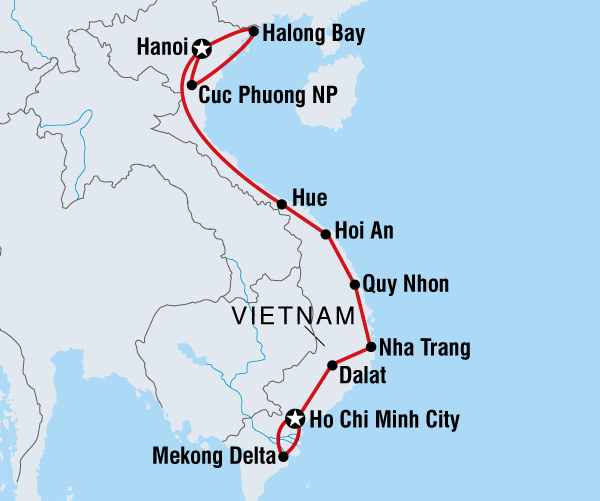
Best of Vietnam

Valid for all departures until 31 December

Currency: Vietnamese Dong

Exchange Rate: AUD$1 = VND16,318

Experience quintessential Vietnam on this comprehensive journey from south to north. Travel from Ho Chi Minh City to Hanoi and experience dynamic cities, tranquil backwaters, imperial ruins, faded colonial elegance and picture-perfect landscapes dotted with reminders of past history.



# Itinerary

## Days 1-2 Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon)

Xin chao! Welcome to Vietnam!

Your adventure begins with a welcome meeting at 6pm on Day 1. You can arrive at any time, as there are no activities planned until this important meeting. Please look for a note in the hotel lobby or ask the hotel reception where it will take place.

Formerly known as Saigon, Ho Chi Minh City is characterised by a vast array of sights and sounds, and is a fascinating blend of old and new, East and West. The huge number of people rushing about their daily lives in Vietnam's largest city gives it a dynamic atmosphere and the French influence is evident in the excellent baguettes and coffee on offer. Much of city life takes place on the busy streets lined with shops, stalls and vendors, who have their wares spread out on the footpath and sell everything from soup to sophisticated electronics.

Visit the famous Cu Chi Tunnels. This former Viet Cong stronghold provides an insight into the resourcefulness and tenacity of the Vietnamese people, as well as a unique sense of what underground life was like during the American War.

#### Included Activities

* Cu Chi Tunnels
* Saigon Opera House
* Riverboat Dinner Cruise

## Day 3 Mekong Delta Homestay

Travel south to the village of **Cai Be** by private bus (approx 3 hours).

Board our boats to cruise the Mekong Delta and explore its intricate waterways. This is our introduction to a world where life depends on the river. Often referred to as the 'rice bowl' of Vietnam, the fertile delta is famous for its abundant harvests of tropical fruits, flowers and rice, as well as it fantastic views while boating along the canals.

Visit an orchard where you can sample tropical fruits, before continuing on to visit some local cottage industries. Around sunset we make our way up one of the many canals to our homestay where we enjoy a wonderful meal of local specialities. At our homestay we'll be sleeping on simple camp beds in a dorm-style arrangement. Bedding and mosquito nets are provided. Shared toilet and bathroom facilities are basic with cold water only.

#### Included Activities

* Mekong Delta - boat cruise and homestay
* Orchard Visit
* Visit to a variety of local industries

## Day 4 Ho Chi Minh City

Activity in the delta starts at dawn, so we'll be up early. After breakfast, we visit the busy **Cai Be** floating market.

Return to Ho Chi Minh City (approx 3 hours) and enjoy more sightseeing in this vibrant metropolis.

Visit the War Remnants Museum. Originally opened in September 1975, it displays old military equipment and other related items from the Vietnam War. In the courtyard you'll find some larger exhibits including a F5A fighter and a UH1-Huey helicopter.

#### Included Activities

* Hammock Coffee
* HCMC - War Remnants Museum

#### Optional Activities

* HCMC - Reunification Palace - VND30000 ($1.60)

## Days 5-6 Da Lat

Rubber, tea and coffee line the route into the cooler climate of the South Central Highlands and the honeymoon town of Da Lat (approx 8 hours). Make a brief stop at La Nga River to see the fishing community and also stop at Chicken Village, home to K'hor, Chill and Cham minorities.

One of Vietnam's most delightful cities, Da Lat is a perfect base to explore this pleasant region. There's plenty to see around town, including lakes, palaces, flower gardens, pagodas, and churches.

Join a city tour, which takes us into Bao Dai's Summer Palace, the famed Crazy House and the vibrant Da Lat market. In the afternoon you have free time to explore or to take the train to Trai Mat Village.

#### Included Activities

* Bao Dai's Summer Palace
* Hang Nga Crazy House
* Forest chairlift ride
* Trai Mat village trip

## Days 7-8 Nha Trang

Today's drive is predominantly downhill through pine forests and paddy fields as we descend nearly 1,500m travelling through the Bidoup-Nui Ba National Park. This area is home to rare pine forests as well as small villages inhabited by the ethnic minority people of the central highlands.

Once referred to as the 'Cannes of the Orient', Nha Trang's sandy palm-lined beach and island-dotted bay still make an idyllic picture, and a cosmopolitan feel prevails in the town itself.

A highlight for many travellers is our boat trip amongst the islands. From the main boat, we take basket boats to shore and visit a fishing village, snorkel in the turquoise waters, enjoy a seafood buffet, and pass the afternoon lazing in deck chairs or swimming.

#### Included Activities

* Nha Trang - Boat trip

#### Optional Activities

* Nha Trang - Bao Dai Villa - VND120000 ($6.50)
* Nha Trang - Mud baths - VND280000 ($15)

## Day 9 Quy Nhon

Stop en route to visit the striking Po Nagar Cham Towers, one of the more impressive remaining temples of the Cham civilisation.

Travel one of the most breathtakingly scenic sections of Highway One. The road hugs granite cliffs, which fall away into the blue of the South China Sea. Islands, lagoons and sand dunes give way to sugar plantations and rice fields as we approach our destination of Quy Nhon (approx 6 hours).

Although it boasts a beautiful beach and bay, Quy Nhon remains off the main tourist trail. Spend an afternoon enjoying the idyllic beach and calm surf.

#### Included Activities

* Cham Tower

## Days 10-12 Hoi An

Another long but scenic drive takes us to Hoi An (approx 7 hours).

The journey is punctuated with a sobering visit to the My Lai Massacre Memorial, marking the site where American troops massacred a whole village of civilians.

Recently declared a World Heritage site, Hoi An is being beautifully restored and preserved. Known as Faifo to early western traders, it was one of South-East Asia's major international ports during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. Today, parts of Hoi An look exactly as they did more than a century ago and it retains the feel of centuries past, making it the sort of place that grows on you the more you explore it.

It's also a shopping mecca – with much to browse and buy. Choose from original paintings, handcrafted woodwork, ceramics, embroidery, lanterns and more. Hoi An has also become famous for its tailoring, with a great variety of fabrics and tailors to choose from. Bring your favourite piece of clothing or even just a picture, and you'll be able to have it copied.

On arrival, your tour leader will take you on an orientation cycle tour around the outer areas of the town. Cycle through rice paddies and visit local farmers.

#### Included Activities

* My Lai Memorial (Quy Nhon) Entrance Fee
* Hoi An - Ancient town

#### Optional Activities

* Hoi An - My Son Cham day trip - VND800000 ($43)
* Hoi An - Thu Bon river boat trip - VND100000 ($5.50)
* Hoi An - Bicycle hire - VND40000 ($2.50)

## Days 13-15 Hue

Departing Hoi An, we can stop at China Beach (known officially as My Khe Beach) before crossing the dramatic Hai Van Pass to the picturesque fishing village of Lang Co. After a quick stop, continue on to Hue (approx 5 hours including stops).

As the former imperial capital of Vietnam, Hue holds the treasures of Vietnam's royal past and is a curious mix of bustling streets and tranquil settings.

Visit the Imperial Citadel, including the Forbidden Purple City. The latter was almost totally destroyed during the Vietnam War's Tet Offensive, but the foliage-covered ruins are still atmospheric and the gaping holes left by bombs give an idea of the destruction wreaked upon the country during the war.

Enjoy a dragon boat cruise on the Perfume River, and a visit to Thien Mu Pagoda, considered by many to be the unofficial symbol of Hue. It's an active Buddhist monastery with its origins dating back to 1601. Visit the royal tomb of Emperor Tu Duc, with its central lake set amid a grove of frangipani and pine trees, and we may visit what many believe to be the most majestic of all the royal tombs, Minh Mang.

The bustling Dong Ba Market offers a plethora of goods and foods to see and sample, and it's a good place to try some of the specialities that graced the Nguyen emperors' banquet tables, such as the banh khoai, a royal rice cake.

Board a late evening flight from Hue to Hanoi.

#### Included Activities

* Hue - Imperial citadel
* Hue - Perfume river cruise and Thien Mu Pagoda
* Hue - Royal tomb

#### Optional Activities

* Hue - Bicycle hire - VND40000 ($2.50)

## Day 16 Hanoi

The capital of Vietnam is a charming city with a population of over six million. Hanoi is famous for its beautiful lakes, shaded boulevards, verdant public parks and its thriving Old Quarter, which is an architectural museum piece with blocks of ochre buildings retaining the air of a 1930s provincial French town. As Vietnam develops to compete with other South-East Asian countries, the beautiful Hoan Kiem Lake reflects the contrasts of modern office buildings, old Buddhist temples and the tangle of ancient streets in its still surface.

Visit the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum complex, which includes the One Pillar Pagoda and the Ho Chi Minh Museum.

In the evening, enjoy a performance of the unique Water Puppets.

#### Included Activities

* Water puppet show
* Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum and Museum
* Mountain Bike cycle tour

#### Optional Activities

* Fine Arts Museum - VND20000 ($1.10)
* Hoa Lo 'Hanoi Hilton' Prison - VND20000 ($1.10)
* Temple of Literature - VND20000 ($1.10)
* Women's Museum - VND30000 ($1.60)
* Army Museum - VND20000 ($1.10)

## Day 17-18 Halong Bay

Drive to Bai Chay Harbour, gateway to the famous World Heritage site of Halong Bay (approx 4 hours).

Halong Bay is a breathtaking secluded harbour with 2,000 limestone islands rising from the emerald waters of Bac Bo Gulf. One of Vietnam's most scenic regions, this area of about 1,500 sq km is dotted with innumerable beaches and grottos, created over thousands of years by waves and wind.

Board our private boat and cruise among the dramatic limestone peaks. There's an opportunity to swim in the famed South China Sea (known locally as the East Sea), as well as to explore caves filled with stunning stalactites and stalagmites. Spend a peaceful night on board, beneath a night sky alive with stars. Our sailing junk has twin-share cabins that have air-conditioning and private facilities. There's also a dining room and bar where we enjoy a sumptuous lunch and dinner.

#### Included Activities

* Halong Bay - Overnight boat cruise

## Days 19-20 Hanoi

Take a bus to Hanoi (approx 3.5 hours).

Enjoy a farewell group dinner where you can exchange details with your fellow travellers, and enjoy one final authentic Vietnamese meal, and possibly a night of Karaoke at one of the many Karaoke clubs.

# Itinerary disclaimer

Occasionally our itineraries are updated during the year to incorporate improvements stemming from past travellers' comments and our own research. The information given in this itinerary may be slightly different to that in the brochure. It's very important that you print and review a final copy of your Trip Notes a couple of days prior to travel, in case there have been changes that affect your plans. For the latest updated Trip Notes please visit our website: www.Sojourntravel.com

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