

EXPLORE!

Tour Notes



Good Morning Vietnam! + Hilltribes of the North (QVT 2015)



TOUR DURATION
21
DAYS



Tour Style: Simply
Tour Pace: Moderate

Tour Type: Small Groups
Tour Comfort: Simple

tour Code: QVT

Tour Highlights - Good Morning Vietnam! + Hilltribes of the North

- ✓ Ho Chi Minh City - Learn about the resourcefulness of the Viet Cong at the Cu Chi Tunnels
- ✓ Hoi An - Charming ancient merchants' town on the banks of the Thu Bon River
- ✓ Halong Bay - Traditional junk boat cruise through one of the most impressive limestone landscapes in South East Asia
- ✓ Mai Chau - Trek through remote karst landscapes and overnight in a typical White Thai stilt houses
- ✓ Sapa - Trek past terraced rice fields through the villages and valleys of ethnic minority people

Tour Essentials

Accommodation: 7 nights Standard Hotel
6 nights Basic Overnight Train
3 nights Simple Hotel
1 night Standard Junk
3 nights Basic Village House

Included Meals: 16 breakfasts, 8 lunches, 2 dinners

Start Point: Join tour: Ho Chi Minh City

End Point: Tour ends: Hanoi

Transport: Bus, Train, Boat, Public Bus, Taxi, Tuk Tuk

Countries: Vietnam

Good Morning Vietnam! + Hilltribes of the North

Vibrant cities, rice paddies and remote tribal villages are all part of this extended tour of Vietnam. We travel along the spectacular coast from Ho Chi Minh City to Halong Bay where we enjoy a junk cruise around karst limestone islets. We also spend four days trekking through Vietnam's northern mountains, experiencing the culture and cuisine of the friendly hilltribes.

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: Simple

These are often small, family run establishments or campsites which provide a no-frills experience with adequate amenities and service standards. Sleeping arrangements are simple, typically with en suite facilities.

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

Tour Pace: Moderate

These moderately paced tours provide some busy days with plenty of experiences to enjoy, as well as time to relax along the way.

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 Ho Chi Minh City; Orientation tour

Arrive Ho Chi Minh City and check-in at the hotel. Also referred to as Hoi Chi Minh City we start our adventure in Vietnam's largest, and arguably most exciting, city in Vietnam. Saigon is an eclectic mix of the traditional and the new, where pagodas and markets compete alongside the trappings of Vietnam's newly discovered entrepreneurial spirit. We take a short orientation tour on foot around the heart of the city, including the prominent Hotel de Ville, whose ornate grandeur is today the home of the city's People's Committee, the Romanesque Notre Dame Cathedral and the impressive French style edifice that is the GPO building.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available



 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 2 In Ho Chi Minh City

No visit to Ho Chi Minh City would be complete without exploring something of its tragic recent history and the poignant reminders of what the Vietnamese refer to as the American War can still be seen amongst the buildings and artefacts of the old US Embassy, as well as the remarkable Reunification Palace and the emotive War Crimes Museum, which contains a fascinating, and at times chilling, reminder of the cost of the Vietnam War on the people themselves. Another option is to join an excursion out to the infamous Cu Chi Tunnels. Originally started during the French occupation of the country, the tunnels went on to achieve notoriety during the Vietnam War, when they formed an amazing underground command base for 10,000 Viet Cong troops and were a major part of the Tet Offensive. This area was the centre of intense fighting during the war, much of it falling prey to the incessant carpet bombing, napalm and defoliants utilised by the Americans in an attempt to dislodge the Viet Cong from their underground shelters. There is little evidence of any of that now and the landscape has returned to something of its pre war beauty, but exploring the tunnels of Ben Dinh and Ben Binh gives some idea as to the conditions that the Vietnamese and their American adversaries had to endure.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 3 Optional day trip to the Mekong Delta; Overnight train to Nha Trang

Today sees an opportunity to journey down into the Mekong Delta and explore the fertile hinterlands that lie sandwiched between the South China Sea and the Gulf of Thailand. Heading down towards the town of My Tho takes you into a region where the orchids, lychees and coconut palms that are grown in the delta are bartered at breakneck speed and taking to the waters you have a chance to enjoy the timeless tableau of river life that has continued pretty much unchanged for generations, visiting local villages and floating along the narrow tree-lined canals of the Mekong. There will be an opportunity to take lunch on one of the islands, before returning to My Tho by boat to make the return journey back to Ho Chi Minh City. This evening the group transfers to the train station by taxi, in order to catch the overnight train to Nha Trang.

Overnight: **Basic Overnight Train**

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 4 Arrive Nha Trang; Free time

Early this morning we arrive in Nha Trang and transfer to the hotel. Given the early hour of our arrival, dayrooms are provided to freshen up prior to our own rooms becoming available. The day has been left free to explore Nha Trang at your own leisure and the town's picturesque location, amidst a golden landscape of white beaches and blue waters, makes it an ideal spot to enjoy some quality beach time. Other options include a relaxing mud bath, or perhaps a boat trip out to the islands that lie offshore with the chance for snorkelling. Those looking for something a little more active might like to consider a trip by bicycle to explore the nearby Cham Towers and the old part of the town. Probably Nha Trang's most iconic attraction, the Po Nagar Cham Towers span a period of some 500 years and present a haunting reminder of the long forgotten kingdom that once ruled these lands through their divine kings. Only 4 of the original 10 towers remain (many were destroyed during the intense fighting of the Vietnam War), but nonetheless they conjure up an impressive feeling of power and mystery and, along with the remnants of Nha Trang's past and the captivating sights of its fishing villages present an enthralling introduction to the town.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 5 Full day in Nha Trang; Overnight train to Danang

Another full day in Nha Trang offers the chance to continue with some personal sightseeing, or perhaps enjoy a little more of the beach, before we transfer to the railway station for an overnight journey to Danang.

Overnight: **Basic Overnight Train**

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 6 Arrive Danang; Drive to Hoi An

On arrival in Danang we will continue our journey by charter bus to Hoi An. On our way we pass the popular beach resort of My Khe, also known as China Beach. Given the early hour of our arrival at the hotel we might not be able to check-in so we plan to store our bags, have breakfast (not included) then embark on a walking tour of Hoi An. First colonized by the Portuguese in the 16th century, by the 17th and 18th centuries Hoi An had become one of the busiest international trading posts in southeast Asia and, even today, it still retains the engaging charm of a medieval port, with many of its old buildings superbly preserved. Highlights include the Phuc

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Kien Assembly Hall, a pagoda dedicated to the worship of Buddha originally built by the Vietnamese people in the 16th century and the 400 year old Japanese covered bridge. We end at the colourful riverside market, a perfect setting for exploring, the rest of the day is free to enjoy as you wish.

Overnight: **Basic Overnight Train**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY **7** Free in Hoi An

Today is free to wander through the historic heart of this World Heritage Site at your leisure. An early morning visit to the fish market presents a riot of noise and colour that is perfect for some great photo opportunities and some choice local interaction. You might also like to pay a visit to the Japanese Bridge, Hoi An's emblematic symbol, believed to have been constructed to quell the violent rumblings of a restless monster, or perhaps explore the traditional wooden houses and Chinese temples that line the streets. There are numerous tailors shops in Hoi An providing an incredibly cheap and quick service and almost all visitors have at least one item made before they depart. Hoi An is also a great place to hire a bicycle as the roads are relatively quiet. There's a good beach just a few kilometres from the town or alternatively why not set out to explore nearby villages. Cooking classes are yet another option available in this popular travellers hangout.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available


 **Included Meals:** None

DAY **8** Public bus to Hue via Hai Van Pass

This morning sees us heading along the coastal road towards the historic setting of Hue, crossing part of the Truong Son Mountains and travelling via the Hai Van (Sea Cloud) Pass. This stunningly scenic region once marked the boundary between Vietnam and the Champa Kingdom to the south and the journey should get us into the old imperial city around lunchtime, after which the rest of the day is free for personal exploration. Once the capital of Vietnam and an inspiration for poets and artists alike for centuries, Hue is divided by the waters of the Perfume River, which separate the city's 19th century citadel from the suburbs that radiate from the eastern shore and, even today, its easy air of leisurely ambience makes it one of the most engaging cities in the country to explore.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

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

DAY **9** In Hue; Overnight train to Hanoi

With the better part of the day to enjoy the city, Hue offers a wealth of options to make the most of your time here. You could pay a visit to the iconic Thien Mu Pagoda, home to the oldest monastery in the city, whose 21m high tower has become something of a symbol for Hue. Dedicated to the Manushi- Buddha, the existing temple was constructed in the middle years of the 19th century, under the auspices of the Emperor Thieu Tri, and within its confines you can find a number of superb Buddhist statues, as well as an enormous cast bell that weighs in at over 2000kg and is reputed to be audible over 10km away. Another alternative is to spend some time exploring the Old Citadel that dominates the left bank of the Perfumed River. Built by the Nguyen dynasty (Vietnam's ruling emperors from the early 1800s to 1945), the Citadel has formal moats and impressive ramparts that were constructed to be an exact copy of the Forbidden City in Beijing. During the bloody conflicts of the Vietnam War, Hue was the site of some of the most destructive fighting of the Tet Offensive, most of the Inner City being totally destroyed during the month-long battle in 1968. The vast outer walls and the West Wing remain though and provide an eloquent reminder of the palace's former glory. Farther afield, amongst the forested landscapes of the Perfume Valley, you can find the Royal Tombs of the Nguyen kings, the unique mausoleums of the emperors that provide an ideal destination to explore by bicycle. Later this afternoon we will then head for the railway station to board the overnight train north to Hanoi, Vietnam's vibrant and historic capital.

Overnight: **Basic Overnight Train**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch

DAY **10** Arrive Hanoi; Drive to Halong Bay

Arriving in Hanoi in the early hours of this morning we disembark the train and transfer by road towards the Bay of Tonkin on Vietnam's northeast coast. Our destination is the incredible setting of Halong Bay one of Vietnam's, and indeed Southeast Asia's, most spectacular natural attractions, whose staggering beauty has seen it listed as one of the eight natural wonders of the world. A UNESCO World Heritage site, Halong Bay presents a quite extraordinary vista of hundreds of limestone islands (over 1600 at 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

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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 in comfortable en suite air-conditioned cabins with all bedding provided. Please be aware that the boat will not be exclusive to Explore and we will be sharing it with other travellers.

Overnight: **Standard Junk**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 11 Return to Hanoi; Orientation tour

Returning back to Hanoi your tour leader will then take those that wish on a short orientation tour of the city, wandering the streets of the city's Old Quarter, whose narrow streets are named after the various crafts and specialities of the city's artisans: Paper Street, Silk Street, Basket Street etc. 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 and streets present a fascinating venue to explore on foot and the area is known for its interesting 'tube' houses, where the narrow frontages give way to long rooms that stretch back from streets, whose pavements are littered with food sellers tempting passers by with all manner of noodles, snacks and stir-fried delights from shoulder panniers. Later today there may be a chance to witness a remarkable performance of traditional water puppetry, a practice that dates back to the 15th century and is deeply ingrained into the cultural lives of the peoples of the Red River Delta. 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.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 12 In Hanoi; Free time

Architecturally styled like a French provincial town, with tree-lined boulevards and substantial low-built houses, Hanoi is a wonderfully nostalgic city to enjoy and amongst its 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:** Breakfast

DAY 13 Transfer to Mai Chau; Afternoon village walk

This morning we will be joined on our drive (4hrs) 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 typical 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. Up to 20 guests can be accommodated in our house and will be used exclusively by our group for the evening. 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 room locally, it is only possible to arrange this locally and you should consult upon check in. A sleeping mat, blanket, hand towel and mosquito net are provided. Approx walking: 9kms/2.5 hours.

Overnight: **Basic Village House**

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 14 Mai Chau full day village walk

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

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break and take our picnic lunch amid palm 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 hrs.

Overnight: **Basic Village House**

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch

DAY **15** Free morning optional cycling; Drive to Hanoi; Overnight 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 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 along rice paddies and through pretty villages that lie in the shadow of the surrounding mountains. There is of course plenty of opportunity to dismount, and wander amongst the friendly villagers. Later this afternoon we transfer (4hrs) 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**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY **16** Arrive in Lao Cai; Drive to Sapa

Arriving into Lao Cai early this morning we then take a beautifully scenic drive to Sapa town by public bus. The region's minority groups descend upon this remote village to meet and trade. The stunningly located mountain town of Sapa 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 Black H'mong, Zao, Tay, Yai and Xa Pho for whom Sapa is the chief market town. On arrival in Sapa your tour leader will run through your options for today and lead a short orientation tour. Due to our early arrival it may not be possible to check in to our hotel until later in the day. This afternoon you may wish to visit the town's small ethnic museum to learn a little about the region's minority groups or walk out to some of the nearby villages that lie scattered across the valley. Alternatively you may just choose to relax and enjoy the fresh mountain air around town. In the evening the Black H'mong and Red Zao people set up a small market in the town square.


Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY **17** Hilltribe trek

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 valleys 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 houses. 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 house, 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/16 kms.

Overnight: **Basic Village House**

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

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DAY 18 Hilltribe trek; 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 for a short tour around the village we then cross the river and continue along a gradually ascending track, stopping en route for our picnic lunch. After lunch we will reach 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 re-join our vehicle for the journey back to Sapa. Approx walking: 6hours/19kms.

Overnight: **Simple Hotel**
Single Room Available



Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 19 Free time in Sapa; Drive to Lao Cai; Overnight 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 the 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 20 Arrive Hanoi; Free day

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 21 Tour ends Hanoi

Tour ends after breakfast. If you have time you may wish to take another wander through the fascinating Old Quarter or stroll along the shore of Hoan Kiem Lake.



Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodation and Meals

Food & Drink

Included meals: 16 breakfasts, 8 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

Ho Chi Minh City - Half day Cu Chi tunnels (includes transport) US\$ 30; Cu Chi and half day city tour US\$ 29; Mekong Delta day trip to Ben Tre US\$ 40.00; Reunification Palace US\$ 2

Nha Trang - Boat trip US\$ 26-44; Bike hire US\$ 2; Mud Baths from US\$ 16

Hoi An - Marble Mountain entrance fees US\$ 3; Bicycle hire US\$ 2; Entrance to Hoi An Old Town US\$ 5; Half day cooking classes from US\$ 39-45

Hue - Entrance fees for Royal Tombs US\$ 5; Citadel visit US\$ 5.00; Half day Perfume River cruise, Imperial Citadel and Dong Ba Market US\$ 18-23

Hanoi - Water Puppets show from US\$ 6; Cyclo tour of Old Quarter US\$ 6; Ho Chi Minh's Stilt House US\$ 1; Museums US\$ 1; Half day city tour US\$ 11-17

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.

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. Accordingly, you should allow us\$ 50.

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.

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, 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

A torch, water bottle, insect repellent and high factor sunscreen are all essential, as are good quality sunglasses and a lip salve with sun protection. Don't forget your swim wear! An overnight bag is useful for the overnight trains/ bus and junk.

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.

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.

These tour notes were printed on 05/03/2015 10:52:13