

VIETNAM & CAMBODIA WALKS 2013

5 IVV-sanctioned Walks

Saigon Walk: This walk measures about 8 kilometers, but will feel longer. We'll be exploring several faces of Saigon, starting by the Jade Emperor Pagoda, and will make stops en route at places like the Notre Dame Cathedral and Post Office, War Remnants Museum, and Ben Thanh Market. The walk features several connections with traditional Saigon – you'll feel the heartbeat of the city in the markets along busy streets, and in quiet gardens. You'll also share the Vietnam War experience (they call it the "American War"), and walk past places of significance during this tumultuous era in our shared history.

My Tho/Thoi Son Island/Sa Dec Walk: This is a 3-part walk conducted over 2 consecutive days in Vietnam offering us our first flavor of the Mekong River and the communities that thrive along its banks. My Tho provides an example of the bustling markets that seem to consume a fair percentage of everyone's time in Vietnam. Thoi Son is a quiet, rural island that gives us our first connection with the humble charm of the countryside. Sa Dec is a walk along a canal completely off the tourist track, and delightfully alive with the hum of life in small-town Vietnam.

Phnom Penh Walk: The capital of Cambodia has seen hard times off and on over the past 30 years. Our walk here links together some of the primary historic and royal sites, and takes us by a few of the many wats (temples). It becomes evident that Buddhism has a much stronger presence here than in Vietnam. Monks in various shades of saffron-colored robe seem to pop up frequently throughout the city. We visit the National Museum at the end of the walk then, after a break for lunch, take in the impressive Royal Palace complex of the king next door. Phnom Penh appears well behind Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) in its development. Still, there is vibrancy here – and an astonishing and admirable minimalist attitude towards making a living. Overhead is virtually non-existent for many who operate businesses on the street from small carts or portable storefronts.

Kampong Tralach Walk: Kampong Tralach is on the Tonle Sap River, which drains the Tonle Sap Lake into the Mekong, except for the wettest part of the year when the Mekong is so high that Tonle Sap River flows backwards into Tonle Sap Lake, until the Mekong level lowers – got it?! Again, we'll be enjoying rural Cambodia on this route, along with a stop at different kind of Buddhist temple.

Angkor Temples Walk: This area was one of the surprises of the trip for me. I had not realized how advanced and far-reaching the Khmer Empire was, nor the "wow" appeal of their royal temples and royal city. Our walk will be a multi-part trail conducted in two days. We'll leave early in the morning to beat the heat and walk through Angkor Wat Temple itself, the crown jewel of more than 70 archeological sites in the area. From Angkor Wat, we'll bus north to Preah Khan Temple for a one kilometer walk, then bus to Ta Prohm Temple and walk through it. Both of these were temples built in the late 12th and early 13th centuries by the same king. Both have been left in their overgrown state, and the dramatic marriage of beautiful sandstone temples and invading jungle is spellbinding.

Since the middle of the day is quite warm in the tropics, we'll finish up our walk the next day in Angkor Thom, the royal city. This section will include a couple of very impressive ruins, with some of the most significant bas relief carving we'll see, as well as a section of jungle and a nice stroll along the defensive wall overlooking the massive moat.

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