Tour Code
VN1

ADVENTURESABROAD

VIETNAM

A Cultural Odyssey

15 days

Created on: 25 Nov, 2026

Day 1 Arrive in Hanoi

Arrive in Hanoi; transfer to our hotel.

Hanoi, located on the banks of the Red River (Song Hong), is an attractive city with lakes, fine boulevards, flourishing parks, and a public centre that is an architectural museum piece. Rich in history, this is one of the most ancient capitals in the world. Hanoi is like a living museum; a fascinating glimpse into a city of old, yet oozing with the energy and pace of a modern metropolis.

Overnight in Hanoi.

Included Meal(s): Dinner

Day 2 Hanoi: City Exploration

Today we explore Hanoi's historic highlights, witnessing a capital city where tree-lined boulevards, lakes, parks, belle époque villas, and Buddhist temples create a distinctive urban landscape.

We begin at the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum, the final resting place of Vietnam's most iconic leader. The building, constructed from materials gathered from across Vietnam, closely follows the design of Lenin's Mausoleum in Moscow. Ho Chi Minh's preserved body lies in a glass case, and the site serves as a place of pilgrimage for Vietnamese visitors. The mausoleum periodically closes for maintenance, in which case we view it from the exterior only.

We continue to Ho Chi Minh's Stilt House behind the Presidential Palace. Despite his position as President of North Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh chose to live in this modest two-room house built in traditional style, elevated on wooden pillars. The building, constructed from polished and lacquered wood, demonstrates his commitment to simplicity — a stark contrast to the grandiose Presidential Palace nearby, which he never occupied.

The One Pillar Pagoda, originally built in 1049, represents one of Vietnam's most distinctive temples. The lotus-shaped structure rises from a square pool on a single stone pillar, rebuilt after French forces destroyed the original in 1954. The design symbolizes a lotus blossom emerging from muddy water, representing purity rising from an impure world.

At the Ethnology Museum, one of Vietnam's finest museums, we gain insight into the country's 54 ethnic minority groups. The indoor galleries display traditional clothing, tools, and cultural artifacts, while the outdoor section features full-scale reconstructions of minority housing styles. The museum provides essential context for understanding Vietnam's cultural diversity beyond the dominant Kinh (Vietnamese) majority.

We visit the Temple of Literature, established in 1076 as Vietnam's first national university. For nearly 700 years, this Confucian institution educated the sons of mandarins and, later, commoners who passed rigorous examinations. Stone stelae mounted on turtle pedestals record the names of successful examination candidates from 1442 to 1779, creating a remarkable historical archive. The temple's five courtyards progress from public spaces to increasingly sacred areas, culminating in the sanctuary dedicated to Confucius.

We conclude at Hoa Lo Prison Museum, known to American prisoners of war as the "Hanoi Hilton." French colonists built this prison in the late 19th century to house Vietnamese political prisoners and revolutionaries. During the Vietnam War, North Vietnam held captured American pilots here. The museum presents both periods of the prison's history, though exhibits reflect an official Vietnamese perspective on the conflicts.

Overnight in Hanoi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Hanoi - Red River Delta & Tam Coc

This morning we drive to Ninh Binh Province through the Red River Delta, northern Vietnam's agricultural heartland. The Red River (Song Hong) rises in China's Yunnan Province and flows 1,175 kilometres (730 miles) through deep gorges before entering Vietnam and discharging into the Gulf of Tonkin through a vast delta. The silt it carries is rich in iron oxide, giving the water its distinctive red colour and its name. The delta's fertile soil has supported intensive rice cultivation for millennia.

After lunch we drive to Yen Mac village, where we meet a local family to learn about daily life in the delta. Families here practice diverse agriculture, growing rice in paddies while maintaining gardens abundant with vegetables and fruit — tomatoes, aubergines, spinach, herbs, papaya, longan, and jackfruit grow in remarkable profusion. We walk along narrow village lanes to see the local pagoda and communal house, the traditional centre of village governance and ceremonies. The relaxed atmosphere encourages interaction with residents going about their daily routines.

We continue to Hoa Lu, which served as Vietnam's capital during the Dinh Dynasty (968-980) and early Le Dynasty (980-1009). We visit temples dedicated to these dynasties' rulers, set among karst limestone peaks that provided natural fortifications. After Hoa Lu, we drive across the Trang An eco-tourism complex to reach Hang Mua Cave. A climb of 450 steps brings us to the summit, where panoramic views reveal the region's remarkable landscape — often called "Halong Bay on land" — with limestone peaks rising from rice fields and waterways.

This region's combination of karst scenery, historical sites, and agricultural landscapes earned it UNESCO World Heritage designation in 2014 under the name Trang An Landscape Complex.

Overnight in Tam Coc.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 4 Tam Coc - Lan Ha Bay Overnight Cruise

This morning we journey to Lan Ha Bay, absorbing views of the Red River Delta and its rice fields throughout the drive. Lan Ha Bay, lying south and east of Cat Ba Town, comprises approximately 300 karst islands and limestone outcrops. Being farther from Halong City than the more famous Halong Bay, Lan Ha receives fewer tourist boats, creating a more secluded atmosphere.

We arrive at Dinh Vu port around midday and board our overnight boat. Lunch is served as we cruise toward Lan Ha Bay, entering a seascape of limestone karst peaks rising dramatically from emerald waters. These formations began as coral reefs millions of years ago; tectonic uplift and erosion created the landscape we see today.

During the afternoon we explore hidden lagoons and floating villages, observing how communities have adapted to life on the water. We have opportunities to swim or kayak at the base of the limestone cliffs, paddling through channels barely wide enough for the kayak to pass. The scale of the karst formations becomes particularly apparent at water level.

As evening approaches, we drop anchor in an isolated area. Under clear skies, the upper deck offers excellent stargazing away from city lights, while the bay's calm waters reflect the sunset's changing colours.

Overnight on board.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 5 Lan Ha Bay - Hanoi

Those interested may participate in a tai chi class on deck before breakfast, practicing gentle movements as the sun rises over the karst landscape. This morning we explore a cave system featuring thousands of stalactites and stalagmites formed over millions of years by water slowly depositing calcium carbonate.

We slowly cruise back through the karst peaks, returning to Dinh Vu port by late morning. Around noon we disembark and drive back to Hanoi, arriving in mid-afternoon.

Later this afternoon we enjoy a walking tour of Hanoi's Old Quarter, also known as the "Quarter of 36 Streets." This ancient commercial district developed between the 11th and 18th centuries, with streets organized by trade guilds — Hang Bac (Silver Street), Hang Ma (Paper Street), and so on. Many streets still specialize in particular goods, though modern shops have diversified the offerings. The narrow shophouses, typically just 3-5 metres (10-16 feet) wide but extending deep into the block, represent traditional Vietnamese urban

architecture. The Old Quarter's congested streets, filled with motorcycles, vendors, and shoppers, create Hanoi's most vibrant atmosphere.

This evening we attend a water puppet show, an art form unique to Vietnam that originated in the Red River Delta. Puppeteers stand waist-deep in water behind a screen, manipulating wooden puppets that appear to move across the water's surface. The performance, accompanied by traditional instruments, depicts rural life, legends, and historical tales.

Overnight in Hanoi.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Hanoi - Da Nang - Hoi An

Today we fly to Da Nang and continue by road to Hoi An. Da Nang sits on a peninsula where the Han River flows into the South China Sea. Our route takes us past the Marble Mountains, a cluster of five limestone peaks with marble outcrops. These mountains hold religious significance for both Buddhists and followers of traditional Vietnamese beliefs, with caves housing shrines and statues. At the mountains' base, artisans craft marble objects — the stone quarrying has continued for centuries, though authorities now restrict extraction to protect the site.

We continue to Hoi An, one of Vietnam's most atmospheric towns. This ancient trading port flourished from the 15th to 19th centuries as a major Southeast Asian commercial hub, attracting Japanese, Chinese, Dutch, Portuguese, and French merchants. The town centre preserves over 1,000 timber-frame buildings, their architecture reflecting diverse influences. Hoi An's designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1999 recognized it as an exceptionally well-preserved example of a Southeast Asian trading port.

On arrival, flight times permitting, we'll have an informal orientation tour, walking through the compact old town where canals once allowed boats to deliver goods directly to merchants' houses. The town's location on the Thu Bon River, several kilometres from the coast, protected it from coastal storms that frequently damaged other ports. However, by the late 19th century, the river's silting made it inaccessible to larger ships, and trade shifted to Da Nang. This decline ironically preserved Hoi An — without economic pressure to modernize, the old buildings survived largely intact.

Overnight in Hoi An.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Hoi An: Walking Tour & Boat Trip

Today we explore Hoi An's old town on foot, discovering architecture that blends Vietnamese, Chinese, Japanese, and French influences. The town's wealth came from trade in ceramics, silk, pepper, and cinnamon, and successful merchants built elaborate houses that still line the streets.

Hoi An's Japanese Covered Bridge, dating to the 18th century, represents one of Vietnam's most iconic structures. The bridge connects what were historically the Japanese and Chinese quarters of town. On its northern side, a small temple serves as protection for sailors — the bridge was funded by the Japanese community but has been maintained by Chinese and Vietnamese residents over the centuries, symbolizing the town's multicultural heritage.

The Tran Family Temple has remained in the same family for 15 generations. Built in 1802 in a style combining Chinese and Japanese influences, the temple serves both as an ancestral shrine and a family home. The architecture features distinctive details — carved wooden panels, curved tile roofs, and a layout following traditional Vietnamese feng shui principles.

We visit a Chinese Assembly Hall, built by merchants from specific Chinese provinces as meeting places and temples. Hoi An has several such halls, each serving immigrants from different regions of China — Fujian, Cantonese, Hainanese, and others. The halls' ornate decorations honour Chinese deities and historical figures, with incense smoke perpetually filling the interior spaces.

At the Central Market, vendors sell fresh produce, spices, and prepared foods. The market operates daily, supplying both residents and the town's many restaurants. Hoi An's culinary reputation draws visitors specifically for dishes like cao lau (noodles unique to Hoi An), white rose dumplings, and banh mi sandwiches that Vietnamese immigrants have made famous worldwide.

We take a boat trip on the Thu Bon River, which remains essential to the region's economy and transportation more than 500 years after

merchants first navigated it. The river supports fishing, agriculture, and increasingly tourism, with traditional wooden boats now carrying visitors rather than porcelain and spices.

Overnight in Hoi An.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 From Hoi An: My Son Cham Dynasty Complex

This morning we visit My Son (pronounced "mee-sohn"), a UNESCO World Heritage Site comprising over 70 architectural works from the Cham Dynasty. The Chams controlled much of central Vietnam from the 2nd to 15th centuries, establishing a Hindu kingdom influenced by Indian culture through maritime trade. My Son served as the dynasty's spiritual centre and burial ground for Cham royalty.

Construction at My Son began in the 4th century and continued for nearly 1,000 years, creating a complex of brick towers and sanctuaries dedicated primarily to Shiva. The Cham builders developed sophisticated techniques for creating bricks that bonded so tightly that researchers still debate the construction methods. Unlike the stone temples of Angkor, Cham structures used brick almost exclusively, with stone reserved for decorative elements.

The site's remote location in a mountain-ringed valley protected it for centuries after the Cham kingdom's decline. However, the Vietnam War brought devastating damage — American forces bombed My Son in 1969, mistakenly believing it harboured Vietnamese soldiers. Many structures were destroyed, though enough survived to demonstrate the Chams' architectural achievements. The remaining towers, carved sandstone lintels, and lingam shrines reveal clear influences from Indian Hindu temple design, adapted to local materials and aesthetics.

My Son's forested setting and general peacefulness create a contemplative atmosphere. The site receives far fewer visitors than Angkor, allowing time to examine details and imagine the complex during its centuries as a living religious centre.

We return to Hoi An in time for a late lunch. The remainder of the day is free to explore at leisure. The Hoi An riverside, lined with cafés, galleries, and tailor shops, bustles with activity day and night. The town is particularly known for its tailors, who can create custom clothing in as little as 24 hours — though allowing more time produces better results.

Overnight in Hoi An.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Hoi An - Da Nang - Hue

Today we travel to Hue, stopping first in Da Nang to visit the Museum of Cham Sculpture. This museum houses the world's largest collection of Cham art, with over 250 sandstone and terracotta sculptures dating from the 7th to 15th centuries. Many pieces rank as masterworks — the dancing apsara figures, altar pedestals carved with mythological scenes, and lingams adorned with faces display technical skill and artistic vision that place Cham sculpture among Southeast Asia's finest artistic achievements. The museum's collection comes primarily from My Son and other Cham sites throughout central Vietnam.

Shortly after leaving Da Nang, we begin climbing through the Truong Son Mountains, which historically formed the border between North and South Vietnam. Hai Van Pass, literally "Pass of the Ocean Clouds," winds through these mountains at elevations reaching 496 metres (1,627 feet). The pass offers remarkable views — mountains rising to the west, the coastline and East Sea (South China Sea) to the east. Clouds frequently obscure the summit, giving the pass its name. The pass served as a significant barrier throughout Vietnamese history, marking boundaries between kingdoms and later between the divided nation. A tunnel now allows most traffic to bypass the pass, but we take the older scenic route for its views.

Hue served as Vietnam's capital from 1802 to 1945 under the Nguyen Dynasty, the country's last royal family. The city straddles the Perfume River (Song Huong), so named for the fragrant flowers that fall into the water from trees along its banks. As the imperial capital, Hue became Vietnam's cultural, religious, and educational centre, a status it partially retains despite losing political primacy to Hanoi.

Upon arrival in Hue, we take a cyclo ride through the old city and market. Cyclos — three-wheeled bicycle taxis with passengers seated in front — appeared in Vietnam during French colonial times. They remain common in Hue despite being largely replaced by motorcycles in other Vietnamese cities. The ride provides a leisurely way to observe street life and the city's mix of colonial and Vietnamese architecture.

Overnight in Hue.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Hue: Area Tour/Citadel Visit

This morning we take a motorized boat along the Perfume River to Thien Mu Pagoda, considered Hue's finest. Built in 1601 after a local woman (the "Thien Mu" or Heavenly Lady) appeared to Governor Nguyen Hoang and identified the site as sacred, the pagoda has been rebuilt and expanded several times. Its seven-tiered tower, added in 1844, rises 21 metres (69 feet) and has become Hue's most recognizable landmark. The pagoda gained additional significance in 1963 when one of its monks, Thich Quang Duc, drove to Saigon and self-immolated to protest government persecution of Buddhists — the car he drove is preserved at the pagoda.

This afternoon we tour the Imperial City, built between 1804 and 1833 following the principles of Chinese imperial architecture. The complex sits within a walled citadel surrounded by a moat, with a perimeter of nearly 10 kilometres (6 miles). Ten gates pierce the four walls, though many suffered severe damage during the 1968 Tet Offensive, when Hue became one of the war's major battlegrounds.

The Imperial City follows the same layout as Beijing's Forbidden City — successive courtyards and gates leading to increasingly private and sacred spaces. At the complex's heart lies the Forbidden Purple City, once home to the emperor and his family. Where Beijing's Forbidden City remains largely intact, Hue's suffered devastating damage from both the Vietnam War and earlier conflicts, natural disasters, and neglect. UNESCO has supported restoration work since the site gained World Heritage status in 1993, but much remains to be done. The surviving structures, particularly the Thai Hoa Palace (Hall of Supreme Harmony) where the emperor received officials and foreign delegations, display the refinement of Vietnamese court culture through their carved wooden pillars, lacquered panels, and ceramic tile work.

This evening we enjoy dinner in a beautifully restored royal home, now owned by descendants of the Hue royal family. The setting provides an intimate glimpse into how wealthy Hue families lived, with traditional architecture adapted for tropical comfort.

Overnight in Hue.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Hue - Ho Chi Minh City

Today we fly from Hue to Ho Chi Minh City (widely still known as Saigon), Vietnam's largest city and economic engine. Where Hanoi retains a governmental and cultural focus, Ho Chi Minh City pulses with commercial energy. The city's location near the Mekong Delta on the Saigon River has made it a trading hub for centuries. French colonial rule (1859-1954) left a legacy of grand architecture, tree-lined boulevards, and café culture. Since economic reforms began in the 1980s, the city has transformed into a modern metropolis while retaining its French colonial quarter and Chinese district.

This afternoon we visit several city highlights, beginning with the Reunification Palace. This modernist building, completed in 1966, served as the residence and office of South Vietnam's president. On April 30, 1975, North Vietnamese tanks crashed through its gates, marking the end of the Vietnam War and the reunification of North and South. The building has been preserved exactly as it was that day, providing a fascinating glimpse into both the war's conclusion and the architectural tastes of the period. The palace's design incorporated bunkers, war rooms, and telecommunications facilities alongside public reception halls.

We continue to Cholon, the city's Chinatown. Ethnic Chinese have lived in this district since the 18th century, when many fled political upheaval in China. Cholon developed into a separate city before merging with Saigon in 1931. Today it remains one of the city's most vibrant areas, with Chinese temples, medicine shops, and wholesale markets doing brisk business. The architecture blends southern Chinese and Vietnamese styles, while signage appears in both Chinese characters and Vietnamese script.

Overnight in Ho Chi Minh City.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Ho Chi Minh City: Cu Chi Tunnels & War Remnants Museum

This morning we travel outside Saigon to the Cu Chi Tunnels, one of the Vietnam War's most recognizable symbols. The tunnels began during French colonial rule in the 1940s, when Viet Minh fighters dug hiding places to store weapons and evade capture. During the Vietnam War in the 1960s, the network expanded dramatically as Viet Cong forces created an underground city beneath Cu Chi district.

The tunnel system eventually stretched over 250 kilometres (155 miles), with living quarters, kitchens, storage areas, hospitals, and command centres all located underground. Despite intensive American bombing campaigns that turned the district into one of the most bombed areas in history, Cu Chi residents continued their lives beneath the soil — sleeping, eating, planning operations, treating the wounded, and educating children in underground classrooms.

Today, sections of the tunnels have been widened slightly to accommodate visitors — the original passages measured only 60-80 centimetres (24-31 inches) wide, forcing people to crawl. Those comfortable with confined spaces can experience what movement through the tunnels entailed, though claustrophobic visitors may prefer to observe from above ground, where camouflaged trapdoors and ventilation systems demonstrate the network's ingenious design.

We return to the city and visit the War Remnants Museum, Vietnam's most comprehensive wartime documentation centre. The museum presents the conflicts from a Vietnamese perspective, with exhibits covering French colonial rule and the subsequent American war. Some displays contain graphic images of war's effects on civilians and soldiers. The outdoor courtyard displays captured American military equipment, including aircraft, tanks, and artillery. While the museum's narrative reflects official Vietnamese viewpoints and includes anti-American propaganda, it does document the war's human costs and the long-term effects of defoliants like Agent Orange.

Overnight in Ho Chi Minh City.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Ho Chi Minh City - Cao Dai Temple - Mekong Delta

Our destination today is the Mekong Delta, where Southeast Asia's most important river approaches the sea through a network of tributaries and channels. En route we stop at a Cao Dai temple to observe this uniquely Vietnamese religion. Cao Dai emerged in southern Vietnam during the 1920s after Ngo Van Chieu, a civil servant, experienced visions of the "Cao Dai" or "Supreme Being," who instructed him to establish a new faith.

Cao Dai attempts to synthesize major world religions — Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Christianity, and Islam — into a single practice. The religion's symbol, a giant eye representing the Supreme Being, appears prominently in temples and on the religion's flag. The faith gained rapid support among dispossessed peasants and today claims approximately two million adherents and 1,000 temples across Vietnam. The main temple we visit displays remarkable eclecticism, with dragons winding up columns, Christian saints depicted alongside Buddha and Confucius, and French poet Victor Hugo honoured as a saint. If we time our visit correctly, we may observe a ceremony where priests in colourful robes — yellow for Buddhism, red for Confucianism, blue for Taoism — conduct services.

We continue south to the Mekong Delta, the southernmost region of Vietnam. The Mekong River travels 4,350 kilometres (2,703 miles) from the Tibetan Plateau through six countries before reaching Vietnam. Here it fragments into a web of channels and distributaries that the Vietnamese call "Cuu Long," the Nine Dragons. The river deposits massive amounts of sediment, creating exceptionally fertile soil that supports three rice crops annually — earning the delta its nickname as Vietnam's rice bowl. The delta also produces tropical fruits, coconuts, sugarcane, and vast quantities of fish and prawns from its waterways.

Traditional transportation throughout the delta relies on boats navigating the network of canals and channels. Tomorrow morning we'll experience these waterways firsthand at one of the region's floating markets.

NOTE: Please pack an overnight bag for the Mekong Delta trip. Large baggage will be securely stored in Ho Chi Minh City.

Overnight in hotel in Cantho region (Mekong Delta).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Mekong Delta - Ho Chi Minh City / Colonial Quarter

Early this morning we take a covered boat ride on the delta to visit a floating market, where traders conduct business from their boats rather than from fixed locations. Vendors specialize in particular products — one boat might sell only pineapples, another only coconuts — and

advertise their wares by hanging samples from tall poles. Larger boats serve as wholesalers, while smaller vessels function as retailers or restaurants, creating a complete marketplace on water. The floating markets represent centuries-old trading traditions, though they're gradually declining as roads improve and land-based commerce grows more convenient.

Due to the delta's flat terrain and limited forested areas, nearly two-thirds of the land supports agriculture. The Mekong Delta produces more than half of Vietnam's rice output and serves as the country's most important fishing region, with both river and coastal waters providing abundant catches.

After our morning exploration, we drive back to Ho Chi Minh City, arriving early afternoon. We complete any city sightseeing not accomplished earlier in our visit, including the Colonial Quarter. Here we find the Notre Dame Cathedral and adjacent Central Post Office, both constructed by the French in the 1880s. The cathedral, situated in what the French called Paris Square (now Công trng Công xã Paris), ranks among Vietnam's largest Catholic churches. Built entirely from materials imported from France, including red bricks from Marseille, it displays the neo-Romanesque style popular in late 19th-century Europe. The twin bell towers rise 58 metres (190 feet) and once held bells cast in France.

The Central Post Office, designed by Gustave Eiffel's architectural firm, features a vast interior hall with arched windows, decorative tilework, and an enormous map of southern Vietnam and Cambodia from the French colonial period. The building remains a functioning post office, though it now serves primarily as a tourist attraction. Both structures exemplify French colonial architecture adapted for tropical conditions, with high ceilings and large windows designed to provide natural cooling.

Overnight in Ho Chi Minh City.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Departure

Departure from Ho Chi Minh (Saigon/SGN).

HEN GAP LAI!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast