

ST. OLAF ALUMNI & FAMILY TRAVEL

TRIP INFORMATION SHEET

Vietnam: Then and Now

February 16–March 2, 2024

With Cambodia Extension, March 2–5, 2024

Welcome

Hello Study Travelers! We are grateful you have chosen to participate in Travel with St. Olaf College and are working to prepare a program worthy of your high expectations.

The mission of this Study Travel program is to:

- examine the traditional heritage of Vietnam
- consider how French colonialism and Communism shaped Vietnamese society
- visit the jaw-dropping archaeological sites of the Angkor temple complex
- wade through modern life in both countries
- encounter other perspectives while deepening your understanding of your own viewpoints
- engage in stimulating conversations with like-minded travelers

To achieve these goals, we will visit many sites and enjoy conversations throughout the program. Most days are quite full, with a little free time so that you may explore your own interests, reflect on what you are seeing and learning, sit amidst the hustle and bustle of daily life, and to decompress. Time to process new ideas is integral to grasping the accuracy and implications of those ideas. Simply savoring the sights, sounds, smells, and tastes of another culture can deepen your learning experience.

Equally important to reaching the tour's goals is getting to know the others in your group. A rapport with those sharing your encounters can strongly enhance your learning experience. Connecting to and discussing issues raised by this trip with your fellow travelers can augment your encounters and strengthen your new feelings, perspectives and knowledge. Your faculty leaders will strive to create a relaxed, safe environment in which discussion flows easily and all perspectives are welcome.

In fact, we hope to take you “from curious to courageous.” Many of us are eager to see the world and encounter different perspectives, but we find it challenging to take the next step and have difficult conversations. I encourage you to keep these things in mind as you travel:

1. Curiosity is a human condition *and* a skill set. It requires a level of mindfulness and awareness of surroundings. In being curious, we seek to understand both commonalities and differences.
2. Place matters. Travel is as much about creating immersion into an environment as it is about escape from a mindset that is enabled by one's regular environment. When we move into new places we are grasping an opportunity to break a mindset.

3. Voice matters. The speaker's perspective has the power to change the narrative. Pay attention to who is talking, whether it be a local or a fellow group member.
4. Transformation requires reflection, as I mentioned above. Knowledge alone isn't going to generate transformation, we need to engage in further discussion and reflection.
5. The burden of courage is on us. Lifelong learning is a verb – it's an active endeavor. You're going to be processing new information and that's OK, we'll do it together.

I wish you an enriching and enlightening tour.



Heidi Quiram
Director of Alumni & Family Travel

Required Entry Visas

DO NOT APPLY FOR THESE VISAS UNTIL DECEMBER 3, 2023 OR AFTER. In fact, to avoid a bureaucratic snafu based on the date the visa is issued, you could wait until mid-December or early January to apply.

VIETNAM

A visa is required for entry into Vietnam and you will need to apply as individuals. (We will not apply as a group.) The least expensive and easiest to apply for is an e-visa.

Click on this link to get started:

https://evisa.xuatnhapcanh.gov.vn/en_US/web/guest/khai-thi-thuc-dien-tu/cap-thi-thuc-dien-tu

E-visas cost \$25 and take about 3 days to be processed. You will need a clear electronic copy of your passport data page and passport photo, and to make a non-refundable payment as outlined on the immigration website.

- If your flight itinerary has you going back through Vietnam after the Cambodia extension, you should apply for a multiple entry visa.
- If your visa application asks for a point of contact or guaranteeing agency, please write: Intrepid Vietnam, 5th floor HiPT Building, 152 Thuy Khue Street, Thuy Khue, Tay Ho, Hanoi, Ph +84 4 3715 0996.
- Be sure to keep the customs and immigration form you receive on arrival in Vietnam, as you need it to complete exit formalities on departure.

CAMBODIA

A visa is also required to enter Cambodia, and they also offer on-line visa processing.

Click on this link to get started:

<https://www.evisa.gov.kh/>

You can apply for a T-type Visa, which costs \$30, plus a \$6 processing fee, and takes about 3 days to be processed. It will be **valid for entry into the country for only 3 months from the date of issue**, so, as mentioned above, be sure to apply for it on December 3 or after. Or, better yet, wait until mid-December or after the holidays to apply.

If a point of contact is requested for your visa application, please write: Intrepid Cambodia, 92 Taneuy Street, Wat Bo Village, Siem Reap.

Dealing with Covid Now That It's Endemic

We now commonly speak of the pandemic in the past tense, but, in fact, covid has become a permanent component in our lives, like seasonal flu, or like other endemic diseases that we encounter in certain destinations, like malaria. Therefore we're wise to continue to have a plan to deal with covid.

- Before departure, particularly if you're over 65 or medically compromised, you should check in with your primary care doctor and find out if they could prescribe you Paxlovid when you're on the road.
- If you start to feel unwell during the program, we ask that you take a break from the group activities for the day and rest in your room.
- If you start to feel better but symptoms persist, please wear a mask around others in our group until your symptoms resolve. (Therefore be sure to pack a few quality masks, like N95 or KN95.)
- If you continue to feel unwell, you should get tested for covid. In order to be eligible for the travel insurance coverage from EIIA that is included in your trip price, you need more than an over-the-counter at-home test. EIIA's FAQ says, "For expenses to be reimbursed, the policy requires that the participant receive (and submit) written confirmation of a positive result from a local medical official." (You can see the [full FAQ here](#).)
- If you test positive, you must refrain from group activities for five days from symptom onset or, if asymptomatic, from the date you took the test. After that, you may join the group in progress, but remain masked around others for at least five more days, including as much as possible during group meals.

Fellow travelers will not be required to quarantine. If you're sharing a room with a person with symptoms, though, we ask that you mask around others in our group.

You no longer have to test to return to the U.S. or travel to most countries. As we lay out above, CDC guidance says that if you test positive, you should isolate yourself for five days and then wear a mask for five days after that.

Regretfully, we will not be able to ask the national guide nor the tour operator to assist individuals with revised hotel, airport transfer, or flight arrangements, as their attention must continue to be focused on the group logistics. Thank you for your understanding.

And finally, this plan may be amended on-site based on the unique circumstances of this group or destination.

A Thoughtful Journey

In the spirit of study travel, here are some questions to contemplate while you travel:

- what kinds of connections can I make with locals?
- how can we overcome preconceptions about the destination, culture, and people?
- in what ways can we build bridges to what we're seeing, hearing, doing, and learning?

General Resources

As a reminder, please familiarize yourself with the many resources we have online at stolaf.edu/travel > Menu > Prepare for your Adventure, including the overseas travel insurance coverage, how to be an independent group traveler, safety overview, and much more.

Connecting to the Group

The address of the group hotel and the timing of the first gathering will be provided in an email with the subject line “Final Notes and Tips” about 3 weeks prior to departure.

A Typical Day

A typical day will start with breakfast at the hotel and a departure time on our bus between approximately 8 and 9 a.m. On most days, we will set out to see several cultural sites or museums; we will coordinate our departure time in order to maximize our time at the site. Factors will include opening and closing times as well as anticipated tourist traffic. We will typically return to the hotel in the late afternoon. Our itinerary will vary, though, with some days more full than others.

Activity Level

Movement between cities will be by private, air-conditioned motor coach. We will often move around within cities on foot, or a combination of bussing to a site and then walking. One philosophy of St. Olaf Travel is that any destination is more fully experienced on foot. You should be able to walk fair distances in one shot — at times it will be a mile or quite a bit more. Past participants have reported that between group activities and their own explorations, their pedometers have logged 7 to 10 miles in one day. Make sure to have an already-broken in pair of walking shoes along; on certain days, these will be your best friends. This itinerary is full of site visits, and we will spend time on our private bus moving from site to site.

Note, too, that sidewalks in Vietnam and Cambodia can be extremely uneven or non-existent. In addition, residents park their scooters on the sidewalk, often requiring you to walk in the street, close to rapidly moving traffic. You'll need to be constantly aware when moving around in our cities, especially Hanoi.

As a reminder, the physical requirements listed in the Terms & Conditions that you agreed to when you registered are:

Alumni & Family Travel tours vary in pace, but in general, they require you, the participant, to be capable, without assistance, of walking a minimum of five miles per day, standing for 2 to 3 hours at a time, of climbing stairs that may not have handrails, of climbing in and out of a variety of transportation vehicles, of keeping pace with an active group of travelers on long days of traveling, of dealing with the emotional highs and lows that can occur when experiencing a different culture, and of being capable of traveling with a group for several hours each day. St. Olaf has published specific requirements for each Alumni & Family Travel trip. You are responsible for reviewing the specific requirements for your tour and judging the appropriateness of these travel activities to your physical, mental and behavioral capabilities. Any participant who is unable to fulfill the tour requirements may have their registration cancelled. Any participant who has demonstrated an inability, in the opinion of the tour leader, of keeping up with the group or of safely participating in tour activities may be prohibited from participating in certain activities.

When it is possible to do so, St. Olaf strives to make reasonable efforts to accommodate disabilities and other special needs of tour participants if we are notified at the time of registration. If you have a special need regarding your participation in the tour or will need an accommodation, you should contact the Alumni & Family Travel Director as soon as possible. Unfortunately, St. Olaf may not be able to accommodate all special needs. Facilities, resources, accommodations and protections for disabled and special needs individuals can be sharply limited outside the U.S. St. Olaf reserves the right to refuse to make an accommodation when not required to do so by law.

You are expected to behave in a reasonable manner toward other travelers, tour leaders, staff and other persons with whom you come into contact during the tour. If you behave, in the opinion of the tour leader, in a way likely to disrupt the enjoyment or endanger the safety of other travelers, you will be expelled from the group and will have to make your own arrangements to return home. No refunds for the unused portion of the tour will be given.

If you have any concerns about these requirements, please give me a call. (My contact information is at the bottom of this document.)

Weather

Be sure to check your favorite app or web site for forecasts in each city shortly before departure, keeping in mind that the forecast could change. Temperatures could fluctuate by 5 or 10 degrees warmer or cooler. We recommend bringing multiple light layers to that you can add or remove as necessary to stay comfortable.

Clothing Suggestions

Be sure to dress comfortably; we will be out and about for several hours each day. Shorts and short-sleeves are perfectly acceptable attire. Women especially should be prepared to cover knees and shoulders at religious sites, and men may possibly also need to cover their knees. As mentioned above, we recommend bringing multiple light layers so that you can add or remove as necessary to stay comfortable.

Meals

Breakfast will be at the hotel and may vary from continental to a more robust buffet.

Either a group lunch or dinner is included most days. Occasionally a buffet may be available, but more typically these will be set menus chosen by the restaurant or tour operator. ***It's imperative that you have informed us of your dietary restrictions so that we can take these into account when ordering group meals.*** Beverages of any kind (including non-alcoholic) are typically not included at group meals, so you should plan to have some small bills in the local currency to cover your drinks. Tips are included at group meals.

That leaves either lunch or dinner for you to explore the local cuisine at your own comfort level and budget.

When not at group meals, "most upscale restaurants throughout the country now add a service surcharge of 5% to 10%. If they don't, or if the service is good, you might want to leave another 5%." (frommers.com)

Hotel Notes

Our group hotels are likely to have laundry services available. Such service is sometimes expensive. We recommend bringing some laundry soap and doing small batches of laundry in your hotel sink/bathtub.

Some hotels will not provide shampoo or soap; this is often in support of green initiatives. Consider packing a travel sized version of hygiene products. Hairdryers are available at most hotels, either in the room or from the reception desk. Washcloths are not always supplied at hotels around the world, but may be available at the reception desk. Many showers in overseas hotels share a floor with the rest of the bathroom or will not have a shower curtain.

Money

How much money you budget for this program depends on what you plan on doing during your free time, and what kind of meals you like to eat. (A quick dish from a sidewalk vendor will cost less than a three-course meal with wine at a fancy restaurant).

We strongly recommend carrying a variety of forms of money, so you will not be without funds if one form should fail or be stolen. ATMs are readily available in each city we'll stay in, so that you can take out smaller increments of money if you wish.

Pickpocketing is prevalent around the world; we recommend you carry your money and credit cards in a buttoned pocket or money belt — i.e., someplace secure. Pick-pocketing is most common at bus and train stations, at ATMs, and around tourist hotels. Be especially careful in those situations! Cash, if stolen, cannot be replaced. Credit cards can be replaced if stolen, but you will be charged a fee by your bank to use them overseas.

Note that many overseas ATMs dispense your cash before returning your card. This is the opposite way as in the US and people are often caught out by taking their cash and walking away. Remember to wait for your card!

It's typically helpful, too, to inform your bank/credit card company before departure that you'll be traveling and to which countries.

To learn more about the monetary units and exchange rates in your destination, visit [xe.com](https://www.xe.com).

Health Matters: Pre-Departure and On-Site

You should also visit the Centers for Disease Control website to learn about recommended vaccinations for your destination. Get started at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/> and use the Destinations box on the right side of the page to learn more.

We also recommend that you consider visiting a travel clinic or your own doctor on how to handle common travel-related illnesses and possibly to obtain prescriptions in case of illness overseas. Your doctor or a travel doctor can also talk through the CDC recommendations and provide further guidance.

If you are taking regular medicines or even home remedies, it is highly recommended that you bring along a more than sufficient supply, in case you are delayed for any reason returning home.

Be aware that U.S. Medicare does not apply overseas, and that some travel medical insurance is included in your tour price, including emergency medical expenses, emergency medical evacuation, medical repatriation, accidental death and dismemberment, security evacuation, natural disaster evacuation, and some trip cancellation and trip interruption coverage.

Please visit the US State Department's web site for the latest health information for our destination. Get started at travel.state.gov, click on International Travel, then Country Information, and then type the country name into the box under "Learn about your destination."

Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP)

One of the things we do for every tour is register the group with the U.S. State Department's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). According to the State Department's web site, the benefits of enrolling in STEP are:

- Receive important information from the Embassy about safety conditions in your destination country, helping you make informed decisions about your travel plans.
- Help the U.S. Embassy contact you in an emergency, whether natural disaster, civil unrest, or family emergency.
- Help family and friends get in touch with you in an emergency.

Registration involves uploading each of your names, including the phone number and email address that I have for you on file. I do not create a separate login for each of you.

There are no current unusual travel concerns for Vietnam or Cambodia. Enrollment is a standard step we take for each of our study travel trips. I will alert you via email when I complete this enrollment, because you may thereafter receive emails related to your destination directly from the State Department.

Time Difference

To calculate time zone differences, including Daylight Saving Time in either the U.S. or your destination, I recommend using the time zone converter at timeanddate.com.

Electricity

Most gadgets and chargers these days – for laptops, tablets, and phones, whether Apple or Android – are Dual Voltage: Dual voltage appliances are designed to work on either 110V or 220V without a converter. Be sure to check this before you leave. In any case, you will still need the proper adapter to plug into the foreign outlet. The countries in this region are of the two round pin variety (like most of Europe).

If you bring your own hair dryer or electric razors, you will likely need both a converter and an adapter. Converters and adapters can be found at regular stores such as Best Buy, Target, and Walmart.

Airport Security

Visit tsa.gov/travel for up-to-date guidelines on getting through the security lines faster, what you can bring, the liquids rule, proper identification, and more.

Customs (Going Home)

Visit [U.S. Customs and Border Protection](https://www.dhs.gov/customs) for information on what to Know Before You Visit.

Packing Tips

- Mix and match several items of clothing. Pick a scheme like black, brown or navy.
- Take an all-purpose jacket, one that is warm, can double as rain gear, and has pockets.
- Do not take anything that would upset you if you lost it, such as valuables and jewelry.

- Take only comfortable shoes. Match all or most of your wardrobe with one or two pairs.
- Roll clothing in your suitcase or use packing cubes to maximize space and cut down on wrinkling.
- A dressier outfit is appropriate for any performances or fancy dinners you may have booked on your own (i.e., not jeans).
- Small backpacks are very useful as a day pack. Many days we will be out and about for several hours and you will want to carry water, a small umbrella, and layers.

Don't forget to pack

- Credit card account numbers and toll-free phone numbers for card replacement
- Insurance contact information
- A copy of the hotel addresses and dates of stay – if your name and flight tags go missing, the airline will still know how to contact you or where to send your luggage
- Contact solution or an extra pair of glasses in case you break or lose yours, and your prescription
- Perhaps a small, battery powered alarm clock if you're not bringing your cell phone
- A wash cloth, if you regularly use this item at home. Many overseas hotels do not provide them
- Electrical plug adapters. You may also need voltage converters to go from the usual 110 volts in the U.S., to the 220 volts elsewhere in the world, though most electronics now have these converters built into the cord.

Items to carry with you

- Neck safe or money belt
- Passport and another picture ID
- COVID-19 vaccination card and a couple of high-quality masks, just in case
- Overseas or non-toll free numbers for credit card replacement
- Medical insurance card
- Information and contact numbers for any travel insurance you may have purchased on your own. (A link to ID cards and contact information for the travel insurance that is already included with your trip fee will be provided a few weeks prior to departure)
- Prescription medications in their original containers
- Small amount of over-the-counter medications (these items are readily available for purchase at reasonable prices throughout our journey)

Items to leave with someone at home

Some people leave hard copies, and others create a folder in the cloud that can be accessed by family members, no matter where those family members are.

- Copy of the identification page of your passport
- Credit card account numbers and toll-free phone numbers for card replacement
- Photocopy of your medical insurance card
- Travel insurance provider information and contact numbers
- Photocopy of your itinerary, which will include hotel contact information closer to departure
- Prescription medication information in case yours is lost or stolen; often your pharmacy can send a replacement prescription to a nearby pharmacy

Visit www.onebag.com for more packing tips, including what to pack, what to pack it in, and how to pack it.

Miscellaneous Tips

- Investigate – prior to departure – how to replace lost credit cards.
- Bring with you only those credit cards and documents you will need.
- Do not take or wear expensive jewelry. It can be stolen, even when you are wearing it.
- Print the addresses and dates of stay for our hotels (names of hotels to be provided prior to departure) and place inside your checked luggage in case it's lost.
- Make sure you receive a claim check for each piece of checked luggage.
- Read the fire safety instructions in hotels and know where the exits are located.

If you have any questions at any time, do not hesitate to contact the Travel Director:

Heidi Quiram

Tel 507-786-3629

Email quiram@stolaf.edu