

# Singapore & Vietnam

with optional extension to Angkor Wat

## *A San Diego Botanic Garden tour*

November 6-17, 2012

*San Diego Botanic Garden President & CEO Julian Duval serves as host of a member's journey to Singapore and Vietnam. Enjoy a private guided tour of the brand-new Gardens by the Bay in Singapore and see what a billion dollar budget can produce. Visit the pristine Singapore Botanic Garden, the National Orchid Garden and some private gardens. Explore the vibrant natural beauty of Vietnam, visit colorful markets, and enjoy fresh regional cuisine prepared from local produce.*

**Tues-Wed Nov 6/7 USA to Singapore** US and Canadian departure flights cross the international date line en route and lose a day, arriving November 7. Upon arrival transfer to our hotel, the **Goodwood Park**, for a 3-night stay. The gracious, old, colonial style hotel has all the modern amenities with a choice of seven restaurants, from casual to gourmet.

**Thur Nov 8 Singapore** After breakfast at the hotel, we have a full day of visits to gardens in the Lion City of Singapore. Private visits include the Singapore Botanic Garden and National Orchid Garden housing the largest collection of rare and award winning orchids in Singapore. There are more than 700 species and 3,000 hybrids from tropical regions around the globe. After lunch we will enjoy a guided tour of HortPark. The park's themed exhibits include over 40 outdoor display gardens, a collection of silver, grey and white plants, a lush, tropical Balinese garden, Herb & Spice garden and a Rooftop garden. Later we will enjoy a visit to a private garden. Tonight we gather at the hotel for welcome drinks and dinner. *Breakfast, Dinner*

**Fri Nov 9 Singapore** After breakfast at the hotel, we spend the day exploring the magnificent new *Gardens by the Bay*. Spanning 250 acres, Gardens by the Bay comprises three waterfront gardens: Bay South, Bay East and Bay Central. Bay South, the largest at 133 acres, will officially open in June 2012. A showcase of horticulture and garden artistry, the Gardens will bring the world of plants to Singapore and present Singapore to the World. Get up close with a diversity of plant species from around the world in the iconic cooled conservatories marvel at the Supertrees vertical garden, and discover the intricacies of plant life at the themed garden. In this horticultural oasis nestled in the heart of the city, there's so much to explore! *Breakfast*



**Sat Nov 10 Singapore to Saigon** After breakfast, we have a private airport transfer for the 2-hour flight to Saigon. Upon arrival, we meet our guide and transfer downtown and experience a first glimpse of Saigon's hectic traffic. Saigon is the country's commercial center and, with over nine million inhabitants and five million motorbikes, a city that never sleeps. Despite the well-documented hustle and bustle, Saigon retains its connections with the past. We will take a walking tour to admire Saigon's historic landmarks. We continue to Dong Khoi Street, or Rue Catinat as it was known in the time of the French occupation, to discover some of the beautiful French colonial buildings built in the late 19th and early 20th century. We will admire the splendidly restored exteriors of the Opera House and the



former Hotel de Ville which are still two of the finest buildings in Saigon.

We will wander up to the Notre Dame Cathedral, a red brick edifice with twin spires based on the original construction from Paris. Then head across the square to the Central Post Office, designed by the French architect Gustav Eiffel, before he rose to fame for the Eiffel Tower. The remainder of the day is free to walk through Ben Thanh market and enjoy the bustling local life. Dinner tonight is at Wrap & Roll restaurant where we will experience various types of local “market style” food that can be wrapped and rolled with varieties of vegetables.  
*Breakfast, Dinner*

**Sun Nov 11 Saigon-Mekong Delta** We depart Saigon on a leisurely drive to Ben Tre, one of the country's southern provinces, situated in the Delta of the Mekong River. We take in the lush surroundings of rice paddies and fruit farms alongside the highway as we leave the busy city behind. We arrive at a waterfront pier and embark on a motor boat excursion. Along the way we'll enjoy views of the Delta scenery, including houses built on stilts and local fish farms. Upon arrival at Turtle Island, we visit a local house, meet the owner, sample freshly picked fruit and coconut milk while relaxing in the natural surroundings of fruit orchards. We can stroll through the garden and chat with our host to get an insight into daily farming life. We'll have time to enjoy a leisurely walk through the village observing tropical gardens along the way. We will see a family run-business where they make coconut candy directly in front of the pier. We continue on our journey by sampan, paddled by a rower, while discovering the maze of small canals. Later, we bid farewell to our friendly boat rower, take a short stroll through a shaded area of coconut gardens before reaching a rest-stop to enjoy a cup of honey tea and a traditional folk song performance. Lunch will be served at My Tho, where we taste some local delicacies before continuing on to Can Tho. Upon arrival Can Tho we check into our

hotel with the evening at leisure. Dinner is included at the hotel.  
*Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner*

**Mon Nov 12 Mekong Delta-Saigon** This morning, we rise early and get a unique taste of life in the Mekong. We board a local boat and explore the colorful Cai Rang floating market, where many boats laden with fruit, vegetables and fish jostle for trade. Sellers advertise their wares by crying out across the waters or tie their goods to a tall pole attached to their boat so that buyers can see from a distance what is being sold. This memorable experience makes for many excellent photo opportunities. We will relax while cruising back to the hotel where we can freshen up before returning to Saigon. Lunch will be enjoyed at a local restaurant along the way. *Breakfast, Lunch*



**Tue Nov 13 Saigon-Hanoi** After breakfast, we transfer to the airport for the flight to Hanoi. Upon arrival, we'll enjoy a countryside trip and visit the last water puppet making village. Originated in the 10th century, water puppetry is a unique folk art that cannot be found anywhere else in the world. We will enjoy a private 30-min outdoor show on the village pond with live traditional orchestra music background. The puppeteers stand chest-deep in the water while manipulating the puppets. We continue our drive to Hanoi. In the afternoon, visits include the must-see Temple of Literature, the first University for the sons of mandarins, for an overview about Hanoian culture and appreciation for ancient Vietnamese architecture. We will be taken on an hour long cyclo ride through the French quarter and the Administrative quarter and have a walk around the Old Quarter. Our welcome dinner at Ly Club, a typical Hanoi restaurant, offers authentic Northern cuisine, including one of Hanoi's specialities- cha ca la vong -

grilled fish served in boneless chunks, smothered in greens and saffron-infused oil. *Breakfast, Dinner*

**Wed Nov 14 Hanoi** After breakfast this morning we meet with a local Hanoian chef for a market tour. He will show us how to select fresh ingredients while we enjoy the sights, sounds and aromas of the market. We will visit the local chef at his beautiful home for a private hands-on cooking class and enjoy listening to his personal stories. We dine on our own creations for lunch.



Hanoi is known as the culture center of the country. Little wonder then that there are more than 250 art galleries in this small city and almost every street has an art cafe. We pay a visit to Art Salon Natasha before driving a half hour out of town to visit the studio home of Anh Khanh, a well-known Vietnamese painter, sculptor and art performer. Enjoy a cocktail reception and view his exhibition on the ground floor of the wooden stilt house and courtyard. Stroll around the lush garden full of sculpture scattered around the compound. It is a good chance to learn his interesting life story as well. A former policeman, his daring artistic experiments have earned him a reputation for eccentricity, at times even bringing him into conflict with Vietnam's conservative cultural authorities, who remain unfamiliar with more avant-garde modes of expression like performance art. *Breakfast, lunch, reception*



**Thu Nov 15 Hanoi-Halong Bay** We embark on the drive to Halong Bay where we board our deluxe junk, settle into our cabins and prepare our appetites for an enjoyable lunch on deck.

We take in the wonderful views as we cruise through the emerald waters of Halong Bay dotted with limestone outcrops. It was this landscape that inspired the classic French film *Indochine* starring Catherine Deneuve. Mid-afternoon we will visit the Cua Van fishing village, the largest community on the bay. This will allow a closer look into the lives of local fishermen before we transfer to a bamboo boat and are rowed slowly through the village with a museum and a school among floating houses. This evening, we will be amazed by the mysterious atmosphere of Tien Ong cave, adorned with stalactites and stalagmites. We will enjoy sunset cocktails and canapes in the cave before returning to the boat for a wonderful dinner on board. *Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner.*

**Fri Nov 16 Halong Bay to Hanoi** We could wake up early and partake in a Tai Chi class which is held on the upper deck. After an a-la-carte brunch, there is an optional cooking class with the chef while our boat leisurely cruises back towards the shore. We arrive at the jetty late morning and transfer back to Hanoi with light snack provided en route. Tonight we will enjoy a farewell dinner with wine tasting. We meet a local sommelier at The Match Box Restaurant which is located in a lovely setting inside the grounds of the Fine Arts Museum. We can chat with him to learn about the various type of wine available in Vietnam and learn a bit about how to pair western wines with Vietnamese and other Asian foods. Then we enjoy a casual tasting dinner of fusion Asian cuisine combined with matching wines. *Breakfast, Snack, Dinner*

**Sat Nov 17 Hanoi to USA, or optional extension to Cambodia.** After breakfast, we transfer to airport for flight back to the USA, or take the optional extension to Angkor Wat in Cambodia.

### *Optional extension*

#### **Sat Nov 17 Hanoi to Siemreap, Cambodia**

After breakfast, the morning is at leisure to explore corners of Hanoi on our own until we transfer to the airport for the onward flight to Siemreap. Upon arrival, we will be met and transferred to our hotel. Dinner is at the charming Viroth Restaurant.

*Breakfast, Dinner*



**Sun Nov 18 Siemreap** Morning sightseeing drive with stop at Artisans d'Angkor. Then we drive to Angkor Thom, the ancient royal city of Khmer Empire with its centerpiece: the Bayon temple. As we approach, we will notice the enigmatic faces of former King Jayavarman VII looking in every direction. Our guide will take us to the Terrace of the Elephants, which served as a platform from where the King could welcome back his victorious army and the Terrace of the Leper King, which holds detailed carvings winding along a narrow passage way that leads to the Baphuon complex. A gourmet picnic lunch awaits at Angkor Thom temple. In the afternoon, we visit some of the most well preserved carvings in the region at Angkor Wat, one of the world's most impressive temples, constructed between the 9th and 13th centuries and the largest Hindu structure in the world. The temple is home to hundreds of fine carvings of Apsara and Hindu mythology. Stroll around the massive hallways to discover small shrines still in use today by the local people. We return to one of the grass terraces in front of the five massive towers of Angkor Wat to watch the sunset.

*Breakfast, Lunch*

Mon Nov 19 **Siemreap to Bangkok & USA** We transfer by private vehicle to the Angkor complex to start the day with a visit to the picturesque Ta Prohm.

This beautiful temple is one of Angkor's most impressive structures and is overgrown with fig trees, giving a haunting and exotic atmosphere. The magnificent roots of the trees have merged over the centuries with the temple's huge stone blocks, emphasizing a "lost city" feeling. Lunch is at our hotel before we drive to the airport for onward flight to Bangkok where guests can connect for a flight back to the USA, or perhaps continue the journey and explore Thailand independently.  
*Breakfast, Lunch.*

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