

TRAVEL DIARY

SOUTHEAST ASIA WITH
FIRST CABIN

JANUARY 2016

Jan 11 / Arrival Bangkok ~ VIP treatment from the start ~ Early am arrival ~ whisked away to our accommodation, a former 1920's residence converted to a beautiful hotel in 2009. David, the owner, joined us for breakfast and provided a wealth of local knowledge. On this free day, we maneuvered the Sky Train to the Chao Phraya River to view the never-ending parade of unique watercraft that ply the waters. Enjoyed a sumptuous lunch at the riverside restaurant at the Mandarin Oriental followed by a "Jet- Lag" massage in their beautifully appointed teakwood Spa.

Jan 12 ~ 15 / Bangkok and Phuket / Our private driver and guide accompanied us to riverfront, where we boarded our longtail boat for a ride on the klongs (canals) to the backwaters surrounding Bangkok city. Stilted homes scattered along the shoreline had gardens growing out of the water and it was not unusual to see a monitor lizard basking in the sunlight. We disembarked to visit the Temple of Dawn and Grand Palace. Flew to Phuket, and next day we sped by motor craft to Phi Phi Island for a day of snorkeling and adjusting to the time change in a tropical paradise. We then journeyed back to our resort to enjoy a leisurely dinner.



Jan 15 ~ 19 / Hanoi and Ha Long Bay / Enjoying the smiles and welcomes of those we meet and the VIP treatment with private van and driver to lead the way. Relishing 5-course lunches, highlighting local cuisine in gorgeous restaurants, lingering over a local beer until ready to continue on. Never rushed and each day seems a new adventure. Off to Hanoi, where we were cyclo'd (bicycle-driven cart) through the "36 Streets" of Old Town, viewed Ho Chi Minh lying at State, and visited the former "Hanoi Hilton" used to house American flyers. Our hotel, centrally located in Hanoi, allowed us the time to venture out in the early hours to explore this 1,000-year old city and challenge ourselves to maneuver across streets filled with some 5 million scooter bikes coming from all directions. A marvelous drive across the countryside to Ha Long Bay passing rice fields dotted with water buffalo. An incredible experience as we boarded our own private junk, lounging on the top deck as we ate seafood prepared by our own chef, cruising for hours past some of the 3,000 islets and bays.

Jan 19 ~ Jan 24 / Hué / Leaving Hanoi, we flew to the ancient capital city of Hué and stayed at the Imperial Hotel, exploring the royal mausoleums laden with walls of hand made French tiles, the Citadel, Imperial City and the Forbidden City. Our private boat on the Perfume River was exiting, providing a completely different perspective the town and its wondrous sites. Having our own driver and guide provided us many opportunities to hear a personal perspective on life in Vietnam as we journeyed down the coast to Hoi An. Our 5* Palm Garden Beach Front Resort was excellent as were the cyclo ride through the quaint town of Hoi An. Vehicle traffic is restricted in the Old Town making it a pedestrian paradise. We strolled the narrow lanes in evening; all filled with hand made lanterns and tasted some of the finest fresh Vietnamese food imaginable. One afternoon we took a cooking class, making delicate crepes, and enjoyed a delicious meal follow by a restful afternoon, highlighted by a foot and back massage. Hoi An will long remain one out our most favored towns.



Jan 24 ~ Jan 27 / Saigon / Flight arrival Saigon. Visited the Cu Chi Tunnels, used by former enemy forces to hide and store their supplies. A private boat cruise took us through the beautiful, lush Mekong Delta to observe quaint villages in a primitive jungle setting, while meandering along backwater canals. Saigon is a vibrant, sprawling city with skyscrapers towering over the Saigon River with obvious signs of growth. Seeing the Rex Hotel, the Opera House and other significant landmarks left us trying to imagine what life must have been like there in years passed.





Jan 27 ~ Jan 30 / Angkor Wat / Flew to Siem Reap to experience the wonders of Angkor Wat, Angkor Thom and Ta Phrom. These magical temples are a must see, especially at sunrise, watching the glow appear behind their beautifully adorned temple grounds, some with rooted trees atop the temple walls. Our private guide recounted his family's personal struggles and the country's tragic history during the times when the tyrant Pol Pot reigned in power. Visiting the local markets was an eye-opener as we witnessed first hand how these hard working people made use of everything available to them from the land. From snakes to scorpions, their use of a food source is something to behold. Our dinners in the fun section of "Pub Street" left us energized with the sights of street food and multiple restaurants, some with loud music and shows featuring local dancers with lovely costumes. Our private cruise past the floating villages near Tonle Sap Lake completed our stay. We were in awe at how some 300 families lived in the various floating houses, some of which were the size of an American living room, yet all had welcoming smiles as we journeyed on our way.





Jan 30 ~ Feb 01 / Luang Prabang, Laos / Our experience in Luang Prabang came as a complete surprise. a captivating small town with a continuing flow of warm smiles and welcomes. The owner of the charming former royalty home graciously greeted us with food and drink, now converted into a villa for visiting guests. our private boat cruise up the Mekong River aside the jungle shoreline provided another example of how these people manage their lives using the full resources available to them from the land. one highlight of our visit was the sunrise offerings of sticky rice by the townspeople to hundreds of saffron robed monk novices. Quite an incredible experience to view at daybreak, and a tradition dating back to 1344 when Buddhism was first introduced to Laos. A quaint town setting, it is one of the few remaining destinations where innocence continues to have a foothold.

Feb 1 ~ Feb 2 / Bangkok / Our trip concluded with a refreshing overnight in Bangkok, enjoying a late night swim in a lovely hotel, while mentally preparing ourselves for the “re-entry” back to the USA. The kind, gentle, humble, and considerate people that we would be leaving behind taught us a lifelong lesson of being thankful for our blessings and to cherish our family and friends. So many that we met who struggle each day to care for their families seemed always to have a welcoming smile each and every day of what truly was a marvelous journey.

