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UNDISCOVERED VIETNAM

Hiking & Sea Kayaking Adventures

TRIP DETAILS

13 days ~ Vietnam

*2 days moderate hiking,
4 days easy sea kayaking (no
previous experience required),
1 day river/lake kayaking,
moderate road travel*

*6 nights hotels or lodges,
2 nights home stays,
4 nights boat accommodations*

2008 DATES

Mar 17–Mar 29

Nov 17–Nov 29

LAND COST

*\$3,845 per person
(8-10 members)*

*\$4,145 per person
(6-7 members)*

\$350 single supplement

TRIP LEVEL
MODERATE

HIGHLIGHTS

- *Explore hill tribe villages, hike, and kayak in undiscovered Ba Be National Park—far from the crowds!*
- *4 days sea kayaking in the far reaches of Halong Bay*
- *Fantastic mix of culture, activity, interactions with locals, and immersion in the real Vietnam*

Revised July 16, 2007



UNDISCOVERED VIETNAM

Hiking & Sea Kayaking Adventures

This incredible cross-cultural adventure combines our love of sea kayaking with enriching encounters with tribal ethnic minorities in the region of Ba Be National Park, one of Vietnam’s undiscovered jewels.

Surrounded by precipitous limestone mountains and rich tangled forests, Ba Be (“three lakes”) has not yet been discovered by the crowds, so now is the time to see this area! Besides enjoying the rich natural heritage of the park—thunderous waterfalls, rivers, and serene lakes (where you’ll paddle inflatable kayaks and go for a swim)—you’ll hike to Tay and Dao hill tribe villages, visit markets where tourists have rarely been seen, and experience a village home stay where you’ll have a chance to interact with these warm and hospitable people.

Then you’ll head to legend-bound Halong Bay, where strange and fanciful legends abound. Strewn about its sheltered waters are some 2,000 rocky islets, created by dragons that descended from heaven to scatter gems across the water and save the people from invasion (or so the legend goes). Even today, the local fishermen claim to encounter sea creatures and attempt to placate them with offerings. The bay has the surreal quality of ancient Chinese and Vietnamese paintings—sheer limestone islets rise from aqua depths, dwarfing sampans and junks gliding silently past. Here sea and land come together to form one of the natural wonders of the world.

Despite the threat of “here be dragons,” the waters of Halong Bay are ideally suited for sea kayaking, the best way to explore this World Heritage Site. This is also a wonderful place for beginners to be introduced to this easy sport (expert guides will teach you all the requisite skills—it’s easier than you think!).

Ask about our extension to Cambodia’s Angkor Wat. See page 5.

Silently and unobtrusively, we’ll thread the maze of jagged isles to discover secret passages to hidden lagoons and magnificent sea caves (dragons’ lairs?), some only accessible by kayak.

Sea kayakers of all skill levels, including beginners, are welcome, but bring along an expeditionary spirit and flexible attitude. A support boat accompanies us with a friendly crew (our Vietnamese cook is blessed with the ability to conjure up the most exquisite seafood meals) so you’ll be well taken care of.



ITINERARY

DAY 1 ~ Hanoi

Arrive in Hanoi in the afternoon (you should try to arrive by 4:00 p.m. so you can attend the “welcome” dinner). You will be met at the airport and transferred to your hotel for a rest after your long journey. The remainder of the day is free to rest, relax, or explore on your own. Hanoi, the up-and-coming capital of the new Vietnam, is a picturesque city of more than three million people. Its tree-shaded streets are filled with lovely examples of French colonial architecture. Our hotel is situated on one of the narrow bustling streets of the ancient commercial quarter. As we walk the streets we will be transported back in time. We’ll be swept away by the scenes in the marketplaces, family life in the street, commerce, and a mixture of old and new technologies. In the evening we’ll enjoy a “welcome” dinner at Seasons restaurant where we will begin our exploration of the culinary delicacies of Vietnam and have our trip orientation.

D...Quoc Hoa Hotel

Note—Depending on your air schedule, most flights from the U.S. require two to three days of travel and an overnight en route (you arrive in Hanoi either on the second or third day). More specific details will be sent to you in your pre-trip packet of information. We encourage you to arrive a day early in Hanoi to explore this fascinating city, or to help overcome jet lag before the tour actually starts. We’d be happy to make additional hotel reservations if requested. Additional costs will be reflected on your invoice.

DAY 2 ~ Hanoi

In the morning we will visit the Confucian Temple of Learning as well as the mausoleum of Ho Chi Minh and the War Museum, and listen to traditional Vietnamese music. After lunch at Cha Ca restaurant, we’ll explore Hoan Kiem Lake (where local seniors practice a rigorous, joint-limbering version of *tai chi*), the Ngoc Son Temple, built on an islet in the middle of the lake, and the old “Hanoi Hilton.” We may also have time to wander the downtown area and visit the colorful Hanoi market and the market district, where each street hosts vendors of a particular trade: metal workers, funerary wreaths, and electronics. The afternoon is free to explore on your own. Dinner at Dinh Lang restaurant.

B,L,D...Quoc Hoa Hotel

“My Favorite Thing”

*The old woman who sang
me a song straight from her
heart, and danced with the
grace of youth in a temple
courtyard.*

~ Joe Toback, Trip Leader

DAY 3 ~ Ba Be National Park

Drive north about six hours (180 miles) to Ba Be National Park, situated in Bac Kan province of northern Vietnam (picnic lunch en route). Ba Be, a relic of natural lower mountain forests that once covered all the mountain ranges from east to west north of the Red River delta, covers an area of some 90 square miles, of which more than half is strictly protected and the remaining is in a forest restoration zone. The park’s densely forested area is a refuge for unique flora and fauna (410 plant species and 300 wildlife species), and surrounds the only natural lake in Vietnam (it is actually three linked lakes). The area is home to Tay, Hmong, Dao, and Nung ethnic groups, who have lived on the shore of the lake and in the surrounding mountains for hundreds of years. We’ll arrive in the early afternoon and cross the lake by boat (30 minutes) to a Tay village where we stay in a wooden stilt house on the edge of the lake.

B,L,D...Home stay

DAY 4 ~ Dao hill tribe village

Roundtrip hike in the mountains to a remote Dao hill tribe village that still retains age-old cultural traditions. (We'll carry a packed lunch.) Return to the Tay village for overnight. (6 hours hiking; 12 miles.)

B,L,D...Home stay

DAY 5 ~ Ba Be

Today we'll visit a local market, then hike along the trails of Ba Be National Park, looking for birds and butterflies (more than 300 species!) and possibly taking a swim in the lake. Overnight at a lodge in Ba Be National Park.

B,L,D...Ba Be National Park Lodge

DAY 6 ~ Ba Be

The many limestone mountains surrounding Ba Be have numerous caves and under-streams, including the Nang River, which flows through the 100-foot-high, 1,000-foot-long Puong Cave all the way to Ba Be Lake. Today we'll paddle an inflatable kayak right through the cave on a navigable 14-mile section of the river.

B,L,D...Ba Be National Park Lodge

DAY 7 ~ Hanoi

Return drive to Hanoi, with the afternoon free to explore the city and its Old Quarter.

B,L...Quoc Hoa Hotel

DAY 8 ~ Hanoi – Halong Bay

Drive to Halong Bay by van, stopping several times to stretch our legs. Time permitting, we'll visit Bat Trang pottery village en route. In Bat Trang, village life centers on ceramics. We will visit a ceramic factory and the home of a famous artist, and pass by the stands of old women selling betel nut. As we head north we catch a glimpse of rural Vietnamese life, people working in the rice paddies, water buffaloes, children returning from school, and ancient temples. After three hours we come to Halong Bay, where the silhouettes of endless limestone formations beckon us to begin the second part of our adventure.

Board our support vessel, a traditional wooden boat. We head out into the sentinels of Halong Bay, arriving in the late afternoon at the Ba Men temple. Overnight on board near Ba Men Temple.

B,L,D...Boat accommodation

DAYS 9-11 ~ Halong Bay

After a kayak lesson, we'll venture out into one of the most scenic areas of the bay. We visit spectacular beaches sheltered by imposing limestone towers, and on the first day encounter fishing families in a "floating village." These are true boat people, spending their lives in the narrow confines of their small vessels. They still practice an ancient cult of worshipping creatures of the sea, and we may be invited to share in their ceremonies at the temple. We also visit the three tunnel lakes, a series of limestone lagoons accessible only by small boats when the tide is right.

B,L,D each day...Boat accommodation

DAY 12 ~ Hanoi

After breakfast on board the boat we bid a farewell to our Vietnamese support crew before returning to Hanoi. The afternoon is free to relax, shop, or explore on your own. Farewell banquet in the evening at one of Hanoi's finest restaurants.

B,L,D...Quoc Hoa Hotel

DAY 13 ~ Depart for home

Transfer to airport for departure on homeward-bound flight. (Note—some air schedules permit arrival home on this day.)

B...

Stay a Little Longer!

A visit to the famed temple complex of Angkor Wat, Cambodia, a World Heritage Site and one of the most mystical archaeological sites in the world, is a great addition to this trip. It's just a 45-minute flight from Bangkok. *3 days.*

We also offer an eight-day pre-trip extension to Vietnam, which includes visits to Ho Chi Minh City, Da Nang, Hoi An, My Son, Hue, and Hanoi. *8 days.*

Please call us for detailed itineraries for these extensions or visit our website (www.mtsobek.com).

LAND COST

\$3,845 per person (8-10 members)

\$4,145 per person (6-7 members)

Rates quoted are per person, based on sharing double accommodations.

Single Supplement—\$350 for “requested” singles; \$175 for “forced” singles. (For hotels only—home stays and private cabins aboard boat are not available.) If you prefer single accommodations, you must pay the Single Supplement Fee. If you're traveling alone and wish to share accommodations, we'll try our best to find you a roommate. If that's not possible, we will only charge you half of the single supplement.

What's Included

- expert leadership
- accommodations in hotels in Hanoi, home stays and lodge in Ba Be National Park
- boat accommodations and all sea kayaking arrangements
- meals as noted (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner)
- airport transfers
- sightseeing and activities as noted in the itinerary
- ground transportation
- additional guides where necessary
- entrance fees and permits
- basic medical and evacuation insurance

What's Not

International airfare; meals not noted on itinerary; Vietnam visa; insurance other than basic medical and evacuation insurance noted above (we strongly recommend you purchase the supplementary trip insurance offered by Mountain Travel Sobek, which includes trip cancellation insurance); optional tipping to leader, guides and local staff; excess baggage charges; international airport taxes; cost of medical immunizations; items of a personal nature (alcoholic beverages, laundry, etc.).

Air Travel

Airfare is not included in the land cost of our trips. For air reservations, we recommend you contact the airlines directly, either by phone or the Internet. In addition, many travelers elect to use their “frequent flyer” miles when traveling with us. **But please check with our staff before purchasing or obtaining your tickets.** We need to verify your arrival and departure schedule and ensure we have enough participants to operate the trip.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT

Expert Leadership

Expert leadership is the key to an exciting, unforgettable experience. Our trips feature gifted leaders for whom leading trips is a true vocation. Besides showing you wonders you’d never find on your own, they make sure everything runs smoothly and safely without a hitch. They are knowledgeable about all aspects of your trip, and take great pleasure in sharing their insights with you. More than just guides, they positively elevate your experience by being teachers, companions, and the best of friends. You’ll be in good hands with them every step of the way.

Although trip leader assignments are subject to change, *Joe Toback* is scheduled to lead this trip. Joe fell in love with the outdoors as a kid growing up in California where he backpacked, cycled, and paddled at every possible opportunity. In 1983 he discovered sea kayaking as a means of traveling to exotic destinations. After taking part in MTS exploratories to Irian Jaya and Vietnam’s Halong Bay, he began guiding trips for MTS in 1995. Since then he has led trips back to Vietnam, to the wine-growing regions of Portugal, to the Ionian Islands of Greece, the San Blas Islands in Panama, as well as the Mergui Archipelago of Myanmar. “My passion for traveling to new places, for new cultural encounters, grows with each experience. I cherish the opportunity to feel like a child again, to explore my dreams, to learn about the world from people along the way.”

Leader assignments will be confirmed in the Final Bulletin sent to you three weeks prior to departure.

A local guide who will act as an interpreter and liaison will accompany the group throughout the trip.

Activity Level

Mountain Travel Sobek trips are designed for flexible, energetic people who like to be active and have a spirit of adventure and a positive attitude. None of the activities on this adventure could be considered very strenuous; however you will enjoy your experience more fully if you are in good health and physically fit. Due to the rugged nature and remote location, you should have an “expeditionary” spirit.

The hiking is moderate to strenuous in nature, with a lot of up-and-down hiking (as much as 1,000 feet gain and loss). If the weather is rainy, the terrain becomes very difficult (slippery—good hiking boots are essential), but there are alternate dirt roads we can use that are navigable by foot. No previous sea kayaking experience is required (we do recommend it, though); a training and orientation session precedes the first paddling. An average day of paddling will range from 3-6 hours, mixed with some rest time where our aim is to relax or explore our surroundings. A cooking crew will prepare and serve a varied and delicious menu.

We recommend you try to get in good shape. If you want to undertake a pre-trip fitness program, we suggest some moderate aerobic activities (hiking, jogging, bicycling) for at least 30 minutes a session at least three times a week several months before you go. Check with your doctor before undertaking any new fitness program.

Weather & Climate

We operate this trip during the cooler, drier season. Average daytime temperatures are variable in Halong Bay (60°-80°F); nighttime temperatures are sometimes cooler, requiring a fleece jacket. It is often misty and humid with showers. A good rain/paddle jacket is a must. The climate of Ba Be is cool, with an average temperature of about 71°F. The rainfall is about 55-70 inches per year. The best time to visit the area is the dry season, which lasts from October to April.

THE NEXT STEP

Ready to go? Signing up is easy!

Just call us at 1-888-MTSOBEK (687-6235) and reserve your spot! You can also book a reservation online at our website (www.mtsobek.com). If you prefer to use a travel agent, he or she can book your trip at no extra cost and provide other helpful assistance.

Then Leave the Rest to Us

Before you go, we provide you with extensive pre-departure information, including clothing recommendations, suggested reading lists, up-to-date health advice prepared by our consulting physician (an expert in wilderness medicine), and other details from procuring visas to advice on local customs.

Why Mountain Travel Sobek is Your First Choice for Adventure

Mountain Travel Sobek is the pioneer in active adventure travel. No other adventure travel company can lay claim to that title. We were the first to take Americans trekking in Nepal, raft the wild rivers of Africa, and open up many previously inaccessible corners of the world to curious travelers. We set the standard for adventure travel and have a strong reputation for excellence that we do everything we can to maintain. Since we are the leading adventure company, we have a lot to live up to, so we make sure we provide safe, quality trips and the best customer service to our passengers.

With Mountain Travel Sobek, you'll see Vietnam as only an insider can, with friendly, hospitable guides who know the region intimately. They'll accompany you throughout the day, lending support and insights about where you are and what you see. Their close familiarity with the local geography, history, culture and traditions (plus their entertaining stories and great jokes) are the key to a superb, informative experience—one you just can't get on your own.

References

Don't take our word for how great our trips are. We'll be happy to provide you with references of satisfied past travelers.

Questions?

Feel free to call us at 1-888-MTSOBEK (687-6235) if you still have any questions or concerns. We're here to help you.

Note on Itinerary

Although we will do our best to adhere to the itinerary schedule as listed, it is subject to change. Please read the Limitation of Liability and Booking Conditions in the four-page Participant Information Form. You can find all this information on our website at www.mtsobek.com/faq and the form itself at www.mtsobek.com/pdf/participant_info.pdf.

Terms & Conditions

Once you have made a deposit for a trip, you agree to be bound by all our terms and conditions including the Limitation of Liability Clause. The full Terms and Conditions can be found at www.mtsobek.com/faq/#liability or call 1-888-MTSOBEK (687-6235) for a copy. These are partial conditions. Your participation is contingent on your signature on the full list of terms specified in the four-page Participant Information Form (www.mtsobek.com/pdf/participant_info.pdf). Any dispute concerning, relating or referring to the Terms and Conditions, to any literature concerning this trip, or the trip itself, shall be resolved exclusively by binding arbitration in San Francisco, California, according to the then existing commercial rules of the American Arbitration Association. Such proceedings will be governed by substantive California law (but not procedural law) without regard to the California Arbitration Act.

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