



STARR
TRAVEL

Custom Travel Itinerary

Vietnam

Arrival: Ho Chi Minh City - Jan 16, 2013

Arrive in Ho Chi Minh City and transfer to a nearby hotel. The rest of the day is leisure. Overnight in Ho Chi Minh City.

Day 1: Ho Chi Minh City (B) - Jan 17, 2013

Depart your hotel for a full day Ho Chi Minh City tour. Head to Cholon, the Chinatown district, to discover the area's markets, shops, and the Cantonese Thien Hau Pagoda - dedicated to the goddess of the Sea. Visit Vietnam's first traditional medicine museum, the FITO Museum, with an amazing collection of 3,000 items relevant to the development of traditional Vietnamese medicine. Implements used to prepare indigenous herbs, and objects commonly found in traditional pharmacies can be seen in the galleries as well as ancient books and documents on traditional Vietnamese medicine.

Head back to the city center to visit Ben Thanh Market, where an incredible display of fresh produce is offered. Simply stroll through the market exploring the variety of goods for sale.

This afternoon visit the War Remnants or History Museum (choose which one you would most like to see) and the former Presidential Palace. Stroll (or take your vehicle, which will be available at all times) to the major sights of colonial Ho Chi Minh City: the Old Saigon Post Office, Dong Khoi Street (formerly Rue Catinat), Continental Hotel, Opera House and City Hall. At the end of the afternoon head back to your hotel.

Overnight in Ho Chi Minh City.

Note: The History Museum is closed on Mondays.

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Day 2: Ho Chi Minh City & Mekong Delta (B, L) - Jan 18, 2013

The colorful floating market, vast emerald rice fields and lush back waterways are the things that make Cai Be such a desired destination. This morning, leave bustling Ho Chi Minh for the 2 hour drive to the delta town of Cai Be.

On arrival, board your boat for a cruise of Cai Be floating market. Traders work the river, and some have been living on these waters for generations. Produce at the market is hung on a pole in front of boats to attract customers and make it easier for people to see the offerings from afar.

After visiting the market, continue to a cottage factory where 'pop-rice,' rice paper and coconut candies are made. Return to the boat for a cruise to Dong Hoa Hiep Island, admiring the scenery and the daily life of the local villagers along the way. Lunch is the local Mekong style, serving specialties of the area. Following your cruise, drive back to Ho Chi Minh City.

Overnight in Ho Chi Minh City.

Day 3: From Ho Chi Minh City to Danang & Hoi An (B) - Jan 19, 2013

After breakfast, transfer to Tan Son Nhat Airport for a short flight to the central port city of Danang. On arrival in Danang, transfer to Hoi An, a major Asian trading port in the 17th and 18th centuries whose architecture and relaxed lifestyle has changed little over the years. Take a walking tour of the ancient town centre to visit the former merchants' homes, the 400 year-old Japanese Covered Bridge and the colourful market.

Spend the rest of the day at leisure.

Overnight in Hoi An.

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Day 4: From Hoi An to Hue (B) - Jan 20, 2013

Leave Hoi An for Hue, the former imperial capital of Vietnam. Its mesmerizing tombs and mausoleums of the last emperors of Vietnam reveal fascinating insights into the lives of the imperial families and their subjects. The ancient citadel reflects the pomp and ceremony of the dynastic rulers, as well as the scars of many years of turmoil both ancient and modern. The Royal Citadel was badly damaged in the latter stages of the war, but retains a sense of grace and majesty even today.

Drive through Danang and visit the Cham Museum, which contains the finest collection of Cham sculptures in the world before climbing over the Pass of Ocean Clouds and dropping down to the wonderfully photogenic fishing village of Lang Co.

In Hue, visit the Imperial Citadel where the Nguyen Dynasty ruled between 1802 and 1945.

After exploring the ruins of this wonderful monument, depart for Thien Mu (Celestial Lady) Pagoda overlooking the Perfume River. Constructed in 1601, the 21-meter tower is the centerpiece of the pagoda and represents seven reincarnations of Buddha. On the pagoda grounds is the famous Austin car a resident monk drove to Saigon in 1963 to protest against the southern regime. The photo of his self-immortalization is one of the most well-known images of the war.

Overnight in Hue.

Day 5: From Hue to Hanoi (B) - Jan 21, 2013

Start your day with a visit to the city's vibrant Dong Ba Market to see its abundance of fresh produce. After exploring the market, take a cyclo through the 'Old City' to Tinh Tam Lake, where the Emperors once went to relax. It is full of lotus flowers in summer. Around the lake there are many local style coffee shops where university students come to study.

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Continue to the former emperor Minh Mang's tomb, located in a tranquil setting of gardens and ponds. Journey on to Khai Dinh's Tomb, designed in traditional Vietnamese style with a European touch, making it unique from the other tombs in Hue.

From here, travel 30-minutes to the Hue Airport for a 1-hour flight to Hanoi. On arrival, transfer to your hotel.

Overnight in Hanoi.

Day 6: From Hanoi to Halong Bay (B, L, D) Jan 22, 2013

After breakfast, leave Hanoi for an overnight boat trip on Halong Bay. Journey through the rich farmlands of the Red River Delta and observe everyday life of Vietnamese villagers as they work the rice fields, take pigs to the market on bicycles and plough the fields with their water buffaloes. Arrive in Halong City in the late morning and board your traditional wooden junk or a classic colonial era replica steamship, The Emeraude, for the overnight journey into the Bay. Lunch will be served en-route. Cruise by rock formations with such names as Sail, Dog and Dinh Huong (incense pot). Towards the end of the day, set anchor for the night. As the sun sets over the bay, dinner is served on board with fresh seafood, salads, and fruits.

Overnight on Halong Bay.

Day 7: From Halong Bay to Hanoi (B) - Jan 23, 2013

On your return to Halong City, enjoy a wholesome brunch as your boat weaves through strangely shaped limestone rock formations. Upon disembarkation, your driver will meet you for the transfer back to Hanoi.

As an optional extra, visit one of the oldest pagodas in Vietnam, 'But Thap,' on the way back to Hanoi.

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While you are in Hanoi in the afternoon, visit the fascinating Ethnology Museum (closed Mondays), a research center and public museum exhibiting the ethnic groups of Vietnam.

Next, visit Hanoi's Old Quarter, also known as the '36 streets.' Take a walking tour through the charming Hang Be Market and around Hoan Kiem Lake. This bustling area of narrow streets and alleys is home to literally thousands of small businesses and shopkeepers. It's a great place to explore with plenty of photo opportunities all around you.

Finish the day with a Water Puppet show. This is a uniquely northern Vietnamese art form depicting scenes from rural life and episodes of national history.

Overnight in Hanoi.

Day 8: Hanoi (B) - Jan 24, 2013

This morning you will depart your hotel for the Temple of Literature. In 1076, Vietnam's first university, *Quoc Tu Giam*, was established within a temple to educate Vietnam's royalty, mandarins and members of the elite. The university functioned for an incredible 700 years, and its gardens and well-preserved architecture offer a fascinating glimpse into Vietnam's past.

Continue to picturesque West Lake and the sixth century Tran Quoc Buddhist Pagoda. From here, transfer (or stroll along the lakeside) 700 meters to the nearby Taoist temple of Quan Thanh dedicated to *Tran Vu*, one of the principal deities in Taoism.

Overnight in Hanoi.

Day 9: Departure from Hanoi (B) - Jan 25, 2013

Spend part of the day at leisure until your transfer to the Noi Bai Airport for your onward flight.

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