

Vietnam & Cambodia Encounters

Country(ies): Cambodia , Vietnam

Tour type: Small Group

Transport: A/C car/minibus, boats & domestic flight

Group size: Min: 2 | Max: 12

Days: 15 days

Start Location: Hanoi, Vietnam

End Location: Siem Reap, Cambodia

Meals: Breakfasts - 13, Lunches - 5, Dinners - 4

Highlights:

Ancient Hanoi, Halong Bay cruise, colonial Hoi An, Mekong Delta eco-lodge & boat trip, Saigon, Phnom Penh sites, local markets, Kulen mountain waterfalls, statues, Angkor Wat temples, Ta Prohm



Itinerary

Day 1: Arrive in Hanoi, airport to hotel transfers included

After arriving at the airport, the Vietnam tour starts with a tour guide meeting you and transferring you to your hotel in Hanoi. They'll give you some initial introductions to the country and Hanoi during the drive to the hotel, help you settle in and schedule a pick-up time for the next day.

You can decide this evening whether to join the visit to Hoan Kiem Lake to watch or join in with the local's early morning Tai Chi exercise.

OVERNIGHT: Hanoi hotel

MEALS: None

EXTRAS: Extra day in Hanoi - pre-tour Single Room Supplement (VETMVC)

Day 2: Exploring Hanoi and Vietnamese culinary adventure

Your day begins with a cultural exploration of Hanoi's most significant landmarks. First, we'll visit the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum, followed by the unique One Pillar Pagoda and the impressive Presidential Palace. Afterwards, we'll journey back in time to an 11th-century relic before heading to the Temple of Literature, a place built to honour the Chinese scholar Confucius.

In the afternoon, prepare for a culinary adventure in Hanoi's Old Quarter. We'll wander through the narrow streets, discovering and tasting a huge variety of authentic street food. You'll also have the chance to try some of the local brews, with some recipes tracing their origins back to Eastern Europe.

Next, we'll make a stop at Hanoi Train Street for a cup of egg coffee. This narrow train bypass is a sight to behold, with trains passing just inches from the buildings that line the tracks several times a day.

For dinner, we'll eat at the KOTO Van Mieu restaurant. This isn't just a meal; it's an opportunity to support a great cause. The KOTO Foundation runs a vocational training program for disadvantaged young people in Vietnam, providing them with the theoretical and practical skills needed for a career in the hospitality industry, from cooking to front-of-house service and management.

OVERNIGHT: Hanoi hotel

MEALS: Breakfast,Lunch,Dinner

EXTRAS:

Day 3: Junk boat cruise in Halong Bay

Leave the bustling city of Hanoi behind and travel by road through the scenic Red River Delta to the breathtaking Ha Long Bay, a UNESCO World Heritage site. This picturesque drive offers a glimpse into the rural landscapes of Vietnam before you arrive at your destination.

Upon arrival, you'll be welcomed aboard your boat with a refreshing drink. As you settle in, a delicious lunch of freshly caught seafood will be served, giving you a taste of the region's culinary delights while you sail out into the

bay. You'll pass by incredible limestone karsts, each with its own unique shape and story.

Later in the day, if the weather is clear, you'll have the option to take on a challenge: a 400-step climb up a mountain. The effort is well worth it, as the summit provides a spectacular panoramic view of the bay and a perfect vantage point to watch the sun set over the water, creating a truly unforgettable moment.

Please note: The cruise itinerary is subject to change due to weather conditions and other operational factors.

OVERNIGHT: Halong Bay junk boat

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

EXTRAS:

Day 4: Halong Bay, Morning Tai Chi, Kayaking and sleeper train to Hue

Start your final day on the bay with an invigorating session of Tai Chi on the sundeck as the sun rises, or if you prefer, join a 'photo hunt' to capture the bay's stunning early morning light. After working up an appetite, a delicious breakfast will be served on board.

Next, you'll get to explore Luon Cave by kayak. This unique, arc-shaped cave is only accessible by small boat or kayak due to its low height. Paddling through the cave offers an intimate and serene experience. Afterwards, you'll return to the boat to freshen up before the cruise continues, taking you past fascinating sights such as the Ba Hang fishing village and Dog Islet.

As the boat makes its way back to the harbour, you'll have the opportunity to participate in an onboard cooking class. Learn to prepare some traditional Vietnamese dishes before sitting down to enjoy them for lunch.

After lunch, you'll reluctantly disembark from the cruise and travel back to Hanoi. In the afternoon, you'll have some free time to relax or explore, with a day-use hotel room available from 3 pm to 6 pm for you to freshen up before your next adventure.

In the evening, you'll head to the station to board the Reunification Express sleeper train for an overnight journey south to Hue. The train, named SE3, is scheduled to depart at 7:25 pm and arrive the next day at 8:35 am. You will be in a shared, air-conditioned cabin with four beds and a shared toilet.

Please be aware that there will be no tour guide on the train and that meals are not included in your ticket, so you should either prepare your own food beforehand or purchase a meal directly from the train crew.

OVERNIGHT: Overnight sleeper train to Hue

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch

EXTRAS:

Day 5: Welcome to Hue! Explore the Citadel, Thien Mu Pagoda and cruise the Perfume River

Wake up this morning to the picturesque sight of Vietnam's countryside. As the train travels south, you'll see a landscape of lush green rice paddies, attended by farmers and their water buffalo, interspersed with small villages and rural farmland. This is a perfect introduction to the serene beauty of central Vietnam.

Upon arrival in Hue, you'll transfer to your hotel and have some time to settle in. Afterwards, you will embark on a private tour of this historically and culturally rich city and its ancient temples. Hue served as the imperial capital of Vietnam for over 140 years, and its legacy is visible in the city's architecture and atmosphere.

The day's main focus will be exploring the Citadel, a magnificent UNESCO World Heritage site. This vast walled fortress was once the seat of the Nguyen Dynasty and is a testament to Vietnam's imperial past. Inside, you'll wander through its grand palaces, ornate temples, and intricate courtyards, learning about the history that shaped the nation.

In the afternoon, you will board a traditional Dragon boat for a tranquil cruise along the famous Perfume River. The peaceful journey will offer a unique perspective of the city's riverside life and landscape. The journey will include a stop at the iconic Thien Mu Pagoda, a beautiful seven-storey pagoda overlooking the river, which is one of the city's most important religious sites.

After a day filled with history and culture, you'll spend the night in Hue, ready for more adventures tomorrow.

OVERNIGHT: Hue hotel

MEALS: Lunch

EXTRAS:

Day 6: Drive the Hai Van Pass to Hoi An. Explore the ancient town. Lantern making workshop and releasing

Today we'll travel south along a beautiful stretch of Vietnam's coastline, crossing the breathtaking Hai Van Pass on a scenic journey to the charming riverside town of Hoi An. This picturesque community, now a UNESCO World Heritage site, was once a thriving international commercial port from the 16th to 18th centuries, attracting merchants from China, the Netherlands, France, Japan, Portugal, and Arab countries. The blend of cultures is still very much alive in its architecture and atmosphere.

We'll begin with a walking tour of Hoi An's captivating Ancient Town, where we'll explore its rich history and beautiful buildings. The tour will include a visit to a Family Chapel, a significant space for ancestor worship built by influential local families. We'll also see a Chinese-style Pagoda or an Assembly Hall, which served as community hubs for different ethnic groups. One of the town's most famous landmarks is the Japanese Covered Bridge Pagoda, which was built in 1593 by the Japanese community to connect the town with the Chinese Quarter across the stream.

Additionally, we'll visit the Fukien Association Temple, the Ceramic Museum, and the Chua Ong Temple. Each of these sites offers a unique insight into the town's diverse cultural influences and history. In the afternoon, we'll take part in a lantern-making workshop at a local venue, learning the traditional craft. As the sun sets, we'll head to the Hoai River to release our handmade lanterns, a beautiful and memorable experience.

OVERNIGHT: Hoi An hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS:

Day 7: Free day (optional visit to Tra Que Village). Fly to Saigon

Hoi An is a truly captivating town, so much so that many visitors find themselves returning time and again. Today is left free for you to explore at your leisure, allowing you to delve deeper into its charming streets and vibrant culture at your own pace. There are many options available for a day of independent discovery.

One popular choice is to take a cooking class at the nearby Tra Que Vegetable Village. This provides a unique, hands-on experience where you can learn about the traditional, organic farming methods used by the villagers to cultivate a wide variety of herbs and vegetables. You'll get to see the gardens, work alongside the local farmers, and then use the fresh ingredients to prepare authentic Vietnamese dishes in a cooking class.

In the afternoon, you will be transferred to Da Nang airport for a short flight to Ho Chi Minh City, formerly known as Saigon. The journey from Hoi An to Da Nang airport takes approximately 45 minutes to an hour and a half, depending on traffic. You'll then board your flight south, marking the end of your time in central Vietnam and the beginning of your southern adventure.

OVERNIGHT: Ho Chi Minh City hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS:

Day 8: Mekong Delta experience (family visit, bee farm, garden tourism and 'ditch slapping')

Today, you'll leave Ho Chi Minh City for a scenic drive to Cai Be. Upon arrival, you'll board a motorised boat to begin your exploration of the Mekong Delta. Your first stop will be a local family's home, where you'll learn about the traditional process of making rice paper and popcorn cakes. This is a chance to chat with the family and learn about their daily life.

Next, we'll visit the bustling Cai Be Floating Market to witness the unique way goods are traded on the water. We'll then head to a local craft village that specialises in making rice candy. Here, you can see how these sweet nuggets are produced and even try some freshly made samples. Afterwards, we'll visit a local bee farm run by Uncle Tu Dang, who will explain the beekeeping process and the different types of bees. You'll also be offered a cup of honey tea to enjoy with him.

The journey continues to Tan Phong Island, where you'll experience authentic garden tourism. You'll get to walk through fruit orchards, seeing seasonal specialities such as durian, rambutan, longan, and jackfruit. At Uncle 5 On's house, you'll be welcomed with a cup of tea and fresh fruit while listening to traditional folk music performed by local artists.

Following this, you'll board a small rowing boat for a serene trip through the narrow canals around Tan Phong Island, which will take you to your accommodation at Mekong Ecolodge. After checking in and having lunch, you can stroll through the beautiful gardens, picking and eating fresh fruit for free.

Later in the afternoon, you'll take part in a 'ditch slapping' activity to catch fish and collect vegetables from the garden. These fresh ingredients will then be used in a cooking class with the chef at the lodge, where you'll help prepare your own dinner. It's a fantastic hands-on experience that connects you with the local way of life.

OVERNIGHT: Mekong Delta eco-lodge

MEALS: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

EXTRAS:

Day 9: Local life immersion on Tan Phong Island. Return to Saigon

After a light breakfast at the homestay, you'll grab a bicycle to begin a day of exploration and local activities on Tan Phong Island. Your first stop is at 'Sister 3's' home to see how traditional rice paper rolls are made. You'll then visit 'Aunt 4's' house to watch her expertly weave hammocks from banana rope.

Next, you'll head to Ms Thao's house, where you can learn the craft of weaving water hyacinths. With her guidance, you'll have the chance to weave your own beautiful gift to take home. From there, you'll visit Ms Hieu's home to see how she creates nail files from bamboo sticks, a great example of using locally available materials.

Saying goodbye to Ms Hieu, you'll cycle back to the Ecolodge for a cooking class with Ms Tam. You'll learn to make a local specialty of Tan Phong Island: jackfruit leaf cake. After preparing the cakes, you'll get to enjoy them together.

At midday, you'll experience a short but authentic journey on the Tan Phong ferry with the locals to the Hiep Duc ferry. Once there, a car will be waiting to transfer you back to Ho Chi Minh City, marking the end of your time in the Mekong Delta.

OVERNIGHT: Ho Chi Minh City hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS:

Day 10: Cross the Moc Bai Border and enter Cambodia. Continue onwards to Phnom Penh

Prepare for a day of transition as our journey takes us across the border into the heart of Cambodia. We'll travel by road to the vibrant capital of Phnom Penh, with the border crossing at Moc Bai serving as our gateway. Once we arrive and you've checked in to your hotel, the afternoon is entirely free. You can use this time to get your bearings, perhaps take a short walk to discover the local neighbourhood, or simply unwind before the next stage of our adventure begins.

OVERNIGHT: Phnom Penh hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS:

Day 11: Exploring Phnom Penh's history

After breakfast at your hotel, the day begins with a sobering but essential journey into Cambodia's recent past. We will visit the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and the Killing Fields of Choeng Ek, both grim reminders of the country's bloody history under the Pol Pot regime. While confronting the nature of these events can be distressing, the Buddhist memorial at Choeng Ek stands as a powerful testament, commemorating the 1.7 million victims of the 1975-79 period. This experience is a crucial part of understanding Cambodia's historical and cultural identity.

In the afternoon, we continue with a visit to the National Museum, also known as the Musee des Beaux-Arts. Designed by French archaeologist Georges Groslier in 1917, the building itself is a beautiful example of Khmer architecture. Inside, you'll discover a remarkable collection of Khmer art and sculptures from various eras.

The day concludes with a tour of the Royal Palace, built by King Norodom in 1866, and the magnificent Silver Pagoda. Situated within the palace grounds, the Silver Pagoda gets its name from its floor, which is composed of 5,000 silver tiles. The pagoda's incredible treasures include a 90kg solid gold Buddha statue encrusted with thousands of diamonds and a smaller 17th-century Buddha made of emerald and Baccarat crystal.

In the evening, you'll have the chance to explore the city at your own pace. A popular option is to visit one of Phnom Penh's vibrant night markets, where you can browse stalls selling local crafts and clothing, and enjoy a wide variety of delicious street food. You will spend the night in Phnom Penh.

OVERNIGHT: Phnom Penh hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS:

Day 12: Visit the 'spider market' and explore Kampong Kleang on Tonle Sap Lake. Overnight at Kulen Mountain

After breakfast at your hotel, we will begin our journey north to Siem Reap by private car with your tour guide. This scenic drive will offer a glimpse of rural Cambodian life. Our first stop will be in the Skun district, often referred to as the "spider market," where you'll have the chance to see and, if you're feeling brave, even try local fried tarantula. Continuing on, we'll visit a stone carving workshop in the Santuk district, where you can see artisans at work on beautiful Khmer sculptures. We'll also make a brief stop at the ancient Naga Bridge, a historic stone crossing with intricate carvings of the mythical serpent.

Our journey will then take us to Kampong Khleang, one of the largest and least-visited floating villages on the edge of Tonle Sap, the largest freshwater lake in Southeast Asia. Here, you will board a boat for an immersive trip, passing through a stunning submerged forest and floating houses that rise on stilts over the water. You will see firsthand how local communities have adapted to the lake's dramatic seasonal changes. The village is a fascinating and authentic insight into a unique way of life, with floating schools, markets, and fishing farms.

Finally, we will head to your countryside resort located at the foot of the sacred Kulen Mountain. This mountain is considered one of the most significant sites in Cambodia, as it is where King Jayavarman II proclaimed himself a "god-king" and established the Khmer Empire in the 9th century. The mountain is also home to a magnificent reclining Buddha and numerous ancient carvings. In the evening, you'll have the chance to enjoy a unique campfire dinner at the resort. Please note that this dinner is an optional extra and requires a minimum of four participants. You will spend the night at Thisak Resort.

OVERNIGHT: Thisak Resort

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS:

Day 13: Explore the Kulen Mountains. Visit the Tbeng community to learn about local life. Siem Reap Night Market (Street 60)

After breakfast, we'll drive up to the holy Kulen Mountains, known locally as Phnom Kulen. The sandstone from this mountain was the primary source of building materials for the vast temples of the Angkor Kingdom. Our first stop is the sacred site of The River of a Thousand Lingas, a unique archaeological site where hundreds of phallic carvings are etched into the sandstone riverbed, dating back to the 9th century. Further downstream, you'll also see large stone blocks carved with figures of Apsara dancers and Vishnu.

Next, we'll explore the mountain-top pagoda, home to ancient relics, statues, and a large reclining Buddha. Our final stop on the mountain is Kulen Waterfall, where you can cool off in the natural pool. It's also a perfect picnic spot, which is exactly what we'll do before heading back down.

In the afternoon, we'll travel to the community of Tbeng, about 32km from Siem Reap. Here, you'll get a firsthand look at rural life, starting with a visit to a local vegetable garden and livestock area to learn about traditional agricultural practices. We'll also visit Damnak Thlork Vea Pagoda, where you will receive a blessing from a Buddhist monk. You'll also get to observe the traditional process of making mats and, on occasion, Khmer noodles, which you can then sample.

Before returning to the city centre, we'll visit a local's favourite night market, known as Plov Hockseb, or "Street 60." This is a vibrant, authentic market where you can discover a huge variety of Khmer street foods, fresh fruits, local beers, and if you're feeling adventurous, some protein-rich fried insects. We'll then return to Siem Reap for the night.

OVERNIGHT: Siem Reap hotel

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS:

Day 14: Temple visits - Angkor Thom, Angkor Wat, Ta Prohm

After breakfast at your hotel, we will begin a full-day tour of the magnificent temples of the Angkor area, a truly unforgettable experience. Our first stop is the ancient city of Angkor Thom, entering through its impressive South Gate, which is famous for the colossal stone faces that greet you. Inside the city, we'll explore the mesmerising Bayon Temple, with its 216 enigmatic smiling faces, as well as the Royal Enclosure, Phimeanakas, the Elephant Terrace, and the Terrace of the Leper King.

Next, we'll visit the most famous of all the temples, Angkor Wat. This architectural masterpiece, constructed in the 12th century, is the largest and most complete temple on the site, covering an area of about 210 hectares. You'll have plenty of time to explore its incredible bas-reliefs and intricate carvings, learning about its history as a Hindu temple dedicated to the god Vishnu.

The tour concludes with a visit to the atmospheric Ta Prohm. This temple is an incredible sight, as it has been left largely in its natural state, with enormous fig trees and gigantic creepers embracing the stone foundations. The intertwining of man-made and natural elements gives the impression of a lost world being reclaimed by the powerful forces of nature.

For dinner this evening, we will enjoy a delicious meal at Spoons Restaurant. This isn't just a place to eat; it's a social enterprise that supports underprivileged Cambodian youth by providing them with valuable hospitality training. By dining here, you're not only enjoying fantastic food but also directly contributing to a positive social mission.

OVERNIGHT: Siem Reap hotel

MEALS: Breakfast, Dinner

EXTRAS:

Day 15: Your Vietnam & Cambodia adventure comes to an end, airport transfer included

We hope that you had an amazing time in Vietnam and Cambodia! After breakfast, we'll transfer you to the airport to board your flight home.

OVERNIGHT: N/A

MEALS: Breakfast

EXTRAS: Extra day in Siem Reap - post-tour

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
- Meals as indicated in the itinerary
- Internal Flight from Da Nang to Ho Chi Minh
- Street Food Tour in Hanoi
- Halong Bay Experience

- Perfume River Cruise
- Lantern Making and releasing
- Mekong Delta Local Life immersive experience
- Phnom Penh historical tour
- Spider Market and 'Street 60' Market visits
- Tonle Sap Kampong Khleang Community Visit
- Kulen Mountain resort stay
- Tbeng Community Experience
- Angkor region Temples tour

Excluded:

- International Flights (available on request)
- Visas fees
- Travel Insurance (compulsory, available on request)
- Single room supplements
- Meals not indicated in the itinerary
- Drinks, snacks and other personal expenses (e.g. laundry)
- Optional tours
- 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.

Extra day in Hanoi - pre-tour

Min numbers: 1

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.

Extra day in Siem Reap - post-tour

Min numbers: 1

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

Note: Single room and peak season supplements apply.

Cooking class at Tra Que village

Min numbers: 1

A tour guide will meet you at your hotel before cycling to Hoi An's colourful central market. Here, you'll have the opportunity to interact with the local sellers and learn about the ingredients to be used in the cooking lesson later.

You'll then hop back on your bike and head towards the Tra Que vegetable village. You'll be welcomed with a drink before being introduced to the vegetable gardens where the local farmers work using traditional methods of yesteryear - no electricity needed.

After familiarising yourself with the locals, you'll go to the restaurant to meet the chef - who will give you a cooking master class on the traditional ways of preparing and cooking Vietnamese food, before enjoying the fruits of your labour for lunch (included in the tour price).

The tour starts at your hotel at 08.00am or 2.00pm and takes around 4 hours. The tour is arranged as a sharing tour, joining other people, but is available privately for a supplement if you prefer (please contact us for prices).

Single Room Supplement (VETMVC)

Min numbers: 1

The tour price is based on 2 people sharing twin/double rooms. This option books a single room in all the accommodation throughout the tour. If you are a single traveller and would be happy to share a room, let us know and we will see if we can pair you up with another single traveller of the same sex. If a room share is not available when you book then we will add the single room supplement to your booking and it will be payable with your balance payment unless we have arranged a room share for you by then. If a room share is arranged after you have paid the supplement then we will refund it to you. Room shares are arranged in order of booking.

Note: Single supplement prices may vary seasonally.

Mai Chau & Lu Luong Homestay pre-trip Extension

Min numbers: 1

This optional 3-night add-on takes you to the serene Pu Luong Nature Reserve for an authentic escape from city life. Begin with a night in Hanoi to settle in, before heading to the lush valleys of Pu Luong.

For two nights, you'll stay in a traditional, communal homestay, offering a true taste of local life amidst stunning landscapes. Your journey includes a scenic drive through rural vistas, a traditional lunch in a Thai stilt house, and guided treks to 'hidden villages' like Kho Muong. Experience the tranquil pace of life, immerse yourself in local culture, and explore magnificent terraced rice fields. The final day sees you returning to Hanoi which forms day 1 of your main tour.

The price is based on two people sharing, and a single supplement applies for solo travellers, which covers your private room in Hanoi.

Day 1: Welcome to Hanoi, arrival airport transfer

After arriving at the airport, the Vietnam tour starts with a tour guide meeting you and transferring you to your hotel in Hanoi. They'll give you some initial introductions to the country and Hanoi during the drive to the hotel, help you settle in and schedule a pick-up time for the next day.

You can decide this evening whether to join the visit to Hoan Kiem Lake to watch or join in with the local's early morning Tai Chi exercise.

OVERNIGHT:

Hanoi hotel

MEALS:

None

Day 2: Leave Hanoi behind and head to Mai Chau & Pu Luong. Lunch in a Thai stilt house and arrive at homestay

We'll begin with a scenic 3.5-hour drive to Mai Chau. The journey offers beautiful views of the countryside, passing fields of tapioca, sugar cane, and lush rice paddies.

Upon arrival, we'll enjoy a traditional lunch in a Thai stilt house. Afterwards, we'll take a leisurely walk through the local village to see more of these unique homes, which are a central part of Thai culture. They are designed to be airy, comfortable, and safe, providing a truly peaceful atmosphere. The clean air and relaxed pace of life here are perfect for unwinding and escaping the daily grind.

At approximately 3pm, we will transfer to the Pu Luong Nature Reserve. The route takes us over a stunning mountain pass, offering a panoramic view of the whole valley below. We'll arrive at our accommodation with plenty of time to settle in before dinner.

You will have a delicious dinner and then some free time to explore the beautiful retreat. You'll love the captivating views and tranquil setting.

You'll spend the night in a Pu Luong homestay, an authentic, communal experience. These traditional stilt houses are set amidst the stunning scenery, offering a chance to stay in the heart of the reserve. You will share a room with other guests, each with a separate mattress and blanket, providing a real taste of local life and hospitality.

OVERNIGHT:

Pu Luong Homestay

MEALS:

Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 3: Trek to the 'hidden village' of Kho Muong.

We'll begin with a short drive from the retreat to Dong Dien village, the gateway to the most beautiful valley in Pu Luong. From here, we'll start a trek on a winding trail, where you can admire the vast terraced fields. If you visit during the rice season, you'll be treated to a spectacular view of the iridescent, golden rice paddies set against the majestic mountains.

The trail leads to Kho Muong village, often called the "Hidden Village" because it's nestled in a small, forested valley surrounded by high mountains. Inhabited by over 50 households, the villagers here have maintained their traditional culture for generations. We will have lunch with a local Thai family in the village.

After lunch, our trek continues. We'll follow a scenic trail out of Kho Muong towards Bang village, navigating a hidden path alongside the terraced rice fields before returning to your accommodation.

You'll spend the night back at your homestay, your home away from home in the Pu Luong Reserve.

Please note: This trekking itinerary may be subject to change depending on the weather and customer requirements. Trekking will be 8-10km.

OVERNIGHT:

Pu Luong Homestay

MEALS:

Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 4: Return to Hanoi. Free time to explore the city

Today, you'll be leaving the serene valleys of Pu Luong and heading back to the bustling city of Hanoi. After a final breakfast surrounded by the peaceful, terraced fields, your journey will begin.

The drive back to Hanoi typically takes around four to five hours depending on traffic and any stops along the way. The route will see you transition from the rural landscapes and limestone karsts you've become accustomed to, back towards the urban sprawl. This is a good opportunity to reflect on your time in Pu Luong, perhaps reminiscing about the trekking, the local culture, or simply the quiet moments spent amidst nature.

As you get closer to Hanoi, the scenery will change from open fields and small villages to increasingly developed areas. The roads will get busier and the sounds of the countryside will be replaced by the constant hum of traffic. You can expect to arrive in the city in the early afternoon, giving you a chance to settle into your accommodation before deciding how to spend your evening.

MEALS:

Breakfast

1. Accommodation

We use good quality hotels rated at the local 3 and 4-star level on this tour and a comfortable stay onboard a deluxe Junk boat in Halong Bay. Hotel rooms all have air-conditioning and en-suite bathrooms.

Please check the Single Room Supplement option for details on room sharing options and charges for solo travellers on this tour.

2. 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. On this tour we use private AC vehicles for most of the sightseeing tours and transfers. We also spend one night on the overnight Reunification Express sleeper train from Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh, and to save time, take an internal flight from Danang to Ho Chi Minh.

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.

3. Group Size/Tour Leaders/Guides

We are committed to making sure our small-group tours in South East Asia have low maximum numbers as we feel this gives everyone in the group the best chance to get to know their fellow travellers and to hear and make the most of their guide. Having a smaller group also allows us to be a bit more creative with the places you stay and activities you do, which may simply not be possible with larger numbers. The group size for this tour is therefore a minimum of 2 and maximum of 12.

At Encounters Travel we aim to only use local guides and reps. We feel this gives you the best experience of the country and the sites you are seeing.

On this tour we may use separate guides in Hanoi, Hue-Hoi An and Ho Chi Minh, and then in Cambodia. The Halong Bay cruise and some optional tours are a sharing basis and you may join other travellers for these parts of the tour.

4. Dates & Prices

We run regular small-group departures on this tour throughout the year starting on Saturdays. All departures are guaranteed to run with a minimum of 2 people. Departure dates and prices are listed on our website and on a separate dates & prices sheet available on request. Extra nights can be added to the start and/or finish of the tour if you would like to extend your time.

The tour can also be run privately on any other dates for any number of people. An additional supplement will be due for private departures, the amount depending on your dates and the number of people in your party.

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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.
