

EXPLORE!

Tour Notes



Hilltribes of the North (QVH 2015)



TOURDURAT
12
DAYS



Tour Style: Simply
Tour Comfort: Basic

Tour Type: Small Groups
Trek Grade: Moderate

tour Code: QVH

Tour Highlights - Hilltribes of the North

- ✓ Sapa - Trek past terraced rice fields through the villages and valleys of ethnic minority people
- ✓ Hilltribe markets - Chance to visit a colourful local ethnic minority market
- ✓ Mai Chau Valley - Trek through remote karst landscapes and overnight in a typical White Thai stilt houses
- ✓ Hanoi - Wander through the bustling narrow streets of the Old Quarter lined with shop-houses
- ✓ Halong Bay - Traditional junk boat cruise through one of the most incredible limestone landscapes in South East Asia

Tour Essentials

Accommodation: 3 nights Standard Hotel
1 night Standard Boat
3 nights Basic Village House
2 nights Basic Overnight Train
2 nights Simple Hotel

Included Meals: 9 breakfasts, 5 lunches, 2 dinners

Start Point: Join tour: Hanoi
End Point: Tour ends: Hanoi
Transport: Bus, Train, Boat, Public Bus
Countries: Vietnam

Hilltribes of the North

An exciting trek visiting remote tribal villages in the mountainous back country of northern Vietnam. We stay in traditional village houses as we trek through the beautiful rice paddies of Sapa and Ban Lac, experiencing the culture, customs and cuisine of the friendly hilltribes. We also enjoy an overnight junk cruise around the towering limestone islands of Halong Bay.



Suitability

We've given each of our tours a comfort rating and a tour pace, walking or cycling grade to give you a general idea about the level of activity on each tour and the standard of accommodation you will be staying in at the end of your day's adventure.

Often you'll stay in different styles of accommodation during your tour; so we make an average rating across the entire tour. For more information on where you'll stay each night, please refer to the day by day tour itinerary.

Tour Comfort: Basic

Our basic accommodation can offer the most rewarding and memorable places to stay. These are usually communal or camping style with shared facilities. Running hot and cold water may be unreliable and overall comfort levels are basic.

Tour Style: Simply

If your idea of adventure travel is to experience everyday local life in a country then try one of our Simply Explore tours. These grassroots adventures are flexible, affordable and fun

Trek Grade: Moderate

For those who are fit and active, these moderate walks are normally on good paths and tracks at low altitude. Days may include some fairly demanding ascents and descents, so previous experience is preferable but not essential.



Your tour itinerary

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested.

DAY 1 Join tour in Hanoi; afternoon walk in the Old Quarter

After a chance to freshen up, this afternoon has been set aside to explore something of Vietnam's vibrant capital. Like a French provincial town with tree-lined boulevards, the city is wonderfully nostalgic and a walk through the engaging streets of its Old Quarter provides an ideal introduction. Named after the various crafts and specialities of the city's artisans, each street bears such descriptive monikers as Paper Street, Silk Street and Basket Street. This practice dates back to the 13th century, when the city's original 36 guilds established themselves here, adopting a street each to differentiate them from their neighbours. The maze of alleys presents a fascinating venue to explore on foot and the area is known for its interesting 'tube' houses, whose narrow frontages give way to long rooms that

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stretch back. Street vendors tempt you with noodles, snacks and stir-fried delights from shoulder panniers, all adding to the charm of Hanoi's historic heart. Later today there may be a chance to see a performance of traditional water puppetry, a practice that dates back to the 15th century. Set on a flooded stage, the stories tell tales of legendary heroes and everyday life, with dragons and unicorns sharing the stage with ducks and frogs, and even fireworks and naval battles (optional).


Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 2 Drive to Halong Bay; overnight on boat

We drive by charter bus to the incredible setting of Halong Bay, one of Vietnam's most spectacular natural attractions recently voted as one of the eight natural wonders of the world. A UNESCO World Heritage site, Halong Bay boasts hundreds of jungleclad islands (over 1600 at the last count) that rise from the jade green waters of the bay like the scales of some great submerged dragon. Indeed Halong means where the dragon descends to the sea and local legends tells of a time when this rugged landscape was created by the pounding tail of a mighty dragon as he ran from the mountains into the glittering waters of the bay below. On arrival we will board our junk and set sail, threading our way through a flotilla of boats, junks and wooden sampans as they ply their way across the gentle waters of the bay. The plan for today is to sail through this stunning seascape, stopping off to swim and visit some of the limestone caverns that pepper the landscape. There will be a highly recommended opportunity at one of our swim stops for you to climb to the summit of Mount Titov, a 90 metre karst peak, whose 420 steps lead up to a viewpoint that offers some stunning panoramas across the bay, ask your tour leader for more details. We will overnight on board the junk, but please be aware that the boat will not be exclusive to Explore and we will be sharing it with other tourists.

Overnight: **Standard Boat**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 3 In Halong Bay, morning cruise; drive to Hanoi

After a further cruise this morning and brunch aboard our junk we disembark at around 11am then head back to the capital by charter bus arriving back in Hanoi mid afternoon. The rest of the day is free in Hanoi.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 4 Drive to Mai Chau; afternoon tribal village walk; overnight in village house

This morning we will be joined on our drive and the remainder of the holiday by fellow Explore travellers who have combined another trip (QBV or QVN) with the Hilltribes of the North tour. The fertile landscapes of Mai Chau are home to the minority White Thai people, who live in stilt-housed villages surrounded by rice paddies. Arriving into Lac village after midday we will have lunch before exploring our rural surroundings on an afternoon walk in the company of a local guide. The White Thai constitute one of the largest minority groups in the region and our time here will give us a chance to get to learn a little more about the traditions and customs of our hosts. Our walk this afternoon takes us on a circuit from our host village through a patchwork of paddy fields surrounded by lush green hills. We make our way along tracks that pass through a number of friendly village communities. There may also be the opportunity to enjoy traditional music and dancing by the White Thai villagers this evening. We will be staying in a simple, traditional, thatched, stilted house, enjoying the rustic charm of the setting, as well as the local food. You will be sharing the room and facilities with the rest of our group. There may be the possibility of organising and paying for a private bedroom locally, it is only possible to arrange this locally and you should consult upon check in. A sleeping mat, blanket, a hand towel and mosquito net are provided. Approx walking: 9kms/ 2.5 hours

Overnight: **Basic Village House**

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 5 In Mai Chau, walk through tribal villages and paddy fields; overnight in village house

Today we spend our time hiking through the villages of the Mai Chau tribal heartlands. After breakfast we will begin with a short drive, passing along part of the old Ho Chi Minh Trail to the village of Van Mai, the start of our day's trek. From here we then head along a trail that leads us through a patchwork of rice terraces, vegetable gardens and rural villages towards the village of Buoc. Here we break and take our picnic lunch amid plant tree plantations and surrounded by distinctive limestone karst scenery. The White Thai have occupied these landscapes for some 1200 years. Related to the Thai of Laos and Thailand, they came here originally from the Yunnan Province in southern China and today number nearly 400,000. Practising a mix of animism, ancestor belief and Buddhism, the White Thai are renowned for their hospitality and their beautifully intricate weaving and, as we follow the trail through the mountain foothills, doubtless we will see examples of both this morning. After lunch we continue through spectacular rice paddies and bamboo forests on to Van village where we rendezvous with our transport for a short drive back to Lac village (30mins). The rest of the day

is then free to relax. Please note: those who do not wish to walk the whole route today will be able to utilise our support vehicle for some parts of the journey, please consult the tour leader for more details. Approx walking: 15kms/ 4-5 hours

Overnight: **Basic Village House**

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 6 In Mai Chau, free time with option to hire bicycles; return to Hanoi for sleeper train to Lao Cai

With free time until the middle of the afternoon, you can choose to relax in the village, walk to the nearby cave of Hang Boi or have the option to take a half day bike ride through the Mai Chau countryside. This option negotiates an easy 12km loop taking in more of the local villages and the natural beauty of this spectacular region. The cycle route takes you alongside rice paddies and through pretty villages that lie in the shadow of the surrounding mountains. There will be the opportunity to dismount and wander amongst the friendly villages of Chieng Sai and Cha Long before looping around through the villages of Na Trang and Vang, back to Ban Lac. Later this afternoon we transfer back to Hanoi to catch the overnight train to Lao Cai, on the border with China's Yunnan Province to the north-west. We will be making the journey in soft sleeper compartments, with 4 people sharing each air-conditioned berth and shared toilet facilities for each carriage.

Overnight: **Basic Overnight Train**

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 7 Arrive in Lao Cai; bus to Sapa; free day to explore

Arriving into Lao Cai early this morning we then take a beautifully scenic drive to Sapa town by public bus (1½hrs). Due to our early arrival it may not be possible to check in to our hotel until later in the day. On arrival the tour leader will run through your options for today and lead a short orientation tour of Sapa, after which the rest of the day is free to enjoy at your leisure. Sapa is a quiet mountain town that sits deep in the Hoang Lien Son range, close to Fan Si Pan mountain which is Vietnam's highest peak at a height of 3142m. The region is home to a rich diversity of ethnic minorities, including H'mong, Yao, Tay, Zay and Xa Pho for whom Sapa is the chief market town and there are plenty of options available this afternoon to take walks out to some of the nearby villages that lie scattered across the valley or just relax around town. Depending upon the interests of the group, it may also be possible to visit the nearby market at Lung Khau Nhim.


Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 8 From Sapa, trek past rice terraces to minority village of Sin Chai; overnight in village house

Today we begin our 2-day trek through the wonderful landscapes of the Hoang Lien Mountains and the Muong Hoa and Suoi Thau Valleys. These rural panoramas are steeped in the local colour and traditions of the Tay and the Red Zao and over the next two days we will have an ideal opportunity to learn more of the customs and simplicity of life amongst these remote villages. Depending on the season we may see tropical butterflies, wildflowers and orchids. The valley come alive with colourful rhododendrons and fruit blossom during springtime. We will trek through bamboo forests and rustic vegetable gardens encountering plenty of water buffalo and domestic animals along our route. We depart Sapa this morning and transfer the short distance to the village of Ban Lech Dao in Thanh Kim Commune, from where we begin our trek along a narrow, winding trail that leads downhill through terraced rice paddies to the Muong Bo River. Crossing the river by bridge, we then trek to the Tay village of Muong Bo, where we stop for lunch and spend a little time wandering amongst its spacious stilted house. The afternoon then sees us embarking on a fascinating journey into the remote heartlands of the Red Zao, passing through the village of Nam Cum and along the Suoi Thau Valley to our night stop in the village of Sin Chai. The Red Zao people build large wooden houses where it is not uncommon for several generations to be housed under the same roof. After dropping off our gear and settling in to our overnight accommodation the rest of the afternoon is free to take a wander through this charming village. It may also be possible to arrange a traditional herbal bath at the house. If you wish to shorten the distance of today's walk it is possible to ride on the support vehicle at the beginning of the day until Thanh Phu Bridge, thus avoiding about 2 hours of walking. We will be staying in a simple, traditional, local houses, enjoying the rustic charm of the setting. You will be sleeping in a communal area with mosquito nets, sleeping bags, mattresses, pillows and towels provided. Approx walking: 7 hours/16kms.

Overnight: **Basic Village House**

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner


DAY 9 From Sin Chai, trek through valleys, villages and rice terraces; return to Sapa

Our second day sees us departing Sin Chai after breakfast, following a downhill track into the Nam Sai Valley, where we visit another Tay village, before continuing on to the Xa Pho village of My Son. The Xa Pho people are believed to have migrated here from Malaysia and Indonesia some three centuries ago and seem to differ from the other minority groups in both their dress and their language. Semi-nomadic and steeped in strong traditions of community spirit, the Xa Pho are a rather timid people who keep very much to themselves and whose language has been described by other groups as sounding like birdsong. Taking the opportunity to stop for lunch and take a short tour around the village we then carry on, crossing the river and continuing along a gradually ascending track

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stopping en route for our picnic lunch. After lunch we continue to the village of Nam Toong. Another community of the Red Zao, this village affords us a final chance to take in something of the traditional rural life in these valleys, before we make our final descent to the Thanh Phu Bridge, where we rejoin our vehicle for the journey back to Sapa. Approx walking: 6-7 hours/19kms.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch

DAY **10** In Sapa, free time with options to visit minority market; bus to Lao Cai for sleeper train to Hanoi

The day is left free for you to enjoy the charming mountainside town of Sapa and its surroundings. It may be possible to arrange a half day visit to a traditional local minority market or a guided mountain bike trek to the Black H'mong villages in the Ma Tra valley. On the edge of town is Ham Rong, a scenic landscaped area with flower and orchid gardens and spectacular views amongst the stone forest. Or you may choose to relax, take a massage or enjoy the friendly banter with the traditionally dressed girls who wander the town trading their wares. Later this afternoon we will transfer back to Lao Cai to catch our overnight train to Hanoi.

Overnight: **Basic Overnight Train**

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY **11** Arrive in Hanoi; free day with option to visit French Quarter

Arriving in Hanoi early this morning we will transfer to our hotel and check-in, after which the rest of the day is free to enjoy the city at your leisure. Amongst the city's more interesting sights are the charming One-Pillar Pagoda, the Temple of Literature and the Presidential Palace. Ho Chi Minh was a spartan-living and scholarly man, who chose not to live in the Presidential Palace itself, but instead preferred a simple teak 2-storied stilt-house specially built for him in the grounds. You can visit his museum and this austere mausoleum, said to resemble that of Lenin in Moscow, or perhaps taking another walk through the engaging streets of its Old Quarter. The city's French Quarter is a great place to explore by bicycle, its grandiose colonial architecture offering up a rich contrast to the more frenetic pace of the old city. Whilst those looking to discover something more of the colonial wars might like to pay a visit to the Museum of Vietnamese Revolution or the Military History Museum.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY **12** Tour ends in Hanoi

Tour ends after breakfast.

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

Accommodation and Meals

Food & Drink

Included meals: 9 breakfasts, 5 lunches, 2 dinners included in the price of this tour. Please be prepared to pay for non-included meals. Please note that costs for drinks and meals can vary depending on location.

Budgeting for your Tour

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Vietnam

Lunch £: 4.00

Dinner £: 9.00

Drink

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Vietnam

Bottle of Beer £: 1.50

Water £: 0.50

Other Sightseeing & Activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations.

Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

Optional Excursions

Hanoi - Water Puppets from UD\$ 6.00, Cyclo tour of old quarter US\$ 6, Ho Chi Minh's Stilt House US\$ 1.00, Museums US\$ 1.00, Half day city tour US\$ 11.00 - \$17.00.

Mai Chau - Traditional Dance/ Music US\$ 50 per group, Guided cycling excursion US\$ 8 - \$10. Bicycle hire US\$ 4 per day

Sapa - Traditional herbal village bath US\$ 5, Ham Rong Gardens US\$ 5, Optional half day cycling US \$22 - \$26. Bac Ha/ Lung Khau Nhim Market US\$ 15 - \$20.

Please note: Optional excursions offered in Vietnam are generally run via our agent in the country. Other companies to be found locally may offer similar optionals at a cheaper price. Should you want to use these companies please be aware that a lower price may mean that not all costs are included (entrance fees etc) or services will not operate at the same safety and quality standards.

Tipping - Tour Leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Tipping - Local Crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognized part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour.

Accordingly you should allow approx. US\$ 25 for gratuities for local staff.

Foreign Exchange

Vietnam

ATM Availability: There are ATMs virtually everywhere in Vietnam and in Cambodia, though we also recommend bringing cash.

Credit Card Acceptance: Some shops in Hanoi, and Hoi An. The occasional restaurant.

Travellers Cheques: Travellers cheques can usually be changed in the towns, but only during bank opening hours.

Local Currency: Dong.

Recommended Currency for Exchange: Carry your money in US\$ Dollars cash. You can also take GBP but US\$ are easier to exchange. (Dollar bills can be used in some hotels and shops; change is often given in local currency).

Where to Exchange: Most towns.

Joining your Tour

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found on our website at www.explore.co.uk, in the tour specific dates and prices section.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer. For more information please refer to <https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers>.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer please refer to <https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers>.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Important Information

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of joining any of our tours that you must have valid travel insurance. It must indicate that you have cover for (at least) medical expenses and emergency repatriation in the event of illness or injury. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling in England and Scotland. We also strongly recommend your policy includes curtailment, personal effects and cancellation protection as all deposits paid are non-refundable. You will also need to ensure your travel policy covers you for all activities you intend to do whilst on tour.

We are delighted to include FREE travel insurance **for all qualifying customers** who book an Explore trip from 01 January 2015.

For more information about Travel insurance and to check whether you are eligible to receive free cover, please visit www.explore.co.uk/insurance. Explore Worldwide Ltd are an Appointed Representative of Campbell Irvine Limited, who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. The registration number can be checked by visiting the the FCA's website www.fca.gov.uk or by contacting them on 0800 111 6768.

Visa Information

Vietnam: A single entry visa is required by UK, New Zealand, Australian, US and Canadian citizens and must be obtained prior to departure from your embassy of residence. Visas can be obtained through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK. Please contact: Visaswift, at <http://www.visaswift.com/explore.aspx>. Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office.

All visa information is subject to change. You should confirm all visa related questions with the relevant Embassy prior to departure

Vaccinations & Protection

Vietnam

Nothing compulsory, we recommend protection against malaria, typhoid, tetanus, diphtheria, polio and hepatitis A. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on different prophylaxis available against malaria. Although not compulsory travellers may also wish to immunise themselves against Japanese encephalitis. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth/> and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed before departure.

Preparing for your Tour



Trekking Details

This trip involves a series of day walks of between 3 and 6 hours. We have graded this tour as moderate.

Climate

Vietnam

As Vietnam is a long, narrow country from north to south climate conditions vary considerably. The climate can be divided into three distinct patterns between the north, central and south regions. The climate in the north is generally humid and subtropical, although the winter months from November to March can be colder with temperatures from 10 - 15 degrees. Summer months, May to September can be quite hot with temperatures from 30 - 35 degrees. Meanwhile south Vietnam enjoys a tropical climate all year round, with little variation throughout the year (around 27 - 32 degrees), however May to November is the rainy season when short,

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heavy downpours are quite frequent. Central Vietnam lies somewhere in between. The coastal strip is usually dry and hotter from April to October while November to March is wetter and cooler. A light rain jacket and small umbrella are recommended year round.

Clothing

Pack essentially for hot conditions although December through to February warmer clothing is needed for the North. Bear in mind that the region is tropical (humid) and can be hot. Lightweight rainwear is advisable at all times. The north is cold at night during the winter. Highland areas around Sapa are likely to be cooler especially at night and you should pack accordingly. Casual clothes are the most practical.

Equipment

Bedding provided in village stays

Mai Chau: You will be provided sleeping mat, mattress, pillow, mosquito net and blanket. No sleeping bag provided.

In Sin Chai village nr Sapa: You will be provided sleeping bag, mattress, pillow, mosquito net, blanket & toilet kit (shampoo, toothbrush, towel). A sleeping sheet liner (silk) can be useful in both hot and cold conditions, it is possible to buy one in Hanoi.

Bedding on overnight trains You will be provided with clean sheets and a blanket for the overnight train journeys.

Water Bottle Water along the trail must never be considered as drinkable. Take a 1.5 litre personal water bottle (preferably insulated). Our support crew on the trek provide sterilized water each meal time to replenish your supplies. Also energy snacks (nuts, cereal bars etc.) are recommended whilst on trek.

Walking Poles These may be useful for the uphill / downhill sections of the Sapa trek. Adequate poles can also be bought in Sapa.

Sunglasses A good pair of sunglasses are essential for protection against UV rays.

Sun Hat, High Factor Sun Cream/Block & Lip Salve Bring sunscreen (Factor 15 or more) to protect your skin against the sun. A combination sunblock/ lipsalve is ideal for facial protection.

Torch/Batteries/Bulb A small torch is essential for finding things at night etc. Often a head torch is useful around the villages at night. Remember to bring some spare batteries.

Toiletries Try to keep heavy cosmetics etc to a minimum. Essentials are toothbrush/paste, soap, small towel, small nail brush. Wet wipes are great for a quick clean up, so bring a pack of those.

Footwear

Walking/hiking boots with good ankle support, trainers and/or sandals for travelling and general wear.

Luggage: On Tour

One main piece of baggage and daypack. Remember you are expected to carry your own luggage so don't overload yourself.

Luggage whilst on trek:

This should consist of a main piece of baggage, a holdall or kitbag for the trek, and a daypack to carry your personal gear. We recommend you have a holdall or kitbag for the overnight trek in Sapa, purely for ease of access to your things and to save on space. Your overnight bag will be taken to the village nightstop by vehicle.

Day pack

On each trekking day you will only be required to carry your day pack or light rucksack, large enough to carry essential items such as water, snacks and sun/weather protection.

Luggage storage in Sapa and Hanoi

For a small charge you can use one of hotel bases in Hanoi or Sapa to leave the bulk of your gear while away on treks in Mai Chau or remote Sapa villages. Consult your tour leader for further information on storage. You will require a lockable additional bag for this purpose.

Luggage allowance on tour: 20kg

General Information

Country details

Vietnam

Population: 90,549,390

Size of Country: 331,698 sq km

Major Language: Vietnamese

Religion: Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism

Time Difference to GMT: +7

Electric Supply & Plugs

Vietnam

2 Pin Round

Why Choose Explore

We've been creating award-winning pioneering adventure holidays for over 30 years, earning the trust of thousands of delighted customers, who feel safe in our hands. Our tour leaders have expert local knowledge and our tours are designed to take you off the beaten track to see the most exotic, inspiring and dramatic places in the world.

- With over 30 years' experience, we are passionate about what we do.
- Pioneering small group adventures, self-guided, private journeys & tailor-made holidays.
- Award winning tour leaders who you can trust.
- Responsible travel is and always has been one of the driving principles of Explore.

Our adventure holidays are full of exciting things to see and do, exploring in small groups travelling by bus, boat, plane, rickshaw, camel, elephant, or any number of unusual forms of transport. Often you will stay in family run hotels and village houses and enjoy authentic local cuisine. In this way, it's easy to discover the true heart of the people and the place you travel to – and make some new friends along the way. Each tour is uniquely different, so please feel free to browse through our tours to see what may whet your appetite.

Our commitment to the environment

We are passionate about sustainable travel and work hard to create tours where your holiday delivers real benefits to the local communities. We minimise our impact by travelling in small groups, respecting local cultures and traditions, reducing waste and offsetting 100% of the CO2 from our flights.

When you travel with Explore, you are directly contributing to local economies and helping empower the people you meet. We currently support a range of charities and good causes, including: Toilet Twinning (helping to flush away poverty), Lone Buffalo Foundation (a community project based in Laos providing creative skills for young people), Dekamer (a turtle rescue centre in Turkey) and Kids Saving the Rainforest (a wildlife rescue centre in Costa Rica supported through the LATA foundation). We also care passionately about the world's wildlife. We are patrons of the Born Free Organisation and Friends of Conservation.

Cool Earth

Explore are proud to support Cool Earth in their effort to reduce global carbon dioxide levels through the prevention of deforestation in the South America rainforest. Cool Earth focus on areas in immediate danger of deforestation, supporting local communities to be forest guardians. To date 350,000 acres of rainforest has been protected. Saving rainforest also protects rare animals and plants, allows local forest communities to maintain their way of life, and protects a major source of oxygen and fresh water. When you travel on an Explore holiday we make a donation to Cool Earth that exceeds the impact of our customers flights each year.

Earth Matters

- [The Travel Foundation](#)
Explore are active members and supporters of the Travel Foundation which has established a variety of sustainable tourism projects in destinations and works with industry to improve practice. Visit their website www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk
- [Tourism Concern](#)
Explore support the work of Tourism Concern who campaign for fairly and ethically traded tourism, and are part of its Ethical Tour Operator Group www.tourismconcern.org.uk
- For further information on responsible travel go to <http://www.explore.co.uk/ResponsibleTourism/>

Know before you go

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office Advice follow the link at <http://www.explore.co.uk/essential-travel-information/travel-resources/travel-safety>

Booking Your Holiday

Peace of mind - book with confidence

You can book your Explore holiday with confidence, as all monies paid to us for your trip are fully protected. Explore is a fully bonded tour operator licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and by ABTOT.

The air holiday packages (Tours including flights) that we advertise are ATOL protected, since we hold an Air Travel Organiser's Licence granted by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is ATOL 2595. In addition, As a member of the Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited (ABTOT), Explore has provided a bond to meet the requirements of the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992. Please note that packages booked outside the UK are only protected when purchased directly with Explore.

Reserving your place

To reserve your place on this tour you will need to check availability on the Explore website or through our dedicated call centre based in the UK where you can. Our tours can fill up quickly so you are advised to book as early as possible. If your chosen date is 'Available' or 'Guaranteed' we will be able to provisionally hold you a space for up to 48 hours.

For Self-Guided holidays and Private Journeys simply choose your date of travel and let us know so we can confirm all ground services.

The easiest way to confirm your booking is through our website. When you are ready to book, we normally require a 10% non-refundable deposit, but for some holidays this may be more to cover such items as permit fees, internal flights or other non-refundable services. If your travel starts within 60 days of booking, full payment will be required at the time of booking

100% No Surcharge Guarantee

The price paid for our holidays is no longer subject to change. Once booked and confirmed we will guarantee the price you pay will not increase, whatever the circumstances. You will not be approached to pay fuel surcharges unlike the vast majority of other adventure tour operators. The price guarantee applies to all new bookings departing between 1st January 2014 and 31st December 2015.

Tour Itinerary Versions

Itinerary details may vary depending on departure date and alternative itineraries for this tour may exist. Please refer to the dates and prices page on our website to check which itinerary operates on each departure date.

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes.

Please note: 2015 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing in 2015. 2016/17 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing from 1st January to 31st December 2016.

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