



The Spirit of Adventure

Highlights of the north

7 days

highlights

- . Boat cruise in spectacular Halong Bay and Cat Ba Island
- . Colourful seaport city of Hai Phong
- . Reunification Express train
- . Sapa hilltribe homestay and trekking

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 – Cat Ba Island – Hai Phong - Sapa

Day 1 Halong 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.

Overnight: On board private junk boat

Meals included: lunch and dinner

Day 2 Cat Ba Island

Rising to the tranquil beauty of the bay you have time for an early morning swim followed by breakfast. This morning we continue to discover the natural beauty of the Bay along the way to Cat Ba island where you have the options of visiting the national park, cycling around town, taking a boat trip to Monkey island or simply lazing the day away on nearby beaches. We spend the night in the island

Overnight: Holiday View hotel or similar

Meals included: breakfast

Days 3-4 Hai Phong, overnight train to Sapa

We are ferried by hydrofoil to the sea port city of Hai Phong, well known for its beautiful French colonial architecture. In the morning of the next day we visit the City Museum, Du Hang Pagoda and the Hang Kenh Communal House, There is time afterwards to take in some more sights of Hai Phong before transfer back to Ha Noi for the night train to Sapa, we travel in air-conditioned comfort in our soft sleeper cabins! (approx 10 hours)

Overnight: Huu Nghi hotel or similar

Meals included: breakfasts

Day 5 Sapa

You are met on arrival into Lao Cao in the early morning and transferred to Sapa by minibus, driving through dramatic and breathtaking scenery. The remainder of your day is at leisure to explore this fascinating town. You can take some exercise with a walk to Cat Cat village, set in a beautiful valley just outside Sapa. As you walk to the village nestled in the valley below Sapa, you will meet some of the local minority people on their way to and from Sapa. These minority people walk to Sapa to trade at the markets - always an exciting place.

Remember that the weather gets cold particularly in January and February so don't forget some warm clothing.

Overnight: Chau Long hotel or similar

Meals included: none

ETHNIC MINORITIES OF VIETNAM

There is nothing better than walking amongst the rice paddy patchwork that makes up the mountains of northwest Vietnam. To awake and wander off from the village among the clouds and watch as the mist rises from the mountaintops is unforgettable. Vietnam is home to 54 ethnic minorities and a number of these have made the mountainous region of the north their base. During our time here we'll meet many of these fascinating people and have the privilege of staying as guests in their villages. As we wander through the mountains we're constantly met by the delighted squeals and smiles of children and we'll see many members of the ethnic groups who still wear their traditional dress. We'll meet people dressed in exquisite hand-embroidered clothes, and others

weaving fabrics, embroidering ancient patterns, dying cloth with indigo and using beeswax to create a batik design. The ethnic groups are well adapted to the harsh life on hillsides, and you will see many terraces built into the slopes where rice and vegetables are grown.

Day 6 Sapa trek- Ta Van homestay

Following breakfast you embark on a six hour trek which takes you along buffalo paths and trails and through several hilltribe villages. This is an absolutely spectacular walk through stunning scenery inhabited by some of the friendliest people you can hope to meet. Stopping for a picnic lunch along the way, you spend the night with a family in Ta Van Village, inhabited by the Zay people. These people have become very adept at rice cultivation, in marked contrast to the H'mong, and have a higher living standard as a result.

TREKKING

The mountains and valleys of Sapa offer spectacular scenery, clear air and fascinating hilltribe villages. The trek consists of a combination of walking and moderate hiking. For the most part, we walk along established tracks used by local people and the trek is led throughout by a qualified guide. Although everyone can walk at his or her own pace, there are some steep ascents and descents, which can be tough on your legs. We recommend that you bring hiking boots with ankle support as footing can be treacherous. You will only require a small amount of luggage during the trek, and you can leave the vast majority of your belongings in storage at our hotel in Hanoi, leaving you with only a small daypack to carry. Our accommodation will be in village houses. Basic bedding is provided, but we recommend you bring your own sleeping sheet. As we are trekking through one of Vietnam's most remote regions, please be prepared for very basic washing facilities

Overnight: homestay (multi share)

Meals included: breakfast, lunch and dinner

Day 7 Sapa trek- overnight train back to Ha Noi

After breakfast, you set off for a two hour walk to Giang Ta Chai village where you meet up with your vehicle to take you back to Sapa town. Arriving back in Sapa around lunchtime, you have a free afternoon to further explore the town before your transfer to the train station for the an overnight trip back to Hanoi

Meals included: breakfast

Your adventure ends upon arrival in Hanoi. If you do not have other arrangements in Vietnam, Vietnam Spirit Travel can book additional nights for you at the starting point hotel

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

2 nights hotel, 1 night homestay, 2 nights 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. This trip operates on a twin share basis (two single beds in one room) except when we are in a home-stay where we are one big happy family. Single supplements are only applicable to single travellers who wish to have their own room and are not applicable on overnight trains and boats

transport

Ha Noi – Ha Long:	car or minibus
Ha Long – Cat Ba island:	junk boat
Cat Ba island – Hai Phong:	hydrofoil
Ha Noi – Sa Pa and return :	night train

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, lunch on boat, city tour in Hai Phong, Sapa hilltribe trekking and homestay

physical rating: easy* to moderate**

You are required to carry your pack on and off trains and buses, up hotel steps, etc. Your itinerary includes an easy paced trekking of several hours in Sapa on hilly terrain, in conditions that are likely to be hot and muggy.

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\guides 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.

meal inclusions

5 breakfasts, 2 lunches and 2 dinners

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. Your group leader/guide will be able to suggest favourite restaurants during your trip.

meal budget

please allow USD10 each day for meals not included

You will also need to allow enough money for the following:

Money for drinks and shopping.

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.

SUPPLEMENTARY TOUR INFORMATION

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 management, requesting that you speak to or leave a message for us. To do this, please refer to our Emergency Contact.

If you have pre-booked an airport transfer you will be met on arrival at Hanoi Airport. Our representative will be holding a sign with your name when you exit the airport terminal. If for any reason you cannot locate the person please call our management and if you have not made contact with our representative within 30 minutes of clearing customs and immigration, we recommend that you make your own way to the starting point hotel. 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. Providing you were eligible for a transfer you will then be reimbursed for this cost on arrival.

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

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

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.

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.

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

