

Touring Holidays in Vietnam

Expressions



Vietnam Explorer Touring Holiday



www.expressionsholidays.co.uk
01392 441250

Vietnam Explorer

11 NIGHTS / 12 DAYS

Hanoi - Ha Long Bay - Hue - Hoi An - Ho Chi Minh City - Can Tho

Expressions

Highlights

Architectural tour of Hanoi
Ca Tru performance
Ha Long Bay overnight cruise
Thien Mu Pagoda
Royal Tombs of the Emperor Minh Mang
Dong Ba Market
Cham Museum Danang
Ancient Town of Hoi An
Fishermen cruise
Cu Chi tunnels
Mekong Delta cruise
Munir Ansay pagoda
Optional excursions
Evening tour by vintage Vespa in Ho Chi Minh City
A O Show Ho Chi Minh City



Paradise Luxury Cruise, Ha Long Bay

Tracing a long, languid curve down the eastern edge of South East Asia, Vietnam is a land of extraordinary natural beauty. The shape of the land lends itself to a deliberate all-encompassing trail, beginning in the north with Hanoi, and travelling down along the coast and past the mountains to the Ho Chi Minh area, though unique routes and regions of particular focus are always possible. Our range of accommodation includes everything from lovely, boutique residences to grand, seafront, colonial hotels. Hand-crafted authentic experiences make your bespoke holiday to Vietnam even more special, with exciting possibilities available, such as an overnight village home-stay, a Vietnamese cooking class, or a sightseeing tour by Vespa or vintage car.

ABOUT THIS TOUR

This eleven-night tour accompanied by local guide offers more than just a typical first-time insight into Vietnam. You travel from Hanoi in the north, via the UNESCO site of Ha Long Bay, to the ancient cities of Hue and Hoi An, before travelling to fascinating Ho Chi Minh City, visiting the famous Cu Chi tunnels and then staying in Can Tho in the Mekong Delta. There is an optional beach extension in Phu Quoc or Con Dao.

PRICES

From about £3,090 per person
in superior accommodation

From about £4,880 per person
in first class accommodation

(Excludes the 3 night optional beach extension. See below for options and prices).

DATES

This holiday can be arranged throughout the year. Timings can vary depending on the month and day of the week.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Return scheduled flights with Vietnam Airlines from London to Hanoi, returning from Ho Chi Minh City to London in economy class
- Domestic flights from Hanoi to Hue and Danang to Ho Chi Minh City
- Breakfast and accommodation sharing a twin or double room.
- Six lunches and one dinner (as specified in the itinerary) plus full board on the boat in Ha Long Bay.
- Private transfers and sightseeing tours in an air-conditioned car appropriate to the size of your party
- Boat cruises as specified in the itinerary. All Ha Long boats are fully licenced and comply with current safety regulations.
- Services of an English-speaking guide as indicated in the itinerary (free days or part-free

days as well as transfers unless specified do not include the services of the guide).

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

- Visas – our local agent in Vietnam offers a free visa service
- Meals, except as specified above
- Drinks, gratuities and personal expenses
- Camera fees where applicable
- Insurance
- There may be supplements for compulsory Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve gala dinners, sometimes payable locally

DAY-BY-DAY ITINERARY

Hanoi - Ha Long Bay - Hue - Hoi An - Ho Chi Minh City - Can Tho

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Day one: Arrive in Hanoi

You will be met on arrival and transferred to your hotel. There is time to relax after your journey before your guide accompanies you to performance of traditional water puppetry (an art form unique to northern Vietnam, and an interesting, light-hearted introduction to its rural culture). In the evening, you will enjoy a welcome dinner at restaurant in a colonial building.

Day two: Hanoi

The day begins with an architectural tour of Hanoi. You'll wander with your guide through the city centre, studying the capital's French colonial villas, pagodas and communal houses with many Chinese features, merchants' residences, 'tube' dwellings and other vernacular styles. As a counterpoint to the traditional styles, you'll be shown examples of social realism (mostly public buildings, designed or influenced by the USSR), modern houses and buildings.

After lunch, you visit the Temple of Literature, the first university in Vietnam dating back to the 11th century and a fine example of Vietnamese architecture in its own right. Later you are driven to Hanoi's excellent Ethnology Museum for an overview of the country's 54 distinct ethnic groups.

In the evening you'll have tickets for a performance of traditional 'ca Tru' at Thang Long Ca Tru Theatre (at the moment, the only venue offering professional Ca Tru shows in Vietnam). Ca Tru is a uniquely Vietnamese musical style with its religious and courtly origins in the Ly Dynasty (1010-1225 AD), and takes a variety of forms, the most common of which features a trio of performers, with a female vocalist who also plays the phach, a lute player and a scholar or critic who participates in the musical dialogue with a 'praise' drum, expressing praise or disapproval of the performance. The theatre also has an exhibition demonstrating the history and evolution of Ca Tru and uses its profits to train new artists as well as providing vocational training for orphans and disadvantaged children. Please note: the performance is at 20.00 hrs on Thursdays and Saturdays only.

Day three: Hanoi to Ha Long Bay

After an early breakfast, depart by car for Ha Long Bay, one of the most spectacular UNESCO World Heritage Areas and the world's largest marine limestone 'karst' landscape. There you will board your boat, a wooden junk built from the model of old Vietnamese court vessels with sails, a wide transom and rectangular superstructure. The



Hue

boats vary in size, accommodating between ten and eighteen people. that takes you first to the busy World Heritage area and then to some of the less well-known grottoes and caves. Weather permitting, swim, fish, and climb a hill that affords a view of the Bay's remarkable seascape, or venture into some of the sea level caves in a small sampan. All meals are provided on board, usually based on fresh seafood, and you'll sleep in a twin cabin with en-suite toilet and shower.

Day four: Ha Long Bay to Hue via Hanoi

The morning is spent cruising Ha Long Bay, followed by lunch just before docking. You are driven back to Hanoi Noi Bai airport for your flight to Hue. Upon arrival in Hue, you will be picked up and transferred to your hotel for the night. Hue is traditionally a main cultural, religious and educational centre of Vietnam and houses the remarkable tombs of the Nguyen emperors, whose dynasty lasted from 1802 until 1942, a citadel in the Vauban style dating from 1804, a palace and the 21 metre-high Thien Mu Pagoda, astride the Perfume River.

Day five: Hue foodie tour and Royal Tombs

This morning begins with a visit to the Thien Mu Pagoda, built on a bluff overlooking the Perfume River, and then from here you are driven to the Royal Tombs of Emperor Minh Mang and Emperor Khai Dinh. Each royal mausoleum reflects the personality of

the Emperor it commemorates. The most majestic is that of Emperor Minh Mang, who ruled from 1820 to 1840, a staunch follower of Confucianism with many wives, concubines and a small army of children. Planned by the Emperor and built shortly after his death in formal Chinese style, it is opulent and exotic, and a good example of classic Sino-Vietnamese architecture. In contrast to Emperor Ming Mang's flamboyant creation, the tomb of Emperor Khai Dinh is an uneasy combination of Vietnamese and European features, using fragments of ceramics and glass for decoration, but with striking views from the courtyard in front of the mausoleum.

After these visits, hop on your personal cyclo, powered by an experienced driver, and cross over the historic Trang Tien Bridge to visit the colourful Dong Ba Market where you can see many of the ingredients for making local Hue food. During the tour, stop at many famous street restaurants to sample Hue local street food dishes such as: Banh Khoai (Hue pancake), Bum Bo Hue (Hue beef vermicelli soup), Banh Beo (steamed rice dishes topped with shrimp), Banh Uot (Hue wet rice paper), Nem Lui (grilled chopped meat) and much more. You are free to sample as much as you like. In the afternoon, return to your hotel and the rest of the day is at leisure.

Day six: Hue citadel and then to Danang and Hoi An

After breakfast, your guide will arrive to take you on a tour of Hue's ancient citadel, once

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the seat of the Emperors of the powerful Nguyen Dynasty that ruled Vietnam from about 1800 until 1945. You begin with a stroll around the area between the Citadel's giant walls and the defensive moat, now filled with lotus flowers. You then enter the Noon Gate to wander around the Thai Hoa Palace, the Pavilion housing the Nine urns of the Nguyen rulers and the remains of the Royal Palaces. After lunch, your car takes you to Danang, crossing the high mountain pass of Hai Van with excellent views from the top, built on a spur of the Truong Son Mountains that juts into the South China Sea. You should be able to see Lang Co beach and village, with Danang to the south. In Danang, you'll be shown the remarkable Hindu statuary in the Cham Museum, a fine open-air collection of Cham sculpture. From here you continue to Hoi An, with the rest of the day at leisure. You spend the night in Hoi An.

Day seven: A Walking tour and fisherman cruise

After breakfast, your guide meets you to show you the Ancient Town and explain its considerable significance in the history of Vietnam.

Hoi An is a UNESCO World Heritage site. An ancient trading port, once the largest in Indochina, Hoi An was a meeting point for many cultures that left their mark on the different architectural features of its wooden buildings. Untouched by the American War, the original street pattern still exists, as does the quay that once welcomed ships from all over East Asia and beyond. Many remained in port for months at a time, waiting for the trade winds to carry them home.

Today there is still an array of interesting houses, shops, family chapels, pagodas and temples, tombs, bridges and clothes shops where tailoring will be carried out on demand. There are plenty of good restaurants and it is a good place for shopping for silk. Many of the famous sights of Hoi An such as the Japanese covered wooden bridges, the Pottery Museum, the 200 year old Tan Ky House, Chua Ong Pagoda and markets are included in the walking tour.

At 16.30 hrs you are picked up at your hotel to board a boat to the mouth of the Thu Bon estuary to meet local fishermen who are preparing their journey offshore in the Cua Dai Sea. You experience catching fish in a traditional 'Thung Chai' basket boat, (these are light and portable, circular and constructed of bamboo then tarred for waterproofing. Each boat can carry up to five people. Life jackets are provided). Then you relax as you observe



Hoi An

sunset behind the coconut palms, enjoying some snacks. You are driven back to your hotel to spend the night in Hoi An.

Day eight: Hoi An to Ho Chi Minh City

This Enjoy a morning at leisure before an afternoon flight to Ho Chi Minh City. After transferring to your centrally located hotel, you're free to wander around District 1. For the evening there are a couple of options:

Nightlife by Vespa

This evening you are picked up at the hotel for a tour on the back of a vintage Vespa scooter, to experience the nightlife of Saigon the way the locals do. Your first stop is at Café Zoom to enjoy a cocktail and appetiser (included) before adventuring to a favourite local eating spot. The ride takes you through Chinatown into District 4, through busy streets and alleys, into District 3 and downtown District 1 on the way to taste Banh Xeo, Saigon's speciality snack.

Or

A O Show

The A O show captures much of the uniqueness of Vietnam in the engaging style of contemporary circus. The hour-long show is a fusion of dance, acrobatics and live music with theatrical drama tracing the passage of Vietnam from a rural village culture to the modern, urban society it is today.

Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) is a thriving metropolis which has nevertheless preserved

300 years of traditions and ancient culture.

Day nine: Ho Chi Minh City and visit to Cu Chi

After breakfast your local guide will take you to visit the famous Cu Chi tunnels, a maze of underground passages, chambers, rooms and booby traps used by both the Vietminh and the Viet Cong. After lunch you return to Ho Chi Minh City to visit the Reunification Hall, an early colonial masterpiece built to accommodate the Governor-General of Indochina. You also visit the Museum of War Remnants (not for the squeamish) which provides a fascinating perspective of the 'American War'. After the sightseeing there is time to rest and freshen up or visit the lively Ben Thanh market. Overnight in Ho Chi Minh City.

Day ten: Ho Chi Minh City to Mekong Delta and Can Tho

You are driven to Cai Be, about two hours from Ho Chi Minh City, where a Mekong river cruise will take you to visit examples of local life in the rich, fertile Mekong delta. You'll visit orchards, a traditional family-run brick kiln and some long-established cottage industries. Later a rowing boat will carry you through the maze of the channels of the delta so that you can experience the life of the local people, visiting a local house and listening to music performed by local artists. You then drive deeper into the Mekong Delta to Can Tho. Here you visit Munir Ansay, an ancient Khmer pagoda, renowned for its structural

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decorations. You then continue to your hotel in Can Tho where you spend the night.

Day eleven: Return to Ho Chi Minh City or continue to beach extension

After breakfast enjoy a boat cruise to visit the Cai Rang floating market on the Mekong Delta. Both the journey and the market provide insights into the rural Mekong Delta lifestyle. You then return to Ho Chi Minh City, visiting the ancient Vinh Trang Pagoda, three kms from My Tho. This pagoda is renowned for its mix of architectural styles: Chinese, Vietnamese and Angkor. You reach Ho Chi Minh City in the late afternoon, with time to freshen up in your hotel before the evening.

Day twelve: Ho Chi Minh City Departure

You are at leisure today until it is time to be collected by private car and driver to take you to Tan Son Nhat airport for your flight.

Optional beach extension

On day 11, Instead of returning to Ho Chi Minh City, after the early morning cruise to visit Cai Rang floating market, you are transferred to Can Tho airport for a flight to Phu Quoc or Con Dao (or you go by car to Rach Gia and then hydrofoil to Phu Quoc island). You then spend three nights in your beach hotel before returning to the airport for a connecting flight back home.



Mekong Delta



Coast at Phu Quoc

HOTELS

Our 'luxury' selection of hotels in Hanoi, Ha Long Bay, Hue, Hoi An, Ho Chi Minh City and Can Tho are described below.

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As with most of our tours to Vietnam, we offer the choice of mainly four star hotels in our superior accommodation option as well as mainly five star hotels in our First Class option. However, you can mix and match the hotels or ask us to find others for you too. This ten-night tour can be adapted with additional nights in any of the places, or combined with a beach stay at the end perhaps. Also, you are not confined to travelling with Vietnam Airlines and we can arrange for you to fly via other countries in the region, for example Thailand, Singapore and Hong Kong, which is useful if you want to combine a tour of Vietnam with a stay in another country.

FIRST CLASS HOTELS

Hanoi

Sofitel Metropole Hotel

5-star, historic colonial building in a city centre location – Luxury Room Historic Wing

Ha Long Bay

Paradise Luxury Cruise

Traditional junk cruise – Terrace suite cabin

Hue

La Residence Hotel and Spa

4-star deluxe boutique hotel on the banks of the Perfume river – colonial suite

Hoi An

Palm Garden Resort

5-star, villa and bungalow style resort on the northern part of Cua Dai beach – bungalow beachfront

Ho Chi Minh City

Park Hyatt Hotel

Excellent 5-star hotel next to Ho Chi Minh City's Opera House in the heart of District 1, colonial-style architecture, very comfortable – Park garden view room

Can Tho

Victoria Can Tho Resort

4 star hotel beside the Mekong river, with garden – Suite room.



Sofitel Metropole, Hanoi



Paradise Luxury Cruise, Ha Long Bay



La Residence, Hue



Palm Garden Resort, Hoi An



Victoria Can Tho Resort

HOTELS

Our 'standard superior' selection of hotels in Hanoi, Ha Long Bay, Hue, Hoi An, Ho Chi Minh City and Can Tho are described below.

Expressions

SUPERIOR STANDARD HOTELS

Hanoi

Silk Path Hotel

4 star, in Hanoi's Old Quarter – premium deluxe room

Ha Long Bay

La Vela premium cruise

4-star, modern superior quality cruise – premium balcony cabin

Hue

Saigon Morin Hotel

4-star colonial style hotel overlooking the Perfume River – colonial deluxe room

Hoi An

Boutique Resort Hoi An

4-star beachfront boutique resort situated on Hoi An beach and about a 5 minute drive from Hoi An Ancient Town – superior room

Ho Chi Minh City

Liberty Central Hotel

4-star hotel in the city centre – premier deluxe room

Can Tho

Victoria Can Tho Resort

4 star hotel beside the Mekong river, with garden – Suite room.

Optional beach extension

La Veranda Resort, Phu Quoc

Deluxe garden room on bed and breakfast:
£700 per person for 3 nights

JW Marriott, Phu Quoc

Emerald Bay view room on bed and breakfast:
£760 per person for 3 nights

Six Senses Con Dao, Con Dao

Ocean view duplex room on bed and breakfast: £1490 per person for 3 nights

Flights from Can Tho to Phu Quoc or Con Dao, back to Ho Chi Minh City are included in economy class. Additional nights can be added.



La Vela premium cruise, Ha Long Bay



Saigon Morin Hotel, Hue



Boutique Resort, Hoi An



Liberty Central, Ho Chi Minh City



Victoria Can Tho Resort

MAP OF VIETNAM EXPLORER TOURING HOLIDAY

The map below illustrates the route outlined in this touring itinerary, with overnight stops and places of interest highlighted.



GENERAL INFORMATION

This touring holiday is one of several suggested holidays we can offer you exactly as it is but also with any alterations you might want, including extra nights in one or more places or adding in extra places. All our tours can be extended so that you can include a longer stay in one location too, perhaps at the end of the itinerary. Do call to discuss the options with our travel consultants.

The logo for Expressions, featuring the word "Expressions" in a white, elegant cursive font on a dark blue rectangular background.

OUR TOURS

Our touring holidays are for individuals travelling on their own or in their own family group. You do not join a group, but are escorted by an English-speaking local guide with transport as appropriate to the itinerary.

FLEXIBLE ARRANGEMENTS

Our arrangements are very flexible in that you choose to travel on any day you want, subject to availability. Additional nights can be added at any point or the suggested itinerary here amended to accommodate your personal interests.

FLIGHT ARRANGEMENTS

There are a number of ways you can fly to Vietnam. Vietnamese Airlines flight direct from London to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh but other airlines such as Cathay Pacific or Thai might be more appropriate for your holiday, if you want to stop off en-route.

TRAVEL WITHIN VIETNAM

The travel arrangements we include in our tours of Vietnam are appropriate for the route and journey. Travel will be by a mixture of car, air and train.

GENERAL FACTS

Capital

Hanoi

Airport

There are three international airports in Vietnam. They are Tan Son Nhat airport, Ho Chi Minh City; Noi Bai airport, Hanoi; Danang Airport

Currency

Vietnam Dong

Size

128,000 sq miles

Population

91 million

Average temperatures

Although the entire country lies within the tropics and subtropics, Vietnam's climate varies considerably from region to region. Summer temperatures can reach as high as 40°C, though the average hovers round 30°C; November to March average daily temperatures are about 19°C. The winter monsoon comes from the northeast between October and March, bringing damp and chilly winters to all areas north of Nha Trang, and dry and warm temperatures to the south. From April or May to October, the summer

monsoon brings hot, humid weather to the whole country except for those areas sheltered by mountains.

VIETNAM - THE COUNTRY

Tracing a long, languid curve down the eastern edge of South East Asia, Vietnam is a land of extraordinary natural beauty. Soaring mountains and swaying rice fields, sweeping beaches and the mighty Mekong, Vietnam has it all, with Halong Bay and its iconic limestone towers the jewel in the country's dazzling crown. Surviving war after war, colonial rule and communism, Vietnam's people are determinedly upbeat and inventive, imbuing its cities with a crackling energy almost 24 hours per day. Hanoi is its bristling capital, with elegant colonial buildings overlooking avenues buzzing with motorbikes; old, imperial capital Hue is the cultural heartbeat, with palaces and pagodas, tombs and temples, and a biennial arts festival worth the airfare alone; Ho Chi Minh City – or Saigon as it's still universally known – is all hustle and bustle, an intoxicating blend of the old and the new, with teeming markets dwarfed by towering skyscrapers. If Vietnam's cities prove too much, the Mekong Delta provides an ancient, intoxicating foreverness of rice fields and sleepy villages, with river trips taking you along the country's timeless lifeblood. Inland, peasant women in conical hats still tend to their fields, children ride buffalos along country paths and farmers scratch out a living from rice fields cascading down the sheerest of hillsides.

But if Vietnam's hilly countryside is beautiful, its coastline is simply stunning. With its smattering of limestone karsts rising out of the mist, Halong Bay is the undoubted showstopper, but there are also some stunning beaches. Hoi An and Danang are blessed with sweeps of sand and offer a choice of watersports to match anywhere in Asia. A stunning country of vivid colours and dramatic landscapes, with sensational food, exquisite boutique hotels, and a warmth of welcome that will surprise and overwhelm, Vietnam ensures a wonderful holiday.

HIGHLIGHTS OF VIETNAM

Boat trips on Halong Bay, with the more adventurous able to explore its caves and secret lagoons by kayak, paddling around its limestone peaks; the long, sweeping beaches of Nha Trang; Vietnamese cuisine, bursting with fresh, vivid spices, as delicious in roadside food stalls as in top restaurants such as Mango Rooms in Hoi An; historic, riverside Hoi An, with superb galleries, particularly Apricot and Mai Tai galleries in the Old Quarter, and Dong Phong Art Gallery in the French Quarter; full-moon 'Legendary Nights' in Hoi An, when vehicles are banned from the Old Town, which is transformed into a magical land of silk lanterns, traditional food, song and dance, and games in the streets; explore Phong Nha Cave, the largest and most impressive cave in the country; cycle through Ho Chi Minh City, the city where bike is king; the beaches and unique Cham architecture of Quy Nhon; the rugged mountain retreat of Sapa, home to a plethora of minority tribes, and gateway to the Tonkin Alps; the mountain town of Dalat; Cat Tien National Park, a lush refuge for city dwellers with ample hiking and bird-watching, plus elephants, crocodiles and the endangered Javan rhino; the beaches of Mui Ne; river trips on the Mekong river, past river towns and sleepy villages, floating markets and fish stalls; the white-sand beaches of Phu Quoc, a little developed forested island gem; Hue, the old imperial capital and now the intellectual, cultural and spiritual heart of Vietnam.

OUR PRICES

The sample prices mentioned in this leaflet are generally a 'from' price based on the cheapest season of travel. However, flight hotel rates can change (up and down depending on offers), so we give you an accurate price for your holiday when we provide you with a quotation. Our sample prices should be used as an indication of how much a particular combination will cost and to show the differences on average between the hotel categories on offer.

PRICE INFORMATION IN MORE DETAIL

Scheduled return flights from London to Vietnam with Vietnam Airlines in economy, and accommodation at superior standard hotels such as the Silk Path Hotel, with meals and transport as mentioned.

From £3,090 per person.

BOOKING CONDITIONS

Our booking conditions apply to all holidays. A copy can be found on our website and a copy is also sent to you with a written quotation and when you make a booking.

FINANCIAL PROTECTION

Expressions Holidays offers full financial protection for all holidays you book with us. If your holiday includes a flight, the ATOL (3076) covers the costs of the holiday. If the holiday does not include a flight, it is the ABTOT bond that protects the cost of the holiday. We are also members of AITO (the Association of Independent Tour Operators) and ABTA.



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HOW TO BOOK

To make a booking, just phone us on

01392 441250

and we can take you through the details we need and start the booking process. A deposit is required to confirm the arrangements and this can be paid by debit or credit card over the phone. The level of the deposit will be confirmed at the point of booking and will depend on the ticketing deadlines involved in your booking.