

General Trip info

Map

Trip Code: ITVFA

Trip Length: 12-13

Trip starts in: Hanoi

Trip ends in: Ho Chi Minh

Meals: 11 Breakfasts included
5 Lunches included
2 Dinners included

Accommodation: Hotel (9 nights), Overnight boat (1 night), Overnight sleeper train (1 night), Homestay (1 night)

Transport: Boat, Minibus, Overnight sleeper train, Plane, Private Bus

Daily Itinerary

Day 1

Hanoi

Xin chao! Welcome to Vietnam. Hanoi is famous for its beautiful lakes, shaded boulevards, verdant public parks and its thriving Old Quarter. The latter is a veritable architectural museum piece, with blocks of ochre buildings retaining the air of a 1930s provincial French town. You will be transferred from the airport to your hotel, and your adventure begins with a welcome meeting at 5pm. Afterwards, perhaps enjoy some dinner with your family and fellow travellers (this is optional).

Day 2

Hanoi

Embark on a full-city tour of town. You will visit the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum and Museum, and the tranquil Temple of Literature – an oasis of calm in the heart of town. Also head to the Museum of Ethnology to learn more about the diverse heritage of Vietnam. Enjoy some lunch at KOTO restaurant, an excellent establishment and longtime friend of Intrepid which lives by the philosophy of 'know one, teach one'. It supports the underprivileged local youth by giving them a chance at making a career in the hospitality industry. In the evening, sit down to a traditional water puppet performance. This northern tradition, dating back nearly a thousand years, is performed alongside traditional Vietnamese music that employs drums, wooden bells, horns and bamboo flutes.

Day 3

Halong Bay

Travel by minibus to the spectacular World Heritage-listed site of Halong Bay (approximately 4 hours). The bay is a breathtaking secluded harbour, with some 2,000 limestone islands jutting out of the waters of the Bac Bo Gulf. Board your private boat and cruise among the dramatic limestone peaks. There's an opportunity to swim in the famous Vietnam East Sea and explore caves filled with stunning stalactites and stalagmites. Spend a peaceful night on board, beneath a sky alive with stars. Your sailing junk has twin-share cabins that have air-conditioning and private facilities. There's also a dining room and bar. Notes: Due to recent, unforeseen changes by local authorities, many boats are no longer permitted to stay overnight on the bay. This has resulted in a boat shortage. To ensure Intrepid travellers are all accommodated, a larger boat, usually with 12 cabins, may be used, and passengers may be split across multiple boats. An Intrepid group leader will be present on each boat, and the route and onboard inclusions will remain the same.

Day 4

Hue

Return to Hanoi by bus (approximately 3.5 hours). From there you will board an overnight train bound for Hue. As the former imperial capital of Vietnam, Hue holds the treasures of Vietnam's royal past. It's a curious mix of bustling streets and tranquil settings. Although conditions are basic on your train journey, overnight trains are a classic South East Asian experience and the best way to travel long distances with the locals. Lie back and enjoy the ride! Most trains have a dining carriage serving simple food, but it's a great idea to stock up on fresh bread, cheese and fruit before you head off. Notes: Sleeper trains typically have four-berth compartments (occasionally six-berth, depending on seasonal variations) which have bench seats that convert into sleeping bunks. A sheet, pillow and blanket are provided, although some travellers prefer to bring their own sleeping sheet. On occasion, passengers of different genders will be required to share a compartment and there will be occasions where you'll be sharing with local travellers or travellers who are not part of your group.

Day 5

Hue

Welcome to Hue! Your leader will help you choose a local, tasty breakfast option this morning after you disembark the overnight train. Afterwards, enjoy a dragon boat cruise along the Perfume River. The trip includes a visit to Thien Mu Pagoda, which is considered by many to be the unofficial symbol of Hue. It's an active Buddhist monastery originating in 1601. One of the most poignant displays here is a car belonging to a former monk who, in 1963, drove to Saigon and set himself alight to protest against the treatment of Buddhists by the South Vietnamese regime. You will visit one of the royal tombs, that of Emperor Tu Duc, and see the central lake set amid a grove of frangipani and pine trees. There is also the chance to visit the tomb of Minh Mang. Its lush forest backdrop and impressive architecture make it perhaps the most majestic of all the royal tombs.

Day 6

Hue

Delve further into the fascinating former capital today. You will visit the Imperial Citadel, which is the best-preserved remnant of a large citadel and Royal centre that once existed on this fortified site. The unique fortifications are fascinating, even though much of this place has sadly been destroyed by war. The foliage-covered ruins make for an interesting couple of hours of exploring. You will visit the Forbidden Purple City, which was almost totally wiped out during the Tet Offensive in 1968. The gaping holes left by bombs give an idea of the shocking destruction wreaked upon the country during the war.

Day 7

Hoi An

Travelling by bus, head south through coastal rice paddies, then traverse the spectacular Hai Van Pass along the mountains en route to Hoi An (approximately 4 hours). Recently declared a World Heritage site, Hoi An is beautifully preserved and exudes a tranquil atmosphere. It's perfect for strolling around at a leisurely pace, with many beautiful Japanese houses and Chinese temples lining the narrow lanes. Parts of Hoi An look exactly as they did more than a century ago. It's also a shopping mecca – browse local markets and shops for original paintings, handcrafted woodwork, ceramics, embroidery and lanterns. Hoi An has also become famous for its tailoring, with a great variety of fabrics and tailors to choose from.

Day 8

Hoi An

After breakfast we head out to spend the morning at Cua Dai beach. This beach is known for its stunning palm-fringed white sand and views of the Cham islands. Transfer back to town for lunch, before spending the afternoon learning how to prepare White Rose Cake. This hands on experience is one the whole family will enjoy!

Day 9

Hoi An

Enjoy further free time in this beautiful old town. Perhaps take up a cooking class and learn the secrets of preparing local specialties like cao lau – dark pork broth with thick yellow noodles, sliced pork, bean sprouts, green vegetables and croutons. Street food tours can also be arranged. Alternatively, hire some bikes and take the family out on a cycling trip into the gorgeous surrounding countryside. Another great activity which kids will enjoy is a bamboo basket ride down the waterways of the jungle. For more optional day- and half-day trips, chat to your leader.

Day 10

Ho Chi Minh City

Take a short flight to the economic hub of Ho Chi Minh City (approximately 1 hour). Formerly known as Saigon, Ho Chi Minh City is characterised by a vast array of sights and sounds – a fascinating blend of old and new, East and West. Check out Ben Thanh Market and experience a delicious local lunch of street food, and enjoy an orientation walk. Afterwards, you're free to explore the city on your own. Your leader will have plenty of interesting and fun ideas for you and the kids. Consider scooting off on cyclos to Cholon, the Chinatown area of Ho Chi Minh City, for a bit of temple-hopping. Or visit the Vietnamese version of a department store for some serious shopping.

Day 11

Mekong Delta

Head down to the Mekong Delta and visit unexplored Ben Tre where coconut is everything and anything. The fertile delta is famous for its abundant harvests of tropical fruits and flowers. On arrival, board your private boat and cruise along the maze of waterways to visit some local cottage industries. This is a fascinating behind-the-scenes look at a different part of the local economy. Then head to your overnight homestay by the water. Be invited into a family home for a true local experience – a chance to see daily life from the inside. You'll be sleeping on simple camp beds in dorm-style rooms, with all meals included. Bedding and mosquito nets are provided.

Day 12 - 13

Ho Chi Minh

Life in the delta starts with the sun, so embrace the day early. You will visit a local market and soya bean workshop before heading back to Ho Chi Minh City for one more night. You should arrive in the afternoon, which will give you time for a final exploration of the city. On Day 13 your trip comes to an end, and you are free to leave at any time. For those who have booked an airport transfer, the leader will confirm your departure time and onward flight details.

Additional Information

Included Activities

Complimentary Airport Arrival Transfer
Hanoi - Temple of Literature
Hanoi - Water puppet show
Hanoi - Ho Chi Minh Complex: Ho Chi Minh, Stilt House and Museum
Hanoi - Koto Restaurant lunch
Hanoi - Museum of Ethnology
Halong Bay - Overnight boat cruise with seafood lunch and dinner
Hue - Perfume River cruise
Hue - Royal tomb
Hue - Imperial Citadel
Hoi An - Orientation walk
Hoi An - Old Town walking tour
Ho Chi Minh City - Orientation Walk
Mekong Delta - Soya bean workshop
Mekong Delta - Local market visit

Optional Activities

Hoi An - Cooking Class, Central Vietnamese
Hoi An - Thu Bon river boat trip
Hoi An - Countryside bicycle hire
Ho Chi Minh City - Reunification Palace
Ho Chi Minh City - War Remnants Museum
Ho Chi Minh City - Cu Chi Tunnel Experience Urban Adventure

Notes for Vietnam

Tracing a curve down the eastern edge of South East Asia - Vietnam is a long, thin land of extraordinary natural beauty. Marvel at its beautiful deserted beaches, magical rock formations in Halong Bay, the lush, steamy waterways of the Mekong Delta and dramatic mountain ranges. Ho Chi Minh City is a place that crackles with energy 24 hours a day, and the capital of Hanoi has a distinct charm where old colonial buildings overlook avenues buzzing with motorbikes. Vietnam was once in the headlines for all the wrong reasons, but today you'll discover incredible scenery, technicolour sunsets, fascinating cultures, incredible food, and charming locals.

Citizens of the UK, Germany, France, Denmark, Italy, Norway, Spain and Sweden will not need a visa to enter Vietnam as a tourist for up to 15 days. Citizens of the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and all other European countries will need a visa, and this will need to be obtained in advance. Citizens of other countries should check with the relevant consulates as to whether a visa is required. If a visa is required, it will need to be obtained in advance.

Important Notes

The routes, activities and places visited as described in these trip notes are intentions and are meant as a rough guide only.

These trip notes have been compiled to help you prepare for your journey once you have booked. They include the full itinerary and dates, and information about kit lists, meeting hotels, insurance, vaccinations, visas, and other information that will help you get ready for your trip.

These notes are updated regularly, so please ensure you have an up-to-date version of these trip notes.

The planned route and itinerary is the intention, but exact night stops and inclusions cannot be guaranteed. It occasionally happens that there must be a change to our planned itinerary - this may be for a variety of reasons, such as climatic, road or bureaucratic conditions. By their very nature, adventure travel needs to be approached flexibly and some regions can be unpredictable. Some Imaginative Traveller journeys go through off the beaten track areas, which often have poor infrastructure and less stringent safety standards than we are used to at home.

Our Groups

Our groups are made up of people from around the world and are usually an interesting mix of nationalities and ages. On average there is a pretty even split, males to females and between solo travellers, couples and small groups of friends. We believe that adventure travel should be open to as many people as possible and so although some trips have a minimum age limit, as long as you are fit, healthy and passionate about travel, we are happy to take you. One of the highlights of group travel is the camaraderie and friendships that are formed along the way, and as well as the variety of people that you will meet.

The maximum group size depends on the operator and the style of transport, but will usually be a maximum of 15-16 or up to 21-22 on our overland journeys.

Accommodation

Imaginative Traveller trips are designed for shared accommodation, whether staying in hotels, hostels, homestays or campsites, and therefore do not involve a single supplement. Single travellers will share with people of the same sex for the duration of the trip and those that book together will usually be able to share accommodation.

The type, variety and standard of accommodation will vary greatly depending on what options are available in the region you are travelling; hotels can vary from very basic rooms without electricity or running water to high standard hotels with good facilities! Generally in hotels most rooms will be twin-share. Hostels, gers and yurts are nearly always multi-share.

Many trips will feature a stay in a local homestay or community tourism initiative, allowing us to experience a slice of local life in the areas we travel through. On our overland trips, we will sometimes camp in campsites ranging from rather basic or even wild camps to those with excellent facilities, including swimming pools, restaurants and bars.

Dietary Requirements

If you have any dietary requirements please tell us at the time of booking and also remind your leader at your welcome meeting. Our crew will try to cater for any particular dietary requirement or food intolerance whenever possible.

Health

You need to be in good physical health in order to participate fully in our trips. When selecting your trip

please make sure you have read through the itinerary carefully and assessed your ability to cope with the style of travel on that trip. We are always happy to give extra advice if you have additional concerns. Please note that if, in the opinion of our leader, you are unable to complete the itinerary without undue risk to yourself and/or the rest of the group, Imaginative Traveller or our partner operators reserve the right to exclude you from all or part of the trip.

You should consult your doctor for up-to-date medical travel information prior to travel, particularly if you have a pre-existing medical condition. We also advise you to declare any pre-existing medical conditions to your travel insurers upon purchase.

Altitude

Imaginative Traveller offers some trips that travel to above 2,800m altitude above sea level - it is imperative at high altitudes to drink lots of water to stay hydrated, be careful not to get burned by the sun, and try not to exert yourself too much. Some pre-existing medical conditions are known to severely worsen at high altitude and be difficult to adequately treat on the ground, leading to more serious consequences. It is imperative that you discuss your pre-existing medical condition/s with your doctor. We understand certain medications are reported to aid acclimatising to high altitude; please discuss these options with your doctor.

Yellow Fever

A valid international certificate of vaccination against Yellow Fever is required in many countries. You may need to present this on arrival at the airport or border crossing. Some countries will refuse entry if you are unable to present your certificate - please see each country's note above for details. It's also quite common for your home country to request a Yellow Fever certificate on your arrival back home.

It is your responsibility to check with your doctor well in advance of leaving home about the Yellow Fever requirements for the countries you'll be visiting.

Malaria and other mosquito-borne diseases

Some areas we travel to have the risk of contracting malaria. If this applies to your trip, please get expert advice before travelling about types of malaria pills and take them as instructed. Recommended types do change from time to time and from area to area. Consult your GP / travel clinic for the most up-to-date requirements and to find the right option for you. If advised by your doctor to take a course of anti-malarial tablets, please complete the course as instructed as malaria can often manifest itself upon your return home if the course is not followed.

Other mosquito-borne diseases such as Dengue Fever, Chikungunya and Zika are continuing to spread and becoming a bigger problem around the world. Bite prevention is vital to avoid contracting any of these diseases as there are no vaccines or specific treatments available. Health professionals have issued warnings for pregnant women travelling to areas affected by the Zika virus.

The mosquito usually bites between the hours of dusk and dawn and so covering up by wearing long-legged and long-sleeved clothing, preferably light coloured and buttoned at the wrists, can help. Do not sleep without closing windows, use a mosquito net where possible and use mosquito repellent applied directly to your skin or soaked into your clothing.

Vaccinations

Recommended vaccinations and other health protection vary according to different regions and recent bulletins issued by health authorities. It is essential to get the latest advice on the region(s) you are planning to travel in so please check with either your doctor or travel clinic in good time before you travel.

We also recommend you check out any specific health advice for the country you are travelling to either via your GP or the following websites: www.nathnac.org or www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk

In the UK, we have been working with Nomad Travel for many years and their website has comprehensive,

up-to-date vaccination and health information. You will receive a 10% discount off all vaccinations given at Nomad Travel clinics.

Activities

Included activities are listed in the day-to-day itinerary, all other activities are optional and at your own expense. If you choose not to participate in the included activities on this itinerary, the cost will not necessarily be refunded; this is something you will need to check with your leader.

A selection of optional activities is listed in the day-to-day itinerary. This list is designed to be a helpful guide as to what is commonly available in each location, and is neither an exhaustive list, a guarantee that the activity is available, or an endorsement or recommendation. Please note that certain activities may not be available on your particular visit if they are overbooked, underbooked, out of season, or for any other reason - the list of activities is made according to our latest information and in the best faith, but please be aware that things may change between our last visit and your arrival. Please also note that it may not be possible to do all the activities listed in the time available at each destination, and it is recommended to give yourself extra time in your joining or ending city if you would like to participate in some optional activities there.

If you do any optional activities, you do so at your own risk and it must be clearly understood that your participation is your own decision and does not form part of your contract with Dragoman. You may be required to sign/complete a waiver form or optional activity form for some optional activities.

Insurance

It is a condition of booking that you have comprehensive travel insurance. Without evidence of valid travel insurance you will not be allowed to start the trip. This can be arranged by Imaginative Traveller through our website or by contacting our team of travel consultants.

If you prefer to arrange your insurance independently, it should have a minimum medical (including repatriation) cover of £2,000,000. We recommend that any policy also has a minimum level of cover for Personal Liability of £2,000,000 and for Cancellation and Curtailment of £5,000. Cover for loss of baggage, personal effects, money and other inclusions are down to personal choice although please bear in mind that personal effects are more likely to go missing whilst travelling and you should ensure that your policy is adequate to cover the value of your personal effects e.g. cameras, tablets, phones etc. Please note that Imaginative Traveller and our partner operators are not responsible for your personal effects and are not insured for their loss.

If you prefer to arrange your insurance independently, it should cover you for any activities that you may wish to participate in, such as white-water rafting, trekking, horse-riding, etc. and the 24-hour Emergency Assistance Company must be experienced in handling situations in developing countries if applicable (e.g. they have the ability to arrange repatriation from remote areas such as the Sahara or trekking in the Andes). If you are travelling to high altitude (such as embarking on a trek to the summit of Kilimanjaro), please make sure that this is also covered.

Please double check if you have annual travel and/or credit card policies to ensure they have the cover you require, as many of these policies are not suitable with adventure travel to remote areas. Many credit card medical insurance policies are not valid for travelling outside your country of residence or outside the EU.

Please also check the age limits on any policy you wish to take out and make sure that you thoroughly inform the insurance company of any pre-existing conditions.

Passports

Check that your passport will still be valid for 6 months after the end of the trip - this is important as some countries WILL refuse entry to anyone whose passport is due to expire. A temporary or emergency passport is not valid on our trips. You will need to provide us with your passport details prior to departing for your trip. If you change your passport please remember to inform us.

Pre and Post Trip Accommodation and Transfers

At Imaginative Traveller we believe you should make the most of the places you visit, so if you would like to see more of the joining or finishing point cities, why not book additional accommodation to extend your stay? We can take away the hassle of time zones and language barriers by making the booking for you. This accommodation is only available at the joining or finishing city of your trip, immediately before or after the trip you are travelling on. Please note our rates do not reflect last minute walk-in rates or internet specials.

We can also book arrival airport transfers for you as long as we have your flight arrival details. These are normally payable in cash upon arrival; however we do have pre paid transfers in a few destinations.

Please contact our reservations team for details of the accommodation and transfers that we can offer, as not all hotels offer this service.

Responsible Tourism

Imaginative Traveller is committed to ensuring that we have a positive impact on local communities and that we implement policies to minimise any negative impact on the local environment. We recognise that we are guests of local communities and strive to make them benefit directly from our visit. You can find full details of Imaginative Traveller's responsible tourism policy on our website.

Issues on the trip

While we always endeavour to provide the best possible holiday experience, due to the nature of travel and the areas we visit sometimes things can and do go wrong. Should any issue occur while you are on your trip, it is imperative that you discuss this with your group leader or our local partner straight away so that they can do their best to rectify the problem and save any potential negative impact on the rest of your trip.

We recognise that there may be times when your group leader may not be able to resolve a situation to your satisfaction. If this is the case please contact our customer relations department on

customer-relations@imtrav.net

You may also choose to provide details in your feedback questionnaire which we ask you to complete at the end of your trip, but we do ask you to be aware that it is very difficult for us to provide any practical help after the trip is complete.

Feedback

After your travels, we want to hear from you! We rely on your feedback. We read it carefully. Feedback helps us to understand what we are doing well and what we could be doing better, and it allows us to make improvements for future travellers.