

Saigon and the Mekong

4 days | Starts/Ends: Ho Chi Minh City



Discover the best of Ho Chi Minh City, aka Saigon, from its historic landmarks to its bustling markets with a day spent cruising on the palm-fringed waterways of the Mekong Delta, visiting local cottage industries and soaking up the verdant scenery.

- Entrance fees to included sites
- All relevant transfers and transportation in private air-conditioned vehicles

What's Not Included

- International flights and visa
- Tipping - an entirely personal gesture
- Laundry, drinks, items of a personal nature

onwards) with the remainder of the day free.

Overnight - Ho Chi Minh City

Day 2 : Ho Chi Minh City tour



With the services of a knowledgeable English-speaking local guide, spend the day touring Ho Chi Minh City's most famous attractions, kicking off with the Reunification Palace, the home and workplace of the President of South Vietnam during the Vietnam War and now a museum and venue for official receptions. You can visit the War Room from where the South Vietnamese forces were controlled, and most poignantly, the room where the North Vietnamese army took official control in 1975. Nearby stands the 19th century Notre Dame Cathedral, a major centre of Catholicism in modern Vietnam and one of the city's major landmarks. Next to the cathedral stands the Saigon Central Post Office, a classic French colonial structure with huge ceilings that still functions as a post office today.

HIGHLIGHTS AND INCLUSIONS

Trip Highlights

- Saigon - now known as Ho Chi Minh City and a thriving metropolis in south Vietnam
- Reunification Palace - important landmark that witnessed the end of the Vietnam War
- Ben Thanh Market - the city's largest shopping destination and perfect for souvenirs
- Mekong Delta - cruising the waterways on row boats and visiting cottage industries

What's Included

- Breakfast daily and 1 lunch
- 3 nights superior hotel (standard and deluxe options available)
- Guided sightseeing on days 2 and 3 conducted by an English-speaking local guide
- Airport arrival transfer on day 1

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1 : Welcome to Vietnam



Welcome to Vietnam and the start of your mini adventure. Now formerly known as Ho Chi Minh City, the original 'Pearl of the Orient' is a bustling metropolis with bundles of history seen in the fascinating museums and the patchwork of buildings that line the streets.

On your arrival at Ho Chi Minh City's international airport you will be met by our local representative and transferred to your hotel for check in (available from 2pm

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Finally head to Ben Thanh Market, packed to the rafters with everything from fruits to nuts, tourist kitsch to true bargains - it's the perfect place to pick up souvenirs for friends and family back home. In the evening take a walking tour of the city's popular Pho Tay ("Streets of Foreigners") area where you can sample the unique flavors of south Vietnamese gastronomy including Hu Tieu - pork noodle soup, and Banh Xeo - savory fried pancakes. End the day with a cold beverage watching the world go by from one of the many streetside cafes and bars. **Overnight - Ho Chi Minh City (B)**

Day 3 : The Mekong Delta



This morning travel to the Mekong Delta for a day exploring the many waterways and local cottage industries. Travel by road to Ben Tre where you'll embark on a river boat trip making a stop at a brickwork factory to see how bricks are traditionally made from molded clay. Next visit a coconut processing workshop located along the canal and a family workshop run by women making sleep mats. There'll be the chance to enjoy fruit and tea, and chat with the locals.

Leaving the canals behind take a motor cart (xe lô) ride on shady roads, passing by rice fields and vegetable plains where farmers tend their crops. Enjoy a home-cooked lunch with a local family in Ben Tre before returning to the waters in a row boat leisurely cruising along palm-fringed creeks. Later return to the pier where a car will be waiting to return you back to Ho Chi Minh City.

Overnight - Ho Chi Minh City (B, L)

Day 4 : Final day in Ho Chi Minh City

Today marks the end of touring arrangements and you are free to make your own way to the airport for your onward departure flight.(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.

Edenstar Saigon Hotel

Escape the hustle and bustle at the Edenstar Saigon Hotel in the heart of the city. The comfortable guest rooms are simply furnished with contemporary decor and a neutral palette. Free WiFi is provided. Guests can relax in the massage area or swim in the outdoor pool. Buffet breakfast is served in the hotel's restaurant and an evening beverage can be combined with panoramic views of the city from the hotel's bar.



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

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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.

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 your 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

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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 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.

Cabins 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.

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