Hill Tribes, Halong Bay & Beyond
13 days I Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City

From Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City, discover Vietnam’s remote ethnic minority villages and go trekking in the beautiful Mai Chau Valley, cruise around the limestone peaks of picturesque Halong Bay and the floating markets of the Mekong, explore imperial cities and more on this 13 day tour.

Trip Highlights
- Halong Bay – cruise around the picturesque bay in a deluxe Junk Boat, kayak, swim and explore the remarkable caves
- Hanoi – ride on a rickshaw around Vietnam’s capital and visit highlights including Ly Thai To Park, the Opera House and the 36 Streets
- Mekong Delta – sail aboard a traditional sampan and explore the vibrant Cai Rang floating market
- Hue – take a guided tour of this imperial city, including the famous seven story Thien Mu Pagoda and the Purple Palace
- Ho Chi Minh City – discover the highlights of the city on our walking tour and learn about the Vietnam War at the War Remnants Museum
- Tra Que farm experience – cycle through lush countryside and experience tending the fields like traditional Vietnamese farmers
- Hoi An – enjoy some R&R in this enchanting riverside town with its cobbled streets, lanterns and iconic Japanese Bridge
- Hai Van Pass – admire the stunning scenery as we drive along the famous “Road of the Ocean Clouds”
- Mai Chau Valley – trek through picturesque countryside and enjoy lunch in a Vietnamese home

What's Included
- 12 breakfasts, 6 lunches and 1 dinner
- 10 nights 4 star and special class hotels, 1 night deluxe junk boat (en suite cabin) and 1 overnight sleeper train (very basic, 4 berth cabin)
- Economy class flight Danang - Ho Chi Minh City
- Guided sightseeing - Mai Chau Valley, Hanoi, Halong Bay, Hue, Hoi An, Mekong Delta and Ho Chi Minh City
- Bicycle ride to Tra Que village and cooking demonstration
- Sampan boat trips in the Mekong Delta
- Airport arrival transfer day 1 and departure transfer day 13
- All relevant transfers and transportation in private air-conditioned vehicles
- Escorted by an English speaking Vietnamese tour guide

What's Not Included
- Tipping Kitty: USD$35-45pp, paid in USD
- Entrance Fees: USD$30-40pp, paid in USD or VND
- International flights and visa
- Tip for your tour guide. We recommend you allow USD$3 - 6 per day, per traveller. Tipping your guide is an entirely personal gesture

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1: Hanoi
Wednesday. Xin Chao! Welcome to Hanoi, one of Asia’s most enchanting cities, full of culture and history. You’ll be met at the airport and transferred to our hotel in the city centre. The rest of the day is free for you to rest at the hotel or independently explore the capital. Consider visiting the Ho Chi Minh complex, home to Ho Chi Minh’s mausoleum (closed in the afternoon), the Presidential Palace or Ho Chi Minh’s famous House on Stilts.

If you have pre booked the optional Back Streets of Hanoi add-on, please meet in reception for departure at 8am from your...
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Day 2: Mai Chau Valley

Hanoi - Mai Chau. At 8am this morning we leave the hustle and bustle of Hanoi and drive west towards the Laos border. After a scenic 4 hour drive we reach the beautiful valley of Mai Chau, which is home to the White Thai ethnic minority group. Upon arrival we’ll check into our lodge and have lunch at a traditional family-run guesthouse on stilts in a charming little Mai Chich village.

This afternoon we enjoy a leisurely walk through the back roads and rice fields of the valley for our first encounter with the Thai people, going about their daily lives. Returning to our lodge by car, spend the remains of the day at leisure. You can relax by the swimming pool or there are bikes for hire at the lodge for you to explore more of the countryside. Overnight - Mai Chau (B, L)

Day 3: Trek through H'mong ethnic lands

After breakfast we drive through changing scenery to the mountainous province of Hoa Binh and the rocky plateau of Hang Kia. The rice paddies of the Mai Chau Valley are replaced with corn fields and plum trees as we enter the H'mong ethnic lands, where people are colourfully dressed and live in wooden ground floor houses. We are welcomed by a local H'mong family, who teach us about ancestral techniques and unveil the secrets of the H'mong fabric at a Batik workshop. Then we gain a further insight into H'mong culture as we enjoy lunch at a local home.

In the afternoon we take an easy paced, 3-hour hike downhill to the valley of Mai Chau, taking in the incredible views over wild stretches of remote land between the mountains. Our hike ends in a sub-valley of Mai Chau where our vehicle will be waiting to transfer us back to the lodge.

Please note: This is a relatively easy hike on single trails, although it can be rather slippery when wet. If you prefer not to hike, we can transfer you by road from Hang Kia back to the lodge in the afternoon, where you can enjoy some rest and relaxation. Overnight - Mai Chau (B, L)

Day 4: Muong Culture Museum

Mai Chau - Hanoi. This morning there's the opportunity to visit the local Mai Chau market before we travel on to Hoa Binh town to explore the fascinating Muong Culture Museum and learn about the lifestyle and culture of the Muong people. This unique museum was created by a local artist and is spread over 5 hectares of land in a small limestone valley, with women in traditional dress and traditional Muong stilt houses. We have lunch in Hoa Binh before travelling back to Hanoi, arriving mid afternoon.

At 5pm meet other members of the group joining the tour today for a group briefing. The evening is free to spend at leisure. Overnight - Hanoi (B)

Day 5: Junk boat cruising in Halong Bay

Hanoi – Halong Bay. This morning a scenic drive takes us to the spectacular UNESCO World Heritage Site of Halong Bay where two thousand rugged karst islands dappled with lush vegetation protrude from pristine emerald coloured waters. Here we board a deluxe junk boat for an overnight cruise around this beautiful bay.

Based on traditional designs, these wonderful vessels combine oriental style with modern luxury. Soak up the panoramic views from the sundeck as the boat gently plies its course. This afternoon we visit Trinh Nu Cave, one of the finest caves in Halong Bay, covering an area of 2,000m² with a stunning array of stalactites and stalagmites. There’s also the opportunity to go kayaking and enjoy a refreshing swim. Later this evening back on board, watch a Vietnamese cooking demonstration held on the sundeck before settling down for a sumptuous seafood dinner.

Please note: the itinerary in Halong Bay on days 5 and 6 can vary dependent upon the cruise we use and weather conditions. Overnight - Deluxe Junk Boat (B, L, D)

Day 6: Hanoi cyclo ride

Halong Bay - Hanoi - Hue. Early birds can start the day with a relaxing Tai Chi class on the sundeck or a traditional massage - the perfect way to start the day.

Before heading back to port this morning we explore the beautiful Sung Sot cave (Surprise Grotto), which is 10,000m² and consists of two major chambers. These spectacular chambers are spacious enough to hold thousands of people.

On arrival back into Hanoi mid-afternoon we’ll explore the maze of streets in the French Quarter by cyclo (rickshaw), taking in the sights of this fascinating city. This excursion ends back at the hotel at approx 5pm. Overnight - Hanoi
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Highlights such as the Opera house and Ly Thai To park. We then swap our wheels for a leisurely walk through ‘36 streets of the old quarter’, named after the numerous guilds that once set up shop on a particular street from silk tailors to traditional medicine shops.

Time will be given to freshen up before boarding our train (4 berth sleeper cabin, basic standard) on the ‘Reunification Express’ railway line to Hue.

If you’ve booked our Hanoi - Hue flight add-on you’ll be transferred to the airport early this evening and touch down in Hue an hour later. Overnight - Hue Hotel. Tomorrow you will rendezvous with your guide and group (arriving off the overnight train) in the hotel upon at approx 10am. Overnight - Sleeper train (B)

Day 7: Imperial Hue

Breakfast boxes will be served on the train. Arriving to Hue, we disembark and drive to our hotel. If rooms are ready we can check in, if not we’ll depart shortly after on a guided sightseeing tour of the 19th-century Nguyen empire capital. We visit the Thien Mu Pagoda, home to the oldest monastery in the city, whose 21m high tower has become something of a symbol for Hue and the citadel. Within the citadel is the Imperial Purple Palace, an exact copy of the Forbidden City in Beijing, with its impressive ramparts, formal moats and imperial palaces, some of which lay in ruin.

In the countryside lies the Royal Tombs of the Nguyen kings, here we’ll view the elaborate mausoleum of Emperor Tu Duc. As the sun sets opt for a cruise in a long boat along the gentle Perfume River or enjoy some retail therapy at the ever lively Dong Ba Market, a few minute’s walk from our hotel. Overnight - Hue (B, L)

Day 8: The Hai Van Pass to Hoi An

Hue - Road of the Ocean Clouds - Hoi An. Today we take the scenic Hai Van Pass (Road of the Ocean Clouds), which offers magnificent views of beaches to one side and lush hills to the other. En route we stop for a walk along My Khe beach, a beautiful stretch of coastline which was nicknamed ‘China Beach’ by the Americans during the war and famously featured in Francis Ford Coppola’s movie ‘Apocalypse Now’. Perhaps enjoy a refreshing swim in the sea before continuing our journey south along the coast to Hoi An.

The charming, old-world trading port of Hoi An with its cobbled streets, traditional homes and tiny shop houses is a perfect place to lose yourself in a by gone era. Boutique restaurants, hip cafes along the waterfront, delightful craft shops and artisans including some of Asia’s best bespoke tailors (whose services come at a nominal price), all can be found here.

On a short walking tour of the enchanting historical town, we’ll visit the Chua Ong Pagoda, Chinese Assembly Hall, 200-year-old Tam Ky house, former merchants’ homes and the 400 year-old Japanese Covered Bridge.

Note: Travellers that have pre booked the optional Hoi An Street Eats add-on, your guide will inform you today of which evening this will take place during your stay in Hoi An. Overnight - Hoi An (B)

Day 9: Tra Que farm experience & bike ride

A leisurely bike ride into the countryside, leads us to Tra Que village today. Here we discover age old farming practices and learn about traditional medicine. It’s a fun, hands on experience where you can try your hand at tending the fields before we enjoy an interactive cooking demonstration, preparing a tasty lunch for ourselves. Overnight - Hoi An (B, L)

Day 10: Free time in Hoi An

A free day for you relax or further sightsee. You may wish to take a relaxing rowboat journey along the river or spend the day lazing by the beach or hotel pool. It’s also possible to take an optional excursion to the most holiest and evocative of Vietnam’s Cham sites, My Son or to Quang Ngai, the site of the My Lai massacre memorial. The massacre was a significant turning point in the Vietnam War and the story is told through photo presentation on a walk through the village. Overnight - Hoi An (B)

Day 11: Cruising the Mekong Experience & bike ride

Hoi An - Ho Chi Minh City. Early morning flight to Ho Chi Minh City. Drive to the Mekong Delta. Often referred to as the ‘rice bowl’ of Vietnam, the fertile Mekong Delta is famous for its abundant harvests of tropical fruits, flowers and rice, as well as it

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fantastic views while boating along the canals. Taking our sampan from Cai Be we cruise through the maze of waterways watching the hubbub of daily life on the river. Passing colourful trading boats, house boats and children swimming we stop to visit some of the local cottage industries that produce popcorn, coco candies and paper along the way. Lunch is served today in a traditional wooden home on Dong Hoa Hiep Island. Overnight - Can Tho (B, L)

Day 12 : Mekong & Ho Chi Minh City

Can Tho - Ho Chi Minh City. Early today we visit Cai Rang floating market and drive to Ho Chi Minh City. Once called the Pearl of the Orient, modern Ho Chi Minh City is a thriving metropolis on the move. Sleek sky scrapers, gourmet restaurants, designer malls and swanky bars and spas are scattered between ancient pagodas, colonial era landmarks and lively street markets. Our walking tour of Ho Chi Minh City includes visits to the Notre Dame Cathedral, Old Post office and the sobering War Remnants Museum. Evening at leisure. Overnight - Ho Chi Minh City (B)

Day 13 : Ho Chi Minh City

Monday. Today offers free time in Ho Chi Minh City till your departure transfer to the airport. Opt for a relaxing foot massage, shop for souvenirs at Ben Thanh Market or visit the airport. Opt for a relaxing foot massage, shop for souvenirs at Ben Thanh Market or visit the airport. Opt for a relaxing foot massage, shop for souvenirs at Ben Thanh Market or visit the airport. Opt for a relaxing foot massage, shop for souvenirs at Ben Thanh Market or visit the airport.

You could also extend your stay and join us on a day trip to Cu Chi. Here you can go underground to explore the vast network of tunnels and hideouts used by Viet Cong guerrilla fighters, see booby traps, trap doors or test your skill with an AK 47 at the firing range. Visit our website for more info.(B)

HOTELS

Highlighted below are some of the hotels which we frequently use on this tour, though we reserve the right to substitute these hotels to ones of a similar standard. Please refer to your Tour Voucher for your confirmed arrival hotel and further arrival information.

Sunway Hotel

This ambient, boutique hotel combines traditional appeal with modern pleasures. Rooms are furnished in a contemporary fashion with an array of amenities for added comfort. Its restaurant provides a great variety of Vietnamese cuisine and you are welcome to enjoy cocktails and live music in the Jazz Bar or relax in the hotel’s health spa.

Sleeper train - 4 berth cabin

Cabins on board are comfortable though not comparable to European standards. Aboard each wagon are 9 compartments that comprise of 4 bunks per compartment shared by mixed sexes. A western-style toilet (with a varying degree of cleanliness) is located at either end of the wagon. Air-conditioning (not always operational in the summer) and lighting are controlled from inside the cabin, which is also lockable. Luggage can be stored in a compartment under the bottom bunk. Linen and a pillow are provided.

Sol Bungalows

Surrounded by emerald mountains and bamboo gardens, Sol Bungalows is set in the very heart of the Mai Chau valley.

Its guestrooms are elegantly decorated and equipped with modern amenities including complimentary WiFi access. This secluded resort is the perfect spot to relax and soak up the dramatic scenery, with fantastic views over the surrounding lush rice paddies. An onsite restaurant offers delicious regional fare and guests can enjoy a host of other activities including a weaving class, traditional dance class, massage treatments, mountain biking and much more.

Bhya Classic I Junk Boat

This premier cruise boat offers 18 well appointed cabins with en suite amenities. Cabins are contemporary in design, whilst the finer touches have a distinct oriental influence. All cabins feature large windows creating a bright and airy atmosphere as well as scenic views. Facilities and services onboard include a dining room and bar, a sunbathing area on-deck, masseur and small library.

Syrena Junk Boat

A tradition hand crafted boat, the Syrena Junk Boat offers superb en suite air conditioned cabins with comfortable interiors and balconies. The on board Lotus Restaurant serves up a delicious array of Vietnamese and International cuisine. Complimentary Wi-Fi is available in the public areas. Swimming, kayaking and tai chi are all offered on board and movie nights are also very popular.

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Mondial Hotel
Just a 5 minute walk from the Ho Chi Minh museum, the Mondial Hotel is a contemporary hotel with excellent amenities. Guest rooms benefit from spacious interiors, comfortable beds and lots of mod-cons. There is complimentary Wi-Fi for guests, an outdoor pool and onsite spa - perfect for a relaxing massage. As well as the delicious Huong Xuan Restaurant there is also the Lobby Lounge - great for cocktails before dinner!

ÉMM Hotel
Situated in the heart of the former imperial capital, ÉMM Hotel is the perfect base from which to explore Hue’s UNESCO World Heritage-listed sights. Completely renovated in 2016, the guestrooms are generously-sized and complete with modern amenities. The imperial jade and royal purple colour scheme was inspired by ancient Hue itself and guests can take advantage of the mini-gym, pool-side bar and a spacious reading area. Enjoy delicious Vietnamese and international cuisine in the contemporary restaurant after a day of exploring.

River Green Hotel
Set next to the Hoai River, the River Green Hotel is just a five-minute walk from the iconic Japanese Bridge. Guestrooms offer city or river views, alongside all the amenities you’d expect of a contemporary hotel. There’s an outdoor pool, perfect for a refreshing swim, and an on-site restaurant where you can enjoy a variety of international flavours. Complimentary WiFi, bicycle hire and a fitness centre add to this hotel’s list of facilities, making it a great base for exploring historic Hoi An.

Vinh Hung Riverside Resort
Situated right on the banks of the Thu Bon River, this upscale hotel is just a 10-minute walk from the ancient town of Hoi An. Combining Vietnamese tradition with modern facilities, its guestrooms are set in coconut tree-shaded gardens beside the water. They’re well-equipped, with free WiFi and air conditioning, as well as private balconies. The hotel also offers a riverside restaurant, serving local specialties and western dishes on the outdoor terrace. This hotel’s highlight, however, is its pool and fabulous swim up bar, which is the perfect place to enjoy a pre-dinner cocktail.

Thanh Binh Riverside hotel
Boasting a beautiful outdoor swimming pool, the Thanh Binh Riverside offers excellent accommodation in a great location. Guest rooms benefit from garden or river views and all come full air-conditioned, with stunning hardwood floors and all mod-cons. The onsite restaurant offers a great selection of Vietnamese and international dishes and the town centre is just a mere 200m walk away. Why not grab a cocktail and relax by the pool in the afternoon - a great way to refresh yourself from the Vietnam heat.

Victoria Hotel Can Tho
This attractive, colonial-style resort is tastefully decorated with well-appointed rooms and a wide range of facilities including a spa, tennis courts, open-air bar, restaurant and a gym. The hotel also offers sunrise and sunset cruises to the floating markets aboard the Lady Hau junk.

Iris Hotel
This elegant hotel is housed within a modern building in the city of Can Tho. Each guest room comes equipped with plush furnishings to ensure a good night’s sleep and is decorated with a neutral palate and calming tones. Rooms look over the city and boast a range of modern amenities such as air conditioning and stylish ensuite facilities. Magnificent views of the city can be had from the hotel’s skybar while a range of gourmet local and international dishes can be sampled at the onsite restaurant.

Muong Thanh Centre
Centrally located, yet on a peaceful, tree-lined street, you will find the Muong Thanh Centre. Only a ten-minute walk from top attractions such as the Notre Dame Cathedral, Opera House and Ben Thanh Market, this hotel is a great base for exploring the famous sights of the city. Its world-class rooms boast sophisticated

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designs and panoramic views. Warm and friendly, the Muong Thanh Centre also features a spa and swimming pool for you to relax and unwind after a long day of sightseeing.

Lotus Central Hotel
Just footsteps from the Ben Thanh Market, the Lotus Central Hotel offers a great location in Ho Chi Minh City. Its guestrooms are well-equipped, with ensuite bathrooms, air conditioning and free WiFi. On the 8th floor you’ll find the Moon Restaurant, where you can enjoy a range of Vietnamese, Asian and Western specialties. However this hotel’s highlight is the rooftop pool, where you can enjoy a cocktail or two alongside views over the city.

Full Moon Festival Departure - 04 September 2019
Our 04 September 2019 departure is a special Full Moon Festival tour where we join in the Full Moon Festival (aka the Mid Autumn Festival) celebrations in Hoi An. Special arrangements on this tour are as follows:

Days 1 - 8: Arrangements as per normal

Day 9: Today marks the height of the Full Moon Festival and we will be celebrating with the locals. This morning we ride by rickshaw to a local home on the outskirts of Hoi An where we will learn about the family’s long tradition of lantern-making and handcraft our own lanterns for tonight’s festivities. Heading into town we explore the local market stalls and authentic lantern shops before free time to visit one of the many great tailor shops, take a row boat down the river or spend the afternoon relaxing by the hotel swimming pool.

Tonight we make our way to the water’s edge with the locals to release our lanterns and enjoy the spellbinding spectacle of hundreds of sparkling lights sailing down river and lighting up the night sky. Overnight - Hoi An (B)

Day 10: A bicycle ride into the countryside, leads us to Tra Que village. Here we discover age old farming practices and learn about traditional medicine. It’s a hands on experience today where we’ll assist with tending the fields and gardens and cooking lunch. Overnight - Hoi An (B, L)

Day 11 onwards: Arrangements as per normal.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Vietnam Country Guide

Entrance fees
Entrance fees to most sites are not included, although reasonably priced. In Vietnam, we collect entrance fees on Day 2 of the tour (the amount is noted under exclusions on page one of this document). A breakdown of the entrance fee total is provided upon arrival. All funds collected in Vietnam for entrance fees are payable in either US dollars (USD) or Vietnamese dong (VND).

Tipping Kitty
At the start of your tour, we take a small tipping kitty (the amount is noted under exclusions) from all tour participants to cover tips throughout your holiday. This saves you the hassle of knowing when and how much to tip bellhops, luggage handlers, bus drivers, train conductors and other support staff throughout the tour. The tipping kitty is payable in either US dollars (USD) or Vietnamese dong (VND) in Vietnam.

This amount does not include a tip for your tour guides. For a job well done, we would suggest USD $3 - 6 per person per day. Tipping your guide is an entirely personal gesture and ultimately the amount is up to you.

Health Requirements
You should seek medical advice before travelling to Vietnam from your local health practitioner and ensure that you receive all of the appropriate vaccinations. As a guide Diphtheria, Hepatitis A, Typhoid and Tetanus are strongly recommended.

Malaria in Vietnam
Areas with malaria: Rural only, except none in the Red River Delta and the coast north of Nha Trang. Rare cases in the Mekong Delta. None in Da Nang, Haiphong, Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), Nha Trang, and Qui Nhon. Estimated relative risk of malaria for travellers: Low

Water
The tap water in Vietnam is generally considered safe to drink, but as a precaution against stomach upsets you may want to drink bottled mineral water, which is readily available from shops, hotels and restaurants.

Visas
UK passport holders do not need a visa to visit Vietnam for stays of up to 15 days from now till 30 June 2021. At customs you will need show your return airline ticket/E ticket as proof of your date of departure. If you’re exiting Vietnam via a land border then your tour itinerary will be accepted as proof so please have this available to show to border security if requested. UK passport holders do require a visa to stay in Vietnam for longer than 15 days or if you are planning to return to Vietnam within 30 days of your last departure.

Most other nationalities including Australian, Canadian, New Zealand, South African and USA passport holders require a tourist visa to visit Vietnam. Travellers can apply for a 30 day tourist visa (single or multiple entry) from the nearest Vietnamese Embassy or via the more convenient method of applying online for an E Visa. The cost is approx USD$20. After submitting an application you will receive a confirmation number, then upon arrival into Vietnam you will receive the actual visa and additionally pay a stamping fee of USD$25. The stamping fee for a multiple entry visa, for entries within one month is approximately USD$50.

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Applying in advance and then collecting your tourist visa upon arrival is available to all travellers entering the country via Hanoi - Noi Bai International Airport, Ho Chi Minh City - Tan Son Nhat International Airport and Danang International Airport.

PLEASE NOTE: Your passport must be valid for at least 6 months after your departure date, if it is not you may be refused entry into the country.

Climate

Vietnam has a varied climate due to its geography. The south is hot year round and has two seasons: The wet season lasts from May to October, with brief, daily showers. The dry season from November to April is generally sunny and humid. In the north, the summer months (May to October) are hot and there is the occasional burst of heavy rain. In the winter (December to February) temperatures drop in the north and it can be damp. The coastal region of central Vietnam is blessed with long months of sunshine, although there is rainfall in November and December. At this time there can also be some typhoon activity in the central coastal region.

Guides and Groups

Our longest Signature Tour we offer in Southeast Asia is our Bangkok to Angkor Wat - 29 day tour. All other Signature Tours we offer (with the exception of our Vietnam For Teens tour) are sectors of this larger tour. The longest Budget Tour we offer in Southeast Asia is our Hanoi to Bangkok Tour 19 day tour, all other Budget Tours are sectors of this longer tour. As such on your holiday you may have travellers join you part way through your tour (in Luang Prabang, Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City or Phnom Penh on Signature Tours or in Ho Chi Minh City our Budget Tours). There will also be travellers who end their tour when you continue on.

Guiding: A Vietnamese guide will escort all arrangements throughout Vietnam.

Time & Voltage

The voltage in Vietnam is 220v. In Vietnam 3 types of plugs are commonly accepted: 2 flat prong plugs (type A), the 2 round pin plug (type C) and many of the new 4 and 5 star hotels use the British standard 3-pin plug (type G). To cover all bases, it is best to pack an international travel adaptor!

Vietnam is 7 hours ahead of GMT and does not observe daylight saving.

Money

The official currency in Vietnam is the Vietnamese Dong.

Euro, British Pounds, US Dollars and other major currencies can be exchanged locally at the airport, bureau de changes or banks. US Dollar notes are widely accepted and shopkeepers use both currencies interchangeably. You can often pay for items in USD and receive your change in USD notes and coins in VND. Make sure that your USD bills are crisp and clean and you will have no problem using or exchanging these throughout your stay. ATM machines can be found in all major cities though it is not common to pay with credit card in restaurants, cafes or shops for purchases. It’s advisable to request bank notes in smaller denominations, as it can sometimes be hard to get change from large notes and smaller notes are handy for smaller purchases and gratuities.

Traveller’s Cheques are not recommended as they’re often difficult to exchange and incur high fees.

Essential Packing

• Sleep sheet if taking an overnight sleeper train. These also can be easily purchased in Hanoi at a cost of USD$5. Ask you guide for info on where to buy these
• A day pack to carry all your essentials when out sightseeing each day
• An overnight bag, if your tour includes a night board a Junk boat in Halong Bay. As we will be returning to Hanoi it is not essential that you take your big bag/ suitcase with you
• Lightweight cotton garments
• Comfortable walking shoes in addition to flip flops/ thongs
• DEET based mosquito repellent & antihistamine cream
• Bring a 2 flat prong (type A) and a 2 round pin (type C) electrical adaptors. A universal adaptor will cover all bases
• Lightweight, fold up raincoat/ poncho
• Two spare passport photos & a photocopy of your passport
• Sunglasses, hat, sunscreen, swim costume and torch

Arrival Transfers

If your tour or short stay includes an airport arrival transfer (as indicated in the Inclusions section of these Trip Notes) our arrival procedure is as follows:

Arrive to Hanoi - Noi Bai International Airport, Ho Chi Minh City - Tan Son Nhat International Airport. Proceed to the immigration counter and pay the stamping fee of USD$25 (this can take some time). After collecting your luggage proceed to the arrival hall and go to the meeting point detailed on your tour voucher.

If, for any reason you have trouble locating our representative (after waiting 20 minutes) or your flight is delayed please call the emergency contact number as stated on your tour voucher.

If arriving on day 1 of a holiday, that includes an airport arrival transfer (as indicated in the Inclusions section of these Trip Notes) we will be at the airport, ready to transfer you to your hotel. Further if you are booking pre-tour accommodation with us an airport arrival transfer will also be provided. If arriving prior to 9am on day 1 (essentially on a flight that arrives very, very early in the morning) you will need to purchase a night of pre-tour accommodation to save you waiting until standard hotel check in time, which is generally 2pm.

Budget Tours – please note airport transfers are NOT included on our Budget Tours, please make your own way to the start hotel noted on your tour voucher. Transfers can be booked upon request for an additional fee, please contact us for rates.

Airline Luggage Allowance

If your tour includes international or domestic flights within the region please be mindful that the free baggage allowance for Economy class travel is strictly 20kg and 1 piece of hand luggage up to 6kg. Any additional weight is
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charged at a per kilo rate. You may wish to keep this in mind whilst shopping.

Trains in Vietnam
It's not the Orient Express, but Vietnam's Reunification Express. On a number of our group tours we include an overnight train journey on the Reunification Express Railway Line between Hanoi and Hue and on our Budget Tours we include a second overnight train journey from Danang to Mui Ne. The particular SE series train that we use is the highest class of train available in Vietnam. It's titled as being the nation's fastest train; though by international standards it's quite the opposite. Never the less, our journey between Hanoi and Hue takes approximately 14 hours and travellers are accommodated in 4 berth ‘Soft Sleeper’ cabins.

Aboard each wagon are 9 compartments that comprise of 4 bunks per compartment. 4 persons of mixed sex share one compartment. You may be sharing with people from your tour group, other tourists or Vietnamese people. Who you will share your cabin with is ultimately dependent upon how the Vietnamese Railways Corporation configures the bookings.

Cabin onboard are comfortable though not comparable to European standards. A western style toilet (with a varying degree of cleanliness) is located at either end of the wagon. Air-conditioning (not always operational in the summer) and lighting are controlled from inside the cabin, which is also lockable. Luggage can be stored in a compartment under the bottom bunk. Linen and a pillow are provided though we strongly recommend that you bring your own sleep sheet (easily purchased in Hanoi at a cost of USD$5). The cleanliness of the train varies according to wagons assigned to the journey for that particular day. Some wagons are spotlessly clean whilst others can be unclean and should have been decommissioned long ago. Irrespective of the particular train you take, they all have large clear glass windows that allow for uninterrupted views of stunning landscapes and never ending rice paddy fields.