

# EXPLORE!

## Vietnam Explorer

21 days

Vietnam - Trip code VE



## Vietnam Explorer

Take an in-depth journey across Vietnam visiting ancient colonial towns and experiencing traditional river life along the waterways. We follow part of the Ho Chi Minh Trail through the beautiful Central Highlands - we trek, raft and visit tribal villages. We also sea kayak in Halong Bay and cruise among floating markets on the Mekong Delta.

## Trip highlights

- ★ **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 breathtaking limestone landscapes in South East Asia
- ★ **Hoi An** - Charming ancient merchant's town on the banks of the Thu Bon River
- ★ **Kon Tum** - Walk through cassava and sugar plantations to a Bahnar tribal village in the Central Highlands
- ★ **Mekong Delta** - Riverside stilt houses and fascinating floating markets

### ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

#### Standard

Our standard, 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.

**TRIP PACE:****Moderate**

Moderate pace tours are ideal if you want a holiday which combines exciting activities and experiences with plenty of time to relax and unwind. Typically you'll be active and busy for part of the day but then also have time to rest and recharge your batteries.

**GROUP SIZE:****12 - 18**

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

## Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

### DAY 1 - Join tour in Hanoi

Arrive Hanoi and check-in at the hotel. Vietnam's bustling capital is architecturally styled like a French provincial town, with tree-lined boulevards and low-rise buildings. Hanoi is a wonderfully nostalgic city to explore and this afternoon we have some free time to do so. You may choose to take a walk around the shores of Hoan Kiem Lake.



**Accommodation: Anise Hotel Hanoi** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

### DAY 2 - Discover the sights of Hanoi including the Old Quarter

This morning we make a tour of the main sights of Hanoi. Among the interesting sights are the charming One-Pillar Pagoda and the Presidential Palace, a very fine example of French colonial architecture. Ho Chi Minh himself, a spartan-living and scholarly man, chose not to live in the Presidential Palace; he preferred instead a simple teak 2-storied stilt-house specially built for him in the grounds. In the afternoon we visit the Old Quarter of Hanoi. The streets are named after various crafts or specialities: Paper Street, Silk Street, Basket Street etc. The shops themselves have very narrow frontages but are actually quite deep; they are known locally as 'tube' shops.



**Accommodation: Anise Hotel Hanoi** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 3 - Free time in Hanoi, drive to Halong Bay; overnight on boat

This morning we drive out towards the magnificent Halong Bay in the Gulf of Tonkin. Thousands of jagged limestone islands rise out of the jade green waters like the hairy scales of a submerged dragon. In fact Ha Long means 'where the dragon descends to the sea' as legend tells that the rugged seascape was created by the pounding tail of a dragon as he ran from the mountains into the sea, carving islands in his wake. We enjoy the romantic scenery while cruising amongst the islands. We'll have the chance to stop at a grotto beneath towering cliffs and perhaps pull into a beach where you will have time to swim, relax or kayak (optional). It is also interesting to see the curious assortment of boats, junks and wooden sampans, their sails hoisted, gliding through the waters. We enjoy an included seafood lunch on board the boat. In the evening we'll transfer to our overnight boat. Accommodation will be in twin cabins, bedding and mattresses provided.



**Accommodation: Halong Bay Junk** (or similar)



Standard Junk



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

## DAY 4 - In Halong Bay; sea kayaking and visit floating village; overnight on boat

We'll have the chance to stop at an island or Three Peaches beach under towering cliffs and fringed with thick jungle. You will have the opportunity to sea kayak through stunning limestone scenery - we carry our own kayaks and lifejackets and instruction is provided (this activity is optional, but at no extra expense). Late in the afternoon we visit Cua Van floating fishing village to experience some local life of the people in this part of the bay. Again in the evening we'll transfer to our overnight boat.



**Accommodation: Halong Bay Junk** (or similar)



Standard Junk



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

## DAY 5 - Drive to Hanoi; sleeper train to Hue

This morning we board local rowing boats cruising through Bai Tu Long Bay. Enjoying our brunch while on the boat we get to see Bai Tho mountains and Ha Long market. During our cruise we sail to the beautiful caves of Hang Luon. We then return to Hanoi where we have day rooms before boarding the overnight sleeper train for the journey to Hué - bedding provided.



**Accommodation: Overnight train from Hanoi to Hue**



Simple Overnight Train



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 6 - Arrive in Hue; boat along Perfume River to Thien Mu Pagoda

We arrive in Hué, one of the great cultural and religious centres of Vietnam, a quietly impressive place and a major highlight of our trip. The Perfume River divides the city in two and it has been the inspiration for poets and painters for many centuries. In the afternoon we take a trip by boat on the Perfume River to the Thien Mu Pagoda. This lovely monastery is the oldest in Hué.



**Accommodation: Thanh Lich Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

## DAY 7 - In Hue, visit the Imperial Citadel; free afternoon

To appreciate Hue's fascinating history we'll tour the Old Citadel in the morning. The citadel/palace built by the Nguyen dynasty (early 1800's to 1945) has formal moats and impressive ramparts and was an exact copy of the Forbidden City in Beijing. Although most of the Inner City was destroyed during the Tet Offensive (1968), the vast outer walls and the West Wing remain and are an eloquent reminder of the palace's former glory. The afternoon is free to wander at your own pace. You may choose to hire a bike or wander the back streets and lively markets (optional).



**Accommodation: Thanh Lich Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 8 - Scenic drive via Danang to Hoi An

This morning we enjoy a scenic drive across the spectacular Col des Nuages (the pass of Ocean Clouds) to Danang, once the centre of the important Kingdom of Champa (2nd century AD - 1720). We visit the Cham Museum to see the extraordinary Cham sculptures. Not far from Hoi An are the magnificent Marble Mountains which are dotted with Buddhist pagodas and shrines, and were a haven for the Vietcong troops and the scene of many battles. We will also stop at China Beach. Later we drive on to the historic merchant town of Hoi An.



**Accommodation: Van Loi Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 9 - From Hoi An, visit ancient My Son; free afternoon in Hoi An

The Portuguese arrived here in the 16th century and by the 18th century it had become one of the busiest international trading ports of South-East Asia. Hoi An still retains its medieval charm with old buildings and colourful markets. During our stay here we include an excursion to My Son. Declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, My Son is a striking complex of tower temples located in a secluded valley. The rest of our time is left free for personal exploration.



**Accommodation: Van Loi Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 10 - Free day to explore Hoi An; optional visit to My Lai

Bicycles here are inexpensive and a great way to get out into the surrounding countryside or perhaps take a trip to the nearby beaches. Hoi An is also renowned for its many craft and tailors' shops. You may wish to take an optional excursion to Quang Ngai, the site of the My Lai Massacre Memorial. The massacre was a significant turning point in the Vietnam War and the horrific story is told through a photo presentation - an emotional experience.



**Accommodation: Van Loi Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 11 - Drive through mountains to Kon Tum in Central Highlands

Our journey takes us inland through the mountains of the Central Highlands to the market town of Kon Tum. It is a long day of travel but the stunning scenery and opportunity to see this rural area more than make up for it.



**Accommodation: Indochine Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 12 - In Kon Tum, walk through tribal villages

On our second day here we walk out to Kon Ko Tu, one of the many Bahnar tribal villages in the surrounding area (approx 5 hours walking, graded easy to moderate). We walk through cassava and sugar plantations and pass several stilted villages en route. After lunch there is an opportunity to float back to the village on local dugout canoes. In the evening we can visit the Village Rong or communal house which is the most important building in the village - not only is it used for festivals and village meetings, but it acts as the court where people are tried for tribal offences.



**Accommodation: Indochine Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

## DAY 13 - Drive to Western Highlands; take boat on Lake Lak

We drive south today through the Central Highlands, to Buon Me Thuot, Dak Lak Province's administrative centre and the Western Highlands' unofficial capital. Although a nondescript town, there are many minority Ede villages in this region, and we head south to Lak Lake to spend a night in a bungalow near the shores. During our time here we will take a relaxed boat (pirogue) excursion on Lak Lake. There is also time for some personal exploration of the area.



**Accommodation: Lak Bungalows** (or similar)



Standard Lodge



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Dinner

## DAY 14 - Drive to coastal Nha Trang

Our drive today sees us descending to the coastal plains as we make our way to the fishing town and beach resort of Nha Trang. Some of the most impressive Cham towers can be seen on the outskirts of the town on our arrival.



**Accommodation: Vien Dong Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 15 - In Nha Trang, boat cruise on Ninh Van Bay

Today we enjoy this seaside town, famed for its clear warm water, delicious seafood and white sand beach. We plan a boat trip to some of the outlying islands to swim and relax (dependent on local weather conditions).



**Accommodation: Vien Dong Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 16 - Fly to Ho Chi Minh City; explore Old Saigon; free afternoon

Today we fly to Ho Chi Minh City where we have a walking tour of the city's central sights including the National Assembly, Hotel de Ville, Notre Dame Cathedral, the Independence Palace and the War Crimes Museum. The afternoon is free for you to walk around this charming city.



**Accommodation: Asian Ruby Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 17 - Drive to Mekong Delta; cruise Mekong River; overnight on boat

This morning we drive to Can Duoc, where we board our specially chartered river boat. Travelling along the backwaters by boat is by far the best way to see the delta, passing villages of stilted houses, abundant rice fields and a variety of cottage industries as we go. We travel down the Mekong River to Cho Gao, where we disembark for a walk around the local market. We then continue to Thoi Son Island where we'll meet the friendly locals and take a sampan ride through palm-shaded creeks. Back on our boat, we'll cruise to Cai Be, where we moor up for the night. Our accommodation is simple dormitory-style bunks on board the boat.



**Accommodation: Cai Be Boat** (or similar)



Simple Boat



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

## DAY 18 - In Mekong Delta, option to visit early morning floating market; overnight on boat

It is worth rising early to see the superb floating market at Cai Be. As it links the various towns and provinces, Cai Be is a very social and colourful place with the vendors advertising their wares on long poles. We spend some time paddling through the market and enjoying the friendliness of the locals before continuing on our boat journey. We stop off several times today to visit rural islands and some of the many family businesses along the canals. We then continue down the river to Long Xuyen Sadec, where we visit the Quach Temple and the colourful local market. We continue through the Lap Vo Canal to Long Xuyen.



**Accommodation: Cai Be Boat** (or similar)



Simple Boat



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

## DAY 19 - Drive to Ho Chi Minh City

This morning we bid farewell to our boat crew and rejoin our vehicle and make the long journey back to Ho Chi Minh City, where we have the further chance to enjoy this bustling city.



**Accommodation: Asian Ruby Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 20 - From Ho Chi Minh City, visit Cu Chi Tunnels

This morning we'll take a short drive out of the city to the famous Cu Chi Tunnels, which formed an amazing underground command base for 10,000 Viet Cong troops and were a major part of the 1968 Tet Offensive. We then have a final group night before our adventure ends in Ho Chi Minh City.



**Accommodation: Asian Ruby Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 21 - Tour ends in Ho Chi Minh City

Tour ends after breakfast. If you have time you may wish to pick up some last minute bargains at Binh Tay Market.



Meals Provided: Breakfast





## What's included?



### Included meals

Breakfast: 19  
Lunch: 5  
Dinner: 6



### Transport

Bus  
Boat  
Flight  
Train



### Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader  
Boat Crew  
Driver(s)  
Local Guide(s)



### Accommodation

2 nights simple boat  
14 nights standard hotel  
2 nights standard junk  
1 nights standard lodge  
1 nights simple overnight train

## Trip information

### Country information

## Climate

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.

## Time difference to GMT

+7

## Plugs

2 Pin Round

## Religion

Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism

## Language

Vietnamese

# Budgeting and packing

## Optional activities

Hanoi - Water Puppets Show from US\$5; Cyclo tour of Old Quarter US\$6 Hoi An - Half day trip to My Son from US\$25; Cookery class US\$15 Nha Trang - Mud baths from US\$6

## Clothing

From 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 and the Central Highlands can be chilly. Casual clothes are the most practical.

## Footwear

Comfortable walking shoes, trainers and sandals.

## Luggage

20kg

## Luggage: On tour

One main piece of lockable baggage, an overnight bag for your two night trip to Halong Bay and the Mekong Delta when your main luggage is left behind, and a daypack.

## Equipment

Bring a small torch. Even though bed linen is provided on the train journey, you may want to bring a cotton sleeping sheet (it can be purchased in Hanoi) and a small travel towel.

## Tipping

### Explore leader

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

### 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\$ 45.

## Vietnam Holidays & Tours

### Food and drink

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.

**Dinner price**

£9

**Beer price**

£2.00 - 4.00

**Water price**

£0.5

### Foreign Exchange

**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.

**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.

## Transport, Accommodation & Meals

### Transport Information

Bus, Boat, Flight, Train

## Essential information

### FCO Advice

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 [click here](#).

For more information from Explore about travel advice, [click here](#)

**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.

### Essential Information

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

## 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](http://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.

## Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our Essential Information and Booking Conditions.

## Transfers

[Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.](#)

### 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 below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

### 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 [click here](#)

## 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.

Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

## Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. [Read more about them here.](#)

### 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 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.

## Non refundable permits

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## Vaccinations

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.

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