

## Vietnam Encounters

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**Country(ies):** Vietnam

**Tour type:** Small Group

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

**Group size:** Min: 2 | Max: 12

**Days:** 10 days

**Start Location:** Hanoi, Vietnam

**End Location:** Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

**Meals:** Breakfasts - 8, Lunches - 5, Dinners - 3

**Highlights:**

Ancient Hanoi tours, street food walk, Halong Bay overnight junk boat cruise, perfume river in Hue, colonial Hoi An, boat trip and overnight eco-lodge on the Mekong Delta



# Itinerary

## 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

**EXTRAS:** Single room supplement (VESGVE) Extra day in Hanoi - pre-tour

## 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

**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:** Cooking class at Tra Que village

## **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: Free time, included departure airport transfer

The last day leaves you with free time to relax before we include a departure transfer to the airport for you to catch your flight back home. Additional options are also available today if you have a late afternoon or evening flight, or if you'd like to add some extra nights.

**OVERNIGHT:** N/A

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** Cambodia Extension Extra day in Ho Chi Minh - post-tour Half-day city tour Cu Chi Tunnels 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

### Excluded:

- International flights (available on request)
- Visas fees (Currently waived for GB and some other nationals. We can arrange a Visa Approval letter to enable other nationalities to obtain their visa on arrival - see your Tour Notes for details)
- 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

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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 (VESGVE)

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.

## 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 Ho Chi Minh - 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).

## **Half-day city tour**

Min numbers: 1

Go on a city tour of Ho Chi Minh and explore its highlights which include the Reunification Hall, the War Crimes Exhibition or the History Museum, a lacquer or rattan ware factory, Notre Dame Cathedral, War Remnants Museum, Centre Post Office, Chinatown and Thien Hau Pagoda (built by the Cantos congregation in the early 19th). You'll stop at Binh Tay or Ben Thanh Market for some shopping.

The tour starts at your hotel at 08.00am and takes around 4 hours. This is a private tour, just for any travellers in our group. Prices shown are based on min 2 people. Solo travellers can opt to pay a supplement for a private tour, or to join a sharing tour with other travellers.

## **Cu Chi Tunnels tour**

Min numbers: 1

You'll have the chance to visit the Cu Chi Tunnels, which highlight the dedication of Viet Cong soldiers during the Vietnam War. It took about 25 years to build these extensive underground tunnels, which stretch for approximately 250 kilometres.

Using the tunnels, Viet Cong soldiers could move around war areas undetected by American soldiers. It is believed that Cu Chi Tunnels are built on the land known as 'Land of Steel' which is located at the end of Ho Chi Minh Trail.

This activity includes:

- Watching a documentary film about one of the most sophisticated man-made tunnels together with its extraordinary wartime legends
- Walking in the jungle and visiting the traps, the secret entrances, the bunkers, and underground hideouts
- Option to do some shooting at the rifle range of Cu Chi Tunnels. (Exclusive of bullets)
- Seeing the rice-paper (spring roll skin) and rice-wine production line
- Crawling into the tunnels and getting a feel for their size and the soldiers' experience
- Taking a rest, drinking green tea and having tapioca - the main food served during the war time.

You'll then head back to Ho Chi Minh, either back to your hotel or to the airport.

The tour starts at your hotel at 08.00am and takes around 5-6 hours. The tour is priced as a sharing tour, joining other people, but is available privately for a supplement if you prefer (please contact us for prices).

## **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

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## 1. Accommodation

We use good quality hotels rated at the local 3 and 4-star level on this tour, together with a more basic eco-lodge in the Mekong Delta and a comfortable stay onboard a deluxe Junk boat in Halong Bay. Hotel rooms all have air-conditioning and en-suite bathrooms. Facilities at the eco-lodge are simple but with all beds & bedding provided.

All couples will be given a private double room.

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

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## 2. 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. The Halong Bay cruise and some optional tours are a sharing basis and you may join other travellers for these parts of the tour.

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## 3. 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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## 4. 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.

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## 5. 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

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## 6. 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.

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## 7. Financial Security

We are a UK registered company and are committed to providing our customers with financial protection to provide peace of mind and to allow you to book with confidence.

We have therefore partnered with Trust My Travel Ltd., which provides financial protection services to over 2000 partners around the world. Funds paid to us by our customers are protected via an Insurance policy held by Trust My Travel. Each traveller and the description of services sold is declared against Trust My Travel's insurance policy directly against our financial failure. In the event of our insolvency, you will be refunded for any unfulfilled products and/or repatriation to the UK (where applicable). Please see [our website](#) or [booking conditions](#) for more information.

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## 8. 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).

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## 9. 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](http://www.facebook.com/encounterstravel)

<https://x.com/encounterstravl> (yes, without the 'e')

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## 10. 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).

Considering travel insurance for your trip? [World Nomads Travel Insurance](#) offers coverage for more than 150 adventure activities as well as emergency medical, lost luggage, trip cancellation and more.

If your tour includes car hire, or 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.*

## **Covid-19**

**Before purchasing any travel insurance, please check the coverage provided for situations related to Covid-19, and for the rules about government travel advice. Your normal policy may not be suitable.**

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## **11. 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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## **12. Reduce Plastic Waste with Water-to-Go Filter bottles**

Traveling responsibly means minimizing plastic waste, but staying hydrated on the go is essential. At Encounters Travel we are committed to reducing single-use plastics, which is why we've partnered with Water-to-Go. Their portable filtration system removes over 99.9% of contaminants from any non-saltwater source, turning even questionable water sources into safe drinking water.

Given that tap water is un-safe to drink in many of the countries in which we operate, we recommend purchasing a Water-to-Go bottle prior to departure. This will help you avoid the use of single use plastic bottles and keep you hydrated on the go.

Save big! Get a huge 25% off your Water-to-Go bottle and other Water-to-Go products (such as filters, lids, and carriers). Use code **ENCOUNTERS25** at checkout (valid in the UK, USA and Canada).

### **How Water-to-Go Technology works:**

- Their reusable, BPA free water bottles contain their own unique 3-in-1 filtration technology effectively providing clean safe drinking water from any non-salt water source around the world.
- Three different (1 traditional and 2 nano) technologies are combined in one filter cartridge to remove up to 99.9999% of microbiological contaminants in water.

**The three technologies used in a Water-to-Go filter are:**

- Mechanical filtration – A tiny pore size, so small contaminants can't fit through.
- Electrical – A positive charge reduces the pore size even further and attracts contaminants like a magnet, trapping them inside the filter.
- Activated Carbon – Unlike most carbon based filters, instead of using adhesives to glue the carbon particles together, (which vastly reduces the carbon's efficiency) it is contained within the membrane, helping to reduce contaminants whilst eliminating bad tastes and odours. Try filtering water from your tap at home and taste the difference!

**Water-to-Go filter bottles deliver safe, healthy water worldwide**

- Water-to-Go filters remove bacteria, viruses, waterborne disease, protozoa, heavy metals such as lead as well as harmful chemicals.
- Their filters remove Chlorine and Fluoride from tap water.
- The filter will eliminate harmful contaminants from the water but allow beneficial minerals such as sodium and magnesium to pass through leaving you with the healthiest water possible.
- Water-to-Go filters have been independently tested against internationally recognised standards by industry specialists including The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (UK), BCS Laboratories (USA), Bangalore Test House (India) and IMI (China).

**Use Water-to-Go products and you'll be healthier, wealthier and helping to make the world a better place!**

- Depending on filter size, each Water-to-Go filter is able to replace 260 or 400 single-use plastic water bottles!
- They ensure you have access to safe water anywhere in the world without ever having to buy environmentally damaging bottled water.
- Their water bottles deliver safe, clean drinking water at just 5p per litre.
- The filter membrane is biodegradable and the shrouds are recyclable.
- The water bottles are used and approved by everyone from backpackers to commuters, gym users to expecting mums. Perfect for everyday, outdoor and travel.

**13. Private & Tailor-made Tours**

While our group departures offer a fantastic way to explore with like-minded travellers, we understand that some guests prefer a more exclusive experience. Most of our group tours can be booked on a private basis, allowing you to enjoy the same expert-led routes with your own dedicated party. The primary advantage of choosing a private arrangement is the flexibility it provides; we can easily customise the itinerary to include your preferred style of accommodation or adjust the pace to suit your needs. Private tours can be run on the same start days as our group tours, or on other dates. However, some activities within our trips are restricted to particular days of the week - we will advise you on anything like this that we need to work around. Pricing will be based on the number of travellers in your party, and any customisations you may like to make.

For those seeking something truly unique, our specialist sales team is available to collaborate with you on a completely tailor-made tour, designed from the ground up to match your specific interests, accommodation level and requirements.

To request a quotation for a private or tailor-made tour, please [contact us](#).

**14. 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.

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## **15. 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.

We do also sometimes advertise flight inclusive packages from selected airports. Where these are shown on our website, prices are correct at the time of quoting, but are subject to continued availability of the fare used. Prices will be reconfirmed at the time of booking, and we will also provide the flight times and airline details before tickets are issued.

Flight inclusive prices are based on the cheapest Economy ticket class available which is generally non-refundable and non-changeable unless the flight is cancelled for reasons such as Covid-19, in which case the airlines are more flexible. More flexible ticket options, as well as Premium Economy and Business Class tickets are available on request for an additional supplement. Any changes made to flight inclusive bookings will be subject to the airline rules on your ticket.

### **Flight CO2 Emissions:**

Traveling by air is an amazing way to explore the world, but flights also contribute to carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions that impact the environment. By considering the airline's CO2 emissions when you choose your flight, you can help minimize your travel footprint.

When selecting your international flights and airline, we do therefore recommend that you try and also take into account the flight CO2 emissions. Some airlines and flight search websites (eg. Google Flights, Skyscanner) do publish this information, so you can compare between your flight options and make an informed decision. Thankfully, many airlines are working towards sustainability efforts, and choosing a greener option allows you to contribute to positive change while still enjoying your incredible adventure.

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## **16. 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.

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## **17. 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).

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## 18. 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.

Please note that as of April 15, 2026, a new requirement has been implemented at Tan Son Nhat International Airport (Ho Chi Minh City). All foreign travelers (excluding Vietnamese passport holders and transit passengers) are now required to complete a declaration form prior to passing through immigration. This form is free of charge and can be completed:

- Online before departure (strongly recommended) using the following link: <https://prearrival.immigration.gov.vn>
- Upon arrival, by scanning a QR code available at the airport.

Please note that this measure is currently only in effect at Ho Chi Minh City Airport. It may be gradually extended to all airports in Vietnam.

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## 19. 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 this US CDC information about where the virus is present and follow the links to further information detailing which countries need you to have a Yellow Fever vaccination as part of their entry requirements. 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.

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## 20. 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.

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## 21. Time

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

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## 22. 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.

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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.

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