



HIGHLIGHTS OF VIETNAM

Experience the irresistible allure of Vietnam on this journey from north to south. Delve into the surprises of sophisticated French-colonial cities and quaint heritage towns, tasting true Vietnam at every turn.

Tailor-Made Journeys, Suggested Itineraries



Asia, Vietnam



13 days from AU\$12,955 pp



Private

Journey Overview

Experience the irresistible allure of Vietnam on this journey from north to south. Delve into the surprises of sophisticated French-colonial cities and quaint heritage towns, tasting true Vietnam at every turn. Venture through emerald waters to the hidden bays and remote islands of Lan Ha Bay. And encounter the people, culture and cuisine that together make this country so vibrant.

Journey Highlights

- Uncover over 1,000 years of history wonderfully preserved in Hanoi
- See enchanting Ha Long Bay by exhilarating seaplane
- Venture into tranquil Lan Ha Bay on a luxury wooden junk boat
- Seek out chic boutiques, antiques and art in charming Hoi An
- Enjoy traditional Vietnamese hospitality in a 19th century Hue residence
- Experience the food scene of Ho Chi Minh City on the back of a vintage Vespa



Itinerary

Day 1: Arrive Hanoi

Arrive in the elegant Vietnamese capital, greeted by A&K's fast track services and transfer to your iconic hotel.

Hotel de l'Opera Hanoi

Day 2: Hanoi

Spend your morning experiencing the many sides to this enthralling city. Begin your tour at the mausoleum of Vietnam's revered revolutionary leader, Ho Chi Minh. Linger over the iconic One Pillar Pagoda, then, visit Hoa Lo Prison, used to detain political prisoners of the French and later nicknamed "Hanoi Hilton" by prisoners of the Vietnam War. Most of the buildings here were demolished in the 1990s, but the gatehouse remains open for visitors.

After lunch, stroll through the complex of atmospheric halls, pavilions and courtyards of the Temple of Literature, Vietnam's first university. Afterwards, take a *cyclo* (bicycle rickshaw) into the Old Quarter to explore its network of narrow, 15th century streets. Each street bears a name that reflects the business once conducted there, such as Silk Street, Rice Street, Paper Street and Jeweler's Street.

Next stop is the beautiful Hoan Kiem Lake, or "Lake of the Returned Sword" and Ngoc Son, a temple dedicated to Tran Hung Dao who defeated Mongolian troops on three unique occasions in the 13th century.

Hotel de l'Opera Hanoi | Meals: BL

Day 3: Design Your Day Hanoi

Today, choose how to enhance your experience of Hanoi (additional costs apply).

Join your private guide for a locals-only half day immersion in Hanoi's food culture. Your degustation begins in the labyrinthine streets and alleyways of the Old Quarter, where street vendors reveal all the flavours of Vietnamese cuisine. Continue to Dong Xuan to discover first-hand how it earned the nickname "Food Street". Then, take a ride to Truc Bach Lake where a medley of meat-stuffed dumplings, sweet and savoury cakes, and spring rolls await. For dessert, surprise your tastebuds with cà phê trứng (egg coffee), a deliciously sweet Hanoi favourite invented here during a milk shortage in the 1940s.

Or, venture into ancient villages for a full day discovery of rural Vietnam. Begin at the elegant Moon Garden House in Ky Son village, before learning the secrets of traditional Vietnamese cuisine in a cooking class and devouring the fruits of your labour. Later, hop in the saddle for a guided cycling tour through the village. Navigate streets lined with ancient houses and take in the Mia Pagoda, which houses some 270 early Buddhist statues. Pedal on to Duong Lam, where centuries-old houses reveal an ancient way of life.

This evening, take to the busy Hanoi streets on the back of a Vespa for a culinary and cultural tour with a difference. Weave through the maze of streets and narrow passageways stopping at a market where locals busily collect fresh produce for their evening meal. Get a glimpse of neighbourhood life when you peer into tiny homes tucked away behind shopfronts. Sample local street food washed down with a cold brew, visit a local coffee shop and explore the waterfront locale of West Lake.

Hotel de l'Opera Hanoi | Meals: B

Day 4: Hanoi - Lan Ha Bay

Today you will take to the skies for an exhilarating seaplane ride over Ha Long Bay. The one-hour flight is the fastest way to arrive at the picturesque bay and offers breathtaking aerial views along the way. Experience the thrill of landing on water as the seaplane makes its approach towards the marina.

Board your deluxe traditional Halong Bay junk and enjoy lunch as you drift over emerald waters past towering rocky outcrops, some more than 100 metres high. Venture south into the maze of Lan Ha Bay, the less-visited extension of Halong Bay to explore the interesting limestone formations at Dark and Bright Caves by bamboo boat or kayak. Then continue to Tra Bau where you can enjoy swimming in the pristine ocean waters. Back on board, enjoy a cooking demonstration before taking your place on the terrace deck to watch the sun sink behind the bay's myriad islands.

Ginger | Meals: BLD

Day 5: Lan Ha Bay - Hanoi - Hoi An

Rise early for an optional Tai Chi class on the deck, or simply drink in the first rays touching the water. Afterwards, hop on a small bamboo boat rowed by locals, or paddle by yourself in a kayak through an endless sea of islands. Back on board, enjoy a leisurely brunch with more spectacular views as you drift back to port. Transfer to Noi Bai airport for the short flight south to Danang and transfer to the UNESCO World Heritage listed waterside town of Hoi An.

Anantara Hoi An | Meals: B

Day 6: Hoi An

Spend your morning at leisure. Later, take an afternoon walking tour to discover this charming historic town, a major south-east Asian trading post in the 16th and 17th centuries and now a living museum. Roam narrow cobbled lanes where Dutch and French colonial houses are squeezed between Chinese tea warehouses and Japanese temples – a clue to the town's mixed heritage. Inhale the aromas and flavours of Hoi An's lively market stalls. Step inside the Old House of Duc An and Fukia Assembly Hall. Marvel at the 400-year-old Japanese covered bridge – one of the few built outside Japan. After an afternoon wandering beneath the luminous lanterns, it's time to make your own. Join a local master in the studio and learn the traditional art of lantern making.

Anantara Hoi An | Meals: B

Day 7: Hoi An

Unlock the secrets of time-honoured recipes in a half-day culinary masterclass. Discover the local specialties of Hoi An and other classic dishes at The Market Restaurant, where a central courtyard is lined with individual food stalls. Join your guide for a tour of the town's markets bursting with tantalising fruits, spices, herbs, fish and noodles. Gain an insight into how ingredients are selected, and watch the chefs at work in their open kitchens to learn about creating various popular dishes such as banh mi (Vietnamese baguettes), dumplings, noodles and more. Sample some of the dishes as you walk through the stalls, and enjoy the opportunity to join local chefs and try your own hand at making local delicacies. Spend the afternoon at leisure.

Anantara Hoi An / Meals: BL**Day 8: Hoi An - Hue**

Journey overland to Hue, the former Imperial capital of Vietnam. On arrival, step inside the beautiful garden house of Princess Ngoc Son, daughter of Emperor Dong Khanh. Admire the architectural beauty of one of the few remaining examples of a traditional family home during the imperial era. Lovingly preserved by descendants of the family, the residence is now in the hands of historian Phan Thuan An whose wife was Princess Ngoc Son's granddaughter.

Enjoy traditional Vietnamese hospitality as the historian or his daughter explains the nuances of Vietnamese culture and how the home was designed in accordance with the principles of feng shui. Marvel at the collection of antiques and personal mementos including old photographs, medals and furniture as well as valuable Ming Dynasty ceramics before savouring a moment of tranquillity while enjoying a meal in the peaceful garden.

Pilgrimage Village Hue / Meals: BL

Day 9: Hue

Unpeel the layers of this ancient imperial city today. Start at The Imperial Citadel, the seat of Nguyen Dynasty rule between 1802 and 1945. Lose yourself amongst over 100 fascinating buildings and structures that have miraculously survived years of conflict. Take a short drive through the rolling hills that encircle Hue, arriving at the serene tomb of the 'poet Emperor', Tu Duc, set in an elegant garden of pine trees and frangipanis.

Next, enjoy true Vietnamese hospitality in a unique home on the banks of the Huong River. Indulge in a private lunch within the walls of this traditional stone mansion, which stands proudly in a serene and expansive garden.

Stop by an incense-making village before continuing to the tomb of Emperor Khai Dinh whose burial place reflects the European influences at play during his reign. Continue by boat along the dreamy Perfume River as far as Thien Mu Pagoda, one of the oldest religious buildings in Hue. Explore the gardens and the distinctive seven-story octagonal tower, before a final stop at the lively Dong Ba Market.

Pilgrimage Village Hue | Meals: BL**Day 10: Hue - Ho Chi Minh City**

Transfer to Hue airport for your flight to Ho Chi Minh City. This evening, see and taste the city from the back of a vintage Vespa. Enjoy a unique view of the city after dark as you weave through buzzing streets. Plunge into the maze of narrow alleyways to savour the sizzling street food at places only locals know. Then, journey downtown for a taste of Banh Xeo, a local delicacy. Stop at a hidden coffee shop for a taste of Vietnamese acoustic music before finishing the evening with a drink at the city's top live music venue.

Hotel des Arts Saigon | Meals: BD

Day 11: Ho Chi Minh City

Skim along the Saigon River this morning on a private luxury speedboat passing mangroves and palm trees on your way to a small community northwest of Ho Chi Minh City and its famous wartime landmark – the Cu Chi tunnels. This incredible network of narrow tunnels was built during resistance to the French colonisation and used extensively throughout the war. Take a guided exploration of the complex network, discovering underground storage, make-shift hospitals and sleeping quarters.

Return to Ho Chi Minh City for lunch before a visit to the Reunification Palace where the official handover of power took place during the Fall of Saigon in 1975. Then choose between the History Museum or the War Remnants Museum. Built in 1929, the History Museum houses a collection of artefacts illustrating the evolution of Vietnamese culture since ancient times, while the War Remnants Museum contains an at-times grisly display of wartime photographs and relics including an American tank, an original 20th century French guillotine and a UH-1 "Huey" helicopter.

Finish the day on a peaceful note as you venture into Cao Dai Temple, to learn about a unique religion of Southern Vietnam, the result of a colourful range of several religious philosophies. You may wish to stop for a complimentary refreshment at a local place along the way. Return to the hotel driving past Notre Dame Cathedral and the Central Post office en route.

Hotel des Arts Saigon / Meals: BL

Day 12: Design Your Day Ho Chi Minh City

Discover the best of Ho Chi Minh City with your choice of activities (additional costs apply).

Cruise the Mekong Delta to Ben Tre, a province famous for its coconut production and tranquil network of crisscrossing rivers and canals. Take a xe loi (rickshaw) through the village and onwards to the Huu Phuoc Bridge. Embark on a boat trip through narrow waterways, stopping to watch locals use centuries-old brick-making methods. Then, hop on a bike to cycle through lush tropical scenery to a factory that produces famous Hu Tieu noodles. Take a short stroll to meet a local family and get a unique glimpse into their daily life. Enjoy fresh fruits and tea with your host before heading out again for a trip through the canals by sampan, a boat used on the delta waters for centuries. Pause for a riverside five-course lunch filled with local specialties. Then, cycle to My Long to visit a former Vietcong soldier and watch as he and his wife produce iconic rice paper.

Alternatively, encounter a tale of drama, intrigue and fascinating characters in Ho Chi Minh City, exploring on foot with a local art and cultural expert. Gain new perspectives on the old city, uncovering untold stories from its establishment in the late 17th century to the arrival of the French and the turbulence of the Vietnam War. The walk takes you past heritage buildings and historical sites intimately connected with the city's dramatic past. Take a fresh look at iconic landmarks such as the Central Post Office, the former French Lieutenant Governor's residence and the former U.S. Embassy. Stop to take in the vibe at some of the city's trendy cafés and enjoy a meal at a pleasant family-style eatery that serves the authentic flavours of a Vietnamese home kitchen.

Or, experience wellness in one of the city's beautiful green spaces. Enjoy a stroll around the park before joining a tai chi session with an experienced local master. Bask in the serene morning atmosphere and observe the locals go about their daily routine, exercising, practicing various types of martial arts or playing foot badminton. Continue to a renowned local restaurant for a healthy vegetarian meal served in a beautiful, zen-like setting.

Hotel des Arts Saigon | Meals: B

Day 13: Depart Ho Chi Minh City

Transfer to Tan Son Nhat Airport for your onward flight.

Meals: B

Map



Accommodation

Hotel de l'Opera Hanoi



Located in the heart of the enchanting city, known for its serene lakes and scenic boulevards, is L'Hotel de l'Opera Hanoi - MGallery. As the name suggests, the 107-room boutique hotel is within walking distance of the famous Hanoi Opera House, along with the city's Old Quarter and Hoan Kiem Lake.

The drama of 'a night at the opera' is captured in the rich décor of each guest room and suite. Stay in the sophisticated L'Opera Suite and enjoy views across the Vietnamese capital from the spacious lounge. The beds deliver a sense of elevation with an extra layer of mattress for the perfect night's sleep. Suite benefits include breakfast, a complimentary drink at La Fée Verte and a late checkout. Each of the deluxe rooms provide warm, homely touches with wooden floors and fine linens.

Hanoi is known for its exquisite cuisine, and this is reflected within the hotel's two French-inspired restaurants. Café Lautrec, named after the 19th-century painter Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, offers à la carte and buffet dining. Dishes on the menu include wok fried *Nha Trang* seafood in spicy sauce and Hanoian *Pho*. Satine offers classic Vietnamese cuisine with many local favourites and is dramatically set within the eight-storey atrium.

The signature bar La Fée Verte, or the 'Green Fairy', is a nod to the

decadence of a bygone era where absinthe was the drink of choice among Parisian artists. Today, you can choose from cocktails, aged spirits and imported wines.

After a day exploring, you can relax in Hanoi's only heated semi-outdoor swimming pool found on the third floor. From the warm waters you can enjoy views of the vibrant Trang Tien Street known for its bookshops and ice-cream. A well-equipped fitness centre, with TechnoGym, cardio and strength-training equipment is adjacent.

Why we like it

- Located in the heart of the city within walking distance of Hanoi Opera House and Hoan Kiem Lake
- Encapsulates the best of Hanoi with outstanding features of French colonial architecture and operatic interior
- Two French-inspired restaurants with fusion of international cuisine and Vietnamese dishes
- Absinthe cocktails served in the signature bar, La Fée Verte
- Heated swimming pool and gym
- **Our top tip:** relax in Hanoi's only heated semi-outdoor swimming pool and enjoy views of the opera house and vibrant Trang Tien Street

Anantara Hoi An



Nestled in a lush garden just steps away from the town centre, Anantara Hoi An promises a memorable stay for discerning travellers. The resort is located on the banks of the Thu Bon River and a five minute walk from the historic ancient town of Hoi An.

The resort incorporates East Asian and European design elements, reflecting the town's colourful past as a trading port. Choose from superior rooms, junior suites or grand suites each of which boasts uninterrupted views of the gardens or the river. Appointed with white linens, ceiling fans and generous windows, the inviting and airy rooms showcase the property's natural surroundings. Likewise, the swimming pool is surrounded by plants and trees and the renowned spa is a haven of relaxation, relying on natural products to relieve stress and fatigue.

Why we like it

- 93 rooms and suites in split level design with daybed porches
- Vietnamese cooking, language, painting and lantern making classes
- Swimming pool and children's pool enclosed in a garden courtyard
- Five dining options
- Boat trips on the Thu Bon River

Ginger Cruise



The gracious Ginger is Heritage Line's newest vessel cruising Lan Ha Bay, a tranquil part of the famous Halong Bay in Vietnam. With just 12 large suites, Ginger exudes a private atmosphere on board, making it feel almost like you have the whole vessel to yourself. There are two Regent Suites in the highest room category, four Signature Suites and six Junior Suites. Each room is naturally light-flooded, with a well-sized balcony, warm timber floors, marble bathrooms and distinguished design themes that marry the long-lasting traditions of Northern Vietnam with contemporary accents.

Begin your day with a private balcony breakfast as the boat sails through a mystical landscape of karsts and islands. After an adventure-filled day onshore, recline in your spacious room, head out to the pool deck for sundowners, or choose from the cultural menu of activities, including hands-on cooking classes, tai chi, kayaking and more. There's also a vast spa occupying the whole stern of the ship, with three treatment rooms all offering views of the bay. Later, take your place at the restaurant to watch the chefs prepare your feast of Vietnamese or Western cuisine, before finding a spot in the indoor bar for a digestif - the perfect end to your day.

Why we like it

- Exclusive atmosphere with only 12 suites
- All suites are light-filled with a spacious balcony
- Vast spa with treatment rooms overlooking the tranquil bay

Pilgrimage Village Hue



The Pilgrimage Village is a barefoot luxury resort nestled amongst lush green countryside with magnificent views across the serene lakes beyond. Situated just 20 minutes away from Hue airport, this resort offers the perfect balance of peace and seclusion while still being close to many historic and ecological attractions. The beauty of nature surrounds you here, bringing with it a tranquillity in which you can relax and recharge as you leave behind all the troubles of daily life.

Accommodation comes as Traditional Vietnamese Pool Houses, Honeymoon Pool Huts, Honeymoon Bungalows, Family Deluxe Guestrooms and Deluxe Guestrooms. All rooms and villas display an authentic Vietnamese décor mainly comprising of handcrafted wood and marble stone while offering many modern amenities.

Dining at Pilgrimage Village will leave even the most delicate of palates impressed with highly acclaimed Vietnamese fusion dishes served up in the sophisticated atmosphere of Junei Restaurant, while healthy yet hearty breakfasts can be enjoyed in the stunning lakeside setting of the Valley Restaurant. To learn insider knowledge, traditional Vietnamese cooking classes can be arranged upon request.

As the day draws to a close, head to the modern Slope Lounge, where you can listen to the soft sounds of the accompanying piano while sipping on a classic cocktail or romantic glass of wine; the perfect way to enjoy post dinner sundowners.

Why we like it

- Peaceful, rustic resort hidden amongst lush tropical gardens in the Hue countryside

- Close to both the historical towns of Hue and Danang offering easy access to many cultural attractions
- 99 rooms and villas with a beautiful private garden or balcony overlooking the stunning lakes and rice paddies
- Tantalising Vietnamese fusion cuisine is served at the skilfully crafted Junei Restaurant
- Luxurious Vedanā Wellness and Spa offers relaxing treatments, using organic products, influenced by Buddhist philosophy

Hotel des Arts Saigon



Hotel des Arts Saigon is as much a 5-star boutique hotel as it is an art museum. The owner's personal collection of paintings and antiques are proudly showcased throughout the building, bringing an added element of old-world charm and style to the modern building.

Hotel des Arts Saigon's rooftop swimming pool is the perfect place to take in the views of the city below, whilst sipping a refreshing cocktail at the rooftop bar. A vibrant restaurant, a lounge-bar and a relaxed art-café all offer up a variety of culinary delights, handcrafted drinks and late night snacks to suit any pallet.

Le Spa des Artistes boasts 6 treatment rooms offering guests a perfect retreat from the fast pace of the city outside.

Why we like it

- Rooftop pool and bar serving tailor-made cocktails
- Located 2 minutes from the town centre, shops, bar and restaurants
- Social Club located on 23rd floor serving handcrafted drinks and food

Abercrombie & Kent

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