

Vietnam Adventure Dossier

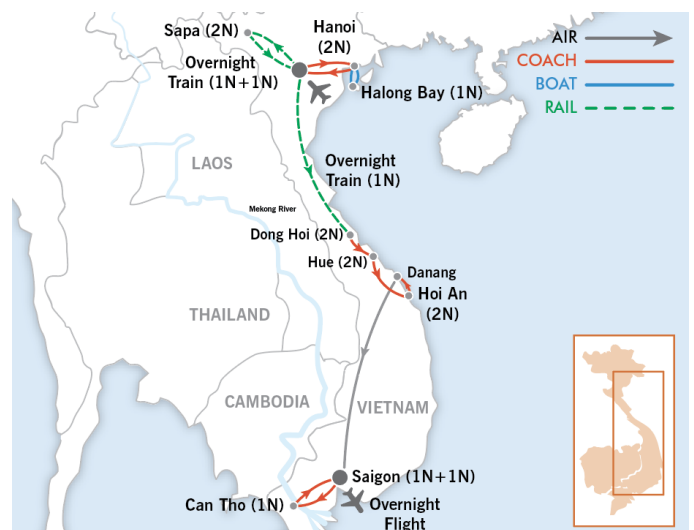
Immerse Yourself Tour | 19 Days | active

Hanoi - Sapa - Halong Bay – Dong Hoi – Hue - Hoi An - Saigon – Can Tho

Journey from Sapa in Vietnam's northern reaches, where you'll hike amongst rice terraces and meet ethnic minority people, through the heritage-rich cities of Hanoi, Hoi An and Saigon, to the very south, where you'll explore the canals of the lush Mekong Delta.

TOUR HIGHLIGHTS:

- Hike Sapa's rice terraces
- Do Tai Chi on Halong Bay
- Cycle Hoi An's countryside
- Unwind on Cham Island
- Stay in a local village in the Mekong Delta



Vietnam Adventure tour inclusions

- Return international flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation
- Meals as stated on itinerary
- All sightseeing and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English-speaking National Escort (If your group is 10 or more travellers)

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

Immerse Yourself Tour

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

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

Active

'Vietnam Adventure' is an **active** tour. Active tours require a good level of fitness, as they are physically more demanding. They may involve hiking, and some travel to remote, high altitude areas where tourist facilities are less developed. You will travel on an overnight train between Bangkok and Chiang Mai, in a second class sleeper section. Trains in Thailand do not have cabins, rather each carriage consists of train seats during the day and at night the train seats convert into one bed and a top bunk pulls out from the wall with curtains for privacy at night.

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

Vietnam is a country of breathtaking 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. 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.

Joining Your Tour

The tour is 19 days in duration including international flights.

Travellers booked on 'Land Only, the price includes visa fees and your arrival/ departure airport transfers if arriving/departing on the start and conclusion date of your tour. Please advise your international flight times to reservations. Join the tour on day one in Hanoi and end the tour on Day 18 in Saigon. Please refer to your final itinerary for more specific meeting instructions pertaining to your departure.

Itinerary Changes

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.

Changes:

- Name of the tour has changed to **'Vietnam Adventure'** (was *Reflections of Vietnam*)
- Tour length will now be increased from 17 days to 19 days
- Two nights added in Dong Hoi including sights at Phong Nha – Ke Bang National Park & Paradise Cave to enhance customer experience
- Two nights added in Hue to relax the tour pace
- One night in Hanoi and one night in Hoi An removed due to the addition of Dong Hoi
- Replaced one night at a home-stay in Mekong Delta with one night in Saigon due to customer feedback.

Important Information Regarding Itinerary Changes and 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.

Vietnam Adventure Itinerary

DAY 1: FLY TO HANOI

Fly to Hanoi where you will be met at the airport in the arrival hall by your Local Guide 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: HANOI

Discover the sights of Hanoi today. First stop will be Ba Dinh square and the Ho Chi Minh complex, followed by the Museum of Ethnology. After lunch visit a water puppet artist, where you will have a chance to talk with the artist, have a look at the steps of making the puppets, and enjoy a private water puppet show. Tonight your guide will take you on a culinary adventure in the Old Quarter for a chance to browse the local street foods before transferring to a restaurant for your dinner. Sightseeing in central Hanoi involves approximately four hours on foot.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

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.

Destination Information

Ho Chi Minh complex - Dedicated to the father of modern Vietnam and where Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum stands in Ba Dinh Square. Ho Chi Minh first declared independence from French rule in 1945.

Water Puppet Show – Is a traditional form of entertainment, founded by farmers working alongside the Red River in Hanoi. Topics covered usually involve traditional folklore but sometimes modern themes are incorporated.

DAY 3: HANOI TO LAO CAI

This morning rise early for a visit to Hanoi's biggest flower market, Quang Ba, before taking a stroll around Hanoi's iconic Hoan Kiem Lake watching hundreds of locals doing their morning aerobics. Return to the hotel for breakfast. Later visit the Temple of Literature before enjoying a walking tour in Hanoi's Old Quarter and trying some Vietnamese coffee.

This evening transfer to the 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 four berth cabin with other travellers who may not be part of the Wendy Wu Tours group and may be of different genders; 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 nine hours (over 340km) and can be quite bumpy.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

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

Destination Information

Temple of Literature – One of the main centres of Confucianism in Vietnam, the Temple of Literature was originally a centre for education in Hanoi and is still used for graduation ceremonies in Vietnam.

Hanoi Old Quarter – Hanoi's Old Quarter is one of its most exciting and colourful sections. The Old Quarter is home to many stalls, selling Vietnamese curios, small eats and souvenirs.

DAY 4: LAO CAI TO SAPA

Arrive in Lao Cai around 5:30am and go to a local restaurant for breakfast before transferring to the verdant hill town of Sapa. You will start your four to five hour walk at Suoi Ho Village and make your way through beautiful rice terraces and quaint villages. Surfaces sometimes are uneven and can be steep in places. Stop at Ma Tra Village where you will learn about local culture from the Sapa people. Back in Sapa hike up Ham Rong Mountain for spectacular views of the town.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch

Please ensure you have sturdy and comfortable walking shoes as the mountain trails can be slippery in wet weather.

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.

Ham Rong Mountain – Ham Rong rises up impressively over the town, the peak forming the 'Dragon's Jaw'; the mountain is scattered with beautiful orchid gardens and European style botanical gardens.

DAY 5: SAPA

This morning starts your six hour hike south of Sapa towards the busy village of Cat Cat, today's walk will be around 13km and requires a good level of fitness. 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, dip your toes in the cool mountain waters and if you are lucky see local children fishing with nets, before continuing deeper through the villages and terraces of the Black H'mong. Enjoy lunch with a view at a local village restaurant before continuing through the valley towards the village of Lao Chai. Take a well-earned rest and enjoy a soothing cup of tea before learning the art of Batik painting. Afterwards, head to Ta Van village where you will be picked up and transferred back to your hotel in Sapa.

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch

Destination Information

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.

DAY 6: SAPA TO HANOI

This morning is free for you to further explore the town or relax in your hotel. After lunch head to Hau Thao village where you will see the stunning view of Muong Hoa valley. In Hau Thao Commune, you will have a chance to discover the daily life of Black Hmong minority and their traditional customs. Continue trekking to Giang Ta Chai village inhabited by Zay and Red Zao minorities. You will be walking today for approximately two and half hours (five to six kilometres); this requires a good level of fitness. Later transfer to Lao Cai for your overnight train journey back to Hanoi.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

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: HANOI TO HALONG BAY

Arrive early in Hanoi and freshen up before driving four hours to Halong, where you will take an overnight cruise to the far-most corners of the bay on a traditional Vietnamese boat. There is usually a crowd of boats at the docks; however, the cruise itself will be scenic and relaxing. Boarding your 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 usually hold about 40 travellers; has 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.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

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 two hours from Hanoi. Our guides will make every effort to inform the group at the earliest possible moment should there be any itinerary changes.

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. Unique 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 8: HALONG BAY – TRAIN TO DONG HOI

Start your day on deck with a relaxing Tai Chi session whilst you admire an amazing sunrise over the karst scenery. Spend the morning sailing through Halong Bay. After brunch disembark your cruise and return to Hanoi. Board the overnight train to Dong Hoi. Day use room in Hanoi is included this evening before your overnight train.

Meals Included: Brunch, Dinner

You will be sharing a four berth cabin with other travellers who may not be part of the Wendy Wu Tours group and may be of different genders; 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 ten hours (approximately 522km) and can be quite bumpy.

DAY 9: DONG HOI

This morning, arrive in Dong Hoi, a coastal city that is the gateway to Phong Nha – Ke Bang National Park. Arrive early in the morning and freshen up before visiting the impressive Phong Nha caves, a World Heritage Site. The unique system of caves is the largest in Vietnam. The caves

are connected by an underground river and once used by the Viet Cong as a weapon depot. Stay overnight in Dong Hoi.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

DAY 10: DONG HOI

This morning, explore Paradise Cave. Admire countless stalactites with different shapes: Thach Thien Cung, Waterfalls Thien Ha, Quan Tien converging, and Thap Lien flower.

Have lunch at a local restaurant and then enjoy a free afternoon relaxing or swimming at your beach resort.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch

Destination Information

Paradise Cave - First discovered in 2005 by spelunkers from Cave Research Association, it is the largest and most beautiful cave in the Phong Nha - Ke Bang area. It is said that the cave's beauty is reminiscent of an imperial palace and very well resented with easy access, great walkways, and excellent feature lighting which makes it extra special.

DAY 11: DONG HOI TO HUE

Drive north to the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) along Highway one, a mountainous road offering views of cascading ranges. The tour includes stops at some of the DMZ's best-known combat sites where you will hear the stories of a country at war. First is the Citadel of Quang Tri, the site of a major 1972 battle between US backed South Vietnamese forces and their North Vietnamese adversaries.

Next, cross Hien Luong Bridge, that spans the Ben Hai River at the middle of the DMZ and marks the former border between North and South Vietnam. The tour continues at the nearby Vinh Moc Tunnels, which housed an entire Vietnamese village for two and a half years! Visit the small museum displaying photos that depict their difficult underground life. After a Vietnamese lunch, you will visit Khe Sanh, the site of a landmark 1968 battle near the Vietnam-Laos border. You will arrive in Hue in the late afternoon.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

DMZ – This narrow strip of land running west to east from the Vietnam-Laos border to the sea once included the wartime boundary between North and South Vietnam. And contrary to its name, it was the site of ferocious fighting.

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 12: HUE

Hue is the epitome of Vietnam's dynamic past, and considered a scholarly city. Take a cyclo-ride to visit the Imperial Citadel and the Forbidden Purple City which is still being restored many years after the destruction caused by street fighting and bombing during the American War in Vietnam. Hop back into your vehicle to visit the Royal Tomb of Minh Mang; the complex comprises almost 40 monuments and is surrounded by gardens and pools, making it one of the more beautiful tombs. Continue by road to Thien Mu Pagoda and take a cruise on the Perfume River.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch

Destination Information

Imperial Citadel - The Imperial City of Hue is a walled palace located in central Vietnam's Hue, and was recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1993. It was built in 1362 and served as the capital of Vietnam during the reign of the Nguyen dynasty between 1802 and 1945.

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 13: HUE TO HOI AN

Today travel approximately three hours to the charming town of Hoi An. Stop en route to visit the tallest Buddha statue in Vietnam located at Linh Ung Pagoda in Da Nang, and enjoy a panoramic view of Da Nang city and the white sand beach. Spend the afternoon walking the ancient streets of Hoi An, lined with Chinese traders' homes and wooden houses reincarnated as restaurants, cafés, and outlets for local artists, craftsmen and tailors. Explore the beautiful 16th century Japanese Bridge.

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.

Japanese Covered Bridge - First constructed in the 1590s to link the Japanese and Chinese quarters of the town. This iconic pink hued bridge has been restored to its former splendour.

DAY 14: HOI AN

Jump on your bike today and wheel through the scenic rice paddies outside of Hoi An. Pay a visit to local farmers where you can try your hand at traditional farming techniques. Enjoy a calming boat ride to a fishing village where you can try and make fishing nets and paddle bamboo basket boats.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 15: HOI AN TO SAIGON

Fly an hour and a half to Saigon Vietnam's colourful and vibrant southern city. Take a walking tour of Saigon, passing through its colonial and modern architecture. See the French colonial Post Office before passing the Hotel Continental as seen in the book, the 'Quiet American'. Next visit the Caravelle Hotel's rooftop bar where you can enjoy some drinks (at your own expense) whilst you look out over this bustling city. You will be on your feet for three to four hours in Saigon touring some of the city's main sights. This evening, explore the nightlife of Saigon on the back of a Vespa, stopping at street food bars and coffee shops to have a glimpse of the real Saigon and socialise with the locals.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Please note: The Notre Dame Cathedral will be under renovation for two years, starting in July 2017. You will go to Tan Dinh Church and Tan Dinh Market as an alternative.

Destination Information

Saigon - Saigon is one of the world's truly cosmopolitan cities with a history, culture and style obtained from colonial France, ancient China and the art deco era. Once the main port of the Mekong territory, Saigon became the capital of France's Cochinchina and later the capital of the Republic of Vietnam. It remained the capital of South Vietnam until reunification at the end of the American War in Vietnam in 1975, when the capital was moved to Hanoi.

Central Post Office - Located next to the Notre-Dame Cathedral. The Central Post Office building was constructed in the late 19th century. It counts Gothic, Renaissance and French influences and was designed by Auguste Henri Vildieu and Alfred Foulhoux, but is often erroneously credited as being the work of Gustave Eiffel.

DAY 16: SAIGON – MEKONG DELTA

Head south for two hours to Ben Tre, gateway to the Mekong Delta. Here you will take a rickshaw ride past quiet rural villages and verdant fields, usually two people can sit in each rickshaw (also known as Xe Loi). Board a boat to drift through small backwater canals before visiting local workshops where you can talk with locals before meeting a former Vietcong soldier.

After the boat trip, you will have a short walk to a local village to see mat weavers at work, before jumping on the deltas version of a tuk tuk and travelling down the country roads to the pier. Here you will board the beautiful teak boat 'Le Jarai' to continue your cruise along the river. While on board, join in the demonstration of Vietnamese cooking before sitting down to a sumptuous three-course lunch of Mekong specialities. After lunch relax on the top deck and take in the scenery back to Ben Tre, where, on arrival, you will transfer to Can Tho for an overnight stay.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

You will need to pack a smaller overnight bag for your trip to the Mekong Delta. Main luggage will be left in safe storage at the hotel in Saigon and picked up on your return.

Destination Information

Mekong Delta - Although primarily rural, the Mekong Delta is a densely populated area where life progresses around its fertile banks. The Mekong Delta is the 13th longest, and the 10th largest, by volume alone and people live, trade, travel and even go to school on the riverbanks.

Can Tho – Located on the south bank of the Hau River Can Tho is famous for its floating markets, Buddhist pagodas, fantastic food and fresh fruits.

DAY 17: CAN THO TO SAIGON

Pay a morning visit to the famous Cai Rang floating market, taking in the scenery and locals going about their daily business along the canals. Take a relaxed cycle through quiet and isolated countryside before returning by three hours' drive to Saigon.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Destination Information

Cai Rang Floating Market – Is made up of hundreds of boats with vendors selling a myriad of items, including farm products, fruit and seasonal goods.

DAYS 18-19: SAIGON TO AUSTRALIA

This morning drive two hours to discover the amazing network of the Cu Chi Tunnels. Sightseeing here involves

two hours on foot on uneven mud paths through the bush and, if you choose, crawling through some of the tunnels. Transfer to the airport to fly home; arriving home the same or following day.

Cu Chi - The tunnels of Cu Chi are an immense network of connecting underground tunnels located in the Cu Chi district of Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), Vietnam, and are part of a much larger network of tunnels that underlie much of the country. The Cu Chi tunnels were the location of several military campaigns during the Vietnam War, and were the

Viet Cong's base of operations for the Tet Offensive in 1968. The tunnels were used by Viet Cong soldiers as hiding spots during combat, as well as serving as communication and supply routes, hospitals, food and weapon caches and living quarters for numerous North Vietnamese fighters. The tunnel systems were of great importance to the Viet Cong in their resistance to American forces, and helped to counter the growing American military effort.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch

VIETNAM ADVENTURE TRAVEL INFORMATION

Visas

Entry visas are required by all visitors to Vietnam and 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. Please be advised that your passport must have at least six months validity left on it when you arrive back into Australia.

Visa application forms and all relevant documentation are **due in our office 60 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 four weeks prior to your group tour's scheduled departure. If you require your passport to be returned earlier, a \$15AUD 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 South East Asia

South East Asia 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. Meals as stated on the above itinerary (excluding drinks) are included in our group tours. 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, appetizers 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 South East Asia, fork and spoon 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 South East Asia. 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.

Rest 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

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 South East Asia 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 South East Asia 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 an overnight train journey. Trains in Thailand do not have cabins, rather each carriage consists of train seats during the day and at night the train seats convert into one bed and a top bunk pulls out from the wall with curtains for privacy at night. Please refer to your Travel Guide for more information. We will always endeavour to keep group members together, 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 bed, so please be prepared to climb ladders in and out of bed.

Air: Internal flights are based on economy class, with reputable airlines. Pre-flight seat allocation is not available on international and internal flight sectors.

Development in Vietnam

Although Vietnam is 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 Public Holidays

If you are travelling within the below Vietnamese 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. Tet Holiday is between 15th and the 20th February 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.

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 both a National Escort/Local Guides. There will usually be no more than 18 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 eight 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

Local tipping is customary in Asia. However, this can often lead to awkwardness in knowing when it is appropriate to tip and how much, as well as ensuring you have a suitable amount of change available at the time. For your convenience, with years of experience in providing the best customer service, Wendy Wu Tours operates a kitty system on our Group Tours so your National Escort will look after this aspect of your trip for you. It also ensures that the amounts paid are reasonable for you but still fair for the local people. The amount is stated on each Group Tour page will be advised again on your final documentation. Tipping is paid in US Dollars. Any additional tipping on any our tours is welcomed at your discretion. Further guidance for tipping contributions will be outlined in your final documentation.

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 travellers 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 five kilograms. 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. 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 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 per person, per week 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

Sightseeing at nearly all of the palaces, fortresses and some temples involves climbing quite a number of steps. These palaces were built to provide defense against potential invaders so nearly all of them stand on top of a hill, while the interiors have layers of narrow hallways and steps to slow down the advance of enemies once they were inside. The steps tend to be quite large, not level and sometimes without handrails. Hindu and Buddhist temples or pagodas also tend to be built at an elevation, as this is the most auspicious position according to ancient beliefs. 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 Difference

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

Appropriate Dress

When visiting temples or mosques, both men and women should dress in conservative, non-revealing clothing. Full-length trousers with a shirt or t-shirt for men; and pants or skirts well below the knee with a top that covers the shoulders and upper arms for women. Women might also consider carrying a 'modesty shawl' in their backpack – this could be a sarong or light scarf – which they can wear over their shoulders and heads to feel more comfortable while sightseeing at mosques.

Religious sites and homes throughout South East Asia – for Hindus, Muslims or Buddhists to name a few – require all visitors to remove their shoes to enter. Even if you then need to walk outdoors, over hot or rough ground, you will not be allowed to wear shoes. You will often find shoe storage rooms near the entrance of a site where it is customary to leave your shoes near the entrance. Occasionally there are 'shoe minders' who will offer to keep your shoes safe for a 'tip' – this is not compulsory so each customer can choose to tip for this service or not. If you do not want to remove your shoes, you will have to remain outside.

We recommend shoes that easily slip on and off, and carry a pair of thick socks in your backpack, which you can wear to protect your feet from any rough or hot surfaces. The following itinerary will indicate when you need to consider this.

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 four weeks prior to departure.

Updated: 9th October 2017