Why book this trip?

This short break encompasses the best of Vietnam in just 10 days. Using local transport and staying in simple hotels, we experience lush landscapes, discover harrowing history and sample incredible fresh food.

- **Hanoi** - Wander through the bustling narrow streets of the Old Quarter.
- **Hoi An** - Take a cookery course or try out traditional lantern making.
- **Mekong Delta** - Meander along palm-lined canals and barter for exotic fruit.
Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

### DAY 1 - Join trip in Ho Chi Minh City; afternoon orientation walk in Old Saigon

Still commonly referred to by locals as 'Saigon', the city is the largest in Vietnam and the country's commercial hub. You will find an eclectic mix of the traditional and the new, where pagodas and markets compete alongside the trappings of Vietnam's newly discovered entrepreneurial spirit.

For those arriving on time today our Leader plans to meet you in the hotel reception at 4pm for the welcome meeting and to take us on the walking tour. The tour will take in some of the central sights of the city, including the Opera House (formerly South Vietnam National Assembly), Hotel de Ville, Notre Dame Cathedral and the impressive French style edifice that is the GPO building.

If you would like to receive a complimentary airport transfer today, you will need to arrive into Tan Son Nhat International Airport (SGN), which is 30 to 40 minutes from the hotel.

Please note that if you wish to join the afternoon orientation walk today, you must arrive at the hotel by 1.30pm. If you are booking your own flights, we recommend giving yourself at least 30 minutes to clear the airport. From the airport to the hotel is around 30 minutes' drive, so therefore the latest your flight can arrive is 1pm. Should you miss the welcome meeting, your Leader will inform you of any essential information by note left at the front desk.

### ACCOMMODATION:

**Good Vibes Central Hotel** (or similar)

**Grade:** Simple Hotel
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. Be warned, the tunnels are low and narrow and can be claustrophobic.

A full day's visit to the colourful Mekong Delta can also be organised, to witness locals barter for fresh produce at a floating market and to take a sampan through the small narrow waterways of the Delta.

**ACCOMMODATION:**
Good Vibes Central Hotel (or similar)

**Grade:** Simple Hotel

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**DAY 3 - Morning flight to Danang, drive to Hoi An and afternoon tour of the Old Town**

This morning we transfer to the airport for our short flight to Danang in Central Vietnam. 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, better known as China Beach, an area that during the Vietnam War was popular with
the American GIs on RnR. 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 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.

ACCOMMODATION:
Vinh Hung Old Town Hotel (or similar)

Grade: Comfortable Hotel

SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE

SWIMMING POOL AVAILABLE

MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 4 - In Hoi An, free day to enjoy the Old Town, visit nearby beach or hire bicycles to explore surrounding countryside

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 traveller's hangout.

ACCOMMODATION:
Vinh Hung Old Town Hotel (or similar)
This morning sees us heading along the coastal road towards the historic setting of Hué, 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, Hué 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.

ACCOMMODATION:
Thanh Lich Hotel (or similar)

Grade: Comfortable Hotel
With the better part of the day to enjoy the city, Hué 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 Hué. 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, Hué 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.

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**ACCOMMODATION:**

Overnight Train from Hue to Hanoi

**Grade:** Simple Overnight Train

**MEALS PROVIDED:** BREAKFAST

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**DAY 6 - In Hue, optional visit to the Imperial Palace and cruise along Perfume River. Catch an overnight train north**

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**DAY 7 - Early morning arrival in Hanoi; drive to Halong Bay to cruise through the turquoise waters aboard a traditional junk boat**

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 breathtaking 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 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. Later this evening we disembark from our boat and transfer to our hotel in the Bay.
DAY 8 - Return to Hanoi; orientation walk of Old Quarter

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.
DAY 9 - In Hanoi; free day with option to visit the French Quarter or Hoan Kiem Lake

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.

ACCOMMODATION:
Akina Hotel (or similar)

Grade: Simple Hotel

SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE

MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 10 - Trip ends in Hanoi

The trip ends after breakfast at our hotel in Hanoi.

There are no activities planned today, so you are free to depart from Hanoi at any time. If your flight is departing later in the day, luggage storage facilities are available at our hotel. If you would like to receive a complimentary airport transfer today, you’ll need to depart from Noi Bai International Airport (HAN), which is 45 minutes from the hotel.

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.

MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST
Country information

Vietnam

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

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.

Ho Chi Minh City - Half day Cu Chi tunnels (includes transport) US$ 30; Half day city tour US$18; Cu Chi and half day city tour US$ 43; Mekong Delta day trip to Ben Tre US$ 55; Reunification Palace US$ 2

Hoi An - Marble Mountain US$10 ; Bicycle hire US$ 5; Entrance to Hoi An Old Town US$ 7; Half day cooking class US$ 52; Half day walking tour US$24; Full day walking tour and boat trip US$35; Martial arts show US$70

Hue - Entrance fees for Royal Tombs US$ 5; Citadel visit US$ 6; Full day Perfume River cruise, Imperial Citadel, Dong Ba market and Emperor’s tombs US$ 38; Half day Perfume River cruise, Imperial Citadel and Dong Ba Market US$ 18; Half day Emperors tombs US$ 22; Traditional kite making US$30

Hanoi - Water Puppets show from US$ 6; Cyclo tour of Old Quarter US$ 8; Ho Chi Minh’s Stilt House US$ 1.50; Museums US$ 1.50; Half day Hanoi city tour US$ 18; Full day Hanoi city tour US$43; Half day
The prices stated are based on a minimum of 5-6 participants. Please be aware that the optional excursions can run with fewer people but the price may be higher. Likewise, a slightly reduced price may be applicable where the participation is 7 or more. In Vietnam these excursions are generally run via our agent in the country. Local companies may offer similar excursions 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.

**Clothing**

Pack essentially for hot weather although 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.

**Footwear**

Comfortable shoes and sandals/trainers for relaxing.

**Luggage**

20kg

**Luggage: On tour**

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

**Equipment**

A torch, water bottle, insect repellent and high factor suncream 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.

**Tipping**

**Explore leader**

Tipping isn't compulsory, and we work hard to ensure that our leaders all receive a fair wage. You may however, want to recognise a leader that's done a great job or really added to your trip by giving them a tip. We're often asked about the recommended amount. It's a tricky one, and down to personal preference, but we'd recommend between £15 to £20 per person per week as a guideline.

**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$ 35.

**Vietnam**

**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.

<table>
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<th>Dinner price</th>
<th>Beer price</th>
<th>Water price</th>
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<tr>
<td>£9</td>
<td>£2.00 - 4.00</td>
<td>£0.5</td>
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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
Credit card's are widely accepted throughout Vietnam

Travellers Cheques
Travellers cheques are not recommended as they can be difficult to exchange.

Transport, Accommodation & Meals

Transport Information
Bus, Boat, Taxi, Train

Accommodation notes
On this tour we have opted for simple, basic and clean accommodation that provides value for money and a warm welcome. All hotel rooms have air-conditioning and attached bathrooms. Expect rooms to be furnished in a no frills manner and be prepared for both electricity supply and plumbing standards to be somewhat erratic.

In Ho Chi Minh City we stay near the Ben Thanh market and popular travellers area of Pham Ngu Lao Road. Our modern hotel in Nha Trang boasts its own swimming pool and is just a few minutes walk from the beach. In Hoi An we stay just a few minutes from the streets of the Old Town, our hotel has a small swimming pool and some traditional touches such as wooden carvings. We use small modern hotels in Hue and Hanoi, the latter being conveniently situated in the city's Old Quarter.

There are no single sex sleeping arrangements on the overnight train, however your tour leader will do
their best to make tactful sleeping arrangements.

Essential Information

Government Travel Safety 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.

Price Guarantee

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 and Passport Information

Vietnam: Until 30th June 2021 ‘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.

Visa's are required for citizens of the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. eVisa's can be applied for via https://evisa.xuatnhapcanh.gov.vn

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 be able to apply 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.
It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, with the correct validity for your chosen destination.

**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 complimentary transfers will be arranged from the Explore designated airport or train station to your trips joining point, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. Generally the airport or station that Explore have selected will be the one that is closest to the town or city where the trip starts, or the one nearest to the joining point. It will be either an airport or train station but not both.

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, Polar, 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. The cost of many of our Polar Voyages will exceed the capped amount covered by standard insurance premiums and you will be required to pay an additional premium to cover the full value of your trip. Please ensure that you are covered for the full amount of your holiday cost, as insufficient cover could invalidate a claim under the policy. 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.

**Ability to swim**

An ability to swim is essential for your safe enjoyment of the water based activities on this trip. If you wish to participate in these activities then we insist that you are able to swim.

**Vietnam**

**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. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. 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 Explore Travel Health and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.

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**Additional Information**

![Map of Vietnam](image-url)
Why book this trip

This highlights tour of Vietnam covers the country from south to north. Travel is mainly by public transport to give an insight into local life, and has a lot of free time factored in. This trip is suited to more adventurous travellers who enjoy independent exploration as well as organised activities and who want a more flexible holiday. This tour combines with our Indochina Encounter (QBK) trip for a more extended exploration of the region.