

ITINERARY

Unforgettable VIETNAM

19 January - 03 February, 2019



Travelling in Vietnam is fascinating, exciting, relaxing and rejuvenating. I know no other destination that offers the visitor such a range of cultural and personal possibilities, and then lives up to all the expectations.

Our trip is timed to coincide with preparations for the celebration of TET (Lunar New Year), the most significant and colourful festival in Vietnam's cultural calendar.

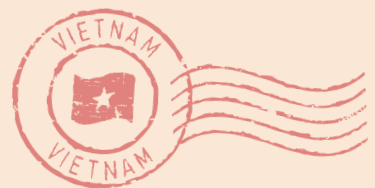
I love being in Vietnam! We begin our journey in **Hanoi**, my most favourite city in Indochina. From Hanoi those taking the **Pre-Tour Sapa Extension** will travel further north, and back in time, into the remote, mountainous landscape inhabited by Vietnam's ethnic minority peoples. This former French hill-station is a place of breath-taking beauty and authentic hill tribe culture. In Sapa we will enjoy a personalised itinerary with local Red Dzao guides and trek above terraced rice fields.

On returning to **Hanoi** we will meet up with other fellow travellers to explore the history, art, architecture and contemporary lifestyle of this centuries old city; we will sit in cafes, join the buzz of street life and enjoy the fabulous food. From **Hanoi** we travel by private coach to the **Gulf of Tonkin** and the emerald waters of **Halong Bay** where we spend three days and two nights cruising amongst the limestone pillars of this UNESCO World Heritage site aboard our exclusive Au Co vessel. From **Halong Bay** we fly south into central Vietnam to the old Imperial city of **Hue** with its regal history, its citadel and tombs, along the **Perfume River**.

From **Hue** we travel by private coach across the spectacular **Hai Van Pass** to another UNESCO World Heritage site, the Ancient Town of **Hoi An**. Here in **Hoi An** we relax, take a cooking class and soak up the uninterrupted threads of Vietnam's rich cultural history. Our visit to **Hoi An** would be incomplete without consulting some of its celebrated tailors and I will introduce you to my favourites. Our last couple of days are spent in the very cosmopolitan, **Ho Chi Minh City**, with its art galleries, museums, designer shops and from where we can explore the **Cu Chi** tunnels and the **Mekong Delta**.



This will be my seventh trip to Vietnam in a little over twelve years. Vietnam is a country of great beauty and dramatic contrasts: old and new; fast and slow; noisy and serene. Our itinerary has been meticulously designed, with the help of my friend Pete Wilkes in Hanoi, to ensure ours is a genuine cultural and sensory immersion - Judith



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Sapa mountains

ITINERARY

Sapa extension



The Chi Boutique Hotel

Day 1 ❖ Wed 16 Jan ❖ Arrive Hanoi

Fly from Australia to Vietnam aboard Vietnam Airlines brand new Boeing 787 Dreamliner aircraft.
Flight VN786 Sydney-Hanoi 15.15pm/20.45pm | Duration: 9hrs 30mins

Welcome to Vietnam! Upon arrival, our local guide will be waiting to transfer us to our hotel.

Accommodation: The Chi Boutique Hotel www.thechihotel.com

Meals: None. We arrive late in the evening, in time for a cocktail at the Chi Rooftop Bar!
Chi Hotel Restaurant is open till 1.00am.

Day 2 ❖ Thu 17 Jan ❖ Hanoi – Lao Cai – Sapa

Today, **10.00am**, we leave by private coach for the hill-station town of **Sapa** known for its mountain scenery, rice fields, and colourful ethnic minority people. Approximately 6 hours driving, with two comfort stops. Our lunch will be a packed surprise!

Approx **4:00pm** we arrive in Sapa; check into **Aira Hotel**; time to explore Sapa town before dinner

7:00pm: Group welcome dinner at **Hill Station Sapa** www.thehillstation.com/about

Accommodation: www.airaboutiquesapa.com

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



Hill Station Sapa

Day 3 ❖ Fri 18 Jan ❖ Sapa

After breakfast, **9.30am**, we meet Ta May, our **Red Dzao guide** for the day.

10:00am - 4:00pm Day trek to Ma Cha/Taphin

Depart for **Ma Cha*** school and organized lunch with the children. (A donation hand out will be organised with Judith prior to departure.) Continue either walking or by mini-van to Ta May's village of **Taphin**, home to the Red Dao and Black Hmong tribes. We visit Ta May's house, witness her way of life while she cooks us lunch.

Finish the trek with a **hot herbal medicine bath** before returning to Sapa by mini-van.

**Ma Cha is located 7 km from Sapa town deep in the Northern Vietnamese Alps. It is one of the most impoverished areas of the Sapa region. There are over 1,000 Black Hmong ethnic minority people living in and around Ma Cha village, with 120 children in the school from kindergarten to 5th grade. Going to school in winter for these children is extremely difficult. Close your eyes and imagine for a moment what it must be like for these children to walk up to 6km bare foot over icy rice fields to school each morning, sit in cold cement class rooms with no heating while the wind whistles through the broken windows and doors. (Words by Pete Wilkes, Judith's friend in Sapa.)*

7:00pm Group dinner at Silk Path/Aira or Victoria Hotel

Accommodation: www.airaboutiquesapa.com

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



Day 4 ❖ Sat 19 Jan ❖ Sapa

After breakfast, **9:00am** meet Ta May for an easy drive to **Lao Chai Village** followed by a downhill trek from Lao Chai to **Tavan Village** (total 4 km walking). Drop into the Black Hmong Indigo hemp batik workshop in Lao Chai Village.

Lunch at L' Dao Spa and cafe in Tavan village: www.ladaospa.com

Transported back to Sapa to Aira Hotel by **1:00pm**

Depart Sapa - Hanoi approx 5 hours driving with two comfort stops along the way

6:00-7:00pm arrive in Hanoi

Free time; dinner at recommended restaurants nearby

Accommodation: The Chi Boutique Hotel www.thechihotel.com

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

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ITINERARY Main Tour



Day 1 ❖ Sat 19 Jan ❖ Arrive Hanoi

Flight from Australia to Vietnam (VN786 SYD-HAN 15.15pm/20.45pm).

Welcome to Vietnam! Upon arrival, you will be greeted by your local guide and transferred to our hotel in Hanoi for check-in.

Accommodation: The Chi Boutique Hotel www.thechihotel.com

Meals: None. Judith will be waiting for you in Chi Rooftop Bar.

Day 2 ❖ Sun 20 Jan ❖ Half-day Charming & Historic Hanoi Tour, Afternoon

After breakfast, Judith will organise small group meanderings to parts of the Old and French Quarters.

Casual, independent lunch close by Chi Hotel.

1.00pm our guided historic tour of Hanoi's highlights, including the Temple of Literature, the One Pillar Temple and the mausoleum of Ho Chi Minh. **7.00pm: Welcome dinner at Maison de Tet Décor**

Accommodation: The Chi Boutique Hotel www.thechihotel.com

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner



Day 3 ❖ Mon 21 Jan ❖ Sophie's Art Tour

After breakfast, at **9.00am**, we begin our tour with Maia, a local art expert, for coffee at a charming art café to discuss the day's plan.

Our first stop is the National Museum of Fine Arts. Housed in an impressive former French convent, the museum is the perfect place to learn about Vietnam's cultural heritage. We are introduced to art created during the colonial era, when European influences fused with a traditional Vietnamese style to give birth to the country's modern art movement. From here, we move on to one of Hanoi's longest running contemporary art galleries browsing works by the first generation of Vietnam's modern artists as well as works by emerging younger artists. Our final stop is a vibrant art space café where we view a current contemporary exhibition before returning to the Chi Hotel.

Independent lunch, Judith will have recommendations. Free afternoon till **4.00pm**

4.00pm Hanoi Street Food Tour with Food Blogger

Starting with a trip to the food stalls at Thanh Ha Market, then onto the handbags, clothes and accessories at Dong Xuan Market. Time to sample treats such as pho tieu noodle soup with pork and herbs, and bun dau, tofu served in soup with rice noodles and shrimp paste. Moving on to the Old Quarter for some preserved fruits and French inspired desserts. Finish up with a sweet iced coffee and some people watching in a local café.

Accommodation: The Chi Boutique Hotel www.thechihotel.com

Meals: Breakfast, snacks on our food tour

Day 4 ❖ Tue 22 Jan ❖ Hanoi to Halong Bay - Overnight on luxury Au Co Ship

Following breakfast we leave Hanoi for a **4-hour drive to Halong Bay** including a 20-minutes stop on the way.

Halong Bay comprises around 2000 karst limestone peaks jutting out of calm emerald waters. Designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its incredible natural beauty, the forested islands are dotted with caves and home to a variety of birdlife. Whether cloaked in mist or bathed in sunshine, a cruise through this beautiful bay is one of Vietnam's highlights.



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We arrive at the dock late morning to check in for our **luxury 3day/2night cruise**. We are transferred to our boat where lunch is served as we cruise into the bay. In the afternoon we can visit Cua Van floating fishing village or simply relax on deck. Happy Hour at sunset is followed by dinner as our ship drops anchor for our overnight stay. Movies or squid fishing after dinner.

Overnight on board AU CO Luxury Ship
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 5 ❖ Wednesday 23 Jan ❖ Halong Bay

Begin the day with an early morning Tai Chi lesson.

After breakfast, we disembark at a local island to explore the small village on foot or bicycle. Weather permitting, we may also visit a Community Farm Project in the National Park.

10:30am Return to the ship.
12:15pm Enjoy lunch while the Au Co cruises slowly past beautiful karst towers.
Afternoon Kayak to sandy beaches in Ho Ba Ham area, or relax on board the Au Co.
5:30pm Bar opens for Happy Hour.
7:30pm Barbecue party on the sundeck. Movies or squid fishing after dinner

Overnight on board AU CO Luxury Ship
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



Day 6 ❖ Thu 24 Jan ❖ Hanoi – Fly to Hue

A second chance to join the Tai Chi lesson on the sundeck.

7:00am Breakfast buffet is prepared in the restaurant.
7:45am Visit Tien Ong Cave, covering an area of 1,000 m² with stunning stalactites and stalagmites, it is one of the finest caves in Halong Bay, or relax on board the Au Co.
9:00am Back to the ship and prepare to check out.
9:45am Join a traditional Vietnamese tea ceremony while the ship sails back to the port.
10:45am Disembark at Tuan Chau International Passenger Port. Farewell.

From the Passenger Port we will be driven back to **Hanoi airport** for our short flight to **Hue**.

Flight VN1545 Hanoi-Hue 18:00pm/19:10pm | Duration: 1hr 10mins

Upon arrival in **Hue**, we will be greeted by our local guide and then transferred to our hotel for check-in.

Accommodation: Hotel Saigon Morin www.morinhotel.com.vn

Meals: Breakfast; our hotel offers a choice of restaurants and bars for independent dinner options

Day 7 ❖ Fri 25 Jan ❖ Half-day Highlights of Hue

After breakfast, at **8.00am**, we will begin our introduction to **Hue's** remarkable history, culture and natural beauty. During our half-day tour, we will visit the UNESCO-Heritage Imperial Citadel, roam its expansive grounds, view buildings that reflect the pomp and ceremony of the once-mighty Nguyen Dynasty and hear intriguing stories of former emperors. From the Citadel, we will leave the city centre and travel through Hue's beautiful countryside to arrive at Khai Dinh's tomb. One of the Nguyen Dynasty's former emperors, Khai Dinh's remarkable complex blends traditional Vietnamese design with European touches, making it unique from the other tombs in Hue. Before heading back to your hotel, we will browse the stalls at Dong Ba Market, a place that teems with colour and glimpses of everyday life in modern Hue.

Free afternoon and evening

Accommodation: Hotel Saigon Morin www.morinhotel.com.vn

Meals: Breakfast; our hotel offers a choice of restaurants and bars for independent dinner options



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ITINERARY Main Tour



Day 8 ❖ Sat 26 Jan ❖ Hue – Danang – Hoi An

After breakfast, we leave Hue for **Hoi An** (approx 3.0 hrs). We will take the scenic route over the **Hai Van Pass**, also known as the Pass of Ocean Clouds, and through the fishing village of Lang Co – a very picturesque journey. We will stop for coffee at a coastal café/restaurant.

Lunch at the Shore House – An Bang Beach: www.thedekhouseanbang.com

Check in to our Hotel. The rest of the day is free to explore Hoi An with Judith.

Accommodation: Almanity Hoi An Wellness Resort: www.almanityhoian.com

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Day 9 ❖ Sun 27 Jan ❖ Hoi An Ancient Town Walking Tour with Private Guide

After breakfast, our Half-day walking tour begins at **8.30am**. We visit remarkably well-preserved traditional houses that have withstood 200 years of weather and war and learn about the prosperous merchants who used to live in them. We walk across the historic 400 year-old Japanese Covered Bridge, hear about its design and symbolism, and visit the Chinese Communal Hall. Along the way we will visit some of Hoi An's famous handicraft shops, art galleries and markets.

Lunch at Morning Glory Original Restaurant

Free Afternoon: Judith will introduce you to a couple of her favourite Hoi An's tailors.

Accommodation: Almanity Hoi An Wellness Resort: www.almanityhoian.com

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch



Day 10 ❖ Monday 28 Jan ❖ Hoi An – Red Bridge Cooking School

Today's tour will begin at **8.00am**. Set off on a culinary adventure with this Half-day Hoi An cooking class. After breakfast at the hotel, transfer to Hai Café, a charming restaurant in the centre of Hoi An's old town. Enjoy a welcome drink while being briefed on the day's activities.

Then it's off to the market to shop for ingredients. Learn about the fresh items on sale, from herbs and spices to colourful vegetables and live seafood, and how they are used in authentic Vietnamese cooking. Purchase a selection of items and mingle with the locals, enjoying the sights, sounds and aromas of this busy market.

Take a short walk to the pier where a private motorboat is waiting. Climb aboard and cruise up the **Thu Bon River**, enjoying the passing views of fishermen on the way to the Red Bridge Cooking School.

Upon arrival meet with the chefs and start cooking! The two-hour course starts with a demonstration from the chefs, showing the proper cooking techniques and introducing the ingredients. Then, at a personal cooking station, prepare a selection of Vietnamese dishes under the watchful eye of the Red Bridge team.

Once ready, sit down and feast on a delicious meal of authentic local cuisine. After filling up on these home-cooked delights, return to Hoi An for the afternoon.

Free Afternoon.

Accommodation: Almanity Hoi An Wellness Resort: www.almanityhoian.com

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch



Red Bridge Cooking School



Ho Chi Minh City

ITINERARY Main Tour



Danang

Day 11 ♦ Tue 29 Jan ♦ Hoi An – March Gallery

After breakfast, we will visit the March Gallery and meet the owner/artist, English born Bridget March.

Bridget will introduce us to contemporary art practices in Hoi An and offer a practical workshop for those interested. We may also have the opportunity to meet with a writer and hone our journal writing skills.

Lunch today at **Brothers Restaurant**.

Free Afternoon: shopping and visits to tailors.

Accommodation: Almanity Hoi An Wellness Resort: www.almanityhoian.com

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch



Ho Chi Minh City

Day 12 ♦ Wed 30 Jan ♦ Hoi An – Danang – Ho Chi Minh City

Leisurely morning in Hoi An.

Check-out Almanity Wellness Resort.

Late morning transfer to Danang airport for flight to **Ho Chi Minh City**.

Flight VN125 Danang- Ho Chi Minh City 14.00pm/ 15.30pm | Duration: 1hr 30mins

Arrive Ho Chi Minh City - transfer from airport to our hotel for check-in.

Accommodation: Hotel Des Arts Saigon MGallery: www.hoteldesartssaigon.com

Meals: Breakfast

Day 13 ♦ Thu 31 Jan ♦ Ho Chi Minh City

There is so much to see and do in HCMC or **Saigon**, as it is still called by many. Judith and Natalie recommend the following tours, and Judith will also help you design more personalised self-guided excursions around the city, and accompany you wherever possible.

Optional Tours: at own cost

1. Sophie's Art Tour AUD\$136 11 people or more

Looks at Vietnam's fascinating history through the lives and works of its artists. Tours run in **Ho Chi Minh City** and **Hanoi** and complement each other as they respectively offer an insight into the development of the cities' distinct art scenes as well as give an overview of Vietnam's history as a whole.

2. Cruise The Saigon River To Chu Chi Tunnels (Join-In Tour/ Lunch Included) AUD\$120 11 people or more

This is a join-in Cu Chi Tunnels tour. Groups are small with up to 15 people maximum per tour. The morning begins with a short drive to the banks of the Saigon River. Board a speedboat for a scenic ride to the Cu Chi tunnels. Gaze upon the modern skyline of the city while enjoying a light breakfast. Watch as the scenery changes, passing through urban neighbourhoods and then rural countryside.

After 90 minutes arrive at Cu Chi and explore the incredible network of 200 km underground tunnels. Crawl underground and get a better sense for what life was like living and fighting in the labyrinth of caves and tunnels. Hear remarkable stories of the residents' resilience and see relics of the wartime weapons.

Following the visit, return to the boat and relax while cruising back to the heart of Ho Chi Minh City.

Accommodation: Hotel Des Arts Saigon MGallery: www.hoteldesartssaigon.com

Meals: Breakfast



Hoi An Market



ITINERARY Main Tour



Day 14 ♦ Fri 01 Feb

Free Day OR...

Optional Tour: at own cost

A Day in Ben Tre (Join-In Tour/ Lunch Included) AUD\$120 11 people or more

Today's tour will begin at 8am. Leave the buzz of Ho Chi Minh City behind and drive through the countryside for this tour to Ben Tre. Situated at the edge of the Mekong Delta, Ben Tre is the perfect starting point for this insightful excursion.

The adventure begins with a ride on the back of a xe loi, a local motorized cart. Bounce along back paths through coconut groves, lush rice paddies and fruit farms a picturesque canal. Step aboard the 'Mango Cruise' and cast off for a glimpse of Delta scenery. Sip a freshly picked coconut as the boat winds through the maze of canals.

Stop at a small brick workshop where locals still use centuries-old traditional methods to make the bricks by hand. Observe this labour-intensive process, then return to the boat and cross the An Hoa River. Hop onto a bike for a short ride through Phong Nam, a typical delta village. Visit a local house to see coconut processing by hand and learn how every part of the coconut is used. Continue cycling through gardens and stop to visit a ruou dua factory, observe the process of making the coconut spirits.

Then get a closer look at delta life with a visit to a family home. Enjoy the tropical fruits and honey tea in the garden and hear how the family relies on fishing and farming to make a living. After this unique immersive visit, climb into a sampan boat and row through a hidden maze of small, sun-dappled canals gaining an insider's perspective on daily river life.

Having worked up an appetite during the morning's touring, take a break at Mango Home Stay restaurant to enjoy a delicious Vietnamese lunch. Afterwards, take leisurely walk past green gardens to the house of Mr Sau Tuong. Have a chat with him and watch as his wife makes crispy rice paper, the most famous specialty of this village.

Armed with a camera-full of amazing images and unforgettable memories, return to Ho Chi Minh City by car.



Farewell Vietnam Dinner

Accommodation: Hotel Des Arts Saigon MGallery: www.hoteldesartssaigon.com

Meals: Breakfast, Farewell Dinner

Day 15 ♦ Sat 02 Feb

Free Day.

Late check-out hotel until 6.00pm.

Transfer to Ho Chi Minh airport for our flight home.

Flight VN773 Ho Chi Minh City-Sydney 21.25pm.

Day 16 ♦ Sun 03 Feb

Arrive Sydney at 9.50am