

VIETNAM HIGHLIGHTS:

Day 1: Depart London on flight to Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon)

Day 2: Arrival Saigon and transfer to your hotel for 3 nights

Day 3: The sprawling, densely packed CHOLON (CHINATOWN) constantly bustles with activity and retains a traditional feeling, unlike the more modern Saigon city centre. Explore the highlights of this fascinating area, beginning with BINH TAY MARKET, the vast wholesale market selling every kind of good from dried foods to T-shirts to electronics. Continue to THIEN HAU PAGODA, built by the Cantonese congregation and dedicated to the heavenly goddess, the NGHIA AN HOI PAGODA, built by the Chaozhou Chinese congregation, and the TAM SON HOI QUAN PAGODA, and dedicated to Me San, the Goddess of Fertility. **Overnight in Saigon**

Day 4 Saigon (Breakfast)

A vibrant metropolis, SAIGON teems with energy, activity and motion. Everywhere you look, you see the meeting of traditional and modern life. The emerging modern skyline stands cheek by jowl with colonial buildings and traditional temples. Outside on the streets, young professionals zip by on motorcycles, chatting on cell phones; inside the quiet temple courtyards, worshippers pray amidst clouds of incense. Begin your tour of this exciting city with a tour of the historic centre, strolling along DONG KHOI STREET, formerly known as the Rue Catinat, the main shopping thoroughfare and heart of old colonial Saigon. Pass by classic European-style landmarks such as the ornate CITY HALL (HOTEL DE VILLE), the old OPERA HOUSE (both may only be viewed from the outside), and pay a quick visit to the neo-Romanesque NOTRE DAME CATHEDRAL and the CENTRAL POST OFFICE.

Afterwards dive into modern history with a tour of the REUNIFICATION PALACE. Formerly the Independence Palace of the South Vietnamese president, this 60s style building was famously stormed by tanks on April 30, 1975 signifying the fall of South Vietnam. It has been preserved in its original state, and the original tanks remain on display near the entrance gates. Continue to the harrowing WAR REMNANTS MUSEUM, which comprehensively documents the travails of the long Vietnam- American War. Inside are detailed photographic exhibitions; outside is a collection of tanks, planes and weapons. Finally, end up at the central BEN THANH MARKET, where vendors display a vast array of goods and handicrafts, appealing to every taste

Excursion to Cu Chi Tunnels

Never discovered by American forces, the CU CHI TUNNELS were an important Vietcong base during the American War. Stretching over 200 km, this incredible underground network, dug by hand out of hard laterite, connected command posts, hospitals, shelter and weapon factories. Today, you can walk through the area and learn about the day-to-day life of the VC, see the cleverly disguised entrances and elaborate booby-traps, and even venture inside the tunnels, some of which have been modified. **Overnight in Saigon**

Day 5 Saigon (Breakfast) **Excursion to My Tho with a boat trip to Mekong River islands**

From Saigon, transfer to My Tho, a bustling town in the rich agricultural region of the Mekong Delta and visit the Vinh Trang Pagoda, a beautiful temple and a sanctuary for orphans and other needy children. Afterwards board a local boat to explore the islands of the Mekong, stopping at a fruit orchard to enjoy fruit and tea while listening to local music. The trip also includes a brief sampan ride through the tiny waterways that thread the island.

Overnight in Saigon

Day 6 Saigon - Hue (Breakfast) **Transfer - Flight from Saigon to Hue. - Transfer - Sightseeing in Hue**

Hue served as the capital of Vietnam for more than 140 years. It houses ancient temples, imperial buildings and French-style edifices. It was established in the 17th century.

Excursion to Thien Mu Pagoda with a boat trip on the Huong Giang River. Embark on a local boat and cruise down the PERFUME RIVER to the iconic THIEN MU PAGODA, an elegant seven-tiered octagonal tower which has become Hue's most widely recognizable monument. During the early 1960s, this became a centre of anti-government protest, and the site of the famous self-immolation of the monk Thich Quang Duc. Visit the Old Imperial City. Located in the heart of Hue is the IMPERIAL CITADEL, a vast complex built in the early 19th century and modelled after the Forbidden City of Peking. The original walls stretched for 10 km and were surrounded by a wide moat. Today, most of the buildings have been destroyed due to bombing during the Vietnam-American War, but the monuments that remain provide a fascinating glimpse into the court life of the Nguyen Dynasty. Approach the city past the striking FLAG TOWER, where a giant Vietnamese flag waves proudly overhead, to the imposing NGO MON GATE, the main entrance to the Imperial Enclosure. Enter into an area of spacious courtyards and serene lotus ponds, and visit DIEN THO Residence (Dien Tho palace) is where the Queen mother lived, visit THAI HOA PALACE, the magnificently decorated reception hall, the HALLS OF THE MANDARINS, and the original NINE DYNASTIC URNS, among other sites.

Visit the Imperial Tomb of Emperor Tu Duc .TU DUC TOMB: Emperor Tu Duc, who ruled Hue more than 100 years ago, built his tomb when he was still alive and used it for meditation, reading and theatre performances. There are pavilions in a tranquil setting of forested hills and lakes. The tomb was constructed between 1864 and 1867. Tu Duc, who was the longest reigning Emperor, lived a luxurious life. **Overnight in Hue**

Day 7 Hue - Danang - Hoi An (Breakfast) **by vehicle from Hue to Hoi An with sightseeing in Danang - Visit Cham Museum**

CHAM MUSEUM: this houses probably the best collection of Cham art to be found anywhere in the world. There are more than 300 artefacts in the museum, many dating to the 4th century. There are beautiful sculptures reflecting the 1000 year Cham period.

Visit Marble Mountains

MARBLE MOUNTAINS: consist of 5 stone hillocks, once islands, made of marble. Each is said to represent one of the five elements of the universe. The largest and most famous, Thuy Son, has a number of natural caves in which Buddhist sanctuaries have been built over the centuries. When the Champas ruled this area, these same caves were used as Hindu shrines.

TAM THAN: located in Marble Mountain near Thuy Son.

Sightseeing in Hoi An

The exquisitely preserved merchant town of HOI AN was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1999. Its colourful shop houses and temples reflect a diverse heritage, dating back to the 16th and 17th century, when it was a major port for Western, Chinese and Japanese traders. Today it is a thriving centre of traditional crafts and a shoppers' paradise, best explored on foot.

Wander through the cobbled streets, past low tile-roofed buildings, the bustling central MARKET and the small HARBOUR where colourfully painted boats are moored. The walking tour will include visits to a PRIVATE HOUSE, where members of the same family have lived continuously for centuries in a traditional setting; to one of the FAMILY CHAPELS built by prominent merchant or official families as centres for ancestor worship; and to a typical CHINESE-STYLE PAGODA or ASSEMBLY HALL. Finally, continue to the famous JAPANESE COVERED BRIDGE, first constructed in 1593 by the Japanese community of Hoi An to link the town with the Chinese quarters across the stream. **Overnight in Hoi An**

Day 8 Hoi An (Breakfast) * No local guide *

All day at leisure Overnight in Hoi An

Day 9 Hoi An - Danang - Hanoi (Breakfast) **Transfer to Danang airport - Flight from Danang to Hanoi. - Transfer - Sightseeing in Hanoi - Visit the Temple of Literature**

TEMPLE OF LITERATURE: a peaceful series of walled courtyards and graceful gateways, this monument is one of the best-preserved examples of traditional Vietnamese architecture. Founded in 1070 and dedicated to Confucius, this was also the site of Vietnam's first university. In one courtyard, giant stone tortoises bear stele on their backs, listing the accomplishments of graduating scholars.

Visit the Museum of Ethnology

MUSEUM OF ETHNOLOGY: This museum brings to life the astonishing ethnic diversity in Vietnam, with art and artefacts from the 54 different ethnic groups that inhabit the country. Inside the museum are detailed descriptions of minority groups, with examples of their traditional clothing and way of life. Outside are faithful reconstructions of traditional longhouses, cemeteries and other distinctive ethnic buildings.

Visit Hoan Kiem Lake, Ngoc Son Temple and the Rising Sun Bridge

HOAN KIEM LAKE: located in the centre of the city this is an enchanting body of water. Legend has it that in the mid-15th century, Heaven gave Emperor Ly Thai To a magical sword which he used to drive the Chinese out of Vietnam. One day whilst boating on the lake a giant golden tortoise grabbed the sword. Since then, the lake has been known as the 'Lake of the Restored Sword'.

NGOC SON TEMPLE: located in the northern end of Hoan Kiem Lake, it was founded in the 18th century. Surrounded by water and shaded by trees, it's a delightfully quiet place to rest. The temple is dedicated to the scholar Van Xuong, General Tran Hung Dao and La To, patron saint of physicians.

Visit the Old Quarter by cyclo

Discover the old quarter of Hanoi by cyclo (1 hour). It is also called 36 streets most of which are named after the crafts or merchandise traditionally sold there.

Visit a Water Puppet Show with transfer to/from restaurant

WATER PUPPET SHOW: a fantastic art form originating in northern Vietnam, best seen in Hanoi. The Municipal Water Puppet Theatre is located on the shore of Hoan Kiem Lake. **Overnight in Hanoi**

Day 10 Hanoi (Breakfast / Lunch: Seafood Lunch on Boat Trip) **Excursion to Halong Bay**

The day cruise starts at 12.30 pm. Cruise on a traditional wooden boat among the emerald waters and craggy limestone cliffs of Halong Bay, stopping at different islands to explore some of the many caves in this area. Sail past floating villages, fishermen casting their nets and pearl fisheries and observe the rhythms of daily life on the bay. The boat returns

to Halong pier at approximately 16.30 pm. **Overnight in Hanoi**

Day 11 Hanoi (Breakfast) **Sightseeing in Hanoi - Visit the Ho Chi Minh Memorial Complex**

Visit the miniature ONE PILLAR PAGODA. Also dating from the 11th century, this monument was rebuilt after being destroyed by the French in 1954. Today it stands near the vast HO CHI MINH MEMORIAL COMPLEX, a lovely park setting which is home to Ho Chi Minh's final resting place, as well as a museum and other memorials. Begin at the HO CHI MINH MAUSOLEUM, where visitors can pay respects to the embalmed body of Ho Chi Minh. The Mausoleum is closed in the afternoons, on Mondays and Fridays, and closes annually in October and November for restoration (can only view from the outside). Continue to the Presidential Palace (may be viewed

from the outside only). Stroll through the park to HO CHI MINH STILT HOUSE, the simple two-room dwelling where Ho Chi Minh lived from 1948 until his final days. Preserved in the same condition as during his life, it may be viewed through the windows.

Visit the Presidential Palace (may be viewed from the outside only) - Afternoon at leisure - **Overnight in Hanoi**

Day 12 Hanoi (Breakfast) * No local guide *

Time at leisure. And then transfer to the airport for your return flight to UK

As you will be travelling westward your arrival will be later the same day.

Hotel	
Saigon	Metropole Hotel*** Deluxe May Hotel*** May Deluxe
Hue	Huong Giang Hotel*** Deluxe Riverview
Hoi An	River Beach Resort (f.Dong An Beach Resort)*** Superb Deluxe Hoi An Trails Resort**** Deluxe
Hanoi	Ocean Hotel (F. Green Park Hotel)*** ROH Anise hotel*** SuperiorThang Long Opera Hotel (f. Thuy Tien Hotel)*** Innova Superior Indochina 2 Hotel Hanoi

