

EXPLORE!

TRIP NOTES



Vietnam Express (VF 2017)



TRIP DURATION
10
DAYS



Tour Style: Classic
Tour Pace: Full On

Tour Type: Small Groups
Accommodation
Grade: Standard

Trip Code: VF

Trip Highlights - Vietnam Express

- ✓ Halong Bay - Cruise through the towering limestone cliffs on a traditional junk boat.
- ✓ Hue - Discover the Imperial Citadel and take a boat along the Perfume River.
- ✓ Hoi An - Stay in this charming merchant's town with its Chinese-influenced architecture.
- ✓ Ho Chi Minh City - Explore modern Saigon before stepping back in time in the traditional Mekong Delta.

Trip Essentials

Accommodation: 8 nights Standard Hotel
1 night Simple Overnight Train

Included Meals: 8 breakfasts, 2 lunches, 0 dinners

Start Point: Join trip: Hanoi

End Point: Trip ends: Ho Chi Minh City

Transport: Bus, Train, Boat, Flight

Countries: Vietnam

Vietnam Express

Experience the highlights of this fascinating country on a fast-paced trip that travels the length of Vietnam. Wander through the streets of the charming Old Quarter of Hanoi, experience travel on an overnight train, discover ancient Hoi An and cruise through the myriad of waterways in the tropical Mekong Delta, all inside of 10 days.

Why Book this trip

This trip is ideal if you are limited on time but still wish to experience the highlights of this fascinating and diverse country. It is a fast-paced tour that takes in the '5 H's' of bustling Hanoi, beautiful Halong Bay, imperial Hue, ancient Hoi An, and modern Ho Chi Minh City. We also visit the Mekong Delta, with a chance to experience rural Vietnamese life, virtually unchanged for centuries. The trip is based in our standard range of accommodation, and contains a good mix of included excursions, with some free time to relax or explore at your own pace.

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.

Accommodation Grade: Standard

Our mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en-suite facilities.

Tour Style: Classic

Packed with adventure, these tours offer inspiring destinations and authentic travel experiences at a reasonable price. Using all kinds of transport and accommodation, we'll take you off the beaten track to discover the true heart of the people and places you visit.

Tour Pace: Full On

These fast paced tours move on quickly from place to place and with lots of early starts and long busy days, they're packed with experiences.

Your trip 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 trip in Hanoi

Arrive in Hanoi and after checking into the hotel, the rest of the day is free at leisure. You may wish to take a gentle stroll around the beautiful Hoan Kiem Lake, or perhaps negotiate the narrow streets, shops and noodle stands of the Old Quarter.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available



 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 2 Discover the sights of Hanoi including the Old Quarter

This morning we set off to discover Vietnam's capital. Hanoi is a multifaceted city offering a wealth of experiences, we find wide tree-lined boulevards with charming colonial buildings and trendy shops in the French Quarter, whilst the Old Quarter offers up a distinctly more Vietnamese experience - narrow streets filled with street-food vendors, craft stalls, and of course Hanoi's most famous form of transport - mopeds! After some time spent discovering the Old Quarter and its various streets, named after the goods sold there (Basket Street, Paper Street, Silk Street) we continue onto the precarious one-pillar Pagoda, before visiting the Presidential Palace. Interestingly, Ho Chi Minh himself, a spartan-living and scholarly man, chose not to live in the Presidential Palace; he preferred instead a simple teak stilt-house specially built for him in the grounds. After finishing our tour we make our way to back to the hotel, where the remainder of the afternoon is at leisure.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 3 Free time in Hanoi, then drive to Halong Bay

We have some free time in Hanoi this morning, you may wish to visit Ho Chi Minh's austere mausoleum, an interesting piece of architecture resembling Lenin's in Moscow, or perhaps dive into one of the city's many noodle bars to sample Vietnam's favourite dish - Pho (a tasty rice noodle soup made with meat, fresh chillies and vegetables) . You could also choose to explore the city via one of its more traditional methods; on a cyclo-rickshaw ride through the narrow streets and lanes of Hanoi. Later this afternoon we head out of the city and onto the coast as we drive to Halong Bay.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 4 Cruise Halong Bay; from Hanoi overnight train to Hué

We head out on a traditional junk boat this morning for a cruise amongst the towering limestone karsts and jade-green waters of Halong Bay. Legend has it that a furious dragon descended down from the mountains to chase out northern invaders, and the action of the mammoth creature diving into the sea caused this remarkable geological seascape. In fact the word Halong literally translates to descending dragon. We have chance to learn the stories and folklore that adds to the mystical atmosphere of the Bay, as well as stopping at a grotto beneath towering cliffs and perhaps visit a beach. We will stop for a fresh seafood lunch before disembarking and returning to a hotel in Hanoi to freshen up before boarding the Reunification Express to Hue. Overnight trains are an enjoyable and efficient way to travel across Vietnam, and you will stay in either 4 berth or 6 berth cabins, dependant on availability. Bedding is provided and toilets are available at either end of each carriage.

Overnight: **Simple Overnight Train**

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 5 In Hué; visit Imperial city and cruise on the Perfume River

We arrive into the central city this morning, with some time to relax and re-energise before heading out to learn about Hue's fascinating history. We will start with a visit to the Imperial Citadel which was built by the Nguyen dynasty, Vietnam's ruling emperors from the early 1800s to 1945. Much of the citadel has been copied from the Forbidden City in Beijing, and the formal moats and impressive ramparts were thought be constructed by some 20,000 men. Although most of the inner part of the city was totally destroyed during the month-long Tet Offensive in 1968, the vast outer walls and the west wing remain an eloquent reminder of the palace's former glory. We then make our way to the Perfume River, cruising down the river to the towering seven storied Thien Mu Pagoda.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 6 Scenic drive over Hai Van Pass to Hoi An; explore the old town on foot

This morning we continue south, this time by road as we enjoy a scenic drive across the spectacular Col des Nuages, otherwise known as the Hai Van Pass. This winding mountain road passes scenes of thatched wooden houses and lime-green rice paddies as it snakes its way across the mountains before we catch our first glimpse of panoramic sea views. We stop at the nearby five peaks of the Marble Mountains, said to represent the five elements of water, wood, fire, gold and earth. Naturally formed grottoes have been transformed into heavily carved Buddhist sanctuaries here. A short distance from the mountains we find the white sands of My Khe

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Beach (nicknamed China Beach by American troops)- an ideal spot for a brief rest before reaching our destination - the UNESCO World Heritage town of Hoi An. This afternoon we have planned an orientation walk of this charming merchant town, taking in the wonderful architecture of the Japanese Bridge, as well as visiting some of the Chinese temples and meeting halls in the Old Town.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 7 Free day to explore Hoi An; optional visit to My Lai

The historic, merchant town of Hoi An had become one of the busiest international trading ports of Southeast Asia by the 17th and 18th centuries. First colonised by the Portuguese in the 16th century, it still retains its old world charm today, with many of its old buildings superbly preserved. The day is free to explore at leisure. There are many shops, bars and restaurants in this charming town and it is a great place to buy souvenirs, have clothing tailored or simply watch the world go by in a riverside café. You may wish to take an optional excursion out to the site of the My Lai village massacre memorial. The massacre was a significant turning point in the American War and the horrific story is told through a very emotive photographic exhibition.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 8 Fly to Ho Chi Minh City; Afternoon walking tour

This morning we transfer to Danang, where we take our flight to the south of Vietnam, into Ho Chi Minh City. Heavily bombed during the Vietnam war, Saigon (as it is still often referred to by locals) displays a curious mix of old and new, with French colonial buildings and traditional Vietnamese architecture vying for space with gleaming new skyscrapers. We plan to visit some of these buildings this afternoon, including the beautiful Notre Dame Cathedral and GPO office, as well as some of the old French Colonial hotels such as The Rex. We will also have the chance to visit the graphic War Remnants Museum, offering up a very different side of the story compared to Hollywood's depiction of the Vietnam War.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 9 Full day exploring the Mekong Delta by boat, trishaws and on foot.

Today we leave city behind as we drive into the myriad of waterways that make up the Mekong Delta. Offering a rich and fertile plateau upon which to farm, the Mekong Delta is hubbub of activity, with farmers exploiting its lush agricultural properties, and fisherman catching the Mekong's plentiful supply of freshwater fish. We plan to visit a floating market in the town of My Tho, a wonderful experience where traders offer their fresh produce of exotic fruits, vegetables and fish from a variety of sampans (small Chinese wooden boats) placed along the river. We take a ferry to a nearby village which we explore by trishaws, and later we board sampans to cruise along the narrow, palm-tree lined canals that run off from the main veins of the Delta. Finally we plan to visit a local family-run business based around produce from the humble coconut, before driving back to Ho Chi Minh City late in the afternoon.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 10 Trip ends in Ho Chi Minh City

Trip ends in Ho Chi Minh City after breakfast.

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

Accommodation and Meals

Food & Drink

Included meals: 8 breakfasts, 2 lunches, 0 dinners included in the price of this trip. 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 Trip

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the trip 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 £: 5.00 - 7.00

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 £: 2.00 - 4.00

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 Show from US\$ 5; Cyclo tour of Old Quarter US\$ 6

Hoi An - Cookery class US\$ 15

Hoi An - Full day trip to the UNESCO temples of My Son US\$ 24

Hoi An - Half Day cycle through countryside - US \$22

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 US\$ 30.

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 Trip

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.

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

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>.

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 booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

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The Adventure Travel Experts

CAMPBELL IRVINE
DIRECT TRAVEL INSURANCE



Travel Insurance is essential. If you have not already arranged cover, please contact our recommended Travel Insurance providers www.campbellirvinedirect.com/Explore who offer Travel Insurance specifically designed to cover travel with Explore or call **Campbell Irvine Direct** on Tel: 020 7938 1734

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Travel Aware

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 www.explore.co.uk/travel-safety

We strongly advise that you register with the FCO to receive updates to the travel advice for your chosen destination. A hard copy of the current FCO Travel Advice for your chosen destination is available by contacting cr@explore.co.uk or 01252 379438.

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Visa Information

Vietnam: Until 30th June 2018 'British Citizen' passport holders can visit Vietnam for up to 15 days without a visa. A visa will be required if you enter after this date or if you wish to re-enter within 30 days of your departure.

For visits of up to 30 days, you can get an e-visa before you travel from <https://evisa.xuatnhapcanh.gov.vn/>

For visits of longer than 30 days you must get a visa from the nearest Vietnamese embassy before travelling to Vietnam. If you want to make a second visit within 30 days of leaving Vietnam, you'll need to get a multiple entry visa to re-enter.

Please note that it is a pre-requisite for entry into Vietnam that your passport is valid for a minimum of 6 months from your date of entry

All visa related issues including information for other nationalities should be confirmed with the relevant Embassy prior to departure.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on **0208 5431846**.

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 Malaria and Zika Virus. 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 Trip

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

From December through to February warmer clothing is needed for the North. Days are hot and humid. Lightweight rainwear essential at all times. The northern region is cold at night during the winter.

Equipment

Even though bed linen is provided on the train journey, you may want to bring your own sleeping sheet (it can be purchased in Hanoi); torch, and don't forget mosquito repellent (no need for a mosquito net as when necessary, it is provided).

Footwear

Comfortable shoes, trainers and sandals.

Luggage: On Tour

One main lockable bag/case, an overnight bag for your trips to Halong Bay and the Mekong delta when your main luggage is left behind and a daypack.

Luggage allowance on trip: 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, 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.

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

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, 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) and have recently supported women's cooperatives in Borneo and Morocco. We are a member of Tourism Concern's Ethical Tour Operator Group (www.tourismconcern.org.uk) and support their campaign for fair and ethical tourism. We also care passionately about the world's wildlife and actively support and promote the Born Free Organisation and Mahouts Elephant Foundation.

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 2016 and 31st December 2017.

Trip 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: 2017 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing in 2017. 2018/19 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing from 1st January to 31st December 2018.

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