



INSIDE
Vietnam

Get beneath the surface



Small Group Tours



Fully Tailored Journeys



Experiences & Inspiration



Welcome to Vietnam



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Our company is proud to be a member of AITO - The Association of Independent Tour Operators; the hallmark of superb holidays from specialist tour operators. Land only arrangements are fully bonded with ABTOT (5233) while flight-inclusive packages are protected by our ATOL Licence (9419). Book with confidence knowing your money is always secure.



InsideVietnam Tours

InsideVietnam Tours is a select team of travel experts dedicated to offering the very best of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. We are the sister brand of InsideJapan Tours and share the same passion for our country of expertise, in addition to a shared commitment to excellent service, quality and attention to detail.

Our brochure is a collection of inspirational itineraries drawn from many years of experience; designed to showcase the wonderful diversity of Vietnam and its neighbours: a region blessed with spectacular scenery, exciting modern cities and rich and ancient cultures.

Within these pages you will find details of our Small Group Tours, suggestions for Fully Tailored Journeys, as well as numerous experiences and inspirational ideas to help you create the perfect holiday.

Whatever style of holiday you choose, we hope that you will enjoy travelling through our brochure as you journey from towering rice terraces, through dense jungle, lost cities and white-sand beaches to ancient trading ports and modern thronging cities.

All this and much more awaits you. Contact us directly or talk to your local travel agent and make your first steps towards realising your Vietnam holiday dreams.

At home and away

We are committed to providing top level customer service both before your departure and throughout your stay in Vietnam. For those taking a Small Group Tour, you'll be looked after by a full time IVT Tour Leader whereas those travelling independently on a Fully Tailored Journey can expect a courtesy call from your travel consultant in the UK just to make sure everything is going well. For your peace of mind, our partners in Vietnam have offices in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City staffed by English speakers who are just a phone call away. We'll always ensure that your welfare and enjoyment are never left to chance.



Your Info-Pack

All of our services include a detailed Info-Pack which contains the essential information you need to make the most out of your free time, with sightseeing guides and maps, help with language and customs and our favourite restaurants recommendations. The Info-Pack is your personalised, printed travel companion and an essential part of your trip.

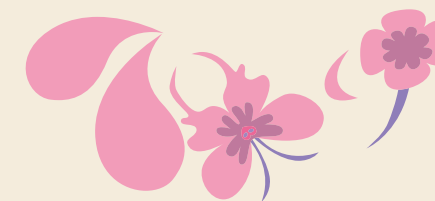


Full financial protection & guaranteed prices

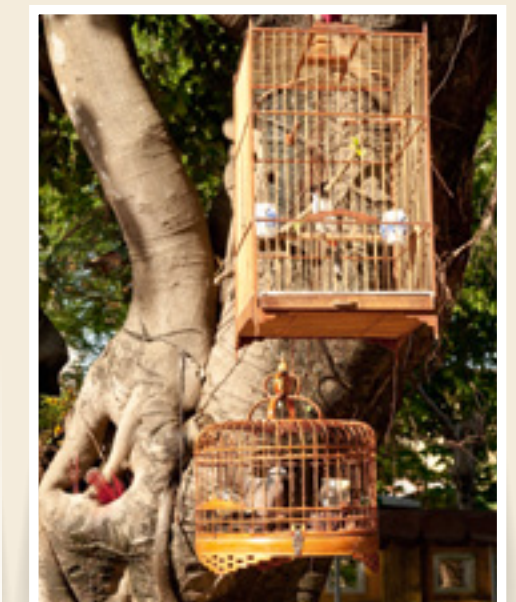
All AITO member companies are fully bonded and governed by an independent dispute settlement service, which means you are in safe hands. Land only arrangements are bonded with ABTOT (5233) while flight-inclusive packages are protected by our ATOL Licence (9419). In the extremely unlikely event of our financial failure your money is safe and secure. All latest prices are available on our website or by contacting us or your local travel agent. We do NOT surcharge; prices are guaranteed once a deposit is paid.

How to book

The InsideVietnam Tours' office is located in Bristol in the UK and we can be contacted by phone, email or via our website - www.insidevietnamtours.com. We are also happy to take bookings via travel agents both in the UK and worldwide. When booking we will need to know your full names, address and a contact telephone number and email as well as your dates of travel and any dietary requirements that you may have. Your travel consultant will also be delighted to discuss with you any other special requirements for your trip.



Our sincere thanks to customer Norman Blaikie for allowing us to use many of his wonderful images throughout this brochure.



Introducing Vietnam



Sapa & the North
The misty mountains of Sapa and North Vietnam offer idyllic hiking trails, beautiful minority markets, and a remote and rural side to Vietnam

Hanoi
Vietnam's historic and chaotic capital is a fusion of colonial architecture, delectable cuisine, colourful markets and a labyrinth of old world streets

Halong Bay
Steeped in legend, the islet-strewn waters of Halong Bay lives up to its billing as one of the most beautiful bays in the world

Hue & Hoi An
Imperial Hue and ancient Hoi An: contrasting and beguiling historic towns famed for their delicious cuisine, picturesque architecture and idyllic atmosphere

Central beaches
From secluded, romantic bays to fun beach towns offering island excursions, snorkelling and diving trips, Central Vietnam has a beach break to suit all tastes

Ho Chi Minh City
Dive into this buzzing city's bright lights, lively markets, glitzy shopping malls and sample fabulous street food

The Mekong Delta
Drift along the endless waterways, cycle through lush rice paddies and soak up the beauty of the tropical Mekong Delta

Laos
The undiscovered jewel in Indochina's crown, Laos boasts glimmering temples, phenomenal natural beauty and a unique atmosphere

Cambodia
Home to the remarkable temples of Angkor, Cambodia is a beautiful and fascinating country, recovering from the dark days of recent history

Southern Islands
The idyllic southern islands of Phu Quoc and the Cao Dao Islands boast some of Vietnam's finest beaches and most exclusive resorts



Vietnam
Vietnam is a country on the move. The American-Vietnamese War ended almost forty years ago and whilst not forgotten, it no longer defines today's Vietnamese, who are young, optimistic and dynamic; ready to welcome the world. That's not to say traditions have been forgotten. You'll still see women all over the country wearing traditional *ao dai* dresses and conical hats are ever-present. Minority groups make up 14% of the population and in the highlands women still proudly wear traditional clothes, colourful woven cloth and elaborate head dresses.

Vietnam stretches the length of the Indochina Peninsula, 1,650km in total. In the north the Chinese influence is evident as in Hue's Confucianist Imperial City. Moving south, Indian and Hindu culture sweeps in; the national dish *pho* (noodle soup) becomes spicier and you'll find coconut curries, Cham temples and Khmer pagodas. Then there's the colonial legacy, the coffee and the baguettes sold on every street corner. While Vietnam is fiercely proud to be independent, the most celebrated architecture is French; stay in landmark colonial hotels such as the Metropole in Hanoi and the Palace in Dalat.

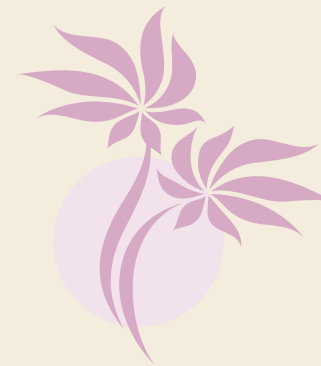
You're never far from water in Vietnam, whether it's the two thousand miles of coastline or the many rivers and rice paddies. Relax at a luxurious beach resort or hop on a traditional Chinese junk to cruise past the spectacular limestone islands of Halong Bay. In the Mekong Delta visit floating markets selling coconuts, pineapple and dragon fruit or try your hand at fishing from a tub boat in Hoi An.



Cambodia & Laos
To complete your Indochina experience visit neighbouring Cambodia and Laos; contrasting but fascinating destinations easily reached from many parts of Vietnam. This is the Asia of postcards; smiling people, orange-robed monks, tropical fruit, golden temples, lush rice paddies, simple wooden stilt-houses, jungle-clad ruins, and delicious coconut curries served on banana leaves. Whether you join one of our Small Group Tours or choose a Fully Tailored Journey, we'll show you the many different faces of this region that make it such an enchanting and fascinating holiday destination. Vietnam is evolving rapidly which means the time to visit simply has to be now.



Choose your holiday



Small Group Tours Contents

Small Group Tours

Pages 7 - 19

With a relaxed and friendly style, our accompanied tours are perfect for anyone who enjoys travelling in a small group. You will have the benefit of an expert Tour Leader on hand throughout your trip to introduce you to the very best sights, sounds, tastes and experiences that Vietnam has to offer. Our four styles of Small Group Tour ensure there is an itinerary for every visitor.



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Fully Tailored Journeys

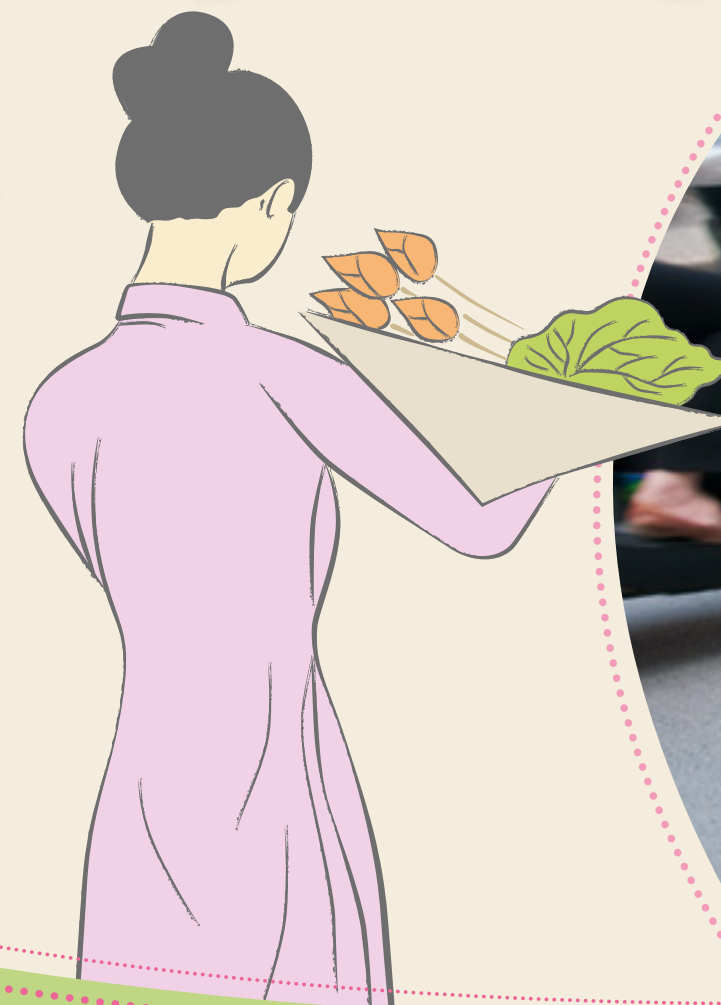
Pages 20 - 39

Vietnam is a wonderful place to explore independently. Here we present some of our favourite itineraries which take all the logistical worries from your shoulders, allowing you to get the most from every minute of your trip. These itineraries are just suggestions; all can be tailored by our expert consultants to include the right amount of guided support and pre-arranged inclusions to ensure it will be exactly the trip you are looking for.

Experiences & Inspiration

Pages 40 - 55

Looking for inspiration? Whether it is the most beautiful of Vietnam's national parks, the delicious and varied cuisine, traditional arts and crafts, glorious beaches or excellent museums that interest you, our brochure showcases just a few of the many options and experiences available; a little something to whet your appetite for planning the perfect trip.



Small Group Tours

Travelling through Vietnam in a small group is a fantastic way to see the country whilst learning about its history and culture, meeting fellow travellers and indulging in some fantastic meals.

Our Small Group Tours have a maximum group size of just 14 people and are led by expert, enthusiastic Tour Leaders. Our tours are very flexible, enabling you to see and do everything you want. Each day you can decide to stay with the tour group or head off and explore independently; the choice is yours.

From the great value Highlights of Vietnam tour through to our luxurious Magnificent Vietnam trip, we have created itineraries to suit every budget and interest. Whichever tour you choose, breakfast every day and a number of evening meals are included. There is no local payment to make; we even include tips for local guides and drivers.

On tour we travel by a combination of train, aeroplane and private coach, with the occasional boat or bicycle thrown in for good measure, allowing you to get beneath the surface of this fascinating country and interact with its people and culture, whilst making the most of your precious time.



Prices & booking

We have many repeat travellers on our tours and departures do sell out fast. That's why you won't find prices or departure dates printed in our brochure. Contact us or your local travel agent or check our website for the latest information on pricing, departure dates and availability.

W: www.insidevietnamtours.com

E: info@insidevietnamtours.com

Tel: 0117 244 3370

For your local AITO Specialist Travel Agent see: www.aitoagents.com

Your Tour Leader

Your Tour Leader will accompany the group throughout, stay in the same accommodation and travel with you from destination to destination. Your Tour Leader is not a professional guide, but rather someone with experience of living and working in the region, there to make sure that you get the absolute most out of your time in Vietnam. Our small team of Tour Leaders are passionate about Vietnam and by the end of the tour you will be too!

Accommodation

On our tours we use a mixture of well-located, fully en suite Western-style hotels, comfortable boats and, on a few of our tours, some wonderful local homestay accommodation and lodges. Due to the remote destinations and basic nature of some homestay accommodation some may have communal sleeping and bathroom arrangements. All overnight train journeys also have access to simple shared facilities only. Please ask us for full details of accommodation used on each tour.

Meals

One thing we're sure you'll look forward to in Vietnam is the best local cuisine. All our tours include breakfast everyday as well as at least one evening meal (most tours have three or more). At InsideVietnam we love Vietnamese food and strive to include Vietnam's amazing range of culinary styles on our tours. Your Tour Leader will of course give their personal recommendations for the most delicious *pho* noodles or tasty street food.

Single supplements

All of our Vietnam tours carry a mandatory single supplement, but we have kept the price as low as we can. This guarantees a single room on all but overnight train journeys, where shared four-berth compartments are the norm. Please see our website for full details.

Luggage

The luggage allowance on most domestic airlines in the region is 20kg, so please bear this in mind when packing for your trip. If an overnight train journey is included in your trip please also note that luggage must be stored either under the bottom bunks or on a ledge above the door, so large, heavy or bulky suitcases are best avoided.

International flights

International flights are not included in our tour prices, giving you the freedom to source your own flights. However, we are more than happy to arrange flights for UK clients if required. Please let us know if you would like us to provide a quote.

Extra nights and extensions

We always suggest that an extra night (or even two) at the start of the tour is a good option to help you settle in and get over jet-lag before the tour gets underway. We can also add extra nights after the tour, or even put together a fully tailored tour extension if you would like to explore the region further after the tour is over. A selection of convenient extension ideas is included with the description of each of our tours. Please let us know if this would interest you.

What's included:

- ★ No local payment
- ★ All transport between destinations
- ★ Quality hotels and accommodation
- ★ Airport 'meet and greet' and return airport transfers
- ★ Breakfast every day
- ★ At least 1 evening meal (most tours have 4 or more)
- ★ Maximum group size of 14
- ★ Full time expert Tour Leader
- ★ Info-Pack full of sightseeing ideas and cultural tips



Small Group Tours Tour styles

IVT: ESSENTIAL



Great value for money, our 'IVT Essential' tours allow you to see and experience Vietnam in-depth but with maximum flexibility. Accompanied by one of our highly skilled Tour Leaders you will be travelling at a reasonably fast pace in order to see as many sides of Vietnam as possible. Accommodation is usually in comfortable, central three star hotels, putting you in the best location for exploring in your free time. Breakfast each day and typically one or two evening meals are also included. Your Tour Leader will give plenty of recommendations for the other nights. These tours combine a great balance of escorted excursions and leisure time, allowing you to get your bearings with your group before setting you free to make your own discoveries. Great for first time visitors to Vietnam on a budget.

IVT: CLASSIC



Our 'IVT Classic' tours feature our very favourite destinations in Vietnam and neighbouring Cambodia; staying at three or four star hotels and including breakfast and a number of evening meals. A comprehensive programme of activities and excursions is included to enable you to experience as much of the country as possible. Accommodation, including any overnight boats but not overnight trains, is fully en-suite. These tours are moderately paced, allowing us to really soak up the sights, sounds and atmosphere of select destinations in Vietnam. You will be led by a skilled IVT Tour Leader, together with select local guides who will between them not only coordinate logistics but share their knowledge of Vietnam's history and culture. These tours are great for first time visitors to Vietnam looking for comfortable accommodation and a carefully thought out selection of included experiences and meals.

IVT: SUPERIOR

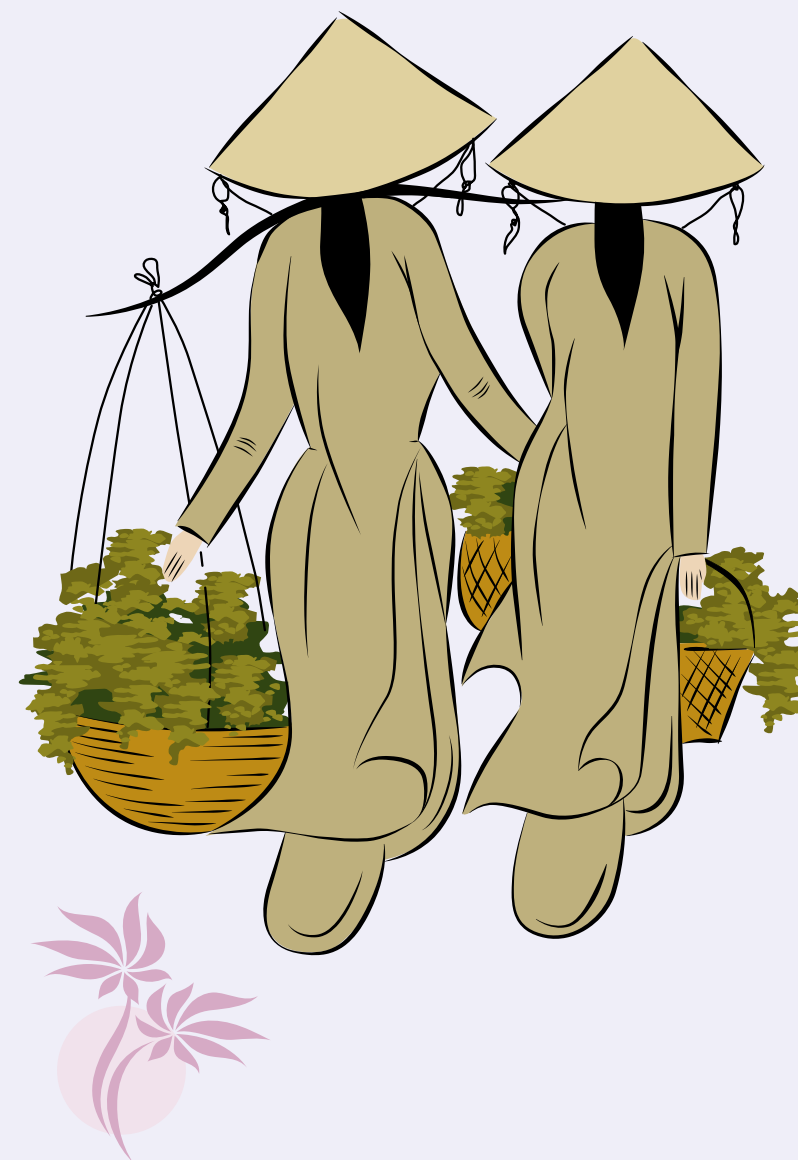


'IVT Superior' tours are characterised by high quality, characterful accommodation, and a trip packed full of experiences. A full range of enlightening excursions is included, and a number of hands-on experiences that will help to bring the destination to life. In addition to your skilled IVT Tour Leader we utilise expert local guides at select destinations to achieve a deeper understanding. Breakfast is included each morning as well as a number of excellent evening meals that will demonstrate the great culinary range of the country. These tours are ideal for people looking for more luxurious accommodation, a relaxed yet in-depth sightseeing and cultural experience.

IVT: EXPLORER



Perfect for a second time visit and for those wishing to get off the beaten track and immerse themselves in Vietnam, our 'IVT Explorer' tours concentrate on either a particular region, an activity or a cultural or historical theme. Accommodation is chosen to suit the particular destination but is generally of a three star level with the occasional stay at basic, local lodgings that may be communal in nature. As well as your IVT Tour Leader we usually use a local guide at selected destinations. Transport will be a range of planes, trains and private coaches as appropriate. Breakfast is included each day along with a number of evening meals. We usually only offer one departure a year so book early to ensure you get your place!



Highlights of Vietnam

10 Nights

IVT: ESSENTIAL 

Hanoi (2) – Halong Bay (1) – Hoi An (2) – Hue (2) – Ho Chi Minh City (1) – Mekong Delta (1) – Ho Chi Minh City (1)

There are not many countries where a short tour can take in five separate destinations inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list, but this is Vietnam, where cultural heritage and scenic wonder combine to create a unique and remarkable experience.

Our Highlights of Vietnam tour commences in Hanoi's romantic Old Quarter; we go on to visit the majestic scenery of Halong Bay, bask in the unparalleled beauty of Hoi An, cycle through history in Hue, dive right in to the hustle and bustle of Ho Chi Minh City and make a memorable stay at a jungle lodge in the Mekong Delta!



As with all our Essential style tours, the Highlights of Vietnam includes some really good value, well-located accommodation, all transfers and connections and a number of great excursions where we feel you'll benefit most from the support of your Tour Leader and expert guide. The remainder of the time is yours to explore, have your own adventures and make your own discoveries, with the help of your Info-Pack and recommendations from your Tour Leader of course. The pace of the tour is quite high to enable us to fit in so many highlights, but with a night spent onboard a lovely Chinese-style junk on Halong Bay, a full day in Hoi An, one of Asia's most laid-back towns, and a day exploring the quiet backwaters of the Mekong Delta there's plenty of time to kick-back and relax if that's your style.

We travel by a combination of plane, boat and private coach to get you from place to place in the most convenient and efficient manner possible. For the first-time visitor to Vietnam this is an exciting, active and great value journey covering all of the highlights. We hope you'll join us!



Halong Bay

UNESCO World Heritage designated Halong Bay is the scenic pinnacle of northern Vietnam, and a highlight of any tour. Sail serenely between the karst towers scattered throughout the bay, stopping at floating fishing villages, kayaking to remote beaches or exploring spectacular caves. Local legend has it that the islands were created long ago when a celestial dragon and her children were sent to earth to fend off invaders. As the mother dragon protected the land she breathed out a thousand beautiful pearls which turned into a wall of islands to protect the mainland. As the baby dragons followed their mother and ran into the sea, their thrashing and flailing tails gouged out valleys in the earth and the final pinnacles were created. The dragons then plunged into the sea leaving the still waters lapping at the newly formed islands.

What's included:

- ★ 9 nights hotel accommodation
- ★ 1 overnight boat, the Bai Tho Cruise
- ★ All transport between destinations in Vietnam
- ★ Meet and greet upon arrival at Hanoi Noi Bai International Airport
- ★ Breakfast every day
- ★ 3 lunches
- ★ 3 evening meals
- ★ Full time services of your Tour Leader
- ★ Services of an expert local guide in most destinations
- ★ InsideVietnam Tours' complimentary Info-Pack
- ★ Tips for local guides and coach drivers

Have more time to spend on holiday?

Why not...

- ★ add a relaxing stay at one of Vietnam's excellent beaches
- ★ visit the awe-inspiring temples of Angkor in neighbouring Cambodia



Vietnam and Cambodia Uncovered

13 Nights

IVT: CLASSIC 

Hanoi (2) – Halong Bay (1) – Hoi An (2) – Hue (2) –
Ho Chi Minh City (2) – Siem Reap (3) –
Phnom Penh (1)

The histories of neighbours Vietnam and Cambodia have intertwined throughout the centuries; power and influence ebbing and flowing between the two. Our two-week exploration picks out the highlights of these two contrasting but equally fascinating and beautiful destinations, and traces the common bonds that link them together to form such a remarkable pair.



Commencing in the great northern capital, Hanoi, we journey south through Vietnam, seeing history unfold through the Imperial and colonial eras, and into the dark days of more recent history, before stepping back in time to conclude in the heart of one of history's most remarkable civilisations, at the temple complex of Angkor.

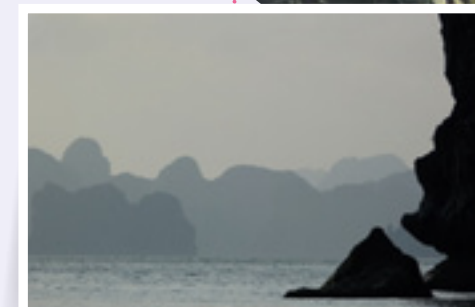
For those who like to understand history in context, and to witness it in remarkable settings, this is a tour that will not disappoint. From the great Imperial Citadel and grand tombs of the Nguyen Emperors in Hue, to the ancient port of Hoi An, once amongst the largest in Asia, you will explore all aspects of the rich cultures encountered along the way.

Modern Vietnamese history bookends the first part of the tour, commencing in Hanoi at the immense Stalinist mausoleum of revered leader Ho Chi Minh, and finishing in the city that was renamed in his memory at the end of the Vietnam War. Many sites of interest in and around the city provide a fascinating and unfamiliar perspective on this notorious period.

Much of modern southern Vietnam was once part of the great Khmer empire, and a short flight brings us to the heart of what was, a millennium ago, one of the greatest cities in the world. We have three days to combine exploration of the jungle-clad temples of Angkor with relaxation at our resort accommodation in laid-back Siem Reap, before a final day in Cambodia's capital Phnom Penh brings the tour to its conclusion.

Temples of Angkor

The many temples of Angkor are truly one of the most fantastic man-made sights on the planet. Seeing the sunrise over the world's largest religious building Angkor Wat, feeling the gaze of countless stone faces watching you at Bayon Temple or clambering around the jungle ruins of the "Tomb Raider Temple" Ta Prohm - all are unforgettable experiences. Angkor was seat of the ancient Khmer Empire which flourished between the 9th and 15th centuries. The temples were built by the Khmer 'god-kings'; blending tenants of Hinduism and Buddhism to represent heaven on earth, they are the ultimate expression of creative vision and spiritual devotion.



What's included:

- ★ 12 nights hotel accommodation
- ★ 1 overnight boat, the Halong Jasmine Cruise on Halong Bay
- ★ All transport between destinations in Vietnam and Cambodia
- ★ Meet and greet upon arrival at Hanoi Noi Bai International Airport
- ★ Breakfast every day
- ★ 2 lunches
- ★ 4 evening meals
- ★ Full time services of your Tour Leader
- ★ Services of an expert local guide in most destinations
- ★ InsideVietnam Tours' complimentary Info-Pack
- ★ Tips for local guides and coach drivers

Have more time to spend on holiday?

Why not...

- ★ add a relaxing stay at one of Cambodia or Vietnam's excellent beaches
- ★ head across the border to magical Luang Prabang in neighbouring Laos

Magnificent Vietnam

13 Nights

IVT: SUPERIOR

Ho Chi Minh City (2) – Mekong Delta (1) – Hoi An (2) – Hue (2) – Hanoi (1) – Victoria Express (1) – Sapa (1) – Victoria Express (1) – Halong Bay (1) – Hanoi (1)

Magnificent Vietnam is a grand two-week journey that visits Vietnam's best destinations in comfort and style. This tour adheres to the InsideVietnam Tours' philosophy of going local and 'getting beneath the surface' but also stays at some of the country's most celebrated hotels and classic properties. This tour visits all the great sights, and reaches a scenic high in Sapa, where the local ethnic minorities and glorious terraced rice paddies bring our journey to an unforgettable end.



Our journey commences in the modern, energetic hub of southern Vietnam, in Ho Chi Minh City, and journeys north to a grand conclusion in the nation's capital, Hanoi. Along the way we explore the country's finest cultural and scenic highlights, including the Imperial capital of Hue, home to the Citadel of the Nguyen Emperors and their extravagant tombs and the ancient trading port of Hoi An, one of Asia's most relaxed and characterful destinations.

We confront more recent history at the Cu Chi Tunnels near Ho Chi Minh City, and pay a visit to the revered leader's mausoleum in Hanoi, where locals still mass to pay their respects. After the throng of Vietnam's cities the remote mountains of Sapa could not seem further removed; we travel overnight by train to witness the stacked rice terraces stretching to the skyline, and visit the minority groups who still reside throughout the mountains, and whose ancestors created these remarkable feats of early engineering.

Food plays an integral part in Vietnamese life, and our journey provides plenty of opportunities to sample many of the sumptuous styles on offer. From simple but delicious street food in Ho Chi Minh City where we whizz between the best stalls on the back of a Vespa, to the elegant and complex Imperial cuisine of Hue, where we try our hands at creating traditional dishes at the wonderful Tha Om Garden House.

We spend a night on board a couple of our favourite boats – the beautiful converted rice barge, the Bassac, deep in the Mekong Delta, and the refined Paradise Luxury that cruises through the towering peaks of Halong Bay. Magnificent Vietnam is true to the InsideVietnam Tours' philosophy of going local and 'getting beneath the surface', but does it in considerable comfort and style. We can't wait!



Colonial accommodation

One of the most positive legacies of Vietnam's turbulent history is the elegant colonial architecture that still graces the boulevards that were laid out in the French Indochina-era. Many of the remaining buildings have been converted into stylish period accommodation, and it is with these as our luxurious base that we will set out to explore the length and breadth of this diverse and fascinating country.

What's included:

- ★ 9 nights hotel accommodation
- ★ 2 overnight train journeys onboard the Victoria Express
- ★ 2 overnight boats, the Bassac and Paradise Luxury
- ★ All transport between destinations in Vietnam
- ★ Meet and greet upon arrival at Ho Chi Minh International Airport
- ★ Breakfast every day
- ★ Seven lunches
- ★ Six evening meals
- ★ Full time services of your Tour Leader
- ★ Services of an expert local guide in most destinations
- ★ InsideVietnam Tours' complimentary Info-Pack
- ★ Tips for local guides and coach drivers

Have more time to spend on holiday?

Why not...

- ★ add a relaxing stay at one of Vietnam's excellent beaches
- ★ head across the border to magical Luang Prabang in neighbouring Laos
- ★ visit the awe-inspiring temples of Angkor in neighbouring Cambodia



Sofitel Metropole Legend hotel, Hanoi

The iconic Metropole, located in Hanoi's French Quarter close to the Opera House and Hoan Kiem Lake, ranks amongst Vietnam's finest and most distinguished colonial hotels. Dating back to 1901 the hotel is a historic landmark in its own right, having played host to visiting dignitaries and celebrities for more than a century.



La Residence, Hue

The elegant, art-deco La Residence, is widely considered the finest accommodation in the historic city of Hue. Originally constructed in 1930 as the official residence of the French regional governor, the property has been thoughtfully extended in recent years and transformed into a sophisticated but relaxed luxury hotel on the banks of the Perfume River.



Wild Vietnam

13 Nights

IVT: EXPLORER 

Hanoi (1) – Ba Be National Park (2) – Hanoi (1) – Halong Bay (1) – overnight train (1) – Phong Nha National Park (1) – Hue (1) – Hoi An (2) – Nam Cat Tien National Park (2) – Ho Chi Minh City (1)

Wild Vietnam is our tour for those who like to do things a bit differently; to visit places off the regular routes, and who don't mind a little bit of roughing it when it delivers a truly unique experience.

On this active tour we visit the finest of Vietnam's national parks, at Ba Be, Phong Nha and Nam Cat Tien, as well as dropping in at some of our favourite Vietnam classics.



Vietnam's capital is our starting point, providing an exciting launch-pad for the adventure to come. Kick off the tour like the locals with a few glasses of street side 'bia hoi' and a bowl of steaming pho noodles before we embark into the terraced mountains of the north. Our destination is the remote Ba Be Lakes National Park, home of the Tay minority group, where we spend two glorious days exploring the lakes, caves and forests of this beautiful region by boat and on foot.

A short break sailing on the limpid waters of Halong Bay provides a chance to relax, before we board the Reunification Express and trundle south to Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park. These jungle-clad mountains hide a remarkable collection of vast caverns. Here we explore the awe-inspiring Paradise Cave, filled with remarkable sculpted stalactite and stalagmite formations; we swim in Nuoc Mooc Springs, and explore the jungle paths of this wonderful area.

En route to the Imperial city of Hue we explore the incredible underground network of the Vinh Moc Tunnels. A gentle cycle ride around Hue is followed by a scenic drive over the Pass of Ocean Clouds to Hoi An, ancient trading port and relaxed riverside destination.

The final leg of our journey takes us to the dense jungle of Nam Cat Tien National Park. We may not be fortunate enough to see the elephant, leopard and tiger said to reside in the park's depths, but we will trek through the jungle to seek out the endangered Siamese crocodile, listening out for the wild gibbon in the canopy above, before concluding our trip with a final night in the bright lights of Ho Chi Minh City; an energetic end to a remarkable journey.



Sustainable travel

Our aim is to balance great experiences with a sustainable approach to tourism, which enables local communities to benefit from our visits without substantial impact upon the environment. We have designed our Wild Vietnam tour with this philosophy in mind, and two aspects are particular highlights:

At Ba Be National Park we stay in a traditional wooden stilt-house homestay. Facilities are simple and we sleep in a large communal room, but this is a great experience. Our hosts will cook us traditional local meals and we'll have the chance to get to know them over a beer in the evening.

Nam Cat Tien National Park is less than a hundred miles from the busy streets of Ho Chi Minh City, but the verdant jungle, alive with call of tropical birds, feels like a different planet. We stay at Forest Floor Lodge, an eco-lodge in a beautiful setting overlooking the Ben Cu rapids and Monkey Island, which is home to the excellent gibbon rehabilitation centre. The lodge employs local people and uses local resources wherever possible, which helps to minimise the conflict between the needs of the wildlife and communities nearby.

What's included:

- ★ 9 nights hotel accommodation
- ★ 2 nights shared homestay accommodation at Ba Be (communal sleeping arrangements and shared bathroom facilities)
- ★ 1 overnight boat, the Bai Tho on Halong Bay
- ★ 1 overnight train from Hanoi to Dong Hoi
- ★ All transport between destinations in Vietnam
- ★ Meet and greet upon arrival at Hanoi Noi Bai International Airport
- ★ Breakfast every day
- ★ 11 lunches
- ★ 7 evening meals
- ★ Full time services of your Tour Leader
- ★ Services of an expert local guide in most destinations
- ★ InsideVietnam Tours' complimentary Info-Pack
- ★ Tips for local guides and coach drivers



Have more time to spend on holiday?

Why not...

- ★ add a relaxing stay at one of Vietnam's excellent beaches
- ★ take a trip into the beautiful Mekong Delta
- ★ visit the awe-inspiring temples of Angkor in neighbouring Cambodia



Fully Tailored Journeys

Whether for a family holiday, a romantic getaway or a solo adventure, our Fully Tailored Journeys allow you the freedom and flexibility, with the help of our expert travel consultants, to craft the perfect itinerary to suit your own interests and budget.

Our services cover the whole country; and we've travelled to the great majority of these destinations ourselves to test the experiences, check the logistics and ensure that everything we propose adds to the quality of the experience you will enjoy. We can advise on everything from jungle trekking in the national parks of Cuc Phuong or Nam Cat Tien, to the most idyllic beaches of Phu Quoc or Nha Trang. We can also arrange special activities and private experiences to allow you to follow your own passions, getting hands on with everything from art, to cookery, to wading through knee-deep mud helping the local farmers plant rice in the paddies.

For some initial ideas, read through the Fully Tailored Journeys and Small Group Tours itineraries as well as the suggestions and experiences on the following pages. Then simply give us a call or contact your local travel agent and make the first step towards your dream Vietnam holiday.

We will ask you about your ideas, interests, accommodation preferences and the places you wish to visit. Our travel consultants are also happy to offer advice and make suggestions. We can design a trip at almost any budget from backpacker level to five-star luxury and everything in between, always striving to give you the best value for money.

We'll take care of all your transport and accommodation arrangements, leaving you free to enjoy your holiday without the hassle of working out which train to catch or how to get to your hotel!

You will also have the support of our Vietnam partner's office staff who can help should any problems arise. Your personalised Info-Pack includes full details of all your accommodation and transport plans as well as general information on Vietnam and sightseeing guides for all the places on your itinerary.

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Fully Tailored Journeys

Our Fully Tailored Journeys are for those who wish to travel independently but with the knowledge that the itinerary has been designed by experts, accommodation carefully chosen and pre-booked, transport tickets organised and fully explained, carefully selected guided excursion and transfers included and with back-up available every step of the way.

The itineraries that we propose in the following pages combine our favourite destinations and experiences to create a range of plans showcasing the diversity of Vietnam. They are all suggestions based on our personal experience; each outlining what we consider to be a great journey based upon a range of possible trip lengths, interests and activities.

Each could be arranged to start on the date of your choosing, exactly as it is outlined here, but we expect that you'll be keen to amend or combine these ideas to suit your own interests and preferences. Itineraries can be booked for single travellers, couples, families or groups and can be taken at any time of the year. We pride ourselves upon providing a flexible and expert service, and we love the challenge of creating an itinerary that perfectly matches your needs.

We will include breakfast each morning and a number of lunches and evening meals where they add to the experience of your journey. Where you have a guide they will be happy to make recommendations for meals not included as part of the trip, and you will also have our detailed Info-Pack where our own recommendations for restaurants and other experiences to help you make the most of your free time are detailed.

Transport around the country is mainly by a combination of domestic flight, train and private car, selected to enable you to make the most of the time available to you.

Vietnam and surrounding countries are well served by the network of international carriers that operate throughout the region, meaning itineraries can start and end in a number of major cities. Most airlines require a short stopover or touchdown en route, though Vietnam Airlines does now offer a non-stop service twice weekly to both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City from London Gatwick Airport.



Private guiding

We work with a range of highly skilled local guides throughout Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, who are experts in both ensuring the logistics of your journey run smoothly, but also in the history and culture of your destinations you visit, giving you a deeper understanding of each area. How much of your trip you require the services of a guide is entirely up to you; many people enjoy the thrill of making their own discoveries so we leave you with plenty of time for your private explorations if this is your preference. In some destinations, however, we believe for logistical or cultural reasons you will get far more out of your experience if supported by a guide, and we will make these recommendations in consultation with you during the trip planning process.



Getting around

Although private cars are always an option, a mix of exploration on foot, by bike, cyclo or even elephant-back lets you see local life from a range of angles, and we are happy to recommend these options where available.

Your guide will have sightseeing suggestions for each day they are with you, but we believe chance encounters and spontaneous events are often the most unforgettable parts of any trip. We make sure you have the flexibility to make the most of the experiences that you stumble across along your journey.



Exclusive tours

We can arrange private entry to many sites of interest, often with specialist expert guides, unique experiences tailored to your own interests, wonderful meals in remarkable destinations, private helicopter or balloon rides and much more. Please ask us for details.

Prices & booking

Because your holiday is one of the most important events of the year, we prefer to discuss your travel plans with you in depth. Then we can provide the most up-to-date information and the keenest prices. That's why you won't find any prices printed in our brochure. Contact us or your local travel agent or check our website for the latest information on pricing, accommodation and options.

W: www.insidevietnamtours.com
E: info@insidevietnamtours.com
Tel: 0117 244 3370

For your local AITO Specialist Travel Agent see: www.aitoagents.com



Fully Tailored Journeys

Best of Vietnam

9 Nights

Hanoi (2) – Halong Bay (1) – Hue (2) – Hoi An (2) – Ho Chi Minh City (2)

This north-to-south itinerary showcases the best of Vietnam. Bookended by Vietnam's largest cities, the capital Hanoi and frenetic Ho Chi Minh City in the south, you'll also drop in to historic Hue, the merchant port of Hoi An and spectacular Halong Bay for a night aboard a traditional cruise boat.



Your journey begins in the capital Hanoi, a city of lakes and distinct districts that reflect the diverse influences that have shaped the city over the centuries. Admire the faded glory of the architecture and wide boulevards of the French Quarter, or delve into the cafes, markets, trinket shops and art galleries of the narrow Old Quarter lanes. Grab an iced coffee *sua dua* from a streetside stall and watch Vietnamese life unfold around you.

From Hanoi head out to Halong Bay, where two thousand limestone islands rise dramatically from the Gulf of Tonkin. The best way to view this UNESCO World Heritage site is from the comfort of a Chinese-style junk boat, where you spend a relaxing night onboard.

In Central Vietnam visit Hue, seat of the Nguyen Dynasty. Hop on a dragon boat for a ride down the Perfume River and be sure to visit the Emperors' extravagant mausoleums. Next stop is Hoi An where buildings reflecting the multitude of foreign influences on this once-great trading port line the riverfront and vibrant blue fishing boats bob in the harbour.

Your final destination is Ho Chi Minh City, the country's economic powerhouse and home to nine million people, and yet surprisingly accessible. Head out of town to the Cu Chi Tunnels to get an understanding of recent history and the American-Vietnamese War.

To see the best of Vietnam in ten days, you can't beat this itinerary to Hanoi, Halong, Hue, Hoi An and Ho Chi Minh City, which we affectionately call the famous five Hs. Packed with contrast you'll get an insight into every aspect of Vietnamese culture: the history, landscape, cuisine and wonderful people.



Roi Nuoc Water Puppetry

Included in our Best of Vietnam itinerary is a performance at the Thang Long Theatre in Hanoi, the best place in the country to experience the traditional art of *roi nuoc* or water puppetry. Originating more than a thousand years ago in the rivers and rice paddies of the Red River Delta, water puppetry tells the tales of traditional Vietnamese culture and folklore.

Standing in waist deep water and hidden behind a curtain, puppeteers manoeuvre wooden puppets representing peasants, mandarins and animals such as water buffalo, all accompanied by live singers and musicians.

A water puppetry show is a great start to any Vietnam adventure; a quirky lesson in Vietnamese culture to set you up for the rest of your travels.



Trip Highlights:

- ★ Take an overnight junk boat cruise in Halong Bay
- ★ Visit Hoi An, Vietnam's most picturesque town
- ★ See the ancient Hue citadel
- ★ Visit the Cu Chi Tunnels in Ho Chi Minh City
- ★ Enjoy a traditional water puppet show in Hanoi

Have more time to spend on holiday?

Why not...

- ★ add a relaxing stay at one of Vietnam's excellent beaches
- ★ take a trip to into the beautiful Mekong Delta
- ★ visit the awe-inspiring temples of Angkor in neighbouring Cambodia



Fully Tailored Journeys

Golden Vietnam

13 Nights

Hanoi (1) – overnight train (1) – Sapa (1) – overnight train (1) – Halong Bay (1) – Hue (2) – Hoi An (2) – Ho Chi Minh City (2) – Mekong Delta (1) – Ho Chi Minh City (1)

With two weeks in Vietnam you have the chance to get further off the beaten track. This itinerary includes an overnight train to the rice terraces that sweep down the mountains of Sapa, home to colourful minority groups. Explore the winding waterways of the Mekong Delta, home to the classic Vietnam image: ladies in conical hats selling exotic fruit from traditional wooden boats.



Golden Vietnam starts and finishes in the big cities. In the capital Hanoi, daily life plays out on the street; cafes and market stalls spill on to the pavements while ladies balancing bamboo baskets weave around outdoor hair salons. Ho Chi Minh City has a very different feel as sleek skyscrapers tower above French colonial architecture such as the Notre Dame Cathedral.

In Vietnam you're never far from the water and this itinerary includes two nights aboard very different boats. Among the thousands of craggy islands in Halong Bay you'll cruise on a elegant junk boat past floating villages, while in the Mekong Delta you'll board a converted rice barge to float from Cai Be to Can Tho. Take a break from the boat to cycle through paddy fields, sugar-cane groves and fruit orchards.

An overnight train from Hanoi takes you to Sapa's spectacular mountains, cut into steep tiers of lush green rice paddies. Many minority groups live in and around Sapa, dressed in colourful woven skirts and elaborate head dresses. On market days H'mong people gather to buy and sell water buffalo, fruit and vegetables and to socialise.

Hue's draw is its historical sights, including the 19th century Citadel containing the Imperial City which Vietnam's Emperors once called home and the merchant shops, assembly halls and pagodas of the Phu Cat district. In nearby Hoi An every evening feels like a festival, as hundreds of coloured silk lanterns hung from trees sway in the breeze. The streets bustle with tourists and locals strolling from craftshop to art gallery to restaurant to indulge in Vietnam's finest cuisine.

This is a packed itinerary but one that offers plenty of chances to relax, unwind and watch daily Vietnamese life unfold around you, whether you're lounging on a boat in Halong Bay or the Mekong Delta, strolling through a Sapa market, sipping coffee in the big cities or indulging in fantastic food in Hue or Hoi An.



Minority Culture

Vietnam has the richest ethnic diversity in South-East Asia. While 86% of the population belong to Viet, the largest group, there are 53 minority groups, living predominantly in the mountains of the central and northern highlands, some numbering as few as 100 people.

Sapa is a great place to meet members of the H'mong group, who originate from southern China. Their relative geographical isolation makes the H'mong one of the most distinct minority cultures, best known for their rainbow skirts, elaborate headdress and chunky silver jewellery. Tourism has brought some income to the H'mong and today many H'mong women sell woven handicrafts in the markets around Sapa.

The Vietnam Museum of Ethnology in Hanoi is also a fantastic place to learn more about minority culture and includes a fascinating outdoor museum of traditional architectural styles including tall thatched houses built on stilts.



Trip Highlights

- ★ Rice terraces and minority cultures at Sapa
- ★ History, culture and great cuisine in ancient Hue and Hoi An
- ★ Streetfood, markets, hustle and bustle in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City
- ★ UNESCO World Heritage quality scenery at beautiful Halong Bay
- ★ Vietnam's 'rice bowl' - experience life in the Mekong Delta

Have more time to spend on holiday?

Why not...

- ★ add more time in Sapa for longer trekking or a homestay with local minority people
- ★ visit the spectacular and awe-inspiring temples of Angkor in Cambodia



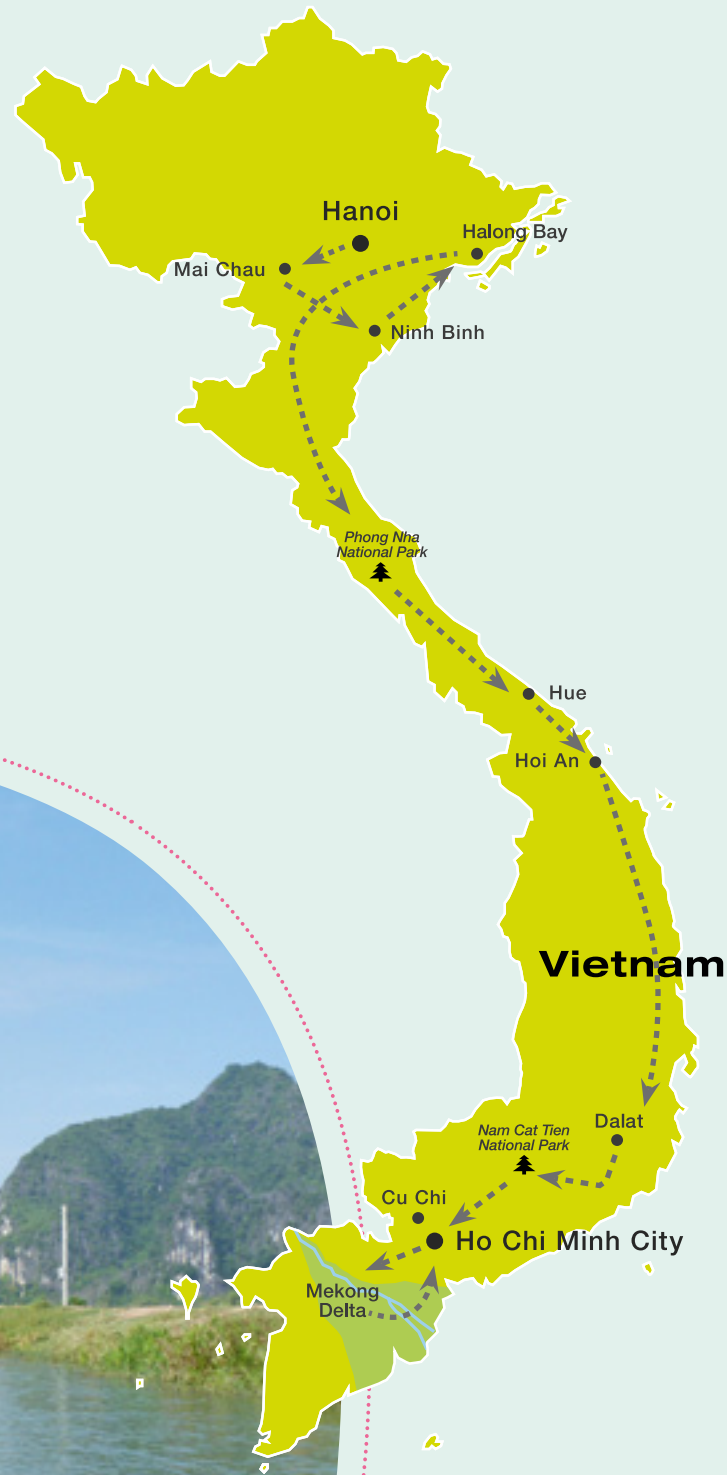
Fully Tailored Journeys

Vietnam Discovery

19 Nights

Hanoi (2) – Mai Chau (2) – Ninh Binh (1) – Halong Bay (1) – overnight train (1) – Phong Nha (1) – Hue (2) – Hoi An (2) – Dalat (1) – Nam Cat Tien (2) – Ho Chi Minh City (2) – Mekong (1) – Ho Chi Minh City (1)

For those with a passion for exploration and the time to really get beneath the surface of the country, our Vietnam Discovery itinerary is the perfect option. Combining Vietnam's most iconic destinations with beautiful, off the beaten track highlights, this all-encompassing tour describes a near-complete picture of Vietnam's many and varied faces.



Your adventure commences in Vietnam's ancient capital, Hanoi, where the narrow, chaotic streets of the Old Town, crammed with street markets selling steaming bowls of noodles and fresh, flapping fish, provide a dizzying introduction to the country. Soak up the throng of the city before heading west to savour an altogether different pace of life. In rural Mai Chau, traditional Thai-minority wooden-housed villages, set in an idyllic valley surrounded by wooded mountains feel a world away from the bustle of the city. Stretch your legs or jump on a bike to immerse yourself in local life.

Driving southwest the limestone pinnacles of Ninh Binh provide a tantalising taster of the highlight to come, at UNESCO World Heritage listed Halong Bay, where you have chance to relax and savour the magnificent scenery onboard an overnight cruise. Return to Hanoi and board the iconic Reunification Express for an atmospheric journey south to Dong Hoi, where you head inland to the lush jungle of Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park, home to Vietnam's most spectacular cave systems; the undisputed jewel being the recently discovered Paradise Cave.

Ancient Hue, seat of the Nguyen Emperors, and laid-back Hoi An provide a well-earned breather midway through your trip, offering the chance to relax on the beach or by the pool, savour a river cruise or simply watch the world go by from a street-side café. Drive on through the coffee plantations of the Central Highlands to Nam Cat Tien National Park, the beautiful jungle reserve that is one of the last refuges of Vietnam's native large mammals. Stay overnight in a riverside lodge overlooking Monkey Island, and trek to seek out the rare Siamese crocodile, gibbons and glorious bird-life.

The final leg of your journey brings you to Ho Chi Minh City, the most modern and exciting of Vietnam's cities, and gateway to the Mekong Delta. Learn about Vietnam's war history at Cu Chi and the city's fine museums, before a final night of gentle boat exploration of the delta brings your trip to its conclusion.



Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park

Deep in the misty, vine-clad mountains along Vietnam's border with Laos lies Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park. This is one of the country's most beautiful and unspoilt regions, and in 2003 designated a UNESCO World Heritage site for its biodiversity and geological significance. As a tourist destination the park is most celebrated for the enormous cave complexes which riddle its towering peaks, including Son Doong, reputedly the largest cave in the world.

The most spectacular of the caves, however, was only discovered in 2005, and after extensive exploration by a team of British experts and thoughtful development was opened to the public in 2010. Only a small proportion of the 31km of the Paradise Cave is accessible, but the remarkable stalactite and stalagmite formations and awe-inspiring cathedral-like halls make this well-worth the journey.



Trip Highlights:

- ★ Vietnam's bustling capital, Hanoi
- ★ Minority culture and glorious scenery at Mai Chau
- ★ Cruising through UNESCO-listed Halong Bay
- ★ Remarkable caves at Phong Nha National Park
- ★ Imperial Hue and laid-back Hoi An
- ★ Verdant jungle at Nam Cat Tien National Park
- ★ Energetic and exciting Ho Chi Minh City
- ★ The wonderful, watery world of the Mekong Delta

Have more time to spend on holiday?

Why not...

- ★ take a longer multi-day trek between minority villages around Mai Chau
- ★ add a relaxing stay at one of Vietnam's excellent beaches
- ★ visit the awe-inspiring temples of Angkor in neighbouring Cambodia



World Heritage Indochina

14 Nights

Ho Chi Minh City (2) – Hue (2) – Hoi An (2) – Hanoi (1) – Halong Bay (1) – Luang Prabang (3) – Siem Reap (3)

Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia are the jewels of Indochina; with so many staggeringly beautiful UNESCO World Heritage Sites to see and explore this route has it all. Take your time to discover this enchanting region and see how these ancient worlds meet the 21st century in Southeast Asia.

Start your journey in Vietnam's dazzling metropolis, Ho Chi Minh City, a city on the move. With chaotic traffic, bright lights, traditional markets, fine restaurants and street food vendors this city will not fail to create an impression. Continue to Hue, former capital of the great Nguyen Emperors. Situated on the bank of the Perfume River, this UNESCO World Heritage site has a seemingly endless choice of pagodas, tombs and temples to explore, not to mention the vast Citadel and Imperial City.



Drive from here over the scenic Pass of Ocean Clouds to Vietnam's most picturesque city, Hoi An. Try your hand at a cookery class, see how colourful silk lanterns are made, head out to the ruins at My Son or just watch the world go by as you soak up the traditional atmosphere for which the town is famed.

Continue north to the serene majesty of Halong Bay, designated a World Heritage site in 1994 for the magnificence of its scenery. After a rejuvenating cruise swap the tranquil waters of the bay for the bustling streets of Hanoi as you arrive into Vietnam's capital. Visit one of the excellent museums or Ho Chi Minh's mausoleum; take in a traditional water puppet show and explore the vibrant streets of the Old Quarter to really get beneath the surface of this historic capital.

Waving goodbye to Vietnam, your next stop is the land of a million elephants, Laos. Nestled in the mountains, Luang Prabang is a beautiful World Heritage site known for its magical atmosphere. The combination of the many gold temples and shrines scattered across the town, beautifully lit markets and orange robed monks meandering the streets, creates an unforgettable scene. From here you fly to Siem Reap, where your trip culminates in at the great temples of Angkor. Without doubt one of the most impressive archaeological sites in the world, Angkor will be the perfect end to your phenomenal World Heritage Indochina tour.



Hue

Hue gained prominence in 1802 when Emperor Gia Long founded the Nguyen Dynasty. In an effort to unite both Northern and Southern Vietnam, Hue was selected as the dynasty's seat, and the impressive Citadel was built. The dynasty's power began to crumble when the French attacked in 1885, burning the library and pillaging everything of value. The Nguyen Emperors were permitted to remain as puppet rulers under the French authorities until 1945, when a brief Japanese occupation finally brought the dynasty to its end.

During the American-Vietnamese War the Citadel suffered massively and was heavily damaged. In recent times, however, a huge effort has been made to restore the Citadel to its former glory. Work is ongoing, making it a fascinating and popular attraction. The city is also famed for its delectable royal cuisine and signatory local dishes; a fantastic complement to its tombs, mausoleums and fascinating historical sites.



Trip Highlights:

- ★ Visit Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia
- ★ See how Emperors lived in the ancient Hue Citadel
- ★ Relax in Hoi An's Old town
- ★ Explore the ancient My Son Ruins
- ★ Enjoy a two day cruise in glorious Halong Bay
- ★ Marvel at the temples of Angkor in Cambodia
- ★ Meander through the beautiful streets of Luang Prabang in Laos

Have more time to spend on holiday?

Why not...

- ★ head into the northern mountains and minority region around Sapa
- ★ visit Laos' capital Vientiane, or Phnom Penh in Cambodia
- ★ add a relaxing stay at one of Vietnam or Cambodia's excellent beaches



Fully Tailored Journeys

Honeymoon Vietnam

15 Nights

Hanoi (2) – Halong (2) – Hue (2) – Hoi An (2) –
Phu Quoc (3) – Ho Chi Minh City (1) – Siem Reap (3)

Wonderful beaches, romantic accommodation, great food, fascinating history and friendly people; Vietnam combines all the elements that make for a romantic and unforgettable honeymoon. Explore the finest destinations in Vietnam, and reach a dramatic climax at the remarkable temples of Angkor.



Your honeymoon begins in Hanoi, Vietnam's ancient capital, where lively markets, bustling streets, and tranquil lakes create a wonderful blend of energy and tradition. After exploring the highlights of the city travel onwards to the enchanting waters of Halong Bay, where you board your delightful Chinese-style junk boat and set sail into the bay. Here you have two days to unwind and savour the spectacular scenery.

Your next stop will take you to Central Vietnam, to the historical town of Hue. With the secluded Pilgrimage Village Resort as your base, explore the incredible temples, pagodas and tombs of this former Imperial capital. Cruise down the majestic Perfume River and indulge in some of the fabulous cuisine for which this city is famed. From Hue take a scenic drive on to the charming town of Hoi An. With its streets lit by beautifully crafted silk lanterns, this quintessentially Vietnamese town is the ideal place to relax and enjoy a couple of leisurely days. Also known for its fine cuisine, you will have the chance to take a cookery class and learn first hand how to create some of Vietnam's most iconic and delicious dishes.

From Central Vietnam fly south to the beautiful bays of Phu Quoc Island. Here you will find a wonderful, intimate retreat to spend a few days of well-earned relaxation. Swim in the crystal waters, sunbathe by the pool, or head out to sample the excellent seafood and enjoy island living. After this rejuvenating escape fly back to modern Ho Chi Minh City for a last, exciting night in Vietnam before flying on to Siem Reap, ancient capital of Cambodia. This laid-back town is the gateway to the breath-taking, jungle-clad temples of Angkor. Spend your last days here at a fabulous resort, giving you plenty of time to relax, enjoy the fantastic night markets and explore one of the world's most impressive sights.

Beach options

If a few days of relaxation on the beach appeals to properly wind down after all the excitement, then finding the best option for your needs is key. Vietnam boasts a terrific range of beach destinations and resort styles from which to choose. From secluded resorts accessible only by boat to lively hotels in popular beachside towns; whether you want to go diving, get active or simply lounge by the pool, there are wonderful options to suit. Based on the time of year and your preferences we will recommend the perfect, romantic location for you. For more information please refer to the Beaches of Vietnam section later in this brochure.



Trip Highlights:

- ★ Combine contrasting Vietnam and Cambodia
- ★ Enjoy a glorious two night Halong Bay cruise
- ★ See the dancing water puppets in Hanoi
- ★ Relax in Hoi An, Vietnam's most picturesque town
- ★ Kick back on Phu Quoc Island's romantic and secluded beaches
- ★ Explore the remarkable temples of Angkor in Cambodia

Have more time to spend on holiday?

Why not...

- ★ get active trekking in the beautiful mountains and minority regions around Sapa
- ★ visit the laid-back world of the Mekong Delta in southern Vietnam
- ★ take the slow-boat to Cambodia with a luxurious cruise up the Mekong River to Phnom Penh



Fully Tailored Journeys

Vietnam Adventure

16 Nights

Hanoi (2) – Ha Giang (4) – Hanoi (1) – Phong Nha (4) – Hue (2) – Hoi An (2) – Ho Chi Minh City (1)

Allow your adventurous side to flourish as you hike, bike and kayak around undiscovered and unspoilt parts of Vietnam on our exciting Adventure itinerary. Combining many of Vietnam's classic highlights with the more remote northern and central regions, this itinerary is the perfect mix of both rural and urban adventure.

Starting in Vietnam's capital, Hanoi, you begin your adventure with a walking street-food tour in the company of a local expert. Sample some of the best street food Hanoi has to offer whilst exploring the rambling streets of Hanoi's Old Quarter. From here jump aboard the sleeper train to the far north-west mountains of Ha Giang, where the next few days will be spent hiking through the lush misty mountains. Along the way see locals work their buffaloes in the rice paddies and visit rural markets, rich in tradition, where local minority people go in their finest attire to trade their produce and animals. Spend two nights staying with local families in traditional homes as you trek through the beautiful northern hills and valleys far off the beaten track.



Return to Hanoi and travel onwards to Dong Hoi in Central Vietnam, where you explore the beauty of Phong Nha National Park. With its phenomenal caves, hidden valleys and beautiful and diverse landscape, Phong Nha is the perfect place to spend a few days exploring; camping in the jungle and hiking between secluded swimming holes and kayaking down jungle-lined rivers.

With the imposing Citadel, excellent cuisine, impressive tombs and with the mighty Perfume River running through its centre, Hue is a wonderful city to enjoy for a couple of nights. From here take the breathtaking Pass of Ocean Clouds over to Hoi An – tackle it by bike if you feel up for the challenge! Whilst in Hoi An you have the opportunity to cycle to the ancient My Son Ruins or simply take time at leisure to enjoy what is arguably Vietnam's most picturesque town.

From Central Vietnam fly on to your final destination, Ho Chi Minh City. Colloquially known still as Saigon, this is Vietnam's most cosmopolitan and lively city, with phenomenal food, world-class accommodation, amazing museums, and traditional local markets all within walking distance; a fantastic place to bring your Vietnamese adventure to a close.

Ha Giang

The beautiful mountainous region around Ha Giang is one of the newest additions to the Vietnamese travel scene, and although tourism is slowly increasing, the colours and traditions of this minority stronghold remain much as they have over the preceding decades. For those happy to don hiking boots and strike out into the terraced hills this is a fabulous part of the world. The scenery of sculpted rice terraces through which you trek en route between traditional wooden-housed villages is truly stunning, and the markets that play host to the colourful Flower H'mong, Nung, Dzao and Tay minority groups are a photographer's dream. Accommodation is basic, as might be expected in this remote part of the country, but staying in a local homestay is part of the experience; making a visit to Ha Giang an unforgettable adventure.

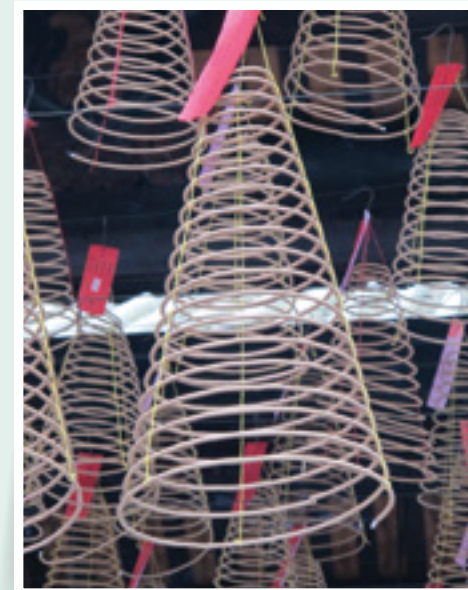
Trip Highlights:

- ★ Trekking between local family homestays in the northern mountains
- ★ Camping and caving in glorious Phong Nha National Park
- ★ Urban adventure in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City
- ★ Learning about local life, farming and fishing in Hoi An
- ★ Cycling the Pass of Ocean Clouds between Hue and Hoi An

Have more time to spend on holiday?

Why not...

- ★ search for gibbons and Siamese crocodiles jungle-trekking at Nam Cat Tien National Park
- ★ add a relaxing stay at one of Vietnam's excellent beaches
- ★ slow the pace down with an overnight cruise at beautiful Halong Bay



Colonial Vietnam

13 Nights

Ho Chi Minh City (2) – Dalat (2) – Hue (2) – Hoi An (2) – Hanoi (1) – Victoria Express (1) – Sapa (1) – Victoria Express (1) – Hanoi (1)

Although it is more than half a century since French rule came to an end, the colonial influence of the Indochine-era remains writ large in the architecture, grand boulevards and the cuisine across Vietnam. Our Colonial Vietnam itinerary traces the heritage of this era, in the choice of both destinations and accommodation, which features some of the country's finest and most elegant colonial properties.



Modern Ho Chi Minh City has undergone many transformations on its journey from fishing port to Vietnam's largest city; moulded by Khmer, French and American influences to form the most cosmopolitan and dynamic city in the region. Your journey commences here with two nights at the elegant Majestic Hotel, and after exploring the highlights of the city, follow the lead of the French and head to the cool of the colonial summer retreat at Dalat, in the heart of the Central Highlands. Start your day at the bustling central market, before heading out to explore the pine forest-clad countryside, dotted with crumbling French villas and punctuated with spectacular waterfalls.

Hue, the next destination on your journey, played a significant role in the Colonial-era as the capital of the puppet Nguyen Emperors. The vast Citadel which contains the Imperial City, modelled on Beijing's Forbidden City, remains as testament to the ambition and glory of the dynasty's founders. La Residence, a sumptuous art-deco hotel on the banks of the Perfume River provides an atmospheric base for your stay. The ancient trading port of Hoi An, a few hours drive down the coast from Hue, provides a welcome change of pace – an opportunity to unwind for a couple of days; wandering through the streets of the old town or relaxing by the pool, before flying north to Vietnam's capital, Hanoi.

In the heart of the French Quarter, close to the Opera House, is the Metropole, one of Vietnam's grandest colonial hotels. Built in 1901, the hotel has played host to visiting celebrities and dignitaries for more than a century. Stroll to Hoan Kiem Lake and the thronging streets of the old town before heading to the station for your overnight train journey on the Victoria Express. The hill station at Sapa is the final highlight of your trip, high in the Fansipan Mountains. Gaining popularity in the 1930s, the town is the gateway to some of Vietnam's finest scenery, with spectacular rice terraces forming giants' staircases on the steep mountainsides.



Ho Chi Minh City

Until the decisive battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the French had maintained *de facto* control of Vietnam, as well as much of modern-day Laos and Cambodia, for much of the preceding century. During its time as capital of French Indochine, Saigon grew to one of Asia's primary trading ports, rivalling Singapore and Hong Kong. The legacy of wide boulevards, grand architecture, including the Town Hall, Opera House and Notre Dame Basilica, and a love of coffee and baguettes remain, making modern Ho Chi Minh City a delightful juxtaposition of influences and images: Vietnamese and European, traditional and modern.



Trip Highlights:

- ★ Staying at elegant colonial hotels
- ★ The atmospheric hill stations of Dalat and Sapa
- ★ The architectural legacy of Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi
- ★ Imperial and colonial history in Hue
- ★ International influence of laid-back Hoi An

Have more time to spend on holiday?

Why not...

- ★ include a relaxing cruise on beautiful Halong Bay
- ★ visit the laid-back world of the Mekong Delta in southern Vietnam
- ★ take the slow-boat to Cambodia with a luxurious cruise up the Mekong River to Phnom Penh



Family Vietnam

14 Nights

Hanoi (2) – Ninh Binh (2) – Halong Bay (1) – Hoi An (4) – Ho Chi Minh City (2) – Siem Reap (3)

Families have all kinds of interests and enthusiasms, we know, so with this itinerary we've tried to capture what we believe is the essence of a great family holiday: a trip that combines unique experiences that all ages will enjoy; activities to keep hands and minds engaged, and plenty of down time to relax by the pool or on the beach



There is no better way to explore Hanoi's streets than on a cyclo, the unique local take on the bicycle rickshaw. Hop onboard to visit the excellent, interactive Museum of Ethnology to get a feel for Vietnam's incredible diversity; take in a water puppet show and explore the bustling markets and street food stalls with the guidance of a local food expert. Leave the city behind for a short drive to Ninh Binh, a fantastic spot to cycle through picturesque karst scenery, stopping off in local villages to get a feel for rural life. The following day explore nearby Cuc Phuong National Park; your first taste of Vietnam's ancient steamy jungles and home to the excellent Primate Rescue Centre.

A cruise on Halong Bay is a highlight of most Vietnam journeys, but the chance to kayak, fish for squid and swim in the warm waters of the bay make it a great experience for families. Your next destination, Hoi An, is the perfect place to slow the pace of the trip with a few nights of relaxation at one of the great beach resorts just a few minutes drive from the atmospheric old town. Get hands on learning about Vietnamese farming and fishing, have a go at knocking up local dishes at one of the excellent cookery classes in town, or if that sounds like a lot of effort, just relax by the pool or on the beach.

Your final stop in Vietnam is Ho Chi Minh City. From here you visit the famous Cu Chi Tunnels, which provide a remarkable insight into life during the American-Vietnamese War. For the more adventurous there is the chance to clamber onto old US tanks or crawl through the warren of underground tunnels that concealed Viet Cong fighters throughout the war. The holiday concludes with what will undoubtedly be a highlight for the entire family, as you fly to Cambodia and the astounding complex of jungle-clad temples at Angkor. Two days of Indiana Jones-style exploration, by bike, on elephant-back or by tuk-tuk finish the trip in unforgettable style.



Hoi An

For centuries Hoi An was one of Asia's greatest trading ports, attracting merchants from across the continent and beyond; drawing influence from all comers that is reflected still in the architecture and character of the town. The beautiful old town was mercifully largely undamaged during decades of war and political turbulence, and was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1999. The combination of a traditional old town, brimming with restaurants and riverside cafes, just a short drive from the excellent Cua Dai beach, and beautiful countryside makes Hoi An a wonderful base to relax mid-way through your journey and an undisputed highlight of any visit to Vietnam.



Trip Highlights:

- ★ Cyclo tour through the narrow streets of Old Hanoi
- ★ Cycle through beautiful scenery of Ninh Binh
- ★ Kayak and swim in UNESCO listed Halong Bay
- ★ Jungle-trek in Cuc Phuong National Park
- ★ Learn to fish and farm local-style in Hoi An
- ★ Indiana Jones-style adventure at Angkor

Have more time to spend on holiday?

Why not...

- ★ search for gibbons and Siamese crocodiles jungle-trekking at Nam Cat Tien National Park
- ★ get active trekking in the beautiful mountains and minority regions around Sapa
- ★ complete the Indochina set at magical Luang Prabang in neighbouring Laos



Experiences & Inspiration

Holidays in Vietnam and neighbouring Cambodia and Laos have something for everyone, whatever your interests. Working closely with you, we will help make your dream holiday become a reality. We can cater for almost any travel budget, from backpack to the heights of five-star luxury and for a wide range of special interests. Our services cover the whole country so if it's trekking through the mountains of the north, or relaxing on a tropical paradise island in the south, no problem.

The following pages describe some of our favourite experiences across Indochina, and we hope offer inspirational ideas for creating your perfect holiday.



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Culinary Vietnam

Immersing yourself in Vietnamese culture through its food will take you on a phenomenal gastronomic journey around the country. The delicate flavours, gentle tastes and subtle regional differences in Vietnamese cuisine make the food here a key feature of any itinerary. The attention to detail and the care taken in preparing every dish makes the food served as good to look at as it is to eat, making even the simplest snack a sensory delight.



Vietnamese food has taken influence from the Chinese, French, Indian and Thai, but has a distinct culinary identity all of its own, with a wonderful array of dishes to enjoy. There are three distinctive flavours, cooking styles and signatures which make up Vietnamese cuisine.

The north is synonymous with *pho*, a light but satisfying rice noodle soup. This aromatic dish is traditionally served for breakfast, but is equally likely to be eaten for any other meal of the day. Seasonal herbs and leaves are used to flavour the soups and dried and pickled foods supplement the northern diet. Deliciously infused teas also compliment each meal, and the aromas of fresh cinnamon bark, pear and fresh ginger tea are also linked to this part of the country.

Central Vietnam is often regarded as the birth-place of modern Vietnamese cuisine. The old capital of Hue is known for its delicious bite size morsels of delicate rice cakes, dumplings and a variety of intricate and imaginative dishes. In Vietnam dishes are often shared between the table, which is a fantastic way to enjoy and taste as many dishes as possible. Hoi An too is famed for its delicious cuisine, and the town boasts enough excellent restaurants to keep you in foodie heaven for weeks!

In Southern Vietnam you will find slightly spicier food. The rich and fertile soil of the Mekong Delta yields an abundance of produce and this is reflected in the variety of the cuisine and the market stalls which overflow with exotic fruits and fresh seafood. Whether dining at the finest restaurants or eating with the locals at a street side stall you won't fail to be seduced by the fantastic selection of fresh and tasty dishes on offer. The only challenge is deciding what to have next!



Street food and market tours

Markets in Vietnam are a real highlight, selling everything from the mundane to the bizarre. From exotic fruits to plates of flapping fish, squirming frogs and bowls of writhing snakes; going to the market is an event in itself. Arranging a street food tour with a local expert will ensure you get the most from a trip to the market, to learn what and how the locals eat, and allow you to eat with confidence at the best stalls and eateries. Taking a guide will get you away from the usual tourist haunts and allow you to order, taste and understand local foods and unusual local tastes that you would otherwise miss. Our favourite places for these experiences are in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, please ask us for more details.

Cookery courses

With its fine culinary heritage, we recommend Hoi An as an ideal place to take a half day cookery class. Learn how to cook traditional Vietnamese dishes in the atmospheric Old Quarter, in historical merchant houses, or at one of the excellent local restaurants which also run cookery schools. Wherever you choose, this a great opportunity to cook, socialise and of course eat the fabulous dishes you cook. After an initial meet and greet students are taken to the local market by their head chef/ teacher to buy the ingredients for the selected dishes. After exploring the market and learning about local produce you will head back to class and learn to create some beautiful Vietnamese food. Guaranteed to impress your friends when you get home!



Beaches of Vietnam

Vietnam boasts over two thousand miles of coastline, of sheer cliffs and hidden coves, sandy peninsulas and mangrove-clad deltas. Thanks to this meandering ribbon of coast it offers a huge range of captivating beaches and island retreats from the north right down to the borders of Cambodia in the far south. This wide geographical range also ensures that we can recommend a great option at whatever time of year you choose to travel.



Central Vietnam

In the central region surrounding Danang and Hoi An you will find a range of great beach options. Stretches of China Beach in Danang and the great sweep of Cua Dai Beach close to Hoi An are home to a selection of excellent seafront resorts, perfect for honeymooners, families and those simply in search of some relaxing beach time. Taking a beach break in this region comes with the added benefit of the fascinating historical and cultural highlights found nearby, allowing you to combine beach time with exploration.

From February to August, snorkelling and diving trips out to the Cu Lao Cham Marine Park are popular to enjoy the crystal clear waters and tropical fish. This region receives the majority of its rainfall from September to December, when the sea can be rough and typhoons occasionally pass through.



Southern Vietnam

Nha Trang has a well-earned reputation as Vietnam's top beach destination. With miles of sandy beach right on the city's doorstep and with the surrounding islands within easy reach, Nha Trang is the perfect place to relax and enjoy the sunshine, beach and lively resort atmosphere. It is possible to arrange day trips out to the nearby islands as well as snorkelling and diving excursions. For those seeking a little more seclusion, nestled in the private bays across the water from Nha Trang are some of Vietnam's most exclusive resorts.

Accessible only by speed boat, these luxurious resorts are some of the finest in the country and take advantage of this beautiful stretch of shoreline.

Further south are the resorts of Mui Ne and Phan Thiet, popular beachside destinations for those wanting to escape Ho Chi Minh City. This area has a drier climate than the resorts further north and after a few years of rapid development is brimming with accommodation to suit every budget. Just further out of town you will find some emptier stretches of beach perfect for more secluded relaxation.

Island escapes

For island retreats we love idyllic Phu Quoc and the remote Con Dao Islands - just a short flight from Ho Chi Minh City these islands make for the perfect island get-away. Phu Quoc is largely mountainous and densely forested, and offers many secluded bays, amazing seafood, magnificently clear waters and great diving and snorkelling grounds. Long Beach on the west of the island is known for its bustling beach resorts where visitors can enjoy beach relaxation alongside vibrant evenings.

Con Dao is a chain of islands, with Con Son being the largest in this collection. Con Son is a tiny island just 20km square and was once used by the French to hold thousands of prisoners-of-war. Now predominantly protected by the Con Dao National Park this island is the nesting grounds for Vietnam's most important sea turtles (nesting season May-November). This is a beautiful island, and the small number of exclusive resorts here makes it a perfect choice for those really wanting to get away from it all.



Outdoors Vietnam

Those who like to include some activity as part of their holiday will be delighted by the range of outdoor activities on offer throughout Vietnam. From a gentle cycle ride through the rice paddies around Hoi An, to grand trekking expeditions into the northern mountains; from hiring a kayak for a relaxing paddle on the calm waters of Halong Bay to swimming in the vast, unlit caverns of Phong Nha National Park. Vietnam is never short of opportunities to add a sense of adventure and exploration to your journey.



Trekking

If donning your walking boots and heading out on foot is your passion, there are glorious options across the country, from half-day jungle treks in Nam Cat Tien or Cuc Phuong National Parks, to multi-day expeditions through the beautiful mountains of the minority regions of the north. Ha Giang, Sapa, Mai Chau and Ba Be all offer an inspiring combination of stunning scenery and fascinating local culture, and are readily accessible from Hanoi.

Biking

Vietnam offers fantastic biking country, whether you like your cycling on or off-road. We are able to arrange gentle guided cycle rides in many of the most popular destinations. In Hanoi, Hue, or Hoi An this is a great way to visit hidden corners of town that most visitors never see, or to explore the quiet back roads of the local countryside. The rice paddies and fruit orchards of the Mekong Delta are also beautiful cycling country; flat, traffic-free and wonderfully scenic. For the more energetic there are great mountain-biking options around the Central Highlands, Mai Chau and Sapa, that can be arranged for as little as a few hours to adventurous week-long tours cycling from village to village.

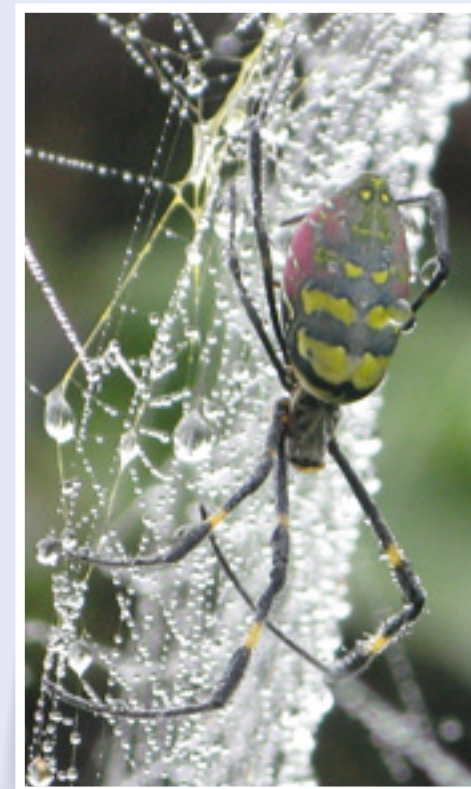
Caving and kayaking

Phong Nha National Park in Central Vietnam is home to the country's most spectacular cave systems – vast caverns filled with great underground lakes and sculpted stalagmite and stalactite formations. Many are accessible with little effort, but the magnificent jungle-clad mountains hide many more, rarely-visited caves where you can explore with head-torches and helmets, and swim in the warm waters of dark lakes. For those who prefer to paddle, kayaking on the Chay River is also possible in this area. Most Halong Bay cruise boats offer kayaking excursions, and Dalat in the Central Highlands has excellent kayaking opportunities and rafting with various classes of rapids available.



Snorkelling and diving

With such an incredibly long and beautiful coastline great snorkelling and diving is bound to be available, and Vietnam does not disappoint. The time of year has a major influence on the quality and clarity of the experience, but there is always a great option to be found if this is your passion. Nha Trang has long been considered the diving and snorkelling heartland of Vietnam, with nearby Whale Island also providing a wonderful underwater experience. The Cham Islands near Hoi An and the southern island of Phu Quoc are pleasant, if not world-class options, but for an unbeatable, if expensive location, the Con Dao Islands are a real divers' paradise.



On the Water

With more than two thousand miles of coastline and some of Southeast Asia's greatest rivers, it's little surprise that cruising options, from a few hours of gentle water-borne exploration to week-long cruises, feature so prominently on many itineraries to Vietnam. Here we describe some of our favourite boats that sail through some of the region's most beautiful scenery.



Halong Bay Cruises

UNESCO World Heritage designated Halong Bay, scenic highlight of northern Vietnam, is a fabulous location for taking to the water. Sail serenely between the karst towers scattered throughout the bay, stopping at floating fishing villages, kayaking to remote beaches or exploring spectacular caves. Most popular is an overnight cruise on one of the many traditional-styled junks that ply the bay, but day-boats or extended two-night options are also possible, the latter providing an opportunity to escape the crowds that are an inevitable consequence of such a world-renowned destination.

Dragon's Pearl, Indochina Junk

Modelled on the traditional Chinese junks that used to sail on the bay, the handcrafted teak and oak Dragon's Pearl is an intimate and elegant option for a Halong Bay cruise. With only 11 cabins this is one of the smaller vessels on the bay, and the route taken through Bai Tu Long Bay offers a more off the beaten track itinerary than most.



Mekong Delta Cruises

The Mekong River, the world's twelfth longest, flows south for more than 2,000 miles from the Tibetan Plateau until it reaches Southwest Vietnam, where it splits into great tributaries that spread out to form the vast and fertile Mekong Delta. This is Vietnam's rice bowl, where the combination of constant tropical temperatures, plentiful water and fertile land enable up to four rice harvests annually. The delta also produces an abundance of exotic fruit: coconut, mango, pineapple, papaya, dragon fruit and the pungent durian in season. The myriad waterways of the delta make the boat the perfect means of exploration, and one that enables you to get amongst local life, much of which is conducted on the water.

Bassac

The converted rice barges that comprise the small fleet of Bassac Mekong cruise boats provide our favourite setting from which to explore the waterways and floating markets of the delta. Ranging from 6-24 cabins, each of the dark-wood Bassac boats has a sun deck, bar and lounge area providing plenty of space to relax and make the journey your own.



Mekong River Cruises

For those with a little longer to spare and who enjoy kicking back and watching the world go by, there can be few more exotic options than an extended cruise on the Mekong River, journeying upstream from Vietnam to Phnom Penh or Siem Reap in neighbouring Cambodia. There is an array of ships catering to all budgets that operate cross-border itineraries, ranging from three to eight days onboard. Most cruises offer a full schedule of shore excursions, that enable you to both stretch your legs and witness the transformation as you travel from the bustling delta to the rural Cambodian backwaters.

RV Jayavarman

For a taste of colonial-era glamour, nothing on the Mekong quite compares with the wonderful RV Jayavarman. Built in 2009, the ship marries French colonial and Indochine styles to produce a uniquely elegant and luxurious experience. Each of the 27 spacious stateroom cabins has a private balcony from which to sit back and soak up the glorious scenery as you cruise along the river.



Sustainable Tourism

All of our itineraries have elements of sustainable tourism in them: we use local guides, encourage visits beyond the usual tourist hot spots and provide cultural tips and recommendations for local restaurants and ethical shops in the Info-Pack. In this way you can be sure your holiday has a positive impact on Vietnam, the country we are passionate about. In addition to this we have selected some experiences that offer an in depth exploration of Vietnam's wildlife and local communities.



Farming & fishing

Vietnam is no exception to the global rule that young people are leaving rural areas to find work in the big cities. Yet people still need to eat and it's vital that fishing and farming techniques are not abandoned. On a fun adventure into the countryside you can learn about rural Vietnamese life while trying your hand at gardening, weaving palm leaves, casting fishing nets, rowing a tub boat and even riding a water buffalo through a rice paddy!

Homestays

A homestay gives you the chance to befriend local people in their own environment. We can arrange nights in a traditional wooden house on stilts in a small mountain village or stay in a Chinese merchant house in the Mekong Delta. Another option is Bai Huong Village on Cham Island, a two hour boat ride from Hoi An. The island's coasts are protected, forbidding boats to get too close, so you can enjoy an afternoon's snorkelling, kayaking or swimming in pristine waters. At all homestays your host family will show you how to make local dishes before sitting down to eat dinner together.



Traditional arts & crafts

Vietnam has a long history of arts and crafts, and the merchant port of Hoi An is a great place to experience this first hand. We can arrange a lesson in traditional painting techniques at the home of Mr Sinh Trong, a local artist, followed by the chance to make the traditional silk lantern for which Hoi An is famous. The craft lessons are arranged through the Lifestart Foundation who teach skills to disadvantaged Vietnamese people, including Mr Trong, to help them earn an income and become self-sufficient.



Wildlife

Vietnam's jungles are home to a staggering array of wildlife, but many animals are in decline due to the effects of war, deforestation and water pollution. Poaching is also an issue; there's a huge demand across Asia from people who want to eat or wear endangered animals. At the top of Vietnam's endangered list are elephant, tiger, leopard, black bear, honey bear, snub-nosed monkey, flying squirrel, crocodile, turtle and rhino.

Fortunately there are success stories in the many protected wildlife areas in Vietnam. In Cuc Phuong, the Endangered Primate Rescue Centre home to 150 rescued monkeys is well worth a visit. There's also a Turtle Conservation Centre which raises and releases 60 turtles back into the wild each year.

Nam Cat Tien National Park is on UNESCO's list of biosphere reserves. Siamese crocodiles were once extinct in the wild but have been successfully reintroduced to the park and are now thriving. There's also a primate rehabilitation centre, on an island in the Dong Nai River near the park entrance, which looks after gibbons, langurs and lorises that have been confiscated from traffickers.

We're proud to support these sustainable tourism projects. Please don't hesitate to ask your travel consultant if you'd like to weave one into your Vietnam itinerary.



Experiences & Inspiration

Cambodia

Much less developed than Vietnam, Cambodia is the Southeast Asia of postcards; smiling people, orange-robed monks, tropical fruit, golden Khmer temples, lush rice paddies, simple wooden houses on stilts, tuk-tuks, coconut curries served on banana leaves and traditional wooden boats. Any Cambodian will tell you their country is famous for two things: the magnificent temples of Angkor of which they are deservedly proud, and the killing fields of the Khmer Rouge which they would rather forget. A trip to Cambodia can be sobering as well as inspiring, but we'd rather focus on the positive; a trip to Tonle Sap lake and the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh, not to mention fantastic Khmer cuisine and great shopping are all not to be missed.



Phnom Penh

As little as five years ago Phnom Penh was considered an adventurous travel option, a bit dangerous and certainly dirty around the edges. These days Phnom Penh calls itself 'the charming city' and thanks to its scenic location on the mighty Mekong River, welcoming people, lively café culture and world-class food it lives up to its new reputation. Must-sees include the Silver Pagoda at King Sihanouk's Royal Palace and Tuol Sleng Museum, an infamous prison during the Khmer Rouge 'revolution'.

Temples of Angkor

The many temples of Angkor are truly one of the most fantastic man-made sights on the planet. Seeing the sunrise over the world's largest religious building Angkor Wat, feeling the many stone faces watching you at Bayon Temple or clambering around the jungle ruins of the "Tomb Raider Temple" Ta Prohm - all are unforgettable experiences. Angkor was once a huge city home to one million people and the seat of the ancient Khmer Empire. The temples were built by the Khmer 'god-kings'; blending tenants of Hinduism and Buddhism to represent heaven on earth, they are the ultimate expression of creative vision and spiritual devotion.

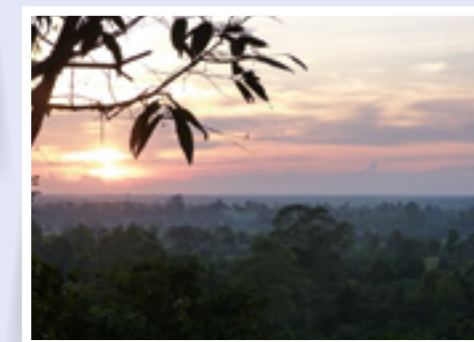
Siem Reap

After all that hard temple trekking, it's a welcome break to return to Siem Reap where the Angkor hotels are located. Colonial architecture, wide streets and a pretty river make the centre a lovely place to potter, browse the market stalls and upmarket boutiques or eat Cambodia's best cuisine, including amok coconut curry.



Tonle Sap Lake

Cambodia's life blood is Tonle Sap, the largest lake in South-East Asia, which provides fish and irrigation for half the country's population. During the rainy season (May to October) the lake swells from 2,500 sq km to more than 4 times its size, until the dry season when the water level drops and the lake empties back into the Mekong. This annual flooding makes Tonle Sap a unique breeding ground for many birds and fish. It's also the reason why central Cambodian houses are built on stilts. On the lake itself are many floating communities which make a pleasant day trip by boat from Siem Reap.



Laos

Laos, the land of a million elephants, makes for a wonderfully contrasting addition to any of our Vietnamese tours. If you can spare an extra few days we thoroughly recommend paying a visit here, one of Asia's least-visited and most-underrated destinations. Although Laos is situated just across the border from Vietnam, the pace, culture, flavours and sights found here are distinct from those of its more renowned neighbours, but no less impressive.



Land-locked Laos sits in the heart of the Southeast Asian peninsula, penned in on all sides by its larger, more powerful neighbours: Vietnam to the east, Cambodia to the south, Thailand to the west, and Burma and China to the northwest. This location has resulted in a turbulent history, but a period of stability has enabled the country to slowly modernise, and although it remains considerably less developed than many of the surrounding countries, Laos is now far more accessible. Rugged mountains and plateaus make up 70% of the country and with a number of roaring rivers including the great Mekong River winding through its land, Laos is a lush, mountainous, jungle-covered country. Roughly the size of the UK, Laos has a population of just 6.5 million people and so nature and the natural landscape dominate this beautiful land.

The culture and pace of Laos moves at a snail-pace compared with the hurtling speed at which the Vietnamese operate, and this unhurried attitude can be a refreshing change. This quiet and calm culture creates a gentle atmosphere which invites you to take some time to explore this beautiful country..

Luang Prabang

If you have a few extra days to spare in the region we highly recommend you take a trip to Luang Prabang. Laos' former royal capital is an enchanting and magical place; the whole town protected as a UNESCO World Heritage site. Around every corner is a photo opportunity; the town is festooned with temples and shrines; colour and enigmatic sights. There are fabulous restaurants and eateries to choose from, night markets and shops to browse, and amazing landscapes and small traditional villages to explore nearby.

As Luang Prabang is set in the mountains there are countless treks and walks to choose from, whether you want to walk for a few hours or a few days. Whether you are swimming in the cascading waterfalls, taking an elephant ride, enjoying a traditional Laos massage or watching the orange-robed monks go by from a street side cafe, a visit to Luang Prabang will make an unforgettable addition to your Vietnamese adventure.

Vientiane

For those with an extra few days to spend in Laos, a trip to the modern capital, Vientiane, is a rewarding choice. By Southeast Asian standards Vientiane is an atmospheric and relatively quiet city, and is best explored by bike. Take a gentle cycle ride or arrange for a local cyclo tour to pedal you around and see the numerous attractive temples and monuments. Thanks to the colonial French influence Vientiane has an appealing café culture, and situated on the banks of the Mekong River, its charming atmosphere makes it a delightful spot to spend a day or so soaking up Lao culture.

Southern Laos also boasts the alluring 4000 Islands in the Mekong River and offers many more off the beaten track options to see and explore. Vientiane is an excellent jumping off point for an extended adventure, and we'd be delighted to explore these with you.



Important Information

Holiday descriptions & inclusions

Every effort will be made to deliver your holiday exactly as described in this brochure. Occasionally however, changes have to be made and in this case we will endeavour to inform you as soon as possible.

Our packages include:

- ★ Accommodation as detailed
- ★ Most transport between destinations
- ★ Airport transfers on arrival and departure
- ★ Meals as detailed
- ★ Accommodation taxes and service charges
- ★ Info-Pack with full instructions, sightseeing and eating out advice

Our packages generally do NOT include:

- ★ International flights (these can be included for UK departures if you wish; please ask)
- ★ Entrance fees and meals other than those detailed
- ★ Local transport (e.g. taxis, subways, local buses)
- ★ Drinks with any included meals
- ★ Incidental costs at your accommodation (telephone costs, drinks, etc)

If you are unsure of the exact inclusions, please ask your booking agent or contact us for further details.

International flights

If you are departing from the UK, we would be delighted to make flight arrangements for you (please ask for details) or alternatively, you can arrange flights through your travel agent or by yourself. Once your flights are confirmed, please make sure that your booking agent is aware of the full flight details. We are unable to arrange international flights originating outside the UK.

Please note that arrival and departure airports vary by package, so if arranging your own flights please ensure you have referred to the individual trip details and confirmed the appropriate flight arrangements.

Meals

A number of meals are included in most packages. Please advise your booking agent of any dietary requirements and we will do our best to accommodate them.

Prices

Due to the volatility of currency exchange rates and the flexibility of our itineraries we have not printed any prices in our brochure. For the latest prices please contact us or your local travel agent or check our website:

www.insidevietnamtours.com

When planning your trip please keep in mind that during certain holiday periods prices can be a lot higher than usual. Peak periods are as follows:

24th December to 4th January – Christmas and New Year

Late January/early February – Tet Festival, Vietnamese Lunar New Year

How to book, payment & travel documents

You can book through your local travel agent or by contacting InsideVietnam Tours directly. If you are booking through a travel agency, all subsequent correspondence should be made through that agency. For all bookings, please use an InsideVietnam Tours' booking form. You will need to read the terms and conditions and sign the booking form to confirm on behalf of all those in your party that you accept and understand the terms and conditions. Your booking agent will advise payment terms at the time of booking. InsideVietnam Tours asks for a deposit upon booking and then full payment 2 months prior to your package start date. Please check with your travel agent for their payment terms as these vary from agent to agent.

After we have processed your booking, we will issue you or your travel agent with a confirmation document which will show exactly what is included in your holiday. Please check all the details carefully and advise your booking agent if there are any mistakes or if there is anything that you do not understand.

Your Info-Pack and other travel documents will be sent to you approximately 4 weeks before departure.

Late bookings

Bookings made less than 4 weeks before your planned departure date will be accepted on a case by case basis. In most situations we will be able to confirm your holiday at the price in this brochure. However, there may be situations where we have to change the price. For late bookings we will endeavour to confirm your holiday arrangements and the price within 3 working days.

Passports & visas

It is your responsibility to ensure that you and all members of your party have the correct passports and visas to enter Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. Vietnamese visas, either single or multiple entry can be arranged in advance via the relevant local Vietnamese Embassy or Consulate, or can be obtained on arrival providing you are in receipt of the correct permissions. Visas for Cambodia and Laos can be obtained on arrival at international airports or land borders from neighbouring countries. We will provide appropriate detailed guidance, including up-to-date prices, application forms and letters of authorisation where necessary, on an individual basis.

Health advice

Vaccinations against a range of diseases are required for much of Southeast Asia. Please consult your GP and visit http://www.nathnac.org/ds/map_asia.aspx for details of the recommended vaccinations for the particular regions you will be visiting on your trip. Anti-malarial medication may also be required.

Further useful advice on health and other aspects of safety can be obtained from:

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/asia-oceania/>

Travel insurance

It is a condition of booking with us that you and all members of your party have adequate travel insurance to cover medical costs and repatriation. You will be asked to sign a booking form to show that you have, or will have, this insurance in place for the duration of your trip. Although not compulsory, we also recommend that you also take out cancellation insurance.

Money & debit / credit cards

Vietnam is predominantly a cash society - most shops and restaurants do not accept debit or credit cards, though they can be used in many hotels. The currency in Vietnam is the Dong (VND), and though US dollars are accepted in many tourist-focused destinations and attractions, the majority of transactions are conducted in Dong.

There is no longer a currency black-market in Vietnam, and most hotels offer roughly the same US dollar exchange rate as banks or exchange-desks. British pounds are not widely accepted, and where they are the exchange rate is unfavourable, so we recommend you bring a cash float in USD or at least Euros. ATMs are widespread in all but the most remote destinations, and although rates and charges can often be higher, this is a reliable method of obtaining cash.

Traveller's cheques will be accepted at most major banks, but generally not in hotels, and the process may both be more time-consuming and incur higher charges than exchanging cash. These should be USD denominated to ensure the best chance of acceptance.

Children

Children aged 12 years or older are treated as adults in terms of accommodation and transport costs. For younger children we can sometimes offer discounts on the published prices; please ask your booking agent for further details. Any children aged 17 years old or younger at the time of travel, must be accompanied by a parent, guardian or another adult who will assume legal responsibility for them for the duration of the trip.

Rooms & check-in

Check-in and check-out times vary from hotel to hotel. Check-in can be any time from 13.00 to 16.00 and check-out from 09.00 to 12.00.

Please note that in Vietnam check-in times are strictly adhered to and early check-in requests may be refused. You can, however, always leave your suitcases with the front desk before check-in time.

Please advise your booking agent if you wish to have smoking or non-smoking hotel rooms and we will do our best to accommodate your wishes. Adjoining, triple or quad-share rooms may be available upon request; please ask your booking agent for further details.

Luggage

The luggage allowance on most domestic airlines in the region is 20kg, so please bear this in mind when packaging for your trip. If an overnight train journey is included in your trip please also note that luggage must be stored either under the bottom bunks or on a ledge above the door, so large, heavy or bulky suitcases are best avoided.

If you have any questions or queries please contact your travel agent. If booking direct, please contact InsideVietnam Tours:

W: www.insidevietnamtours.com

E: info@insidevietnamtours.com

Tel: 0117 244 3370

For your local AITO Specialist Travel Agent see:

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Weather facts and figures

Travel to Vietnam is possible at all times of year – the decision of when will be the best time of year for you will depend on your own personal tolerance of heat and rainfall, and the activities you wish to include.

Vietnam's length and varied topography combine to make it a challenging country to describe climatically. As most journeys cover the entire length of the country, however, it is highly likely that you will encounter rain at some point along the way; where this is most likely to fall and the impact it may have on your trip will depend on the time of year. In most cases rainfall is tropical in nature, meaning short intense storms that clear the air, rather than extended periods of rain.

North Vietnam

Hanoi and the surrounding region are sufficiently far north to have a distinct summer and winter season. Winter is relatively short, from December through to February; during this period Hanoi can be cool (daytime maximum 15c) and it is often misty and damp though with little significant rainfall. Further north, in the mountainous regions of Sapa and Ha Giang, snow is not uncommon and we would recommend against extensive trekking or outdoor activity at this time of year.

Things start to heat up during spring, with the hottest and wettest months of the year falling over the summer months from June through to August. In general the months of spring and autumn are considered the best time for this part of Vietnam.

Central Vietnam

Central Vietnam, including Hue and Hoi An, remains pleasantly warm throughout the winter months, and it is generally dry and hot during the summer when the rest of the country is encountering tropical downpours. The autumn months from September through to December tend to be wet in this part of the country, with its location making it prone to potentially disruptive typhoons.

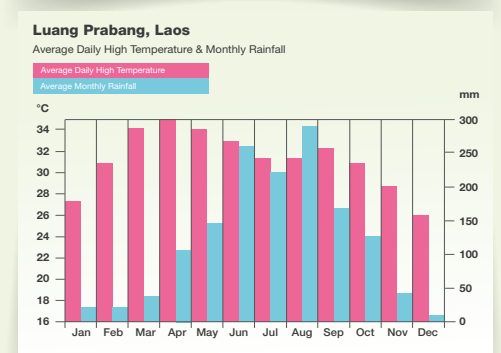
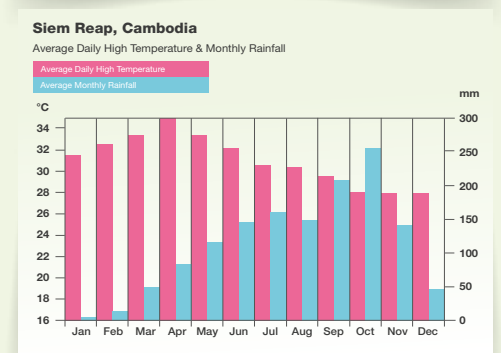
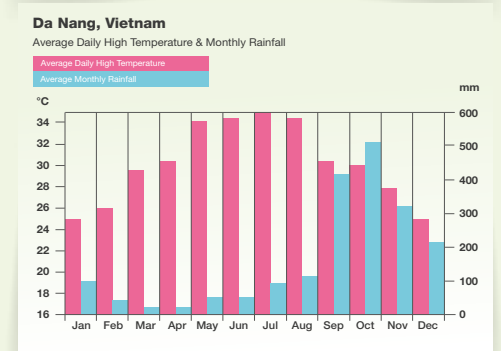
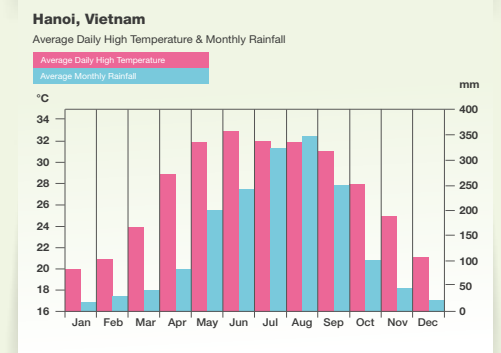
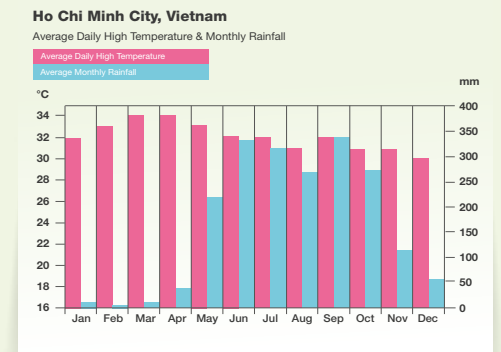
Southern Vietnam

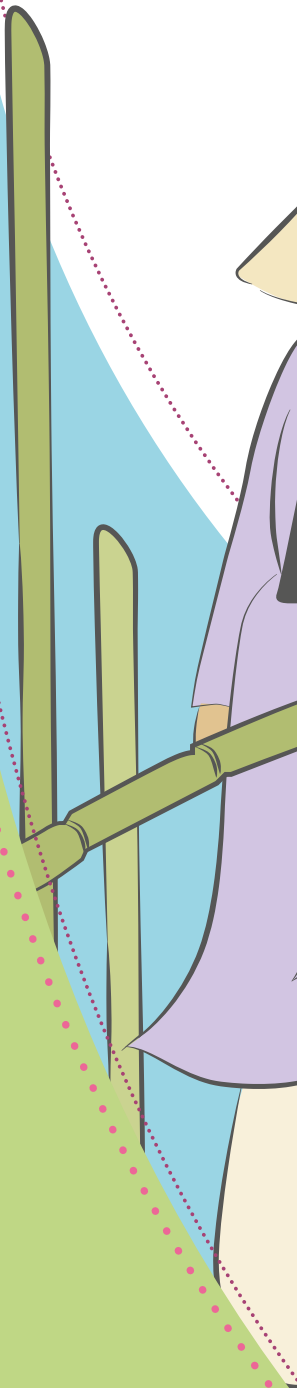
The tropical south, including Ho Chi Minh City, sees less variation in temperatures throughout the year, with winter offering balmy temperatures and little rainfall. During autumn you are most likely to encounter downpours in this region, though these are rarely prolonged or disruptive, and typhoons are uncommon.

Cambodia and Laos

Like most of Southeast Asia, Cambodia is warm to hot year round and the climate is dominated by the annual monsoon cycle with alternating wet and dry seasons. The monsoon cycle is driven by cyclic air pressure changes; as the pressure drops during the summer months (June through October) moist air is drawn in, bringing the monsoon rains to Cambodia. In the winter months (November to May), the air pressure over central Asia rises, driving cool, dry air back across Southeast Asia and introducing a largely dry season to Cambodia. Temperatures begin to rise from March, reaching a peak of up to 40C in April and May. During this period river and lake levels are at their lowest and travel by boat can be problematic. Travel is possible year round, although the period from November through to February is generally considered the best time for visiting both the interior and coastal regions of the country. Each season brings its own benefits, however, with rainfall rarely lasting more than a couple hours and the countryside is at its most lush and verdant during the rainy season.

These dominant seasonal patterns are mirrored in neighbouring Laos, though the greater range of topography and latitude creates some notable differences. The mountainous northern and north-eastern provinces are noticeably cooler, particularly when the rest of the country swelters in April/May. These northerly regions also receive some rainfall during this period, similar to northern Vietnam just over the border.





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InsideVietnam Tours Ltd

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@ info@insidevietnamtours.com

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