. In Luang Prabang

This morning we travel by bus to the beautiful Kuang Si Waterfalls, approx 45 minutes from Luang Prabang. Passing forested hills and several ethnic minority villages we arrive at the limestone falls that cascade into several clear pools below. Returning to Luang Prabang there is the opportunity to take an afternoon bicycle trip (optional) to the Lao Loum village at Ban Khanom. Approx 6km from Luang Prabang, the road gently undulates through cultivated scenery and arrives at a well kept scenic village on the banks of the Nam Khan river. We will spend time meeting the locals and learning a little more about the every day life of rural Lao before returning to Luang Prabang for a well earned 'Beer Lao'. **(Included meals: B).**

#### Day 5. Drive Vang Vieng

Today we drive 4 hours to Vang Vieng, a tranquil town on the banks of the river Nam Song. **2 nights hotel H+ (included meals: B).**

#### Day 6. In Vang Vieng

Today is free to relax or explore with most things easily accessible on foot, although you may choose one of the several options available. You can visit the nearby limestone caves, the great cavern where local people used to hide 200 years ago from the Chinese invaders. Other alternatives include 'tubing' down the river on inflatables accompanied by a local guide or cycling in the nearby countryside. If you want to stay closer to home Vang Vieng is the perfect place to relax and unwind. You can also visit the small local market, make sure you don't miss the 'wet' market items: wild game meats and mekong algae. **(Included meals: B).**

#### Day 7. Drive to Vientiane

This morning we drive to Vientiane (3/4 hours drive). We plan to stop several times along the way to visit traditional villages. In the afternoon we include a sightseeing tour around the city. This is a lowbuilt, red-roofed attractive capital city, with a slight french feel to it. We'll explore some of the best sights including the Victory Gate (a Triumphal Arch with good views of the town), the That Luang stupa (said to contain a hair of the Buddha) and Sisaket Wat, packed with fine Buddha images. **Overnight hotel H+ (included meals: B).**

#### Day 8. In Vientiane; fly Hanoi

Today is free for your own further exploration of Vientiane. You can take an optional trip by tuk-tuk to the Buddha Park. In the afternoon we fly to Hanoi in Vietnam. This evening you can take a walk through the bustling streets and markets of the Old Quarter. The shops themselves have very narrow frontages but are actually quite deep; they are known locally as 'tube' shops, while on the pavement food sellers sell noodles, snacks and stir-fries from shoulder panniers. **2 nights hotel H+ (included meals: B).**

#### Day 9. In Hanoi

This morning we make a tour of the main sights of Hanoi. Architecturally styled like a French provincial town with tree-lined boulevards and substantial low-built houses, the city is wonderfully nostalgic. Among the interesting sights are the charming One-Pillar Pagoda and the Presidential Palace, a very fine

example of French colonial architecture. Ho Chi Minh himself, a spartan-living and scholarly man, chose not to live in the Presidential Palace; he preferred instead a simple teak 2-storied stilt-house specially built for him in the grounds. **(Included meals: B).**

#### Day 10. In Hanoi; drive to Ha Long Bay

We have some free time in Hanoi this morning to visit some of the city's many museums or you may choose to visit Ho Chi Minh's austere mausoleum which resembles Lenin's in Moscow. In the afternoon we drive out towards the magnificent Ha Long Bay in the Gulf of Tonkin. Thousands of jagged limestone islands rise out of the jade green waters like the hairy scales of a submerged dragon. In fact Ha Long means 'where the dragon descends to the sea' as legend tells that the rugged seascape was created by the pounding tail of a dragon as she ran from the mountains into the sea, carving islands in her wake. **Overnight hotel H+ (included meals: B).**

#### Day 11. Cruise in Ha Long Bay; drive to Hanoi; overnight train to Hué

This morning we will enjoy the romantic scenery cruising amongst the islands. We'll have the chance to stop at some of the hidden grottoes beneath towering cliffs and perhaps pull into a quiet beach, fringed with thick jungle. It is also interesting to see the curious assortment of boats, junks and wooden sampans, their sails hoisted, gliding through Ha Long Bay. We enjoy an included seafood lunch on board the boat, then return to the hotel in Hanoi to freshen up before boarding the 'Reunification Express' to Hué. **Overnight sleeper train (included meals: B, L).**

#### Day 12. Arrive Hué; afternoon boat trip on the Perfume River

We arrive in Hué, one of the great cultural and religious centres of Vietnam, a major highlight of our trip. In the afternoon we plan to take a trip by long-tailed boat on the Perfume River from Hué to the Thien Mu Pagoda. This lovely monastery is the oldest in Hué. **2 nights hotel H+.**

#### Day 13. In Hué; visit Museum and Citadel

To appreciate Hué's fascinating history we'll tour the Old Citadel and museum in the morning, and leave the afternoon free. The citadel/palace built by the Nguyen dynasty (Vietnam's ruling emperors from the early 1800s to 1945) has formal moats and impressive ramparts and was an exact copy of the Forbidden City in Beijing. Although most of the Inner City was totally destroyed during the month-long Tet Offensive (1968), the vast outer walls and the West Wing remain and are an eloquent reminder of the palace's former glory. **(Included meals: B).**

#### Day 14. Drive via Danang to Hoi An

We enjoy a scenic drive across the spectacular *Col des Nuages*, passing rural scenes of thatched, wooden houses and lime-green rice paddies. Pausing at Danang, once the centre of the Kingdom of Champa (2<sup>nd</sup> century AD – 1720) we visit the Cham Museum which houses a fine collection of Cham sculptures. We also visit China Beach and the nearby Marble Mountains. The five peaks are said to represent the five elements (water, wood, fire, gold and earth),

and the naturally carved grottoes have been transformed into buddhist sanctuaries. Finally we continue to the ancient town of Hoi An. **3 nights hotel H+ (included meals: B).**

#### Day 15. Exploring Hoi An

The historic, merchant town of Hoi An had become one of the busiest international trading ports of southeast Asia by the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, and it still retains its medieval charm today, with many of its old buildings superbly preserved. The day is free to explore at leisure. You may choose to visit the Japanese Bridge; or visit some of the many wooden houses and Chinese temples that line the streets. There are many markets in town which are an ideal place to pick up silk paintings and tailored silk clothing. You may wish to take an optional excursion either today or tomorrow afternoon to Quang Ngai, the site of the My Lai massacre memorial. The massacre was a significant turning point in the Vietnam War and the horrific story is told through a photo-presentation – quite an emotional experience. **(Included meals: B).**

#### Day 16. In Hoi An; excursion to My Son

A further day is spent based in this popular historic town. This morning we take an excursion to the holiest and most evocative of Vietnam's Cham sites, My Son. The Chams were dynastic lords who rejected the authority of China in 2AD and established their own kingdom. For 1000 years they managed to stave off attacks by the Vietnamese and Chinese, before being overcome by the Vietnamese in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Travel along the track that leads to the site is slow, as we bump through wooded hills southwest of Hoi An. But the site is certainly impressive with several groupings of Cham tombs and temples to be visited. We should be back in Hoi An by early afternoon; the rest of the day being left free. **(Included meals: B).**

#### Day 17. Drive to Danang; fly Ho Chi Minh City

We make an early start today to take full advantage of our time in Ho Chi Minh City. After a short drive to Danang Airport we fly to Saigon, Vietnam's largest city and former capital of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam). This afternoon we plan a walking tour of the central sights. Our programme will include such interesting places as the Independence Palace (renamed Reunification Hall) and the War Crimes Museum. **2 nights hotel H+ (included meals: B).**

#### Day 18. In Ho Chi Minh City; visit Cu Chi Tunnels

This morning we'll take a short drive out of the city to the infamous Cu Chi Tunnels, which formed an amazing underground command base for 10,000 Viet Cong troops, and were a major part of the 1968 Tet Offensive. The afternoon is free for you to wander around Saigon. **(Included meals: B).**

#### Day 19. Drive to Cai Be; boat to Vinh Long

This morning we drive to Cai Be and take a boat to its colourful floating market where you'll have the chance to practise the age-old art of bartering. We continue along the river and visit local family houses where popcorn and rice paper are produced. After lunch in a traditional restaurant in Cai Be, we cruise to our homestay in Vinh Long. Our accommodation for tonight is located on a river bank and has been built in the traditional Mekong architecture. Sharing our host accommodation, rooms will be simple with several people sharing a room and shared facilities with cold water showers only. This is a unique opportunity to experience life with a local family and find out more about their culture. You will also enjoy some excellent home cooking! **Overnight homestay L (included meals: B, L, D).**

#### Day 20. Mekong Delta; boat and drive to Ho Chi Minh City

We spend the morning exploring the Mekong

#### EXPLORE ACCOMMODATION RATINGS :

The following key is intended as a guide to the type of accommodation listed for each night stop. We stress that standards may vary and reserve the right to make changes as necessary without warning.

#### Hotels / Pensions / Lodges

**H+** : Usually twin bedded rooms, normally with private facilities. Local grading 2/3/4 star.

**H** : Usually twin bedded rooms, sometimes 3-4 bedded rooms may have to be used. Normally with shared facilities. Local grading 1/2/3 star.

#### Booking a Single Room

All of our tours are planned and operated on a twin-share basis, meaning that the standard cost is based either on individual travellers sharing accommodation with another group member of the same sex, or people who book together sharing accommodation. On this particular tour we are pleased to be able to offer customers the option of pre-booking a guaranteed single room. Due to the variety of accommodation used on this tour, single rooms are available for a majority of the nightstops, however it would still mean sharing whilst on the train.

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Page 2 of 4

Delta, its wonderful markets and meeting some hard working locals making tofu and soya related produce. We then drive back to Saigon. **Overnight hotel H+ (included meals: B).**

#### Day 21. Fly Phnom Penh

We have a free morning in Saigon before flying this afternoon **2 nights hotel H+ (included meals: B).**

#### Day 22. In Phnom Penh

Phnom Penh is a pleasant and surprisingly quiet city with many French colonial buildings and plenty to see. Our city tour includes the National Museum of Arts, the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, and the 'Killing Fields' of Choeng Ek. You should be aware that many people do find Tuol Sleng and the 'Killing Fields' quite distressing. This afternoon we make our way to the Royal Palace where we visit the Silver Pagoda. We will also see Wat Phnom before having some free time in the city. **(Included meals: B).**

#### Day 23. Drive to Siem Reap

This morning we drive to Siem Reap. On arrival, we journey to the nearby Tonle Sap Lake where we board our chartered boat for a cruise through the fascinating floating village of Chong Kneas. **4 nights hotel H+ (included meals: B).**

#### Day 24. Exploring Angkor

Our exact programme may change slightly at the tour leaders discretion (to avoid crowds, coincide with sunsets etc). We spend a full day in exploration of these stunning temples. Firstly we plan to visit the impressive Rolous Group which includes: Preah Ko, Bakong and Lolei Temples. In the afternoon we'll visit Banteay Srei and Ta Phrom, lying half consumed by the jungle, and the best known and most breathtaking of all the sights, Angkor Wat. **(Included meals: B).**

#### Days 25 & 26. Exploring Angkor

We continue our exploration today with a visit to Angkor Thom. We'll spend our last days exploring the fortified city including visits to The Terrace of the Elephants and the Leper King, the Baphoun and Phimeanakas, and some of the surrounding temples such as Preah Khan. We'll also visit the 2nd Angkor capital which includes the temples of Kravan, East Mebon, Srah Srang, Takeo and Pre Rup. We'll leave the best known and most breathtaking of all the sights, Angkor Wat to the end. **(Included meals: Bx2).**

#### Day 27. Friday. Tour ends Siem Reap

**(Included meals: B).**

## PERSONAL EXPENSES

You'll also need some extra money to cover meals not included in the price, optional sightseeing, **airport taxes (Laos/Vietnam US\$10, Cambodia/Vietnam US\$25)**, souvenirs and items of a personal nature.

### Foreign Exchange

**Local Currency:** Laos: Kip. Vietnam: Dong. Cambodia: Riel.

**Recommended Currency:** Carry your money in US\$ Dollars cash. You can also take GBP but US\$ are easier to exchange. (Dollar bills can be used in some hotels and shops; change is often given in local currency.

**Where to Exchange:** In major towns in Vietnam and Cambodia.

**ATM Availability:** Only in major towns.

**Credit Card Acceptance:** In major restaurants.

**Travellers Cheques:** You can change them in Vietnam and Cambodia, it's more difficult in Laos, and bear in mind that this can only be done during bank opening hours.

**Additional Information:** Your Tour Leader will advise you on currency matters on arrival. Up-to-date information re: global exchange rates can be obtained at <http://www.xe.com>

## Meal Plan

**Local Food and Drink:** 25 breakfasts and 1 lunch are included on this trip; please be prepared to pay for all other meals.

Approximate meal costs are given below:

|                 | Laos  | Vietnam | Cambodia |
|-----------------|-------|---------|----------|
| Coffee/tea      | £0.40 | £0.50   | £0.50    |
| Soft drink      | 0.50  | 0.50    | 0.60     |
| Bottle of Water | 0.50  | 0.50    | 0.50     |
| Bottle of Beer  | 0.80  | 0.70    | 1.00     |
| 2 Course Meal*  | 3.00  | 3.00    | 3.50     |
| 3 Course Meal** | 6.50  | 7.00    | 7.50     |

\* Cheap local fare in a small cafe or restaurant.

\*\* Typical food in a simple, reasonably comfortable mid-range restaurant.

|                 | UK    |
|-----------------|-------|
| Coffee/tea      | £1.20 |
| Soft drink      | 0.80  |
| Bottle of Beer  | 2.50  |
| Bottled water   | 0.80  |
| 2 Course Meal*  | 10.00 |
| 3 Course Meal** | 18.00 |

## Tipping

**Local Staff:** In this area, tipping is a recognised part of life. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. Accordingly, you should allow £30.

**Tour Leader:** At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

## Other Sightseeing

The following tours are usually available and may be booked and paid for locally during your trip. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants.

**LUANG PRABANG** Bicycle Hire US\$3.

**VANG VIENG** Limestone caves 1US\$; Tubing 3US\$; bicycle hire 1US\$; river kayaking 8US\$.

**VIENTIANE** Buddha park US\$8.00.

**HANOI** Water Puppets US\$3.

**HUE** Trip to Royal Tombs US\$9.

**HOI AN** Cookery class US\$5; trip to My Lai US\$10.

**HO CHI MINH CITY** Trip to Mekong Delta US\$15.

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

### Seasonal Climate

December to February is normally dry with temperatures ranging from 10°C-20°C. March to April is a transitional period into the summer months of May to September: hot and humid (around 27°C-33°C with some heavy rain). Autumn temperatures October-November are once again transitional (15°C-20°C). Temperatures in Saigon and Cambodia are 15°C-35°C all year round.

Up-to-date information on the weather worldwide can be found at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather>.

### Visa Requirements

**Laos:** An entry visa is required by UK, AUS, NZ, USA and CAN citizens. All other nationalities should consult their travel agent or consular office. Laos visa is obtained on arrival in Vientiane and at a cost of US\$30 for NZ & AUS citizens, US\$35 for UK & USA citizens and US\$42 for CAN citizens. For other nationalities between US\$30-42, please consult your travel agent. 1 passport photo is required.

**Vietnam:** An entry visa is required by UK, AUS/NZ, USA and CAN citizens. All other nationalities should consult their travel agent or consular office. Passengers travelling with Vietnam Airlines on at least one leg of their International

journey, may transit through a Vietnamese airport on their inbound flights from Cambodia. Providing they do not intend to clear immigration and remain in transit, only a single entry Vietnamese visa is required for the tour.

**Cambodia:** An entry visa is required by all nationalities and can normally be obtained upon arrival at Phnom Penh airport at a cost of about US\$20 (please also bring two passport sized photos: 1 for the visa and 1 for the Angkor pass).

Alternatively you can now obtain an e-visa prior to departure from [www.mfaic.gov.kh](http://www.mfaic.gov.kh) for US\$25.

## Vaccinations & Protection

Nothing compulsory, we recommend protection against malaria, typhoid, tetanus, diphtheria, polio and infectious hepatitis. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on different prophylaxis available against malaria. Although not compulsory travellers may also wish to immunise themselves against Japanese encephalitis.

**Special Note:** Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed before departure.

Further information regarding vaccinations for travel to this country can be found at [www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk](http://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk) and from your local healthcare provider.

## Electric Supply and Plugs

For comprehensive information regarding voltages and plug types in use in the countries visited, we recommend you check the website <http://www.kropla.com>

## Insurance

Travel insurance is compulsory for all bookings. You must take your policy document with you on tour as your tour leader will ask to see this at the start of the trip. Your documentation must state in writing that you are the named policyholder and that the cover is valid for your period of travel. Your policy document must also indicate that you have medical expenses and emergency repatriation cover and a 24-hour contact telephone number for your Insurance Company must be shown on your documentation in case of emergency. If you are unable to provide all this information at the start of the trip your tour leader will ask you to purchase an Explore Policy. If you have purchased Explore Insurance you should carry the Master Certificate leaflet with you, which outlines the conditions of the policy together with a copy of your Confirmation Invoice, which is your proof of purchase of insurance.

## PACKING FOR YOUR TRIP

A complete list of clothing and personal gear is contained in Explore's '**General Information Booklet**', available only after a booking has been accepted. Here we make a few recommendations with regard to your tour.

**Luggage:** One main lockable bag/case and a daysac. Total allowance: **44lbs/20kgs.**

**Clothing:** Pack essentially for '**Hot Conditions**' although December through to February warmer clothing is needed for the North. Days are hot and humid. Lightweight rainwear essential at all times. The northern region is cold at night during the winter.

**Footwear:** Comfortable shoes/trainers and sandals.

**Equipment:** Even though bed linen is provided on the train journey, you may want to bring your own sleeping sheet (it can be purchased in Hanoi); torch and don't forget mosquito repellent (no need for a mosquito net as when necessary it's provided locally).

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Page 3 of 4

