

## Reunification Express (Hanoi to Saigon)

Visiting: Vietnam

Code: GTRE

Tour price from **GBP 416.00** for **11 days** - Land Only

Plus a local payment of **USD 150.00pp** payable locally

**Up to 20% off all dates departing up to the 31st October 2012. Was GBP 520 - Now GBP 416**

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# Reunification Express (Hanoi to Saigon)

## Trip Notes

At Imaginative Traveller we always aim to provide accurate information for our travellers. Unfortunately information such as the price of optional activities is occasionally subject to change, and this means that we are constantly revising our trip notes. In order to ensure that you have the most up to date information for your trip we suggest that you check the trip notes for your tour around one month before departure.

**Trip code:** GTRE

**Trip valid from:** 05/02/2012

**Trip valid until:** 30/06/2013

**Trip length:** 11 days

**Trip starts in:** Hanoi

**Trip ends in:** Saigon, Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam

**Maximum group size:** 16



### Highlights

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Vietnam's Northern Capital Hanoi

The Tailors And Market Traders Of UNESCO World Heritage-listed Hoi An

Perfume River Cruise To The Thien Mu Pagoda And Royal Mausoleum Of Emperor Tu Duc

Nha Trang Cruise - The Islands Of The South China Sea

Cu Chi Tunnels - The Underground Network Of The Viet Minh And Viet Cong

Beginning in the nation's capital, Hanoi, this north-to-south tour of Vietnam allows you to visit all of the country's most popular destinations in just 10 days. Most of our travelling will be done aboard the Reunification Express train, a fascinating and unforgettable way to view the unfolding landscape of Vietnam. We begin by discovering the charms of graceful Hanoi before taking the train down to a city that's steeped in history and culture, Vietnam's former imperial capital, Hue. A short drive through some remarkable rural and coastal scenery brings us to Hoi An. We'll spend time in this wonderfully well-preserved ancient port town, a favourite of every traveller to Vietnam. Further south at the beach resort city of Nha Trang we'll cruise the offshore islands and relax in the sun before once again catching the overnight sleeper train down to the steamy southern city of Saigon.

## Itinerary

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**Day  
1**

Hanoi

Your trip starts today with your arrival in Hanoi. No activities are planned until your evening group meeting, so you may arrive at any time. Please check the noticeboard in the hotel lobby, located on the ground floor, for a notice containing details of your tour. This will advise you of your tour guide's name, telephone number and the time and location of your group meeting. Normally this meeting takes place around 6pm. Until your meeting we encourage you to get out and discover the delights that Vietnam has to offer. Make sure that you take a hotel business card so that you will be able to find your way back to the hotel.

**Day  
2**

Hanoi

Although there has been a settlement here since the 3rd century AD, the city of Hanoi can trace its origins back to 1010 when Emperor Le Thai To moved his capital from Hoa Lu to this site. From the 1880s to World War II, Hanoi was developed as the French colonial capital of French Indochina and many of the old structures in Hanoi were razed to make way for new French buildings. Today's Hanoi people take a lot of pride in their grand old colonial buildings and these together with the wide spacious boulevards and tree-lined lakes help make Hanoi one of most graceful and charming cities in South East Asia. After breakfast, we'll take a half-day walking tour of the city, showcasing some of Hanoi's most interesting attractions. We'll begin by visiting the One Pillar Pagoda near the dour, Soviet-inspired mausoleum of Ho Chi Minh. (Please note that the mausoleum is closed on Mondays, so you will need to have visited it yesterday morning (Sunday) if you wish to see Uncle Ho lying in state. Also please be warned that opening times are also very limited and it is closed for up to three months a year.) The One Pillar Pagoda was first constructed in 1049 and as such it was Hanoi's oldest structure. If it doesn't look that old to you, it's because the French blew it up in 1954 as a parting gesture and the current edifice is a replica of the original. From here we'll walk to the Temple of Literature, a wonderful name for a wonderful place. Founded in 1070, it was Vietnam's first educational institute and a place where candidates for the position of Mandarin were examined. Finally we'll visit the Hoa Lo Prison, probably better known to most of us as the 'Hanoi Hilton'. Hanoi's tallest building now occupies most of the original site, and no, it doesn't belong to the Hilton Hotel chain, but the eastern wall and a small section of the prison behind have been retained and today serve as a museum. It mostly serves as a reminder of the Vietnamese who were incarcerated here by their French masters. The remainder of the afternoon is free for us to wander around town and check out the lifestyles of Hanoi's people. One of the best places to do this is the city's 'Old Quarter', situated to the north of the lake. It's a great place (and an easy place) to get lost in for a couple of hours. However, it's easy to find our bearings if we remember that its boundaries are the railway line to the west and the north, the Red River to the east and Hoan Kiem Lake to the south. This evening we board the Reunification Express for our overnight train journey down to Hue. (N.B: This is a local train and conditions on board are generally quite basic. Also, breakfast tomorrow is not always available on the train, so it is recommended that you purchase some breakfast supplies before boarding in Hanoi). (B)

**Day  
3**

## Hue

We reach Hue in the early morning. During the reign of the Nguyen emperors, Hue served as Vietnam's capital from 1801 to 1945. Dripping with history, and often with rain, it has a certain serene and classic character that sets it apart from all other provincial centres. After disembarking from the train, we'll take a short spell to refresh in our hotel rooms before mounting our local 'shopping' bikes, as they're known here, and cycling down to the riverside. Here, we'll place the bikes on board our 'Dragon Boat', and enjoy a leisurely cruise up the timeless Perfume River to visit the Thien Mu pagoda, one of the oldest and most significant pagodas in Hue, the religious capital of Vietnam. You have the choice of cycling back into town from here, approximately 8kms, or staying on the boat to head back down river to the Citadel. The bikes are ours for the remainder of the day and we can spend a couple of hours exploring Hue's massive walled citadel and the Forbidden Purple Palace enclosed within. The palace's splendid 'Ngo Mon' gate gives little hint of the wholesale destruction that has taken place inside at the hands of various occupying forces. The bloody 'Battle of Hue' during the 1968 Tet offensive all but finished it off but skilled Vietnamese craftsmen, with the help of UNESCO and other non-government organisations are hard at work restoring and rebuilding what remains. Sadly it can never be returned to its former glory, but it's still a fascinating insight into Imperial Vietnam. Tickets to enter the Forbidden Purple Palace are available at the main gate opposite the flag tour and will cost you about US\$4 (55,000VND). The remainder of our time in Hue is free and we can use our bicycles to further explore the city and its imposing citadel.

Day  
4-6

## Hoi An – Nha Trang

On Wednesday we have an enjoyable four-hour drive to Hoi An in the afternoon, through a region of Vietnam that's blessed with magnificent rural and coastal scenery. Shortly after passing through pretty Lang Co Beach, Highway 1 begins its winding ascent through Hai Van Pass or, 'Pass of the Ocean Clouds'. On the other side we drive through the busy streets of Danang and pass by the massive former US airbase that was, in 1968, the busiest airport in the world with all manner of aircraft coming and going in support of South Vietnam's war effort. The ancient and historic town of Hoi An was for three centuries one of the most important ports in Central Vietnam, visited by sailing ships from all over the world seeking trade in silk, ceramics, spice etc. In the late 19th Century, the Tu Bon River, linking the port to the open sea, began to silt up and became unnavigable to large vessels. Trade moved up the coast to Tourane, now modern day Danang, and Hoi An went back to being a sleepy little fishing and rice farming community. Today however, Hoi An's fortunes are once again riding on the crest of the wave as Vietnam's Number One tourist destination. This is largely due to the fact that the old town's narrow streets are packed with a brilliant blend of Chinese, Portuguese and Japanese style of architecture that has changed little from what it must have been like during its heydays as a major port of trade. We include a tour of the "Old Town" where you can visit an ancient house, a Chinese Assembly Hall, the Japanese Covered Bridge and a museum. In your free time afterwards we can rent bicycles and set off to explore the surrounding countryside, take a boat trip on the river, relax on the nearby beach, enjoy the wonderful cuisine on offer at some of the town's numerous cheap cafes or have some clothes made up. Hoi An has nearly 100 'silk shops' offering same day service for tailor made clothes at unbelievably low prices. If you'd like to venture further afield, it's only a short trip up the road to Vietnam's world famous 'China Beach' and the adjacent Marble Mountains. If you'd like to learn more about the Kingdom of Champa, the ancient ruins at My Son can be visited inside half a day. Here you can see more than 70 monuments spread over a large area. 'Spread' being the operative word, after the French meticulously began restoring the site, the Americans came along and blew it to bits. However, if only for its beautiful setting, it's still worth a visit and our tour guide can help you to arrange transport if you would like to see it. Depending on the train schedule, we

plan to leave Hoi An on Friday mid-morning and drive back into Danang then take the day train from here to Nha Trang. (N.B: Vietnam Railways often changes the departure time of this local train so it may operate as an overnight sleeper instead. Either way, the conditions on board are generally quite basic. Be prepared for this and don't forget your spirit of adventure!! Also, breakfast for Day 7 is not always available on the train so it is recommended that you purchase some breakfast supplies before boarding in Danang). (3B)

### Day 7-8 Nha Trang - Island Cruise

With fabulous sunny weather for most of the year, crystal clear blue waters surrounding a string of offshore islands and a beach that spans the whole length of the city, it's little wonder that Nha Trang has become Vietnam's premier beach resort. We'll have plenty of time to worship the sun during our two full days in Nha Trang, and we'll head out onto the water for the day to cruise around the islands. Bring your towel and swimmers because there's a stack of time for swimming and snorkelling. At lunchtime our crew will serve up a sumptuous feast of freshly caught seafood and other delights for non-fish eaters. On Sunday evening, we board the Reunification Express for the final time and make our overnight journey to Saigon. (L)

### Day 9 Saigon

We wake to the sounds of frenzied activity this morning as our train rolls to a halt at Saigon railway station. Officially renamed Ho Chi Minh City after reunification in 1975, most people here still prefer to use the old name, Saigon, and they don't seem to mind if you do as well. Once referred to as the 'Pearl of the Orient', Saigon, with its population unofficially nearing 8 million is Vietnam's largest city. As a city that stands in stark contrast to Hanoi, it lacks the charm of its northern cousin but still has a certain laid back tropical ambiance that makes it a distinctly South East Asian city. Our hotel is centrally located and convenient to all of the city's best restaurants, bars, nightclubs and most interesting sights. Reunification Palace, the War Remnants Museum, Ben Thanh Market, Notre Dame Cathedral and the adjacent Gustav Eiffel designed Central Post Office are all within walking distance of each other. But to make the most of your time, you might like to consider hiring a 'cyclo' (bicycle rickshaw) for touring the city sights. You'll find cyclo drivers right outside our hotel and the going rate is approximately 50,000 VND per hour. Make sure you negotiate a rate before setting out.

### Day 10-11 Saigon - Cu Chi Tunnels

You may wish to take a spare shirt with you this morning because we're literally going to 'get down and get dirty'. Our excursion to the north of Saigon would have been considered risky business indeed 30 odd years ago but today the peaceful farming communities around the former Viet Cong stronghold of Cu Chi Tunnels belie the horrors of the Vietnam War. Begun by the Viet Minh and later expanded by the Viet Cong, Cu Chi's tunnels were constructed to conduct covert operations and then quickly hide from the enemy. There are reputed to be around 200 kilometres of underground tunnels within the area and in some places they even managed to penetrate the perimeters of nearby US military bases. We'll actually be given the opportunity of crawling through a section of the tunnels while we're here, and learn how the brave men and women of Cu Chi built underground hospitals, kitchens and meeting rooms during their struggle for a unified Vietnam. Early afternoon we return to Saigon where you are free to spend your remaining time exploring some of the city's attractions. Your Vietnam tour finishes after breakfast on Wednesday morning. (2B)

## Itinerary Variation

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While the information presented here details our planned itinerary, including routes taken, activities included, accommodation and meeting times, please accept that unforeseen changes may occur. We are constantly on the lookout to improve our program and further enhance your experience. Naturally, we will keep you up to date with any last minute amendments to your tour.

## About The Imaginative Traveller

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Our aim has always been to provide exceptional travel experiences. We believe that adventure travel should be stimulating, and that it should give you an authentic experience of a place. We want our travellers to relish the amazing diversity of countries and cultures the world has to offer. Our focus is on innovation, not imitation.

## Obsessed with quality

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One of our strengths has been our obsession with quality. We've always believed that our commitment to you doesn't end as soon as you've paid for your holiday. On the contrary, it is just beginning. Whilst most operators simply get a local company to handle the day to day operation of their tours, we do it all ourselves. We have managers for each of our **key destinations** around the world and all our small groups are escorted by our own leaders. Our local teams include guides, drivers, administration staff and contacts in the local community who help us ensure that our adventures are active and involving.

For comparability, all prices in this dossier are quoted in one currency. We use the US Dollar since that is familiar to most. However, once on tour you will need to pay for all goods and services in the local currency. See your Country Dossier for details of exchange rates.

## Trip Grade

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### Culture

Whether you're taking in man's greatest works at places like Petra or Angkor Wat, experiencing grand set-pieces like the Trans-Mongolian Railway or trying your hand at regional specialities like tango in Buenos Aires, getting to grips with local cultures is what travel's all about. A few tips from a guide and a sense of adventure are pretty much all you need. So what are you waiting for? It's time to get the lowdown on high Tibet among Lhasa's magisterial temples; follow up Delhi's eye-popping bustle with a fix of its fiery food; and mix manic markets and Incan masterpieces in Peru.

## **Fitness**

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A reasonably good level of fitness is required for this holiday and you should be in good health. Any physical preparation will always be to your advantage. Anyone with respiratory or cardiac problems, or over the age of 60, should fully consult their medical adviser prior to booking and we may require full medical clearance.

## **Included**

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- Gecko's expert English-speaking local tour guide throughout the tour, and local site guides at some sites.
- Reunification Express journeys – Hanoi to Hue (overnight), Danang to Nha Trang (day), and Nha Trang to Saigon (overnight).
- Sightseeing (including entrance fees where relevant): Hanoi - One Pillar Pagoda, Temple of Literature and Hoa Lo Prison (Hanoi Hilton); Hai Van Pass; Hoi An's 'Old Town'; and the Cu Chi Tunnels.
- Local 'shopping' bike ride around Hue and Dragon Boat cruise up the Perfume River to visit Thien Mu pagoda (with option to cycle back through the countryside).
- Day cruise on the South China Sea in Nha Trang, with a freshly-caught seafood lunch included (non-seafood options available).
- Free time to explore Hanoi, Hue, Hoi An, Nha Trang and Saigon.

## **Not included**

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International flights, arrival and departure transfers, departure and airport taxes, visas, all other meals, all optional tours or activities during free time, transfers outside of the tour program, travel insurance, tips and items of a personal nature.

## **Meals**

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6 breakfasts, 1 lunch

## **Accommodation**

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3 nights Sleeper train, 7 nights Hotel

## Single room supplement

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Most of our travellers like the thought of travelling with a few like-minded souls. There are NO compulsory single supplements on most tours as we simply arrange twin shared accommodation for you and another tour member of the same sex. But don't worry if that doesn't appeal. We do understand there are times when you just want a bit of privacy and 'me' time so we are more than happy to arrange a private room upon request when you book.

## Transport

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Bicycle, Boat, Bus, Train

## Optional excursions

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\*prices below are guide only

### **Hanoi - Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum**

Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum - Free

### **Hanoi - Ho Chi Minh's Museum**

- US\$1.30

### **Hanoi - Taxi to Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum**

Taxi to Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum - US\$5

### **Hanoi - Taxi to Ho Chi Minh's Museum**

Taxi to Ho Chi Minh's Museum - US\$5

### **Hoi An - Bicycle Hire – Per day**

Bicycle Hire – Per day - US\$2

### **Hoi An - Car to My Son Cham ruins**

Car to My Son Cham ruins - US\$25

### **Hoi An - My Son Cham ruins**

My Son Cham ruins - US\$5

### **Hoi An - Tu Bon River boat trip**

Tu Bon River boat trip - US\$10

### **Hue - Bicycle Hire – Per day**

Bicycle Hire – Per day - US\$2

**Hue - DMZ tour (time permitting)**

DMZ tour (time permitting) - US\$15

**Nha Trang - Bao Dai's Villa**

Bao Dai's Villa - US\$1

**Nha Trang - Mud Baths**

Mud Baths - From US\$5

**Nha Trang - Return Taxi to Bao Dai's Villa**

Return Taxi to Bao Dai's Villa - US\$8

**Nha Trang - Return taxi to Mud Baths**

Return taxi to Mud Baths - US\$12

**Saigon - Reunification Palace**

Reunification Palace - US\$1

**Saigon - Taxi to Reunification Palace**

Taxi to Reunification Palace - US\$4

**Saigon - Taxi to War Remnants Museum**

Taxi to War Remnants Museum - US\$4

**Saigon - War Remnants Museum**

War Remnants Museum - US\$1

**The itinerary and supplementary information has been compiled with care and provided in good faith. However it may be subject to change, and does not form part of a contract between the client and The Imaginative Traveller.**

## **Responsible Travel - Travellers' Guidelines**

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At Imaginative Traveller we love helping our clients experience the beauty and cultures of the destinations we visit. However, hand in hand with this we have always been aware that we have a responsibility to minimise any negative impacts that tourism can bring.

Responsible Travel is twofold. It's about taking people to the places they want to go in a safe and responsible manner but also about respecting and maintaining the natural and often delicate balance of the destination. Economic gain from tourism is often fundamental to a country, but should never be at the expense of its culture or the environment.

## Our Aims

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It is our aim to provide journeys that have minimal negative and maximum positive impact on the places we visit.

We do not believe that, as visitors, we should impose our own cultures on others; rather that we should experience foreign cultures and appreciate them for what they are.

Whilst it is our aim to show destinations and cultures in a positive light, we do not believe in papering over the cracks or shielding visitors from the realities of life. This does not mean, however, that we condone or endorse certain situations or regimes that may be in place.

Our guidelines are meant not as rigid instructions but rather as suggestions to make our holidays more enjoyable – for everybody. As cultural and environmental sensitivities vary from country to country more specific guidelines can be found in our individual country and trip dossiers.

## Travellers' Guidelines

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- ✓ Before you depart try to spend some time familiarising yourself with the destination you will be travelling to – their culture and customs. The country dossiers on our website offer detailed information about all the regions we visit. They also include some useful phrases in the local language for you to use on your trip! A few words of the local language can open up many more opportunities for you to interact with the people you will meet.
- ✓ Although it is tempting to give out pens, sweets and money to people begging, and particularly tempting to give to children, we feel that this encourages a begging mentality and has a long-term negative impact on communities. If someone begging earns more than someone in the same community who works this can discourage local employment. If children regularly bring home money it may discourage their parents from sending them to school. It is of course your own personal choice but you could consider giving to registered charities or contributing to our Responsible Travel fund instead. Money donated through our fund to our worldwide projects is matched pound for pound by Imaginative Traveller and used to help local grassroots projects.
- ✓ Always ask permission to photograph local people and respect their decision if they would prefer not to have their picture taken.
- ✓ Respect local dress codes, especially at religious sites. Our tour leaders are always on hand to give you advice about this.
- ✓ In many of the countries we visit you might see examples of animal cruelty (for example dancing bears, performing monkeys and snake charmers). Please do not take photographs of this or offer money as it encourages the activity.
- ✓ Respect the environment you are in. It sounds obvious but do not throw litter, take it with you or use rubbish bins! You may see locals throwing rubbish on the street but do not follow their example!

- ✓ When shopping in countries where haggling is the norm – enjoy it and only pay what you feel is a fair price for the goods you are purchasing. However, remember that the shopkeeper does have to make a living so do stop once you have reached a price you are happy with. Bargaining should be fun but always remember that a small amount can mean much more to the vendor than to you.
- ✓ Endeavor to take home souvenirs made locally; the money you spend can be very important to the local communities. However, do use your common sense and don't buy anything that you think might be made out of endangered animals or plants.
- ✓ To help keep as much money as possible in the host country - try to eat in locally owned restaurants and order local drinks and produce rather than international brands.
- ✓ In hotels do be conscious of how much water you are using. Many of the areas we visit regularly have shortages; try not to have hour long showers! Don't leave lights, air conditioners or fans on when you leave the room – you wouldn't at home!
- ✓ Respect the environment you are in, especially when in national parks or reserves. Pay attention to rules about keeping on paths, keeping a distance from animals and not removing any of the natural habitat.
- ✓ Relax and immerse yourself in the differences of the culture you are in – you'll be back home in the familiar soon enough (and wishing you were still on holiday!). These cultural differences are part of what makes your experience special.

If you would like to offset the carbon dioxide that will be produced on your flights you can do this on our website ([on our Responsible travel page](#)). We work with climatecare, who will reduce the equivalent amount of carbon dioxide that you produce in another part of the World through their emission reduction projects. These projects are low carbon efficient technologies in developing countries and not only serve to reduce emissions but also help to spread the adoption of low carbon technologies and improve the quality of life for local communities. Details of climatecare's projects can be [found on their website](#).



If you would like to contribute to our Worldwide projects, helping communities all over the World, you can also do this on our website or with a sales consultant. Please refer to our [responsible travel page](#) on the website for details of our current projects. Any donation you make will be matched £ for £ by Imaginative Traveller (up to a maximum of £1000).

Have a great trip!

Please do let us know if you have any comments about responsible travel at [rto@imtrav.net](mailto:rto@imtrav.net)

**The Imaginative Traveller & Gecko's Adventures** This trip is operated by our partner company, Gecko's Adventures. Gecko's is an Australia based company with more than 10 years experience in adventure travel and they share our ethos for offering unique holiday adventures. As this is a code shared departure you can expect there to be both Imaginative Traveller and Gecko's travellers on your trip.

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