

Vietnam and Cambodia

By Craig and Kathy Lesley, clients

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We started our tour, set up by Nancy Fowler, with about 4 days in Ho Chi Minh City (the former Saigon). The city has a lively vibe and is crowded with lots of shops, clubs, cafes etc. We particularly enjoyed the waterfront area, where one could sit and have a meal in open air restaurants overlooking the lights and action, and our hotel was centrally located so we could walk to many spots. Included in the stay were two tours. The half-day city tour featured a unique water puppet show, which, they say, can only be seen in Vietnam. The tour to the Cu Chi tunnels gave us a lot to think about, as it described the conditions in which soldiers on both sides fought and lived during the Vietnam War (called the American War there). Our tour guide was excellent, and always there on time for airport transports, information etc. We would like to go back and see more of the country.

We spent most of our time in Cambodia, as that's where our daughter was living. In Phnom Penh we stayed at a pretty, and reasonable place called The Pavilion, in a room that had a private plunge pool. We took city tours by cyclo (a small carriage pulled by a moto), which are really fascinating, as you see parts of the city you normally wouldn't. If you really want the full experience, one of us braved the traffic on the back of a moto, wearing a helmet of course. There are also trips to the silk farms and of course the big markets. One highlight (though it may not be for everyone) was a visit to the court where the Tribunal of Khmer Rouge is being held. It's really history in the making.

We also fit in a trip to the southeastern coast to Kep, a town on the water known for its crab fishing and for being a mecca for the wealthy before the war. Remains of the villas can still be seen. We took a long-tailed boat to an island to enjoy the white sand and the excellent food stalls, and we were lucky to stay in a resort, Knai Bang Chat, which was lovely and built to fit in with the style of the area. It is normally quite pricey but tourism was down. We highly recommend hiring a driver to get to the coast from Phnom Penh. It wasn't that expensive but saves time and a long, bumpy ride!

Finally we moved on to Siem Reap, where Angkor Wat is located, and stayed at Shinta Mani, where Nancy arranged for us a lovely, large room near the pool and spa. It was an ideal base for exploring the temples. We had been there before and saw some of our favorites, such as Bayon, with over 200 large faces, and also had our guide take us to temples and ruins farther out, which were new to us. And there are ruins even further into the countryside which we hope to see someday. Siem Reap has lots of fine places to eat and also a lively nightlife.

All in all, the trip was a fascinating experience for us, full of new impressions and ideas. The people were good to us everywhere we went, and we now have a longing to see more of SE Asia. We have definitely got the travel bug! And thanks to Nancy for taking care of important details and giving us her tips on what to see and do.