

SE Asia Rally 2018

Day 1-2 Our first stay in Vietnam will be in **Hoi An**, a World Heritage Site dating from the 13th century which has been influenced by the Portuguese, Chinese, Japanese, Dutch, British and French. There are pleasant walks around the old town. There will be a chance to sample Jeremy Clarkson's favourite drive over the Hai Van pass to warm up the car. (see right)



Day 3 We will drive inland into the highlands. Our stop at the end of the day is **Kon Tum**, the provincial capital. Kon Tum is at the centre of an area with many tribes. In each local village there is a rong – a meeting house on stilts (see left). In town there are a wooden cathedral and a French built seminary which houses a small museum on hill tribes.

Day 4 The rally continues through the highlands to **Buon Ma Thuot**. The first part of the drive, to Pleiku, is through a sensitive post-war area which has been closed to unescorted foreigners. Later we see lakes near the road. Buon Ma Thuot is at a lower altitude and, being warmer and less humid than the higher areas, is the centre of tea, coffee and rubber production.

Day 5 The route climbs the central mountains to **Da Lat**, a hill station. It was used by both sides in the Vietnam War for rest and recuperation and the beautiful colonial buildings (see right) escaped damage as a result.



Days 6-7 After a morning sight-seeing in Da Lat we descend to the coast where there will be a day off in **Mui Ne** (see left).

Days 8-9 The rally will take the coast road and by-pass Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) to spend our last two nights in Vietnam in **Can Tho** and **Ha Tien** in the Mekong delta. The first has floating markets and the second boasts plentiful seafood, tombs and pagodas. Since the drive between the two is short you may choose to spend some extra time in one or the other.

Days 10-11 A 10km drive takes us to our first border crossing; into Cambodia. On our way to **Ta Tai**, where there are rivers and waterfalls to swim in (see right), there is the possibility to take a 60 km detour to visit a ruined French hill station. Taken over by communist guerrillas and later the



Khmer Rouge, it is now ruined. Don't walk off the path – landmines! Then on to **Battambang**, a French Colonial city. Battambang means 'disappearing stick'. We reach it via a dirt track through the Scenic Cardamom Mountains. (see left)



Days 12-14 We descend to a river plateau to spend two nights in the Grand Raffles Hotel at **Siem Reap**, the home of Angkor Wat (left). Here we will overdose on temples. We will then continue to **Preah Vihear** (right): a hidden gem off the tourist circuit.



Day 15 From Preah Vihear we cross into Thailand where we visit Surin, a silk making town, en route to **Khon Kaen**, a large university town with a good selection of restaurants and bars. There is a lake that expands and contracts according to the season and a good branch of the national museum. Next to the lake there is a 'stunning' Wat.

Day 16 We drive on to **Dan Sai**, through the scenic hills of rural Loei province, in the far northeast of Thailand, near the Mekong River. Unfortunately we will not be there for the ghost festival!

Day 17 Ruins can be spotted in the rice fields on the way to the old capital of **Sukhothai**, a national historical park with lotus ponds and flowering trees. A haven for birds. We shall be staying in the national park and have the afternoon to visit the ruins.



Sukhothai

Day 18 We cross the mountain pass into Myanmar and stay in **Hpa-an** – a colourful market town in beautiful countryside. There is a Pagoda near the waterfront and a clock tower which is lit 'like a gaudy lollipop' at night.

Days 19-21 We may spot the Kyaiktiyo Pagoda, AKA the golden rock, where a golden temple stands on a rock which is held in place by one of the Buddha's hairs. After a night in **Nay Pyitaw**, the new capital built from scratch, we stop overlooking Mount Popa, a volcanic plug with a barefoot 800 step climb to the top. Two nights will be spent in **Bagan** where 4,000 temples and pagodas can be viewed from a hot air balloon at dawn – a magical experience – or on foot. Visits to a local market and/or a lacquer work workshop are also possible. Views from the viewing tower at the hotel are stunning.



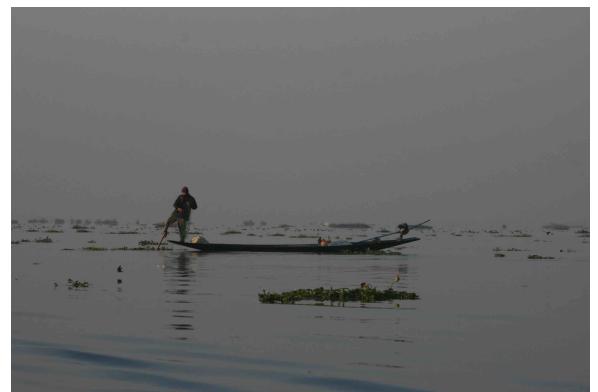
Bagan temples



Mount Popa



**Inle
Stupa**



Fisherman on Inle Lake

Days 22-23 There will be a stop for afternoon tea in Kalaw, a British Hill station, on the way to **Inle** where there is the possibility of another dawn outing, this time on a boat on the lake to see fisherman, floating gardens, temples and stupa. We shall stay for two nights.

Days 24 -25 A lazy morning, then a short scenic drive to **Namsang** in the Shan province. The next day we have a lovely mountain drive to **Kengtung**, pronounced Cheng Dong, in a rugged mountain area of the same province. The town has streets lined with pagodas according to Lonely Planet. There is a small lake where a pleasant morning or evening stroll may be taken in what was the British



Monastery, Namsang



quarter. There is a conventional market and a water buffalo market takes place twice a week!

Keng Tung



Day 26 Across the border to the 'Golden Triangle' mountainous area of Thailand. **Chiang Rai**, where we will stay, was founded in the thirteenth century. It has old repaired city walls and Wats but the main item



of interest for us will probably be the night market (left and right).



Day 27 A shorter day's driving to **Nan**, described as a little visited town. It is said that Buddha came trekking in this area looking for auspicious sites for Wats! Wat Phumin, left and below, built in 1596 has fine nineteenth century murals.



Days 28 - 29 A border crossing into Laos and a drive through rural areas crossing the Mekong river will take us to **Luang Prabang**. Two nights in Luang Prabang will give time to explore the picturesque town and take a trip on the Mekong river. There are still thirty intact Wats, beautifully presented, in this World Heritage site.



Rural Laos

Day 30 You may choose to spend an extra hour in Luang Prabang or drive straight to **Oudomxay**. If the latter there might be time to explore further north in Laos where there is still a very rural undeveloped way of life.



Near Oudomxay

Day 31 A mountain ascent takes us to the border with Vietnam – now in the north near the border with China. This is Vietnam war area and where opium poppies are grown. We shall stay in **Dien Bien Phu** – the site of a 57 day siege which is considered to have ended French domination of the area. It is situated at the northern end of a pancake flat heart shaped valley with the Nam Rong River running through it. There are battleground sights for those who are interested.



A reminder of the war



Days 32-33 We then have a drive past Fansipan mountain to Sa Pa which is 'unbelievably scenic' according to travel agents. Certainly this area of Vietnam has precision-terraced paddy fields and strange shaped mountains galore as well as opportunities to meet colourful local people. We will stay for two nights in Sa Pa to make the most of it.

Sa Pa area

Days 34 - 35 We will definitely be off the beaten track in the remote mountains near the Chinese border for two days of scenic driving. The first night will be spent in **Ha Giang** and the second in **Cao Bang**.



The mountains near Ha Giang



Days 36-37 A further day completes the journey to **Halong Bay** where our trip finishes. We shall spend two nights on a boat there. After dropping the cars at the port we shall celebrate our last night with dinner in a candlelit cave on an Indigo sea with 3,000 islands.