

Classic Vietnam

14 Days sample itinerary



Travel the length of the country from Saigon to Hanoi on this Classic trip of Vietnam. Starting in the bustling metropolis of Saigon, explore the Cu Chi Tunnels, visit a Wildlife Rescue Centre and journey through the fascinating waterways of the tropical Mekong Delta. Then on to the magical merchant town and ancient trading port of Hoi An, with ample time to stroll the charming laneways or relax on Cua Dai beach. Discover the citadel and tombs of Hue, the former royal capital and seat of the Nguyen Dynasty, and visit an ancient village, providing a glimpse into this area's royal past. Travel to Hanoi with its French colonial architecture and tree lined boulevards. End your trip with a two day cruise on the emerald waters of Halong Bay, where thousands of limestone rock sculptures jut dramatically from the sea.

Our Classic itineraries cover the key attractions with carefully selected experiences to ensure you get the most out of your holiday. Classic itineraries include time for relaxation or for adding extra activities. Discuss itinerary options and extensions with our Asia Travel Experts.

Suggested Itinerary

Day 1: Saigon

You will meet your guide on arrival, transfer and check-in to your hotel. During the drive your guide will provide an introduction to Saigon, answer any questions you have, and make arrangements for the following day. Enjoy free time for the remainder of the first day.

Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) in southern Vietnam is a sprawling metropolis of ten million people. Formally renamed Ho Chi Minh City in 1975 at the end of the Vietnam-American war, locals still refer to Saigon. With thousands of motorbikes zipping past luxury cars, French colonial buildings dwarfed by modern skyscrapers and traditionally dressed school girls riding bicycles past trendy city workers, Saigon is an exciting city of contrasts.

Saigon is a city that never sleeps and offers a plethora of great restaurants and bars catering to all tastes, from street food vendors to the rooftop bar at the Rex Hotel, where international correspondents covered the Vietnam War and where the U.S. military attaché's press briefing was held daily and dubbed the "Five O'clock Follies". Whatever your interests, be sure to ask your guide for personal recommendations.

Itinerary Option: If you're arriving to Saigon in the morning, discuss additional day 1 activities with our staff.

Day 2: Saigon

Tour Saigon's historic landmarks with your guide. Visit the Notre Dame Cathedral, a red brick building with twin spires based on the original construction from Paris, then head across the square to the Central Post Office designed by the French architect Gustav Eiffel. Next stop is the former Presidential Palace, headquarters to the Saigon Government during the Vietnam-American war. You may also like to visit the War Remnants Museum for a vivid insight into the Vietnam-American war from a Vietnamese perspective. In the afternoon, enjoy free time to continue your exploration of Saigon.

Day 3: Mekong Delta

Depart your hotel this morning for a 1.5 hour drive heading south to Ben Tre, known to be one of the biggest coconut orchards in Vietnam. Take in the lush surroundings of rice paddies and fruit farms alongside the highway as you leave behind the busy city. Arrive at the waterfront pier and embark on an enjoyable motor boat excursion, take a glimpse at the Delta scenery, houses built on stilts and local fish farms along the way. Cruising among islands with names such as Dragon, Unicorn, Turtle and Phoenix. You will stop along the way to discover how Vietnamese farmers work their rice fields and observe the daily life of the villagers in the Mekong Delta.

Take a short horse cart (or moto-cart) ride along country roads to a tropical orchard for a tasting session of local honey and some exotic fruits. Engage in a casual chat with your host and stroll through the garden to get an insight into daily farming life. Take some time to enjoy a leisurely walk through the village observing tropical gardens along the way. Continue discovering the Mekong by cruising the small canals lined with palm and coconut trees.

Stop at Vinh Trang pagoda, which was built in 1849 and is one of the first pagodas to incorporate a mixture of Asian and European architectural features. Lunch will be served at My Tho, taste some local delicacies before returning to Saigon mid afternoon.

Day 4: Saigon

The Cu Chi Tunnels are an immense network of interconnected tunnels near Saigon that are part of a much larger network lying below much of the country. A guided visit to these tunnels provides a better understanding of their history, the hardship of life underground and the resilience of the Vietnamese during combat.

The tunnels were built and used initially by the Viet Cong guerrillas as hiding spots to protect them from the French air and ground sweeps. They later served as communication routes, storage facilities, hospitals and living quarters for the guerrilla fighters throughout the Vietnam-American war.

You're invited to enter a section of the tunnels to witness the secrets of the tunnels firsthand. Your guide will also show you various mantraps employed from this period, the remains of an American tank and numerous B52 bomb craters. There is also the opportunity to fire an M60, M16 or AK47 rifle at the range next to the tunnel complex.

Optionally visit the Cu Chi Wildlife Rescue Station to understand the risk to wildlife in this area of the world and what this non-government organisation is doing to assist. The Animal Rescue Station is operated by Wildlife at Risk (WAR) which is dedicated to protecting the biodiversity of Vietnam by combating illegal wildlife trade, raising environmental awareness and by promoting the conservation of endangered species and their habitats. The Rescue Centre located near to the Cu Chi Tunnels rescues wild animals and returns them to their natural environment.

In the afternoon, return to Saigon and enjoy free time to continue your exploration of the city.

Day 5: Saigon to Hoi An

Fly to Danang where you will meet your new guide on arrival at the airport. First stop en route to Hoi An is the Marble Mountains, a cluster of five limestone and marble peaks that rise dramatically from the surrounding flat land. The local Vietnamese believe that the five peaks represent the five elements of fire, water, earth, wood and metal. Previously celebrated in the religion of the Cham people, the mountains were later used by the Viet Cong in the Vietnam-American war to monitor the US air base at Danang.

The mountains contain many caves and tunnels. Climb the cut stone steps or take the elevator up to the top of one of the peaks, and explore the caves, temples and pagodas. There are panoramic views of Danang and the coast from the many lookout points. Continue on to the beautiful old merchant town of Hoi An. Built on the site of an ancient Cham village. Hoi An was a prosperous port from the 16th to 19th centuries trading with merchants from China, Japan, India, Indonesia and Europe who came to buy silk, spices and porcelain. Hoi An's UNESCO World Heritage Old Quarter is beautifully preserved with ornate pagodas, antique trading houses and old tile-roofed shops. It is a rich architectural fusion of Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese and European styles. Many of the historic buildings lining the canals and pedestrian streets have been converted into art galleries, boutique restaurants, bars and cafes. Hoi An is surrounded by attractive countryside with traditional farming and fishing, and by sandy beaches with modern seaside resorts.

Day 6: Hoi An

Experience the charm of Hoi An on a walking tour with your guide. Wander along the narrow lanes and gain an insight into Hoi An's illustrious past as you explore this heritage listed town. Take in the old merchant houses with influences from Chinese, Japanese and Vietnamese architecture. See the 400 year old Japanese Bridge, a unique covered structure built by the Japanese, and the only known covered bridge with a Buddhist pagoda attached to the side. Visit the Assembly Hall of the Chaozhou Chinese Congregation with its outstanding wood carvings and explore the colourful market with stalls brimming with local specialties including silk which can be turned into fashionable garments within one or two days.

Enjoy free time for the remainder of the day. There is plenty to see and do in Hoi An, but many visitors find themselves relaxing by the beach, browsing the markets and boutique shops, or visiting one of the many tailors in town.

Day 7: Hoi An

Leisurely cycling through the scenic countryside. Spend a half day leisurely cycling through the scenic countryside of Vietnam far from the traffic of motor scooters and the noises of the city. You will cross the islands on the Song Thu river delta using local transportation including ferries and floating bridges. This tour will take you on a visit to artisans making bricks according to age old traditions. You will discover how wooden river boats are made and learn the secret of weaving the colourful straw "Hoi An" sleeping mats. You will spend the day in first-hand contact with the rural inhabitants of the region far from the usual tourist circuits. You will be invited into the home of a local Vietnamese family to learn their customs and traditions. After you have relaxed for a while under the shade of a mango tree you will begin your return to Hoi An.

Alternative Itinerary Option: Cooking class: Lead by a Vietnamese chef, the class gives a fabulous insight into Vietnamese culinary skills in a friendly and relaxed setting. This wonderful course is suitable for both experienced chefs wanting to learn new techniques or amateur cooks who simply want a fun day out. The tour includes a local market visit.

Day 8: Hoi An

Today is at leisure for shopping and exploring this charming town, a protected UNESCO site. Hoi An is noted for its hand sewn, tailored clothing and beautiful white sand beaches so today is an ideal day to simply enjoy the environment, relax by the pool, or people watch to your heart's content.

Day 9: Hoi An to Hue

Today you will depart Hue for Hoi An. Travel over the beautiful Hai Van Pass, Vietnam's geographical and psychological boundary between north and south, the peak of the pass perpetually shrouded in clouds. Arrive into Hue in the afternoon and check in to your hotel.

This afternoon visit Khai Dinh and Tu Duc Royal Tombs, there is also the opportunity to visit an incense stick making house. Enjoy the evening at leisure.

Day 10: Hue

This morning take a cyclo ride around the city of Hue. Visit the UNESCO listed Imperial Citadel where the Nguyen Dynasty ruled between 1802 and 1945. Enter through the towering main gate and you will appreciate the magnificent architecture and gardens while your guide explains about the events and the intrigue of the former royal court. Despite being bombed heavily, there are some incredibly well preserved sections still intact and others which are being restored. The visit also includes the Hue Royal Fine Art Museum which is housed within the former Dien Long An Royal Palace.

Continue to visit one of the famous, traditional garden houses of Hue. These houses are privately owned and set in large and attractive formal gardens. Some have connections with the old Royal Imperial Court and the house's traditional architecture has long been associated with the natural environment and the ancient belief of 'feng-shui'.

Visit Ming Mang Royal Tomb near Hue. Minh Mang was the second Nguyen Emperor whose interest in architecture brought major new construction to the Imperial City of Hue. His tomb is set in a large garden on the west bank of the Perfume River, with lakes and pavilions built in the old Chinese traditional style.

The next stop is Thien Mu pagoda, Hue's best-preserved religious monument, which stands on the riverbank with its impressive seven storey tower. Later, take a boat trip along the romantically named Perfume River as it carries you through tranquil settings of gardens and lakes on the way back to town.

Day 11: Hue to Hanoi

Transfer to the airport for your flight to Hanoi where you will meet your guide on arrival. During the drive your guide will provide an introduction to Hanoi, answer any questions you have, and make arrangements for the following day.

Hanoi is Vietnam's capital city and home to seven million people. Traditional and refined, with French colonial architecture, tree-lined boulevards, scenic lakes and a bustling Old Quarter, Hanoi has a sophisticated charm. Observe elderly people practicing Tai Chi by the lake, with barbers and food vendors plying their sidewalk trade.

Hanoi has many great restaurants with French, Vietnamese and international cuisines available. Ask your guide for personal recommendations.

Day 12: Hanoi

Accompanied by your guide, the day starts with a visit to the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum, an imposing monument lavishly built using marble and granite, where the preserved body of "Uncle Ho" resides. See the lotus shaped One Pillar Pagoda which rests on a single stone pillar emerging from the water, and then explore the Temple of Literature, the first University for the sons of mandarins, to gain an overview of Hanoi culture and ancient Vietnamese architecture.

In the afternoon, visit the Museum of Ethnology which offers a fascinating insight into Vietnam's 54 ethnic minority groups.

Continue on to the Buddhist Tran Quoc Pagoda, the oldest of all the pagodas in Hanoi, located beside the dazzling West Lake.

Visit Quan Thanh Temple with its spacious and charming landscape that helps highlight the ancient and romantic beauty of this area. Quan Thanh Temple is dedicated to Saint Huyen Thien Tran Vu who guarded and administered the north of the country.

Enjoy a walking tour through the bustling Old Quarter before ending the day with a show at the water puppet theatre, a uniquely northern Vietnamese art form depicting scenes of rural life and episodes of national history.

Itinerary Option: Your guided tour can include alternate attractions like the Hoa Lo Prison (Hanoi Hilton), the Fine Arts Museum or the KOTO restaurant - a organisation that is supporting street kids with a career in the hospitality industry. Our staff can provide advice based upon your interests.

Day 13: Halong Bay

Travel to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Halong Bay and board your deluxe junk for your overnight cruise. Marvel at the dramatic vista and relax onboard, as you sail amongst the thousands of limestone islands that rise from the turquoise waters of the Gulf of Tonkin. Rock sculptures jut dramatically from the sea and the numerous caves and grottoes have created an enchanting, timeless world.

Set sail through Bai Tu Long Bay whilst a seafood lunch is served, then sit back, relax and enjoy the scenery as you cruise past various islands en route to Cua Van fishing village. Explore the floating village by bamboo rowing boat. Visit Tien Ong Cave before returning to the junk for sunset cocktails and canapés, followed by dinner served on the deck or in the restaurant.

Day 14: Halong Bay to Hanoi

Why not begin the day with a Tai Chi class on the top deck? Or just admire the beautiful scenery as the sun rises over the azure waters. Choose between an excursion to a secluded island with a sandy beach for a morning swim, or join the chef for a cooking demonstration to learn more about Vietnamese cuisine. Enjoy a buffet brunch as your junk cruises Halong Bay, passing islets and caves as you make your way back to the dock.

You have the option to visit a pottery workshop on the trip back to Hanoi. On return from Halong Bay you are transferred to the airport for your onwards flight.

Personalise Your Trip

Phone now to discuss options to personalise your itinerary.

Ideas to upgrade or extend your itinerary:

- Cu Chi Tunnels: Learn about life in the tunnels from a Viet Cong war veteran who lived here during the war.
- Saigon: Squeeze in a Vespa motor scooter tour. Options include street food tours, a wartime landmarks tour, an art and architecture tour, and a locals insider tour.
- Saigon: Add a cooking class to spice up your itinerary, either at the renowned Saigon Culinary Arts Centre, or an exclusive class at an historic villa.
- Saigon: War history tours, including itineraries that focus on Vung Tau and Nui Dat for Australian war veterans.
- Mekong Delta: Consider adding a night in the Mekong Delta to spend more time getting to know this fascinating area of Vietnam.

- Hoi An: For those not inclined to relaxing, Hoi An has the most exciting array of activities in Vietnam, from cooking classes, culinary tours, cycling trips, fishing or farm visits, to island snorkelling and lantern making lessons.
- Hue: Enjoy a royal elephant ride at the Imperial Citadel.
- Hue: Kayak down the Perfume River at sunset.
- Hue: Explore the countryside via a driving or cycling tour, learn about Hue royal cuisine in a cooking class or culinary tour, or discover the Vietnam-American war DMZ.
- Hanoi: Tour the countryside with options to visit ancient villages, local artisans, or Mai Chau hill tribes.
- Hanoi: Other options include cycling tours, Van Long nature reserve including a boat trip (recommended), Perfume Pagoda and grotto tour, wildlife tours, cooking classes, culinary tour and art tours.
- Halong Bay: Why not spend two nights on your traditional junk boat? Refer below for details on the different boats.

Halong Bay Cruise Ships

Note that the schedule above refers to the Jasmine and Ginger luxury sailing Junks. The schedule on the Halong Bay Sails junk used on the budget price standard differs, although it is similar.

Jasmine / Ginger

The Jasmine and Ginger are luxury sailing junks with polished woodwork, French Indochina design, refined Asian decor and golden sails. The sundecks are complete with lounge chairs giving you the opportunity to sit back, relax and enjoy the spectacular scenery of Halong Bay. Relax at the bar and enjoy meals in the restaurant where lavish international brunches, casual Vietnamese lunches and formal dinners are served.

The cabins offer panoramic windows or private balconies, with individually controlled air conditioning and glass standing showers. Various optional activities are offered including kayaking to explore the bay's uninhabited islands and caverns, tai chi, cooking classes and wine tasting.

We recommend these Heritage Line junks for our Halong Bay one and two night stays due to the fantastic feedback received from our customers experience on these amazing boats. With our good relationship with Heritage Lines, we also believe these boats represent good value for this once in a lifetime experience.



Jasmine / Ginger Junk Photos.

Halong Bay Sails

The Halong Bay Sails is a traditional wooden junk with modern facilities and amenities. Cabins are decorated simply but comfortably, with large windows, en-suite showers and air conditioning. The restaurant serves fresh seafood caught locally, and the bar serves coffee and cocktails. There is a large sundeck complete with sun lounges enabling you to relax and enjoy the beauty of Halong Bay.

Excursions are similar to those on the Jasmine / Ginger junks, and include trips to floating villages or exploring rock formations by boat or kayak.

The Halong Bay Sails is used on the budget itinerary option.

Contact us for details.

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