



The Spirit of Adventure

Sapa homestay & Trekking

4 days

highlights

Sapa overnight train
Colourful hill-tribes of Sapa's cool climate
Great trekking amongst ethnic hill-tribes villages
Homestay experience
Breathtaking views along the way

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

Day 1 : Overnight train to Sapa

20h30 Our guide picks you up from the hotel. Transfer to railway station for a 10 hour night train to Sapa.

Overnight: Soft sleeper train.

Day 2 : Sapa

We 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. Cat Cat is home to the H'mong people who originated from China about 3000 years ago. The H'mong people are easily recognisable by their dark blue or black clothing. The dye is made from the indigo plant which is native to the area. H'mong women wear long aprons with embroidered waistcoats and have their hair rolled up into a turban-like hat, while the men wear a black skullcap, long waistcoat and loose trousers. 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. As well as the H'mong, you can expect to see the Dao (pronounced Zao). Dao women are particularly striking as they wear a large red turban often covered with old coins or jewellery, and shave their hair and eyebrows. Remember that the weather gets cold particularly in January and February so don't forget some warm clothing.

Overnight: Chau Long hotel or similar

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 3 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.

Overnight: Simple family homestay

Meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner.

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

Day 4 Giang Ta Chai - Sa pa, 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 night train to Hanoi.

*Overnight: Soft sleeper train.
Meals: 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

transport

Overnight train, private transport and transfer, walking.

accommodation

superior class hotel (1 nt), family homestay (1 nt, multi-share basis), soft sleeper overnight train (2 nts)

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

physical rating: moderate**

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 trekking of 3-6 hours in hilly terrain, in conditions that are likely to be hot and muggy. You may raise your heart rate on these trips, so a basic level of fitness is required

physical preparation You should be a person who takes regular walking exercise to enjoy this trip to the fullest.

travel insurance

Travel insurance is highly recommended on these trips. When selecting a travel insurance policy we recommend that at a minimum you are covered for medical expenses including emergency repatriation. We also recommend that the policy also covers personal liability, cancellation, curtailment and loss of luggage and personal effects

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

2 breakfasts, 1 lunch and 1 dinner

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!

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

You can leave your main baggage at the hotel in Hanoi and take a small bag to Sapa.

checklist

Sun block

Insect Repellant

Passport

Camera and Film

Money (there are no banking facilities in the area)

Trekking shoes

Warm clothes for the winter months (Nov to Feb).The mean temperature in Hanoi in January is just 16 degrees celsius and in Sapa 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