

Vietnam Highlights
11 days/10 nights
Hanoi, Ha Long Bay, Da Nang, Hoi An, Ho Chi Minh City, Mekong Delta

Day 1: Hanoi

After clearing customs procedures and collecting your luggage at the Noi Bai International Airport, our tour guide will meet you as you exit the airport, and transfer you by private vehicle to the hotel for check-in. The rest of the day is free to rest and relax or to start discovering the city. Vietnam's capital is described by almost all who go there as "an old-fashioned city". Old-fashioned in style, it is a city of lakes, parks, trees, villas, mansions and an area called the Old French Quarter where crumbling houses are crammed into narrow alleyways that are still named after the goods that were traded there - Silk Street, Gold Street, even Fried Fish Street! Old-fashioned in atmosphere, Hanoi has sidewalk cafes, pavement barbers, wide tree-lined bicycle-filled boulevards, and elegant colonial French mansions. The grandeur and solemnity of Ho Chi Minh's monumental Mausoleum, the incongruous rustic simplicity of the house in which 'Uncle Ho' lived out his final years, the barely concealed misery of the Hoa Lo Prison, the 'Hanoi Hilton' where so many prisoners of war were incarcerated, the religious pride that built the beautiful temple of Literature compound - it's all here in Hanoi, a microcosm of the Vietnamese culture.

Day 2: Hanoi

This morning visit Ho Chi Minh's complex. Subject to opening times it may be possible to join the silent single file queue of Vietnamese and foreigners going to pay their respects to Ho Chi Minh's embalmed corpse in the Mausoleum*. The tomb is monumental, built of marble, granite and precious wood. Behind the Mausoleum is Ho Chi Minh's house. The simple house where Ho Chi Minh lived and worked is made of wood and enjoyed a tranquil setting, with a view of a lotus pond. Ho Chi Minh's belongings are on display and visitors can walk up the steps of his house to see his bedroom. Close by, you will see a famous pagoda built in the 11th Century named the One Pillar Pagoda. Continue to visit Hanoi's famous Hoa Lo Museum (former prison famously known as the 'Hanoi Hilton') and then visit the Temple of Literature founded in 1070. An excellent example of traditional Vietnamese architecture, the pagoda housed Vietnam's first university, which was established in 1076 to educate the sons of Mandarins. The temple, dedicated to Confucius, consists of 5 walled courtyards leading to a pavilion where 82 stelae of an original 117 record the names and places of birth of successful candidates of the grueling mandarin examinations from 1498 to 1787, the years of the Ly dynasty. The stelae sit on the backs of giant turtles, symbol of longevity; these emblems along with the crane, another creature denoting longevity, are also found in the main red-lacquered temple nearby.

This afternoon, enjoy an orientation of the tree-lined streets of Hanoi, resplendent with French colonial architecture, including the recently restored Opera House- the magnificent 900-seat Municipal Theatre was built in 1911 and is a jewel of French colonial architecture. Originally modeled as a smaller version of the Great Paris Opera House, it was from the balcony of this wonderfully restored French colonial building that the Viet Minh-run committee of citizens announced that it had taken over the city on 16 August 1945. Pass by Hoan Kiem Lake, also known as Lake of the Restored Sword from the legend that surrounds it en-route to one of the city's fascinating museums (Army, History or Fine Arts, depending on your preference). Then enjoy a green way to explore Hanoi Old Quarter by "cyclo" ride (Pedi-cab) - Vietnam's most traditional form of transport - and on foot for a walking tour (approx. 1 hour) of the Ancient Quarter or 36 Streets District. This densely populated corner of the city was once a center of commerce where goods were sold under the street name of a particular guild. Still a thriving community of sellers today, you will see street names such as Sugar Street, Tin Street and Paper Street. Ancient homes and temples are interspersed with stores in this souvenir hunter's paradise! Overnight in Hanoi. [B/L]

** Note: the mausoleum is only open in the mornings and is closed all day on Mondays and Fridays. It is also closed to all visitors during the months of October & November*

Day 3: Hanoi's Countryside

For early risers there is an opportunity to depart the hotel very early and visit the fresh vegetable wholesale market named Cho Rau Dau Cau, which operates daily from 04:00-06:00am. This is where the farmers from the countryside bring their produce to the city for sale. Next visit the lively and very colorful flower market (Cho Hoa) which is a photographers' delight. Continue into the center of Hanoi to the famous Hoan Kiem Lake, and take an early morning walk around the lake, a popular place for the Hanoi locals to socialize and

enjoy their early morning exercises. There is an opportunity for the energetic to join with the locals in some Tai Chi – a form of martial art also used for health exercises. Wander through the streets of Hanoi's old quarter as the city comes to life, and take a break for a traditional Vietnamese coffee, by the lake, with the locals before returning to your hotel for breakfast. This morning visit the Museum of Ethnology, arguably Vietnam's finest museum dedicated to the fascinating life and traditions of its numerous ethnic groups. After visiting the Museum, leave for one-hour drive to Duong Lam Village with rice paddy field views along the road. On arrival, take a 5 minutes walking to see the village communal house and the village pagoda. Then, an hour on bicycle takes you through the village that offers amazing scenery. From the small alley of old house to the green of rice paddies surrounding the village, we have the chance to appreciate the beauty of Vietnamese farmer's simple life. The bike ride also brings you to Mia Pagoda, where tales tell about a Vietnamese Queen in the 17th century who not only encouraged the making of sugar and soy sauce business in the village but also built up a Buddhist pagoda with 287 statues – still a record in Viet Nam! Mid-afternoon, come for a visit to a 300 years old traditional house, where a friendly host will invite you to join their lunch, a good introduction of Vietnamese cuisine and, certainly, an enjoyable experience of rural Vietnam. After lunch, return to Hanoi with the remainder of the afternoon and evening is at leisure to relax, shop or continue exploring at your own pace. Overnight in Hanoi. [B/L]

Day 4: Hanoi, Ha Long Bay

After breakfast at your hotel, drive to Ha Long Bay for an overnight cruise on the Bay (Note: the transfer from Hanoi to Ha Long Bay takes approx. 3.5 hours. All boats' embark time is approx. 12:30pm)

Ha Long Bay is often called Vietnam's eighth wonder of the world and once visited, it is hard to dispute that claim. Three thousand spectacular limestone outcroppings, cliffs, arches and coves compete for space in an area that is without doubt the most outstandingly naturally beautiful in the country - an incomparable coastal scenery. We hire a traditional sailing junk (joining basis) and meander through the area whose name translates as 'Where the Dragon Descends into the Sea', stop off at an islet and climb through a series of breathtaking caves and grottoes, marveling at some of the most impressive stalactite and stalagmite formations anywhere in the world. Upon arrival at Ha Long City, embark on a traditional junk boat and enjoy a delicious fresh seafood lunch on board while cruising on the Bay. During the cruise, enjoy the solitude and beauty of the bay, marveling at its formations before watching the sun go down on the deck of the boat. Pause for a swim and kayaking (not included). Dinner is served onboard. Your accommodation tonight is on board the junk boat allowing for a peaceful night sleep and a memorable morning out on the bay. [B/L/D]

Day 5: Ha Long Bay, Hanoi, Da Nang, Hoi An

Enjoy breakfast on board in the still of the morning before cruising the more outer reaches of Bai Tu Long Bay and exploring its numerous caves and channels. After checkout (at approx. 10:00am to 11:00am), return to shore and journey back to Hanoi's airport for your departure flight to Da Nang**. Arrival and transfer from Da Nang Airport to your hotel in Hoi An for check-in. The rest of the day is at leisure.

One of the most ancient cities in Vietnam, Da Nang was the center of the Cham Dynasty from the 2nd century. Da Nang's rich cultural history, it's proximity to atmospheric Hoi An and the extraordinary ruins of My Son, and it's world-famous Cham Museum all continue to draw visitors. Unwelcome visitors have made their mark here too – Da Nang was the first landing-point for the invading French troops and again decades later for the US Marines. Today Da Nang is the fourth largest city in Vietnam and is a major port and center of industry. Close by Da Nang is Non Nuoc Beach, immortalized for many by the US television show and still one of the most spectacular beaches in Asia. Overnight in Hoi An. [B]

** Note: The above cruise itinerary is subject to change without prior notice and depends on weather conditions

Day 6: Hoi An & Surroundings

This morning enjoy a bicycle tour into the very heart of rural Hoi An for a special insight into the everyday life of a local village community. The small settlement of Cam Thanh, nestled among seemingly endless rice fields, allows the visitor to experience first hand the very backbone of Vietnam's rural culture. The short bicycle ride through the deepest countryside of the village will be one of the highlights of your time in Vietnam – this unique glimpse into the rural lives of the villagers is a sight that very few visitors will see – and in turn you will delight the local people with your presence on their most favored form of transportation – the humble

bicycle! Depending on the season, you will have the opportunity to see the local farming community threshing and harvesting.

After having lunch at Brothers Café, housed in a restored French colonial villa with lovely gardens located along the riverfront, take a walking tour to visit the unique trading town of Hoi An a town cut off from civilization by destroyed railroads and a silted river, leaving it untouched by war and frozen in time. See architecture reminiscent of traders of bygone eras - Japanese, French, Chinese, and Indian, as well as beautifully preserved ancient houses. No cars are allowed to pass through Hoi An, rendering it an excellent walking village. Visit the unique Japanese covered bridge and a Chinese communal house. Shop for art at one of the numerous galleries and enjoy the riverside ambience. Overnight in Hoi An. [B/L]

Day 7: Hoi An – Cooking class

After breakfast visit Hoi An's central market place to view the vast array of produce on display and gain an insight into to the various ingredients most commonly used in Vietnamese cooking, Hoi An style. After wandering through the market place take a walk through some of the surrounding streets where you will notice the Hoi An local residents enjoying 'street food' while seated at small chairs on the pavement. On arrival at the Market Restaurant & Cooking School, managed by Ms. Vy, a Hoi An native and the third generation of chefs in her family. Ms. Vy is also a renowned local businesswoman and the owner of several restaurants in the town as well as an expert on the cuisine of Hoi An. She has been featured in many international publications including the New York Times, The Weekend Australian, Travel & Leisure, and Lonely Planet's World Food Vietnam guidebook. (Note that this is join-in class and Ms. Vy's presence is to be confirmed - if Ms Vy herself is unavailable on these dates then one of her highly trained assistants will conduct the cooking class instead.) Ms. Vy or her assistants will give an introduction to Vietnamese street food and explain some of the peculiarities and traditions, and then you will enjoy a cooking demonstration where a selection of street food dishes is prepared, including some that are particular to this area. Attendants will be able to attempt to prepare the dishes themselves and sample the dishes that have been prepared throughout the morning. The afternoon is at leisure for you to enjoy the facilities at your hotel, or to further explore the historic town at your own pace. Overnight in Hoi An. [B/L]

Day 8: Hoi An, Da Nang, Ho Chi Minh City

After breakfast drive to the Da Nang Airport for one-hour flight to Ho Chi Minh City. Saigon is surely one of the most evocative place names in Asia and definitely one of the most extraordinary cities in the world. The most Western in atmosphere of Vietnam's cities, Ho Chi Minh City (to use it's official name - although to residents and visitors alike it is universally and affectionately known as Saigon) has a population of 8 million, and a booming free-market economy. It is a city of amazing contrasts: elegant new international hotels, exclusive restaurants and trendy bars side-by-side with roadside noodle stalls, street children and vociferous Pedi-cab drivers. Golf courses, bowling alleys and shopping malls vie for space with fruit and vegetable markets, pagodas and karaoke rooms. Bustling, booming, crowded, noisy - all words that barely scratch the surface of the addictive and often mesmerizing chaos that is Saigon. And yet there are the elegant colonial French boulevards and buildings, the Cathedral, the riverfront, the quiet moments at a sidewalk cafe watching the world literally go by you at breakneck speed. Saigon. A city that is almost indescribable and completely unforgettable.

On arrival you will be transferred to the center to check into your hotel and take an essential highlight tour, visiting the former Presidential Palace, which is now preserved as a museum, including the underground communications bunkers, headquarters for the Saigon Government during the American War. Continue to the History Museum (or the Museum of War Remnants or Fine Arts, depending on your preference) which houses an excellent display tracing the origins of the indigenous Vietnamese. Visit Notre Dame, an impressive neo-Romanesque cathedral in the center of the city, the 'wedding cake' styled Hotel de Ville and Dong Khoi Street, formerly the center of haute couture in Saigon when it was known as Rue Catinat. Continue with your guide to visit the nearby Central Market (Ben Thanh Market) where you will wander the colorful stalls and stands of this central area of local trade and commerce.

Early this evening (06:00pm), take a part night excursion, part street food adventure by motor-scooter tour. Your motor-scooter (Vespa) driver will pick up you at the hotel and first stop at a local Café to "watch the world go by" and enjoy a cocktail and appetizer (included) before venturing into the favorite local eating spot. You'll experience the nightlife of Saigon the way locals do, all from the back of a vintage Vespa scooter. The tour will start with a ride to China Town and then head to District 4 through busy streets and alleys to see the local night life and enjoy street seafood and cold drinks, places that foreigners won't found. Leaving district 4

to district 3 the tour pass through downtown district 1 to take in the sights on the way to Banh Xeo, specialty of Saigon, and taste southern food with the locals. Then the tour will continue to a hidden Vietnamese-style coffee shop to have a taste of Vietnamese local live music. After this the tour will bring you to a lively bar to enjoy the drinks with live music. Overnight in Ho Chi Minh. [B/D]

Day 9: Ho Chi Minh City, Mekong Delta (Cái Bè's area)

A tow and a half hour drive going south of Ho Chi Minh City will get you to the Mekong River town of Cai Be to board a motorized sampan for a winding introduction to life on the river. Cái Bè is known for its large floating market, where displays of food produce are hung from bamboo poles over the host boat in order to attract customs. From here the journey continues across the upper reach of the river to a maze of tributaries and fruit plantations. Barges ply the route, overloaded with rice husks used as fuel for the region's numerous brick kilns. It's time to board a sampan for a relaxing trip along narrow canals before re-joining your craft for the leisurely cruise back to the pier. Depending on the season, a sample of local tropical fruit will be served with lunch in the shade of a local farmer's home before rejoining your craft for the leisurely cruise back to Cái Bè and returning to your hotel. Overnight in Ho Chi Minh City. [B/L]

Day 10: Ho Chi Minh City

This morning, visit Cu Chi to see the vast underground network of tunnels built first as a defense against the French, and later expanded during the American war. It was from here that the North Vietnamese waged their guerrilla warfare and you will marvel at their ingenuity and resilience. See secret trapdoors, underground kitchens, living areas and meeting rooms. The more adventurous may explore the deeper secondary, and even third level tunnels. For those preferring to remain above ground, there is ample opportunity to view excavated areas from above. Your guide will advise you of the length and level of difficulty of each tunnel before entering - some are easily accessed by stairs. We recommend good walking shoes and sun protection for this tour and advise that you may get a little dirty! This afternoon and evening are at leisure for you to explore the city on your own or go shopping what you like. Overnight in Hotel in Ho Chi Minh City. [B]

Day 11: Ho Chi Minh City, USA

Day at leisure until time comes to transfer you to the Tan Son Nhat Airport for your departure flight Back to the USA. [B]

[B] = Breakfast | [B/L] = Breakfast and Lunch | [B/L/D] = Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

** Notes:

- *Above cruise itinerary is subject to change without prior notice and depends on weather condition!*
- *Transfer from Ha Long Bay to Hanoi Airport takes approx. 3.5 hours and check-in time for International flights is normally minimum 2 hours prior to departure.*

Remark: *Itinerary and activities are subject to change depending on road, weather conditions, river water levels, local condition and confirmed flight.*

Tour includes:

- Private transfers as listed
- 7 nights accommodation:
 - Hanoi – 3 nights
 - Ha Long Bay- 1 night
 - Hoi An – 3 nights
 - Ho Chi Minh City – 3 nights
- Meals
 - Breakfast daily
 - 4 lunches
 - 3 dinners
- All entrance fees for included sightseeing
- 2-days Ha Long Bay junk cruise (sit-in basis)
- Land transportation as described
- English speaking local station guides
- Bottle of water and cool towel provided during transfers
- Vietnam Government tax and services charges.

Price does not include:

- International and domestic airfares*
- Vietnam visas & processing fees (\$45 & \$20 net per person including photo)
- Meals not mentioned in the itinerary
- Drinks with meals or others
- Travel Insurance or expenses of a personal nature (minibar, phone call, laundry, etc.)
- Hotels' early check- in (before 2pm) or late check-out (after 12:00 pm)
- Peak season surcharge and compulsory meals on Christmas and New Year Eve (to be advised)
- Entrance fees or extra charges for any optional activities or extra sightseeing not mentioned as included in the above itinerary.
- Tips to guides, drivers, crew and hotel/restaurant staff



Hotels in your Tour:

CITY	Hotel Name	Room Type	Tripadvisor
First Class (4-star)			
Hanoi	Silk Path Hotel in Hanoi	Premium Deluxe	4.5
Ha Long Bay	Pelican Cruise Vessel	Deluxe cabin	5
Hoi An	Hoi An Essence	Deluxe with Balcony	4.5
Ho Chi Minh City	Grand Hotel	Premium Deluxe	4
Deluxe (5-star)			
Hanoi	Pan Pacific Ha Noi	Deluxe	4.5
Ha Long Bay	Paradise Luxury Vessel	Deluxe cabin	5
Hoi An	Hotel Royal Hoi An	Deluxe	5
Ho Chi Minh City	New World Hotel	Deluxe	4

Hotels may be substituted by others of similar category at time of reservation

Tour Prices

Category	Season	Double	Single	Triple
First Class	01 November '17 - 31 March '17 & 01 - 31 October '17	\$2,015	\$2,905	\$1,809
	01 April - 30 September '17	\$1,915	\$2,605	\$1,705
Deluxe	01 November '17 - 31 March '17 & 01 - 31 October '17	\$2,425	\$3,545	\$2,215
	01 April - 30 September '17	\$2,309	\$3,379	\$2,099
Domestic airfares	Saigon to Da Nang & Da Nang to Hanoi	Economy class	\$290	
		Business class	\$360	

Prices are per person and may change without notice.

* Domestic airfares may be partially absorbed within the international itinerary. Check with your travel agent or Holidays with Downtown

Supplements:

Compulsory Dinners	
Christmas Eve (24Dec16)	\$129
New Year's Eve (31Dec16)	\$129
Peak Season Supplements	
Hotel Royal Hoi An - From 24 Dec. 2016 to 1 Jan. 2017	\$25
Paradise Luxury Boat in Ha Long Bay - From 20 Dec. 2016 to 5 Jan. 2017	\$85
Pelican Cruise in Ha Long Bay - 24 & 31 Dec. 2016	\$25

Tour Code: VT02HAN17DA