

General Trip info

Map

Trip Code: ITVRN

Trip Length: 15

Trip starts in: Ho Chi Minh City

Trip ends in: Hanoi

Meals: 3 Breakfasts included

4 Lunches included

3 Dinners included

Accommodation: Guesthouse (1 night), Homestay (1 night), Hotel (8 nights), Overnight boat (1 night), Overnight sleeper train (3 nights)

Transport: Boat, Overnight sleeper train, Private Bus, Private vehicle, Taxi, Train

Daily Itinerary

Day 1

Ho Chi Minh City

Xin chao! Welcome to Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Your adventure begins with a welcome meeting at 6 pm today. You can arrive at any time during the day as there are no activities planned until this important meeting. Please check with hotel reception or look on the reception noticeboard for where and when the meeting will take place. If you're going to be late, please inform the hotel reception. We'll be collecting your insurance details and next of kin information at this meeting, so please ensure you have all these details to provide to your leader. As you won't be spending much time in Ho Chi Minh City, we recommend arriving a few days early to see more of this incredible city. See the ancient pagodas and cathedrals near the former Presidential Palace, the historic Dong Khoi Street, and the chaotic markets of Ben Thanh and Cholon (Chinatown). Consider taking a day trip such as 'The Cu Chi Experience' with our partners Urban Adventures. See urbanadventures.com for more information.

Day 2

Mekong Delta

Make your way to the province of Ben Tre, where you'll get on a boat to tour the canals of the Mekong Delta. This fertile area is famous for its abundance of fruit, flower and rice crops, and is known as 'the rice bowl' of Vietnam. During your boat ride you'll visit some local cottage industries and then head to your local guesthouse. Staying in simple local accommodation close to the Delta and hosted by a Vietnamese family will be one of the highlights of your trip as you get a taste of the life of a local and enjoy a home cooked meal.

Day 3

Mekong Delta - Overnight Train

Rising early to the sounds of the delta coming alive, we enjoy a simple breakfast before boarding our boat, and catching a bus back to Ho Chi Minh City. Enjoy some free time in Ho Chi Minh City this afternoon, perhaps visit the War Remnants Museum or Reunification Palace. This evening, board an overnight train to Nha Trang (approx 11 hours). Conditions are basic on these trains and they may be a little dirtier than what you're used to, however overnight trains are the best way to brush shoulders with the locals and make the best use of your time. Most trains have a dining carriage serving simple food, but some travellers like to take some fresh bread, cheese and fruit for the journey.

Day 4

Nha Trang

Arrive in Nha Trang at about 5am and transfer to your hotel. You'll have today free to spend as you wish. Perhaps enjoy your time on the sunny beaches or explore the local markets. Be sure to try some of the excellent seafood in town. Also nearby are the Cham Towers, where you can go for a day trip to see the fascinating archaeological site.

Day 5

Nha Trang - Overnight Train

Today is another free day to take in the coastal delights of Nha Trang. In the evening, board another overnight train for Danang (approximately 8 hours).

Day 6

Hoi An

Arrive in Danang and travel by minibus for one hour to Hoi An. Hoi An was recently declared a UNESCO World Heritage site, and is being beautifully restored. It was a major trading port with the west from the 17th century onwards. Today, parts of Hoi An look exactly as they did more than a century ago. Your leader will take you on a sightseeing walk through the Old Town and visit some of the city's major attractions. A sightseeing pass is included in your tour for you to visit a selection of the major sights as you wish. Hoi An is also a shopping mecca, so head down to the markets and street stalls to browse paintings, woodwork, ceramics and lanterns. Hoi An is famous for its tailors who can make beautiful items to order.

Day 7

Hoi An

Go on a bike ride through the countryside near Hoi An. There's no better way to explore the peaceful area than by bike. You'll see places few tourists get the chance to see among green rice paddies and small creeks. You'll get a true insight into rural life in Vietnam.

Day 8

Hue

Say goodbye to Hoi An this morning and make your way to Hue. The drive in our minibus will take about five hours, but along the way you'll stop at My Khe Beach (China Beach) and the picturesque fishing village of Lang Co. You'll be travelling on the incredible Hai Van Pass, through lush mountains. Once in Hue, you'll have a free afternoon to explore. Hue was once Vietnam's Imperial capital and has a curious mix of bustling streets and tranquil enclaves. Perhaps visit the Dong Ba Market, which sells everything imaginable and is a great place to spend some time.

Day 9

Hue - Overnight Train

Enjoy a free day in Hue. Perhaps visit the Imperial Citadel which includes the Forbidden Purple City that was almost totally destroyed during the Vietnam war. The gaping holes left by bombs give you an idea of how much destruction occurred in this country. Another optional activity is a dragon boat cruise along the Perfume River and then a visit to Mu Pagoda, the unofficial symbol of Hue. Here you'll see an active Buddhist monastery dating back to 1601, and a car belonging to a monk who set himself alight in protest against the treatment of Buddhists. You may also like to visit one of the royal tombs, that of Emperor Tu Duc, with its central lake set amid a grove of frangipani and pine trees. This afternoon take another overnight train bound for Hanoi. The journey will take approximately 12 hours.

Day 10

Hanoi

Arrive in Hanoi at about 5am and transfer to your hotel. Today you'll take a walking tour of Vietnam's charming capital. Explore the 36 streets of Hanoi's Old Quarter, including the Dong Xuan Market, Hoan Kiem Lake and the unique architecture nearby. Hanoi has a French provincial feel remaining from its colonial times, but it also has a Buddhist influence and striking modern buildings. The rest of the day is yours to explore Hanoi as you please.

Day 11

Da Bac

After an early breakfast, leave Hanoi around 8am and make the drive to Sung village (approximately 4 hours). Enjoy lunch at the Sung village homestay before heading out on a 6-kilometre trek (3.7 mi) through this beautiful, practically untouched landscape of rivers, mountains and rice fields. We start at 500m and maintain around the same elevation for the first 4km of the trek. We descend over the last 2km to finish at around 120m. This trek can be quite slippery after or during rain, so we highly recommend suitable footwear. Our home stay hosts can provide bamboo trekking poles on request. At the end of the trek, take a boat to Da Bia village, home to the Muong ethnic group and where you'll spend the night in a homestay.

Day 12

Hanoi

This morning is free to make the most of your lovely surrounds and just soak up the serenity of this place – or maybe use the time soak in the reservoir instead! This afternoon, return by bus back to Hanoi (approximately 4 hours). This evening is free for you to explore this delightful city. Why not relax at a cafe or stop for a bia hoi (freshly brewed draught beer) at one of the microbars in the Old Quarter.

Day 13

Halong Bay

Drive through the Red River Delta for about four hours and arrive at Halong Bay. Along the way, you'll stop at the Hong Ngoc Humanity Centre, which provides vocational training and employment to Vietnamese people who experience a disability. Halong Bay is one of Vietnam's most scenic places, a secluded harbour with 2,000 limestone islands and caves rising from the emerald waters. You'll board our boat and spend the rest of the day cruising the breathtaking bay. Enjoy a sumptuous seafood lunch on board, stop for a visit to Sung Sot Cave, and perhaps take a swim at Ti Top Beach or opt for a kayaking trip. Spend a night onboard your boat, with gentle waves rocking you to sleep.

Day 14

Hanoi

Disembark from your boat in Halong Bay at around midday and take a three-and-a-half hour bus ride back to Vietnam's charming capital, Hanoi. On the way back stop at the stop for refreshments at a handicraft village. Return to Hanoi at around 4pm. Enjoy your last few hours of free time then join the group for an optional farewell dinner.

Day 15

Hanoi

There are no activities planned for today and you're able to depart the accommodation at any time.

Additional Information

Included Activities

Mekong Delta - Boat cruise and guesthouse
Hoi An - Old Town walking tour
Hoi An - Countryside bicycle hire
Hanoi - Old Quarter Walking Tour
Da Bac - Ba Dia Village Homestay and activities
Halong Bay - Overnight boat cruise

Optional Activities

Ho Chi Minh City - Cu Chi Tunnel Experience Urban Adventure
Ho Chi Minh City - Ho Chi Minh Discovery Urban Adventure
Ho Chi Minh City - Reunification Palace
Ho Chi Minh City - War Remnants Museum
Nha Trang - Boat trip
Nha Trang - Row boat tour
Nha Trang - Mud baths
Nha Trang - Po Nagar Cham Tower
Hoi An - Street Food By Night Urban Adventure
Hoi An - My Son Cham day trip
Hoi An - Hoi An Boat & Bike Urban Adventure
Hoi An - Hoi An Walking & Cooking Class Urban Adventure
Hue - Imperial Citadel
Hue - Countryside Bike Urban Adventure
Hue - Hue Royal Street Eat by Cyclo Urban Adventure
Hue - Royal tomb
Hue - Perfume River cruise & Thien Mu Pagoda
Hanoi - Temple of Literature
Hanoi - Hanoi Street Food By Night Urban Adventure
Hanoi - Museum of Ethnology
Hanoi - Hoa Lo 'Hanoi Hilton' Prison
Hanoi - Army Museum
Hanoi - Women's Museum
Hanoi - Fine Arts Museum
Hanoi - Ho Chi Minh Complex: Ho Chi Minh, Stilt House and Museum
Hanoi - Citadels, Karsts & Cycle Urban Adventure
Hanoi - Village Discovery by Bike 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.