

# HIGHLIGHTS OF VIETNAM 2019 (16 days)

This trip brings you to the famed and iconic spots. However we promise an individual and memorable experience by adding healthy servings of creativity and panache. So to offer you the best service possible we find the trails and hidden gems that others overlook in their haste. When you visit the 'must do' spots with Handspan, you'll do more than just see them, we'll give you a deeper understanding of these beautiful places. We'll take you to the spots you expect to see while taking you far beyond your expectations.

## DESTINATIONS

- The always bustling, never sleeping, perpetually changing Ho Chi Minh City
- The Mekong Delta, feel the pulse of the life generated by the mighty Mekong river
- The World Heritage ancient port town of Hoi An and its seductive atmosphere
- Hue, a journey into the magnificence of an imperial past
- Hanoi, Vietnam's vibrant 1000-year-old capital and one of Asia's loveliest cities
- The breathtaking natural splendor of the World Heritage Halong Bay archipelago

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Cruise along the rivers maze of canals for a taste of the lush and lively culture in Mekong delta
- See the very best of the world's nature and culture heritages in Hoi An, Hue & Halong

## ITINERARY

### Day 1: Arrive in Ho Chi Minh city

*Meals: Not Included | Accommodation: Paragon hotel (Deluxe)*

Arrive in Ho Chi Minh city from Sydney. You will be picked up and transferred to your hotel in center Saigon. Free to explore the city of Saigon the rest of the day. Overnight in Ho Chi Minh.

### Day 2: Saigon & Cu Chi tunnel

*Meal: Breakfast, Lunch | Accommodation: Paragon hotel (Deluxe)*

We depart at 8am from your hotel to visit Cu Chi - a byzantine maze of underground passages, chambers, rooms and booby traps used during the war. You'll be able to get an idea of what it would have been like to live, sleep and eat in the underground passages and bunkers during the fierce battles above and below the surface.

Return to the city for lunch at a tasty restaurant in the city centre.

In the afternoon, you'll discover the Reunification Palace - a blend of traditional ritual and modern architecture, served as the presidential palace of South Vietnam until reunification in 1975. The building now functions as a museum, offering tours of the former state rooms, presidential office and library, living quarters of the president's family, and underground war rooms. Then, you'll also visit the War Remnants Museum - one of the most sobering, yet popular, museums in the city. It highlights the suffering of the Vietnamese people at the hands of the French and American forces up to 1975, and while its perspective is less than perfectly balanced, its exhibits nonetheless are well designed and ably document the folly of war. You'll find a collection of weapons, machinery, aircraft, tanks, artifacts and horrific photographs illustrating the devastating affects of napalm, Agent Orange and other weapons of mass destruction. Trip ends at your hotel around 4pm.

Overnight in Ho Chi Minh city

*Lunch: at local restaurant*

### Day 3 : Saigon – Cai Thia – Vinh Long - Can Tho (Mekong Delta)

*Meal: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner | Accommodation: Victoria Resort (Superior)*

8:00: Pick up from your hotel for an approximate 2.5 hour drive to our exploration area. We let the touristy spots behind and travel beyond, where very few other visitors have the chance to go.

We arrive at Cai Thia pier at about 10h30. Boat hits the waterways bring you to the village of Hoa Loc. We will cycle through the villages on the winding countryside roads. The first stop is the local house where they produce the typical rice paper, there will be lots of opportunities to interact with locals as you cycle through the villages. We also visit another family for a cup of tea and taste some local cakes.

We go back to our boat heading to further remote region of Mekong. We reach the canals, we'll take a rowing boat that takes us deeper into the countryside of the Delta through the networks of small canals with traditional houses on both sides and lots of daily life. Lunch will be served on board with featured local dishes. After lunch, we may leisure walk around lush garden or learn a bit history of traditional house by its owner.

In the afternoon, we cruise toward Vinh Long with more stops at local workshops. 16:00 – a quick transfer from Vinh Long pier to Can Tho, where you check-in your hotel and enjoy the night in this "mega city" of the Mekong Delta.

Overnight in Can Tho

*Dinner: Nam Bo restaurant Set menu*

#### **Day 4 : Can Tho – Cai Rang – Phong Dien – Can Tho**

*Meal: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner | Accommodation: Victoria Resort (Superior)*

After an early breakfast, we start a boat cruise to head to the bustling Cai Rang & Phong Dien floating markets – the largest and most colorful in the Mekong delta. Feel free to take photographs, talk or bargain while our boat glides slowly through the market mayhem. There are fantastic photo opportunities amidst the huge variety of agricultural bounty on sale here. Farming boats big and small trade seasonal fruits and an array of other goods in a chorus of sights and smells that you won't soon forget.

After Phong Dien floating market, you'll get back to your car for a short drive to Vam Xang. Here, you'll start your visit deeper into the delta. As you'll go on small village roads, you will see some beautiful small bridges across canals with benches along the bridges, and local home by the river. You will also visit the house of Uncle Ut Dzach who has the traditional job of making banh hoi, steam rolls made of fine rice flour. There's possibility to try this specialty as well. We return to Vam Xang for lunch.

Back to Can Tho in the afternoon

Overnight in Can Tho

*Lunch: at VamXang Rustic Home*

*Dinner: Victoria Can Tho set menu.*

#### **Day 5 : Can Tho - Saigon**

*Meal: Breakfast, Lunch | Accommodation: Paragon hotel (Deluxe)*

Free to explore the city of Can Tho in the morning.

Afternoon, we drive back to Saigon. Local rice paper workshops, nice paddy fields are pleasant sights on the way.

Overnight in Ho Chi Minh City

#### **Day 6: Saigon- Hoian**

*Meal: Breakfast, Dinner | Accommodation: Vinh Hung resort (Superior)*

You will be picked up at your hotel at 9h30 to transfer to Saigon airport to get a flight to Danang (VN324- 11h20- 12h30). Your local guide in Hoian will pick you up in Danang and take you to Hoian. With sightseeing tour on the way. Transfer to your hotel late afternoon. Overnight in Hoian

*Dinner: Vinh Hung restaurant - Vietnamese Family menu.*

#### **Day 7: Hoi An – Cooking class**

*Meal: Breakfast, Lunch | Accommodation: Vinh Hung resort (Superior)*

- We start the day (8.15am / 1.30pm) with a drink at Hai Scout Café – our meeting point.
- Visit Hoi An's colourful market, and experience the amazing sights, sounds and aromas of this busy market. We will have the opportunity to interact with the local sellers and purchase some of the ingredients to be used in the cooking lesson later.
- We board the Red Bridge boat for a leisurely cruise (25 minutes) along the Hoi An River to the Red Bridge Cooking School. This is a chance to view local river life, so make sure your camera is handy.
- On arrival, we explore the cooking school's herb and vegetable garden, before learning about some of Hoi An's and Vietnam's well-known dishes. The cooking lesson runs for about 2 hours – each dish is first demonstrated by the Red Bridge chef's, before we prepare the same dish ourselves. Included in the class is a brief introduction to Vietnamese food carving (plate decoration).
- After the lesson, we sit down and eat exactly what we have cooked.

Overnight in Hoian

### **Day 8: Hoi An- Morning cycling tour to Tra Que village**

*Meal: Breakfast, Lunch | Accommodation: Vinh Hung resort (Superior)*

In the morning, you'll be met at your hotel and driven to Tra Que village, where you'll be introduced to one of the local families who will take you to their fields. Your first job will be helping to water the vegetables, a fine opportunity to feel what it's like to use a bamboo shoulder-pole to carry water. It takes quite a bit of skill as well as strength. A good photo opportunity, if nothing else!

Next, you'll be shown how to cultivate and scatter seeds and harvest the produce, after which you'll help to prepare and eat a Vietnamese lunch with the family. It'll be an exhausting day, but there's no better way of gaining an insight into the life of Vietnamese peasant families. Your overnight stay will be in Hoi An.

- Tra Que is a small village about three kilometres northeast of the old town on the bank of Tra Que lagoon. The villagers rely upon market gardening for their livelihood, and supply much of Hoi An's vegetable produce requirements.

Overnight in Hoian

### **Day 9: Hoian- Free day**

*Meal: Breakfast | Accommodation: Vinh Hung resort (Superior)*

Free day in Hoian to enjoy the beach or shopping in the old town.

Overnight in Hoian

### **Day 10: Hue**

*Meal: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner | Accommodation: Eldora Hotel (Deluxe City View)*

In the morning, you will transfer to Hue, with a great chance to visit the Marble mountain and Cham Sculpture museum and drive over the stunning Hai Van pass. Check into Elbora Hotel. In the afternoon, you will take a Dragon style boat trip on Perfume river and visit the ancient Thien Mu (Heavenly Lady) pagoda. Hue is also very famous for its historical relics including King's tomb. Your boat will stop by Tu Duc tomb, one of the nicest King's tomb which is set in harmony of Earth, Heaven, Green trees, Water and monuments. You will take a small walk to a smaller tomb of Dong Khanh before your bus pick you up to go back to your hotel.

Overnight in Hue

*Lunch: Local restaurant*

*Dinner: Club Garden restaurant*

### **Day 11: Hue- Hanoi**

*Meal: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner | Accommodation: La Belle Vie (Superior)*

This morning take you to the Forbidden Purple City, the former living place of the Royal family during the Nguyen dynasty in from 19th century to mid 20th century. Although most of palaces were destroyed during the American War (Vietnamese War) especially in Tet offensive (1968), this place still worth a visit with many palaces and temples. Your guide will help you to understand more about this period in Vietnam history as well as the daily life of the Royal family.

Afternoon fly to Hanoi. Your friendly Hanoi guide will meet you at Hanoi airport and transfer to Hanoi down town.

Overnight in Hanoi

*Lunch: La Carambole Hue*

*Dinner: Vua Cha Ca - Tran Hung Dao in Hanoi*

### **Day 12: Hanoi City tour**

*Meal: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner | Accommodation: La Belle Vie (Superior)*

After breakfast in your hotel you will be met by your guide at 8:00am for an insightful city tour to visit the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum and Museum, One Pillar Pagoda (ad 1049), and The Temple of Literature (ad 1070). Following lunch, you will take a fascinating 2 hour tour of Ha Noi's Old Quarter by Cyclo. The history of the Old Quarter dates back some 2000 years with it's 36 narrow streets each named after the trade or merchandise made and sold there. With various influences in the architecture and the many temples dedicated to the patron saint of each guild, this is truly a shoppers and photographers delight. Back to your hotel to relax.

Overnight in Hanoi

*Lucnh: at KOTO restaurant*

*Dinner: at Maison D' Yen restaurant*

### **Day 13: Hanoi – Halong Bay**

*Meal: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner | Accommodation: Treasure Junk (Superior)*

Depart from Hanoi at 8.00 for a 3.5 hours drive to Halong City through the Red River Delta. Upon arrival, get on board of the Treasure Junk. Start cruising from Hon Gai pier to the boundaries of Halong bay while lunch with fresh seafood is served (vegetarian and kids menus available).

After lunch, just make yourself at ease and relax. We are slowly getting off the classic cruising routes, far from the clichés of a busy tourism spot. Limestone rock formations will parade around us for about 2 hours before our first stop.

We reach the perfect spot, remote and scenic, where the waters of Halong and Bai Tu Long hit and wave together. Let's get ready for serious things. Swimming suits, ok. Kayaks and tender boat, ok. Paddles and gears, ok. Let's get closer to the water and explore the bay in depth.

After one/one and a half hour kayaking, we get back on board to refresh and start the aperitif on the sundeck. Dinner is served either inside or outside depending on weather conditions. Overnight on board in a cozy air-conditioned cabin with en-suite bathroom facilities.

### **Day 14: Kayaking in Halong Bay**

*Meal: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner | Accommodation: Treasure Junk (Superior)*

The breakfast will be served from 7.15am. But if you like, we invite you to share a cup of tea or coffee from 6.30am and participate then in a Tai Chi session before breakfast.

Around 8.30am, we board a smaller boat. It takes us even farther from the touristy area, to the hidden nooks of the archipelago.

A whole day of fun and relaxation. More kayaking, more swimming, more sandy beaches, more floating houses, more local cuisine, definitely a "cruise++"... The exact program depends on tide and weather conditions but we guarantee that we will make this trip extension worth. Lunch will be served on the support boat.

The guide will lead you back to the Treasure Junk in the mid-afternoon. Time to refresh and to make yourself cozy on the sundeck. Dinner will be served again either in the dining room or on the deck. Second night onboard.

### **Day 15: Ha Long – Ha Noi**

*Meal: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner | Accommodation: La Belle Vie (Superior)*

We will be back at the pier about 11am, and driven to Hanoi with an expected arrival time about 4pm. The day will be short so let's wake up early to take the maximum of it.

Coffee, tea and cakes will be served from 6.30am. Wake up smoothly while witnessing the silence of beautiful misty bay. A 30-minute Tai Chi session will be organized, energize your body and soul or just allow yourself some farniente time on a sunbath with a cup of coffee. About 7.45am, we hop on bamboo boats to go visiting a secluded floating village surrounded by the mountains. We spawn our way between numerous floating houses and small rowing boats that serve the everyday life as vehicle, itinerant shops, fishing utility, sometimes overnight shelter.

Back on treasure before 9am, we start cruising back to the pier. From 9.30am, a brunch will be served. Take a last glance at the rocks, standing still as the eternal guardians of a kingdom, we are about to reach the pier.

Once on land, we sit in a small café to wait for our overland vehicle.

*Farewell dinner at Rue Lamblot restaurant*

Overnight in Hanoi

### **Day 16: Free in Hanoi.**

*Meal: Breakfast | Accommodation: N/A*

Free in Hanoi until your flight out of Vietnam Trip ends.

### **Accommodation:**

City	Hotel	Room type	Rate	Location
Saigon	<a href="#">Paragon Saigon hotel</a>	Deluxe	4 star	City Saigon Center near Dong Khoi
Can Tho	<a href="#">Victoria Can Tho</a>	Superior	4 star	By Mekong river with 5 minute shuttle boat to city center
Hoian	<a href="#">Vinh Hung resort</a>	Superior	4 star	By Thu Bon river with 2 minute walk to the Old town
Hue	<a href="#">Eldora hotel</a>	Deluxe Cityview	4 star	City center near Perfume river
Hanoi	<a href="#">La Belle Vie Hotel</a>	Superior	4 star	Old quarter
Halong	Treasure Junk	Superior cabin	4 star	n/a

### **Trip Included:**

- Local English-speaking guides, except for free time in Hoian
  - Ho Chi Minh & Mekong Delta: 01 Guide
  - Hoian & Hue: 01 Guide
  - Hanoi & Halong: 01 Guide
- Accommodation in double/ twin shared at mentioned hotels with daily breakfast
- Private transfer by appropriate vehicle with air-conditioner and by experienced driver
- Boat trip cruise in Halong bay and Bai Tu Long bay by Treasure Junk
- Meals as mentioned in the itinerary: B- Breakfast, L- Lunch, D- dinner
- Boat trips in Mekong Delta as specified
- Entrance fees for all sightseeing.

**Trip Excluded:**

- Travel insurance in all kinds
- Surcharge for peak season at hotels
- Other meals, tip, drinks even drinking water
- Internal flight tickets and airport taxes
- External flight tickets and airport taxes
- Single room supplement
- Personal expenses
- Visa and visa service to Vietnam
- Any optional additional tours or activities during free time
- Late check out from the hotels
- Things are not mentioned in above lists