

“Heaven & Earth: A Citizen Diplomacy Delegation”

Option 2: March 24th- April 6th 2025

DAY ONE: Arrival in Ho Chi Minh City

Guests will be picked up at the international airport for transport to the hotel. We will kick off this special expedition with a group dinner, hosted by author and humanitarian Le Ly Hayslip in historic Ho Chi Minh City.

DAY TWO: Historic Tour -Mekong Delta

Leave the busy streets and modern buildings of Ho Chi Minh City behind on this Ben Tre day trip. Following breakfast, drive south of the city to the Mekong Delta, a remarkable agricultural area referred to as ‘the rice bowl of Vietnam’. On arrival in Ben Tre Province, we’ll board a local boat for the first glimpse of life on the Mekong Delta’s maze of waterways. Cruise among the river islands with whimsical names such as Dragon, Unicorn, Turtle, and Phoenix Islands. En route, visit a small factory producing handicrafts made of coconut – an abundant material in the Mekong region. Also, visit Turtle Island to explore an orchard and taste its fresh, tropical fruits. Then, we’ll switch gears and travel by horse-driven cart for a different perspective, cruising along country roads to a lush garden and tasting the honey that is harvested by the residents and famous throughout Vietnam. We’ll return to the waterways, this time using a rowing boat. Taking advantage of this boat’s smaller size, we’ll cruise up the narrow Xep canal, which is set amongst a dense grove of palm trees. Following this Delta adventure, we will return to land for lunch before returning to Ho Chi Minh City we’ll stop at Vinh Trang Pagoda - this massive Buddhist pagoda boasts impressive architecture and an incredible collection of statues, including a life-size jade image. Having gained a greater understanding of Ho Chi Minh City’s culture and history, the group will enjoy dinner hosted by a very special friend of Le Ly Hayslip.

DAY THREE: Cultural Tour & Helping Hands

Relax on the drive to Tay Ninh, watching the landscapes change from concrete buildings to rice paddies and villages dotted with wooden houses. At Tay Ninh we will visit the Cao Dai Great Temple, with architecture that could have come straight from a Walt Disney fantasy. Admire the whimsical statues and colorful paintings covering this remote temple building. Learn about the origins and beliefs of this unusual religion, which blends the world’s major faiths into a unique mosaic. Following a lunch break, we will enjoy an afternoon humanitarian visit to Mái Ấm Mây Ngàn in Tây Ninh where we will drop off much needed supplies. This center cares for orphans and even adults left by family members who can no longer afford to care for them. The center welcomes all, from one year old to 100, including people with disabilities and mental illness. On our way back, Le Ly will have a big surprise at the hottest spot in Cu Chi hosted by Mr. Binh and his family with a traditional Vietnamese homemade dinner! In the evening, program participants are free to explore the city.

DAY FOUR: Historical Tour and Travel to Da Nang

Today we will explore the many wonders of Vietnam’s southern metropolis. We will start with a trip to the Jade Emperor Pagoda and continue with a visit to Tan Dinh Market (said to be the oldest in all of Ho Chi Minh City). Dating back to the 1800s, this typical Vietnamese market sells all sorts of goods, though it is particularly known for its local foods and fabrics. Enjoy a much more local market experience, where tourists seldom visit. Le Ly will share a story of the market and traditional medicine before we head to the FITO Museum, which has an impressive collection of over 3,000 items related to developing traditional Vietnamese medicine. After the museum visit, fuel up with a local lunch before delving into Vietnam’s past at the Tet Offensive History Museum and a walking tour from the historic Presidential Palace through the city center where you will be able to see the Old Saigon Post Office, Dong Khoi Street (formerly Rue Catinat), the Continental Hotel, Opera House, and City Hall in order to learn more about Vietnam’s colonial past. In the evening we will take an evening flight to Danang.

DAY FIVE: Humanitarian Tour

We begin the day with a visit to Mother's Love Health Clinic, built by 3 US/VN vets and former VCs in 1989 in Le Ly's village. We will then visit the Man Quang Primary School before continuing on the enjoy a luncheon at Le Ly's regional birthplace, the house built in 1927. There, Le Ly will demonstrate her respect to the ancestral temple, family shrines, and how she communicates with heaven. Wonderful stories will be shared by Le Ly, her bother Bon Nghe (who was a North Vietnamese NVA), and Le Ly's friends who she grew up with. In the afternoon, we will visit Marble Mountain before heading back to the hotel and prepare for dinner.

DAY SIX: Remembrance & Citizen Diplomacy in Action

Today is dedicated to the remembrance of the 50th anniversary of liberation by the North Vietnam (Viet Cong). We will enjoy many different kinds of celebrations with good food and entertainment festivals around the city. Dinner will be held at the Village of Hope, after playing and interacting with the children at the center.

DAY SEVEN: Helping Hands & UNESCO Site Tour

After checking out of the hotel, we will journey to Peace Village Orphanage in Quang Nam Province. After touring the facilities we will distribute donations and interact with the inhabitants. Lunch will be shared with the staff and

administration at the center. After lunch, we will visit the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Mỹ Sơn, a UNESCO World Heritage Site of Hindu Temples built between the 4th – 14th century by the kings of Champa in Duy Xuyen District. While at Mỹ Sơn, Le Ly will share the Champa ghost story before heading back with the group to enjoy dinner in Hoi An. We'll visit the night market in Hoi An for best Cao Lau. The next morning we go to Hue!

DAY EIGHT: Spiritual Tour: Heaven & Earth

After departing Hoi An, will drive to the Imperial City of Hue. Along the way, we will cross the majestic Hai Van Pass with its spectacular landscapes and views. There, participants will have the opportunity for exploration, hiking, and shopping. After a group lunch we will check into the Huong Gian Hotel Perfume River for some much-needed R & R. In the afternoon there will be a walking tour of the The Citadel, home of the last Vietnamese King of the Bao Dai Dynasty. We will enjoy the group dinner and enjoy some traditional singing on Perfume River. Overnight in Hue.

DAY NINE: Visit to the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ)

We will cross the famed Hien Luong Bridge at the Ben Hai River where the 17th parallel divided Vietnam into two countries from July 1954 through July 1976. We will tour the famed US military sites from the war including the Marine hilltop base at Khe Sanh, the Rock Pile observation post, the bridge at Dong Ha and the North Vietnamese Tunnel complex at Vinh Moc. Overnight stay in Quang Binh.

DAY TEN: Ecological Tour

Enjoy a boat ride and visit Phong Nha Cave and Paradise Ke Bang National Park - a UNESCO site characterized by beautiful mountains, tropical forests, and underground rivers – renowned for its ancient limestone karsts and vast network of many caves. Evening flight to Hanoi.

DAY ELEVEN: Culture & UNESCO Site Tours

Today we will travel by private bus to visit West Lake to admire the sixth-century Tran Quoc Buddhist Pagoda before continuing on to explore the famed Temple of Literature, wandering around this incredible compound which was constructed in 1076. You will be fascinated by the stories of the building and get a glimpse of the past when it served as a university and temple. Afterward, we'll head over to the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology for a private tour and browse and learn about the remarkable diversity of Vietnam's ethnic communities. Lunch will be held at The Secret Garden and then we will visit the Ho Chi Minh complex and see the famous Mausoleum from a viewing point before taking a short walk to Ho Chi Minh's former house. Built on stilts, this was where he lived from 1958 to 1969 as he orchestrated the movement that eventually led to Vietnam's independence. Walking around the serene ground we will learn all about Ho Chi Minh's life and legacy.

DAY TWELVE: A Special Night on Halong Bay

After breakfast, we will travel eastward to the bays along the Gulf of Tonkin. Our final destination is the most exquisite – Halong Bay, a UNESCO World Heritage site with nearly 3000 limestone karst islands rising from the beautiful waters. It is a wonder of serene natural beauty, with caves, beaches, floating villages and markets. Then, we will arrive at our jetty in Halong City and, once aboard, enjoy a lunch while cruising the bay. Towards the end of the day, the boat sets anchor for the night among the karst formations, where dinner will be served on board.

DAY THIRTEEN: Hanoi Hilton

Enjoy your fresh morning in the middle of the bay as the sun rises on Halong in the morning and breakfast is served while the vessel cruises slowly through the magnificent rock formations and back towards port. We will transfer back to Hanoi making stops to visit the Women's Museum and the infamous Hanoi Hilton before finishing the day at the water puppet theatre and enjoy a live performance of this unique northern Vietnamese art form.

DAY FOURTEEN: Historical Tour

Today we will depart from the hustle and bustle of Hanoi and enter the surrounding, quieter countryside in Hoa Lu. We'll be guided through exploration of the ruins of Vietnam's first capital, learning about the Dinh (968-980) and Le (980-1009) Dynasties, experiencing the ancient tombs and ruins of this once-imposing Citadel. You'll have some time to rest, relax, or souvenir shop before attending a special Farewell Dinner.

DAY FIFTEEN:

Transport to the airport in Hanoi.