

Cultural Vietnam - 8 Days Life through the local eyes
1ST October 2014 – 31 March 2015

DESTINATION ASIA

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT FOR ASIA'S TRAVEL CONNOISSEURS

Itinerary – Vietnam 8 Days Life through the local eyes



More people are coming to Vietnam in recent decades for traveling and doing business but Vietnamese culture may be still mysterious and unknown to most foreigners and getting to know Vietnam and Vietnamese culture is interesting and fascinating.

With this package guests are going to do something with the local people and also experience daily life by staying amongst the locals at selected hotels and homestays

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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 hotel in Ha Noi. Overnight at one of the best three star boutique hotels in Hanoi's Old Quarter for a night



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 by special 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

Dinner
At your selected accommodation

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Day 2 Hanoi

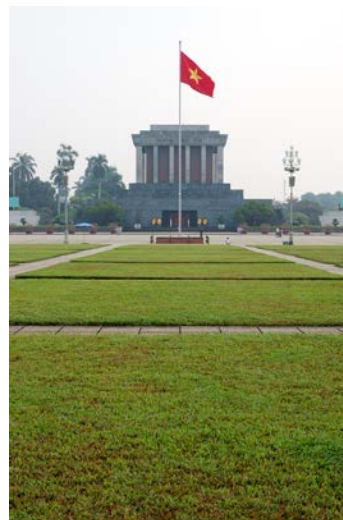
For the half-day tour to visit the Ho Chi Minh complex, guests will first visit Dinh Square – a quiet place where silent sentries guard the marble and granite mausoleum where Ho Chi Minh lies in state. (Subject to opening times the interior of the mausoleum can be visited). See the simple cottage where Uncle Ho lived and worked. Nearby we visit the Ho Chi Minh Museum - an extraordinary tribute to the life of the 'father of the country' and the key figure in Vietnamese independence. French architecture is a feature of Hanoi and the nearby former Governor's Residence is a fine example. We also see the One Pillar Pagoda and hear the legend surrounding its construction - born from the love of an emperor in the 11th Century.

Alternatively you may wish to experience Ha Noi's Highlights instead. We take an orientation of the tree-lined streets of Hanoi, resplendent with French colonial architecture, including the recently restored Opera House. Pass by Hoan Kiem Lake, also known as the Lake of the Restored Sword - from the legend that surrounds it en-route to one of the city's many fascinating museums (Army, History or Fine Arts depending on your preference). Continue to the Temple of Literature - built in 1070 and dedicated to Confucius. This is a serene retreat from the busy streets outside. Later in it's life it became Vietnam's first university. Then take to the streets on foot for a walking tour of the Ancient Quarter or 36 Streets District. This densely populated corner of the city was once the centre for commerce where goods were sold under the street name of a particular guild. Still a thriving community of sellers today you will see names such as Sugar Street, Tin Street and Paper Street. Ancient homes and temples are interspersed with stores in this souvenir hunter's paradise!

After lunch at a local restaurant we leave Hanoi for the 2-hour drive to Ky Son village where guests are warmly welcomed and will enjoy a comfortable stay and experience rural life for one night with the locals at Moon Garden homestay. Depending on the arrival time the activities below can be made either in the afternoon or the next morning.

In the afternoon guests are encouraged to join as many activities as possible involving the locals. Enjoy a herbal hand massage, have a conversation with the host family on local culture and traditional customs or even learn some Vietnamese. You may also take a bike ride and visit the surrounding areas with markets and a kindergarten (if open). Why not stop to visit the many houses en-route and help with plowing or making rice beds, transplant seedlings or harvest some rice (or cassava, corn, sweet potatoes...) depending on the harvest season. Enjoy some local drinks before returning to a traditional, refreshing steam bath with fragrant herbs. Having dinner in a house's courtyard and finally enjoying a traditional way to get a good nights sleep - by way of herbs. Overnight in your comfortable private room at one of the old houses in this village

Meals included	Breakfast, lunch, dinner
Accommodation	At your selected accommodation



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Day 3

Hanoi

Da Nang – Hoi An

Join the locals for a morning Yijinjing – a traditional exercise in the courtyard before breakfast. Then guests will have free time relaxing on a hammock in the garden, taking pictures in farmers clothes, chatting with the locals or further discovering the village and surrounding areas. Bid farewell to the owners about mid-morning and take the drive to Hanoi's airport for an hour flight to coastal Da Nang. Upon arrival at the local airport guests are transferred to Hoi An's outskirts for a relaxing experience in a peaceful local garden surrounded by friendly people.

This homestay is an exclusive villa retreat encompassed within a 3000 square meter tropical landscape in a small village - near the city center of Hoi An. This boutique property consists of 10 stylish villas and rooms that have been inspired by the Vietnamese concept of unity between man and his environment. The Homestay Villas is a 10-minute walk from the center of Hoi An town and a 20-minute bicycle ride to the beach. Or guests can simply relax by the swimming pool which is surrounded by a tropical garden.

Check-in to your own room and have the rest of the day free at leisure until it is time to join the cooking experience organised by a homestay family member and followed by dinner showcasing local specialties. After dinner guests can simply make a visit Hoi An town with guidance from the houses family to explore the town at night time.

Hoi An - a civilisation cut off by destroyed rail lines and a silted river, leaving it untouched by war and almost frozen in time. No cars are allowed to pass through Hoi An, rendering it an excellent walking village. The visit at Hoi An town should include a visit to Chinese communal houses/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. At day time you will also have chance to visit the Hoi An local market or shop for art at one of the numerous galleries and enjoy the riverside ambience.

Meals included

Breakfast, Dinner

Accommodation

At your selected accommodation



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Day 4 Hoi An

After breakfast at the homestay guests are free to extend for another nights stay or may wish to take the walking tour with the escorted guide to visit the town's highlights before leaving for an ethnic minority commune.

This special trip to an ethnic commune takes guests from Hoi An through picturesque rice paddies, climbing into the mountains West of Da Nang into the Ka Tu minority regions - just 80km away - a stunning 2hr drive.

Upon arrival, guests will experience the local culture first hand by lunching with a former Ka Tu king and staying in a traditional village in custom built bungalows. Activities in the village include trekking and a traditional gong and dance performance in the evening.



Meals included Breakfast, lunch, dinner
Accommodation At your selected accommodation

Day 5 Hoi An Ho Chi Minh City

The second day of this excursion sees us traveling back to Hoi An via a different route. We visit a traditional weaving handicraft village and journey along the Ho Chi Minh highway through pristine rainforest. We then stop for a gourmet picnic lunch by tropical waterfalls before heading back to Da Nang airport for the flight to Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon).

On arrival at Tan Son Nhat airport, guests are welcomed by the local guide for a short transfer to a hidden boutique guesthouse that encapsulates the concepts of French rural life.

During this first evening in the Saigon you are going to take an orientation tour of the city's highlight that is partly night excursion, partly street food adventure. At 6PM guests are picked up from the guesthouse 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 a few drinks with live music. Guests ride pillion behind local drivers for the whole trip and get back to your comfortable room at the end of the tour.



Meals included Breakfast, lunch & street food tour
Accommodation At your selected accommodation

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Day 6 Ho Chi Minh City

In this special morning tour guests will explore this vibrant, electric city, moving away from the initial tourist-type sights to some of the lesser-visited but equally interesting places in the city.

The trip starts in early morning with a visit to a local flower market in District 10. Here a wide variety of flowers are sold including roses, daisies, orchids, lilies, salem, mimosa, sun flowers and lotus flowers as well as wild flowers. Trucks deliver flower boxes from Hanoi and Dalat cities to the market daily and some flowers are even imported from Japan, Thailand and China. This busy local market has about 100 trading households and is said to receive between 1,000-3,000 flower boxes daily, depending on the season, which are then traded to buyers who visit from all areas of the city.



Then, let's journey out of the city centre to the Cu Chi region where you will visit the vast underground network of tunnels built first as a defence against the French and later expanded during the American war. It was from here that the North Vietnamese waged their guerrilla warfare. You will marvel at their ingenuity and resilience. See secret trapdoors, underground kitchens, living areas and meeting rooms. The more adventurous may explore the deeper second, and even third level tunnels. For those preferring to remain above ground there is ample opportunity to view excavated areas from above. Your guide will advise you of the length and level of difficulty of each tunnel before entering - some are easily accessed by stairs. We recommend good walking shoes and sun protection for this tour and advise you may get a little dirty!



Having lunch at a riverside restaurant nearby the tunnel with a Vietnamese set lunch then return to Saigon visiting some Saigon secrets

In this afternoon, continue to visit the first and only museum in the city that specializes in Vietnamese traditional medicine – the Fito Museum. This very first museum of traditional medicine in Vietnam has been skillfully crafted with stunning interiors made from wood. Frames of wooden houses were transported from some northern provinces to give the museum an antique look. The museum has a black ebony fence and two bamboo hedges at its gate. Staircases are made of black wood with intricately carved handrails. Even the museum's elevator is framed with black carved wood. Each level has an open space for indoor plants and herbs. According to the manager of the Fito museum, the museum was founded to house the ancient traditional medicines used for posterity and for future generations to be better able to understand the diverse Vietnamese herbs and their applications in various ailments. The core collection of the museum contains over 3,000 varieties of traditional Vietnamese medicines dating back to the Stone Ages. It also includes different tools that were used in the preparation of these medicines. Some of these 2,500 year old knives, grinders, mortars and pestles used at that time for preparing the medicinal concoctions were brought from the homes of two of the founders of Vietnamese traditional medicine, Tue Tinh and Hai Thuong Lan Ong – Le Huu Trac.



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Leaving the medicine museum, enjoy some cool drinks at one of the best local coffee shops in Saigon - Tram coffee. This popular coffee shop for local residents is located in the Phu Nhuan District alongside a pagoda and offers a tranquil environment filled with water pools and green plants. The atmosphere inside provides a respite from the bustle of this city that can be at times overwhelming to visitors and locals alike.

Afterwards head back to the city center to visit the Nam Chon temple that is situated in District 1 and was built over 100 years ago as a place of worship for local residents. Everyday around 5PM at Nam Chon Temple martial artists gather around to practice Vietnamese Kungfu called Nam Huynh Dao. If lucky you may meet and join a Kungfu class with the instructor.

Finally continue on to visit the building where the last helicopter evacuated employees of the U. S. Government. This apartment building became an icon of the Fall of Saigon in 1975. A Dutch photographer, Hubert van Es, working for UPI, took a photograph that captured the last chaotic days of the Vietnam War and most people believed that it showed desperate Americans crowding on to the roof of the United States Embassy to board an evacuation helicopter. The photo depicts an Air America Huey helicopter landing on the roof of the elevator shaft to evacuate employees of the U. S. Government as North Vietnamese Army troops entered Saigon.

Whilst not normally accessible to the public, subject to special advance permission a visit to this rooftop, one of the most iconic war sites in Saigon, may be organized for our guests.

Return to your hotel in the late evening and the rest of the night is at leisure with dinner on your own.

Meals included	Breakfast, lunch, dinner
Accommodation	At your selected accommodation

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Day 7 Ho Chi Minh City

Today following the 2.5 hour drive from Saigon you will come to the town of Cai Be where the program will start with a visit to the Cai Be colorfull floating market. Cruise amongst local barges full of fruits and vegetables in a wooden boat. Then an optional stop can be made at local workshops where you can see how rices paste, coconut candy and pop-rice/pop-corn are made. And you will also visit the handicraft village where local people produce rice-net for spring-rolls, fish sauce & soya sauce, cooking salt, and sewing coconut-leaves.

A Vietnamese set lunch will be served at a local house then the rowing boat will take you deeper into the countryside on smaller canals and to enjoy the peaceful surrounds. It is so interesting to see traditional houses made of wood and palm tree leaves and see some activities of the local farmers with an opportunity to make contact with them and see how they catch fish or pick fruit the 'old way' in the Mekong Delta..

Next we will visit a nursery garden where you have contact with traditional farmers - Mr Tiger & his son who are very sucessful in Vietnam agriculture. Upon arrival at Ut Trinh homestay enjoy some fruits and tea while listening to traditional music.

In the afternoon you can enjoy biking on village paths to see the local farms and houses – the real life of the local people. Or you can simple relax before joining in cooking with the owners. During dinner you may wish to have a cup of tea or rice wine when talking with the owners about the culture, people, history of this land.



Meals included	Breakfast, lunch, dinner
Accommodation	At your selected accommodation

Day 3 Ho Chi Minh City

Following a simple breakfast you can walk along to the village and enjoy the fresh air in the morning before leaving the house for a boat trip to visit the brick-kilns where you can see how the local people create beatiful pottery from clay. Our boat will go along to the floating village and you can learn how to farm catfish on the Mekong river

Finally you will visit the Vinhlong market in the town where you to take pictures of fish, shrimps, prawns, crabs, snakes, rice-field rats, tropical fruits and vegetables. The cruise will end at Vinh Long city then you are transferred back to Ho Chi Minh city with lunch en-route. Guests may wish to take another night stay in the city or catch an evening flight to their next destination.

Meals included	Breakfast, lunch
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