



Vietnam

11 days

Tour Description

Located on the Indochinese peninsula, Vietnam has both tropical and temperate weather patterns. It's made up of chaotic yet vibrant cities, rice fields dot the countryside, bustling marketplaces stand alongside rivers, dense mountain regions and a long coastline. Vietnam has a diversified culture of 54 different ethnic groups, 90% of whom are Kinh (Viet). The major religions include Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Caodaism and Hao. The Vietnamese lifestyle is closely related to its villages and native lands. This is a country that's striving to modernize, yet still embraces it's glorious past.

Highlights

- ❖ Visit the Presidential Palace, once headquarters during the American (Vietnamese) War
- ❖ Explore the Chu Chi Tunnels system left over from the war
- ❖ Take a Mekong Delta cruise via Sampan
- ❖ Admire Buddhist Pagodas and temples
- ❖ Visit Ba Dinh Square where Ho Chi Minh lies in state
- ❖ Take a Halong Bay Cruise via Sailing Junk

Sample Tour Itinerary

Ho Chi Minh (Saigon) – 4 nights

Day 1: Arrival Saigon

Welcome to the most western of Vietnam's cities. Ho Chi Minh is a booming metropolis of 5 million people featuring elegant colonial French boulevards and sidewalk cafés that contrast with the crowded, bustling populous that call this home. During your transfer from the airport to the city, you'll pass by the looming Cathedral Notre Dame and the Opera House.

Day 2: Saigon Tour

Visit the former Presidential Palace, which is now preserved as a museum, including the underground communications bunkers, headquarters for the Saigon Government during the American War. Continue to the History Museum, which houses an excellent display tracing the origins of the indigenous Vietnamese. See Notre Dame, an impressive neo-Romanesque cathedral in the center of the city, the 'wedding cake' styled Hotel d'Ville and the former US Embassy. After lunch, visit Cholon, which literally translates to 'big market', and is the focus for the Chinese community. See Cha Tam Church, where President Diem sought refuge shortly before his assassination in 1963. Visit the impressive Thien Hau Temple dedicated to the goddess of the seas, who is said to protect fishermen and sailors. Here huge coils of incense hang from the ornate ceiling, and can burn for up to three months at a time. Visit Binh Tay market which bustles with trading activity and stop at a tiny Cao Dai temple, where one small sect of this eclectic religion worship daily.



Day 3: Tunnels and Village Full Day Tour

Journey out of Saigon to Cu Chi, where you will visit the vast underground network of tunnels built first as a defense against the French, and later expanded during the American war. It was from here that the North Vietnamese waged their guerrilla warfare and you will marvel at their ingenuity and resilience; see secret trapdoors, underground kitchens, living areas and meeting rooms. The more adventurous may explore the deeper second, and even third level tunnels. For those preferring to remain above ground, there is ample opportunity to view excavated areas from above. Your guide will advise you of the length and level of difficulty of each tunnel before entering - some are easily accessed by stairs. After lunch continue on to the nearby Crafts Village for a casual lunch followed by an afternoon tour of the craft village where guests will see examples of ethnic minority long houses. The handicrafts quarter includes traditional crafts such as embroidery, weaving, knitting, joint wood painting, sculpture, gold-leaf making, gold inlay, ceramics and paper making. You will learn about the skillfulness, patience, and talent of Vietnamese craftsmen and artists through workshops such as knitting, ceramics or enamel picture making.

Day 4: Mekong Delta Waterways Full Day Tour

Heading out of town, we'll travel along the bustling highway into the surrounding countryside where you will pass lush rice paddies carefully tended, before boarding your motorized sampan for a unique experience on the mighty Mekong Delta waterways. As you journey through a maze of tributaries and fruit plantations you will see how the water is a lifeline and the focus of daily life. Enjoy a sample of delicious fruit in the shade of a fruit farmer's garden before continuing via sampan through small canals on to lunch, where the speciality is a remarkable dish of 'elephant ear fish.' Return to Ho Chi Minh City by the late afternoon.

Hue – 2 nights

Day 5: Arrival in Hue

Transfer to the airport for your one-hour flight from Saigon to Hue. Visitors to Hue are often taken aback to discover that the sleepy provincial town was once the religious, economic and cultural epicenter of Vietnam; the mighty Imperial headquarters of 13 Nguyen Dynasty Emperors, and the political capital of the country until 1945. That this glorious architectural masterpiece of a city should have been reduced almost completely to rubble as a result of war is a tragedy, but has regained its royal demeanor and is a peaceful and tranquil place to visit.

Day 6: Country-side Full Day Tour

We'll start today by visiting one of the most famous sights in Hue, the Thien Mu Pagoda. An octagonal tower of seven tiers rises majestically over the tranquil Perfume (Huong) River. Beyond you may see robed monks chanting their mantra, or novices carefully tending the bonsai garden. One unusual feature of this temple is the blue Ford Austin motor car in the ground; the same car that appeared on television screens around the world when a revered monk self-immolated in central Saigon, in protest of the repressive Diem regime in the 60's. Then, continue on to visit the Imperial Citadel, which was built in 1804 by Emperor Gia Long (the first Nguyen emperor). After lunch, continue to Emperor Tu Duc Tomb, resplendent with its traditional architecture, paved walkways, resting pavilions overlooking tranquil lotus ponds, and a small



forest for hunting. Then, you'll see the tomb of Minh Mang built between 1841 and 1843, it's well known for its harmonious blend of architecture and natural landscape.

Hanoi – 4 nights

Day 7: Arrival in Hanoi

Transfer to the airport for the short flight from Hue to Hanoi. Check-in at your hotel, with the balance of the day on your own to explore this northern city. Stroll down the tree-lined streets of Hanoi, resplendent with French colonial architecture, including the recently restored Opera House and the former Governor's Residence is a fine example.

Day 8: Hanoi Full Day Tour

In the morning we will visit Ba Dinh Square, where silent sentries guard the marble and granite mausoleum where Ho Chi Minh lies in state. (Subject to opening times the interior of the mausoleum can be visited). See the simple cottage where Uncle Ho lived and worked, Nearby, visit the Ho Chi Minh Museum, an extraordinary tribute in abstract form to the life of the 'father of the country' and the evolution of Vietnamese independence. See also the One Pillar Pagoda, and hear the legend of its construction, born from the love of an emperor in the 11th Century. After lunch we will enjoy an orientation of this city that lies on Hoan Kiem Lake, stopping at one of its fascinating museums (Army, History or Fine Arts, depending on your preference). Continue to the Temple of Literature, built in 1070 and dedicated to Confucius, which later became Vietnam's first university. Then take to the streets on foot for a walking tour of the Ancient Quarter or 36 Streets District. This densely populated corner of the city was once a center of commerce where goods were sold under the street name of a particular guild. Still a thriving community of sellers today, you will see street names such as Sugar Street, Tin Street and Paper Street. Ancient homes and temples are interspersed with stores in this souvenir hunter's paradise!

Day 9: Halong Bay Cruise

Enjoy breakfast at your hotel before departing on the four hour drive to Halong. Often called Vietnam's eighth wonder of the world, 3000 spectacular limestone outcroppings, cliffs, arches and coves compete for space in an area that is without doubt the most naturally beautiful coastal scenery. Board a traditional Chinese-style sailing junk as we meander through the area whose name translates to 'Where the Dragon Descends into the Sea.' Stop off at an islet and climb through a series of breathtaking caves and grottoes, marvelling at some of the most impressive stalactite and stalagmite formations anywhere in the world. A luscious seafood lunch will be served on-board.

Day 10: Tay & Tay Phuong Pagoda Tour

Rich in Buddhism, this area of Vietnam is home to the country's most colorful and revered pagodas and temples. Located 40 kilometres southwest of Hanoi lies the Tay Pagoda (Master's pagoda). While a temple is a place to pay homage to the dead, a pagoda is a place to worship the Lord Buddha. Tay Pagoda is widely known for its finely carved statues in lacquer and gold of Buddha in his past and present form and for its colourful Buddhist ceremonies performed here during auspicious dates of the Lunar calendar. Nearby lies Tay Phuong Pagoda. Built in 1794 the pagoda is famous for its vast display of finely carved wooden statues of former monks from the 18th Century.



Day 11: Departure

Transfer to the airport for your flight home.

INCLUSIONS

- Accommodations: Ho Chi Minh (Saigon) 4 nights, Hue 2 nights, Hanoi 4 nights
- Meals: Continental breakfast daily, lunch and dinner as noted in itinerary
- Ground transportation via air conditioned luxury coach
- English speaking assistants and guides
- Admission tickets as outlined in the itinerary