

General Trip info

Map

Trip Code: ITVXA

Trip Length: 10

Trip starts in: Hanoi

Trip ends in: Hanoi

Meals: 9 Breakfasts included
5 Lunches included
3 Dinners included

Accommodation: Homestay (2 nights), Hotel (6 nights), Resort (1 night)

Transport: Private Vehicle, Bike, Boat

Daily Itinerary

Day 1

Hanoi

Welcome to Vietnam. Your adventure begins with a welcome meeting at 6 pm. Please look for a note in the hotel lobby or ask reception where it will take place. We'll be collecting insurance details and next of kin information at this meeting, so please ensure you bring these details to provide to your leader. If you arrive early into the capital of Hanoi, there's plenty to see and do. Consider booking one of our active Urban Adventures available too if you want to warm up for the rest of your trip! Or take it at your own pace and wander the Old Quarter and admire the city's French-colonial architecture, relax in a park, or enjoy some street food.

Day 2

Sapa trek

After breakfast climb board a private bus to Sapa (approx. 5 hours), a town in the Hoàng Liên Sơn Mountains of northwest Vietnam. After exploring the Sapa market, venture out on a short trek (approximately 2.5 hours) through the surrounding verdant valleys and past grazing water buffalo to visit a hill-tribe village called Cat Cat. This is home to the H'mong people, who emigrated from China 300 years ago. In the evening, settle into your hotel in Sapa for the night.

Day 3

Lao Chai to Ta Van trek

Savour the dramatic landscapes and panoramic views of rural Vietnam on another trek today, this time from Lao Chai to Ta Van. Our trek supports a local social enterprise that invests back into the villages it visits and benefits ethnic minorities. You'll pass by terraced farms ripe with corn and rice, cross bubbling brooks and through bucolic H'mong and Giay minority villages. Stop for a picnic lunch before heading on to our home stay with a local family in the evening where we will enjoy a home-cooked meal. The total trekking distance today is around 10 kilometres (6.2 miles).

Day 4

Ta Van to Su Pan trek - Hanoi

This morning trek enjoy another scenic trek to Su Pan via Giang Ta Chai, through bamboo forests, past a waterfall and over a rattan suspension bridge, meeting Red Zao minority villagers along the way (approx 8 km). Rest your legs on the bus ride back to Sapa (approx 12 km). Return to Hanoi by private vehicle this afternoon (approximately 5 hours). Check into our hotel and maybe get a bird's eye view of the city from a rooftop bar or unwind with an iced coffee.

Day 5

Hanoi

Much of Vietnam's capital is best explored on foot, which is exactly what we will do today on our walking tour. See the final resting place of Vietnam's revered revolutionary at Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum and Museum before stopping by the Temple of Literature. Although the shrine was originally built in the 11th century, and is therefore considered to be the city's oldest temple, the current structure and shrine to Confucius actually dates from the 18th century. In the afternoon, there's a chance to practice on your bike with a warm up cycle around West Lake.

Day 6

Hanoi - Mai Chau cycling

Leave behind the Hanoi hustle first by vehicle to escape the traffic, then jump on your bike and journey to the clean air of the Mai Chau valley (approximately 60km / 37mi). There are plenty of great photo opportunities along the way. We may also have the chance to try our hand at planting in fields depending on the season. Stop at a vantage point to take in the view of Mai Chau, which like Sapa is home to a variety of minority groups each with their own unique culture and languages. Arrive in Mai Chau and head to the village of Pom Coong where we have a home cooked lunch. After lunch, take some time to relax before saddling up for a bike trip to some nearby villages. Return to our home stay to relax and for dinner.

Day 7

Ninh Binh

After breakfast set out again on your bike, riding from from Mai Chau to Ninh Binh, a region well-known for its green valleys, karst mountains and conservation areas. Today's ride will cover approximately 70 kilometres in total. Stop for lunch along the way to break up the trip and check in to our hotel for the night on arrival in Ninh Binh.

Day 8

Lan Ha Bay kayaking

In the morning catch a bus from Ninh Binh to Cat Hai, where you'll take a ferry to Cat Ba Island which sits at the southeastern edge of Halong Bay. Lan Ha Bay is a part of Ha Long Bay with the additional attraction of numerous white-sand beaches. Dock on the island and drive to Cat Ba town then to hop on another boat and ride from Ben Beo to Lan Ha Bay while enjoying your lunch on the boat. Total travel time including driving and ferries is around 5 hours today. After lunch, grab a kayak and spend some time surrounded by towering limestone islands dotted with green foliage, paddling away from other tourists across the turquoise water and through the caves of Lan Ha Bays. Following our kayaking activity, take a short boat trip to Monkey Island Resort where you'll stay the night in a secluded property right on the water's edge. If you would like to explore there is a walking trail for a short walk around the island. Just be aware that this island is named as it is for a reason!

Day 9

Lan Ha Bay kayaking - Hanoi

Another chance to kayak this morning before we catch the bus back to Ben Beo for lunch and then head back to Hanoi (approximately 5 hours travel time), arriving in the afternoon. Perhaps head down to the markets for some last-minute souvenir shopping or pay a visit to one of the city's many fascinating museums, such as the Fine Art Museum, Women's Museum or Museum of Ethnology. Toast the end of this active adventure with an optional farewell group dinner.

Day 10

Hanoi

This active adventure comes to an end today. You are free to depart at any time. Perhaps consider exploring further on one of our Urban Adventures.

Additional Information

Included Activities

Sapa - Cat Cat Village trek
Sapa - Lao Chai to Ta Van trek
Sapa - Ta Van to Su Pan trek
Hanoi - Old Quarter Walking Tour
Hanoi - West Lake bike ride
Mai Chau - Pom Coong Village visit & traditional lunch
Mai Chau - Cycling
Mai Chau to Ninh Binh cycling
Lan Ha Bay - Kayaking
Lan Ha Bay - Kayaking

Optional Activities

Hanoi - Village Discovery by Bike Urban Adventure
Hanoi - Hanoi Street Food By Night Urban Adventure
Hanoi - Citadels, Karsts & Cycle Urban Adventure
Hanoi - Hanoi Highlights Urban Adventure
Hanoi - Hanoi Street Food By Night Urban Adventure
Hanoi - Village Discovery by Bike Urban Adventure
Hanoi - Citadels, Karsts & Cycle Urban Adventure
Hanoi - Hanoi Highlights 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.