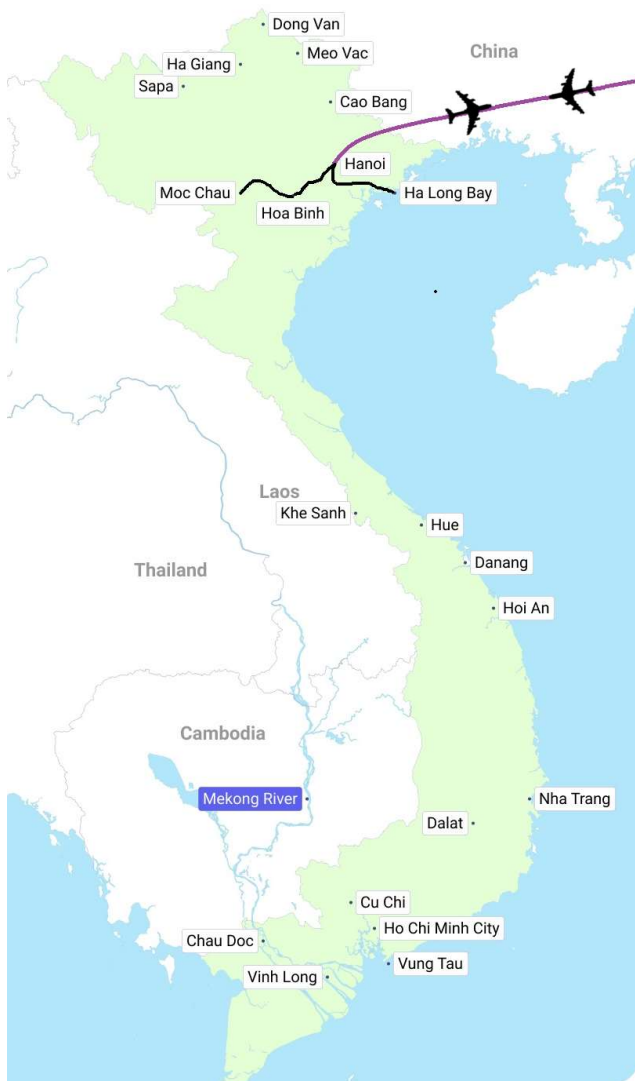


The Remote North (9 days)

Vietnam



Please note: This itinerary can be modified to best suit your school's aims, objectives and budget.

Vietnam is much more than its history of conflict. Its diverse ethnic makeup and stunning natural landscapes promise to captivate. With 54 distinct ethnic groups, many living in remote mountainous areas, this program offers students the unique opportunity to spend three days in a hill tribe village. Here, they will participate in a meaningful service-learning project while immersing themselves in the community's traditional culture and way of life.

The itinerary includes exploring both the iconic and lesser-known sites of Hanoi, a picturesque boat cruise on the Da River near Hoa Binh, and a journey through the striking karst formations of Ha Long Bay. Students will also gain valuable insights into how the Vietnamese people navigate their future through innovation and competition within a socialist-controlled economy.

This program aims to deepen students' understanding of contemporary social issues,

highlighting the stark contrasts between urban and rural life. It also focuses on themes of development and sustainability. A central feature of the itinerary is a community service project in a remote village, where students will collaborate with local residents to build a house. This hands-on experience fosters teamwork and offers a meaningful understanding of the importance of service-learning.

Day 1

Arrive Hanoi



Hanoi is one of Asia's most beautiful cities and was virtually off-limits to foreigners until the early 1990s, when the Cold War ended, and Vietnam began to open its doors. Today its streets surge with motorbikes jostling for the right of way amongst delightful French Colonial period architecture, Soviet-style state buildings, and traffic rules those unfamiliar cannot fathom.

After being met at the airport and checking into our hotel, we explore the city's famed 'Old Quarter'. Each of the 36 streets once sold a designated product, showing the legacy of the skilled artisans servicing the ruling dynasties. Our next stop is the Temple of Literature, revealing some of the city's ancient traditions, including 1000-year-old architecture and a stone stele engraved with students' names who passed the Confucian exams.

To finish the day, we watch a performance of Hanoi's famed Water Puppet Troupe, where folklore and legends are recreated over a pond (water stage). The puppeteers amaze us with their secretive skills, fireworks, and storytelling as we journey back in time, witnessing an ancient form of entertainment once performed in countryside villages. (meals: lunch, dinner)

Day 2

Hanoi – Hoa Binh – Da Bia



We begin with a visit to the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum, a stark Soviet-style structure that houses the body of Ho Chi Minh, the former President and leader of North Vietnam during the Vietnam War. Ho Chi Minh, who passed away in 1969, six years before the war's conclusion, remains a deeply revered figure in Vietnam. His legacy as a nationalist leader and political strategist draws countless visitors, as evident from the long queues of people waiting to pay their respects and view his preserved body lying in state.

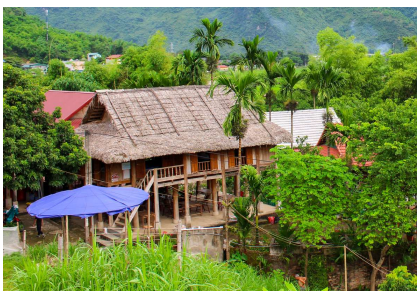
Leaving the city, we pass notable landmarks such as the century-old Long Bien Bridge, designed during the French Colonial era, and Truc Bac Lake. Our drive takes us southwest to Hoa Binh, a region renowned for its lush terraced rice fields, caves, and the scenic Da River.

At Hoa Binh port, we board a simple transport boat for a cruise along the Da River, enjoying views of the surrounding rolling hills. Our journey concludes at Da Bia village, an isolated riverside community nestled in a quiet corner of the river system.

Our host family welcomes us with warm countryside hospitality. We take a guided stroll through the village, visiting the local primary school and a few small shops, as our guide provides insight into life in this close-knit fishing community. For the night, we stay in the village's sole homestay, where our hosts prepare a traditional dinner featuring several local dishes. (meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner)

Day 3

Da Bia – Moc Chau



After bidding farewell to our hosts at the Da Bia homestay, we take a short boat ride across the river to meet our bus for the journey to Moc Chau, located in the far west of Hoa Binh Province. Close to Vietnam's border with Laos, Moc Chau is home to a number of hill tribes, most notably the Black Hmong ethnic minority. The Hmong community preserves its traditional way of life, with women often seen wearing intricately designed traditional costumes. This sub-group is known for their unique rituals, including singing, flute playing, and expertise in traditional medicine and indigo dyeing.

Upon arrival in Moc Chau, we begin our exploration with a walk to our homestay, where our host family greets us warmly. This afternoon, we delve into the customs and rituals of the Hmong people, gaining insight into how they integrate sustainable farming practices with a deep respect for the environment. During a

scenic trek, we observe traditional farming techniques still in use and visit the site of tomorrow's building project.

The building project is a collaborative effort involving local tradespeople, village labourers, and the family who will benefit from the new home. (meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner)

Please note: While Moc Chau is one of our trip highlights, the facilities are quite basic. Thin mattresses, pillows and mosquito nets are provided. Our main luggage may be left in our Hanoi hotel. You will need to carry a small pack while trekking. A local cook prepares all meals.

Days 4, 5, 6

Moc Chau (community-building project)



Following breakfast, we begin our community project under the instruction of the chief builder and our experienced tour leader. Breaking into groups and rotating every few hours, various activities are undertaken. Tasks include bricklaying, tiling and manual labouring such as hammering, sawing, and transporting materials. Safety is paramount; therefore, only local tradespeople work on the roof section.

The days are long; however, the results are rewarding as our project becomes a reality.

As friendships blossom, we begin to understand the Hmong's sense of community and customs. The last evening's activities include a small

handover ceremony of the newly constructed house to the recipient family. (meals: 2 breakfasts, 2 lunches, 1 dinner)

Day 7

Moc Chau - Hanoi



We bid farewell to our host family and return to Hanoi to further explore this vibrant city. Despite its history of conflict and hardship, Hanoi retains much of its colonial charm, seamlessly blended with modern architecture and bustling street life.

For lunch, we enjoy a typical local meal, sampling three of Vietnam's beloved national dishes: Pho, Bun Bo Hue, and Bun Cha, staples of the city's culinary culture.

We are guided through the Hoa Lo Prison Museum. Originally built by the French in 1896 to detain political revolutionaries, the prison later became infamous as the "Hanoi Hilton" during the Vietnam War, housing

captured American airmen. Notable prisoners included Truong Chinh, a former General Secretary of the Communist Party, and Senator John McCain III, who later ran for the US presidency.

In the early evening, we take part in a hands-on cooking class led by a local chef. Equipped with aprons, woks, and unfamiliar ingredients, we learn to prepare three Vietnamese dishes. Our chef guides us through the process, explaining the importance of balance, subtlety, and the interplay of flavours that define Vietnamese cuisine. (meals: breakfast, lunch)

Day 8

Hanoi - Ha Long Bay



We set out on our journey to Ha Long Bay, with a stop en route at a social enterprise workshop and gallery showcasing handcrafted goods. Upon arriving before lunch, we board our private sleeper boat to begin a scenic cruise through this serene wonder, home to 1,963 limestone peaks.

Ha Long Bay's islands are adorned with wave-carved grottoes and lush vegetation, rising dramatically from the emerald waters. Scattered among them are floating fishing villages, adding to the Bay's charm.

The calm waters provide the perfect setting for an afternoon kayaking

excursion. As we paddle, our tour leader shares the myths, legends, and geological insights behind the region's striking karst formations.

Later, our boat docks near floating fishing and pearl farms, offering a closer look at life on the water. As evening falls, we anchor in a secluded spot, offering spectacular views of the Bay's entrance, a perfect backdrop for a peaceful night on board.

NB: The sleeper boat is equipped with life jackets, a shower and toilet facilities. All meals are prepared on board. Sleeping arrangements are twin/triple or quad share. The boat sails through calm waters. (meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner)

Day 9

Ha Long Bay - Depart Hanoi



We begin the day with sunrise over Ha Long Bay before sailing back to the mainland to disembark. From there, we journey to our final destination, the charming village of Yen Duc. Here, we delve into Vietnam's rural traditions and explore the rich heritage of lacquer painting, a distinctive Vietnamese art form.

There is also an opportunity to purchase any last-minute souvenirs before we head to the airport for our return flight. Our tour leader ensures a smooth transfer, assists with onward travel arrangements, and bids us a fond farewell as our journey comes to an end. (meals: breakfast)

Summary

Grading

Challenging; To get the most out of this trip, you need to be in very good health and have a high-level of fitness. The itinerary may include camping, strenuous work and challenging tasks. Some outdoor activities include physical exertion and long periods exposed to the elements. You will be expected to walk every day and carry your luggage. If your itinerary includes community service work of any description, you will be expected to work diligently during this component. Conditions here may be very basic with simple accommodation and bathroom facilities. Suitable packing lists will be provided to match the content of the itinerary.

Accommodation

School tours: Student accommodation is on a twin/triple share basis. Teacher accommodation is on a single room basis. Hotels usually hold a 3-star equivalent rating. Separate sleeping areas and bathrooms are provided for boys, girls, and staff members at homestays.

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 the accompanying teachers, please refer to our website.

Group Size

School tours: Minimum group size is 16 students with a minimum of 2 staff members.

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, students 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\$ 1,400

Based on a minimum of:

16 students & 2 accompanying teachers/staff members.

*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

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