



# Sino French Railway

## China and Vietnam



### Day 1 Arrive Kunming

On arrival take the short drive to your hotel, located in the centre of the city by Green Lake. Kunming has a long history from the 12th century when it was made the regional capital under the Yuan dynasty. Set almost 1700 metres above sea level the weather is said to be 'spring-like' all year round. The city has undergone a massive modernisation program since 1996 and now boasts a population of over 7 million. During the early 20th century Kunming and the province of Yunnan was occupied by the French Colonialists who sought to expand their interests by linking this inland city with the sea port of Haiphong (Vietnam) some 850 kilometres away by rail. Dinner is included tonight with a tour briefing by your journey leader. **Accommodation: Grand Park Hotel**



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### Day 2 Kunming and the Stone Forest

After breakfast we will visit the Railway Museum. The Sino French Railway was constructed by the French from 1904 to 1910 covering a distance of 845 kilometres from Haiphong in the northern coastal area of Vietnam to Kunming in southern China. The design and route presented a challenge for French engineers. The topography was unforgiving and the area was remote where few facilities existed for the 60,000 strong workforce of Vietnamese coolies and pressed labour from Chinese provinces. At the museum we can see many relics from the railway's glory days, including steam engines, carriages and railway infrastructure. En route to the Stone Forest we follow the old railway out of Kunming heading due south, stopping to photograph the sidings and elevated railway line. We visit the unique scenery of the Stone Forest, a remarkable example of karsts landscape. We return to Kunming. **Accommodation: Grand Park Hotel**

### Day 3 Kunming to Jianshui

Depart this morning for the four hour drive to the old Chinese village of Jianshui. Southern Yunnan is a remote and mountainous area of China, home to over 34 different ethnic groups - many of these indigenous people still practice farming as it was 1000 years before in ancient terraced fields that cascade to valley floors. Many wear their traditional costumes and the area is remote with few foreign visitors. On arrival we will visit the Double Dragon Bridge (Ming dynasty 14th century) and continue to our hotel. This evening we will find some tasty food at a local restaurant.

**Accommodation: Family Zhu Garden Hotel**

## Day 4 Jianshui to Yuanyang

This morning we have a chance to enjoy this old town in some detail, including visits to the Family Zhu residence and ancient Chaoyanglou Pavilion. In Jianshui there is a Confucius temple, reputed to be the second largest in China. Here we have an opportunity to learn about a philosophy from 2500 years before that still plays an active role in everyday Chinese society. In the centre of the town there are three old wells that still provide water for the local people. We continue by road through spectacular mountain countryside to the hill-top town of Yuan Yang, perched high on a ridge with tumbling valleys of terraced rice fields stretching into the distance. Along the way see villages of Black Yi, Hani, Dry Dai and Yao ethnic minorities. **Accommodation: Yunti Hotel**



## DAY 5 Around Yuanyang

The rice terraced fields around Yuanyang are awe-inspiring. Said to have been constructed some 3000 years ago by the Hani people, the fields are still worked by hand. The distinctive dwellings of these ancient people resemble mushrooms with small towers to dry their crops. At the time of our travel the rice terraces are immersed in water, making for a spectacular photographic opportunity as the light reflects through the valley. We will take a walk through their fields and visit a local village.

**Accommodation: Yunti Hotel**

## DAY 6 Yuanyang to Mengzi

We descend from our mountain top to the Red River valley. The Red River runs from China over 600 kilometres into Vietnam and was the original route chosen by the French for their railway. A survey of the area revealed unstable conditions so an alternative route via the town of Mengzi and the river valley of Hekou was preferred. The countryside is mountainous as we travel in an easterly direction to link up with the old railway. For the first time we reach relatively flat country around Mengzi which became a major fuelling and water stop for the trains from Hanoi. Mengzi has a colourful history that once saw representation of five foreign consulates (from 1910) as western countries clamoured to claim a slice of post-dynasty China. We visit the Bise Railway station, largely intact from 1912 - the old clock at the platform looking grand but missing its hands. In town there are some old French buildings which served as customs checkpoints. During the 1930s, Beijing University was transferred to Mengzi to escape the invading Japanese.

**Accommodation: Mengzi Guanfeng Hotel**

## Day 7 Mengzi to Pingbian

Across the road from our hotel in Mengzi is the Nanhu park where retired Chinese spend their mornings exercising and playing mahjong. Take a stroll in the park before heading further south towards the Vietnamese border through valleys of corn and beans. The small town of Pingbian is set in the corner of a valley, close to the old railway line. Here we will see a war memorial to Chinese soldiers who died in the bloody conflict with Vietnam in 1979. This evening enjoy the atmosphere of this appealing new town.

**Accommodation: Pingbian Hotel**

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## Day 8 Pingbian to Sapa

A spectacular day ahead as we rejoin the Sino French railway for breathtaking views of two bridges that span cliffs and traverse ravines close to the Vietnamese border. Across the length of the railway there are hundreds of bridges and tunnels, all built by hand at tremendous cost. It is said that 20,000 perished by accident or disease in six years of construction. To reach the bridges we must transfer to smaller vehicles and follow a local farming road for 30 kilometres. High on the valley wall we will see the rail line as it carves its way along the side of the mountain. The engineering masterpiece called the 'Man Bridge' is our reward after a bumpy ride. Spanning 70 metres between two sheer rock faces and some 90 metres above the valley floor, it was designed by a French woman - the name 'man' derives from its shape, which is similar to that of the Chinese character for man. A truly marvellous site and for those who are willing, there will be a short walk onto the rail line to get as close as possible to the bridge. Continue by road, parallel to the old line, until we reach the Chinese border town of Hekou. Here we will complete passport formalities and walk across a 300 metre bridge into Vietnam. After completing arrival details we will transfer to the old French hill station of Sapa, set high in the mountains of north-west Vietnam. **Accommodation: The Victoria Resort**



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## Day 9 Sapa

Set at the foot of Vietnam's highest mountain, Sapa is a delightful town with many ethnic minority groups including Hmong and Red Dao. There is a colourful daily market operated by the local Hmong people who trade their tie-dye clothes and traditional jewellery - you can pick up a great bargain here for sure. This morning we will take a short walk through the town and along a dirt trail through beautiful gardens and lush pine forests. During the walk we will visit a local school and the Old Catholic church at Ta Phin. From here our vehicle will transfer us back to Sapa. Free time later this afternoon. **Accommodation: The Victoria Resort**

## Day 10 Sapa to Hanoi by the old railway

Most of today is at leisure to enjoy the old town. In the early evening we will transfer back to the border town of Lao Cai and take the overnight train service to Hanoi. Finally our chance to travel by train as we board and settle into our comfortable sleepers (two persons per cabin), and travel overnight to arrive in Hanoi the following morning around 6am. On arrival we transfer to the hotel where early check in has been arranged. **Accommodation: On board the Sapaly train**

## Day 11 In Hanoi

Welcome to 'the Paris of the East' as the French called Hanoi during the colonial period from 1880 to 1954. Here you will see many fine examples of French architecture and discover the true essence of Vietnamese culture in this 1000 year old city. Most of today is at leisure after an early arrival. There will be an optional walking tour for those who would like to discover the Old Quarter and Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum. **Accommodation: Sofitel Metropole Hotel**

## Day 12 Hanoi to Haiphong

After breakfast we will transfer to the Hanoi Railway station on Le Duan Street. During the American war in Vietnam this fine old French structure was bombed and a large section of the building was destroyed. After the war finished in 1975 the damaged section was rebuilt, however, the architectural style reflected the Russian presence - stark and oblique. We board the local train and follow the Sino French railway to Haiphong, crossing the Long Bien Bridge (formally Paul Dumar Bridge) and on to the coast 100 kilometres to the east. On arrival in Haiphong we will take a short tour of the city with visits to the Cathedral Theatre and Hang Kenh temple. **Accommodation: Harbour Hotel**



### Day 13 Haiphong to Halong Bay

This morning we leave for the world natural heritage site of Halong Bay where 1967 limestone islands rise from the sea. The word 'Ha' means descending and 'Long' means dragon - an appropriate name given that the islands resemble a dragon's tail. We board our private boat and cruise the calm waters. Enjoy a sumptuous seafood lunch on board. We head to Cat Ba National Park and overnight on the island.

**Accommodation: Cat Ba Sunrise Resort**

### Day 14 Cat Ba

There are no plans today. A free day to reflect on our travels from Kunming to Haiphong following the Sino French railway. The island has many walking trails and provides a very natural landscape for us to enjoy. **Accommodation: Sunrise Cat Ba Hotel**

### Day 15 Back to Hanoi

We take the speedboat to Haiphong then join our bus on Highway 5 for the two hour journey back to Hanoi - the old French railway line by our side. We check in at the Metropole Hotel and prepare for our farewell dinner later that evening.

**Accommodation: Sofitel Metropole Hotel**

### Day 16 Departure

Farewell to Hanoi and the Sino French railway. Continue your travels or return home.



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A series of horizontal dotted lines for taking notes.