



The Spirit of Adventure

Essential Vietnam

11 days Hanoi to Saigon

Welcome to Vietnam Spirit Travel...As we travel through Vietnam, we look forward to sharing our passion for this beautiful destination with you. As you explore this historic country you will marvel at the warmth of the people and the sheer beauty of the countryside. The faded ochre colonial buildings and wide tree lined boulevards make Hanoi a most attractive city and the maze of narrow streets in the Old Quarter are a delight to explore. Halong Bay takes you away from the hustle and bustle to enjoy cruising between the limestone peaks for an overnight stay on board. The imperial splendour of Hue, enchanting Hoi An and rural scenery of Mekong Delta combine to make this a most memorable trip. Finishing in dynamic Ho Chi Minh City, don't miss the Ben Thanh market for some fantastic shopping.

highlights

Take a cyclo ride in Hanoi's Old Quarter, Dive into the emerald-green waters of Halong Bay, Explore Vietnam's imperial past in Hue, Cycle among the rice paddies near Hoi An, Get a taste of local life in a Mekong Delta homestay, Crawl down a Cu Chi Tunnel

itinerary disclaimer

The itinerary attached is correct at time of printing. It may differ slightly to the one in reality. Occasionally our itineraries change as we make improvements that stem from past travellers, comments and our own research. Please note that our brochure is usually released by the end of each year. If you have booked from the previous brochure you may find there have been some changes to improve the itinerary. It is very important that you print a final copy of your Trip Dossier to review a couple of days prior to travel, in case there have been changes that affect your plans

DETAIL ITINERARY

Hanoi - Halong bay – Hue - Hoi An - Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) - Cu Chi Tunnels – Mekong Delta

Day 1 Hanoi arrival

On arrival at Hanoi airport you are met and transferred to your hotel. An arrival transfer from airport is included for clients arriving in Hanoi on Day 1 or before Day 1 if extra accommodation is booked with Vietnam Spirit Travel. (transfers cannot be arranged on arrival, please advise flight arrival details prior to departure). Hotel check-in time is 12 noon

Note our representative will collect the remaining balance of the tour price in cash on day 1. Please bring new USD bills/notes in large denominations.

Day 2 Ha Long bay, Junk overnight

This morning you are collected at around 8.30am by your guide for the 4 hour drive to Halong Bay. En route there will be a short stop at the Sao Do centre run for and by handicapped children. On arrival we board our private junk, this traditional wooden sailing junk boat offers a unique way of navigating the limestone karsts of Halong Bay with all the comforts of a motorised, floating hotel. Once settled in, you start your cruise round the majestic Halong Bay, while enjoying a delicious lunch. After lunch you have the chance to explore some of the limestone caves dotted around the bay. Then, the captain will find a secluded spot where you can swim in the clear water of the bay, soak up the sun on the top deck. In the evening the cook prepares a sumptuous meal as the boat weighs anchor in the heart of the bay. For those who are interested, there is the opportunity to do some night fishing.

You can leave your main luggage in Hanoi, so just take a small bag with a change of clothes and essential travel items.

Day 3 Hanoi water puppet show, overnight train to Hue

On the morning of day 3 we may be able to visit Dong Trieu ceramic village as we make our way back to the capital, time permitting. In Hanoi there is ample time for sightseeing and shopping.

In the evening we attend a performance of traditional water puppetry before the overnight train journey to Hue. We travel in air-conditioned comfort in our soft sleeper cabins!

WATER PUPPET SHOW

You absolutely must go to a Water Puppet Show (mua roi nuoc) when you are in Hanoi...especially if you have children or are a child at heart. They are absolutely charming and it's a uniquely Vietnamese art form that you really won't find anywhere else in the world. The stage is a small pool and the puppeteers hide behind a screen...so the brightly colored puppets come in and out of the water in amazing ways. The live music is wonderful and here is quite a cast of puppets from men fishing, to dancing women, a wide variety of animals ...and of course fireworks and some modern stage effects. The hour show is done entirely in Vietnamese with accompanied by traditional Vietnamese sting instruments. It consists of short skits of traditional Vietnamese stories (that if you've been in Vietnam for awhile you will know). But you won't need to know the stories or language to be totally enthralled. It was such a wonderful show that when you leave you will be "walking on water" !

Days 4-5 Hue sightseeing

We arrive in Hue, another World Heritage site. The pace of life is slow and tranquility prevails in this former imperial capital of Vietnam. We have the opportunity to visit the Imperial Citadel, one of the Nguyen emperors' tombs, the famed Thien Mu Pagoda, and also enjoy a dragon boat cruise on the Perfume River. With 2 full day here, there is time to explore the city's many Buddhist pagodas, outlying handicraft villages and the busy

Dong Ba Market. Enjoying a coffee at one of the riverside coffee shops at sunset is also an experience not to be missed.

THE IMPERIAL CITY

When Hue was established as the country's capital by Nguyen Emperor Gia Long, he built a vast citadel with the Imperial City at its centre, designed in keeping with the symmetrical layout of the Forbidden City in Beijing (about a north-south axis). During its period of prosperity the Imperial City consisted of some 148 splendidly decorated buildings - palaces, assembly halls, pavilions, ancestral alters, and gardens spread over 6km². During the Vietnam War the site was devastated, but a number of the buildings have now been restored to their former glory.

THIEN MU ("HEAVENLY LADY") PAGODA

Built in 1601, by Lord Nguyen Hoang, this is Hue's oldest and finest pagoda, romantically situated on the banks of the Perfume River. The pagoda takes its name from a legend about a lady who appeared to Nguyen Hoang and told him of the spiritual significance of this place by the river. He erected the pagoda to mark the event and the importance of the site. Throughout its history, the pagoda has been a centre for Buddhism in Hue and, more famously, its monks waged strong opposition to colonialism and the repression of Buddhists by President Diem in the 60s.

MAUSOLEUMS OF THE NGUYEN EMPERORS

Unlike other Emperors in Vietnam's history, who were buried in ancestral villages, the Nguyen rulers had grand mausoleums built as their final resting places. They are situated in the forested valley of the Perfume River, 12km away from Hue city, surrounded by lovely gardens - a wonderfully tranquil place to spend a couple of hours.

Days 6-7 Hoi An

Leaving Hue, our bus journey takes us south through rural countryside and the picturesque fishing village of Lang Co before ascending the dramatic Hai Van Pass, past stunning rural and coastal scenery, to the town of Danang, visiting the Cham Museum with its unique, Hindu style sculptures. We drive the short distance south to famous China Beach and then to the enchanting town of Hoi An - newly declared World Heritage Site (approx. 5 hours). Once a thriving river port, the town's architecture has been preserved and restored. This small town is a favourite with Vietnam Spirit travellers. Wandering the streets and narrow alleyways brings hours of pleasure and discovery. Today's trade is in ceramics, wood-ware, paintings and tailoring. There is something here for everyone and it is the perfect place to pick up gifts for those at home. There are options here for a half day tour to My Son, another World Heritage of Vietnam, or a boat trip to the handicraft villages of Kim Bong carpentry, Thanh Ha ceramics or simply lazing the day away on a nearby beach.

Day 8 Sai Gon

You are transferred to the airport for your flight to Ho Chi Minh City (included). You are met on arrival at Ho Chi Minh City Airport and transferred to your hotel. In the afternoon, there is much for you to discover on your own, how about scooting off on cyclos to Cholon, the Chinatown area of Ho Chi Minh City for a spot of temple hopping? Or perhaps you'd like to visit the Vietnamese version of a department store for some shopping - the choice is yours!

Days 9-10 Mekong Delta homestay- Cu Chi tunnels

On day 9 we travel south to Cai Be (approx. 3 hours), we board our waiting boats to cross the upper Mekong River and explore its intricate waterways. This is our

introduction to a world where life depends on the river. We visit a fruit orchard where we can sample tropical fruits, before continuing on to visit some local cottage industries. Around sunset we make our way up one of the many canals to our homestay. Our treat this evening is a wonderful meal of Delta specialities before settling down under our mosquito nets for the night. Activity starts early in the Delta, so we're up with the birds. After breakfast we visit the busy Cai Be floating market before re-boarding our bus and heading to the tunnels of Cu Chi (approx. 4 hours). This former Viet Cong stronghold provides an insight into the resourcefulness and tenacity of the Vietnamese people. We return to Ho Chi Minh City in the afternoon (approx. 2 hours).

MEKONG DELTA & HOMESTAY

Making its way from the plateaus of Tibet through China, Laos and Cambodia, the Mekong fans out as it reaches Vietnam, originally forming nine tributaries that gave the delta region its Vietnamese name 'Cuu Long' (meaning nine dragons). Once aboard a little wooden boat you'll find yourself in amongst the water highways that are used to transport everything from school children, to mountains of rice husks and baskets of glisteningly ripe fruit. The delta supports a mass of cottage industries and at every turn there are people making rice paper, or piling pots into smoking kilns and bashing out tools for harvesting the plentiful supply of rice. After chilling out in a hammock over lunch you'll get to jump in a rowing boat and don a conical hat for a peaceful trip downstream (experienced rower provided!). Home for the night is courtesy of a local family in a house on the edge of the river where their amazing hospitality has to be experienced to be believed. After exploring the area, feasting on an excellent dinner and washing it all down with rice wine it is heaven to watch the fireflies flicker about and have the sounds of the river soothe you to sleep. We sleep in army-cot style bed complete with basic bedding and a mosquito net, but you will need to bring a towel. Shower facilities are also available to help freshen up for the following morning of discovering life around this beautiful region.

Day 11 Departure

Today is at your leisure in Ho Chi Minh City. Please note that your hotel check-out time is 12 noon unless you negotiate late check-out directly with the hotel. Extra nights can be added in Ho Chi Minh City.

travel style: Independent

If you're looking for something different (perhaps group travel isn't for you) or you want an extension to your trip, an Independent adventure could be just the thing. These private itineraries will take you to a new level of personal experience and self discovery. Transport and accommodation are provided and to give you maximum flexibility, sightseeing and entrance fees are not included except those specified in the itinerary.

group size

N/A as this trip is on a private basis.

accommodation

7 nights hotel, 1 night homestay, 1 night sleeper train, 1 night on board junk boat
Please keep in mind that accommodation as shown in the itinerary is subject to availability at time of booking. The closest available alternative will be substituted if our first choice hotels are not available.

transport

Ha Noi – Ha Long:	car or minibus
Ha Noi – Hue:	night train
Hue – Hoi An:	car or minibus
Hoi An – Sai Gon:	flight
Sai Gon – Mekong delta – Cu Chi tunnels:	car or minibus and boat

Road Transport

We use privately chartered air-conditioned mini buses or coaches and some local transport such as buses, tuk tuk and private taxis; in remote areas, jeeps or pickup trucks. There is a NO SMOKING policy on all our tour buses - however there are tea and toilet breaks every couple of hours or so. The only exception to this rule is the driver. Major roads in Vietnam are good, enabling our coaches to cover distances quickly. Even so the country is large and as a guideline we have noted approximate driving times in the itinerary above.

included activities

This is a list of included activities on this trip. All other activities are optional and at your own expense. For a list of optional activities and sightseeing available on this trip, see the spending money section below. If you choose not to participate in the included activities on this itinerary, the cost will not be refunded

Entrance to Halong Bay caves, boat cruise, meals on boat, entrance to Water Puppet Show, Perfume River boat cruise and entrance to Citadel and Emperor's tomb - Hue, Mekong Delta boat trip and homestay, entrance to Cu Chi Tunnels

physical rating * easy

You are required to carry your pack on and off trains and buses, up hotel steps, etc. Your itinerary may include easy paced walks or bikerides, but these are on mainly flat ground.

important notes

1. During the months of October and November Vietnam is prone to heavy rains. While we continue to run successful trips during this period please note that our itinerary is subject to change as the conditions require.
2. Please note that mobile phones on a GSM or Global Roam network may work in some less rural cities on this trip

PASSPORT & VISAS

The visa requirements for your trip vary depending on where you are from and where you are going. We keep the information up to date as much as possible, but rules do change. It is important that you check for yourself.

For the most up to date information please refer to our Vietnam Travel Facts page

For information on the location of your nearest embassy or consulate we recommend the following website: http://dir.yahoo.com/Government/Embassies_and_Consulates/

If the visa application form requires a contact address in the destination, please give either your starting point hotel or the address of our postal address (which you will find in the Contact Us page)

VISA SERVICES

A large number of our travellers have found it beneficial to use a specialist 'Visa Service'. As it is their business to obtain visas every day, these companies build up good working relationships with the various embassies and consulates. They are usually able to obtain a visa more quickly than you would, especially if a destination is not represented in your home country or if you live too far away to visit an embassy in

person, a visa service can be invaluable. Visa service companies do charge, but you should weigh this up against the convenience and time you will save.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of the correct visas for your holiday and onward travel. Vietnam Spirit Travel cannot accept responsibility for anyone who is refused entry to a country because they lack the correct documentation.

INSURANCE

You must be comprehensively insured as a condition of travelling with Vietnam Spirit Travel. Insurance should include coverage for personal accident, medical expenses, baggage loss, and cancellation or curtailment of your holiday. We will ask you to confirm your insurance details as part of our travel registration process at the start of your journey. If you do not have appropriate insurance we will insist you obtain insurance. We reserve the right not to provide the services booked with us until insurance is purchased

HEALTH

There are no specific health requirements for entry into Vietnam. However, you should consult your doctor for up-to-date information and prescriptions for vaccinations, anti-malarial requirements and any reasonably foreseeable illnesses whilst travelling in Vietnam. We recommend that you carry a First Aid kit as well as any personal medical requirements (including a spare pair of glasses).

Please be aware that for legal reasons our leaders are prohibited from administering any type of drug including headache tablets, antibiotics, etc. Please ensure that you are adequately prepared. Vietnam Spirit Travel recommends the services of International SOS for all the medical requirements of our travellers and staff when travelling in Vietnam. International SOS's 24 hour clinics have expatriate doctors and specialists, and can be found at the following locations:

Website: www.vietnammedicalpractice.com

HANOI

Van Phuc Compound, 298 I Kim Ma Road, Ba Dinh District, Hanoi, Vietnam

24-hrs Emergency Tel: +84 (0) 4 843 0748, Fax: +84 (0) 4 846 1750

Email: hanoi@vietnammedicalpractice.com

HO CHI MINH CITY

Diamond Plaza, 34 Le Duan Street, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

24-hrs Emergency Tel: +84 (0) 8 822 7848, Fax: +84 (0) 8 822 7859

Email: hcmc@vietnammedicalpractice.com

DANANG

50-52 Nguyen Van Linh Street, Nam Duong Ward, Hai Chau District, Danang, Vietnam

Tel: +84 (0) 511 582 700, Fax: +84 (511) 583 049

24-hrs Emergency Tel: +84 (0) 913 917 303

Email: danang@vietnammedicalpractice.com

MEDICAL REQUIREMENTS

Our adventures bring together people of all ages. It is very important you are aware that, as a minimum, an 'average level of fitness and mobility' is required to undertake our easiest programs. Travellers must be able to walk without the aid of another person, climb 3-4 flights of stairs, step on and off small boats, and carry their own luggage. Travellers over the age of 70, or travellers with a preexisting medical condition, are responsible to ensure that they have the necessary fitness and mobility to comfortably complete their chosen trip. While our leaders work hard to ensure that all our travellers

are catered for equally, it is not their responsibility to help individuals who cannot complete the day's activities unaided

money exchange

Currency exchange rates often fluctuate. For the most up to date rates please refer to the following website: <http://www.oanda.com/>.

The official currency in Vietnam is Dong(VND). The Dong at the time of writing trades at approximately 16,000 VND to USD1. The US dollar, preferably crisp clean bills, can be used to directly purchase goods and services along with the local currency,. Travelers checks can be cashed at authorized foreign exchange outlets and banks and require presentation of passport. There is normally a 2 to 5 percent transaction fee for cashing, however it can be difficult to change traveller's checks outside the big cities. Other major international currencies may be exchanged in the main cities, where Visa and MasterCard may also be used for cash advances. ATMs are available in most large towns throughout Vietnam. Most hotels offer exchange services at a reasonable rate. It is not possible to exchange Vietnamese Dong outside the country so convert or spend all your Dong before leaving. Black markets are reemerging in Vietnam but are considered a danger and best avoided

Make sure that the Vietnamese notes you receive are not torn, this because many shops and restaurants will not accept them. Also try not to change too much money at one time, as you will end up with a large wad of notes.

spending money

Every traveller is different and therefore spending money requirements will vary. Some travellers may drink more than others while other travellers like to purchase more souvenirs than most. Please consider your own spending habits when it comes to allowing for drinks, shopping and tipping. Please also remember the following specific recommendations when planning your trip.

final payment

Your final payment needs to be paid in US\$ cash to our representative on day 1 of the tour. We recommend that you organise before arriving at your destination. If this is not possible, money exchanges and banks can be found at the Airport upon arrival, or close to the starting point hotel, where its possible to obtain US dollars. Charges or commisions may apply.

meals

While travelling with us you will experience the vast array of wonderful food available in Vietnam. Generally, to give you the maximum flexibility in deciding where and what to eat, not all meals are included in the trip price. This also gives you more budgeting flexibility. Please check the itinerary for details of meals included, you can allow USD15 each day for meals not included. Your group leader/guide will be able to suggest favourite restaurants during your trip. You will also need to allow enough money for drinks and shopping.

optional activities

Bring along USD100 for optional activities not included in the trip, approximate costs (per person) for popular optional activities taken in free time are –

Fine Arts Museum (Hanoi) - USD1

Women's Museum (Hanoi) - USD1

Army Museum (Hanoi)- USD1

Taxi to each museum - approx USD2

Bicycle Hire (Hue) - USD1

ThuBon River Boat Trip (Hoi An)- USD5
Hoi An sightseeing ticket (Hoi An) - USD5
Cyclo tour (Ho Chi Minh City)- USD4
War Remnants Museum (Ho Chi Minh City) – USD1
The Reunification Palace (Ho Chi Minh City) - USD2
Saigon Water Park (Ho Chi Minh City) - USD4

tipping

Tipping is very much appreciated by local guides, hotel staff, drivers and restaurant staff. As a guide, allow US\$ 5-8 per day.

emergency fund

Please also make sure you have access to an additional USD400 as an 'emergency' fund, to be used when circumstances outside our control (eg. A natural disaster) necessitate a change to our planned route or unforeseen incidents such as an outbreak of Avian Influenza. This is a rare occurrence!

departure tax

All departure taxes should be included in your international flight ticket. *Please note - all international flights from Vietnam require confirmation, which can be arranged through the hotel reception.*

For comparability, all prices in this dossier are quoted in one currency. We use the US Dollar since that is familiar to most. However, once on tour you will need to pay for all goods and services in the local currency.

ARRIVAL

Starting hotel

Army Hotel

33C Pham Ngu Lao

Hanoi, Vietnam

Tel: +84 (0) 4 8252896

Fax: +84 (0) 4 8259276

The Army Hotel, our base hotel in Hanoi, is located in a peace and quiet area within easy walking distance of many of the city's main attractions. Rooms have air-conditioning, IDD phones, mini-bars, satellite tv & private bathrooms. Staff are friendly & helpful, there is 24 hour reception, a restaurant, bar & health centre with pool, sauna, massage & jacuzzi. Check in time is from 12 noon.

***Note:** Details of the starting hotel will be printed on the tour vouchers you will receive after your confirmation. As starting hotels may be subject to change at any time before departure, we recommend you check the details online before your tour starts.*

Finishing hotel

Huong Sen Hotel

68-70 Dong Khoi St., Dist. 1

Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Tel: +84 (0) 8 8291415

Fax: +84 (0) 8 8290916

Free Arrival Transfer

An arrival transfer from Ha Noi airport is included in this trip, but it cannot be arranged on arrival, thus in order to be able to meet you at the airport, we need to be informed of your flight arrival details well in advance. Please ensure that we have the following information as soon as possible

- Nationality and passport number
- Airline and flight number
- City of embarkation
- Date and time of arrival

If we do not have this information we cannot meet you. We will not chase for this information, so please make sure that you provide it in good time.

On Arrival

ARRIVAL TRANSFERS

After clearing Customs and Immigration please look for our representative who will be carrying a sign with your name or Vietnam Spirit Travel on it. They may actually be waiting for you in the Arrivals Hall (i.e. after exiting the Immigration and Customs area) BEFORE you reach customs. If you do not see our representative immediately, do not worry, he/she is probably attending to other clients and will be with you as soon as possible. He/she will usually wait until all passengers arriving on the same flight (or at the same time) have arrived, then escort you all to the taxi or transfer bus. If there are only a few people, the transfer to the hotel might be by taxi. Our representative will give the taxi driver specific instructions and will pay for the ride. You do not need to give the driver any money

What if I am not met?

Do not take a taxi but wait until you see the Vietnam Spirit Travel sign and driver (as he will meet you here if unable to make contact in the Arrival Hall). If you have not made contact with our representative 30 minutes after clearing Immigration & Customs, we advise you to take a taxi to the starting point hotel where you should inform our representative that you were not met. If you take a taxi directly from the airport expect to pay around 150,000 Dong (approx. US\$10). Use a metered taxi and avoid taxi touts.

We regret that we cannot guarantee to meet you if your flight is rescheduled or heavily delayed. Providing you were eligible for a transfer you will then be reimbursed for this cost on arrival.

arrival complications

We don't expect any problems, and nor should you, but if for any reason you are unable to commence your trip as scheduled, as soon as possible please contact our Emergency Contact.

emergency contact

Vietnam Spirit Travel's Hanoi Office can be reached on Tel: 84 4 7192898

Hotlines 84 1685 734 016 and 84 987 876 013 or alternatively email

emergency@vietnamspirittravel.com

Arriving at Your Hotel

Upon arrival at your hotel please report to the reception and the staff will show you to your room. In most hotels you may be required to deposit your passport at reception. This is a perfectly normal practice and nothing to be concerned about - just make sure that you retrieve it before you check out of the hotel. Please note: The official check-in time for most hotels in Vietnam is around midday. If you reach the hotel earlier than this, you may have to wait for a room to become available. If you are arriving late at night or in the early hours of the morning and you wish to go straight to your room you will need to book an extra night's accommodation. For example; if your tour begins on 23 March

and your flight arrives at 01:00am on 23 March, you'll need to book an extra night's accommodation for the night of 22 March if you wish to use a room before midday on the 23rd.

Departure Transfer

We do offer you the option of booking a departure transfer, but to be frank, this will cost you more than arranging it yourself. By the end of your tour you will probably feel comfortable enough to arrange your own taxi / bus ride to the airport. If you require any assistance your Tour Guide or the hotel receptionist will be happy to help you.

Pre and Post Tour Accommodation

If you require extra nights accommodation before or after your tour, we will be happy to organise this for you. The rates for this service are shown in the price section. Our pre and post tour accommodation rates include the cost of a hotel room along with local taxes, booking services and administration expenses. It is therefore likely that hotel rates available locally will be lower than those offered in our brochure. It is not compulsory for you to book your pre/post tour accommodation through Vietnam Spirit Travel. Any extra nights accommodation required should be booked at the same time that you book your tour. We will always try to book extra nights accommodation in the same hotel that has been designated as the Starting Point for your tour, but in certain circumstances, this may not be possible. If your extra accommodation is prior to the start of the tour your voucher should be presented to the hotel reception upon check-in. If the extra accommodation is after the end of your tour, the voucher should be presented when the accommodation included in your tour has ended.

Left & Lost Luggage

If you discover upon arrival that your luggage is missing, or has arrived incomplete, you should report this immediately to the information desk in the baggage hall. The staff will be able to tell you what the procedures are for reclaiming your luggage and advise you on any forms that may need to be filled in and stamped. The airport staff should also be able to explain what will happen next and when you should expect your luggage. If you experience any problems in dealing with airport / airline officials your Tour guide will be happy to assist you. However please remember that lost luggage is a matter between you and the airline / airport authority and the recovery of your luggage is your own responsibility and at your own expense. Please make sure you do not leave anything behind at any point on the tour or at the end of your holiday.

Unfortunately we are NOT in a position to forward any luggage - or other belongings - you may leave behind.

SUPPLEMENTARY TOUR INFORMATION

keeping in touch-communication while on the road

If you need to be contacted while travelling we recommend that you set up an email address that can be accessed on the road, rather than relying on postal mail. Email cafes are becoming increasingly commonplace and cheap throughout Vietnam, and have quickly become the preferred way for our leaders/guides and travellers to stay in touch. If someone wishes to contact you in an emergency while you are on one of our trips we recommend that they refer to our Emergency Contact at

emergency@vietnamspirittravel.com or fax 08 4 7192898

or call our hot lines 84 1685 734 016 or 84 987 876 013

We recommend that family and friends don't try to contact you through phoning hotels en route, as our hotels are subject to change, and our hotel receptions often don't have English speaking staff.

your fellow travellers

As you travel on a trip you will be exposed to all the pleasures and maybe also some of the frustrations of travelling in a group. Your fellow travellers will probably come from all corners of the world and are likely to be of a variety of ages too. We ask you to be understanding of the various needs and preferences of your group - patience with your fellow travellers is sometimes required for the benefit of everyone's travel experience. Remember too that you have responsibilities to the group. If you are requested to be at a place at a certain time, ensure that you don't keep the rest of the group waiting. We have found time and time again that the very best trips we operate are those where the dynamics within the group work well - this takes just a little effort on your part.

your tour guide

All Independent trips are accompanied by an experienced local English speaking guide. The aim of the guide is to take the hassle out of your travels and provide information on the places you are travelling through including historical, cultural, religious and social aspects, offer suggestions for things to do and see, recommend great local eating venues and introduce you to our local friends so as to help you have the best trip possible.

what to take

Try to pack as lightly as possible (try to stay under 15 kg /33lb). It is in your own interest as you will have to carry your own luggage at times. Please make sure you bring good walking boots or shoes particularly in the colder winter months. Hanoi is a wonderful city for shopping so you should leave room for your purchases.

checklist

Travel documents: passport, visa, travel insurance, air tickets, voucher

Health requirements arranged

Money: travellers cheques/cash/credit card Money pouch

First Aid kit

Day pack to carry your personal needs during the day

Alarm clock Torch/flashlight

Mosquito repellent

Hat, sun cream and sun glasses

Refillable water bottle

Tampons can be difficult to buy in Vietnam

Vietnam travel guide - great for history and general information

Light raincoat in the wet season (May to Oct)

Warm clothes for the winter months (Nov to Feb).The mean temperature in Hanoi in January is just 16 degrees celsius and in mountainous areas can drop to near zero in December/January. Bring a winter weight sweater and trousers and jacket when travelling in these months.

laundry

Facilities are offered by most hotels for a charge. There will be times when you may want to or have to do your own laundry so we suggest you bring nonpolluting/biodegradable soap.

local dress

When packing be aware that dress standards are conservative throughout this region. Loose, lightweight, long clothing is both respectful and cool in the predominantly hot Asian climate. In winter months the extra length will keep you warm! Generally speaking, neat and tidy clothing is also appreciated in Vietnam. Shorts should be knee length and singlets/ tanktops are also not recommended.

safety

Many national governments provide a regularly updated advice service on safety issues involved with international travel. We recommend that you check your government's advice for their latest travel information before departure. We strongly recommend the use of a neck wallet or money belt while travelling, for the safe keeping of your passport, air tickets, travellers' cheques, cash and other valuable items. Leave your valuable jewellery at home - you won't need it while travelling. Many of the hotels we use have safety deposit boxes which is the most secure way of storing your valuables. A lock is recommended for securing your luggage.

Note that your group leader/guide has the authority to amend or cancel any part of the trip itinerary if it is deemed necessary due to safety concerns. Your leader/guide will accompany you on all included activities. During your trip you will have some free time to pursue your own interests, relax and take it easy or explore at your leisure. While your group leader/guide will assist you with options available in a given location please note that any optional activities you undertake are not part of your Vietnam Spirit Travel itinerary, and Vietnam Spirit Travel makes no representations about the safety of the activity or the standard of the operators running them. Please use your own good judgement when selecting an activity in your free time. For more details on the type of conditions and safety standards you can expect on your trip, Vietnam Spirit Travel's operational safety policy is accessible via our website. We recommend that you take a moment to read through this policy before travelling, and would appreciate any feedback on how well it is being implemented in the field.

a couple of rules

Illegal drugs will not be tolerated on our trips. Possessing or using drugs not only contravenes the laws of the land but also puts the rest of the group at risk. Smoking marijuana and opium is a part of local culture in some parts of the world but is not acceptable for Vietnam Spirit travellers. Vietnam Spirit Travel's philosophy of travel is one of respect towards everyone we encounter, and in particular the local people who make our destinations such special places. The exploitation of prostitutes is completely contrary to this philosophy. Our group leader/guide has the right to expel any member of the group if drugs are found in their possession or they use prostitutes.

a word of warning

As Vietnam embraces capitalism with open arms it is also falling victim to some of the problems of the West. Some parts of city centres are now a favourite hangout for pickpockets. If doing some exploring on your own carry only the necessary minimum with you and use a well-hidden money belt. Valuables, including your passport, should be left in the hotel safe - organize this at reception. There is no need to get paranoid, just be cautious.

feedback

After your travels, we want to hear from you! This is so important to us and at the end of the trip we ask you to complete an online survey. Please visit our feedback page on the website.

Hotel brief and meal inclusions

Hanoi: Army Hotel (3 star)

Meals included: breakfast

Halong Bay: Private junk boat

Meals included: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Overnight train:

Comfortable sleeper, air- conditioned with clean linen. Shared 4 berth cabin.

Meals included: none

Hue: Asia Hotel (3 star)

Meals included: breakfast

Hoi An: Thuy Duong Hotel (3 star)

Meals included: breakfast

Ho Chi Minh City: Empress Hotel (3 star)

Meals included: breakfast

Mekong Delta: homestay (multi share)

Meals included: breakfast, lunch, dinner

Before you travel it is essential that you read carefully this dossier which you can download from our website.

We regularly update our dossiers. Please check our website to ensure that you have the most up to date copy

The itinerary and supplementary information has been compiled with care and provided in good faith. However it may be subject to change, and DOES NOT form part of a contract between the client and Vietnam Spirit Travel

RECOMMENDED READING

- *The Rough Guide* by Jan Dodd
- *World Food Vietnam – for people who live to eat, drink and travel –* by Richard Sterling.
- *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* by Neil Sheehan.
- *In Retrospect - The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* by Robert McNamara.
- *The Vietnam Reader Edited by Walter Capps.*
- *Vietnam – A History* by S. Karnow.
- *Catfish and Mandala: A 2 Wheeled Voyage through Vietnam –* Andrew X. Pham.
- *The Quiet American* by Graham Greene.