



Highlights of Vietnam: Hanoi, Hạ Long Bay & Hồ Chí Minh City

12 days | 15 days with Phú Quốc Island and Hồ Chí Minh City extension

See Vietnam's unique makeup unfold before your eyes as you tour Hanoi's prismatic French, Chinese, and Southeast Asian heritage before cruising between the colossal cliffs of Hạ Long Bay. You'll experience the timeless charm of Vietnam in Huế and Hội An, where ancient imperial grandeur meets lantern-lit streets, offering a journey through history and culture. Trace the steps of Vietnamese independence in Hồ Chí Minh City—Vietnam's largest city—still known as Saigon to locals and travelers. Along the way, you'll examine Vietnam War era sites, traverse verdant rice fields, and learn about Vietnamese traditions—like pearl farming—all while treating your taste buds to the spicy, tangy, sweet, and herbal complexity of Vietnamese cuisine. Extend your trip to tropical Phú Quốc and experience island life like no other—with flavors you won't find anywhere else—before diving into colorful, dense coral reefs on a snorkeling cruise.



Your tour package includes

- 9 nights in handpicked hotels
- 1 night aboard a cruise ship
- 10 breakfasts
- 4 lunches
- 4 dinners with beer or wine
- 1 cooking demonstration
- 1 tasting
- 11 sightseeing tours
- Expert Tour Director & local guides
- Private deluxe motor coach
- 2 on-tour flights

Included highlights

- Temple of Literature
- Hỏa Lò Prison
- Hạ Long Bay cruise
- Hội An's Japanese covered bridge
- Rice farm visit
- Huế Imperial City
- RENEW Mine Action Visitors Center
- War Remnants Museum
- Cù Chi tunnels

Tour pace

On this guided tour, you'll walk for about 3 hours daily across uneven terrain, including paved roads, dirt paths, and stairs.

Group size

12–22

Highlights of Vietnam: Hanoi, Hạ Long Bay & Hồ Chí Minh City

12 days | 15 days with Phú Quốc Island and Hồ Chí Minh City extension

Overnight Flight → 1 night

Day 1: Travel day

Board your flight to Hanoi today.

Hanoi → 3 nights

Day 2: Arrival in Hanoi

Welcome to Vietnam! Transfer to your hotel to settle in. If you need an invigorating pick-me-up, remember that Vietnamese coffee, or cà phê, is typically brewed strong and sweetened with condensed milk.

Day 3: Sightseeing tour of Hanoi

Included meals: breakfast, welcome lunch

Join your Tour Director and fellow travelers on a guided exploration of Hanoi. Vietnam's capital city is known for its centuries-old architecture, as well as its rich, cultural heritage, which includes a mix of Southeast Asian, Chinese, and French influences.

- Pass Ba Đình Square, where Hồ Chí Minh—the revolutionary leader and president of North Vietnam—read the Proclamation of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.
- Wander through the 11th-century Temple of Literature, a walled complex that's dedicated to the Chinese philosopher Confucius and site of Vietnam's first university.
- Visit the site of Hỏa Lò Prison—the notorious “Hanoi Hilton”—where late U.S. Senator John McCain was held as a prisoner of war (POW) for more than five years during the Vietnam War.
- Tour the museum that occupies the remaining prison structure, and learn about POWs' harrowing experiences in captivity.
- Board a bicycle rickshaw and ride through the busy Old Quarter, an area that's rich with Vietnamese architecture—picture wooden shutters and wrought-iron balconies—as well as hidden courtyards and gardens, locally owned shops, and street food vendors.
- Pass Đồng Xuân Market (one of the largest wholesale markets in the north of Vietnam), the Hanoi Opera House (inspired by the

Second Empire architecture of the Palais Garnier in Paris), and Hoàn Kiếm Lake (its name, which translates to Lake of the Restored Sword, derives from a 15th century Vietnamese legend).

Get to know your Tour Director and fellow travelers at a welcome lunch hosted by the KOTO Van Mieu, a social enterprise which helps train vulnerable youth in the culinary and food service professions.

Vietnamese culture places a strong emphasis on sharing meals with guests. Add an optional excursion to enjoy a home-hosted dinner of Vietnamese specialties with a local family. Up to exploring on your own? Use your free time today to go back to Hanoi's French Quarter or take a cyclo—a cycle rickshaw—ride through the city's narrow streets for the ultimate way of getting around.

Please note: In the event KOTO Van Mieu is unavailable, travelers will visit a similar vocational restaurant.

+ Vietnamese Home-Hosted Dinner

Day 4: Free day in Hanoi

Included meals: breakfast

Experience the dramatic emerald valleys and towering seaside cliffs of Vietnam on an optional excursion. Bask in these views from a row boat on an optional excursion to Ninh Binh's Tam Cốc village where you'll sail past rice paddies and limestone mountains.

Not joining the excursion? Use your free day in Hanoi to take in a traditional water puppet performance showcasing Vietnamese folklore and culture, visit the Vietnam Fine Art Museum or sit down with locals at one of Hanoi's atmospheric cafes.

+ A Day in Ninh Binh

Hạ Long Bay → 1 night

Day 5: Hạ Long Bay cruise

Included meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Transfer to Hạ Long Bay and embark on a luxurious, overnight cruise. As you explore the emerald waters of this striking setting and UNESCO World Heritage Site by boat, you'll pass by many of its nearly 2,000 limestone islands and islets, most of which are uninhabited and unaffected by human presence.

- Once on board the ship, enjoy a welcome drink, followed by an included lunch served with beer or wine.
- Cruise past notable natural features, including Fighting Cocks Islet's pair of limestone islets—shaped like a rooster and a hen—as well as Thien Cung Cave, and Dau Go Cave.
- Climb aboard a small tender with a guide from your ship and motor across the water to Sung Sot Cave—the largest and, according to many, most beautiful cave in the bay. Discovered in 1901, the cave's stalagmites and stalactites are lit by multicolored lights.
- Get back on board your tender for a ride to your next stop, Tung San Pearl Farm—pearl farming is an important source of livelihood for local communities—where you'll learn how pearls are grown using traditional Vietnamese methods and new Japanese technology.
- Paddle a kayak along the waters of Hạ Long Bay to enjoy up-close views of the deep green waters and stunning limestone karsts. Keep an eye out for colorful fish, jellyfish, and even monkeys on some of the islands.
- Return to your ship to enjoy a Vietnamese cooking demonstration, then sit down for an included dinner served with beer or wine.

Hội An → 2 nights

Day 6: Ti Top Island & flight to Hội An

Included meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Join a sunrise lesson in Tai Chi—a gentle form of exercise that originated in China as a martial art—on the ship this morning, if you're up for it. Then, hop into a small boat and make your way to Ti Top Island for time spent swimming or hiking to the top of the island—summit height is about 360 feet or 110 meters—to enjoy panoramic views of Hạ Long Bay's island-dotted waters.

After enjoying an included lunch, disembark your cruise ship and board a flight to Da Nang. Then, transfer to your hotel in Hội An.

Freshen up at your hotel and gather with your fellow travelers this evening for an included dinner served with beer or wine.

Day 7: Sightseeing tour of Hội An & rice farm visit

Included meals: breakfast, lunch, tasting

Explore Hội An on a guided tour to shop its markets where you'll be sure to find the perfect Vietnamese keepsake to bring home.

- Discover the city's landmarks, including the ornate Japanese covered bridge and Old Town, which has retained its charm as a major trading port and is now a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site.
- Pass by the quaint Nguyễn Thị Minh Khai pedestrian shopping street and its colorful, eye-catching stalls.
- Walk the town's cobblestone streets to see the 18th century Quan Thang Ancient House with its majestic wooden carvings and silk lantern shop.

This afternoon, pay a visit to Cẩm Thanh village, known as the Coconut Village, located in the Bay Mau coconut forest.

- Visit a farm to learn how Vietnamese farmers grow rice in the fields.
- Sit down for a family-style lunch at the farm.
- Interact with a rice farmer and watch water buffalo plow the fields while enjoying a tea tasting.

After sampling Vietnamese delicacies, how about trying your hand at preparing them yourself? Add an optional excursion to take a hands-on cooking class or return to Hội An and enjoy a free evening in the city perusing a night market or relaxing by the river.

+ Hội An Vietnamese Cooking Class & Dinner

Huế → 1 night

Day 8: Transfer to Huế & sightseeing tour

Included meals: breakfast, dinner

Travel through the Hải Vân Pass as you make your way to Huế, famous for imperial and colonial history, all set along the peaceful "Perfume River".

- Explore the Thiên Mụ Pagoda, Vietnam's tallest religious building. Built in 1601, it's been preserved, expanded, and enhanced for generations to become the unofficial symbol of Huế.
- Visit the fortress and palace known as the Imperial City, surrounded by massive stone walls that stretch for 1.5 miles and punctuated with large gateways and protective moats.
- Head to the RENEW Mine Action Visitor Center where you'll meet up with a center

guide to learn about the ramifications of the Vietnam War that are still felt today, as well as the center's efforts to remove landmines and other unexploded ordinance from the Vietnamese countryside.

Enjoy an included dinner with beer or wine this evening with your group.

Hồ Chí Minh City → 3 nights

Day 9: Free day in Huế & evening flight to Hồ Chí Minh City

Included meals: breakfast

With your free day in Huế today, add an optional excursion that further delves into Nguyễn dynasty emperors and their impressive tombs. If you're heading off on your own, ask your Tour Director for a recommendation. We suggest continuing to explore the traditional houses in the city center, checking out the treasures in the Huế Royal Antiquities Museum, and of course, try local specialties like Huế-style crepes and sweet dessert soups.

Later, board your flight to Hồ Chí Minh City. Hồ Chí Minh City was officially renamed from Saigon on April 30, 1975, the same day Saigon fell to North Vietnamese forces, leading to the reunification of North and South Vietnam. Many locals, especially older residents, still refer to the city as Saigon.

+ Tu Đức & Khải Dinh Tombs

Day 10: Sightseeing tour of Hồ Chí Minh City, War Remnants Museum & Củ Chi tunnels

Included meals: breakfast

Take in the sights of Vietnam's dynamic, vibrant metropolis—and largest city—on a guided tour. Hồ Chí Minh City, or Saigon, was crucial as the political, economic, and military hub of South Vietnam during the Vietnam War.

- Witness Vietnam's progression from French colony to unified, independent nation as you enter the Reunification Palace, whose architecture draws heavily on Brutalism and modernist design.
- See the General Post Office, City Hall, and Notre-Dame Cathedral Basilica of Saigon—whose building materials were imported from France in the late 1800s.
- Visit Bến Thành Market and stroll along Lê Công Kiều, a street known for its treasure trove of antiques.

Spend the afternoon learning more about the history and impact of the Vietnam War.

- Take a self-guided tour of the War Remnants Museum to get a local perspective on the lingering effects of the Vietnam War.
- Visit the vast underground network of narrow, winding tunnels at Củ Chi, which were built during Vietnam's war of independence from French colonial authority in the 1940s, and expanded during the Vietnam War in the 1960s.
- Learn how the North Vietnamese waged guerrilla warfare against the South.
- See secret trapdoors, underground kitchens, living areas, and meeting rooms.

Please note: Your guide will advise you of the length and level of difficulty of each tunnel before entering. Those preferring to remain above ground will have ample opportunity to view excavated areas. Good walking shoes and sun protection are recommended, as are clothes that can get slightly dirty.

Day 11: Free day in Hồ Chí Minh City

Included meals: breakfast, farewell dinner

Retrace yesterday's steps through Hồ Chí Minh City and linger at the market and street food stalls, or add an optional excursion to visit community artisans, farmers, and businesses as you learn more about life along the Mekong River Delta.

Tonight, rejoin your fellow travelers at a local restaurant for a celebratory farewell dinner served with beer or wine.

+ Traditions of the Mekong River Delta

Flight Home

Day 12: Departure

Included meals: breakfast (excluding early morning departures)

Transfer to the airport to board your early morning flight home or extend your trip to explore an environmental and cultural jewel, the island of Phú Quốc, for a special side of Vietnam you—and your five senses—will never forget.

+ Phú Quốc Island and Hồ Chí Minh City extension

Did we save the best for last? For your stay in Phú Quốc, we're taking you on a joyous journey through the island's local specialties, including pungent, umami-rich fish sauce, rose myrtle fruit wine, and fiery peppercorns, before cooling off with a dreamy snorkeling cruise. Unwind on this tropical island off the southern coast of Vietnam before returning to Hồ Chí Minh City.

Phú Quốc → 2 nights

Day 12: Flight to Phú Quốc & sightseeing tour

Included meals: breakfast, lunch, wine tasting, tasting

Board a flight to Phú Quốc, the picturesque island known as the Pearl Island due to its environmental conservation efforts. Upon arrival, sit down for an included lunch at a local restaurant before heading out to get to know this laid-back paradise with your local guide.

- Learn about Vietnam's ubiquitous condiment, fish sauce—famous for its savory, salty-sweet flavor.
- Stop by a sim wine factory, an island speciality traditionally concocted by fermenting rose myrtle fruit (sim), resulting in a delicious wine with a unique flavor and smell.
- Enjoy a tasting of a variety of sim products like wine, alcohol, candy, and honey at the factory.
- Head to a local farm specializing in the cultivation and harvesting of peppercorn off the vine.
- After learning about the production cycle of the peppercorn, take part in a tasting of different peppercorn products.
- Visit Ho Quoc Temple, a majestic pagoda, where you'll soak in panoramic sea and mountain views.

Day 13: Free day in Phú Quốc

Included meals: breakfast

Sure, you could spend your full free day relaxing on one of the island's pristine beaches or checking out the waterfalls at Suoi Tranh, but the optional excursion to cruise and snorkel the surrounding islands will reward you with eye-popping sights of incredible marine life in these Maldives-like waters.

+ Phú Quốc Snorkeling Cruise & Lunch

Hồ Chí Minh City → 1 night

Day 14: Flight to Hồ Chí Minh City

Included meals: breakfast

Spend one last free morning on Phú Quốc—lounging by the resort pool is always a good idea—before flying back to Hồ Chí Minh City.

This evening, join your group for a farewell dinner served with beer or wine.

Flight Home

Day 15: Departure

Included meals: breakfast (excluding early morning departures)

Transfer to the airport to board your early morning flight home and stash a bánh mì sandwich in your day pack for a timely snack later. *Tạm biệt*—goodbye!

Customize your experience

Customize your tour by adding excursion options. Excursions offered on the same day will occur at different times, so there's no need to choose. Save \$10 when you book your excursion up to three days before your tour departs.* Excursions requiring advance reservation only list this discounted price. Call or go online to customize your tour: goaheadtours.com/VET | 1-800-597-0350

Day 3: Vietnamese Home-Hosted Dinner

\$75/\$85* (3.5 hours, departs in the evening with dinner)

Get a taste of authentic local flavors with a home-hosted dinner at Ms. Nga's house in Hanoi. Listen to her stories of everyday life and enjoy the opportunity to tour her home. Then, dine on regional specialties, like Vietnamese vegetable soup, spring rolls, fried fish or chicken, sautéed vegetables, and papaya salad. Finish the meal with tea and peanut candy before saying your goodbyes.

Day 4: A Day in Ninh Binh

\$115/\$125* (8 hours, Departs in the morning, includes lunch)

Travel south of Hanoi to Ninh Binh's Tam Cốc village, where you'll board a row boat and be transported to another world—often referred to as “Hạ Long Bay on Land”. Wind your way along its rivers, past towering mountains that seem to jut out of the surrounding rice paddies. Cruise along the peaceful waters until you reach Bích Động (translation: Green Pearl Grotto), and visit the ornate pagoda surrounded by lotus flowers. Afterward, return to the village and sit down for an included lunch before returning to Hanoi.

Day 7: Hội An Vietnamese Cooking Class & Dinner

\$65/\$75* (3 hours, departs in the evening, includes dinner)

Dive into the Vietnamese culinary world alongside a chef during this evening's activity where you'll learn to prepare traditional dishes. Start with boarding a long-tail boat for a short cruise down the Thu Bồn River, a highlight of central Vietnam, to the cooking school. Take part in a hands-on cooking class and craft three dishes before sitting down with your group to enjoy the dinner that you've prepared.

Day 9: Tu Dúc & Khai Dinh Tombs

\$55/\$65* (3.5 hours, departs in the morning)

The hills surrounding Huế are dotted with the tombs of the Nguyễn dynasty emperors. You'll visit the two most impressive tombs, designed in contrasting styles. First, behold the tomb of Emperor Tu Dúc, resplendent in traditional architecture, paved walkways, resting pavilions overlooking tranquil lotus ponds and a small forest for hunting. The tomb of Emperor Khải Định, who is remembered as the “Puppet Emperor” because of his affiliation with the French, exemplifies colonial flair. A glass mosaic frieze dominates this tomb's interior.

Day 11: Traditions of the Mekong River Delta

\$85/\$95* (11.5 hours, departs in the morning, includes lunch)

Journey south to the Mekong Delta town of Bến Tre to board a boat for a winding introduction to life on the river. Begin with a visit to an artisan brick kiln business and learn the importance of brick production in the area and how the bricks' design has remained unchanged for centuries. Continue cruising to a coconut plantation,

where you can try your hand at picking young coconuts and see how coconut candy is made while enjoying a tasting of other tropical fruits, tea, and honey. Next, you'll stop and visit local women at a straw mat-weaving workshop and enjoy a demonstration of traditional straw weaving. Step off the beaten trail for a moment and travel by either motor cart or bike along a back road to a local family's home, where you'll enjoy an included lunch and learn about their lives. Afterward, stroll along the canal, then travel by motor and paddle boat back to the pier.

Extension excursion options

Day 13: Phú Quốc Snorkeling Cruise & Lunch

\$109/\$119* (9.5 hours, departs in the morning, includes lunch)

The surrounding islands in the Phú Quốc area are something of a miniature Maldives, where you'll find pristine beaches, turquoise waters, coral reefs, and postcard-worthy scenery. Spend the day island hopping where you'll have plenty of time to snorkel, swim, and relax. Head to An Thoi Harbour and board your boat setting off on a cruise to some of the the most beautiful islands in the Gulf of Thailand. Start with a visit to Xuong Island, often called “the paradise of Vietnam”, taking time to snorkel along the dense reefs and watch the colorful marine life. Next, cruise to Gành Hào Island which boasts soft white sandy beaches and an impressive marine ecosystem. Relax under the coconut trees and take a dip in the cool waters before heading back on board your ship to enjoy an included freshly prepared lunch. Continue on to the quiet island of May Rut Trong, which has remained relatively unexplored. On the island you'll enjoy swimming, sunbathing, or paddleboarding. Reboard your vessel and cruise back to An Thoi Harbour, then return to your hotel.

*Optional excursions may be purchased up to three days prior to departure or while on tour. Pre-purchased optional excursions cannot be canceled within three days prior to departure or while on tour. Select optional excursions require advance booking and cannot be purchased or canceled after the advanced reservation deadline. GAT accepts payment by cash, Visa or MasterCard for optional excursions purchased on tour. Additional fees may apply for optional excursions purchased on tour. Excursions require a minimum number of participants to operate. Details and prices are subject to change. Due to seasonal hours of operation and availability, some excursions may not operate. If this occurs, you will be refunded any payments made for that excursion post-tour. Learn more at goaheadtours.com/terms