

North Vietnam Explorer

Country(ies): Vietnam

Tour type: Private

Transport: A/C minibus, sleeper train & junk boat

Group size: Min: 2 | Max: 0

Days: 8 Days

Start location: Hanoi, Vietnam

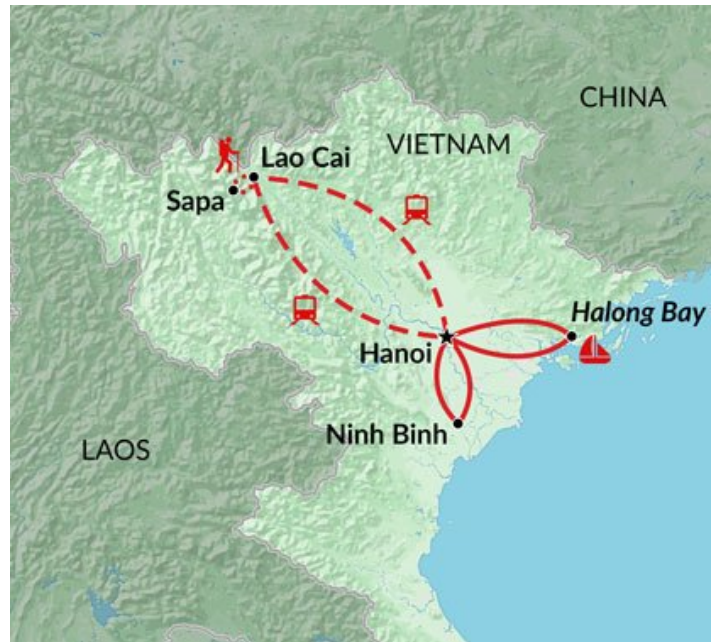
End location: Hanoi, Vietnam

Departs On: Any day

Meals: Breakfasts - 7, Lunches - 7, Dinners - 4

Highlights: Soaking up the hustle and bustle of Hanoi's Old Quarter, trekking in Sapa and meeting ethnic minority people, marvel at the natural beauty of limestone peaks in Ninh Binh, spending a night on a junk in romantic Halong Bay

Places Visited: Hanoi, Lao Cai, Sapa, Ninh Binh & Halong Bay



Itinerary

Day 1: Arrive Hanoi and transfer to hotel

We meet and greet you at the airport and provide a private transfer to your hotel where you can settle in and explore your new surroundings. In the evening your guide will take you on a tour of Hanoi's street food. We start our adventure into the world of street food with a taste of the local brew called "bai hoi". This very fizzy draft beer originated from eastern Europe. We continue through the streets and stalls, sampling the many wonderful culinary delights on offer, including Vietnamese flame grilled barbecue of meats, tofu and vegetables on skewers and much more. We end the evening with a wander around the lake and take dessert at Hanoi's most famous ice cream parlour.

OVERNIGHT: Hanoi - 3-star hotel

MEALS: None

EXTRAS: Extra day in Hanoi - pre-tour || Single room supplement (VETMNV)

Day 2: Hanoi city tour & overnight train to Lao Cai

This city tour takes in Hanoi's essential sites. In the morning you'll visit Ho Chi Minh Complex including the Mausoleum, his former stilt-house residence, the Presidential Palace and the Ho Chi Minh Museum. You then have time to explore the Imperial Citadel of Thang Long - centre of regional political power for almost 13 centuries. This has recently been recognized as the World Cultural Heritage Site.

After lunch you visit The Temple of Literature, Vietnam's first university dating back to 1070, and Long Bien bridge, constructed from 1899 - 1902 whilst Vietnam was under French occupancy. Later you'll take a fun one-hour cyclo tour through the narrow, chaotic streets of the Old Quarter - a must for any visitor to Hanoi!, before finishing the day with a Vietnamese coffee in a local cafe overlooking Hoan Kiem Lake.

Note: The Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum is closed all day on Monday and Fridays, as well as from 1st October to 30th November (approx.) for annual conservation.

Later in the evening you board an overnight train from Hanoi to the border town of Lao Cai. Catch some sleep along the way in soft sleeper berths on the express train (4 berth shared cabins). The train departs around 21:00pm and arrives into Lao Cai the following day at around 06:00am.

OVERNIGHT: On board sleeper train

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch

EXTRAS: None

Day 3: Lao Cai, drive to Sapa, start trekking

Our trekking adventure starts with the drive from Lao Cai Station to the mountain town of Sapa. This drive takes about an hour, but it's worthwhile as the scenery on our northward journey into the highlands is both dramatic and breathtaking. We arrive in Sapa around 8.00 am and start the day proper with a good breakfast.

Sapa is a former French hill station set in a high valley near the Vietnam-China border and is surrounded by picturesque mountains. At 1600m, its cool climate inspired the French to build villas here as their summer retreat from Hanoi. Today, Sapa attracts visitors from around the world due to its stunning scenery, crisp climate, colourful markets and ethnic hill tribes living in nearby villages.

After breakfast we take a jeep ride to the trekking route. The trek starts by walking through the wonderfully scenic

"Ban Ho" valley. En route you'll have a chance to explore the wooden houses, which traditionally belong to the Tay ethnic minority. We continue trekking to Thanh Phu village where we stop for lunch in a local house.

After lunch you continue on to Sin Chai village of the Red Dao minority where you'll spend the night in bamboo huts. The wonderful hospitality of the Red Dao will make you feel so at home.

Approx: 1 hour driving/ 5 hours trekking/ 1 hour lunch.

OVERNIGHT: Sin Chai village bamboo huts

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

EXTRAS: None

Day 4: Sapa, trekking then train to Hanoi

You start the trek today downhill toward the My Son village, which belongs to the Xafo ethnic minority, one of the smallest group's ethnic in Northern Vietnam. After an hour and a half walking you'll reach the Red Dao village of Nam Toong, where we will take lunch. After lunch you'll continue descending back to Ban Ho village, where you'll be able to enjoy a swim at the nearby refreshing waterfall of La Vie.

In the afternoon, transfer to Lao Cai for the overnight train journey to Hanoi.

Catch some sleep along the way in soft sleeper berths on the express train (4 berth shared cabins). The train departs around 20:00pm and arrives into Hanoi the following day at around 05:00am.

OVERNIGHT: On board sleeper train

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch

EXTRAS: None

Day 5: Arrive Hanoi, drive to Ninh Binh

Hoa Lu, 100 km south of Hanoi, was the Vietnamese capital city under the Dinh and Le Dynasties between 968 and 1009 AD. Some of the structures and tombs have survived the years and can still be seen today. The area is also one of an outstanding natural beauty with limestone peaks whose splendour is said to surpass even that of Halong Bay. This morning, your tour guide will be meeting you at the train station then depart for Ninh Binh province, which will take two hours driving. Upon arrival you'll spend time visiting the Dinh and Le sanctuaries before we head to Tam Coc for lunch at a local restaurant. Next we take a traditional boat ride along the Boi River which is lined by the rice paddies and protected by the limestone cliffs, and en route you'll pass through caves and ancient temples. Following the boat trip head to Cuc Phuong national park for the evening.

OVERNIGHT: Ninh Binh - 4-star hotel

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

EXTRAS: None

Day 6: Ninh Binh to Halong bay

After early breakfast, you'll be transferred to Halong Bay. You'll enjoy an overnight boat cruise on Halong bay, which is listed as a World Heritage Area of outstanding natural beauty. The trip of Halong Bay is unforgettable. Visit ancient limestone caves and enjoy sea kayaking and swimming, weather permitting. Back on board the junk boat you can relax on deck with a drink to watch the sunset. In the evening you'll enjoy a freshly prepared seafood dinner under the stars.

OVERNIGHT: Halong Bay junk boat

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

EXTRAS: None

Day 7: Lan Ha Bay

This morning we board a smaller boat to explore Lan Ha, a remote corner of the bay. Here we visit the Leaning Tower, a popular rock climbing cliff, then off at some small floating fishing villages to see the farm pens that hold a variety of fish, shrimps and crabs that the locals farm in the bay. Later in the morning there is more time for swimming or to explore the area in a kayak. After lunch the boat cruises to Three Peaches beach, a beautiful white sandy beach, where there is plenty of time to top up your tan, weather permitting!

OVERNIGHT: Halong Bay junk boat

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

EXTRAS: None

Day 8: Halong Bay, return to Hanoi for flight home

Enjoy an early morning swim followed by breakfast. The tour then visits the "Cave of Surprises" before cruising back to the main harbour for the return drive to Hanoi.

In the evening you are transferred to the airport for your flight home.

Note: Day use room in Hanoi is not included.

OVERNIGHT: N/A

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch

EXTRAS: None

Included

- All accommodation as stated in the itinerary
- All transport and transfers
- 24-hour airport arrival & departure transfer service
- Services of a local tour guide during sightseeing and activities
- Admission fees, with instruction where necessary
- Meals as indicated in the itinerary

Excluded

- International flights (available on request)
- Visas fees (Currently waived for GB nationals. We can arrange a pre-registration VISA letter for other nationalities - you will still need to pay for visa stamp fee upon arrival into the country, at customs check in counter, at a cost of \$45 per person together with 2 passport photos. Please contact us for more information about the cost of this letter as prices vary depending on nationality.)
- Travel insurance (compulsory, available on request)
- Meals not indicated in the itinerary
- Drinks, snacks, tips and other personal expenses (e.g. laundry)
- Tips for tour guides and drivers
- Any other items not mentioned above

Options

Our tours are designed to include all that you need to enjoy a really special time in the destination you're visiting.

However, we do also offer some extra options to complement the tour and add some additional sightseeing or activities, or some extra time at either end of the tour.

All accommodation based options (e.g. Single supplements, extra nights, cruise upgrades) should be booked and paid for in advance so that we can make the appropriate arrangements.

Other options may either be booked and paid for in advance or while you are on the tour, though we recommend booking in advance to ensure there are no issues with availability.

Many options are priced the same throughout the year, but some may incur single or high season supplements - full details are given on the tour reservation form or on request.

Single room supplement (VETMNV)

Min numbers: 1 person

Price: \$265.00

This option books a single room in all the accommodation throughout the tour. Room shares are not available on this tour, so if you are single traveller then you will need to add this option to your booking.

Note: The price shown is a low season price. Slightly higher prices may apply during high and peak seasons - the exact price for your dates will be shown on the online booking form and is always available on request.

Extra day in Hanoi - pre-tour

Min numbers: 1 person

Price: \$30.00

This option adds an extra day to the start of your tour, staying in the same hotel as the main tour itself (subject to availability). Your airport arrival transfer is still included. Prices shown are per person and based on two people sharing.

Note: Single room and peak season supplements apply.

Tour Notes

1. Transport

Our trips feature a mix of different transport options. We want you to feel like you're really experiencing the country you're travelling through, but at the same time we want you to finish journeys refreshed enough to enjoy the next stage of the tour. With this in mind we use public transport where we think it offers a good local experience, this may include overnight sleeper trains, local buses and local ferries. We also use private transportation including jeeps, rickshaws or pickup trucks, and mini buses for sightseeing tours where required.

Sleeper trains:

The sleeper trains in Vietnam are of a good standard and are popular with tourists. Each carriage has its own steward who ensures the train is kept clean and tidy. You will stay in a 4-berth cabin with 3 other passengers. Supplements can be paid to book a private cabin. Bedding is provided onboard the train. The berths are on two tiers and we cannot pre-book lower tier berths. A ladder is provided but you therefore need a reasonable degree of mobility to climb up to the top tier berths.

When travelling in a group, we cannot guarantee that everyone in the group will be seated together in the same cabins. However, the train stewards are generally very helpful at arranging seat swaps, and the local travellers on the train are friendly and interesting to talk to during your journey too.

2. Transfers

Our South East Asia tours all include a 24-hour arrival and departure airport-hotel transfer service, and all other transfers throughout the tour. If you are already in the country then we will provide you with your first hotel details, contact numbers for our local representatives, and details of your first meeting time.

3. International Flights

We want to give you as much flexibility as possible when it comes to booking your holiday with us. So, to take account of people with varying travel plans, we don't include your international flights in the main tour price. We are however very happy to suggest flights to go with the tour. Please contact us with your preferred dates and departure airport and we'll give you a selection of airlines, times and fares to choose from.

Your airport arrival & departure transfers are included on the first and last days of the tour.

Our Vietnam tours start and finish in either Hanoi airport (HAN) or Ho Chi Minh airport (SGN).

If you are booking a tour that combines Vietnam and Cambodia we may not include the connecting flight between the two countries in the tour price (see the inclusions/exclusions or extension option sections for details). This flight can often be built into your main international flight ticket, or we may be able to book this flight for you separately if you prefer - please contact us and we will advise you on available airlines, times and prices.

4. Entrance Fees

The tour price includes entrance fees to all the tourist sites mentioned in the itinerary. You will need to cover the cost of entrance to any other extra sites that you may wish to visit.

5. Tipping

Tipping is not part of culture in South East Asia in the same way that it is standard practice in other parts of the world. However it has become more customary but not compulsory in the tourist and service industry. Tipping is always optional, and any amounts paid should reflect excellent service. You may therefore wish to tip your guide and driver at the end of the tour. You should not feel obliged to tip any particular amount, and should consider your personal budget. We are often asked to provide a guide however, and can suggest that approx. USD 5-10 per person per day would be appropriate for your guide(s).

6. Health and Vaccinations

You should ensure you are fully insured for medical emergencies including emergency evacuation and repatriation.

Recommended vaccinations and other health protection measures vary according to the country you are visiting and where you are travelling from. We recommend you contact your GP/medical practitioner or a travel clinic for current information on vaccinations needed for your destination. You should ensure that you are up to date with vaccines and boosters recommended for your normal life at home, including for example, vaccines required for occupational risk of exposure, lifestyle risks and underlying medical conditions. In addition, additional courses or boosters normally recommended for the countries in this region are:

Thailand: Additional vaccinations: Hepatitis A, Tetanus. [Malaria map](#). Yellow Fever certificate: Required if arriving from or having transitted through an infected area.

Vietnam: Additional vaccinations: Hepatitis A, Tetanus, Typhoid. [Malaria map](#). Yellow Fever certificate: Required if arriving from an infected area.

Cambodia: Additional vaccinations: Hepatitis A, Tetanus, Typhoid. [Malaria map](#). Yellow Fever certificate: Required if arriving from or having transitted through an infected area.

Laos: Additional vaccinations: Diptheria, Poliomyelitis, Hepatitis A, Tetanus, Typhoid. [Malaria map](#). Yellow Fever certificate: Required if arriving from an infected area.

The above information can change at short notice. For up to date health information & vaccination requirements we recommend that you contact your medical practitioner or a travel clinic.

Malaria: Vaccinations are not available against Malaria, which is a disease transmitted by mosquitoes that can be very serious and sometimes fatal. You should avoid mosquito bites by covering up bare skin with clothing such as long sleeves and long trousers and applying insect repellents to exposed skin. When necessary, sleep under a mosquito net. Mosquitoes are most active during and after sunset. You should consult with your GP/medical practitioner/travel clinic about the most appropriate malaria prophylactic medication to take for the regions you are visiting.

Yellow Fever: This disease is spread by infected mosquitoes that bite during the day. A Yellow Fever Certificate of vaccination may be required as a condition of entry depending on which country you are arriving from, or that you have travelled or transitted through recently (including connecting flights with stopovers of over 12 hours). You can view a [World Health Organisation map](#) of areas where the virus is present in monkeys and therefore a potential risk to humans. Please ensure you have this certificate with you and to hand if necessary.

Please inform us of any pre-existing conditions such as diabetes or asthma and any prescription medicine you may be taking. We also need to know about any food allergies or physical disabilities that you may have.

7. Passports and Visas - Vietnam

Passports should be valid for at least six months after your departure from the country. Please do not bring an almost full or almost expired passport. Visa arrangements are the responsibility of the traveller, and requirements are subject to change by the local authorities.

British citizens (plus Japan, South Korea, Denmark, Russian, Sweden, Norway, Finland, , France, Germany, Italy, Spain) are currently subject to a visa exemption scheme, so no visa is required for stays in Vietnam of up to 15 days. Other nationalities and those staying longer in Vietnam will need to obtain a visa in advance. As this isn't always convenient we offer the option of obtaining a visa on arrival approval letter which means that you can then purchase your visa on arrival in Vietnam. However if you try to board the flight without this letter or a visa you'll be refused board. Visa approval letter fees are normally USD 10 p/p for single entry, or USD 15 p/p for multiple entry visas. The visa stamp fee on arrival at the immigration desk is then USD 25 p/p for single entry, or USD 50 p/p for multiple entry. These fees are given as a guide and may vary over time and subject to nationality. Please contact us if you have any queries.

8. Time

The time in Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos is GMT plus 7 hours. Daylight saving adjustments are not observed.

9. Voltage

Sockets are two round or flat pronged and 220 volts (Type A, B, C). Universal adaptors are available in most airport shops if you don't have one already. Standard European adapters will work fine, though sometimes they may feel a little loose in the sockets. All hotel rooms have electrical sockets where you can re-charge cameras, phones etc. Hair dryers are normally available on request from the hotel reception if not in your room already. If you have US appliances (110 volts) you will need a voltage converter as well as a plug adapter.

10. Money - Vietnam

The Vietnamese currency is the 'Dong' (VND). Most people prefer to be paid in Dong rather than US dollars. It can sometimes be difficult to change large notes at smaller villages so try to keep a stash of smaller notes with you.

You can also change all major currencies with any private moneychangers, at the local markets, shops or hotels, or at a bank. Banks usually open from 8.00am to 3.00pm, except Saturday afternoons and Sundays. Although all major currencies are usually accepted, the US\$ is by far the most widely accepted and preferred currency, with large notes (\$50 and \$100 bills) getting a better exchange rate. Travellers' cheques in major currencies are accepted at all banks, though a commission will be charged.

At banks throughout Vietnam you can draw cash, in both dong and dollars on all major credit cards. Approx. 3% commission will be charged for this service. Many souvenir shops, restaurants and hotels will accept payment with credit cards. There is, however, a 3-4% surcharge.

There are ATMs in Major cities like Ho Chi Minh, Hanoi and Hué, which accept major credit cards. We recommend that you consider bringing both credit cards, some cash in a hard currency (e.g. GB Pounds, Euros, US Dollars), and some travellers' cheques.

11. What to take

Luggage: Suitcases, rucksacks or fabric holdalls are all fine to bring with you to Vietnam, though if your itinerary has many stops and different travel included within it, we recommend packing light and not bring any large cases. You should also bring a small daypack/bag to take out during the day. Your main luggage will normally be left in the hotel during your sightseeing trips - you will not need to carry it far, and there are nearly always hotel porters to assist.

Luggage limits: There is no luggage limit for this tour. However, most airlines restrict you to between 20kg and 25kg for your hold luggage and between 5kg and 10kg for hand luggage. Please check with your airline before travelling to the airport.

Climate and Clothing: There are three reasonably well-defined seasons in Vietnam, but unlike in Europe, where seasons are temperature based, Vietnam is tropical and generally speaking warm all year round. Take light clothes with something warmer for the winter nights. Some light raingear would be useful in the wet season.

Other items: We recommend you also bring:

- Cool footwear (sandals are ideal). If you are interested in exploring the reefs, a pair of reef shoes is recommended to avoid injuries. If you are trekking, then bring comfortable and sturdy walking shoes or light walking boots.
- Swimming costumes - rash-guards/t-shirts are recommended for snorkelling to avoid sunburn.
- Sunscreens, after sun lotions and personal hygiene products - Please adhere to 100ml restrictions for anything you wish to carry on hand-luggage on flights.
- Prescription medications (if required) - please bring supporting documents.
- Power adapter for phones, laptops etc
- Sunglasses and hats
- Basic first aid kit and toiletries
- Money belt
- Small torch
- Dive certification card and log book if you intend to participate in SCUBA diving.
- Sleeping bag if your tour includes any hill-tribe or village trekking

12. Booking & Payment

If you would like to book a place on this tour, please complete the online reservation form on our website (via the Dates & Prices tab on the tour page). You may make a deposit or full payment online, or just hold a reservation if you prefer (full payments are due 8 weeks before departure). We will then contact you with more details about how to complete your booking. Payments may be made by debit or credit card (subject to a card processing fee), or by making a bank transfer, or posting us a cheque/bank draft. Full details will be provided in your booking confirmation email. Please [contact us](#) if you would like any more information or have any questions before making a booking.

13. Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is compulsory on all of our tours and needs to cover personal accident & liability, medical expenses and repatriation, travel delay & abandonment. We also strongly recommend that you take out cover against cancellation and lost/stolen baggage. Personal medical insurance does not normally provide sufficient cover and is generally not suitable for travel on our tours. You will not be able to join your tour if you have not provided us with details of your insurance or if you arrive without cover in place (no refunds will be due in this event). [More information...](#)

You may arrange your own insurance, or you can take advantage of a comprehensive policy that we can arrange for you through Endsleigh Insurance which has been designed to be suitable for our tours. The policy is available to travellers of all nationalities and you do not need to live in the UK to take out the policy. For full details of cover provided, prices and to apply for one of our policies, please complete [travel insurance application form](#).

Note: Any country that borders the Mediterranean is considered as 'Europe' for the purposes of travel insurance (including Turkey, Israel, Egypt and Morocco). If you are doing a tour that visits one country in 'Europe' and one that is 'Worldwide' (for example, an Egypt and Jordan tour), then you need a 'Worldwide' policy. When completing the

form you should enter your travel dates including any extra days involved in overnight flights or connecting travel between your home and the tour. Our policies are not able to cover any extra time or activities other than your tour and options booked with us and your travel to & from home.

Note - to comply with insurance sales regulations, our travel insurance policies are only available to customers booking directly with us. If you have booked through a travel agent you will need to arrange your own insurance.

If you plan to arrange a hot air balloon flight locally, or do some scuba diving during your tour, you should check the small print in your policy to make sure these are covered (these are covered in our policy). Please also check the maximum altitude that you will be reaching and that full cover including emergency evacuation is provided up to this altitude.

If you are taking expensive camera gear or other electronic equipment with you then please check the coverage and the fine print of your policy to ensure that you have sufficient cover.

IMPORTANT: We must have your travel insurance details (policy number and type of insurance) before you depart or you may not be allowed to join the tour. If you haven't told us already, please let us know the details when you can. You should take a paper copy of your insurance policy with you as you may be asked to show this at the start of the tour.

14. Financial Security

We are a UK registered company and an ABTA Member (Y4447) and you can be confident when booking with us that your money is safe and protected.

Financial failure insurance is also provided through Affirma to protect all customers for the land portion of your tour. Please see [our website](#) or [booking conditions](#) for more information.

15. Responsible Tourism

It is impossible not to have an impact on the local environment, cultures and eco-systems when you travel. However, it is very possible to try and ensure that these impacts are as limited, or positive as possible. We are committed to ensuring that we try to leave our host countries in a better state than we found them and encourage and assist our travellers to help us with this.

The following are a few simple tips that require very little effort on your part but which will help ensure that any effect you have on the locations you visit is positive rather than negative.

- Don't prejudge: Things in different countries will almost certainly be different. That doesn't make them worse or inferior, just different.
- Communicate: Don't expect locals to speak your language. Take the trouble to learn a few words or phrases of the local language. Don't worry about sounding silly. Most locals are patient and accommodating and appreciate you making the effort to communicate in their language.
- Conserve energy: Be careful not to waste valuable resources. Use local resources sparingly. Switch off lights, air-conditioning and fans when you leave the hotel room and don't waste water. Remove superfluous packaging. Many countries have far less efficient waste disposal systems than ours. Remove packaging from newly acquired items before leaving home.
- Don't litter: No matter how untidy or dirty the country you're travelling in may look to you, avoid littering, as there is no need to add to the environment's stress. Many of the countries we visit have a tough challenge dealing with rubbish and waste. Please consider taking home as much plastic waste as you can (e.g. water bottles).
- Choose environmentally friendly products: By using environmentally friendly (bio degradable) sun creams, shampoos and detergents you can help reduce pollution.
- Respect local customs and traditions: As you are a guest in these countries, you should also comply with the

local customs. If you are friendly and well mannered, the locals will reciprocate and it will only enhance your experience. It's important to follow dress and behaviour guidelines especially when visiting religious or sacred sites (your tour leader will advise you how best to do this).

- If a client commits an illegal act the client may be excluded from the tour and Encounters Travel shall cease to have responsibility to/for them. No refund will be given for any unused services.

All porters are employed and equipped following guidelines set by the International Porter Protection Group (IPPG).

16. Follow Us Online

You can stay in touch with us online by following us on Facebook and Twitter. We post updates on relevant travel news in our destination countries, special offers and discounts and other interesting travel related news and information.

www.facebook.com/encounterstravel

www.twitter.com/encounterstravl (yes, without the 'e')

17. Before you travel

It is important when considering and preparing to travel anywhere in the world that you have a good understanding of the country you are visiting, its laws and customs, and the possible risks and situations that may occur. This includes specific risks related to your itinerary (eg. does it involve water & can you swim, are you fit enough for the activities included), as well as more general risks such as terrorism and natural disasters.

General details and links to more information about health risks, visa requirements, money, and travel insurance are given in these tour notes. We recommend that you re-read all these before your departure as well as the small print of your travel insurance policy so you know exactly what is covered and what is not.

You should take copies of your important travel documents with you and ideally also store them online securely as a backup. Make sure that you have given us your emergency contact details and told that person where and when you are travelling. Ensure you take enough money with you and that you have access to emergency funds.

Finally, you should read through and stay updated with the current [official government travel advice](#) for your destination. We are registered partners with the UK Foreign Office's '[Travel Aware](#)' campaign which provides further useful and invaluable information.



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Note: Please [download an up-to-date copy](#) of these tour notes shortly before you travel as itineraries and information does change from time to time.
