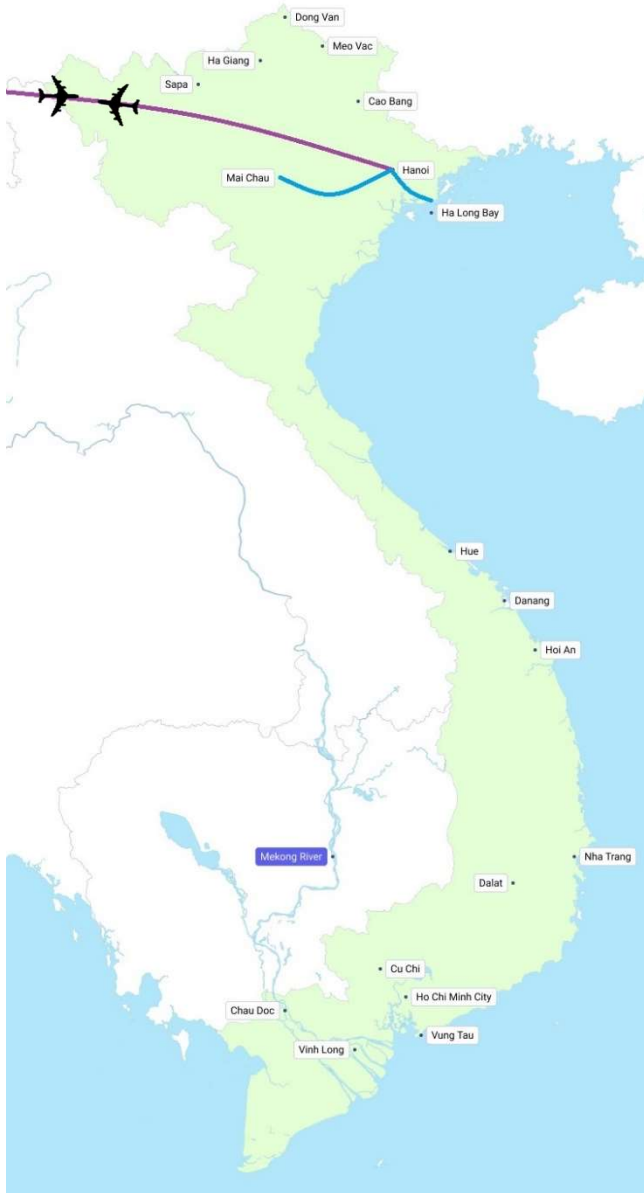


Adventurous Journey & Service Project (11 days)

Vietnam



Vietnam is both perplexing and exciting, a land of astounding beauty, cultural complexities, picturesque coastline, and colourful hill-tribe villages. This trip is specifically designed for adults seeking opportunities to engage with the Vietnamese people and learn about this rising Asian nation.

The itinerary features a 3-day community service program that will entail the construction of a traditional wooden house on stilts while working alongside rural hill tribe villagers. In addition, there will be a hike through the hill tribe regions and an exhilarating motorbike ride as pillion passengers around the back blocks of Hanoi city.

Other activities throughout this journey include a hands-on cooking class, urban rickshaw rides, and learning about Vietnam's turbulent history from a local perspective. This trip will surely leave the traveller astounded by what Vietnam has to offer, with its pulsating street life and contrasting urban and tribal lifestyles.

The trip is designed to positively impact the country, fostering a sense of responsible travel and global citizenship.

Day 1

Arrive Hanoi

We arrive in the capital city of Hanoi, are greeted by our tour leader at the airport and then escorted to our hotel. En route, our tour leader discusses our itinerary and thoroughly explains everything we need to know when travelling in Vietnam, including a short Vietnamese language and a history lesson. A group meeting briefing on our itinerary is held on arrival at our hotel. Tonight, we venture out for a short walking tour of the Hoan Kiem District, followed by our first taste of Vietnamese cuisine at a popular local restaurant. (meals: dinner)

Day 2

Hanoi



This morning we take to the streets to explore some of the city's fascinating sights, beginning with a visit to the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum. This very imposing Soviet-style block is the final resting place of President Ho Chi Minh. Ho Chi Minh was the leader of North Vietnam when war with the United States broke out and who, over time, became the country's most prominent nationalist leader. While he passed away in 1969, many Vietnamese still revere him today.

No trip to Hanoi would be complete without exploring Hanoi's bustling Old Quarter. A virtual rabbit warren of roads and narrow lanes packed

with a myriad of goods, including exotic fruits and foodstuffs, copied designer clothes and electronic items. We visit the Temple of Literature – Vietnam's first Confucius university, founded in the 9th Century. Later, we walk through the former French Colonial quarter taking in St Joseph's Cathedral and the beautifully restored Opera House.

Tonight, we enjoy a hands-on cooking class hosted by a talented local chef who introduces some of north Vietnam's favourite dishes and ingredients. We are cooking our meal tonight, so we best pay attention! (meals: breakfast, dinner)

Day 3

Hanoi – Mai Chau



We saddle up as pillion passengers following breakfast for an exhilarating motorbike ride. Our experienced drivers take us on an adventure around the city, seeing some local highlights and attractions. This includes riding over the 100-year-old historic French Colonial bridge; today named Long Bien. The bridge was constructed using the cantilever method. Next, we ride around Truc Bac Lake, West Lake and the beautiful tree-lined Thanh Nien Street, voted one of Vietnam's most beautiful spots. Cruising towards the laneways of Ngoc Ha commune, we pass through a densely packed residential area of the city that was

once rice fields. Our destination is B52 Lake, the site of an American B52 aircraft shot down in December 1972 in one of the final bombing raids before the American/Vietnam war ended. We return to our hotel to pack for the upcoming adventure.

After lunch, we drive 4 hours northwest of Hanoi, arriving in Mai Chau province, a short distance from Vietnam's border with neighbouring Laos. This remote region of Vietnam is home to several ethnic minority groups, including the *White Thai tribes*. The White Thai maintain a traditional lifestyle, live in longhouses on stilts and carry out unusual religious and ceremonial practices (such as singing and dancing to welcome in the rice harvests). Our host family reveals a way of life that has little changed in generations as we sample the local rice wine and enjoy a tasty traditional dinner. (meals: breakfast, dinner)

Day 4

Mai Chau (Trekking)

We set off for a day's trek through valleys and rolling hillsides. Along the way, we encounter friendly faces, terraced paddy fields and intriguing irrigation systems. As our guide explains the crops, we see how the minority groups live in harmony with the environment. Our final destination is a new Thai village, with our

accommodation being a traditional longhouse on stilts. The host family prepares a delicious evening meal while we listen and learn about the local customs and folklore of the region's inhabitants. We partake in traditional dancing, where we are asked to jump between bamboo poles banging together while waving our arms.

Please note: While the village is one of the trip highlights, the facilities are basic. A thin mattress, pillow and mosquito net are provided in each longhouse. Toilets are basic, and showers are lukewarm. Good quality walking shoes are necessary. Main packs may be left in our Hanoi hotel or delivered to the main homestay, so we only need to carry a small pack during the trek. A local cook will prepare all meals. (meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner)

Days 5, 6, 7

Mai Chau (Community service house building program)



Today we begin our three-day community project. This is a hands-on building program as we help construct a traditional house on stilts for a local community, working alongside local tradespeople. The chief builder and his team supervise and assist throughout the project. Smaller groups rotate throughout the project completing the required tasks. The main support beams are raised with ropes, and the outer frame and roof are constructed. Flooring takes the form of bamboo slats laid out and nailed down. The roofing is made from straw thatching or tiles. Local builders coordinate the technical aspects, and

natural materials are used as much as possible. During construction, a short ceremony is held to signify the creation of a new dwelling.

Over the coming days, we learn about the sense of community and the process involved in choosing the family who will receive the house. The recipient family works with us, thus fostering relationships with the new homeowners and their children. During our time in this region, it is not uncommon for us to assist with preparing and cooking meals. *(meals: 3 breakfasts, 3 lunches, 3 dinners)*

Day 8

Mai Chau - Hanoi



Today we put the finishing touches on the stilt house we have spent many hours helping to build before a short handover formality with the family. This is a time of celebration as we thank the local people for their hospitality. Mid-morning, we farewell our host family and the building team, who have become our friends over the past four days and drive back to Hanoi.

Mid-afternoon, there is time to relax and freshen up in our hotel before we venture out to visit Hoa Lo. Formerly, a prison nicknamed the 'Hanoi Hilton' by the American airmen shot down over Vietnam and incarcerated here during the war years of the 1960s. The French originally built the prison in 1896 to hold political revolutionaries. Famous prisoners once included Truong Trinh, the former General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam, and Peter Peterson, a US pilot shot down over Vietnam who later became the first Ambassador to Vietnam after Vietnam/American relations normalised. Perhaps the most famous American prisoner was another former pilot, Senator John McCain III, who ran for the US presidency in 2000. The city streets surge with motor scooters weaving amid the city's delightful architecture telling of its French colonial occupation from 1858-1954. The rest of the afternoon and evening is set aside for free time, allowing us to explore independently or perhaps sit at a café and watch the hustle and bustle of the locals going about their daily business. *(meals: breakfast, lunch)*

Day 9

Hanoi - Ha Long Bay



This morning we begin our drive to magnificent Ha Long Bay, stopping at handicraft villages or workshops along the way. Arriving before lunch, we board our private boat to cruise this secluded bay with its 1,969 limestone peaks. Topped with thick jungle vegetation, each island rises from the ocean amongst clear waters dotted with floating pearl farms and fishing villages. The bay's calm waters make a perfect setting for swimming on one of the beaches before we visit an impressive cave. Our guide shares the myths and the geographical processes that formed the bay's stunning karst topography.

We dock at the main port and drive to our seaside hotel as the sun sets. Tonight, we investigate the town's bustling open-air night market selling handicrafts and souvenirs of Ha Long Bay. If you love seafood, there are an endless number of specialty restaurants from which to choose. *Please note: The boat trip is through calm waters as Ha Long Bay is sheltered from the open sea. (meals: breakfast, lunch)*

Day 10

Ha Long Bay - Hanoi



We farewell Ha Long Bay, making our way back to Hanoi for a chance to explore this intriguing capital city further. Mid-afternoon, our guide takes us on a tour of the Lakes District, where we call on a couple of art galleries displaying the finest quality oil paintings and imagery of Vietnam.

Alternatively, we can stop at one of the quirky propaganda art galleries selling old Soviet-era socialist and communist posters, often depicting notable events during Vietnam's politically turbulent history. Time is allocated to visit one of the ancient temples dotted around the city to gain an understanding of Buddhism in Vietnam and see stunning architecture while the locals light incense and pray. Tonight, we dine at a famous small

restaurant that has only sold one dish for the last 100 years before taking in a performance of Hanoi's renowned Water Puppet Troupe, where ancient legends and folklore are played out almost magically, floating on a pond. *(meals: breakfast, dinner)*

Day 11

Depart Hanoi

This morning we are free to explore independently until lunchtime. We regroup and enjoy a farewell lunch to discuss our amazing time in Vietnam coming to a close. Our tour leader then escorts us to the airport for our homebound flight and waves us farewell. *(meals: breakfast, lunch)*

Summary

Grading

Moderate; To get the most out of this trip, you need to be in good health. However, anyone with a good level of fitness will be able to take part. Some outdoor activities include physical exertion, and there may be long periods of exposure to the elements. You will be expected to walk every day and carry your luggage for short distances. The itinerary may include bike riding, climbing steps and trekking. If your itinerary includes community service work of any description, you will be expected to work diligently during this component. Conditions here may be basic with simple accommodation and bathroom facilities. Suitable packing lists will be provided to match the content of the itinerary.

Accommodation

Private tours/family tours: Accommodation is based on a double/twin share arrangement. If you are travelling alone, you will be paired up with someone of the same gender. If you choose not to share or are the odd numbered person on tour, a single supplement is payable. For children under 12 years of age, it may be possible for one child to share with parents (depending on hotel regulations and availability of extra beds/rollaway beds)

Transport

Depending on the tour, modes of transport may include modern air-conditioned private coach, boat, train, plane.

Your Tour Leader

A tour leader accompanies all group tours. Your tour leader is the person who most influences the success of your trip. They have been meticulously trained and are very experienced in running tours. Every tour leader is locally employed, therefore they are the best person to showcase their country and culture. Their expertise and knowledge creates an insightful and authentic experience of the region. They are with you throughout your trip from breakfast time until the group returns to the hotel in the evening. They are contactable 24/7.

For more information on the role of the tour leader, local guides and accompanying teachers, please refer to our website.

Group Size

Private tours/family tours: Minimum group size is 12. There are no maximum participant numbers on any tour.

Service-Learning Programs

The local community instigates all our service-learning programs in response to their genuine needs and goals. Every program is conducted *only* after careful consultation with local community leaders and authorities.

We assess each program during the consultation process to ensure that it's sustainable, ethical, and empowers local people. Each project is designed to have lasting economic benefits that build wealth within the community – we're not in the business of tokenistic hand-outs.

- **Physical construction projects.** These projects include building, repairing or improving housing, schools, libraries, washroom facilities or other infrastructure and fittings. We also work with communities that require water reservoirs, irrigation systems and animal pens.

As you can imagine, these projects require lots of physical exertion, sweat and some exposure to the elements. Undertaking a construction project involves hiring expert local tradespeople, assistant builders and transport providers. More substantial construction projects require purchasing locally produced materials, hiring cooks and booking local homestay accommodation, all of which inject money into the host community. Fundraising is usually required for these projects.

- **Environmental projects.** Our environmental projects are wide-ranging. They include activities such as: constructing greenhouses with suitable plants, planting cash crop gardens, such as mango and dragon fruit trees; constructing small dams; restoring native vegetation and habitat; setting up solar panels, installing fish farms, and maintaining conservation huts and hiking trails.

By taking part in these projects, travellers will develop their environmental awareness. They'll learn about environmental impacts and discover ways to measure the lasting success of an environmental project. As with physical construction projects, fundraising is usually required for these projects.

For more details about our service-learning programs, please refer to our website.

Land Trip Cost and Details

Cost per traveller from A\$ 1,650

Based on a minimum of 12 travellers

**Smaller or larger group sizes priced on application*

Inclusions

- All accommodation, transport, activities, entrance costs and other programs as described in the itinerary
- Professional Adventure Travel tour leader throughout the trip & additional specialist guides
- Extensive destination-specific risk management and assessment
- Meals (and drinking water) as listed in the itinerary
- 24-hour **IN COUNTRY** support
- Pre-departure support, briefings and planning meetings
- Tips for tour leaders, local guides & drivers

Exclusions

- International flights to/from Vietnam
- Travel Visa costs (if required)
- Cost of Community projects/Service-learning programs \$3,800
- Spending money
- Travel Insurance

Contact details

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