

Tour:

VIETNAM WILDLIFE & ECOLOGY EXPEDITION

Destination:

Hanoi, Ninh Binh, Cuc Phuong & Halong Bay

Itinerary:

9-days / 8-nights total trip (dependent upon departure location)

VIETNAM WILDLIFE & ECOLOGY EXPEDITION					
Day	Morning		Afternoon	Evening	
1	Overnight travel to Vietnam				
2	Arrive Hanoi, Vietnam; clear Customs & Immigrations	Welcome, Safety & Orientation Briefing	Explore Bai Dinh Pagoda in a Ninh Binh Adventure	Hotel Check-In	Welcome Dinner
3	Earthen Building Workshop - Sustainable Building Practices with Natural Materials		Permaculture Initiation Course - Environmental Action	Ninh Binh Night Market & Vietnamese Cuisine Dinner	
4	Cuc Phuong National Park Morning Hike	Biodiversity Deep Dive at Cuc Phuong Museum	Turtle Conservation Center & Service Project	Hoa Lu Ancient Town Night Walk & Dinner	
5	Endangered Primate Rescue Center & Service Project		Carnivore & Pangolin Conservation Program & Service Project	Local Dinner & Free Time	
6	Vietnam School Visit - Interactions & Activities		Hanoi University of Science & Technology Campus Tour	Local Dinner & Hanoi Night Market	
7	Hanoi City Tour - St Joseph Cathedral, Hanoi Opera House & Ngoc Son Temple	Vietnamese Cooking Class	Vietnam National Museum of Nature	Dinner & Traditional Water Puppet Show	
8	Ha Long Bay Overnight Cruise with Cat Ba Archipelago UNESCO World Heritage Site with Sung Sot Cave, Luon Cave Kayak, plus Titop Island Beach time & Mountaintop Hike			Farewell Dinner Onboard & Reflection Discussion	
9	Transfer to Airport, return travel Home				



As with all sample itineraries, please be aware that this is an “example” of a schedule and that the activities and hotels shown may be variable dependent upon dates, weather, special requests and other factors. Itineraries will be confirmed prior to travel.



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Day 1

Dinner in flight

Travel on an overnight flight to Hanoi, Vietnam.

Day 2

Breakfast in flight, lunch on own, dinner included

Travel to the capital city of Hanoi, Vietnam. Transfer to your hotel, check-in and get settled. Later, we'll have our Welcome, Safety & Orientation Meeting and get some exploring in!

Vietnam... Vietnam is an exhilarating country to travel with vibrant street life, exquisite food and epic landscapes all awaiting you here. A nation on the move, Vietnam balances cool urban culture with traditional values. In the cities, ancient pagodas squat just around the corner from sleek rooftop bars; and in the countryside, life still follows the rhythms of the rivers and the rice harvest. This contrast between old and new Vietnam is a big part of its appeal. Another great reason to visit Vietnam is its diverse natural beauty. The capital of Hanoi is your gateway to the treasures of the north: spectacular mountains and bays studded with karsts. Smack in the center, up-and-coming Danang gives you easy access to photogenic riverside towns, national parks and long, sandy beaches. In the south, Ho Chi Minh City will entice you with its captivating streets. Nearby, the water world of the Mekong Delta as well as islands big and small, are just waiting to be explored.

Timeless Culture - Vietnam inherited its cultural wealth from thousands of years of history, sprinkled with a handful of outside influences. The Vietnamese have a strong sense of pride in their traditions. If you're a culture seeker, the central cities of Hue and Hoi An are treasure troves, as is Hanoi, the country's graceful capital. Outside the cities, many elements of Vietnamese culture trace back to cycles of wet rice cultivation. Old and new, side-by-side, is what makes Vietnamese culture so compelling.

Fabulous Food - If there is one characteristic that unites Vietnamese food, it's freshness. The Vietnamese love their food, and all across the country, markets are bursting with the abundance of sea and soil. Plucked the same morning, feathery herbs, plump vegetables, colorful fruits, and flapping-fresh proteins are just waiting for a skillful cook to transform them into something magical. These beautiful ingredients are combined with a symphony of delightful textures and flavors. Simply put, it's one of the world's healthiest and most mouth-watering cuisines.

Striking Scenery - Vietnam is chock-full of forested peaks, thundering waterfalls, and breezy coastline, so it's no wonder the country is luring more and more nature lovers. While you'll find plenty of pulse-pounding activities here including spelunking, canyoning, and trekking, there's no shortage of leisurely ways to enjoy Vietnam's natural wonders. Areas such as Phong Nha and Ha Long Bay offer equal opportunities for relaxation and adventure in spectacular natural settings.

Changing Cities - Vietnam's vibrant urban centers are growing fast. Here you'll find international restaurants alongside cheap-as-chips street food, ancient pagodas across the street from five-star hotels, and glittering shopping malls around the corner from wet markets. Hanoi is a city of lakes, brimming with historical and cultural treasures. Da Nang is a coastal metropolis on a fast track to becoming a hub for technology and tourism. Ho Chi Minh City is home to uber-cool rooftop bars, trendy co-working spaces, and colonial-chic cafes.



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SAMPLE HOTELS

Hanoi: [Grand Mercure Hanoi](#), [Hanoi Pearl Hotel](#), and [Rex Hotel Hanoi](#)
 Ninh Binh: [The Vissai Hotel](#), and [The Reed Hotel](#)

Hanoi - Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam, is known for its centuries-old architecture and a rich culture with Southeast Asian, Chinese and French influences. At its heart is the chaotic Old Quarter, where the narrow streets are roughly arranged by trade. There are many little temples, including Bach Ma, honoring a legendary horse, plus Đồng Xuân Market, selling household goods and street food.

Upon arrival, we'll have our **Welcome, Safety & Orientation Briefing** where our local team will explain details about your travel plans, give advice on how to adapt to the local culture and outline how you will stay safe during your travels. Please note that lunch is not included today to accommodate various arrival times. If you arrive early enough for lunch, we will happily get to the perfect spot to indulge, payable on own.

Following our Welcome meeting we'll take a private coach to explore Bai Dinh Pagoda.

Bai Dinh Pagoda - The largest pagoda in Southeast Asia, we'll explore through a self-guided adventure full of picture hunts, riddles, and challenges. Nestled at the base of Dinh Mountain, this awe-inspiring complex offers breathtaking views of the river valley and surrounding limestone karsts. Discover its vast and majestic architecture—a pinnacle of Vietnamese tradition that demands a full day to fully appreciate. Embrace the beauty and mystery as you navigate through this iconic site.



Later in the evening we'll have our Welcome Dinner and get a great night's rest because it's full speed ahead tomorrow!

Day 3 – Sustainability Focus

Breakfast, lunch and dinner included

Good morning Vietnam! After breakfast at our hotel, we'll head off to discover Earthen building and then after lunch, we'll jump into a specialized course!



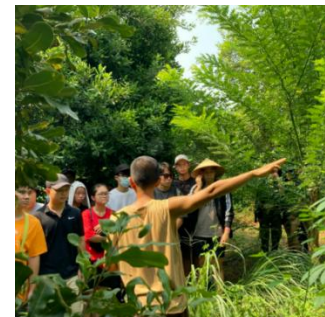
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Earthen Building & La Library – La Library is an education center promoting sustainable living through sustainable agriculture farming, earthen building techniques and the art of chilling out. Run by a small group of young Hai Phong and Hanoi locals, the project was established in 2016 and has developed to become an example of how sustainable building practices can be used to create beautiful and functional structures. Through workshops, guests learn about the benefits of sustainable building techniques and gain hands-on experience building with natural materials.

La sits on a 15,000-square-meter plot, and the team of four friends and housemates collectively run the food forest, while also running La Architects & Construction, the earthen-building design agency. They also lead an array of programs ranging from gardening and organic materials research to sculpture. A makerspace in the communal nhà sàn is available, welcoming artists and creatives to experiment with natural materials.



When asked why he started the project, founder Nguyen Minh Vu explained “we want to teach people and establish a new education of living in harmony with nature, where human beings are a part of nature and all living activities stick to healing nature, such as building the soil, building homes with natural materials, etc.”

Permaculture Initiation Course - After lunch we'll learn about sustainable living, develop practical skills and make a positive impact on the environment and the community. www.lalibraryvietnam.com/home



After dinner this evening, it's time to check-out the markets!

Ninh Binh Night Market - Visit Ninh Binh night market, which has more than 100 stalls selling many kinds of products, consumables, clothes, shoes and other specialties. Enjoy the night by trying some local Vietnamese cuisine and souvenir shopping.

Day 4 – Conservation, History & Service

Breakfast, lunch and dinner included

Rise and shine Ninh Binh! Today we start exploring conservation through service projects. This morning we'll travel by coach to the incredible Cuc Phuong National Park for a day of discovery and service. After learning about the park and its history, we'll devote our efforts to service conservation projects working with the Turtle Conservation Center.

Cuc Phuong National Park - Step back in time and explore the fascinating **Cave of Early Man!** Located within Cuc Phuong National Park, this cave holds the remains of prehistoric people dating back an incredible 7,000 to 12,000 years ago. Prepare for a short hike to reach the cave entrance and then be rewarded with a glimpse into the lives of our distant ancestors.



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Cuc Phuong Museum – Embark on a journey of discovery. This treasure-trove of knowledge offers a deep dive into the incredible biodiversity of Cuc Phuong National Park. From the vibrant wings of dragonflies to the fascinating forms of stick insects, the museum showcases the park's rich insect and plant life. Learn about the calls of cicadas and discover the diverse bird species native to the Cuc Phuong forest. Get ready to be amazed by the wonders of nature.

Turtle Conservation Centre - The Turtle Conservation Centre (TCC) was established by Fauna and Flora International (FFI) in 1998 as a rescue and holding center for tortoise and freshwater turtles which were seen in the extensive illegal wildlife trade during the 1980s and 1990s. The TCC rapidly developed into a conservation project and was transferred to the national park management at the end of 2001. Today, the TCC serves as a regional flagship for tortoise and freshwater turtle conservation efforts and for educating the public about the critical threat to the survival of turtles in Vietnam. The Turtle Conservation Center houses more than 600 terrestrial, semiaquatic and aquatic turtles representing 19 of Vietnam's 25 native species.



The TCC plays a central role in ensuring turtles in the illegal trade can be rescued and cared for. Since it is difficult finding protected nature areas where it is relatively safe to release turtles, the TCC maintains turtles until appropriate release sites are found. In 2019, the TCC released over 80 turtles of critically endangered and endangered species such as the Bourret's Box Turtle (*Cuora bourreti*) and Keeled Box Turtle (*Cuora mouhotii*) back into the wild at the protected forest area.



TURTLE CONSERVATION SERVICE PROJECT – This afternoon we will work under the guidance of the local authorities to assist the center is whatever needs they have to support their animals. From enclosure service to administration, our role will be one of support. The center encompasses an area of about 7,000 square meters comprising enclosures, aquatic tanks, and specialized breeding and holding facilities for more than 1000 turtles. Most animals at the TCC have been confiscated by wildlife protection authorities from the illegal trade or were hatched at the center.

In the evening, we'll have a local dinner and discover Hoa Lu Ancient Town.

Hoa Lu Ancient Town - Discover the enchanting atmosphere of Hoa Lu Ancient Town with a night walk. Wander through the illuminated streets at your own pace, soaking in the ancient architecture and serene ambiance under the stars. This nighttime adventure offers students a unique perspective of the town's rich history and cultural heritage.



Day 5 – Wildlife Conservation & Service

Breakfast, lunch and dinner included

Good morning Cuc Phuong! Follow will again travel to Cuc Phuong National Park for two more very special service projects – primates and carnivores!

Endangered Primate Rescue Center - The Endangered Primate Rescue Center is a project dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation, breeding, research and conservation of Vietnam's endangered and critically endangered primate species. First established in 1993 through a collaboration between Frankfurt Zoological Society and Cuc Phuong National Park, the center is presently managed under the umbrella of the Vietnam Primate Conservation Program, jointly operated by Zoo



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Leipzig and Cuc Phuong National Park. More than 200 animals have been born at the center, some being the first of their species to be born in captivity, including the critically endangered Cat Ba Langur, Delacour's Langur, and the Grey-Shanked Douc Langur.



The EPRC currently employs 31 staff both from the local community and abroad and the center is home to around 180 primates representing 14 species. The primates are housed in more than 50 large enclosures including two fenced semi-wild areas of primary forest, measuring 2 and 5 hectares in size. These enclosures serve to prepare animals for release into the wild and provide opportunities to study the behavior of animals in semi-wild conditions.

25 species of Vietnam's primates are 'on the edge of extinction'
11 species listed as Critically Endangered

ENDANGERED PRIMATE SERVICE PROJECT – This morning we will work hand-in-hand with the program operators in a variety of tasks to support the endangered wildlife and to help protect the center and its occupants. Projects may range from enclosure preparation to care and support of the primates to business preparation or even guest services.



Carnivore & Pangolin Conservation Program - The Carnivore and Pangolin Conservation Program (CPCP) is operated and managed through a collaborative partnership between Cuc Phuong National Park and Save Vietnam's Wildlife and is recognized globally as a world leader in pangolin research and captive care. While here, you'll visit the permanent animal residents who act as Education Ambassadors at the Education Center, listen to their rescue stories and find out why they cannot return to the wild. Current permanent resident animals include Pangolin, Binturong, Mask Palm Civet, Leopard Cat, Owston's Civet, and Common Palm Civet.

Directly rescued	Veterinary cared	Released	Travelled
+2,471	92%	~60%	+220,747
wild animals of 45 species	survival rate	back to the wild	km to rescue & release sites

Inside the Center, you will:

- Find out about 39 precious and irreplaceable carnivores and pangolins of Vietnam;
- Understand the threats to wildlife;
- Learn more about the conservation efforts of Save Vietnam's Wildlife;
- Find out how you can help save the wildlife from the brink of extinction

Since SVW was founded in July 2014, they have developed a long-term conservation program. Most of the resources are spent working on the ground to save animals from illegal trade, protecting recognized wildlife strongholds and



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continuing to monitor released individual and wild populations. There are six main fields the program is dedicated to: Wildlife rescue and Rehabilitation, Site protection, Education Outreach, Conservation Breeding, Species Conservation, Advocacy.

WHY WILDLIFE RESCUE?

In Vietnam each year, thousands of animals are illegally traded for meat consumption, traditional medicine, pets and souvenirs. The majority of live animals trafficked, are often dehydrated, nutritionally-stressed, carrying diseases, or have suffered injuries from being trapped and hunted. Poachers and traffickers often force feed pangolins to increase their weight before selling them.

Government agencies in Vietnam often release trade-confiscated wildlife straight back into the forest. Generally, these animals are released without any health checks or quarantine and are often released outside of where the species is naturally found, this in turn can pose a threat to wild populations. The rescue work aims to reduce these threats, by directly targeting known areas of threat to wild populations. They incorporate media coverage of rescues and releases, to help educate the public, and raise awareness on the impacts of the illegal wildlife trade. Most importantly, they use these rescues to encourage and motivate the government to continue combating the illegal trade.

CARNIVORE & PANGOLIN SERVICE PROJECT – The service volunteer program offers an intimate experience for those who want to get their hands on real conservation work. At Save Vietnam's Wildlife you will play a part in the rescue and rehabilitation of confiscated pangolins, binturongs, leopard cats and several species of palm civets. Please note the minimum age is 16 so younger students may be asked to participate with guest services or to operate souvenir tables.



During our short time here, we'll get a rare opportunity to see and work with some of the rarest species in Asia. We'll learn about basic husbandry skills to care for pangolin and small carnivores and also gain an insight into conservation issues faced in Vietnam and what's being done to save the wildlife. Tasks are dependent upon needs but may include enclosure maintenance and cleaning, grounds maintenance, painting, collecting and preparing animals diets, making environmental enrichments, monitoring animal behavior and success of enrichments and more.

This evening we'll have dinner and then travel back to Hanoi for the evening.



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Day 6 - Community

Breakfast, lunch and dinner included

Rise and shine Vietnam! After breakfast at our hotel, we'll explore new partnerships with local students!

Vietnamese Partner School Exchange – Visit a partner school in Vietnam and get to exchange interactions through activities. This unique opportunity fosters friendships and broadens your perspective on education and the world around you. Schools will be selected based on available dates. If you are traveling when school is not in session, a different activity will be selected.



Hanoi University of Science & Technology: Campus Tour (or similar visit, dependent upon availability) - Vietnam's premier technical institution, HUST offers students a glimpse into the country's innovation-driven future during this enriching campus visit. Founded in 1956 and located in Hanoi's dynamic Hai Bà Trưng District, it is Vietnam's oldest and largest technical university, renowned for its cutting-edge research and academic excellence. During this tour, students will explore the university's expansive 22-hectare campus, where modern laboratories, collaborative research centers, and leafy courtyards blend seamlessly with traditional Vietnamese architecture. They'll gain insight into the university's role in shaping Vietnam's scientific and technological landscape, while experiencing the vibrant energy of student life. Whether walking past the iconic C1 lecture hall, observing engineering projects in progress, or engaging with local students, this visit offers a meaningful window into higher education and innovation in Vietnam.



After our amazing day, we'll travel back to Hanoi for dinner and then a night to explore the Hanoi markets!

Hanoi Night Markets - This evening, explore the Hanoi Night Market. Enjoy the endless markets, shops, and houses all selling Vietnamese goods. Fruits, candies, coffee, snacks, smoothies... you name it!

Day 7 – Hanoi discovery

Breakfast, lunch and dinner included

Good morning Hanoi! After breakfast at our hotel, we'll explore Hanoi and discover some hidden gems!



Hanoi City Tour - Unveil the captivating heart of Hanoi on a whirlwind city tour. Immerse yourself in iconic landmarks like Saint Joseph's Cathedral, the Hanoi Opera House, and the serene Ngoc Son Temple. Our journey culminates at the picturesque Hoan Kiem Lake, also known as the "Lake of the Returned Sword." Later in the morning, get ready for an afternoon filled with delicious discoveries, as we delve into the secrets of **Vietnamese cuisine through a hands-on cooking class!**



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Vietnam National Museum of Nature - Visit the Vietnam National Museum of Nature which has nearly 1,400 specimens that showcase the biodiversity and natural history of Vietnam. You can explore various exhibitions featuring geological specimens, flora, fauna, and environmental conservation efforts.

After dinner we'll get a chance to attend a very traditional form of Vietnamese entertainment!



Water Puppet Show - A traditional form of Vietnamese entertainment, water puppetry involves puppets performing on a water stage. You can watch enchanting performances that depict traditional folk tales and cultural scenes.

Day 8 – UNESCO History & Beauty

Breakfast, lunch and dinner included

Rise and shine Vietnam! After breakfast, we're in for an amazing last day and night as we travel to Halong Bay. We'll get packed up and board a cruise for our final time in Vietnam! Coach transfer time is approximately 2.5-hours.



Overnight Cruise in Ha Long Bay - This overnight cruise through Ha Long Bay and the Cat Ba Archipelago offers an unforgettable finale to the Vietnam journey - blending natural wonder, adventure, and reflection in one breathtaking experience! As the tour winds down, students will board a comfortable group cruise and set sail through the emerald waters of Ha Long Bay, a UNESCO World Heritage Site famed for its towering limestone karsts and serene beauty. The itinerary includes a guided exploration of Sung Sot Cave, known as the "Surprise Cave" for its dramatic stalactites and vast chambers, and a peaceful kayak paddle through Luon Cave, where cliffs and calm waters create a magical setting. On Titop Island, students can relax on the beach or hike to the mountaintop for panoramic views of the bay - an ideal moment for group photos and quiet reflection. As the sun sets and the boat anchors for the night, the group will enjoy a final evening of fellowship, Vietnamese cuisine, and starlit skies, making this cruise a perfect closing chapter to their cultural and educational adventure.

Farewell Reflection - End your adventure on a high note with an unforgettable Farewell Reflection. This isn't just your typical goodbye. It's a chance for students, faculty, and our team to come together and truly process their experiences. Through guided discussions, listening exercises, and thought-provoking questions, we'll unpack the amazing things you've seen, heard, and felt throughout the trip.

Day 9

Breakfast included; lunch on own, dinner in flight

Today it is time to say 'Chao Tam Biet' (goodbye) to Vietnam as we pack up and head for home. As our team's mission is to expand minds through transformative travel experiences, we hope that as you settle into your seat for the journey



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home, that all you have experienced during your trip will leave you with a feeling of increased confidence, knowledge, understanding and yearning for your next adventure!

Dependent upon flight times, we'll have breakfast at our hotel and then our onward journey to the airport for our return trip home.

Chao Tam Biet



Weather in Hanoi

December - March: cool to cold, misty, cloudy

April - June: warm to hot, clear skies, sunny

June - August: hot, humid, rainy

September - November: cool, clear skies, sunny

The best time to visit Hanoi is usually from April to June or from September to December. From April the days are normally hot, occasionally above 30oC with clear skies. September to November sees cooler temperatures of around 25oC and sunny skies -- perfect for exploring the capital.

If you're coming to Hanoi in June, expect soaring temperatures with humidity highs of 40oC, and the rainy season is full swing (June to August). December is cool, misty and atmospheric, however from late December until March temperatures are surprisingly cold with lows of 10 degrees. You'll want to bundle up!

Vietnamese Etiquette for Travelers

Vietnam is known for its diverse culture and fun-loving people. Divided into three distinct regions, this long strip of country is a goldmine of stories and traditions. If you're coming to Vietnam for the first time, a basic knowledge of the



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local customs can help you engage with the people you'll meet in a friendly, positive way. Here are eight top tips to get you started.

Practice the art of saving face

The idea of "saving face" has long been an important part of life in Vietnam. Most Vietnamese will avoid public displays that could compromise their reputation. As a general rule, keep your cool and avoid loud arguments, making a scene, berating others for mistakes, or pointing out anything that may cause the locals to feel shamed.

TIP: Vietnamese dislike public displays of affection, and men and women often do not touch in front of others. Try to respect the local sentiment by keeping public displays of affection to a minimum.

Take care when visiting temples or homes

When you enter someone's house, take your shoes off just outside the door. Vietnamese families keep altars in their shops and homes, including some at ground level. Don't step over these ground altars or walk around directly in front of them.

When visiting temples, wear modest clothing and always remove your shoes and hat. You can carry shoes with you, but just don't wear them on your feet.

TIP: When visiting a family home, bring a box of biscuits or cake, fruit, flowers or soft drinks as a gift -- never bring anything black. Greet the older members of a family first, shake hands with your right hand and offer plenty of smiles to everyone!

Ask before taking photographs

There are so many beautiful photo opportunities in Vietnam and most people will be fine with you taking their photo, but respect their privacy and always ask before you lift up your camera. Taking photos this way offers the same level of respect to your subjects as you would apply to yourself, and it can be a unique and fascinating opportunity to learn a bit about someone's life.

Dress as the Vietnamese do

In Vietnamese cities, there's an appreciation of modern fashion and contemporary clothes are worn by many young people. Outside the urban centers, most Vietnamese are quite traditional and modest. Visible undergarments, sheer fabrics and skimpy attire will not endear you to your Vietnamese hosts and acquaintances.

Observing the locals where you are staying will give you a good idea of what is acceptable in terms of clothing and coverage. Foreigners should note that men should not be seen shirtless in public, and swimwear is welcome only on the beach or in your resort. You can show respect for Vietnamese customs by wearing clothing that does not offend the locals.

Eat with good manners

Mealtimes in Vietnam are all about sharing. Most meals are laid out as an assortment of shared dishes, with small rice bowls and chopsticks for each person. Pass dishes at the table with both hands or your right hand (not the left) and hold your spoon in your left hand if you're eating soup.

It is considered good hospitality for a host to offer you food, refill your glass and put the best bits of a dish into your bowl. If you want to stop eating, simply repeat politely that you're very full. In most social gatherings the person who made the invitation is the one who pays the bill. Otherwise, the most senior person is the one who pays.



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Learn the correct salutations

In Vietnam, people rarely say the words “excuse me.” Instead, they say “hey you!” but use different versions of “you” to indicate respect. This can all get a little complex, so if in doubt, say “bạn ơi!” (bang oi) which simply means, “hey friend!”

Use your hands wisely

While the middle finger is not traditionally an offensive digit in Vietnam, the typical “fingers crossed” gesture that many people from the West make to indicate that they are hoping for the best is highly impolite. If you hope for good luck, keep your fingers out of it! It’s also a good idea to avoid pointing at people or patting people on the back or head, particularly if they are older than you. When you pass something along, use your right hand or both of your hands, rather than just one hand or your left hand.

Smile and be friendly

Vietnamese are fun-loving people, however they are also very proud of their deep-rooted traditions and hardworking ethics. Some Vietnamese can be wary of foreigners, who may overstep without realizing the complicated cultural undercurrents behind a situation. A smile can go a long way in Vietnam, especially when language fails. A simple hello (xin chào) or thank you (cảm ơn) communicates your goodwill and will usually earn a smile from the Vietnamese.

TIP: When drinking, most Vietnamese will raise their glasses and “cheers” every time they drink, sipping together as a group rather than individually. Vietnamese use the word “do” (yo in the south, zo in the north) to say 'cheers'.

TOP 10 CULINARY EXPERIENCES

In Vietnam, before eating they say “Chúc ngon miệng!”-- meaning 'enjoy your meal'. While Vietnamese cuisine abroad still flies under the banners of pho and bánh mì, the full spectrum of Vietnamese food is a symphony of delightfully textured, bright and piquant flavors. The Vietnamese love their food and cooks make the most of each region's abundance produce and special ingredients to make their meals. Northern food is known for its simplicity; the dishes of central Vietnam are generous in spice and quantity; Southerners like to add sugar. Wherever you travel across the country, you're sure to eat well.

1. Pho - Pho is the quintessential Vietnamese dish, the word pho referring to the type of noodle used in the recipe. Flat rice noodles dance around with medium-rare slivers of beef or boiled chicken in a hearty beef stock. The more popular of the two widely known varieties is pho Hanoi. Originally from the north, it is distinguished by a clear broth and dressed only with a squeeze of lemon and slices of bird’s eye chili. The southern iteration, pho Nam, has a murkier broth and is served with a bouquet of fresh herbs like bean sprouts, basil and mint. The secret to a good bowl of pho lies in its stock. The broth is usually infused with fragrant star anise, clove and cinnamon to lend a natural sweetness to the mix. This dish is found on almost every street corner and is actually consumed for breakfast, unbeknownst to outsiders.

2. Bánh Mì - Baguettes may have been adopted from the French, but bánh mì is as Vietnamese as it comes. Paté and margarine are spread swiftly across the soft, chewy interior of a baguette and later, the sandwich is loaded with pickled vegetables, fresh cilantro, pork belly, pork floss and cucumber. Sink your teeth into the crunchy crust and watch the warm roll give way to a whole scheme of textures.

3. Cơm Tam - Back in the day, Vietnamese farmers would eat the fractured rice grains they could not sell. Nowadays, “broken” rice is a food staple for the everyday working-class citizen. For a meal of humble origins, the preparations for cơm tam can get very decadent. While it's prepared in a number of ways, the most popular is cơm tam sườn nướng op la. A fried egg is paired with caramelized grilled pork chop and laid out on a generous heap of broken rice. The dish is then slathered with nước



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cham, a mixture of chili, fish sauce and sugar, and a drizzle of green onion oil. The final touches include a side of shredded pickled carrots and daikon, slices of cucumbers and tomatoes, and crushed fried pork rinds and shallots for garnish.

4. Bún Bò Huế - Representing the legendary royal cuisine of Hue, bún bò hue is a mighty demonstration of both beauty and taste. The red broth is the first signal of its striking flavor—the result of hours spent simmering beef bones and stalks of lemongrass to produce a citrusy concoction. Flash boiled vegetables paired with tender beef shanks give this dynamic affair added vivacity. This may be a beef soup—the word bò is Vietnamese for beef—but don't be surprised when you see sausage lurking in the bowl. Cha lụa is a sausage made of ham paste that has a texture reminiscent of tofu.

5. Cao Lau - A dish unique to Hoi An, cao lau is beyond compare. Saluting the history of the coastal trading port from where it originated, this sensuous bowl of noodles is a fusion of Japanese, Chinese and Vietnamese influences. Slices of Chinese barbecued pork are fanned over cao lau noodles. These thick noodles, with the same heft as Japanese udon, are then doused with a spice-laden broth and topped with fresh herbs and crushed pork cracklings. Authentic cao lau is said to be made from the water found in the thousand-year-old Ba Le well in Hoi An, rumored to have magical properties.

6. Cơm Gà - Chicken and rice is a foolproof combination. But in Hoi An, this delicious duo is elevated using fresh ingredients from the countryside. Strips of tender chicken are shredded, mixed with flavored fish sauce and onions to accompany a bowl of turmeric rice. Pickled shallots, radish and herbs are served on the side. Cooks from all over the country have their own secrets to set their turmeric rice apart. Classic Hoi An Chicken Rice is topped with a few leaves of Vietnamese coriander and hot mint to balance out the zesty chicken marinade and soft, young eggs. After a day exploring the Ancient Town on foot, a plate of golden chicken rice is simply the perfect treat.

7. Mì Quảng - Part soup, part salad, mì quang gracefully pulls off an identity crisis. That being said, don't let the elegance of mì quang fool you. This light and springy noodle dish from the Quang Nam province in Central Vietnam is street food. The vibrant yellow noodles owe their rich color to the turmeric-infused broth made rich with peanut oil. Only a ladleful is used in the making of this "soup," which can be topped with anything from shrimp and chicken to pork belly and snakehead fish. Eat mì quang with sliced banana flowers, Vietnamese coriander, basil and bánh tráng me, toasted sesame rice crackers.

8. Bánh Xèo - A Mekong Delta creation, bánh xèo is widely eaten around south and central Vietnam. Watching the crispy crepe being assembled is an audio-visual experience: the batter crackles loudly when it hits the hot pan—xèo meaning sizzling—and the edges gradually curl and golden as the skilled xèo maker deftly swirls the pan to evenly spread out the dense batter. The batter, traditionally made from rice flour and coconut milk, owes its yellowish hue to the addition of turmeric. Another French-inspired delight, the savory pancake is filled with slices of boiled pork, minced pork, bean sprouts and shrimp and then folded in the manner of a crepe. A bánh xèo shouldn't be too soggy and is best appreciated fresh off the skillet.

9. Bún Cha - Bún cha became an overnight sensation after President Obama was pictured scarfing down a bowl of these grilled pork patties with Anthony Bourdain. In the Hanoi Old Quarter, the scent of pork grilling over hot charcoal wafts down the sidewalks, filling the noses of hungry Hanoians. This classic northern dish is comprised of cold bún (rice vermicelli), slices of seasoned pork belly, a mountain of fresh herbs and salad greens, and last but not least, medallions of minced pork swimming in a bowl brimming with a fish sauce-based broth. The go-to approach is to scoop small bundles of bún into your broth bowl and rotate between eating the noodles, the pork and the greens.

10. Xoi - Xoi, Vietnamese sticky rice is a departure from other sticky rice interpretations in the region. The weighted, more dense glutinous staple comes in a savory or a sweet option. Xoi man, savory xoi, is a popular, inexpensive breakfast fix. Hankering for something sweeter? There are over 20 types of xoi ngo, but if you're hoping to be mesmerized, you're in luck. Xoi ngũ sắc, the five-colored xoi, is a psychedelic swirl of purple, green, red, yellow, and white, pigmented using natural plant extracts.



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Entry Requirements for US Citizens

US citizens need a valid visa to enter Vietnam. US citizens can apply for a visa in person or by mail at the nearest Vietnamese Embassy or Consulate, or online through the Vietnam Immigration Department's website. To streamline the process, US citizens can **complete their visa application online before their trip**. You must have a valid passport and a visa (or pre-approval for a visa on arrival) to enter Vietnam. Your **passport must be valid for six months beyond your planned stay**, and you must **have at least one blank visa page** (not including the endorsement page). If you arrive in Vietnam without an appropriate visa or pre-approval for a visa on arrival, you will be denied entry. U.S.-Vietnam dual nationals should consult the Department of State's information page for [Travelers with Dual Nationality](#) and the [Embassy of Vietnam](#) for travel requirements. You must enter and exit Vietnam on the same passport. If using a Vietnamese passport to enter and exit the country, your passport must have at least six months' validity from your return date to the United States.

E-Visa: U.S. citizens can apply online for an E-visa on the [Vietnam Immigration website](#). The E-visa is valid for a maximum of 90 days and does not allow for renewal or extension from within the country. An E-visa is usually processed within three to five working days after the Vietnam Immigration Department receives the completed application and E-visa fee. E-visa holders must present the printed E-visa and valid passport at the port of entry. Prior to your travel with an E-visa to Vietnam, we recommend travelers to carefully check their E-visa to make sure all information is correct, and that you will enter/exit Vietnam through a port of entry that you had selected at the time of application. **For this specific tour, you will enter and exit Vietnam through the Hanoi, at the Nội Bài International Airport.** An error on E-visa, including minor differences between the information on the application and the biographical information on the passport, may result in a denial of entry by immigration authorities. The U.S. Embassy and Consulate General are unable to change the information on your E-visa or help expedite the process as Vietnamese E-visa is under the sole jurisdiction of the Vietnamese government.

As of May 2024, a Vietnamese e-visa costs \$25 for a single entry. E-visas are valid for up to 90 days and can be paid for by bank transfer. The fee is non-refundable if an application is rejected.

Please note that Vietnam requires a valid visa, residence card, or approval from the Immigration Department to leave the country. Immigration officials will apply a fee to replace lost/stolen visas or will assess a fine for any visa overstay.

[U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT](#)

Entry Requirements for UK Citizens

As of August 15, 2023, UK citizens don't need a visa to enter Vietnam for stays up to 45 days. However, there are some requirements, including passport validity and arrival method.

To enter Vietnam, your passport must have:

- ✓ an 'expiry date' at least 6 months after the date you arrive
- ✓ at least 2 blank pages
- ✓ no damage – British nationals have been denied entry and exit due to passport damage

IMPORTANT NOTES:

- You will be denied entry if you do not have a valid travel document or try to use a passport that has been



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reported lost or stolen.

- Make sure you get your passport stamped.
- Check the visa expiry date written in your passport is correct before leaving border control. If it is wrong, you could be accused of overstaying.

Gov.uk

Vietnam Embassy UK

Entry Requirements for Canadian Citizens

A tourist Visa / E-Visa is required for entry to Vietnam. Your Canadian passport must be valid for at least 6 months of your entry into Vietnam and should have at least 2 blank pages. You have a soft copy of your full passport personal detail page (in jpeg format) You have a soft copy of your portrait (in jpeg format, meeting the Vietnam E-Visa photo requirements).

Passport with “X” gender identifier: While the Government of Canada issues passports with an “X” gender identifier, it cannot guarantee your entry or transit through other countries. You might face entry restrictions in countries that do not recognize the “X” gender identifier. Before you leave, check with the Vietnam Embassy for guidance.

If you have a valid Canadian passport, you may be eligible to apply online for an e-visa. This can be a single-entry or multiple-entry electronic tourist visa, valid for a maximum of 90 days. It allows you to enter Vietnam via the port of entry indicated in the visa approval notice only.

Some restrictions apply.

[Apply for an e-visa](#) - Immigration Department of Vietnam

Visa exemptions: Canadian spouses or children of Vietnamese citizens may be eligible for a visa exemption certificate. Contact the Embassy of Vietnam in Canada for more information on this process.

Travel.gc.ca

Global Affairs Canada



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VIETNAM WILDLIFE & ECOLOGY EXPEDITION

Minimum Booking Numbers: 20 students

What's Included:

Roundtrip international flights to/from Hanoi

7-nights' accommodation in Vietnam + overnight air travel

Airport transfers & group transportation to all included activities

Breakfasts, lunches & dinners daily (starting with dinner on arrival and ending with breakfast on departure)

All inclusions as shown in the above itinerary:

- ✓ Bai Dinh Pagoda excursion & challenge
- ✓ Earthen Building excursion
- ✓ Permaculture Initiation Course at La Library
- ✓ Ninh Binh Night Market excursion
- ✓ Cuc Phuong National Park, Hike & Cuc Phuong Museum
- ✓ **SERVICE PROJECT** – Turtle Conservation Center
- ✓ **SERVICE PROJECT** – Endangered Primate Rescue Center
- ✓ **SERVICE PROJECT** – Carnivore & Pangolin Conservation Program
- ✓ Hoa Lu Ancient Town excursion
- ✓ Overnight Cruise to Ha Long Bay (UNESCO Natural Heritage Site)
- ✓ Kayaking in Luon Cave
- ✓ Sung Sot Cave excursion
- ✓ Hanoi Night Market
- ✓ Hanoi City Tour
- ✓ Vietnamese Cooking Class – Lunch
- ✓ Vietnam National Museum of Nature excursion
- ✓ Water Puppet Show in Hanoi
- ✓ Local Hanoi School Visit/Exchange
- ✓ Hanoi University Campus Visit, dependent upon availability

Personal SST Tour Director

Gratuities for your Vietnam Activities Team and Transportation providers

24-hour emergency cover

What's Not Included:

- ⊗ Fully comprehensive insurance (**mandatory**)
- ⊗ Beverages, apart from table water at meals (pay on own for other beverage options)
- ⊗ Transfers to/from home airport
- ⊗ Baggage costs, pay directly to airline if not included in ticket pricing
- ⊗ Baggage handling (each student should be able to carry/load their own suitcase)
- ⊗ Cost of visas and passports
- ⊗ Cost of inoculations or medication required for travel
- ⊗ Sightseeing / Entertainment options not shown in Itinerary
- ⊗ Hotel incidental deposits & bills – meals, mini-bar items, purchases billed to room, etc.
- ⊗ Gratuities for your SST Tour Ambassador
- ⊗ Additional taxes, fuel surcharges or service charges levied by the governments or our suppliers
- ⊗ Credit card fees if individuals wish to pay via credit card instead of ACH (online check).

As always, our staff are always available to you to answer any questions you may have regarding programming. If we may serve you in any way, please do not hesitate to contact us.



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