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## ITINERARY

### 13 Day Off the Beaten Track - 13 Days Exploring North & Central Vietnam

#### Day 1: Welcome to Hanoi

Upon arrival at the airport in **Hanoi** your local guide will be there to greet you and take you to your hotel where you can check in and relax.

The rest of the day is free for you to enjoy at your leisure.

Overnight in Hanoi: L'Heritage Hotel - Deluxe Room (Standard); Hanoi Pearl - Deluxe Room (Deluxe); Apricot Hotel - Sketch Room (Super Deluxe)

#### Day 2: The hidden highlights of Hanoi

Start your day with a tour of Vietnam's capital city – **Hanoi**.

Get a feel for local life with a visit to the bustling market near **Tran Phu Street** and enjoy a stroll down **Tong Duy Tan Street** (or "Food Street"). Popular with the Vietnamese, take advantage of the many street food stalls and have a mid-morning snack or something to drink. Continue your trip to **Hanoi Railway Station**, one of the first railway stations to be built in Vietnam and opened in 1902.

Your guide will then drive you to the exquisite **Van Mieu**, also known as The Temple of Literature. Over 1000 years old the temple is tucked away from the bustle of the city. Enjoy lunch at the nearby KOTO restaurant, a social enterprise that was set up to train at-risk and disadvantaged youths in cooking.

In the afternoon visit the **Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum**, the final resting place and monument of the former Vietnamese leader.

Finish your day with a cool drink watching the world go by on **Ngoc Ha Street**

Overnight in Hanoi: L'Heritage Hotel - Deluxe Room (Standard); Hanoi Pearl - Deluxe Room (Deluxe); Apricot Hotel - Sketch Room (Super Deluxe)

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch

### **Day 3: Pu Luong Nature Reserve and the River Cham**

Today you will be collected from your hotel and driven to **Pu Luong Nature Reserve** (around 4 hours). Discover the natural beauty of this spot, almost unheard of by foreign travellers until recently, and considered one of the friendliest spots in Vietnam - don't be surprised if you are invited into a villager's home for a refreshment :)

Arrive at the Reserve in time for lunch, unpack your bags and settle in before the afternoon's activities begin.

Later your guide will drive you to the suspension bridge over **Cham River**. Set off by foot and discover how the water is moved from the river using handmade bamboo water wheels and aqueducts until you reach a local fisherman's house. Here you can stop and rest for a while and prepare for your rafting adventure with Mr. Dinh and his team.

As you float along the calm waters of the river, enjoy the views, perhaps even have a go at steering your handcrafted raft - the guides will be happy to show you the ropes.

The walk to the fisherman's house is an easy walk (around 1.5 hours). If you prefer not to walk it can be arranged with your guide for you to travel by car. The rafting covers a distance of 2 km on gentle water (around 1.5 hours).

Arrive at Tan Lap bridge where your guide will meet you to take you back to the retreat for dinner.

Overnight in Pu Luong: Pu Long Retreat - Valley View Bungalow (Standard, Deluxe & Super Deluxe)

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

### **Day 4: The untouched limestone landscape of Pu Luong**

Enjoy the sounds of the surrounding forest as you wake.

After breakfast your guide will escort you on a walking tour down into the valley through the magnificent limestone landscape and picturesque villages (an easy walk around 3-3.5 hours long). Again, if you prefer not to walk or if the weather is not favourable, a car transfer can be arranged.

Meet the villagers and learn all about their daily life - they will be more than happy to share their skills and local culture with you. If you need help conversing, your guide will be happy to help.

The trek ends at the base of the valley where a car will be waiting to take you back to the Retreat in time for lunch.



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Check out and head to Ninh Binh for your overnight stay.

Overnight in Ninh Binh: Tam Coc Rice Fields Resort - Bungalow with Garden View (Standard); Ninh Binh Legend Hotel - Superior Room (Deluxe); Emerald Resort - Superior Room (Super Deluxe)

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch

### **Day 5: Explore Ninh Binh and the majestic beauty of Tam Coc**

Today explore **Ninh Binh** located in the South of the Northern plain. Arrive at **Hoa Lu** (or "The Ancient Capital" as it is known) and visit the temples of Vietnam's King Dinh and Kinh Le before making your way to **Tam Coc** where you will stop for a Vietnamese buffet lunch.

After lunch take a cruise down the river in a traditional sampan, passing by limestone rock formations - this area is also known as "Inland Ha Long Bay".

Once the cruise has ended take a short break and rest for a while before carrying on by bicycle to **Bich Dong** for a leisurely ride around the villages (around 20 minutes on easy ground). If you prefer not to take a bike you can be driven by car - the use of driver and accompanying car will be at your disposal for the whole day.

You will then be driven to **Hai Phong** (around 3 hours) for your overnight stay.

Overnight in Hai Phong: Lac Long Hotel - Superior Room (Standard); Avani Harbour View Hotel - Superior Room (Deluxe and Super Deluxe)

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch

### **Day 6: Visit Viet Hai Village in the Cat Ba Islands**

Often we see the final destination as the goal but it is the journey and destination that are the whole package and this is never more true than when travelling through the rural landscapes of Vietnam. After breakfast, you will be collected and driven to Ben Binh Harbour to catch your speed boat to the town on **Cat Ba Island** (45 minute ride). Once you have disembarked there is a short car transfer to Ben Beo pier where you will continue cruising by boat through the most scenic areas of the bay to Viet Hai pier. Here you can take a bike or be driven by motorbike to the Viet Hai Village (around 30 minutes). The whole journey will take approximately 2.5 hours arriving at the Village in time for lunch.

In the afternoon you will be free at your leisure to explore the small fishing village of **Viet Hai**. Surrounded by rolling green mountains and jungle - it's a beautiful place to visit.

Overnight in Viet Hai: Whisper Nature Bungalow (Standard, Deluxe & Super Deluxe)

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



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## **Day 7: Cruise the waters of Lan Ha Bay by Private Junk Boat**

Discover the beauty of **Lan Ha Bay**. Situated a little further South from Ha Long City - a lot of the tourist boats don't go here yet, which gives it a more remote feel.

As you cruise the limestone waters, pass by a floating village. Have lunch on board and carry on taking in the surrounding area of **Lan Ha Bay** and **Ha Long Bay**.

Kayak through the narrow lagoons and tunnel caves of **Hang Ca** (the Bat Cave) and cruise to the **Bai Trai Dao** beaches where you are free to spend the rest of the day at your leisure. Take a swim or relax on board as you watch the sunset over the bay.

Dinner will be served on board as you anchor down for a peaceful night set amongst an incredibly beautiful backdrop.

Overnight on boat: Eco Friendly Private Boat (Standard, Deluxe & Super Deluxe)

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **Day 8: The wonders of Lan Ha Bay and Cat Ba Island**

Wake up and watch the sun rise over the bay before breakfast.

Today the boat explores some other parts of the bay, visiting a floating fish farm where you can learn about how the local people make their living.

Continue cruising the bay and its beautiful surroundings, stopping for a swim in the waters before disembarking the boat around mid morning at **Cat Ba**.

Here you will have a couple of hours free to look around the town, beaches and local market at your own pace.

Enjoy lunch at a local restaurant before taking the boat from Cat Ba to Hai Phong for your drive back to Hanoi.

After a short rest, you will be taken to the train station for your overnight train to Dong Hoi.

Overnight on train - The train is run by Vietnam Railways and the cabin is a shared cabin with 4 berths (soft berth cabin). If you would like to have a cabin to yourself, there is a surcharge - please let us know and we can provide you with a quote. The train departs Hanoi at 7.30pm and arrives into Dong Hoi around 5.35am.

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch



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## Day 9: Paradise Cave and Phong Nha National Park

Arrive in Dong Hoi in the morning where you will be met by your guide and driver. After breakfast at a local restaurant travel to **Phong Nha National Park**, a UNESCO World Heritage site since 2003.

Take a boat along the Son River and discover the **Phong Nha** cave system - one of the longest and highest caves on this site. Journey into the cave by river and see some of the most magnificent stalagmites and stalactites.

After lunch at a local restaurant your guide will take you to **Thien Duong** aka **Paradise Cave**, also known as the "Underground Palace". Discovered by scientists of the British Caving Research Association in 2005 it is the longest dry cave in Asia.

Later you will have the opportunity to try your hand at kayaking on the Chay River. Watch the wildlife go by as you make your way back to the meeting point where you can take a leisurely swim before being driven to your hotel.

Overnight in Dong Hoi: Vinh Hoang Hotel - Superior Room (Standard); Muong Thanh Holiday Quang Binh - Deluxe Room (Deluxe); Muong Thanh Luxury Nhat Le - Deluxe Ocean View Room (Super Deluxe)

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch

## Day 10: Experience rural Vietnamese life at Thuy Bieu Eco Village in Hue

This morning you will be collected from your hotel and driven to Hue Imperial city (around 3.5 hours). Take some time after checking in to your hotel to relax and settle in.

Later in the afternoon you will set off on a bike tour to **Thuy Bieu Eco-village**, stopping at the altar of Nam Giao - a religious site where the Kings of the Nguyen Dynasty offered sacrifices to heaven. Enjoy the panoramic views from the top of Vong Canh Hill over the Perfume River and beyond - remember to take your camera! If bicycling is not your thing, there is the option of travelling by motorbike (with driver) and the surcharge is AUD10 per person.

As you pass by the grapefruit gardens (a speciality of the region) continue your bike journey towards **Thuy Bieu Village** where you can take a stroll around the village and meet the people who live there. Visit the Luong Quan Temple known for its important ceremonies.

Later experience local life hands on - try your hand at farming or fishing and learn the art of traditional Vietnamese cooking. Travel back to Hue in the late afternoon for your overnight stay.

Overnight in Hue: Alba Hotel - Superior Room (Standard); Eldora Hotel - Deluxe City View Room (Deluxe); Pilgrimage Village - Deluxe Room (Super Deluxe)

Meals included: Breakfast



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## Day 11: Explore Hue, Lang Co and the central coastline

Enjoy your morning in Hue at leisure.

Alternatively, if you would like to do a half day sightseeing tour, we can arrange this for you - please let us know at the time of booking. The additional cost will be \$60 per person and you will visit the famous Citadel and the Tomb of Emperor Tu Duc. Situated on the Perfume River, the Citadel was designed for the exclusive use of Emperor Gia Long and his household. The complex is inside a 2km wall and here you will find the Yellow Imperial City, the Forbidden Purple City and more. The area has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage site and is a fascinating place to visit.

You will be collected at 1pm by car for your drive to **Hoi An** via the scenic **Hai Van Pass** - pass by the most beautiful views of the central coastline, stopping at **Lang Co** to stretch your legs at the water's edge of this white sandy beach.

Arrive at Hoi An and spend the rest of the day exploring this beautiful town.

Overnight in Hoi An: Kim An Hotel - Superior Room (3 Star); Belle Madison Hadana Hoi An Resort & Spa - Deluxe Room with Balcony (4 Star); Sunrise Resort - Ocean Deluxe Room (5 Star)

Meals included: Breakfast

**Please Note:** You will be transferred from your hotel in Hue to Hoi An by private car and driver only – no local guide.

## Day 12: Cooking class in Hoi An

Vietnamese food is simply the best and today you will get to cook up your own delicious feast and familiarise yourself with the local ingredients.

After breakfast at your hotel, your guide will meet you and take you to the bustling local morning market, where you will learn some bargaining tips to buy the ingredients you need for the cooking class later in the day.

Next have fun cruising down the waters of the canals of the **Bay Mau Nipa Palm Forest** by coracle (a small basket boat with a paddle). You can buy some handmade souvenirs, along the way, made from the nipa palm leaves such as hats, watches, rings and learn a traditional folk game called "bit mat dap nieu".

After a short break for tea, start to prepare your ingredients for lunch under the supervision of the skilled chefs at the cooking class. The chefs will teach you how to cook Vietnamese food and share valuable information in Vietnamese cuisine culture. Sit down and enjoy your very own beautifully prepared lunch.



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In the afternoon relax with a cruise down the Thu Bon River by boat and watch the local fishermen at work.

Overnight in Hoi An: Kim An Hotel - Superior Room (3 Star); Belle Madison Hadana Hoi An Resort & Spa - Deluxe Room with Balcony (4 Star); Sunrise Resort - Ocean Deluxe Room (5 Star)

Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch

### **Day 13: Time to go home or on to your next adventure**

Today is a day free at your leisure to enjoy Hoi An before being collected from the hotel for your flight home (around 3 hours prior to your flight departs).

Meals included: Breakfast

Note: You will be transferred from your hotel to Da Nang Airport by private car and driver only – no local guide.