



INDOCHINA

THE COLOURS OF ASIA



Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos make up what is commonly known as Indochina, as historically these three countries received strong cultural influences from both India and China. Each country offers something completely unique and is ideal for those wishing to seek out new experiences. Indochina is a lot less commercialised than the rest of South East Asia, with many undeveloped towns brimming with ancient temples, stunning natural scenery and untouched natural wonders, all linked by the famous Mekong River.

Vietnam is hauntingly beautiful: patchworks of brilliant green paddies, mist shrouded mountains and sweeping deserted beaches make up the stunning natural scenery. Despite its history of turmoil and violence the Vietnamese people are friendly, hospitable and happy to welcome you into their historic towns and sleepy fishing villages. Long closed to the outside world, Vietnam retains a charming innocence that more visited regions lack.

Cambodia is a magical place. A land of treasures: it boasts ancient temples still buried in the jungle, hill tribes settled in remote areas, coloured pagodas, elegant French-colonial homes and its people are welcoming, friendly and gentle. Angkor, the famous 'lost city' of the Khmers and Cambodia's main tourist attraction, is without doubt amongst the most awesome and stunning creations of mankind.

Laos is still relatively undiscovered and packed with beautiful scenery, great food, stunning sights and some of the warmest & friendliest people with hospitality second to none! It has a long and fascinating history of royalty, occupation and struggle for independence, awe-inspiring temples and a unique mix of French colonial and traditional architecture. You will find streets busy with bicycles and motorcycles, but at a pace associated more with a country town. A more peaceful and relaxed way of life is found here, with a sense of timelessness, and things happen in their own time.

WHEN TO GO There is no real best time to visit Vietnam: It is hot and humid Jun-Sep, and Hanoi & the north are cool and often misty from Dec-Feb. May-Oct is classed as the wet season, but rain is normally just to 1 or 2 hrs each day. Cambodia is hot all year with average temperatures from 20-30°C. May-Oct expect heavy rainfall and temperatures soar. The most pleasant time to visit is between Nov-Mar when it tends to be cooler. There are 3 main seasons in Laos. Wet season is Jul-Oct with temperatures 25-29°C. Rain can start as early as May and travel can be difficult sometimes, although it can be a good time to visit as there are fewer tourists and cheaper prices. Nov-Feb is classed as high (dry) season: less rain and not too hot. In Luang Prabang and the north it is cool in the evenings and early mornings. Mar-Jun is the hot season with Apr being the hottest at temperatures of 30°C plus.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT One of the highlights of any trip to Vietnam is the fabulous cuisine: a mix of Chinese, Thai and French influences. Spring rolls dipped in a fish or soy sauce, are a Vietnamese favourite. Rice and fish form the basis of most Cambodian dishes with coriander, mint and lemongrass used for flavouring. Local specialities include curries and noodle soups. One of the easiest and most affordable ways to eat/try Khmer cooking is to visit the food stalls in the markets, and sample each dish before deciding what to eat. Vientiane and Luang Prabang in Laos both offer local and international restaurants. In provincial centres and remote areas most serve mainly Laotian cuisine – very similar to Thai. In Luang Prabang dried water-buffalo skin is popular, and the closest thing to a national dish would be 'laap' a spicy meat or fish salad.

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

VISA All travellers require a 30 day/1 month tourist visa. For Vietnam it is recommended that you purchase this in the UK [single entry costs approx. £40], see www.vietnambassy.org.uk. Visa's for Cambodia and Laos are available upon arrival into the international airports or official borders. They cost approx. US\$20 for Cambodia and US\$30 for Luang Prabang, alternatively they can be purchased in the UK before travel.

CURRENCY In Vietnam the local currency is the Dong (VND). In Cambodia it is the Riel (KHR) and in Laos it is the Kip (LAK). US Dollars are widely accepted in all three countries and credit cards in larger hotels and restaurants.

HEALTH Always drink bottled water. Recommended vaccinations are hepatitis, typhoid, tetanus, rabies, polio and Malaria tablets. Japanese encephalitis and yellow fever are also often recommended. Check with GP for further information before you travel.

LOCAL TIME GMT + 7