

## General Trip info

## Map

**Trip Code:** ITVSR

**Trip Length:** 15

**Trip starts in:** Hanoi

**Trip ends in:** Ho Chi Minh City

**Meals:** 13 Breakfasts included  
5 Lunches included  
4 Dinners included

**Accommodation:** Guesthouse (1 night), Homestay (2 nights), Hotel (9 nights), Overnight boat (1 night), Overnight sleeper train (1 night)

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

## Daily Itinerary

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### Day 1

#### Hanoi

Xin chao! Welcome to Vietnam. Your adventure begins with a welcome meeting at 6 pm tonight. Please look for a note in the hotel lobby or ask the hotel reception where it will take place. 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. In free time, step out onto the streets to explore the chaotic capital of Vietnam. Hanoi is an alluring city of contrasts, best discovered on foot. Tonight perhaps get to know your new travel buddies over a glass of fresh bia hoi. This is a foamy, light beer made fresh each day and served in basic, open-walled 'brew halls'. Take up a brightly coloured plastic chair and sip your tasty brew.

### Day 2

#### Da Bac

Enjoy breakfast hosted by the Blue Dragon Children's Foundation, and learn about the work of this organisation, which supports over 1500 of the most vulnerable children throughout Vietnam every year. Afterwards, travel out to the Da Bac region before arriving at your accommodation for the next two nights, a quaint homestay with the Dzao 'Tien' people in Sung Village. Take a short trek (2kms) to the alluring Sung Cave and visit a hundred-year-old tea plantation. Visit the tea processing plant and a handicraft workshop before returning to the homestay for a nice hot shower and a delicious dinner. The trek has some steep and slippery sections so please ensure you have suitable footwear for this activity.

## Day 3

### **Da Bac**

The opportunity to take in more of this curious landscape presents itself on a 10 kilometre (6.2 mi) trek from Sung Village to Da Bia. We climb from 500m and maintain a similar elevation for the first 4.5km of the route before descending over the next 2km to 120m. It can be quite slippery if there has been recent rain, so suitable footwear is highly recommended. Our homestay hosts can provide bamboo trekking poles on request. Keep an eye peeled for the monumental stone at the peak of Da Bia Mountain during the trek that takes us through the local villages, meeting people from the ethnic Muong tribe along the way. The option to take a dip in the local reservoir is a great idea if you want to cool down from the trek.

## Day 4

### **Hanoi**

This morning take a scenic 1.5 hour boat trip across on Hoa Binh hydropower reservoir. Arrive at Thung Nai then board a bus transfer to Hanoi (approximately 2 hours). This afternoon your leader will take you on a tour of Hanoi's Old Quarter. Explore the ancient '36 streets' and discover an amazing selection of shops that sell everything from souvenirs to exquisite silk clothing, jewellery and beautifully embroidered tablecloths. In the evening, you'll sit down to a unique water-puppet performance.

## Day 5

### **Halong Bay**

This morning drive north-east of Hanoi (approximately 4 hours) to the famous Halong Bay. You can leave your luggage behind at the Hanoi hotel and pack an overnight bag for staying on the boat. Halong Bay is listed as a World Heritage site and is one of Vietnam's most spectacular natural wonders. The views of sailing junks navigating past thousands of limestone islands with rocky outcrops in Bac Bo Gulf are nothing short of spectacular. You'll visit a cave in the area and, in the warmer months, you can enjoy a swim from Ti Top Island Beach or kayaking. Spend a peaceful night on board, beneath a night sky alive with stars. There's also a dining room and bar where you'll enjoy a sumptuous lunch, dinner and breakfast. The boat has twin-share cabins with air-conditioning and private facilities.

## Day 6

### **Hanoi - Overnight train**

In the morning you will sail back to the port, disembark and drive back to Hanoi (approximately 3.5 hours). Stop on the way back at the Dong Trieu Factory to watch locals working on the traditional art of ceramics. There will be free time to explore the city when you arrive back in Hanoi. There will be shared hotel rooms available this afternoon if you would like to freshen up or organise your luggage. In some free time perhaps do some shopping on Hang Gai Street or seek out some delicious Hanoi street food. Tonight you'll board an overnight train bound for Hue (approximately 12 hours). Although conditions are basic, overnight trains are a rewarding experience. It's an efficient way to travel long distances and a great way to get a sense of the country.

## Day 7

### **Hue**

Arrive in Hue just after sunrise and proceed to the hotel to refresh. Hue is the hub of Vietnam's historic past. This former imperial capital is an eclectic mix of busy streets and peaceful beauty. The rest of the morning is free for you to relax; perhaps pick up a classic Hue breakfast of bun bo Hue, a popular Vietnamese soup containing rice vermicelli (bun) and beef (bo). After lunch you will visit the Imperial Citadel, a sprawling complex of temples, pavilions, moats, gates, and walls. The Ngo Mon Gate, Thai Hoa Palace and the Ancestral Altars are still impressive, and the complex must have been awe-inspiring during its heyday in the 19th century. In your free time you might like to visit to Dong Ba Market, which offers locally made goods, fresh produce and tantalising street food. This is a good place to try the specialties enjoyed by Emperor Nguyen such as the banh khoai royal rice cake.



## Day 8

### Hue

Today's adventure will be taken on the back of a motorbike. You'll have your own driver who will take you first on a drive around the Imperial Citadel, including the Forbidden Purple City. The latter was almost completely destroyed during the Tet Offensive in the Vietnam War, but its humble, foliage-covered ruins remain a testament to its proud history. Here you'll gain some insight into the horrific damage endured during the war. Then it's on to the Thien Mu Pagoda, the unofficial symbol of Hue. This site dates back to 1601 and is still an active Buddhist monastery. Here you'll also see the car left by a monk who set himself alight to protest the treatment of Buddhists by the South Vietnamese regime. Hop off the motorbike for a bit and go on a boat cruise along the Perfume River. After the 40-minute cruise get back on your motorbike and ride to a special lunch spot at a convent or Buddhist monastery. After lunch, drive to the royal tomb of Emperor Tu Duc, set amid a lake, frangipani bushes and pine trees. This evening, perhaps ask your leader for the best place to try imperial street specialties.

## Day 9

### Hoi An

Travelling by bus, head south through coastal rice paddies before stopping in at Lang Co Beach. Then traverse the dramatic Hai Van Pass, a sometimes bumpy but incredibly scenic stretch of highway with views back to Lang Co Beach and beyond. The spectacular Marble Mountains will be your backdrop as you arrive at Hoi An (approximately 4 hours). Declared a World Heritage site, Hoi An is being beautifully restored and preserved. Known as Faifo to early western traders, it was one of South-East Asia's major international ports from the 17th to the 19th centuries. Today, parts of Hoi An look exactly as they did more than a century ago and it retains the feel of times past, making it the sort of place that grows on you the more you explore it. On arrival, a walking tour will take you around the major sites of Hoi An's charming Old Town, including an historic house (formerly home to a prominent trader), the Japanese Covered Bridge, a Chinese assembly hall and a museum. You will notice a distinctly Chinese appearance to the pagodas and assembly halls scattered along the small streets. A sightseeing pass is included in your tour for you to visit a selection of the major sights as you wish.

## Day 10

### Hoi An

If you feel like getting active on your free day today, why not hire a bicycle and tour the surrounding countryside. This is one of the best ways to get an insight into rural Vietnam. Other optional activities include a day trip to My Son Cham (elaborate World Heritage-listed temples that reflect the rich cultural traditions of the Cham civilisation), a cruise along the Thu Bon River, and a trip to the nearby Cua Dai Beach. Your leader will be able to help with suggestions on activities in Hoi An.

## Day 11

### Hoi An

Enjoy another free day in the World Heritage-listed Hoi An. You may like to wander the Central Market and the street stalls selling paintings, woodwork, ceramics, lanterns and much more. Hoi An is also famous for its talented tailors who can make beautiful items to order within a few hours. Bring your favourite piece of clothing, or even just a picture, and you'll be able to have it copied. You might like to visit a local workshop to learn how to make your own rice paper, while a Vietnamese cooking class too is a great way to familiarise yourself with some age-old culinary techniques, not to mention being able to feast on the fruits of your own labour.

## Day 12

### **Ho Chi Minh City**

Transfer to Danang (approximately 45 minutes) for your flight to Ho Chi Minh City. Formerly known as Saigon, Ho Chi Minh City is characterised by a fascinating blend of old and new, East and West. The huge number of people rushing about their daily lives in Vietnam's largest city gives it a dynamic atmosphere and the French influence is evident in the excellent baguettes and coffee on offer. Take a guided tour to get a feel for the city, going past the GPO, Reunification Palace, and the Opera house. Stop in at the War Remnants Museum and the Notre Dame Cathedral. With free time this evening perhaps drop by one of Vietnam's most pulsing markets, Ben Thanh. This is the perfect place to pick up any last-minute snacks, cooking utensils, ingredients, or presents for friends and family before you return home. Perhaps enjoy some of the market fare for dinner as you shop.

## Day 13

### **Mekong Delta**

Today you'll travel south by private bus (approximately 3 hours) to explore the Mekong Delta. When you arrive, you'll board a boat and explore the intricate waterways of the Mekong Delta. Often referred to as 'the rice bowl' of Vietnam, the fertile delta is where rice, tropical fruit and flowers are grown for the whole country. The views along the canal will take your breath away. Disembark at Ben Tre and visit a local cottage industry and sample the candy that the region is famous for. You'll have the opportunity to take a tuk-tuk around this remote village and make a stop to sample tropical fruit, see a honey farm, and learn more about rural life. For lunch, go to a restaurant in the heart of the delta and try regional specialities such as the famous elephant-ear fish. After lunch, board sampans (small rowing boats) and paddle along the canals under the shade of lush water coconut trees. Stay overnight at a guesthouse in the Delta. The accommodation is fairly basic with shared bathroom facilities and dormitory style rooms, but the sounds of nature thrumming softly in the night makes for a memorable experience.

## Day 14

### **Ho Chi Minh City**

Take the bus back to Ho Chi Minh City. Maybe spend the final night of your Vietnam adventure with a few glasses of street-side beer hoi.

## Day 15

### **Ho Chi Minh City**

Your Vietnam adventure ends after breakfast today. There are no activities included, so you are free to depart at any time. For those who are staying on longer and want to explore Ho Chi Minh City further, maybe check out our Urban Adventure day trips.

# Additional Information

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## Included Activities

Hanoi - Blue Dragon breakfast  
Da Bac - Sung Cave & village tour  
Da Bac - Trek  
Hanoi - Water puppet show  
Hanoi - Ho Chi Minh Complex: Ho Chi Minh, Stilt House and Museum  
Halong Bay - Overnight boat cruise  
Hue - Imperial Citadel  
Hue - Perfume River boat ride  
Hue - Motorbike trip including lunch  
Hue - Royal tomb  
Hoi An - Old Town walking tour  
Ho Chi Minh City - War Remnants Museum  
Ho Chi Minh City - City tour  
Mekong Delta - Boat cruise and guesthouse

## Optional Activities

Hanoi - Hoa Lo 'Hanoi Hilton' Prison  
Hanoi - Fine Arts Museum  
Hanoi - Temple of Literature  
Halong Bay - Kayaking  
Hanoi - Temple of Literature  
Hoi An - Hoi An Boat & Bike Urban Adventure  
Hoi An - My Son Cham day trip  
Hoi An - Street Food By Night Urban Adventure  
Hoi An - Hoi An Walking & Cooking Class Urban Adventure  
Ho Chi Minh City - Reunification Palace  
HCMC - Saigon Street Food by Night Urban Adventure  
Ho Chi Minh City - Cu Chi Tunnel Experience Urban Adventure  
HCMC - Saigon Street Food by Night Urban Adventure

## Notes for Vietnam

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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](http://www.nathnac.org) or [www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk](http://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](mailto: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.