

LEGACY OF Elegance

Keira Dodd revels in the graceful colonial style and exuberant atmosphere of Indochina.



Vietnamese girl

FACT FILE

A 14 night trip featuring stays at some of these colonial properties costs from £1,950 per person based on two sharing, including flights from the UK, private tours, transfers and all accommodation on a B&B basis. For further details call our Indochina Specialists on 01869 276 385.



Indochina was under French governance for nearly 100 years, and it was not until 1954 (after years of guerrilla warfare under Ho Chi Minh) that Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos regained their independence. One legacy of those days is the beautiful architecture and enchantingly cosmopolitan cities that can be found throughout the region.

Nowhere is this colonial charm more apparent than at the Sofitel Metropole in Hanoi, built in 1901. Graham Greene stayed here while writing *The Quiet American*, and the best suite is dedicated to him. While this suite stretches most budgets, everyone can enjoy a cocktail named after him in the hotel's stylish bar. Hanoi itself is a reminder of times past, with its elegant French quarter and the frenetic streets of the old Vietnamese quarter.

Saigon (now known as Ho Chi Minh City) was declared the capital of French Cochinchina in 1862 and the city owes its whole form and character to the French colonists. In the 1930s, trams ran along the boulevards of the city and a plethora of chic cafés, hotels and boutiques sprang up. Many of these are still to be found (in varying states of grandeur) along Don Khoi Street, cheek by cheek with the newer hotels. Two that are still in good repair are the Majestic and the Grand, where the service may be a little variable but the chance to experience Ho Chi Minh City as it once was is a real treat.

Similarly, the French presence can still be felt in the sleepy Laotian capital of Vientiane, where wide tree-lined boulevards epitomise the French spirit as you wander towards the distinctly Arc de Triomphe-like Patuxai monument. The best hotel here is the Settha Palace, which has 29 rooms and has been beautifully restored. Its restaurant is still called *La Belle Epoque* as a reminder of days gone by.

Luang Prabang is a captivating mix of French colonial influence and traditional Laotian architecture, epitomised by Prince Souvannaphoum's former residence. Now a five



Opera House, Hanoi

star boutique hotel, the *Maison Souvannaphoum* exudes the style of the colonial era with its shuttered windows and opulent decor.

Phnom Penh is one of Southeast Asia's most beguiling cities, and is steadily rediscovering itself in the wake of the Khmer Rouge. The wide riverfront promenade is European in flavour and many of the riverfront restaurants offer delicious French-influenced cuisine. A Singapore Sling in the Elephant Bar at the Hotel Le Royal (part of the prestigious Raffles group) is not to be missed and really fits the mood as you drink in the ambience of your splendid surroundings.

These are some of my favourite places in Indochina, but the great thing about a trip to the region is discovering for yourself a faded, perhaps forgotten relic of the colonial era that you can treasure as your own memory. There are plenty still to be found, I'm sure.

Keira Dodd
Indochina Specialist



Maison Souvannaphoum, Luang Prabang



Softel Metropole facade, Hanoi



Schoolgirls, Saigon



Majestic Hotel reception, Saigon



Riverfront, Phnom Penh