

Touring Holidays in Vietnam

Expressions



Romance of Vietnam Touring Holiday



Romance of Vietnam

12 NIGHTS / 13 DAYS

Hanoi - Sapa - Ha Long Bay - Nha Trang - Ho Chi Minh City

Expressions

Highlights

Moon Garden Homestay visit
Visit local people at Sapa
Walk in the Hoang Lien National Park
Ethnic Sapa market
Ha Long Bay overnight cruise
Emperor cruise Nha Trang Bay
Museum of War, Ho Chi Minh City
Jade Emperor Temple
Ben Thanh market ectural tour of Hanoi



Sapa

Tracing a long, languid curve down the eastern edge of South East Asia, Vietnam is a land of extraordinary natural beauty. The shape of the land lends itself to a deliberate all-encompassing trail, beginning in the north with Hanoi, and travelling down along the coast and past the mountains to the Ho Chi Minh area, though unique routes and regions of particular focus are always possible. Our range of accommodation includes everything from lovely, boutique residences to grand, seafront, colonial hotels. Hand-crafted authentic experiences make your bespoke holiday to Vietnam even more special, with exciting possibilities available, such as an overnight village home-stay, a Vietnamese cooking class, or a sightseeing tour by Vespa or vintage car.

ABOUT THIS TOUR

During this twelve-night romantic tour, explore Vietnam, north and south, with a homestay, an overnight on a junk in Ha Long bay, an Emperor cruise in Nha Trang Bay and visits to markets in Saigon. You will meet local villagers, explore the remote region of Sapa, and then relax on an isolated peninsula in Nha Trang Bay.

PRICES

From about £4,390 per person

DATES

This holiday can be arranged throughout the year. Timings can vary depending on the month and day of the week.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- Return scheduled flights with Vietnam Airlines from London to Hanoi, returning from Ho Chi Minh City to London in economy class
- Domestic flights from Hanoi to Nha Trang, Nha Trang to Ho Chi Minh City including

airport taxes.

- Breakfast and accommodation sharing a twin or double room.
- Seven lunches and one dinner (as specified in the itinerary) plus full board on the boat in Ha Long Bay.
- Private transfers and sightseeing tours in an air-conditioned car appropriate to the size of your party
- Boat cruises as specified in the itinerary. All Ha Long boats are fully licenced and comply with current safety regulations.
- Services of an English-speaking guide as indicated in the itinerary (free days or part-free days as well as transfers unless specified do not include the services of the guide).

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

- Visas – our local agent in Vietnam offers a free visa service
- Meals, except as specified above
- Drinks, gratuities and personal expenses
- Camera fees where applicable
- Insurance

- There may be supplements for compulsory Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve gala dinners, sometimes payable locally

DAY-BY-DAY ITINERARY

Hanoi - Sapa - Ha Long Bay - Nha Trang - Ho Chi Minh City

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Day one: Arrive in Hanoi

You will be met on arrival and transferred to your hotel. Time to relax, and then, in the evening, you will enjoy a welcome dinner at restaurant in a colonial building.

Day two: Hanoi to Ky Son and Moon Garden Homestay visit

This morning, you are picked up and transferred by car to the Moon Garden Homestay in Ky Son village. This is about 50 kms from Hanoi and was originally a summer home for the family of a Hanoi-based architect, who specialises in the restoration of historic buildings and this is reflected in the design and furnishings of the homestay.

There is a lovely central courtyard with outside seating, a 100-year old church, a small pond and a bonsai garden overlooking a lake and surrounding rice fields. Upon arrival here you will have some free time to explore the grounds and the village, and then you participate in a cooking class to learn more about Vietnamese cuisine. You have lunch here and then enjoy a hand-spa treatment with traditional herbs, take a bicycle ride to discover the paths of Thang Thac Village and follow a local guide to explore the ancient village of Duong Lam and Mia Pagoda. Upon your return to Moon Garden, you will be treated to a traditional foot bath and can participate in a Vietnamese prayer ceremony. You are taken back to Hanoi in the late afternoon to spend the night in Hanoi.

Day three: Hanoi to Lao Cai and Sapa

After an early breakfast, you are met and driven to Sapa on the new highway through Yen Bai and Lao Cai provinces. The highway takes you up the Red River Delta to the place the river enters Vietnam at Lao Cai City on the border with China. This part of the country includes some of Vietnam's most spectacular scenery and these mountainous regions are home to many distinct hill tribes, including the H'mong and Dzao people. This region is cooler than other parts of Vietnam and it can be cool and foggy in January and February with average temperatures of about 10C, with the summer months of June to August being warmest but with rain.

Your destination is Sapa, perched on the mountainside opposite Mt. Fan Si Pan, Vietnam's highest peak. Sapa is in a scenic valley, surrounded by the mountains and with hillside rice terraces. The ethnic communities live in numerous villages, tucked away on the lower slopes of the valleys, and many villagers wear authentic traditional costumes. The



L'Amour Junk, Ha Long Bay

driving time from Hanoi to Sapa is about 5 and a half hours. Lunch is included on arrival and then in the afternoon there is a short drive to the entrance of Cat Cat village, home to the Black H'mongs. The village is set in a beautiful valley just outside Sapa. You spend time exploring how the locals live, there are plenty of photo opportunities and then a walk uphill for about 2 kms to meet your car to take you back to Sapa and your accommodation.

Day four: Full day to explore the most remote area of Sapa

Enjoy a hearty breakfast in anticipation of today's walk. You are driven by car deeper into Hoang Lien National park to start a trek from near Sin Chai village. This is really 'off-the-beaten-track' with spectacular views of high mountains, waterfalls and deep valleys. The trails will soon lead you to the red Dao village of Nam Nhiu where you meet the villagers, enjoy a cup of green tea with them at home and learn about their daily way of life.

You continue on the trail, leaving the village behind, and glimpse a panorama of the rice valley dotted with bamboo huts, used by farmers to sleep in during harvesting. Passing the rice terraces and a river you walk on a quiet road before reaching Nam Cang village. Lunch is served at a local home here. Nam Cang village is situated at the most remote area of Sapa. The Red Dao women wear the most colourful costumes of all Vietnam's ethnic groups. The people are very skilled at using herbs and local medicine as well as

embroidery. You are accompanied by your guide as you explore the village and learn how the locals make writing rice paper, jewelry and embroidery. At 3pm you are transferred back by car to Topas Ecolodge. Here you might want to book a traditional Red Dzao herbal bath or enjoy a private hill top dinner. (The walking today is of moderate grade and last for about 3.5 hours).

Day five: Visit an ethnic market and return to Hanoi

After an early breakfast, your car and guide will arrive to take you to a market frequented by ethnic minority peoples. Unlike the markets in tourist areas, the ones we choose are not only for buying and selling, but are meeting places for local people to exchange views. There will be plenty of colour and authentic costumes, but very little to buy unless you want to barter for a water buffalo or a sack of fertiliser. Lunch is taken at a local restaurant, then the car takes you back along the new highway to Hanoi. You should arrive here by late afternoon for the night.

Day six: Hanoi to Ha Long Bay

After an early breakfast, depart by car for Ha Long Bay, one of the most spectacular UNESCO World Heritage Areas and the world's largest marine limestone 'karst' landscape. There you will board your boat, a private wooden junk that take you through Bai Tu Long Bay area.

Your cruise continues to the bay's most

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deserted areas with opportunities to swim at quiet sandy beaches on Hon Co island or to visit one of the least visited caves, Thien Canh Son. The route is designed to avoid the busy areas and includes a quiet location for your overnight on board. Your junk is one of the L'Amour junks, the best wooden boats in the Bay. They are modelled on old Chinese court vessels with three barge sails, a wide transom and rectangular superstructure. Each boat has only one cabin, which is air-conditioned and has windows overlooking the bay. The floor area is about 10m² and the cabin is furnished with two twin beds or a double queen size bed. The interior panelling, floor and furniture are of hard wood. The cabin has a wardrobe, pillows, white cotton sheets and en-suite toilet and shower with a selection of toiletries. All meals, usually based on fresh seafood, are provided on board. Kayaking is available and is included.

Day seven: Bai Tu Long Bay to Hanoi

You wake to the fresh air of the bay with chance to relax on the sundeck or to swim. After breakfast your cruise continues to Vung Vieng fishing village with the chance to explore the village and the hidden lagoon in a rustic rowing boat. Check-out of the cabin and cruise towards the harbour while an early lunch is served. You dock about midday and then are transferred to Hanoi Noi Bai airport for a flight to Nha Trang. Once in Nha Trang you are picked up by car and taken to your hotel for the night.

Day eight: Full day Emperor Cruise

You are collected from your hotel at 8am to be taken to the port in Nha Trang where you board the Emperor Cruise's junk. You are welcomed on board with an introduction to the junk, the bay and local culture. Your cruise takes you past the Tam, Mot and Mun islands in the bay with your destination being a secluded beach at Bai Cau in Dam Bay Lagoon, near the famous diving site on Mun Island. At the beach, you can snorkel, swim, fish, walk or kayak, in either a normal or glass-bottomed boat, or try a basket boat. Or, just relax at the Mango Bar on the beach enjoying the stunning vista of the sails of the junk against the blue waters of the bay. Lunch is served on boat with local beers, fine wine and premium spirits as the boat anchors near Hon Tam island, known for its tranquil lagoon and fish farms.

After lunch, you cruise back to Nha Trang harbour passing Vung Ngan floating village, Vinpearl island, Tri Nguyen aquarium and catching a glimpse of the inhabited Mieu



Nha Trang

island, which is where you head this afternoon for walking tour to visit the local villages. Learn about the way of life of the villagers of the fishing villages, away from the mainland and interact with the friendly locals. You travel to the fish farms by basket boat and then head back to the junk by speedboat. On board the junk, enjoy refreshing coconut milk, the speciality of the region. Once you dock, you are transferred back to your hotel.

Day nine and ten: In Nha Trang

You have two days at leisure in Nha Trang.

Days eleven: Nha Trang to Ho Chi Minh City

Enjoy a morning at leisure before an afternoon flight to Ho Chi Minh City. After transferring to your centrally located hotel, you're free to wander around District 1. A possibility is to extend your time in Ho Chi Minh City by one night in order to visit perhaps Ben Tre in the Mekong Delta or the famous Cu Chi tunnels. Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) is a thriving metropolis which has nevertheless preserved 300 years of traditions and ancient culture. For the evening, you have the option to see the A O Show. The A O show captures much of the uniqueness of Vietnam in the engaging style of contemporary circus. The hour-long show is a fusion of dance, acrobatics and live music with theatrical drama tracing the passage of Vietnam from a rural village culture to the modern, urban society it is today.

Day twelve: Ho Chi Minh City

After breakfast your local guide will arrive to take you on a tour of Ho Chi Minh City. You visit the Reunification Hall, an early colonial masterpiece, built to accommodate the Governor-General of Indochina. You also visit the Museum of War Remnants (not for the squeamish) which provides a fascinating perspective of the 'American War'. Another site visited is the Jade Emperor Pagoda, one of the best Taoist temples in Vietnam with superb effigies, carved panels of the descent to Hell, and also terrapin and tortoise sanctuaries. After the sightseeing, there is time to rest and freshen up or visit the lively Ben Thanh market. Overnight in Ho Chi Minh City.

Day thirteen: Ho Chi Minh City and departure

Enjoy the rest of your time until your transfer to the airport for your return or onward flight.

HOTELS

Our selection of hotels in Hanoi, Sapa, Ha Long Bay, Nha Trang and Ho Chi Minh City are described below.



The accommodation included in this tour is mainly 4 star except that it also includes more rustic accommodation in keeping with the romantic atmosphere of the tour. There is a homestay and the accommodation in Sapa is more basic, but there is little choice in this area. For other places, we can offer you upgraded hotel stays if you prefer but they will be quite a contrast to the rest. This twelve-night tour can be adapted with additional nights in any of the places, or combined with a beach stay at the end perhaps. Also, you are not confined to travelling with Vietnam Airlines and we can arrange for you to fly via other countries in the region, for example Thailand, Singapore and Hong Kong, which is useful if you want to combine a tour of Vietnam with a stay in another country.

SUPERIOR STANDARD HOTELS

Hanoi

Apricot Hotel Hanoi

4-star, located in the city centre close to the Opera House, the Old Quarter and Hoan Kiem Lake – canvas with garden room.

Sapa

Topas Eco Lodge

Basic accommodation with twenty-five bungalows overlooking the valley. A good example of sustainable tourism – executive bungalow.

Ha Long Bay

L'Amour Junk

A traditional junk.

Nha Trang

Mia Nha Trang Resort

4-star beach resort in the slopes between Cam Ranh airport and Nha Trang – beach front villa

Ho Chi Minh City

The Myst dong Khoi

4-star boutique hotel with charismatic modern design, harbouring relics of Saigon's past – Saigon Signature Suite room.



Topas Eco Lodge, Sapa

FIRST CLASS HOTELS

Hanoi

Sofitel Metropole Hotel

Ha Long Bay

Paradise Peak cruise

Nha Trang

Six Senses Ninh Van Bay

Nha Trang

Lalyana Ninh Van Bay

Ho Chi Minh City

Park Hyatt

Ho Chi Minh City

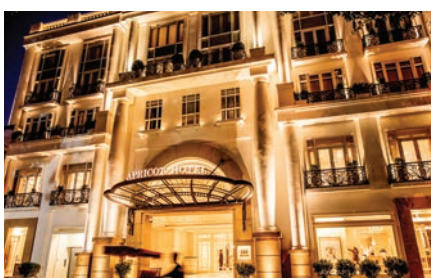
The Reverie Saigon



L'Amour Junk, Ha Long Bay



Mia Nha Trang Resort



Apricot Hotel, Hanoi



The Myst Dong Khoi, Ho Chi Minh City



Six Senses Ninh Van Bay, Nha Trang

MAP OF ROMANCE OF VIETNAM TOURING HOLIDAY

The map below illustrates the route outlined in this touring itinerary, with overnight stops and places of interest highlighted.



GENERAL INFORMATION

This touring holiday is one of several suggested holidays we can offer you exactly as it is but also with any alterations you might want, including extra nights in one or more places or adding in extra places. All our tours can be extended so that you can include a longer stay in one location too, perhaps at the end of the itinerary. Do call to discuss the options with our travel consultants.

The logo for Expressions, featuring the word "Expressions" in a white, elegant cursive font on a dark blue rectangular background.

OUR TOURS

Our touring holidays are for individuals travelling on their own or in their own family group. You do not join a group, but are escorted by an English-speaking local guide with transport as appropriate to the itinerary.

FLEXIBLE ARRANGEMENTS

Our arrangements are very flexible in that you choose to travel on any day you want, subject to availability. Additional nights can be added at any point or the suggested itinerary here amended to accommodate your personal interests.

FLIGHT ARRANGEMENTS

There are a number of ways you can fly to Vietnam. Vietnamese Airlines flight direct from London to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh but other airlines such as Cathay Pacific or Thai might be more appropriate for your holiday, if you want to stop off en-route.

TRAVEL WITHIN VIETNAM

The travel arrangements we include in our tours of Vietnam are appropriate for the route and journey. Travel will be by a mixture of car, air and train.

GENERAL FACTS

Capital

Hanoi

Airport

There are three international airports in Vietnam. They are Tan Son Nhat airport, Ho Chi Minh City; Noi Bai airport, Hanoi; Danang Airport

Currency

Vietnam Dong

Size

128, 000 sq miles

Population

91 million

Average temperatures

Although the entire country lies within the tropics and subtropics, Vietnam's climate varies considerably from region to region. Summer temperatures can reach as high as 40°C, though the average hovers round 30°C; November to March average daily temperatures are about 19°C. The winter monsoon comes from the northeast between October and March, bringing damp and chilly winters to all areas north of Nha Trang, and dry and warm temperatures to the south. From April or May to October, the summer

monsoon brings hot, humid weather to the whole country except for those areas sheltered by mountains.

VIETNAM - THE COUNTRY

Tracing a long, languid curve down the eastern edge of South East Asia, Vietnam is a land of extraordinary natural beauty. Soaring mountains and swaying rice fields, sweeping beaches and the mighty Mekong, Vietnam has it all, with Halong Bay and its iconic limestone towers the jewel in the country's dazzling crown. Surviving war after war, colonial rule and communism, Vietnam's people are determinedly upbeat and inventive, imbuing its cities with a crackling energy almost 24 hours per day. Hanoi is its bristling capital, with elegant colonial buildings overlooking avenues buzzing with motorbikes; old, imperial capital Hue is the cultural heartbeat, with palaces and pagodas, tombs and temples, and a biennial arts festival worth the airfare alone; Ho Chi Minh City – or Saigon as it's still universally known – is all hustle and bustle, an intoxicating blend of the old and the new, with teeming markets dwarfed by towering skyscrapers. If Vietnam's cities prove too much, the Mekong Delta provides an ancient, intoxicating foreverness of rice fields and sleepy villages, with river trips taking you along the country's timeless lifeblood. Inland, peasant women in conical hats still tend to their fields, children ride buffalos along country paths and farmers scratch out a living from rice fields cascading down the sheerest of hillsides.

But if Vietnam's hilly countryside is beautiful, its coastline is simply stunning. With its smattering of limestone karsts rising out of the mist, Halong Bay is the undoubted showstopper, but there are also some stunning beaches. Hoi An and Danang are blessed with sweeps of sand and offer a choice of watersports to match anywhere in Asia. A stunning country of vivid colours and dramatic landscapes, with sensational food, exquisite boutique hotels, and a warmth of welcome that will surprise and overwhelm, Vietnam ensures a wonderful holiday.

HIGHLIGHTS OF VIETNAM

Boat trips on Halong Bay, with the more adventurous able to explore its caves and secret lagoons by kayak, paddling around its limestone peaks; the long, sweeping beaches of Nha Trang; Vietnamese cuisine, bursting with fresh, vivid spices, as delicious in roadside food stalls as in top restaurants such as Mango Rooms in Hoi An; historic, riverside Hoi An, with superb galleries, particularly Apricot and Mai Tai galleries in the Old Quarter, and Dong Phong Art Gallery in the French Quarter; full-moon 'Legendary Nights' in Hoi An, when vehicles are banned from the Old Town, which is transformed into a magical land of silk lanterns, traditional food, song and dance, and games in the streets; explore Phong Nha Cave, the largest and most impressive cave in the country; cycle through Ho Chi Minh City, the city where bike is king; the beaches and unique Cham architecture of Quy Nhon; the rugged mountain retreat of Sapa, home to a plethora of minority tribes, and gateway to the Tonkin Alps; the mountain town of Dalat; Cat Tien National Park, a lush refuge for city dwellers with ample hiking and bird-watching, plus elephants, crocodiles and the endangered Javan rhino; the beaches of Mui Ne; river trips on the Mekong river, past river towns and sleepy villages, floating markets and fish stalls; the white-sand beaches of Phu Quoc, a little developed forested island gem; Hue, the old imperial capital and now the intellectual, cultural and spiritual heart of Vietnam.

OUR PRICES

The sample prices mentioned in this leaflet are generally a 'from' price based on the cheapest season of travel. However, flight hotel rates can change (up and down depending on offers), so we give you an accurate price for your holiday when we provide you with a quotation. Our sample prices should be used as an indication of how much a particular combination will cost and to show the differences on average between the hotel categories on offer.

PRICE INFORMATION IN MORE DETAIL

Scheduled return flights from London to Vietnam with Vietnam Airlines in economy, and accommodation at superior standard hotels with meals and transport as mentioned.

From about £4,390 per person

BOOKING CONDITIONS

Our booking conditions apply to all holidays. A copy can be found on our website and a copy is also sent to you with a written quotation and when you make a booking.

FINANCIAL PROTECTION

Expressions Holidays offers full financial protection for all holidays you book with us. If your holiday includes a flight, the ATOL (3076) covers the costs of the holiday. If the holiday does not include a flight, it is the ABTOT bond that protects the cost of the holiday. We are also members of AITO (the Association of Independent Tour Operators) and ABTA.



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HOW TO BOOK

To make a booking, just phone us on

01392 441250

and we can take you through the details we need and start the booking process. A deposit is required to confirm the arrangements and this can be paid by debit or credit card over the phone. The level of the deposit will be confirmed at the point of booking and will depend on the ticketing deadlines involved in your booking.