

## Highlights of Vietnam

Visiting: Vietnam  
Code: PAHV

Tour price from **GBP 1370.00** for 17 days - Land Only

extra  
comfort

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## Highlights of Vietnam 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: PAHV

Trip valid from: 01/01/2008

Trip valid until: 30/06/2012

Trip length: 17 days

Trip starts in: Saigon, Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam

Trip ends in: Hanoi

Maximum group size: 15



### Highlights

'Junk' Boat Cruise Among The Limestone Karsts Of UNESCO World Heritage-listed Halong Bay

Nha Trang Cruise - The Islands Of The South China Sea

The Bustling Streets And Cyclos Of Saigon

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

Vietnam's Northern Capital Hanoi

The highlights and hidden charms of a beautiful country

There will never be a better time to experience the emergence of Vietnam. We start in bustling Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) and head for the tranquil hill station of Dalat. In the old port town of Hoi An, Portuguese, Chinese and Japanese influences from bygone eras are reflected in the charming architecture. It's also an ideal place for shopping or having a silk outfit tailored. At Hue, we visit the crumbling ruins of the Purple Forbidden City and explore an elaborate tomb of one of the former emperors. A trip on the famous Reunification Express takes us to delightful Hanoi, before we complete our journey at Halong Bay with a cruise amongst 3000 limestone pinnacles.

You can also start your Vietnam experience two days earlier and visit the bustling and colourful Mekong Delta. See 'Itinerary Variation' in the Detailed Itinerary for further information.

## Itinerary

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Day  
1

Saigon

Your trip starts today with your arrival in Saigon. No activities are planned until your evening group meeting, so you may arrive at any time. Please check the welcome board or reception desk, located on the ground floor of the hotel, for information on your upcoming tour. This will advise you of your tour leader's name, telephone number and the time and location of your group's Welcome Meeting. Normally, the meeting will be at 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. Please note that your tour leader will collect your travel insurance details at the meeting, so please bring them with you. The meeting is generally followed by an optional group meal out at one of Saigon's many fantastic eating spots.

Day  
2

Saigon

We head out of town today to visit the Cu Chi Tunnels. Cu Chi is actually the name of the district which covers an extensive underground network (approximately 200 kilometres) of tunnels dug initially by the Viet Minh and later expanded by the Viet Cong. The tunnels contained hospitals, plus accommodation and schools, and were used extensively for refuge and storage and also utilised as a military base for the Viet Cong close to Saigon. The 1968 Tet Offensive was launched from Cu Chi with surprising effect. A section of the tunnels has been widened to allow tourists to get a feel for what the life underground must have been

like. We will also visit Tay Ninh, which is the headquarters of the Cao Dai religion. We will attempt to arrive for the mid-day church service when the followers fill the hall wearing coloured robes, a symbol of the curious combination of the religions of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. (Please note that the church service does not operate during Tet.) (B)

### Day 3 Saigon

Today is a free day to explore this vibrant and captivating city. Most places of interest are located close to the centre of town - the Reunification Palace, War Remnants Museum, Notre Dame Cathedral and Ben Thanh Market. You may choose to get around by cyclo, which is the local version of a trishaw. The going rate is approximately 50,000 VND per hour but make sure you negotiate a price before setting out. Take time out to relax in one of the cafes on the tree-lined boulevards or enjoy a drink in the Continental Hotel, the meeting place for journalists during the Vietnam War. (B)

### Day 4 Dalat

We start our northbound journey today with the first stop being Dalat, one of Vietnam's most charming towns. The drive offers fantastic views. The influence of the French is prevalent as Dalat was founded as a hill station to enable the colonials to escape the heat and chaos of Saigon. The city is set around a lake and surrounded by forests, waterfalls and rolling countryside. (B)

### Day 5 Dalat

We have a free day to enjoy the sights in and around Dalat. A pleasant way to get around is by bicycle. This is also a great place for sitting in cafes, relaxing and soaking up the atmosphere. Close to Dalat are local Lat and Chill tribal villages which we sometimes have the option to visit (this depends on the government restrictions at the time). However, we must purchase special permits, which our tour leader can help, us to obtain. (B)

### Day 6 Nha Trang

We make our way to the coast today for some 'R' (B)

### Day 7 Nha Trang

A highlight of a visit to Nha Trang is a day trip out on a boat exploring the islands of the South China Sea. We spend a day on the water enjoying swimming, snorkelling, lazing on a beach and feasting on a seafood lunch. (B, L)

**Day  
8**

## Quy Nhon

This is a very long travelling day. Departing Nha Trang, we drive past the colourful fishing port before making our way north, travelling along the coast. The drive is long, but the views are fantastic and we can make stops as we please, including a stop at the impressive Po Nagar Cham tower. Part of the pleasure of travelling in Vietnam is the simple joy of seeing green rice fields dotted with conical hats and the smiling faces of the people. We arrive in Quy Nhon in the evening for an overnight stop to break our long journey in what is basically a town that sees very few tourists. (B)

**Day  
9**

## Hoi An

We depart for Quang Ngai early and make a stop around lunchtime at the site of the My Lai Massacre. The area and the people are now at peace and, along the old road to the memorial and museum site, we can stop to take a walk through the colourful country roadside markets. We arrive in Hoi An in the afternoon and settle in for our two-night stay in this historical 'oasis'. Hoi An was originally a Cham port town, but has been influenced down the centuries by a myriad of traders from various cultures. There is a distinctly Chinese appearance with pagodas and assembly halls scattered along the small streets. Hoi An was once a bustling port in centuries gone by, before the river silted up. Today it is a delightful backwater town with an air of liveliness about it. The tranquillity and charm of Hoi An, coupled with its low tiled houses, makes it one of the most delightful places to visit in Vietnam. It is a constant favourite of our travellers and staff. A walking tour takes us to see a historic house (formerly home to a prominent trader), the Japanese Covered Bridge, a Chinese assembly hall and a museum. (B)

**Day  
10**

## Hoi An

Today is a free day to explore Hoi An and its surrounding areas. The market is a good place to buy silk, which can be made up into fine garments, all within a day. Close to town there is a nice beach, which can be reached easily by bicycle. (B)

**Day  
11**

## Hue

Leaving Hoi An, we continue north for further sightseeing. China Beach, enjoyed as an 'R' (B)

**Day  
12**

## Hue - overnight train

Hue was once the capital of Vietnam. The royal mausoleum of Emperor Tu Duc and the beautiful Thien Mu Pagoda are not to be missed. We include these in a guided cruise on the Perfume River, which also gives us a taste of the tranquil countryside. In the evening we have an early dinner before boarding the train for our overnight journey to Hanoi. The train is very basic; we travel in 'soft sleeper' class which is a compartment for up to four people; a communal environment. The beds on board come with a pillow and sheets, although some people may wish to bring their own sleeping sheet (purely optional and not a

necessity). Also, breakfast tomorrow is not the best food you will find in Vietnam, so it is recommended that you purchase some snacks before boarding in Hue. This journey is in keeping with the adventurous nature of our trips and allows you to experience a taste of the 'real' Vietnam. (B)

### Day 13 Hanoi

Hanoi is one of Asia's most enchanting cities. This northern capital is a quiet, contradiction of its southern counterpart. Its relaxed ambience is a joy, with exploration best on foot or bicycle. The shopping is fun and the many lakes and parks provide enjoyable escapes. We have enough time this afternoon to explore the Old Quarter streets named after the goods once offered for sale there, including Silk Street, Rice Street and Jewellers Street. In the evening there is an option to enjoy a performance of the unique Water Puppets. In your free time you may also like to take a trip to the outskirts of town and visit the excellent Museum of Ethnology. Please note that museums in Hanoi are usually closed on Mondays.

### Day 14 Hanoi

We take a guided half-day tour of Hanoi, visiting the major sights, including the Temple of Literature, One Pillar Pagoda, and paying a homage to Vietnam's most famous revolutionary, Ho Chi Minh. We also include lunch at the KOTO café – an amazing project aimed at providing vocational training and experience in the hospitality industry for underprivileged young people. All the staff you meet at this café have come from poor backgrounds. The remainder of the day is free to further explore Hanoi or catch up on some shopping in Hang Gai Street. (B, L)

### Day 15 Halong Bay

You can leave luggage behind at our Hanoi hotel and pack an overnight bag. It is a three-hour drive to Halong Bay, truly one of Vietnam's most impressive scenic sights. Views of sailing junks navigating past over 3000 limestone islands and rocky outcrops jutting out of the bay are nothing short of spectacular. We travel to Bai Chay (Halong City West) where we board a boat for an exploration of the bay, enjoying a seafood lunch and dinner (non-seafood also available), as well as spending a night on board. We visit one cave in the area and, in the warmer months, there is a chance to enjoy a swim. Conditions may be somewhat more communal compared to staying in a hotel, however it is a wonderful experience to be spending a night on the bay – weather permitting, the views at sunset are incredible. Bedding and towels are provided. All boats used by us have twin-share cabins with en suite facilities and air-conditioning. There may also be the chance to do some kayaking (optional and extra cost involved) on Halong Bay. Accommodation on the Halong Bay cruise is on a twin-share basis, due to the small number of rooms available on the boats. If you have paid a single supplement, please note that this does not cover the cruise. (B, L, D)

### Day 16

## Halong Bay - Hanoi

In the morning we sail back to the port, where we disembark and drive back to Hanoi. Arriving back in the capital, we have free time to wander around and enjoy some of the city's other attractions. Perhaps afternoon tea at the Metropole Hotel? (B)

**Day  
17** Hanoi

The tour ends after breakfast. A transfer to the airport is not included; however, your tour leader will be on hand to advise you as to the options available. (B)

### 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**

## **Included**

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- The services of Peregrine's expert English-speaking local tour leader throughout the tour, and local guides at some sites.
- Sightseeing (including entrance fees where relevant): Cu Chi Tunnels; Tay Ninh – the headquarters of the Cao Dai religion; Po Nagar Cham tower; site of the My Lai Massacre; Hoi An historical sites; China Beach; Marble Mountain; Hai Van Pass; Hue's Citadel, Purple Forbidden City, Thien Mu Pagoda and Emperor Tu Duc's Mausoleum; and Hanoi's One Pillar Pagoda, Ho Chi Minh's House and Temple of Literature.
- Full day boat cruise on the South China Sea off Nha Trang with a seafood lunch included.
- Perfume River cruise in Hue.
- Overnight cruise on a traditional boat on Halong Bay, enjoying a seafood lunch and dinner (non-seafood also available) and resting in twin-share cabins with en suite facilities and air-conditioning.
- Lunch at KOTO café in Hanoi – a project providing vocational hospitality training and experience to underprivileged young people.
- Overnight train from Hue to Hanoi with accommodation in 'soft sleeper' class – a compartment for up to four people with beds (a pillow and sheets provided).
- Arrival transfer.

## **Not included**

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International flights, airport departure taxes, visas, insurance, other meals, any optional tours and activities during free time, tips and items of a personal nature.

## **Meals**

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15 breakfasts, 3 lunches, 1 dinner

## Accommodation

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14 nights Comfortable hotel, 1 night Overnight train, 1 night Boat

## 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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Boat, Private vehicle, Train

## Passport

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Well before travelling, please ensure that you have a current passport, with an accurate photo, that is valid for at least six months after your scheduled return home. Also check that your airline tickets are in exactly the same name as your passport. Some countries may require that you have a return air ticket, or have sufficient funds to purchase such a ticket.

## Visas

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**Vietnam** - Please note that visa requirements can and do change. It is essential that you confirm requirements with the nearest relevant embassy or check with your travel agent before you travel. At the time of writing, a visa for Vietnam is required by most travellers visiting Vietnam including Australians, New Zealanders, Americans, British and Canadians. All other nationalities should check with the Vietnamese Embassy or Consulate in their country for up-to-date visa information. Your visa must be obtained prior to the commencement of your tour, as visas are not normally issued to travellers on arrival in Vietnam. In fact you will be likely to be denied boarding your aircraft bound for Vietnam without a visa.

It is your responsibility to ensure you have all required visas for your trip. Rules and regulations governing the issuance of visas are constantly changing, and vary for different nationalities and you should check visa requirements with your travel agent or relevant consular authority well before travel.

## Vaccinations

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It is your responsibility to ensure you have all required visas for your trip. Rules and regulations governing the issuance of visas are constantly changing, and vary for different nationalities and you should check visa requirements with your travel agent or relevant consular authority well before travel.

## Other information

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On Day 12 there is the option to fly from Hue to Hanoi.

**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 & Peregrine Adventures This trip is operated by our partner company, Peregrine Adventures. Peregrine is an Australia based company with more than 30 years experience in adventure travel and they share our ethos for offering unique holiday adventures. As this is a codeshared departure you can expect there to be both Imaginative Traveller and Peregrine travellers on your trip.

Last updated: 11/04/2011

## Questions?

If you have any questions please [click here](#) to view our Q & A page where you can view questions other travellers have asked and submit your own.