



Culinary Vietnam - Discover Vietnam's grass roots through its cuisine  
1<sup>ST</sup> October 2014 – 31 March 2015

# DESTINATION ASIA

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT FOR ASIA'S TRAVEL CONNOISSEURS

## **Itinerary – Vietnam**

### **9 Days Discover Vietnam's grass roots through its cuisine**



Vietnamese cuisine doesn't win any points for complexity. Many of the most popular dishes can be made just as well on the side of the road as in a top-end restaurant. In this new journey to discover Vietnamese cuisine guests are going to make and taste some of the best known dishes guided and instructed by local experts.

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## Day 1

## Hanoi



Vietnam's capital is described by almost all who go there as "an old-fashioned city". Old-fashioned in style, it is a city of lakes, parks, trees, villas, mansions and an area called the Old French Quarter where crumbling houses are crammed into narrow alleyways that are still named after the goods that were traded there.

Old-fashioned in atmosphere, Hanoi has sidewalk cafes, pavement barbers, wide tree-lined bicycle-filled boulevards, and elegant colonial French mansions. The grandeur and solemnity of Ho Chi Minh's monumental Mausoleum, the incongruous rustic simplicity of the house in which 'Uncle Ho' lived out his final years, the barely concealed misery of the Hoa Lo Prison, the 'Hanoi Hilton' where so many prisoners of war were incarcerated, the religious pride that constructed the beautiful temple of Literature compound - it's all here in Hanoi, a microcosm of the Vietnamese culture.

On arrival our representative will transfer you to your chosen hotel in Ha Noi where guests are staying for two nights.

Early in the evening guests are collected from the hotel and transferred to a local home to enjoy an evening meal with a specially chosen host family. After a brief welcome the history of the family and the house will be explained. You will be shown around their modest home and you will see the family's ancestral altar for worshipping. Before the meal with the family your host will introduce you to tonight's dishes and their favorite cuisine. The menu for dinner will include traditional Vietnamese dishes and vegetarians can be catered for on advance request. After dinner take some time to relax and chat with your hosts whilst enjoying traditional tea and sweets. The family will explain Vietnamese Tea Culture and share some personal memories with you and you will have an opportunity to do likewise so that both parties will gain insights into each other's worlds.

**Meals included**  
**Accommodation**

Home hosted dinner  
At your selected accommodation

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## Day 2 Hanoi

For years Vietnamese steamed rice rolls have been the long-lasting perfect comfort food to food lovers. In the North of Vietnam a very famous southern district in Hanoi named Thanh Tri is the place for plain rice sheets. Without any filling Bánh Cuốn Thanh Tri is well known with its delicate, flavorful rice paper - the pride of local makers.

After breakfast you are transferred to Thanh Tri village where guests are welcomed by the home-hosted owners. Then make a visit to a local market where guests are introduced to vegetables and ingredients needed to make the dishes they will be preparing. Then we walk back to the house through the village's paths and start to make some of Vietnams special dishes with the help of local expert's. There is also the chance to learn how to make fruit carving and food decoration before your lunch in the middle of the garden. About mid-afternoon return to Hanoi and guests will continue to explore Hanoi city through the street food tour with a local guide.

In this afternoon activity the local guide will take guests to visit some of the markets that are not usually visited by tourists. Guests will learn about and taste some of the ingredients used in the local cuisine and watch the buying and selling rituals of a typical Vietnamese market. After the market visit guests will take a break to enjoy the best drinks of Vietnam with the locals at one of many sidewalk cafes in the historic Old Quarter. Following a drink we continue on to taste some of Vietnams best dishes – from the North. Return to hotel around 7 PM and the rest of evening is free for your own exploration of this great city.



<b>Meals included</b>	Breakfast, lunch, dinner
<b>Accommodation</b>	At your selected accommodation

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## Day 3

## Hanoi

## Hue

While Hanoi has rich food traditions and many of Vietnam's most famous dishes - Hue is famed for its Imperial cuisine originally prepared for the emperor and its emphasis is more on presentation than taste.

In the third day of the trip guests take the hour flight to Hue - the imperial capital of the Nguyen Dynasty between 1802 and 1945. Upon arrival at the airport you are welcomed and transferred to the city for the first visit to one of the religious sites in Hue – the Dong Thien pagoda.

Hue is considered the center of Buddhism in Vietnam and the city and surrounding rural areas have many pagodas that have been built in the last 400 years. Although small compared to other pagodas, Dong Thien Pagoda is a very special place where our guests may visit and enjoy a modest but delicious Buddhist vegetarian lunch with the pagoda's friendly resident nuns.

Arriving at Dong Thien Pagoda you will follow a beautiful path in the cool shade of the trees heading uphill. From our selected vantage point you can enjoy the views and admire the serene location of the pagoda before entering through the main gate. Take a walk around the pagoda and visit the main hall with its beautiful collection of Buddha statues. Guests will have chance to talk with the chief nun who is a master of Zen and you will see the influence of this peaceful philosophy evident everywhere. Visit the kitchen and meet the nuns who will prepare your lunch, and then sit down and experience the typical vegetarian lunchtime meal of the nuns in Hue. After lunch guests can enjoy some dessert and interact with the nuns to discover more about their lives in the pagoda, their practice of Buddhism, and how they came to become nuns.

Leaving the pagoda guests are transferred to the hotel for check-in and a refresh before venturing out for dinner. Tonight it's in one of the five unique houses in the best local restaurant situated at the Garden house Phu Mong with traditional style design. At Ancient Hue visitors can sample local delights or may wish to try the chef's specialties that are mix of Asian and European flavors.

### **Meals included** **Accommodation**

Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner  
At your selected accommodation





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## Day 4 Hue

After breakfast guests will leave the city for a short transfer to the wharf for a cruise to Thuy Bieu ancient village. The village is located along the upstream bank of the Perfume River.

Merely 7km from Hue city center, Thuy Bieu is a hidden gem of untouched nature and culture. Despite the ravages of wars and time, Thuy Bieu remains intact, as it was many hundreds of years ago when Nguyen Lords first founded the land. Its housing architecture is typical of Hue with small cottages hidden in large luxuriant gardens, long gates and fences carved out of ornamental trees.



On the way to the village stop en-route to visit Dong Ba market where guests will buy the food and ingredients necessary for the cooking class with a local chef. Before reaching the village guests also stop to visit the symbol of Hue's religious foundations – Thien Mu Pagoda

Built in 1601 between a river and a pine forest, the Thien Mu Pagoda ("Heavenly Lady Pagoda") in Hue is one of the oldest and most attractive religious buildings in the country. Among the many interesting and somber artifacts housed at the complex is the car that took the monk Thich Quang Duc to his self-immolation in 1963 Saigon.



Upon arrival at the village guests will first take a walking or biking excursion around the village and learn about the local culture through the architecture of garden houses, old ancestral temples and the friendly local people guests will meet en-route. Stop to visit an incense making family to discover the daily life of local people. Return to Thuy Bieu house for the cooking class with a local chef who will proudly share with guests his favorite dishes. Have lunch enjoying traditional Hue dishes that you have cooked before relaxing your feet in medicinal herbal water and enjoying a foot massage by sight impaired people.

Return to the city by car for an afternoon visit to the Imperial Citadel. The Citadel was started in 1805 under the reign of Emperor Gia Long and completed in 1832 under the reign of Emperor Minh Mang. Despite being over 200 years old the complex is still very much in its original state with nearly 140 small and large constructions. Leaving the Citadel you will be transferred to Long An Palace which reopened to the public in late March 2012 after being closed for the preceding four years while it underwent a major restoration. The Hue Monuments Conservation Center also reopened the Hue Museum of Royal Fine Arts inside the palace. Here you will see more than 10,000 items used by members of the Nguyen Dynasty as well as artifacts from other Asian countries. The collection includes artifacts made of wood, gold, pottery, ivory, bronze, and stone and includes ancient coins and royal seals. Guests are free this evening for dinner on your own



<b>Meals included</b>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
<b>Accommodation</b>	At your selected accommodation

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## Day 5 Hue Hoi An

Leaving Hue this morning for the overland drive to Hoi An town via Cloudy Pass – one of the most scenic hillside roads in Vietnam. When braving the steep winding roads of this paved mountain pass, guests will have the chance to discover the peace, serenity and history of the area during this journey.

Check-in to one of many riverside or beachside resorts upon arrival and have lunch on your own.

In the afternoon guests will enjoy a guided tour to explore the ancient town including a visit to the Chinese communal houses and pagodas - the unique Japanese covered bridge, architecture reminiscent of traders of a bygone era - Japanese, French, Chinese, and Indian, as well as beautifully preserved ancient houses. You will also have a chance to visit the Hoi An local market or shop for art at one of the numerous galleries all the while enjoying the riverside ambience.

This evening its time to enjoy a 2-hour romantic dinner cruise on the Thu Bon river where guests can take in the sunset with cocktails followed by a set menu dinner with fresh seafood onboard. After dinner return to the resort or head off for further walking and shopping in the town at your pace.

*Alternatively guests may wish to have a romantic dinner at Mango Mango restaurant's opened terrace overlooking to Hoi An ancient town with an exclusive meet with the restaurant's chef at the end of the meal.*

<b>Meals included</b>	Breakfast, Dinner
<b>Accommodation</b>	At your selected accommodation



## Day 6 Hoi An

This morning tour will start with a guided bicycle ride to the herb gardens of Tra Que Village- a charming little village on the edge of Hoi An. The village is famous for its sweet scented & green vegetables that spice up the daily meals of the Hoi An people: Cao Lau and Quang noodle. A talk is also given on the art of Vietnamese gastronomy, vegetables, herbs & spices and how to prepare and use them. Then guests will enjoy a cooking class with local dishes prepared by the friendly and hospitable host. Return to the resort on your bike and the rest of the day is time to relax at the resort's swimming pool. Dinner is on your own.



<b>Meals included</b>	Breakfast, lunch
<b>Accommodation</b>	At your selected accommodation

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Day 7

Hoi An

Ho Chi Minh City

After an-hour morning flight guests will arrive in Ho Chi Minh City - commonly known as Saigon and the largest city in Vietnam. Guests are warmly welcomed by our local guide for the short transfer to your hotel in downtown that will be your home for the next two nights.

In early afternoon you will start to visit the city's highlights with a visit at the former Presidential Palace, now preserved as a museum and including the underground communications bunkers, headquarters for the Saigon Government during the American War. Continue to the History Museum, which houses an excellent display tracing the origins of the indigenous Vietnamese. Alternatively you may wish to visit the Fine Art Museum of the city that is indispensable for those who are keen on Vietnam arts and culture. Onwards to visit Notre Dame. An impressive neo-Romanesque cathedral in the centre of city. The 'wedding cake' styled hotel d'ville and Dong Khoi Street, formerly the centre of haute couture in Saigon when it was known as Rue Catinat. If time permitted and if interested, guests are dropped off at Ben Thanh central market for an orientation tour of the market with escort guide then return to hotel for a refresh before the evening activity.

This evening tour is partly night excursion, partly street food adventure. At 6PM guests are picked up from their hotel by an antique vespa. First stop - a coffee shop to "watch the world go by" and enjoy an appetizer before adventuring to a favorite local eating spot. Guests experience the nightlife of Saigon the way locals do - all from the back of a vintage Vespa scooter. The tour will start with a ride to Chinatown and then head to District 4 through busy streets and alleys to see the nightlife of locals and enjoy street seafood and cold drinks. Places off the tourist track. Leaving district 4 to district 3 the tour passes through downtown (district 1) to take in the sights on the way to Banh Xeo. This is a specialty of Saigon. Then the tour will continue to a hidden Vietnamese-style coffee shop to have a taste of Vietnamese music (live) as a local would do. After that the tour will bring guests to a lively bar to enjoy the drinks with live music. Guests ride pillion behind drivers for the whole trip. It's back to the hotel at the end of the tour.

**Meals included**

Breakfast, dinner

**Accommodation**

At your selected accommodation





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## Day 8 Ho Chi Minh City

This morning you are departing Ho Chi Minh City for the 2.5 hour drive toward Cai Be town where you will take a private cruise excursion departing from Phu An hamlet at around 1000. Upon embarkation on Cai Be Princess boat, clients are welcomed with fresh cotton towels. The tour will start with a visit to the Cai Be floating market. Here we cruise among local sampans coming from all provinces of the delta loaded with fruit and vegetables. Your sampan will proceed to Dong Hoa Hiep island located between Vinh Long and Cai Be. During this 40 minutes cruise you will be able to discover the beautiful landscapes along the river and observe typical Mekong Delta rural life. These evergreen islands among the Mekong River still remain unknown to many people.



Later we visit an ancient mandarin house dating from the 19th century where the family will welcome you with a cup of tea. Back on board we head off to observe the activity of the largest rice stock market in the region.

Our other stops will allow you to see a traditional brick and tile factory and how locals are using palm leaves for houses. Cruising a further 20 minutes we reach the Phu An hamlet passing by the beautiful Cai Be church. We will also visit some interesting home factories to see how rice paste is made, also rice cookies, coco candies as well as longan fruit drying process. Lunch awaits you at Le Longanier, a superb Indochinese villa located in a lush tropical garden by the river and surrounded by fruit orchards. After a short walk along a beautiful canal our excursion ends at approx. 3.30pm at the Ba Bon Bridge where your own private transportation vehicle is waiting to return you to Ho Chi Minh city by about 5PM



In this evening guests are free for last minute shopping and dinner is on your own.

<b>Meals included</b>	Breakfast, lunch
<b>Accommodation</b>	At your selected accommodation

## Day 9 Ho Chi Minh City

Guests are free until it is time to be transferred back to Saigon airport for the flight back home or to the next destination.

<b>Meals included</b>	Breakfast
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~ END OF SERVICE ~