

Highlights of North Vietnam - Trip notes

Trip code: TAAGVB112

Valid until 31 Dec 2023

Overview

Discover intriguing North Vietnam on an 8-day tour with the vast array of contrasts from the vibrant capital city to breathtaking mountains, mesmerizing bay, authentic country life, and spectacular karst landscapes. This tour design focuses on the must-sees of the land, allowing you to delve deep into beautiful north Vietnam at its best.

Starting from the Hanoi capital where you will be amazed by its colors and tastes. After a sightseeing tour of this historical city, you will spend a day exploring the rustic country and stunning karst landscapes of Ninh Binh where you take sampan rowing along undulating rice paddies and through the caves of Tam Coc. Then, travel up the mountains of Sapa for wonderful trekking amongst terraced fields and jungles, and enjoy a local experience at a hill tribe homestay. A cruise trip on the spectacular Halong bay is simply another highlight and a happy ending for your trip.

Detailed itinerary

Day 1: Hanoi - Arrival

Xin Chao! Welcome to Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam!

Get picked up from the airport upon arrival and transferred to the hotel in Hanoi's center. Today is your arrival day so just relax to recover from jetlag and get ready for the exciting days ahead.

If you arrive early today, why not spend some time exploring around and get yourself adapted to the new environment of this hustling city.

The Old Quarter of Hanoi is really an amazing place with a labyrinth of small streets lined with colorful shops, stalls, cafés, restaurants, temples, and so on where you will easily get lost in the colors. This place is full of sights, sounds, and smells, and is busy from early morning till midnight.

At 6.00 PM you will have a meeting with your tour guide to get instruction and guidance for the coming days. Later this evening, perhaps you may want to join

your travel fellows for dinner and then have a chat over a glass of fresh “Bia Hoi” at one of busy street corners.

Accommodation

Hotel in Hanoi

Meals included

No meal is included on this day

Notes for today

The group meeting today is important as you will have instruction and guidance for the trip as well as meeting up with your travel fellows. For any reason you are not able to attend the meeting, please let us know in advance.

The check-in time for the hotel room is from 14.00 so, if you arrive earlier and want to have a room before that time you can book a pre-trip accommodation when you make the trip booking. Extra activities can also be added before this trip. Please let us know so that we can arrange it for you.

Day 2: Hanoi - city sightseeing

Early risers can join with locals for morning exercise at the Hoan Kiem Lake or one of many little green parks dotted around the city’s center.

After breakfast, head out for a sightseeing tour of Hanoi. Explore the colonial charm as you make a walk along the French Quarter and spend time visiting the Ho Chi Minh Memorial Complex where you will see the Mausoleum, Uncle Ho’s stilted house, One Pillar Pagoda, and the Ho Chi Minh Museum. Following is the Temple of Literature, Vietnam’s first National University, built in the year 1076 and functioned until 1802, where you will see nearly a hundred Doctor Stelae standing on the back of stone turtles, bearing names of national men who received Doctor Laureate through Royal examinations.

Also, discover the Hoa Lo Prison - nicknamed Hilton Hanoi by American pilots who were detained here during the war.

Included activities

Mausoleum, Uncle Ho’s house, One Pillar Pagoda, Ho Chi Minh Museum

Temple of Literature

Hoa Lo Hanoi Hilton Prison

Meals included:

Breakfast

Accommodation

Hotel in Hanoi

Optional activities

Hanoi cooking class: 30 \$US

Water puppet show: 5 \$US

Day 3: Ninh Binh karst landscapes

After breakfast, depart at about 8.00 AM for more than an hour drive along the highway to Ninh Binh which is home to Hoa Lu ancient capital, rustic countryside, and the spectacular karst landscapes on rice paddies.

Surrounded by mountains as a natural rampart, the ancient capital of Hoa Lu now remains two temples dedicated to kings of the Dinh and Early Le Dynasty dating back to the 10th century. These temples were built on the ground of old palaces right in the middle of the ancient citadel. Here, at one of the temples, you will see a Royal stone bed carved with ordinary rural motifs, and a mystic statue of the Queen that shows different moods and mien as seen from different angles. Also, you can make a short climb to the top of the mount to visit the King's grave and have a wonderful overview of the surrounding landscapes from here.

Enjoy local lunch and later this day, you will take a 2-hour rowing boat trip on the Ngo Dong River along rice paddies to discover the beautiful natural setting of jutting mountains, labyrinth caves, water, and also the rural scenes of locals working on farms and fishing with traditional tools, and so on.

Back to the quay for bus drive back to Hanoi. The remainder of the day is at your leisure.

Included activities

Hoa Lu ancient capital visit

Tam Coc boat rowing & cave visit

Meals included

Breakfast

Local Lunch

Accommodation

Hotel in Hanoi

Day 4: Sapa - village trekking

After an early breakfast, leave Hanoi at 7.00 AM for a bus ride along the highway to Sapa (approximately 5 hours).

Situated on the mountainous border area at an elevation of about 1500 meters above sea level, Sapa is known for its breathtaking mountain landscapes, photogenic terraced fields, beautiful hill tribe villages, and diversity of colorful ethnic cultures.

Upon arrival, after a shower and lunch break, you will make a 7-kilometer trek from Sapa town along the Muong Hoa River down to the valley where located beautiful Hmong, Dzao, and Dzay hill-tribe villages. This trekking route provides you with great chances to interact with the locals, perhaps joining them at work on their rice fields, learning about their traditional lifestyles, and working methods as well. Do not forget to get your camera ready for wonderful photos along the way.

Tonight you will stay in a local house and enjoy a delicious home dinner served by the local hosts next to the fire or in the open air overlooking the terraced fields.

Included activities

Sapa village trekking
Hill tribe Homestay experience

Meals included

Breakfast, Homestay dinner

Accommodation

Homestay

Notes for today

Your homestay tonight is a kind of shared accommodation for the whole group on the second floor of the traditional house. It is neat and clean enough, with a private mattress, pillow, blanket, and a mosquito net provided for each person. There are also modern toilet facilities and bathrooms with hot showers next to the house for your convenience.

Since you stay only one night in the village, please bring with you as little as possible. It is good to have a trekking backpack with some really necessary belongings. The rest of your luggage can be left in the storage of the hotel in Sapa town.

The trek today is pretty mild with most of the length rather flat and mainly going downhill. However, if you wish, you can discuss with other group members and the tour guide to take a more challenging path which will lead you to hidden villages with some hill climbs, offering more authentic scenes. Please to ensure that you have suitable footwear for the trek especially for the next day when the trail is more steep and slippery. You can either wear steady-sole sandals or trekking boots if preferred.

Day 5: Sapa - village trekking

Wake up in the mountain fresh air and the sounds of surrounding nature. After a home breakfast, say goodbye to your local hosts and start another half-day trekking following buffalo trails up and down hills, through terraced fields, hidden villages, and bamboo jungles to Giang Ta Chai, home of the Red Dzao people. The trek today requires a little higher physical demand than that of yesterday as some parts of it are pretty steep and slippery, especially if there has been raining. However, in return, the landscape is more rewarding and you also have the opportunity to explore the land away from the crowd. A trekking stick will come in handy and your tour guide or local host can provide you with a simple, light, and strong bamboo stick if requested.

At the ending point, you will be picked up by bus and transferred back to Sapa for hotel check-in. The remainder of the day is free for you to relax and enjoy things at your own pace. Perhaps take a chance to ease your muscles with a foot massage or full body massage.

Included activities

Sapa village trekking

Meals included

Breakfast

Accommodation

Hotel in Sapa

Day 6: Sapa - Drive back Hanoi

Today you have a free day to explore the little Sapa town at your own pace. During this time, you may want to take a walk down to the Cat Cat village of the Black Hmong tribe for interesting sightseeing or take a cable car ride up to the top of Fansipan Peak, the highest peak in Vietnam and Indochina. Other options include a visit to Heaven Gate Pass and the Silver Waterfalls, or a visit to the Dragon Mountain right in the town.

The Sapa market is also a great place to experience the local sights.

At 3.00 PM, you will get picked up from the hotel for a bus drive back to Hanoi. Check in the hotel in the evening and relax.

Meals included

Breakfast

Accommodation

Hotel in Hanoi

Optional activities

Cat Cat village: US\$ 2

Ham Rong Mountain: US\$ 2

Mountain train & Cable car ride Fansipan Peak (return ticket): US\$ 40

Notes for today

Please note that the hotel check-out time is 11.00 AM and at 3.00 PM, the bus will pick you up for the drive back to Hanoi so, please get back to the hotel on time for the bus. If you check out the room earlier to take optional activities, you can leave your luggage at the hotel storage, and later, when you come back, you can use the public bathroom for a shower if you want.

Day 7: Halong Bay - Boat cruise

After breakfast, leave Hanoi at 7.30 AM for a 2-hour bus ride on the highway to Ha Long Bay.

Located in the northwest of the Tonkin Gulf, the bay and its greater area including the Bai Tu Long Bay and Cat Ba Island consist of more than two thousand limestone islands that soar up from the mirror-like emerald water, in various forms created by wind and water through millions of years. There are also lots of breathtaking karst caves and lagoons that offer wonderful discoveries. The bay is one of the most scenic places in Vietnam and was recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site for its exceptional geological, archeological, and cultural values.

Board a wooden boat upon arrival for your cruise to explore the spectacular Halong Bay.

Lunch is served on board as you wind your way through the dramatic landscapes. You will also have the chance to get up close to explore rock formations by kayak or perhaps enjoy swimming in emerald water at one of many beautiful island beaches here.

Get back to Hanoi and tonight is your last night in this city so why not join your fellow travelers for the last supper and have fun together.

Included activities

Halong Bay boat cruise and sightseeing

Halong Bay kayaking

Meals included

Breakfast, Lunch on cruise

Accommodation

Hotel in Hanoi

Notes for today

There are kayaking and swimming activities included in the Halong bay boat cruise today so, swimming or/and waterproof wear should be good. A

waterproof bag/belt is also come in handy to bring with you your valuables when you do the activity away from the boat.

Day 8: Hanoi - Departure

Today is departure day so there is no activity organized. Just relax and enjoy time at your own pace until check-out time then get transferred to the airport for your departure flight. Safe travel and see you again!

Meals included:
Breakfast

Notes for today

The hotel check-out time is 11.00 AM so, if your departure flight is later and you wish to keep the room longer, please let us know so that we can book the room for you, otherwise, you can leave your luggage in the hotel storage and use the public bathroom there. In case you have an extra stay in Hanoi we can arrange post-trip accommodation and activities for you.

If you wish to explore other parts of the country or other countries in the region, you can have a look at our tour list and find a suitable set departure date to combine this with.

Trip Style: Standard

This style is designed with great flexibility to ensure that you can enjoy your experience most with a reasonable budget. Whilst it is built for adventure-minded people, this tour style focuses on active exploration, uncommon landscapes, and local cultures. Accommodations in these trips are normally tourist standard 2 or 3 stars. Guest houses and homestay with a local family are also used in these trips to enhance your local experience. Apart from included activities, you also have some free time to explore the place on your own way. Transports used on these trips are normally by buses and trains with public buses also sometimes used.

Joining & group size

Group tours are where you meet and join with others on the tour to get more fun and enhance your local experiences. During the trip and at certain locations, there will be times you may join different people for certain activities. To ensure the quality, the group size is never greater than 16

people, except on large cruisers and public transport. Most day tours and excursions are organized and run directly by Travel Authentic Asia but sometimes by our local partners at our agreed standard. For those cases, Travel Authentic Asia ensures your trip quality and will take responsibility to deal with our local service providers on the behalf of our own customers and responsible for any complaints that may happen.

Physical Grading: 3

It is suitable for most fitness levels. There are some active activities but nothing is too challenging.

Price inclusions

Meals included: 7 Breakfasts, 1 Lunch, 1 Dinner

Accommodation: Hotel (6 nights), Homestay (1night)

Included activities: Hanoi: City sightseeing, Ho Chi Minh Memorial complex, Temple of Literature; Ninh Binh: Hoa Lu Ancient capital, boat rowing Tam Coc; Sapa: Hilltribe trek local homestay experience; Halong bay: Boat cruise, Halong kayaking

Price exclusions

Visa, International flights in and out of the country, Laundry, Personal expenditures, Travel Insurance, Tips, Other than those mentioned in the trip notes & itinerary.

Optional activities

Apart from a list of included activities listed in day to day itinerary, you can also seek your own tastes and adventures during your free time by taking optional activities where it is available.

Optional activities aren't necessarily endorsed or recommended by Travel Authentic Asia nor included in the price of this trip. If you do take any optional activities, you do so at your own risk and it must be clearly understood that your participation is your own decision and doesn't form part of your contract with Travel Authentic Asia. You may be required to sign/complete a waiver form or a receipt for some optional activities.

Dossier & Itinerary Disclaimer

These trip notes have been compiled with the itinerary and are updated regularly with the most reliable info on local travel facts. For the itinerary, though trying very much to adhere to the route, we cannot say that the local travel conditions stay unchanged so, a certain level of flexibility is requested in case of any alteration need to be made to fit with local circumstances. Please ensure that you read well and have a copy of these trip notes before your departure in case there have been changes that affect your plans.

Meals on tour

When traveling with Travel Authentic Asia you will have chances to experience the vast array of wonderful food that is available in each country you travel to. Apart from some meals included in the trip price, you will have your own choice of eating options at your own budget and taste. This is to give you the maximum flexibility in deciding where what and with whom to eat. Your tour guide will give you suggestions of restaurants during the trip and group members are free to join together or to find their own tastes and privacy.

Transportation

Most of the buses used on the trip are air-conditioned tourist buses. In some cases, for short distances or on some specific tour activities, to enhance your local experiences, we also sometimes use taxis, tuk-tuk, cyclo and so on. Overnight trains we use are local trains with air conditioners and 4 berth compartments that have lockable doors. On the train, you will share the cabin with other fellow travelers or maybe someone that is not part of the group. On occasion, for example, in high season when it is difficult to book, the 6 berth compartments are the alternation.

Accommodations

Our accommodation on this trip is comfortable tourist standard of 2 and 3 stars.

Throughout the trip, we try our best to have rooms prepared for the group at our arrivals if we're arriving before the normal check-in time. However, this isn't always possible which means we won't be able to check in immediately on arrival at some hotels.

In big and populated cities, hotel rooms tend to be smaller than they are in small cities and towns and some rooms may have no window. This is due to the high population density. Though put on the same standard but facilities in hotels may be slightly different from place to place.

Single Travelers

Theoretically, on our joined group trips, you will share the room with another group member of the same gender. However, in case you travel alone and, depending on group configuration, if there is no one else to share the room with, you are subject to pay for a single supplement. There is also the option to pay a single supplement in advance to ensure that you have your own room during the trip. Please note that single supplements are not available on overnight trains or at local homestays.

Start-Ending-points

Starting point

Classic Street Hotel
41 Hang Be Street - Hoan Kiem District
Hanoi - Vietnam
Phone: (+84) 4 38252421 - 39260516

The hotel is located in the Old Quarter of Hanoi, very close to the Hoan Kiem Lake and within walking distance of Hanoi's interesting sights. Rooms are air-conditioned and have an en suite bathroom.

Arrival complication

If for any reason you are unable to commence your group trip as scheduled, please contact your starting point hotel and speak to or leave a message for your tour guide.

Upon arrival at the airport, you will be met by our representative who is waiting for you in the hall with our company sign that bears your name on it. Please note that neither the driver nor any representative should ask you for additional payment.

If you cannot find our representative, or you have any concerns about your transfer, please call our hotline at +842466894949 or +84 903432999 or +84 912221442.

Please give us your flight details at least 14 days prior to your departure for either the included (if it is included in the tour price) or extra airport transfer service. In case the transfer or any portion of your trip is missed because of changing flight schedule without prior notice then no refund is applied and any additional cost incurred in order to meet up with your group is at your own expense.

If you have to take a taxi from the airport to starting point hotel on your own then metered taxis are available at the airport exit gates on the ground floor or come to airport taxi service counters with men in uniform and ask for detail.

To make sure that you get the right taxi, ask airport security men or airport staff. Avoid taxi touts who tell you that they have a metered taxi parked outside the airport.

Ending point

Classic Street Hotel
41 Hang Be Street - Hoan Kiem District

Money

The official currency of Vietnam is Dong (VND).

According to government regulation, all prices for services and commodities must be quoted in VND; foreign currencies can be only dealt through authorized exchange bureaus or with special permission.

In fact, USD is considered the second currency in tourist places, and the commonness of EUR, AUD, BP... goes on respectively.

Places like restaurants, bars, travel agencies, or souvenir shops in tourist places sometimes accept both USD and VND and the price might be quoted in both types of currency so, the best solution is to carry both of them. Out of tourist sites or in remote areas, only Vietnam dong is accepted. It's a good idea to check that any bills you take do not have any tears or look too tatty, as shops and restaurants will not accept them.

You can easily draw the Dong from ATMs that are available at many street corners.

Tipping

Tipping is not compulsory though it is enormously appreciated.

If you're happy with the services provided then some tip is appropriate. It's of great significance to the people who take care of you during your travels, inspires excellent service, and is an entrenched feature of the tourism industry. If you are happy with the service provided, tipping should be given directly to the recipient.

The following amounts are per-person suggestions based on local considerations and feedback from our past travelers.

In local restaurants, if you are a single diner, then a tip of around US\$1 is appropriated. It is from 10% to 15% of your bill in the more up-market restaurants. If you are in a group then depending on the group size, a gather of US\$ 4 or 5 is good.

For drivers, we suggest US\$5 if you are a single traveler and an amount of US\$10-15 from the whole group per day can be used.

For your tour guides, tipping is much dependent on their services. The amount

is entirely a personal preference, however, US\$2-4 per person per day on a group tour is appropriate.

Of course, you are free to tip more or less as you see fit, depending on your perception of service quality and the length of your trip. Remember, a tip is not compulsory and should only be given when you receive excellent service.

Visas

Visas are the responsibility of the individual traveler. The visa requirements for your trip vary depending on where you are from and where you are going. As a general rule, most countries expect that you will have at least 6 months' validity on your passport. On arrival, you may be asked to present return tickets and evidence of means to cover your intended stay.

You can also have visa-on-arrival services provided by Travel Authentic Asia by booking extra service when you make your tour booking or request by email.

For more detail please check on website at:

<https://travelauthenticasia.com/travel-guides/vietnam/how-to-get-a-visa-for-vietnam.aspx>

What to bring

What you need to bring will vary according to the trip style you have chosen, the countries you are visiting and when you are traveling. Generally speaking, you should pack as lightly as possible. On excursions during the trip, you are expected to carry your own luggage and although you won't be required to walk long distances with your luggage, we recommend keeping the weight under 20kg/44lbs.

Some carry their luggage in a backpack, some use suitcases. It is advisable to have your backpack or suitcase with wheels. An overnight bag with a shoulder strap or a little backpack is convenient to carry water and a camera etc for day trips.

Depending on the season and activities on the trip you need to prepare and bring appropriate clothes and belongings. In the wintertime, (from November to February) weather in North Vietnam can be cold so warm clothes are needed while the other time of the year, comfort and loose-fitting wear should be good. If the trip involves some trekking, trekking shoes or trekking sandals will be useful. Please note that you can buy most of the things here at reasonable prices so do not try to bring the whole wardrobe with you except for something really necessary.

Health

There are no specific health requirements for this trip. However, you should consult your doctor for up-to-date medical travel information before departure. We recommend that you carry a First Aid kit and hand sanitizers / antibacterial wipes as well as any personal medical requirements.

Safety and Security

Before departure, please seek advice from any source on safety for international travel and learn about the situations you might confront during your travel.

Traffic can be a little more chaotic than you are used to at home. Slow down a bit at the beginning to adapt yourself to the new environment. Ask your tour guide and learn from the locals how to deal with local traffic.

We recommend the use of a neck wallet or money belt while traveling for your passport, air tickets, travelers' cheques, cash, and other valuable items. Do not bring more than you need when you go out and about. Just enough money for day use and the rest of your money and other valuables should be left in the hotel safety box. A lock is recommended for securing your luggage.

Although the cities visited on tour are generally safe during the day, there can be risks to wandering throughout any major city at night. It is our recommendation to stay in small groups and to take taxis to and from restaurants, or during nighttime excursions.

In certain circumstances, please note that your tour guide has the authority to amend or cancel any part of the trip itinerary if it is deemed necessary due to safety concerns.

Take care when taking part in any activities in the ocean, river, or open water where waves and currents can be unpredictable. It is expected that anyone taking part in water activities is able to swim and have experience in open water. All swimmers should seek local advice before entering the water.

For more information please, check on our website's travel guides.

Travel Insurance

It is your responsibility to get your own international travel insurance before your trip. The requisite level of cover should at least be including personal accident, medical expenses, baggage loss, cancellation or curtailment of vacation, etc. In some cases, travelers may have pre-existing medical conditions that their travel insurance company will not cover. Other than local travel insurance(s) included in sightseeing tickets at sites, Travel Authentic Asia does not provide any kind of travel insurance on the trip except required and paid separately from the tour price.

Responsible travel

TAA operates our business with a strong impression of Responsible Travel. We believe that it is us, tour operator and travelers who somehow play an important role in building this world better. By traveling responsibly, we not only contribute to the progress of tourism in general but also improve our traveling experience.

Responsible travel is not something a strange, abstract concept but is just our actions, behavior, and appearance we conduct every day during our traveling. With a litter effort, you will make a great difference.

Issues on your trip

While we always try our best to bring you the best possible holiday experience, due to the nature of travel and the local conditions sometimes things can and do go wrong. In those cases, a discussion with your tour guide or our travel consultant is the best way to rectify the problem and save any potential negative impact on the rest of your trip.

We recognize that there may be times when tour guides or our local partners may not be able to resolve a situation to your satisfaction - if this is the case, please chat or email directly to our travel consultant or management board.

Trip review & feedback

After you travel with us, your feedback means a lot to help us to improve our service to serve you better next time as well as the others. You are the one who knows what we should and have to do to match your expectation. So, your comments are highly appreciated.