

Vietnam Unveiled: A 10-Day Journey Across Cultures

DAY 1 | ARRIVAL HANOI

Welcome to Vietnam! When you arrive at Noi Bai airport, you will be met by our airport representative and transferred to your hotel to settle in. If you need an invigorating pick-me-up, remember that Vietnamese coffee, or "cà phê", is typically brewed strong and sweetened with condensed milk. For your information, Egg Coffee in Hanoi is a must-try.

Meal plan: None

Accommodations: Grand Mercure Hanoi

DAY 2 | HANOI HIGHLIGHTS WITH LUNCH

Join your Tour Director and fellow travelers on a guided exploration of Hanoi. Vietnam's capital city is known for its centuries-old architecture and rich cultural heritage, blending Southeast Asian, Chinese, and French influences.

- Pass Ba Dinh Square, where Ho Chi Minh—the revolutionary leader and president of North Vietnam—read the Proclamation of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.
- Wander through the 11th-century Temple of Literature, a walled complex that's dedicated to the Chinese philosopher Confucius and the site of Vietnam's first university.
- Visit the site of Hoa Lo Prison—the notorious "Hanoi Hilton"—where late U.S. Senator John McCain was held as a prisoner of war (POW) for more than five years during the Vietnam War.
- Tour the museum that occupies the remaining prison structure and learn about POWs' harrowing experiences in captivity.
- Board a bicycle rickshaw and ride through the busy Old Quarter, an area that's rich with Vietnamese architecture—picture wooden shutters and wrought-iron balconies—as well as hidden courtyards and gardens, locally owned shops, and street food vendors.
- Pass Dong Xuan Market (one of the largest wholesale markets in the north of Vietnam), the Hanoi Opera House (inspired by the Second Empire architecture of the Palais Garnier in Paris), and Hoàn Kiếm Lake (its name, which translates to Lake of the Restored Sword, derives from a 15th-century Vietnamese legend).

You can get to know your Tour Director and fellow travelers at a welcome lunch hosted by the KOTO Van Mieu. This social enterprise helps train vulnerable youth in the culinary and food service professions.

Vietnamese culture emphasizes sharing meals with guests. You can add an optional excursion to enjoy a home-hosted dinner of Vietnamese specialties with a local family. Would you be able to explore on your own? Use your free time today to go back to Hanoi's French Quarter or take a cyclo—a cycle rickshaw—ride through the city's narrow streets for the ultimate way of getting around.

Just so you know, if KOTO Van Mieu is unavailable, travelers will visit a similar vocational restaurant.

Meal plan: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodations: Grand Mercure Hanoi

DAY 3 | HALONG BAY ESCAPE

Transfer to Hạ Long Bay and embark on a luxurious, overnight cruise. As you explore the emerald waters of this striking setting and UNESCO World Heritage Site by boat, you'll pass by many of its nearly 2,000 limestone islands and islets, most of which are uninhabited and unaffected by human presence.

- Once on board the ship, enjoy a welcome drink, followed by an included lunch served with beer or wine.
- Cruise past notable natural features, including Fighting Cocks Islet's pair of limestone islets—shaped like a rooster and a hen—as well as Thien Cung Cave, and Dau Go Cave.
- Climb aboard a small tender with a guide from your ship and motor across the water to Sung Sot Cave—the largest and, according to many, most beautiful cave in the bay. Discovered in 1901, the cave's stalagmites and stalactites are lit by multicolored lights.
- Get back on board your tender for a ride to your next stop, Tung San Pearl Farm—pearl farming is an important source of livelihood for local communities, where you'll learn how pearls are grown using traditional Vietnamese methods and new Japanese technology.
- Paddle a kayak along the waters of Hạ Long Bay to enjoy up-close views of the deep green waters and stunning limestone karsts. Keep an eye out for colorful fish, jellyfish, and even monkeys on some of the islands.
- Return to your ship to enjoy a Vietnamese cooking demonstration, then sit down for an included dinner served with beer or wine.

Meal plan: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Accommodations: Orchid Classic Cruise

DAY 4 | HALONG BAY - FLY TO HOIAN

Join a sunrise lesson in Tai Chi—a gentle form of exercise that originated in China as a martial art—on the ship this morning, if you're up for it. Then, hop into a small boat and make your way to Ti Top Island for time spent swimming or hiking to the top of the island—summit height is about 360 feet or 110 meters—to enjoy panoramic views of Hạ Long Bay's island-dotted waters.

After enjoying an included lunch, disembark your cruise ship and board a flight to Da Nang. Then, transfer to your hotel in Hoi An. Freshen up at your hotel, then gather with your fellow travelers this evening for an included dinner with beer or wine.

Meal plan: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodations: Almanity Hoian Resort & Spa

DAY 5 | EXPLORE HOIAN & COUNTRYSIDE VISIT

Explore Hoi An on a guided tour, shopping its markets where you'll be sure to find the perfect Vietnamese keepsake to bring home.

- Discover the city's landmarks, including the ornate Japanese covered bridge and Old Town, which has retained its charm as a major trading port and is now a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site.
- Pass by the quaint Nguyen Thi Minh Khai pedestrian shopping street and its colorful, eye-catching stalls.
- Walk the town's cobblestone streets to see the 18th-century Quan Thang Ancient House with its majestic wooden carvings and silk lantern shop.

This afternoon, could you pay a visit to Cam Thanh village, known as the Coconut Village, located in the Bay Mau coconut forest?

- Visit a farm to learn how Vietnamese farmers grow rice in the fields.
- Sit down for a family-style lunch at the farm.
- Interact with a rice farmer and watch water buffalo plow the fields while enjoying a tea tasting.

After sampling Vietnamese delicacies, why not try your hand at preparing them yourself? Add an optional excursion: take a hands-on cooking class or return to Hội An and enjoy a free evening in the city, perusing a night market or relaxing by the river.

Meal plan: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodations: Almanity Hoian Resort & Spa

DAY 6 | TRANSFER TO HUE & SIGHTSEEING TOURS

Travel through the Hai Van Pass as you make your way to Hue, famous for imperial and colonial history, all set along the peaceful “Perfume River”.

- Explore the Thien Mu Pagoda, Vietnam’s tallest religious building. Built in 1601, it’s been preserved, expanded, and enhanced for generations to become the unofficial symbol of Hue.
- Visit the fortress and palace known as the Imperial City, surrounded by massive stone walls that stretch for 1.5 miles and punctuated with large gateways and protective moats.
- Head to the Mine Action Visitor Center, where you’ll meet up with a center guide to learn about the ramifications of the Vietnam War that are still felt today, as well as the center’s efforts to remove landmines and other unexploded ordnance from the Vietnamese countryside.

Enjoy an included dinner with beer or wine this evening with your group.

Meal plan: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodation: Silk Path Grand Hue Hotel

DAY 7 | DESIGN YOUR DAY IN HUE - FLY TO HO CHI MINH CITY

Design your day in Hue today and add an optional excursion that delves further into the Nguyen dynasty emperors and their impressive tombs. If you’re heading off on your own, ask your Tour Director for a recommendation. We suggest continuing to explore the traditional houses in the city center, checking out the treasures at the Hue Royal Antiquities Museum, and, of course, trying local specialties like Hue-style crepes and sweet dessert soups.

Later, could you board your flight to Ho Chi Minh City? Ho Chi Minh City was officially renamed from Saigon on April 30, 1975, the same day Saigon fell to North Vietnamese forces, leading to the reunification of North and South Vietnam. Many locals, especially older residents, still refer to the city as Saigon.

Meal plan: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodations: Caravelle Saigon Hotel

DAY 8 | HO CHI MINH CITY HISTORY TOUR

Take in the sights of Vietnam’s dynamic, vibrant metropolis—and largest city—on a guided tour. Ho Chi Minh City, or Saigon, was a crucial political, economic, and military hub of South Vietnam during the Vietnam War.

- Witness Vietnam's progression from French colony to unified, independent nation as you enter the Reunification Palace, whose architecture draws heavily on Brutalism and modernist design.
- See the General Post Office, City Hall, and Notre-Dame Cathedral Basilica of Saigon—whose building materials were imported from France in the late 1800s.
- Visit Ben Thanh Market and stroll along Le Cong Kieu, a street known for its treasure trove of antiques.

Spend the afternoon learning more about the history and impact of the Vietnam War.

- Take a self-guided tour of the War Remnants Museum to get a local perspective on the lingering effects of the Vietnam War.
- Visit the vast underground network of narrow, winding tunnels at Cù Chi, which were built during Vietnam's war of independence from French colonial authority in the 1940s and expanded during the Vietnam War in the 1960s.
- Learn how the North Vietnamese waged guerrilla warfare against the South.
- See secret trapdoors, underground kitchens, living areas, and meeting rooms.

Please note: Your guide will advise you of the length and difficulty of each tunnel before you enter. Those preferring to remain above ground will have ample opportunity to view excavated areas. Good walking shoes and sun protection are recommended, as are clothes that can get slightly dirty.

Meal plan: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodations: Caravelle Saigon Hotel

DAY 9 | JOURNEY TO THE MEKONG DELTA & FAREWELL DINNER

Journey south to the Mekong Delta town of Ben Tre to board a boat for a winding introduction to life on the river. Begin with a visit to an artisan brick kiln business and learn the importance of brick production in the area and how the bricks' design has remained unchanged for centuries. Continue cruising to a coconut plantation, where you can try your hand at picking young coconuts and see how coconut candy is made while enjoying a tasting of other tropical fruits, tea, and honey. Next, you'll stop and visit local women at a straw mat-weaving workshop and enjoy a demonstration of traditional straw weaving. Step off the beaten trail for a moment and travel by either motor cart or bike along a back road to a local family's home, where you'll enjoy an included lunch and learn about their lives. Afterward, stroll along the canal, then travel by motor and paddle boat back to the pier.

Tonight, rejoin your fellow travelers at a local restaurant for a celebratory farewell dinner served with beer or wine.

Meal plan: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Accommodations: Caravelle Saigon Hotel

DAY 10 | FREE DAY & DEPARTURE HOME

Retrace yesterday's steps through Ho Chi Minh City and linger at the market and street food stalls, or add an optional cooking class with lunch to your schedule.

Transfer to the airport to board your onward flight home or extend your trip to explore an environmental and cultural jewel, the island of Phu Quoc, for a special side of Vietnam you—and your five senses—will never forget.

Meal plan: Breakfast

Accommodations: N/A