

NORTHERN VIETNAM



ITINERARY: 14 days / 13 nights

This trip starts and ends in Hanoi



Day 1

Arrival day in Hanoi, Vietnam's northern capital. We shall have you picked up and transferred to our historic downtown hotel, The Sofitel Legend Metropole (3 nights), in the French quarter, next to the Opera House. Check in is after 14:00h and the rest of the day is at leisure to recover from jet-lag. Dinner at our hotel and an early night.

Day 2

After a leisurely breakfast we set off to visit the superb Museum of Ethnology. The museum provides an insightful glimpse into the country's lengthy history, with more than 15,000 photos and 10,000 objects and artefacts depicting a historical perspective of the lives, activities, customs, and habits of Vietnam's 54 recognised ethnic groups. Traditional ethnic homes have been re-assembled in its extensive gardens, giving a glimpse of how rural people live. Lunch at a local restaurant and afternoon at leisure.

Day 3

Today we explore this fascinating city. We start by sampling the traditional *Ca Phe Trung* or egg coffee. We then walk in the French and Chinese quarters, visiting Ngoc Son temple, Hoa Lo Prison, B-52

Lake, the Temple of Literature and more. For lunch we sample local street specialities. Later in the day, once back at our hotel, there is an optional tour, exclusive to hotel guests, of the underground bomb shelter rediscovered in 2011 during renovation of the Bamboo Bar. Dinner out.

Days 4 & 5

After breakfast we depart Hanoi for Ha Long Bay, a spectacular UNESCO World Heritage Area. We board our Orchid Classic cruise boat (2 nights). We have chosen this company as it operates smaller, more intimate luxury boats, ours has only 14 suites, all having big windows and large balconies. We head for La Han Bay, a less visited area with stunning marine karst stacks and one of the New Seven Wonders of Nature. Over the next 2 days we shall be kept occupied by a busy schedule of activities, both onboard and ashore.

Day 6

After some further cruising we disembark late morning and transfer to Trang An, near Ninh Binh (3h), often called the 'Inland Ha Long Bay' for its stunning landscape. Afternoon at leisure at Jiva Hoa Lu, our secluded luxury resort (2 nights).



Day 7

Today we explore the local area. We meet our guide for a cruise through karst mountains and rice fields. After lunch at a local restaurant, we visit Hoa Lu, Vietnam's 10th and 11th-century capital, and explore monuments dedicated to the emperors of the Dinh and Le dynasties before heading back to hotel.

Day 8

We are picked up early from our hotel for Cuc Phuong National Park, located 45 km away (1.5h). Established in 1960, the National Park is Vietnam's oldest nature reserve and rich in biodiversity. The visit begins at the Endangered Primate Rescue Centre, a non-profit focused on the rehabilitation and conservation of endangered primates. After a simple and traditional lunch at a local restaurant we take a short trek through the park to learn about its diverse flora and fauna. We can also visit the 'Cave of Early Man' to learn and explore where the remains of ancient humans were discovered.

Day 9

Morning transfer to Pu Luong (3.5h) where we check-in and have lunch at Pu Luong Retreat (2 nights). Easy afternoon walk begins through a village area, walking along a mix of gravel and cement roads, leading to a water wheel and village site. Continuing through open fields and past stilt houses, the path takes you deeper into rural surroundings. The trek concludes with a peaceful walk along a paved road, offering beautiful views of fields. Duration: 2 hrs. Total Ascent: 61m / Total Descent: 45m.

Day 10

This morning we meet our local guide who will give us a short briefing. From Don Village we set off toward Uoi and Lan Villages on a gentle 3 km walk, with plenty of beautiful photo opportunities along the way. Upon arriving at Lan Ngoai Village, we shall take a short break. The walk continues through Uoi and Lan Village to explore local craft villages, where we can observe traditional weaving, brocade-making, and other daily handicraft activities carried out by local families. Next we head for Hieu Waterfall, walking through quiet valleys and lush landscapes. Lunch is a delicious home-cooked meal prepared by a local family. The return journey to Lan Village follows alternative small trails, offering a different perspective of the valley. Total Distance: 11.50 kms. Estimated Time: 4.5 to 5 hours walk. Total Ascent: 207m / Descent: 309m. Min Elevation: 109m / Maximum: 294m. Level: Moderate to Intermediate

Day 11

After breakfast we set off for another trek. We begin by walking through a local village and open fields, where we navigate off-road trails and gravel paths. As we approach Kho Muong Village, the terrain transitions to a paved road, leading deeper into the village. From here the trek takes us through forested areas with open hill views and a glimpses

of the valley below. We eventually reach the entrance to Bat Cave. After exploring the cave, the trek heads back, following a cemented road. Total Distance: 6.5 Kms. Estimated Time: 2.50 to 3 hours walk. Total Ascent: 227m / Descent: 287m. Level: Moderate to Intermediate. Return to the Pu Luong Resort by car (10 kms / 20 mins drive), freshen up, and enjoy lunch. Afternoon transfer to Mai Chau (1.5h) and the lovely Avana Retreat (2 nights), where we can experience their signature Traditional Afternoon Tea.

Day 12

An easy morning walk through Mai Chau will provide a memorable experience of some of the most peaceful countryside scenery. Our guide will lead us through ethnic villages, along deserted country roads, over a hanging bridge, and along paddy rice fields. Level: easy. Total Distance: 4 Km. Estimated Time: 2h. Altitude Gain: 200m. We then enjoy an authentic ethnic lunch of local ingredients flavoured with local spices. Special 'Waterfall dinner' back at our hotel. When the sun goes down, the fairy lights from hundreds of candles will guide us into the forest for an intimate dinner set up next to a stunning waterfall.

Day 13

Morning at leisure at Avana Retreat, where we also have lunch. Afternoon transfer (4h) back to Hanoi for 1 more night at The Metropole Hotel. Dinner out at a local restaurant.

Day 14

Transfer to Hanoi Airport for your flights home.

