

Touring Holidays in Vietnam

Expressions



Highlights of Vietnam Touring Holiday



Highlights of Vietnam

10 NIGHTS / 11 DAYS

Hanoi - Ha Long Bay - Hue - Hoi An - Ho Chi Minh City

Expressions

Highlights

Tran Quoc Pagoda, Hanoi
Ha Long Bay overnight cruise
Perfume River cruise
Thien Mu Pagoda
Royal Tombs of the Emperor Minh Mang
Cham Museum Danang
Ancient Town of Hoi An
Museum of War, Ho Chi Minh City
Jade Emperor Temple
Ben Thanh market
Ben Tre and Mango cruise
Bicycle rides and sampan canal trip
Tea at home of rice paper makers



Ha Long Bay

Tracing a long, languid curve down the eastern edge of South East Asia, Vietnam is a land of extraordinary natural beauty. The shape of the land lends itself to a deliberate all-encompassing trail, beginning in the north with Hanoi, and travelling down along the coast and past the mountains to the Ho Chi Minh area, though unique routes and regions of particular focus are always possible. Our range of accommodation includes everything from lovely, boutique residences to grand, seafront, colonial hotels. Hand-crafted authentic experiences make your bespoke holiday to Vietnam even more special, with exciting possibilities available, such as an overnight village home-stay, a Vietnamese cooking class, or a sightseeing tour by Vespa or vintage car.

ABOUT THIS TOUR

This ten-night tour accompanied by local guide offers a brilliant first-time insight into Vietnam as you travel from Hanoi in the north, via the UNESCO site of Ha Long Bay, to the ancient cities of Hue and Hoi An, with time to relax on the beach at Hoi An before the bustling street life of Saigon and then a fascinating trip to the tropical fields near Ben Tre, about two hours' south from Ho Chi Minh City and an area famed for its natural beauty and a wealth of food and craft products.

PRICES

From about £2,890 per person
in superior accommodation

From about £4,340 per person
in first class accommodation

DATES

This holiday can be arranged throughout the year. Timings can vary depending on the month and day of the week.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Return scheduled flights with Vietnam Airlines from London to Hanoi, returning from Ho Chi Minh City to London in economy class
- Domestic flights from Hanoi to Hue and Danang to Ho Chi Minh City
- Breakfast and accommodation sharing a twin or double room.
- Seven lunches and two dinners (as specified in the itinerary) plus full board on the boat in Ha Long Bay. Some of the optional alternative excursions may also include lunch.
- Private transfers and sightseeing tours in an air-conditioned car appropriate to the size of your party
- Boat cruises as specified in the itinerary. All Ha Long boats are fully licenced and comply with current safety regulations.
- Services of an English-speaking guide as

indicated in the itinerary (free days or part-free days as well as transfers unless specified do not include the services of the guide).

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

- Visas – our local agent in Vietnam offers a free visa service
- Meals, except as specified above
- Drinks, gratuities and personal expenses
- Camera fees where applicable
- Insurance
- There may be supplements for compulsory Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve gala dinners, sometimes payable locally

DAY-BY-DAY ITINERARY

Hanoi - Ha Long Bay - Hue - Hoi An - Ho Chi Minh City

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Day one: Arrive in Hanoi

You will be met on arrival and transferred to your hotel. There is time to relax after your journey before your guide accompanies you to performance of traditional water puppetry (an art form unique to northern Vietnam, and an interesting, light-hearted introduction to its rural culture). In the evening, you will enjoy a welcome dinner at restaurant in a colonial building.

Day two: Hanoi

You have the whole day to explore Vietnam's capital city. Your guide will discuss with you about any places in particular you want to visit but in principle will take you to the Temple of Literature, the first university in Vietnam dating back to the 11th century, and Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum, his simple stilt house where he lived and worked, and the museum dedicated to his memory. After an included lunch, visit the serene Tran Quoc Pagoda, the oldest in Hanoi, on the banks of Hanoi's Ho Tay (West) Lake. The bustling Old Quarter is a magnet for visitors. It's a maze of shopping streets and restaurants with a hotchpotch of architecture - traditional tube houses, religious buildings, artisans' workshops and cottages, colonial houses and modern concrete edifices. It is noisy and hectic, but definitely a 'must-see' attraction in the city. Another famous market you can visit whilst in the Old Quarter is the Dong Xuan market.

Alternative for day 2:

Cycling and exploring villages around Hanoi
In the morning, you'll be picked up and driven to Bat Trang. Stroll the small alleys of this old village, famous for its high quality ceramics, watch local people producing their fine products and visit some of the houses used as workshops and showrooms. Collect your bicycles and ride along the river dyke, through more of the small villages that surround Hanoi. The total distance you cycle is about 7 kms and it is on a small road that runs beside a tributary of the Red River. At the end of the ride, you are driven to Dong Ho village, famous for its traditional paintings. After a picnic lunch, your driver will take you to Tam Tao village where you will enjoy the traditional Quan Ho music performed by villagers in the commune house. The singers have been officially designated as part of Vietnam's living heritage. In the late afternoon, you'll return to Hanoi for the night.

Day three: Hanoi to Ha Long Bay

After an early breakfast, depart by car for Ha Long Bay, one of the most spectacular UNESCO World Heritage Areas and the world's largest marine limestone 'karst' landscape. There you will board your boat,



Hue

a wooden junk built from the model of old Vietnamese court vessels with sails, a wide transom and rectangular superstructure. The boats vary in size, accommodating between ten and eighteen people. that takes you first to the busy World Heritage area and then to some of the less well-known grottoes and caves. Weather permitting, swim, fish, and climb a hill that affords a view of the Bay's remarkable seascape, or venture into some of the sea level caves in a small sampan. All meals are provided on board, usually based on fresh seafood, and you'll sleep in a twin cabin with en-suite toilet and shower.

Day four: Ha long Bay to Hue via Hanoi

The morning is spent cruising Ha Long Bay, followed by lunch just before docking. You are driven back to Hanoi Noi Bai airport for your flight to Hue. Upon arrival in Hue, you will be picked up and transferred to your hotel for the night. Hue is traditionally a main cultural, religious and educational centre of Vietnam and houses the remarkable tombs of the Nguyen emperors, whose dynasty lasted from 1802 until 1942, a citadel in the Vauban style dating from 1804, a palace and the 21 metre-high Thien Mu Pagoda, astride the Perfume River

Day five: Hue

This morning you will cruise along the Perfume River to the Thien Mu Pagoda, and then travel by road to the Royal Tombs of Emperor Minh Mang. Each royal mausoleum reflects the personality

of the Emperor it commemorates. The most majestic is that of Emperor Minh Mang, who ruled from 1820 to 1840, a staunch follower of Confucianism with many wives, concubines and a small army of children. Planned by the Emperor and built shortly after his death in formal Chinese style, it is opulent and exotic, and a good example of classic Sino-Vietnamese architecture. In contrast to Emperor Ming Mang's flamboyant creation, the tomb of Emperor Khai Dinh is an uneasy combination of Vietnamese and European features, using fragments of ceramics and glass for decoration, but with striking views from the courtyard in front of the mausoleum.

After an included lunch, your guide will arrive to take you on a tour of Hue's ancient citadel, once the seat of the Emperors of the powerful Nguyen Dynasty that ruled Vietnam from about 1800 until 1945. You begin with a stroll around the area between the Citadel's giant walls and the defensive moat, now filled with lotus flowers. You then enter the Noon Gate to wander around the Thai Hoa Palace, the Pavilion housing the Nine urns of the Nguyen rulers and the remains of the Royal Palaces. You then visit Dong Ba market before returning to your hotel before dinner. In the evening, you'll have dinner in the charming surroundings of the garden houses, that are a unique feature of Hue. The houses are traditional, privately owned and set in attractive formal gardens. Some have connections with the old Royal Imperial Court but each is highly individual where house and garden, plants, air and water co-exist harmoniously. The narrow

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streets and abundant flora give the garden house area the feel of a country village

Day six: Hue to Danang to Hoi An

You leave the hotel in Hue this morning for the drive to Danang, crossing the high mountain pass of Hai Van with excellent views from the top, built on a spur of the Truong Son Mountains that juts into the South China Sea. You should be able to see Lang Co beach and village, with Danang to the south. In Danang, you'll be shown the remarkable Hindu statuary in the Cham Museum, a fine open-air collection of Cham sculpture. After an included lunch, you have a guided visit of the ancient town of Hoi An.

Hoi An is a UNESCO World Heritage site. An ancient trading port, once the largest in Indochina, Hoi An was a meeting point for many cultures that left their mark on the different architectural features of its wooden buildings. Untouched by the American War, the original street pattern still exists, as does the quay that once welcomed ships from all over East Asia and beyond. Many remained in port for months at a time, waiting for the trade winds to carry them home. Today there is still an array of interesting houses, shops, family chapels, pagodas and temples, tombs, bridges and clothes shops where tailoring will be carried out on demand. There are plenty of good restaurants and it is a good place for shopping for silk. You spend the night in Hoi An.

Day seven: Hoi An

A day at leisure in Hoi An to spend the day on the beach or exploring the town. The night is spent in Hoi An. Own arrangements for dinner.

Alternative for day 7:

Visit My Son

My Son was once the spiritual capital of the Cham kingdom that dominated the region for nearly a thousand years until the 15th Century. My Son is the Cham equivalent to other Indian-influenced cities in the region such as Angkor and Bagan. Although My Son was heavily bombed during the American war, its remarkable brick towers, a hallmark of its civilisation, are still impressive, as is its remote valley setting in a quiet, richly forested area, crossed by a clear stream and with coffee plantations nearby. Elements of the Cham civilisation can still be seen in the local peoples from their pottery, silk production and rice fields. (Good sun protection is important as the tree cover is not complete and the valley acts as a sun trap). Return to Hoi An and have the rest of the day free.

Or Farmer to Fisherman tour



Thapcham

This is a half day tour that begins with cycling the narrow roads through the countryside, passing by rice paddy fields, water buffalos, bamboo bridges and local farmers on their daily work. You then board a boat that takes you to the mouth of the Thu Bon estuary where the river meets the Cua Dai Sea. You cruise along the coastline, observing the lives of local fishermen. You join the fishermen to try your hand at catching fish in a traditional 'Thung Chai' basket boat. (These are light and portable, circular and constructed of bamboo then tarred for waterproofing. Each boat can carry up to five people. Life jackets are provided). Then the boat meanders through the water palm coconut canal. During the American war, Viet Cong soldiers made use of this area as a highly effective hiding place. You visit a local fishing village and enjoy a fresh seafood lunch before cycling back to your hotel.

Day eight: Hoi An to Ho Chi Minh City

Enjoy a morning at leisure before an afternoon flight to Ho Chi Minh City. After transferring to your centrally located hotel, you're free to wander around District 1. During your time in Ho Chi Minh City it is possible to swap some of our suggested visits for others. For example, instead of Ben Tre you could visit the Cu Chi Tunnels (Ben Dinh is about 20 kms from Ho Chi Minh City) or these could be visited on the last day, depending on the time of your flight. Another possibility is to extend your time in Ho Chi Minh City by one night. Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) is a thriving

metropolis which has nevertheless preserved 300 years of traditions and ancient culture.

For the evening there are a couple of options: Nightlife by Vespa

This evening you are picked up at the hotel for a tour on the back of a vintage Vespa scooter, to experience the nightlife of Saigon the way the locals do. Your first stop is at Café Zoom to enjoy a cocktail and appetiser (included) before adventuring to a favourite local eating spot. The ride takes you through Chinatown into District 4, through busy streets and alleys, into District 3 and downtown District 1 on the way to taste Banh Xeo, Saigon's speciality snack.

Or
A O Show

The A O show captures much of the uniqueness of Vietnam in the engaging style of contemporary circus. The hour-long show is a fusion of dance, acrobatics and live music with theatrical drama tracing the passage of Vietnam from a rural village culture to the modern, urban society it is today.

Day nine: Ho Chi Minh City

After breakfast your local guide will arrive to take you on a tour of Ho Chi Minh City. You visit the History Museum, where there is a special exhibition of the 5th century Oc Eo civilisation (as an alternative you might visit the Fito Museum which hosts a large collection of relics, including traditional Vietnamese medicinal implements and chronicles the history of medical practice in Vietnam from

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2000 BC). You also visit the Museum of War Remnants (not for the squeamish) which provides a fascinating perspective of the 'American War'. Another site visited is the Jade Emperor Pagoda, one of the best Taoist temples in Vietnam with superb effigies, carved panels of the descent to Hell and also terrapin and tortoise sanctuaries. After the sightseeing there is time to rest and freshen up or visit the lively Ben Thanh market. Overnight in Ho Chi Minh City.

Day ten: Full day Ben Tre exploration

This morning you are taken south from Ho Chi Minh City on a two-hour drive to Ben Tre Province, in the Mekong Delta, famous for coconut production and quiet, peaceful waterways. On arrival, ride a xe loi through Huu Dinh Village to enjoy the green fields and gardens. Continue a short distance on foot to Huu Phuoc Bridge, where you begin your boat trip through small canals amidst tropical scenery. On board the Mango cruise boat enjoy a welcome drink of fresh coconut juice and tropical fruit. At your first stop visit a brick making workshop where locals still use centuries-old traditional methods to make bricks by hand. Then, back on the boat, you cross the An Hoa river and take a sampan along narrow canals. The sampan will take you to a local household where three generations live under one roof and make a living on fishing, shrimps and fruit. You are invited to sample their fresh fruit and tea before you move on to visit a rice noodle factory producing Hu Tieu noodles, one of the most popular breakfast dishes in the region.

After that there is bicycle ride along village roads past gardens and local houses, where families live on the traditional business of sampan boat building. Your next stop will be at the home of Mr Sau Tuong, a former Vietcong soldier who survived two years' fighting the Khmer Rouge in Phnom Penh. He and his wife now make rice paper, the speciality of My Long village. Time to chat to him and to enjoy the crispy rice paper made by his wife. The bike ride continues to a riverside restaurant nearby for lunch. Relax and stroll through the



Sunset scene in Vietnam

garden. After lunch you visit the nearby house of Mr Hung, a famous sticky rice maker. He has catfish you can feed and an orchard to visit. Then your boat will be waiting for you at the nearby pier to bring you back to Ben Tre City, and then it's back by car to Ho Chi Minh City for your final night's accommodation.

Day eleven: Ho Chi Minh City and departure

Enjoy the rest of your time until your transfer to the airport for your return or onward flight.



Thien Mu Pagoda, Hue



Basket making



Boating on the Mekong Delta

HOTELS

Our selection of hotels in Hanoi, Ha Long Bay, Hue, Hoi An and Ho Chi Minh City are described below.

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As with most of our tours to Vietnam, we offer the choice of mainly four star hotels in our superior accommodation option as well as mainly five star hotels in our First Class option. However, you can mix and match the hotels or ask us to find others for you too. This ten-night tour can be adapted with additional nights in any of the places, or combined with a beach stay at the end perhaps. Also, you are not confined to travelling with Vietnam Airlines and we can arrange for you to fly via other countries in the region, for example Thailand, Singapore and Hong Kong, which is useful if you want to combine a tour of Vietnam with a stay in another country.

FIRST CLASS HOTELS

Hanoi

Sofitel Metropole Hotel

Sofitel Metropole Hotel, 5-star, historic colonial building in a city centre location – Luxury Room Historic Wing

Ha Long Bay

Paradise Luxury Cruise

Traditional junk cruise – Terrace suite cabin
Surrounded

Hue

La Residence Hotel and Spa

4-star deluxe boutique hotel on the banks of the Perfume river – colonial suite

Hoi An

Palm Garden Resort

5-star, villa and bungalow style resort on the northern part of Cua Dai beach – bungalow beachfront

Ho Chi Minh City

Park Hyatt Hotel

Excellent 5-star hotel next to Ho Chi Minh City's Opera House in the heart of District 1, colonial-style architecture, very comfortable – Park garden view room



Sofitel Metropole, Hanoi

SUPERIOR STANDARD HOTELS

Hanoi

Silk Path Hotel

4 star, in Hanoi's Old Quarter – premium deluxe room

Ha Long Bay

La Vela Premium Cruise

4-star, modern superior quality cruise – premium balcony cabin

Hue

Saigon Morin Hotel

4-star colonial style hotel overlooking the Perfume River – colonial deluxe room

Hoi An

Boutique Resort Hoi An

4-star beachfront boutique resort situated on Hoi An beach and about a 5 minute drive from Hoi An Ancient Town – superior room

Ho Chi Minh City

Liberty Central Hotel

4-star hotel in the city centre – premier deluxe room



Paradise Cruise, Ha Long Bay



La Residence, Hue



Park Hyatt, Ho Chi Minh City



Liberty Hotel, Ho Chi Minh City



Boutique Resort, Hoi An

MAP OF HIGHLIGHTS OF VIETNAM HOLIDAY

The map below illustrates the route outlined in this touring itinerary, with overnight stops and places of interest highlighted.



GENERAL INFORMATION

This touring holiday is one of several suggested holidays we can offer you exactly as it is but also with any alterations you might want, including extra nights in one or more places or adding in extra places. All our tours can be extended so that you can include a longer stay in one location too, perhaps at the end of the itinerary. Do call to discuss the options with our travel consultants.

The logo for Expressions Holidays, featuring the word "Expressions" in a white, elegant script font on a dark blue rectangular background.

OUR TOURS

Our touring holidays are for individuals travelling on their own or in their own family group. You do not join a group, but are escorted by an English-speaking local guide with transport as appropriate to the itinerary.

FLEXIBLE ARRANGEMENTS

Our arrangements are very flexible in that you choose to travel on any day you want, subject to availability. Additional nights can be added at any point or the suggested itinerary here amended to accommodate your personal interests.

FLIGHT ARRANGEMENTS

There are a number of ways you can fly to Vietnam. Vietnamese Airlines flight direct from London to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh but other airlines such as Cathay Pacific or Thai might be more appropriate for your holiday, if you want to stop off en-route.

TRAVEL WITHIN VIETNAM

The travel arrangements we include in our tours of Vietnam are appropriate for the route and journey. Travel will be by a mixture of car, air and train.

GENERAL FACTS

Capital

Hanoi

Airport

There are three international airports in Vietnam. They are Tan Son Nhat airport, Ho Chi Minh City; Noi Bai airport, Hanoi; Danang Airport

Currency

Vietnam Dong

Size

128,000 sq miles

Population

91 million

Average temperatures

Although the entire country lies within the tropics and subtropics, Vietnam's climate varies considerably from region to region. Summer temperatures can reach as high as 40°C, though the average hovers round 30°C; November to March average daily temperatures are about 19°C. The winter monsoon comes from the northeast between October and March, bringing damp and chilly winters to all areas north of Nha Trang, and dry and warm temperatures to the south. From April or May to October, the summer monsoon brings hot, humid weather to

the whole country except for those areas sheltered by mountains.

VIETNAM - THE COUNTRY

Tracing a long, languid curve down the eastern edge of South East Asia, Vietnam is a land of extraordinary natural beauty. Soaring mountains and swaying rice fields, sweeping beaches and the mighty Mekong, Vietnam has it all, with Halong Bay and its iconic limestone towers the jewel in the country's dazzling crown. Surviving war after war, colonial rule and communism, Vietnam's people are determinedly upbeat and inventive, imbuing its cities with a crackling energy almost 24 hours per day. Hanoi is its bristling capital, with elegant colonial buildings overlooking avenues buzzing with motorbikes; old, imperial capital Hue is the cultural heartbeat, with palaces and pagodas, tombs and temples, and a biennial arts festival worth the airfare alone; Ho Chi Minh City – or Saigon as it's still universally known – is all hustle and bustle, an intoxicating blend of the old and the new, with teeming markets dwarfed by towering skyscrapers. If Vietnam's cities prove too much, the Mekong Delta provides an ancient, intoxicating foreverness of rice fields and sleepy villages, with river trips taking you along the country's timeless lifeblood. Inland, peasant women in conical hats still tend to their fields, children ride buffalos along country paths and farmers scratch out a living from rice fields cascading down the sheerest of hillsides.

But if Vietnam's hilly countryside is beautiful, its coastline is simply stunning. With its smattering of limestone karsts rising out of the mist, Halong Bay is the undoubted showstopper, but there are also some stunning beaches. Hoi An and Danang are blessed with sweeps of sand and offer a choice of watersports to match anywhere in Asia. A stunning country of vivid colours and dramatic landscapes, with sensational food, exquisite boutique hotels, and a warmth of welcome that will surprise and overwhelm, Vietnam ensures a wonderful holiday.

HIGHLIGHTS OF VIETNAM

Boat trips on Halong Bay, with the more adventurous able to explore its caves and secret lagoons by kayak, paddling around its limestone peaks; the long, sweeping beaches of Nha Trang; Vietnamese cuisine, bursting with fresh, vivid spices, as delicious in roadside food stalls as in top restaurants such as Mango Rooms in Hoi An; historic, riverside Hoi An, with superb galleries, particularly Apricot and Mai Tai galleries in the Old Quarter, and Dong Phong Art Gallery in the French Quarter; full-moon 'Legendary Nights' in Hoi An, when vehicles are banned from the Old Town, which is transformed into a magical land of silk lanterns, traditional food, song and dance, and games in the streets; explore Phong Nha Cave, the largest and most impressive cave in the country; cycle through Ho Chi Minh City, the city where bike is king; the beaches and unique Cham architecture of Quy Nhon; the rugged mountain retreat of Sapa, home to a plethora of minority tribes, and gateway to the Tonkin Alps; the mountain town of Dalat; Cat Tien National Park, a lush refuge for city dwellers with ample hiking and bird-watching, plus elephants, crocodiles and the endangered Javan rhino; the beaches of Mui Ne; river trips on the Mekong river, past river towns and sleepy villages, floating markets and fish stalls; the white-sand beaches of Phu Quoc, a little developed forested island gem; Hue, the old imperial capital and now the intellectual, cultural and spiritual heart of Vietnam.

OUR PRICES

The sample prices mentioned in this leaflet are generally a 'from' price based on the cheapest season of travel. However, flight hotel rates can change (up and down depending on offers), so we give you an accurate price for your holiday when we provide you with a quotation. Our sample prices should be used as an indication of how much a particular combination will cost and to show the differences on average between the hotel categories on offer.

PRICE INFORMATION IN MORE DETAIL

Scheduled return flights from London to Vietnam with Vietnam Airlines in economy, and accommodation at superior standard hotels such as the Silk Path Hotel, with meals and transport as mentioned.

From about £2,890 per person

BOOKING CONDITIONS

Our booking conditions apply to all holidays. A copy can be found on our website and a copy is also sent to you with a written quotation and when you make a booking.

FINANCIAL PROTECTION

Expressions Holidays offers full financial protection for all holidays you book with us. If your holiday includes a flight, the ATOL (3076) covers the costs of the holiday. If the holiday does not include a flight, it is the ABTOT bond that protects the cost of the holiday. We are also members of AITO (the Association of Independent Tour Operators) and ABTA.



Expressions Holidays
Lynx House, Pynes Hill, Exeter EX2 5JL

HOW TO BOOK

To make a booking, just phone us on

01392 441250

and we can take you through the details we need and start the booking process. A deposit is required to confirm the arrangements and this can be paid by debit or credit card over the phone. The level of the deposit will be confirmed at the point of booking and will depend on the ticketing deadlines involved in your booking.