

## Day 1 Arrive Hanoi

Upon arrival in Vietnam's capital Hanoi – the cradle of national spirit for many - we will be met by our friendly guide(s) and transferred to the hotel.

## Day 2 Hanoi City Tour

Today we will venture out to explore Hanoi – not only the country's capital but also the seat of culture and learning and the spiritual heart of the whole nation. First up this morning we will drive to the Ho Chi Minh complex where we will spend time at Ho Chi Minh's mausoleum, his former stilt-house, the Presidential Palace, the Ho Chi Minh Museum and One Pillar Pagoda. Later this afternoon, we will enjoy a 1 hour cyclo tour through the French inspired 'old quarter' before we take a glimpse of the cultural life and times of ancient Vietnam through a classic Water Puppet performance.

## Day 3 Sapa

Our next couple of days will be simply spectacular and will have us experiencing Vietnamese indigenous cultures and allow us to observe local music, dress and other crafts. First up today we will transfer to Sapa for a leisurely trek, where we will enjoy spectacular scenery as we head to the Y Linh Ho village of the Hmong people. After lunch, we head to the Muong Hoa Valley, on the way passing through the villages of Lao Chai and Ta Van where we will have a chance to meet with and explore the culture of the locals.

Today we will also drop in to the Lao Chai Primary School to visit and interact with the students.

Tonight we enjoy a homestay at one of the hill tribe villages. Homestays are a great way to get a feel for the culture and really understand more about the daily lives of the local people. A common saying is... 'you will arrive as a guest but leave as a friend'.

## Day 4 Sapa – Hanoi

This morning we will enjoy breakfast with our hosts before setting off to visit the Giang Ta Chai village of the Red Dao minority people. As part of today's adventure, we will also trek through a bamboo forest and pass by a majestic waterfall; taking time to rest and enjoy the surroundings. After lunch we will continue toward Su Pan village where we start our journey back to Sapa by car. Spend the remainder of the afternoon at leisure in Sapa before returning to Lao Cai to board the overnight train back to Hanoi.

## Day 5 Hanoi - Halong Bay

Today we set off to the 'Jewel in the Crown of Vietnam'; Halong Bay. Arriving before lunch we will board our boat and then set sail, cruising amongst thousands of extraordinary limestone karst formations. Halong Bay was voted one of 'The New7Wonders of Nature' in 2011, and once here we will discover why it was included in this group. Beauty aside, Halong Bay was also one of the cradles of the ancient Vietnamese peoples and the area maintains many cultural and historical values which are unique to this region.

After dinner we have the opportunity to try our hand at catching some squid with the friendly crew or entertaining our friends with a spot of karaoke before retiring to our room onboard for the night.

## Day 6 Halong – Eco Adventure – Hanoi

This morning we watch the sun rise over the bay before we disembark and transfer back to Hanoi. Along the way we stop at Dong Trieu village to enjoy the most memorable time at Vietnam Eco Adventure. Our time at this quaint little

village will allow us to experience a farmer's traditional way of life and also gain a first-hand insight into the personal, social and cultural identity of the local people. While we are at Dong Trieu we will explore the village on the back of bikes before getting our hands dirty and having a go at farming using methods utilized by northern farmers for centuries. Our group will also have an opportunity to enjoy fishing and crabbing using traditional Vietnamese nets, boats and equipment.

After lunch we will have the opportunity to talk with a resident of the village, a grandmother who has lived through and witnessed the turbulent history of Vietnam and the rapid societal change that has occurred, particularly in the last 5 years. Our discussion will shed light on a number of interesting topics including social institutions, the traditional family system and gender relations.

### **Day 7      Museum Ethnology/Hoa Loa - Street Food Tour – Saigon**

First up today we will spend some time at the Museum of Ethnology. One of the largest and most interesting museums in Vietnam it is dedicated to 'showcasing the lives, cultural activities, and identities of Vietnam's 54 ethnic communities.' Following this we will visit the infamous Hoa Loa Prison Museum. Hoa Loa is also known as the 'Hanoi Hilton' and was where former US presidential candidate John McCain was incarcerated for over 5 years.

After woods we embark on a Food Discovery Tour through Hanoi's Old Quarter - our foodie sojourn not simply being about eating but embarking on a journey that will remain with us for a lifetime.

In the evening we transfer back to the airport for a short flight to Vietnam's most populous city and 'pearl of the Orient', Saigon.

### **Day 8      Saigon – Cu Chi Tunnel**

Today we will spend time at the Cu Chi tunnel system; a complex maze once home to Communist guerrillas in their wars against the Japanese, French, Americans (and Australians). Our time at Cu Chi provides the foundation on which to understand the origins and consequences of war on Vietnamese society. Also on display are various mantraps, the remains of an American tank as well as numerous bomb craters created by 500lb bombs dropped by B52 bombers.

### **Day 9      Saigon – Mekong**

This morning we have an early start as we head to the Mekong Delta. Often dubbed the "rice bowl" of Vietnam, this 39,000-square-kilometre labyrinth of waterways remains one of the most densely populated parts of the country. Our group will stop at workshops to watch century old techniques as the locals produce rice paper, coconut candy and fish sauce.

After lunch we continue to explore the Mekong on the back of a bicycle. As we cycle along village paths we will be able to chat to the local farmers and witness them at work. Later this afternoon we will meet up with our home-stay family where we will help prepare the evening dinner before settling down for a night of festivities with our hosts.

### **Day 10      Mekong Delta – Saigon**

We will have a very early start this morning as we prepare to visit the famous Cai Be Floating Market. We are certainly in for an amazing experience as we watch the local farmers selling their produce from their boats at this amazingly colourful market right on the waters of the Mekong. Later this afternoon we transfer back to Saigon.

Dinner tonight will be at K.O.T.O restaurant. K.O.T.O, founded by Vietnamese Australian Jimmy Pham, is a non-profit organisation which is run by local children who Jimmy recruited from the streets.

### **Day 11      Race Around Saigon – Thien Phuoc Orphanage**

Today we begin our sightseeing around Vietnam's largest and busiest city - but we do it 'Amazing Race' style. Teams will each be given a guide and will need to join forces in a team challenge of map reading, negotiating and interacting with locals and displaying creative communication skills whilst appreciating Saigon's attractive sights like the



Presidential Palace, The Central Post Office, Notre Dame Cathedral, and Ben Thanh Markets. Today we will explore Saigon, its society, unique culture and famous landmarks whilst engaging with one another and the locals at the same time. The final check in point will be at a local Vietnamese restaurant for lunch where a unique trophy will be awarded to the winning team!

This afternoon we will volunteer our time and help out at the Thien Phuoc orphanage, which houses approximately 65 children all of whom have a disability. Some of the children are orphans while others could not be cared for by family members due to lack of finance and facilities at home. The children are cared for by a group of nuns who have dedicated their lives to these children.

### **Day 12      Saigon – Depart for home**

This morning after breakfast we spend time at the Reunification Palace, The Ho Chi Minh Museum and the War Remnants Museum where we will see countless artifacts, photographs and pictures documenting the tragic Vietnam War.

After lunch we should have some time for some last minute bargain hunting before transferring to the airport for our flight home.

### **Day 13      Arrive home**

We arrive home today.

