



Along the Ho Chi Minh Trail Tour Dossier

Discovery Tour | 24 Days | Active

Hanoi – Sapa – Dien Bien – Nong Khiaw – Xam Neua – Vinh – Dong Hoi – Hue – Hoi An

Used during the Vietnam War by North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong as a means of evading their enemies, the Ho Chi Minh Trail provides an exciting alternative route to the usual coastal path.

Tour Highlights:

Hanoi - Exploration of this charming, historical centre & its French provincial influences

Halong Bay - Vietnam's 'jewel in the crown'; the stunning beauty of the 3,000 islets of the Gulf of Tonkin

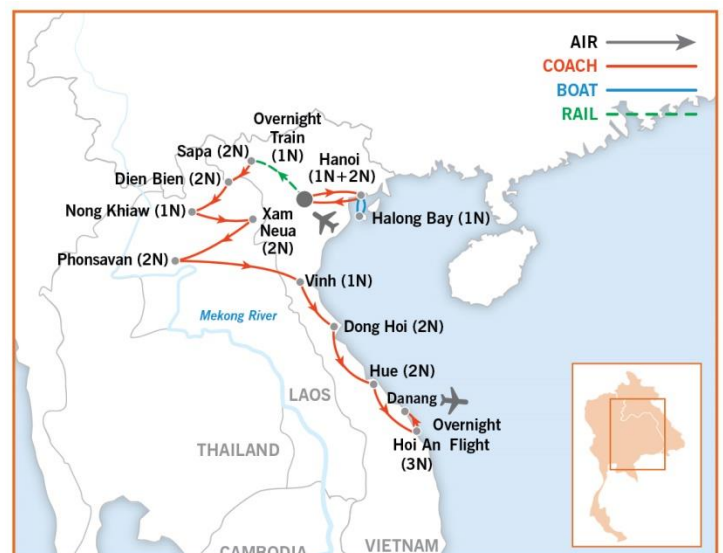
Sapa – A French Hill station nestled within the mountains high above Hanoi and is home to many colourful ethnic groups.

Dien Bein - War sites A1 Hill, French Tunnel and Dien Bien Museum

Sam Neua - Visit Viengxay where the headquarters of the communist Pathet Lao were forced during the American War

Phonsavan - The gateway to the Plain of Jars; an archaeological landscape where large jars made from solid stone are scattered

Dong Hoi - The Ho Chi Minh Trail



Phon Nha - Trek along the "Secret Route" which was used in the war time by the soldiers to hide from the bombs dropped by the Americans

Hue - The country's former capital

Hoi An - Discover this charming UNESCO World Heritage listed site

Along the Ho Chi Minh Trail tour inclusions

- Return international economy flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation
- Most meals as specified on the below itinerary
- All sightseeing and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English-speaking National Escort (if your group is 10 or more passengers)
- Visa fees for Australian passport holders

Personal expenditures e.g. drinks, optional excursions or shows, insurance of any kind, tipping, early check in or late checkout and other items not specified on the itinerary are at your own expense.

Discovery Tours

Designed for those who wish to be further immersed in the authentic charm of Asia; our Discovery Tours include more cultural and active experiences. You will be accompanied by our dedicated and professional a National Escort/Local Guides, whose unparalleled knowledge will turn your holiday into an unforgettable experience. Our Discovery tours include:

- Walking through classic sites
- Unique cultural experiences and encounters
- Off the beaten track destinations
- More evenings at leisure for independent exploration

Active

'Along the Ho Chi Minh Trail' is an **active** tour. This is one of the most demanding trips Wendy Wu Tours offers. As a whole, this itinerary requires a high level of fitness.

- There will be both short and long periods of walking whilst sightseeing
- Whilst in Sapa you will be hiking between 4 to 6 hours each day, occasionally on steep and uneven ground
- Accommodation in Sapa will be a guest house with basic dorm like facilities
- This tour includes 12km's of trekking on Day 17 on uneven surfaces as well as un-kept bushland. You will require a good level of fitness for this day

Of course, our National Escort and Local Guides will always endeavour to provide the highest level of service and assistance; however, they cannot be expected to cater for customers who are unfit to complete the itinerary.

Country Profile: Vietnam and Laos

Vietnam - Vietnam is a country of breath-taking natural beauty with an incredible modern day history that quickly becomes addictive. It has experienced war and a bloody revolution in the past 100 years, but the revolution now underway is peaceful and prosperous. The speed of the modern day changes is making Vietnam the absorbing and gripping place that it is today. Vietnam has something to offer everyone, so whether you are a culture vulture, thrill seeker or just looking to relax and take in the beaches, Vietnam will not disappoint.

Laos - Laos has only recently been discovered as a fascinating tourist destination. This delightful jewel is steeped in historical treasures, glorious colonial architecture, lush green jungles and magnificent mountainous terrain. Discover the UNESCO World Heritage listed city of Luang Prabang and the spectacular multi-tiered Kuang Si Waterfalls. Journey by boat along the mighty Mekong River and be amazed by the stunning natural scenery and meet the beautiful, gentle people of Laos. Refreshingly, its long-established ways of life continue; to hurry is simply not the Lao way. This is a truly magical nation.

Itinerary Changes

1. It is our intention to adhere to the day-to-day itinerary as printed; however, the order of events or sightseeing may change as we look to improve our tours or as local conditions dictate. In these circumstances we will make the best possible arrangements maintaining the integrity of your trip.
2. There will be an opportunity to view The Mausoleum in Hanoi from the outside but we no longer include a visit due to restricted opening hours.
3. The Halong Bay Authorities are taking extra precautions to ensure the safety of all passengers cruising around Halong Bay. Weather conditions such as mist, fog, wind, rain and storms may delay the departure time of your cruise, or in some cases your cruise may be cancelled. Notifications of any delays or cancellations may not be known until your group's arrival in Halong Bay. If your cruise is cancelled after your arrival in Halong Bay, you will have lunch in Halong City and return to Hanoi where you will spend the evening in a hotel. If notification of the cruise cancellation is given prior to your departure for Halong Bay an alternative day trip will be arranged to Hoa Lu and Tam Coc or 'Halong Bay on Land', an area located approximately 2 hours from Hanoi. Our guides will make every effort to inform the group at the earliest possible moment should there be any itinerary changes.

Joining Your Tour

The tour is 24 days in duration including international flights. Travellers booked on 'Land Only' arrangements should make their own way to the starting point. Join the tour on Day 1 in Hanoi and end the tour on Day 23 in Danang. Please refer to your final itinerary for more specific meeting instructions pertaining to your departure.

Important Information Regarding Flight Delays

Due to unforeseen circumstances, flights can be delayed, and therefore connecting flights may be missed. If you find yourself in this situation, please contact our Vietnam office on **+84 989 559 488 (24 hours)** to urgently advise your arrival details have changed. Please ensure you have your trip number, tour name (both included in your final documentation) and new arrival details (flight number and arrival time) handy to pass on to our local office in Vietnam. This will ensure your National Escort/Local Guide can be informed of your most up to date information and ensure someone is at the airport to meet you on arrival.

If we are not advised of late changes and missed connections, Wendy Wu Tours cannot guarantee someone will be able to meet you upon arrival in Vietnam as our local office will have no way of knowing which flight you will be arriving on. Wendy Wu Tours will not be responsible for providing reimbursement of transportation costs from the airport to your hotel in the event that our local office was not advised of changes to arrival time.

Along the Ho Chi Minh Trail Itinerary

DAY 1: AUSTRALIA TO HANOI

Fly with Vietnam Airlines to Hanoi where you will be met at the airport in the arrival hall by your Local Guide and/or National Escort. Together with all other group members who may be arriving at a similar time, you will transfer 45 minutes to your hotel and check into your room or store any luggage if your room is not ready yet. There is no sightseeing today.

Meals included: Dinner

Destination Information

Hanoi - With a population of approximately four million, Hanoi is a charming and richly historic city of lakes, shaded

boulevards and leafy open parks. The centre is an architectural museum piece housing groups of ochre coloured buildings holding the air of provincial French towns of the 1930s, a "Paris of the Orient" as people have called it.

DAY 2: CRUISE HALONG BAY

Drive 4 hours (170km) to Halong Bay Port, including a 20-minute rest stop. There is usually a crowd of boats at the docks; however, the cruise itself will be scenic and relaxing. Boarding your junk boat could involve navigating your way over and through other boats, moored between it and the dock, sometimes without handrails, ladders or assistance from staff.

The boats have an enclosed dining area and an open area on the upper deck. Enjoy lunch onboard as you cruise out into the bay, stopping to anchor for an afternoon of activities (which are subject to change due to cruise selection and weather conditions). Sightseeing includes visiting underground caves on the islands, which require climbing up and down steps inside and outside of the caves. End the day on deck with a drink in hand to watch the sunset over the bay followed by a freshly prepared dinner, before retiring to your cabin for the night.

You will need to pack a smaller overnight bag for your trip to Halong Bay. Main luggage will be left in safe storage at the hotel in Hanoi and picked up your return.

Please note: Weather conditions such as mist, fog, wind, rain and storms may delay the departure time of your cruise, or in some cases your cruise may be cancelled. Notifications of any delays or cancellations may not be known until your group's arrival in Halong Bay. If your cruise is cancelled after your arrival in Halong Bay, you will have lunch in Halong City and return to Hanoi. If notification of the cruise cancellation is given prior to your departure for Halong Bay an alternative day trip will be arranged to Hoa Lu and Tam Coc or 'Halong Bay on Land', an area located approximately 2 hours from Hanoi. Our guides will make every effort to inform the group at the earliest possible moment should there be any itinerary changes.

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

Halong Bay - Compared to the landscape of the limestone islets of Guilin in China and Krabi in southern Thailand, Halong Bay shares a common border with China in the north and harbours some of the most stunning scenery in Vietnam. Bizarre rock sculptures jut out dramatically from the clear emerald waters of the Gulf of Tonkin and numerous grottoes have created an enchanting, timeless world, looking out onto the horizon with the sails of the junks and sampans completing the picture.

DAY 3: HALONG BAY TO HANOI

After an early lunch, return to the docks and drive back to Hanoi, returning in the afternoon where the remainder of the afternoon is at your leisure.

Meals included: Breakfast and Dinner

DAY 4: DISCOVER HANOI

This morning you will be transferred to the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum, an imposing structure that houses the remains of the revered former president who led Vietnam's campaign for independence from colonial rule. Next you will visit the grounds where you will see the One Pillar Pagoda and the Presidential Palace before continuing onto the Temple of Literature, an ancient collection of courtyards and gardens built in homage to the Chinese scholar Confucius. This is considered to be the oldest University in Vietnam. This afternoon, you will visit the Museum of Ethnology. Enjoy a traditional Water Puppets performance this evening before taking a culinary adventure where you will sample street food in the Old Quarter. This is a good opportunity for you to sample the weird and wonderful foods Hanoi has to offer.

The Ethnology Museum is closed on Mondays and on Vietnamese New Year, if your visit falls on these days you will go to the Vietnamese Women's Museum as an alternative.

Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum is closed for entry on Mondays and Fridays every week and from September to December each year. During these times, we are unable to enter the Mausoleum; however, we can view it from the outside.

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

Temple of Literature - Hanoi's first university dating back to 1070 and a historical centre of learning, now dedicated to Confucian worship.

Hanoi Old Quarter - A maze of streets weaving through Hanoi and dating back to the 13th century. Each street specialises in merchants and artisans selling their wares of silk, silver, wood and more.

Water Puppets - Vietnamese Water Puppets were invented thousands of years ago by farmers in the Red River Delta region near Hanoi, as a means to entertain themselves when the rains flooded their paddy fields. Today puppeteers stand in waist deep water and control the puppets via pole and strings. Most plays focus on folklores and tales of rural life.

DAY 5: HANOI TO SAPA

This morning you will visit the Army Museum, Ha Lo prison and the B52 Victory Museum. You will also have the opportunity to talk with a local Historian about the War.

This afternoon, transfer to Hanoi station to board your overnight train to Lao Cai station. You may have to carry your luggage over numerous train tracks to reach your

platform and carriage because of the layout of Hanoi station.

You will be sharing a 4 berth cabin with other passengers who may not be part of the Wendy Wu Tours group. Private use of the cabin is available but it is at an additional cost. Wear comfortable clothes on board to sleep in and take snacks as none are readily available. This journey usually takes 9 hours (over 340km) and can be quite bumpy.

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

DAY 6: SAPA MINORITY VILLAGES

Arrive into Lao Cai station at approximately 5am and drive for 1 hour (34km) to Sapa.

Later this morning, walk south of Sapa towards the busy village of Cat Cat. The valleys that surround the village of Y Linh Ho are some of the most picturesque in the region, and this route allows you to explore one of Sapa's less-traversed areas. Make your way along a gentle incline, through emerald paddy fields above a deep river gorge, before arriving on the river bank. Take a rest and watch local children fishing with nets, before continuing deeper through the villages and terraces of the Black H'mong. Walk at your own pace and take in some of the best panoramas Vietnam has to offer.

Take a break and enjoy a soothing cup of tea before learning the art of Batik painting. The stunning textiles of the Black H'mong are famous around the world and Batik is a traditional part of H'mong culture. Under threat from modernization, Batik is now only practiced by a handful of villagers. Join a hands-on master class led by a local expert and take your creation home.

This evening stay at a homestay. See how food is prepared over an open fire and learn about the H'mong life and culture.

Please note: today you will spend between 4-6 hours hiking on uneven ground.

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

Sapa - Located 1,600m above sea level and close to the Chinese border. This mountainous area with its spectacular landscapes and temperate climate is sure to make a lasting impression on its visitors. The H'mong and Dao people, the largest and most colourful ethnic groups in the region, are a cultural highlight.

Black H'mong Tribe - Migrating from China in the 19th Century, the Black H'mong wear distinctive indigo dyed linen typically accompanied by aprons, leggings and cylindrical hats. They are now one of the largest ethnic groups in Vietnam, cultivating the lands of Sapa with rice and medicinal plants.

Batik Painting - The beautiful textiles of the Black H'mong are famous around the world and Batik is a traditional part of H'mong culture. Under threat from modernization, Batik is now only practiced by a handful of villagers. By taking part you will be supporting a sustainable tourism project that supports local women and ensures this amazing art form is handed down to the next generation.

Day 7: SAPA

Rise early this morning and enjoy breakfast with your hosts before bidding them farewell.

Continue your trek along the Muong Hoa valley towards Tan Van village. Trek along the high road and take in the views of the Valley. The trekking will involve roughly 7 hours of walking.

You will arrive in the village of the Giay ethnic people where you will be transferred back to your Sapa hotel for the night.

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

DAY 8: DIEN BIEN

This morning you will be transferred 10 hours (292km) to Dien Bien with photo opportunities along the way

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

Dien Bien - Located in the north-west region of Vietnam, Dien Bien is best known for the First Indochina War.

DAY 9: DIEM BIEN WAR SITES

Start the day with a visit the War sites of Dien Bien, starting with A1 Hill the battlegrounds of Dien Bien. Continue onto the French Tunnels before visiting the Dien Bien Museum.

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

A1 Hill - Was used as a bunker for the French during the First Indochina War. Many lives were sacrificed by the Vietnamese to take over this bunker, which they eventually did.

DAY 10: DIEN BIEN TO NONG KHIAW (LAOS)

Drive 8 hours (320km) towards Nong Khiaw crossing the Vietnam border into Laos. There will be stops along the way in Tay Trang and Muang Khua.

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Nong Khiaw – A beautiful rustic town located on the bank of the Ou River in Laos.

DAY 11: XAM NEUA

This morning drive 8 hours (319km) to Xam Neua.

On the way you will visit a H'mong village where you will pay a visit to the Standing Stones or Hin Tang which are alleged to be related to the Plain of Jars.

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

Standing Stones - Are believed to be older than the Plain of Jars and their archaeological significance is still unknown.

DAY 12: XAM NEUA - VIENGXAY

After breakfast this morning, you will transfer to Viengxay where you will discover the communist cave system, which was the headquarters for the communist Pathet Lao Forces during their struggle against the Lao Royal Family.

You will learn about their life and how they learnt to fight during the time of the Vietnam and American War.

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

Viengxay Caves - The former headquarters of Vieng Xai which were used to shelter the Pathet Lao officers during the Second Indochina War.

DAY 13: XAM NEUA TO PHONSAVAN

From Xam Neua, you will transfer 8 hours (240km) to Phonsavan. Today you will drive through extreme terrain due to the road conditions.

Along the way you will stop for lunch. Visit Tam Cave before arriving in Phonsavan.

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

Phonsavan - The capital of Xiang Khouang Province - the name stands for 'hills of paradise'. Green hills and pine forests dominate the countryside. Villages consist of colourful wooden houses. Cattle raising is one of the main agricultural activities and H'mong cowboys with brown and violet cowboy hats are a common sight. Phonsavan was

built in the late 1970s and replaced the old Xiang Khouang (today: Muang Khoun) which had been destroyed during the Second Indochina War. Phonsavan's most famous attraction is the nearby Plain of Jars, which has been nominated for UNESCO World Heritage status.

DAY 14: PLAIN OF JARS

Drive half an hour to one of the most important prehistoric sites in Indochina, these mysterious clusters of giant jars are thought to be about 2,000 years old. Sightseeing here will be a full day and involve walking over uneven terrain. You will visit Site 1 where there are over 200 jars, and Site 2, which also allows you to admire the beautiful scenery of the region. There will also be a visit to the office of the Mines Advisory Group (MAG), an organisation that helps clear unexploded ordnance that are a remnant of American raids during the Vietnam War.

Meals included: Breakfast

Destination Information

Plain of Jars - A megalithic archaeological landscape in Laos. It consists of thousands of stone jars scattered around the upland valleys and the lower foothills of the central plain of the Xieng Khouang plateau. The jars are mostly arranged in clusters ranging in number from one to several hundred.

DAY 15: PHONSAVAN TO VINH (VIETNAM)

After check-out this morning, start your drive back towards Vietnam where you will cross the border from Nong Het into Nam Can. From Nam Can, continue your drive until you reach Vinh.

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

DAY 16: VINH TO DONG HOI

This morning you will visit the home of Uncle Ho before you drive along of Ho Chi Minh Trail. Here you will see many of his personal belongings are still arranged as they were decades ago. This includes his working place, a bed and a collection of items that he used in his everyday life.

Along the way, you will also pay visit the sites of Dong Loc and Truong Son Cemetery.

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Uncle Ho's House - Visiting Uncle Ho's house offers an incredible insight into the early life and work of one of the most significant leader of Vietnam. The house remains

untainted and still appears much like it did when Uncle Ho lived here.

Dong Loc – Played a vital role in the transportation of necessities and ammunition from north to the south of Vietnam. From 1965 to 1968, the US army released nearly 50,000 bombs and fired tens of thousands of missiles on the T-junction to cut off the transport route on the southern front. Around 16,000 Vietnamese soldiers sacrificed their lives to keep control of the road.

Truong Son Cemetery – Was built on several low lying hills in Truong Son Village, in Gio Linh District. It is a memorial to the Vietnamese soldiers who lost their lives in the struggle for national liberation and independence. The main area houses 10,263 tombs of fallen soldiers and is divided into 24 smaller sections which are categorised according to provinces. The memorial monument is situated on the highest hill. On the memorial of the Nations to Soldier's sacrifice there are three sides representing the three Indo-Chinese countries leaning on each other invading forces. Here there is also a group of monuments in memory of the heroism of Battalion 599 and Vietnam-Laos solidarity.

DAY 17: PHONG NHA TREKKING

This morning drive to Phong Nha (approximately. 1 hour). You will trek through the tropical forest of Phong Nhake Bang National Park along the "secret route" used by the soldiers to hide from the bombs being dropped by the Americans. The route is covered in a dense green layer and has just enough room for 1 person to go through at a time.

You will see the weapon cave which was made by the army to store all their weapons and you will be shown stories of the jungles past before enjoying a BBQ lunch and trekking back to your starting point via a different route.

Please note: trekking today will be 12km in total. The first 6km will be on flat ground passing through areas with trees and bushes. We suggest you wear long pants to protect your legs. Some areas will require guest to bend and duck under low-hanging branches and much of the terrain is not maintained to the trail will be very narrow. The 6km return trek is a more challenging as it includes trekking uphill and across stones.

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

DAY 18: DONG HOI TO HUE

Leave Dong Hoi this morning and start your drive towards Hue. Along the way you will stop at Vinh Moc Tunnels and Khe Sanh Combat base before arriving into Hue.

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

Vinh Moc Tunnels - Were built to shelter people from the bombing of Son Trung and Son Ha communes in Vinh Linh. The tunnels were dug 10 meters underground but when the Americans designed bombs that burrows down 10 meters they moved the village to a depth of 30 meters.

Hue - Having been the imperial capital from 1802 until 1945 after the last emperor abdicated; Hue is still regarded as the centre of Vietnam's culture and religion. The city is dominated by the Imperial Citadel that is modelled on the Forbidden City in China. There are many wonderful pagodas and temples of high significance and it contains the Grand Tombs of the Nguyen Emperors.

DAY 19: HUE

Visit the of Imperial Citadel this morning before taking a short journey into the surrounding countryside to see the final resting place of the Emperors at the 2 most impressive Royal Tombs.

Afterwards embark on 1-hour cruise along the Perfume River. Boarding your cruise could involve navigating your way over and through other boats, moored between it and the dock, sometimes without handrails, ladders or assistance from staff.

Later today, spend 45 minutes on foot at the Thien Mu Pagoda. There are steep and uneven steps without handrails.

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

Imperial Citadel - A walled fortress accompanied by cannons, artilleries and surrounded by a moat for protection. Inside the Citadel are numerous gates, courtyards and the Forbidden Purple City.

Forbidden Purple City - Constructed for personal use by the Imperial family, their concubines and eunuchs. This royal structure is still being restored many years after the destruction caused by street fighting and bombing during the American war in Vietnam. Wander the grounds and foundations whilst viewing the remaining woodwork and architecture.

Thien Mu Pagoda - This seven-storey octagonal tower built on a hillock, overlooking the Perfume River is Hue's oldest and most beautiful pagoda. Wander the grounds where bonsai, ponds and the smell of incense set a peaceful backdrop.

DAY 20: HUE TO HOI AN

Drive south for 4 hours (140km) over the Hai Van (Cloudy) Pass to Hoi An. This is a winding and steep but scenic road along the coast.

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

Hoi An - Perhaps more than any other place in Vietnam, Hoi An retains the feel of centuries past. Once known as Faifo, Hoi An was an influential port along the Silk Road. For over 500 years merchants from China, Japan, France and Portugal settled in the prosperous town resulting in a distinctive blend of culture, cuisine, religion and architecture.

DAYS 21- 22: HOI AN AT LEISURE

The next two days will be at your leisure in Hoi An where you can take some time to explore the quaint UNESCO heritage town, or visit the tailors.

Meals included: Breakfast

DAY 23: DEPART HOI AN

Transfer to Danang airport in time for your overnight flight home.

Due to flight schedules, Perth passengers may arrive home on Day 23.

Meals included: Breakfast

DAY 24: ARRIVE AUSTRALIA

Arrive home today.

ALONG THE HO CHI MINH TRAIL TRAVEL INFORMATION

Visas

Entry visas are required by all visitors to Vietnam and Laos. Wendy Wu Tours Visa Department can assist you with the process of obtaining a visa. We will supply you with all paperwork and submit the visa application on your behalf. Visas for Vietnam are issued with specific start and expiry dates which are based on the dates stated on the visa application form. Travel must be completed within those dates. Visas for Laos are valid for 90 days from the date of issue and allow you to stay in the country for up to 30 days. Please be advised that your passport must have at least 6-months validity left on it when you arrive back into Australia.

Visa application forms and all relevant documentation are due in our office **75 days prior to departure**; if received after this, urgent visa processing fees will apply. Also please note we do not accept passports and visa applications within 30 days prior to departure. Passports will be returned with your Final Documentation **2-3 weeks prior to your group tour's scheduled departure**. If you require your passport to be returned earlier, a \$15 courier fee will apply.

Insurance

We strongly encourage all customers to take a copy of their travel insurance documents (especially relevant international contact numbers) with them while on tour. We advise that you check the inclusions and procedures for lodging claims prior to your departure. These documents should be stored separately from the originals.

Eating in Indochina

Indochina is home to an incredibly rich food history. The local cuisine is known for its intense flavours, spices and some of the freshest ingredients you can find. In general, meals include either rice or noodles and are packed full of flavour. Lemongrass, ginger, lime leaves, coriander, fish sauce and soy sauce are used in most local dishes. The food has a reputation for being hot and spicy, each region actually has its own distinct characteristics. Vietnam, for example, is perhaps best known for its fresh and aromatic dishes – relying heavily on flavours from fresh herbs such as mint, basil and dill.

Your itinerary has been carefully crafted to introduce you to a range of local dishes and we hope that you enjoy the culinary adventure ahead. Most meals (excluding drinks) are included in our Discovery group. When dining in Vietnam, although some restaurants have adopted a western approach to dining, expect some restaurants to follow the traditional communal style of eating. Typically, this will mean each diner has their own small bowl and may serve themselves from a variety of shared dishes.

At some local restaurants, appetisers and main courses might be served when they are ready instead of following a particular order.

Determining when it's appropriate to use chopsticks, forks or spoons can be challenging for some travellers, even other Asians, as each country has different customs. In Vietnam, dishes are normally placed in the centre and people serve food for themselves with their own chopsticks and bowl. In Thailand and some other countries in Indochina, forks and spoons are used for most dishes and chopsticks are typically provided to eat noodles. Usually chopsticks or other utensils are provided to scoop the food into your bowl to prevent your own chopsticks from touching the food that remains on the table. Dining in Vietnam is fairly casual with not too many rules. Leaving food on the plate is not considered rude.

Please refer to your travel guide for more information on Vietnamese cuisine, including information for travellers with restricted diets.

Accommodation

Your accommodation is selected for convenience of location, comfort or character, and can range from a business hotel in one city to a family run guesthouse in a smaller town. In more remote areas, accommodation may be of a lower standard and may not have all western amenities. Hotels are generally rated as local three to four-star standard, but please note that there is no international classification system for hotels and differences in facilities and quality do exist between Australia and Indochina. All group tour hotels have private western bathroom facilities, air conditioning, TV and telephone. Plumbing and electricity supplies can be erratic and quite often the power in hotel rooms is turned off while guests are out of the room. If you experience any difficulty, please speak to your National Escort/Local Guide.

Rests assured that all hotels used by Wendy Wu Tours are regularly inspected by our staff and our partners to ensure that standards meet your needs.

Throughout the itinerary, you will have the opportunity to stay in homestays, which are local family houses where the hosts invite tourists in for a more local feeling. The accommodation facilities will not be like hotel facilities and bedding may be dorm style.

Please note double bed requests can be made at time of booking but cannot be guaranteed

Transport

Coaches: Coaches with air conditioning are used on our group tours for city sightseeing, short excursions to the countryside and longer transfers where necessary. Roads in Indochina have generally improved over recent years, but traffic and/or weather conditions may extend driving times. Road construction work usually covers an enormous section of road - not just one or two kilometres as you may be used to. For this reason, the timings listed in the itinerary are approximations only.

Seatbelts: Please note that seatbelts are not compulsory by law in Indochina and therefore the local people largely choose not to wear them. For this reason, some vehicles may not be fitted with seatbelts or they may be hidden underneath protective seat covers. It is recommended that where seatbelts are available customers must use them and remain seated at all times while the vehicle is moving. If you have any concerns, please notify your National Escort/Local Guides.

Rail Journeys: This trip involves two overnight train journeys where you will share a 4 berth cabin with other passengers. Please refer to your Travel Guide for more information. We will always endeavour to keep group members together in the same compartment, however there may be times where this is not possible. In this case, you may find yourself sharing with group members of the opposite gender and other travellers. Facilities on board are basic with both Western-style and Asian-style toilets. Some members of the group will be allocated a berth on the middle or top of the cabin, so please be prepared to climb ladders in and out of bed.

Development in Vietnam and Laos

Although Vietnam and Laos are developing quickly, they still lack the international standards of civil infrastructure and tourist facilities. Concepts of personal responsibility are also different to those in Australia. Consequently, tourist and public facilities may not uphold the same safety standards as in Australia; for example, you may see a hole in the road without a warning sign or safety barricade. All of our suppliers meet local safety standards as a minimum. We want you to have an enjoyable holiday so we ask that you take extra care, use your common sense, refer to notices and follow advice from your National Escort or Local Guides.

Vietnam and Laos public holidays

If you are travelling within the below Vietnamese and Laos Public Holidays please note that celebrations can last a couple of days and during these times some businesses will be closed and coach, air and train travel may be affected. Tourist attractions will be open, but may be crowded.

In Vietnam - Tet Holiday is between 27th – 31st January 2017 and 17th – 20th January 2018, International Labour Day is on 1st May every year, Reunification Day is on 30th April every year and National Independence Day is on 2nd September every year.

In Laos: International Women's Day is 8th March, Laos New Year Holiday is 14th – 17th April.

Souvenirs

We want to be able to give you an opportunity to buy souvenirs so we include some stops at museums or exhibitions, which demonstrates a craft or product unique to that region with pieces available to buy. We understand that souvenir hunting is not for everyone so we aim to take you to places, which hold local interest. We trust you will enjoy these opportunities to learn about local arts and crafts and understand their historical and cultural importance.

Group Size

Most of our groups consist of 10 travellers or more and will be accompanied by a National Escort/Local Guide. There will usually be no more than 15 travellers in each group although you may encounter other Wendy Wu tour groups while you are travelling.

All our departures are guaranteed to operate with a minimum of 8 travellers booked (unless cancelled due to factors beyond our control). However, at our discretion we may operate departures with a smaller group size as we try to operate advertised departures wherever it is viable to do so. For groups with fewer than 10 travellers, departures will operate with local guides only.

Tipping Policy

Tipping is a firm and expected element in the tourism industry. A nominated tipping amount is included in all group tour pricing, however is not collected in your final payment received by Wendy Wu Tours. This is so that it can be paid directly to your National Escort who will then distribute the tips among your main service providers – guides and drivers– on your behalf. Any other tipping, such as tips for bathroom attendants, hotel porters taking luggage to your room or river guides is at your discretion based on satisfaction of services received, as are gratuities for additional requested special services. The final tipping amount will be outlined in your final documentation.

If you are travelling in a smaller group with local guides only, then tipping is paid in each destination. To be fair to the guides we ask for slightly higher amounts per traveller with small groups.

We generally find that most customers appreciate the convenience of our tipping policy but we do recognize that it may not suit everyone. However, as this is a group tour we ask that everyone follows the same protocol to be fair to other group members and to ensure smooth operation of your tour.

Packing List and Climate

You will find a complete packing list and a helpful climate chart in the 'Suggested Packing List', which will be included in the pre-departure information link sent within your deposit documentation. Seasonal weather patterns can be quite unpredictable. Up to the minute information on worldwide weather can be found on www.weather.com.

Luggage

All clients are limited to two items of luggage each; a suitcase with a maximum weight of 20kg and one piece of hand luggage with a maximum weight of 7kg. It is essential that your luggage is lockable. Please note that authorities will only allow bottles onto the aircraft if they have been checked in as main baggage. Bottles in hand luggage may be confiscated.

Exchanging Cash

It is highly recommended that extra care and attention is paid when exchanging money when travelling outside major cities in Vietnam and Laos. US Dollars are easily exchanged throughout Vietnam, however other currencies such as Australian Dollars can generally be exchanged in hotels and airports provided notes are new and undamaged. US Dollars should be from the new series from the year 2003 onwards. Old series notes can be difficult to exchange, apart from in some national banks in Vietnam, such as Vietcombank. We suggest for your convenience that you ensure your US Dollars are from the new series to avoid any difficulties exchanging money during your trip.

We suggest exchanging your money before travelling to remote areas and smaller towns, as exchange facilities can be limited. Your National Escort will remind you to do this before departure.

Personal Expenses & Optional Tours

You will need to take some extra money to cover some meals, drinks, laundry and souvenirs, plus any additional sightseeing that may be offered to you. Based on the advice of previous customers an approximate amount of AUD\$350 should be sufficient; however for those that cannot resist a bargain, consider allocating a higher amount.

Optional tours may be offered in each city you visit during your tour at an additional cost. These are not included in the standard itinerary and will only be available if time permits. Each option will be arranged locally by your National Escort/Local Guide.

Climbing Steps

Some sightseeing involves climbing quite a number of steps. This means you sometimes need to walk from the bus park to the entrance, and/or need to climb some steps inside. People with knee or hip injuries, who have poor balance or are otherwise unable to complete these activities independently should consider the suitability of this itinerary carefully.

Cultural Differences

Vietnam has many religions, cultures and histories. Please be considerate of the local beliefs and customs and dress with consideration.

Vaccinations and Your Health

We recommend that you contact either your GP or Travelvax (1300 360 164) for advice on vaccinations and travel health. Travelvax has a comprehensive website that you may also find useful www.travelvax.com.au.

Before You Leave

We strongly recommend registering your travel plans with www.smartraveller.gov.au as in the event of an emergency, Australian Consular assistance will be more readily available. You can also access the Australian Government's travel advisory service for up to date information about your destination on the same website.

After your booking

Once you have booked with Wendy Wu Tours, you will receive a confirmation invoice with deposit documentation via email. This includes important information and links to access the visa application form and instructions sheet online (if applicable). Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately 2 weeks prior to departure.

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