

## The Remote North of Vietnam

*13-day itinerary to Vietnam's Northern Hills, visiting Mai Chau, Son La, Dien Bien Phu and Sapa, before ending in Ha Long Bay*



### Day 1 – Arrive Hanoi

You'll be met on arrival in **Hanoi** and transferred to your hotel in the city centre. The rest of the day is at leisure.

### Day 2 – Explore Hanoi

Your full-day tour of Vietnam's capital begins with its central landmark, the **Ho Chi Minh mausoleum**, a huge marble edifice housing the embalmed body of North Vietnam's first president.

Visitors to the mausoleum form a silent procession as they are led to the central chamber where the body rests, in a ritual that attracts pilgrims from across Vietnam, as well as curious travellers.



### ***Your Financial Protection***

All monies paid by you for the air holiday package shown [or flights if appropriate] are ATOL protected by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is ATOL 3145.

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Your tour continues with a visit to the **Temple of Literature**, Vietnam's first university, established in 1070. This temple/university complex is located at the very heart of the city, but it's easy to forget where you are once you enter its gates; enclosed within high walls and beautiful gardens, it's a peaceful retreat that feels far removed from the hustle and bustle beyond its gates. At its centre are a series of 82 stelae dating to the 15<sup>th</sup> century and recording the names, achievements and dates of the Temple's most famous students.

After lunch, visit the **Hoan Kiem Lake**. This is Hanoi's central landmark, as well as a lively public space where local residents gather in the mornings to perform t'ai chi. On an island at the centre of the lake is the Ngoc Son Temple ('Temple of the Jade Mountain'), accessed via a scarlet wooden bridge, constructed in the traditional Vietnamese style.

End the day with a one-hour 'cyclo' tour of Hanoi's **Old Quarter**.

### Day 3 – Mai Chau (trekking)

Depart Hanoi early morning for the idyllic hill town of **Mai Chau**. Sheltered by a ring of hills and surrounded by lush green paddy fields, Mai Chau couldn't pose a more striking contrast to the busy capital.

In the afternoon, explore the **Van Mai Valley**, where you'll have the chance to visit a number of local villages belonging to the minority White Thai people, before returning to your lodge for dinner.

Today's itinerary can be easily adjusted to include more or less walking depending on your preferences and level of fitness, with both long and short trails available.

### Day 4 – Mai Chau (cycling)

After breakfast, take delight in biking through the **Mai Chau Valley**, a region famous for its stilt homes and rice paddies. The ride will proceed at a leisurely pace, with time to stop, take photos, and interact with the locals. On the return journey, cycle through **Pho Vang Village**.

After lunch at the lodge, say goodbye to Mai Chau and set off west for the town of **Son La**, arriving late afternoon.

### Day 5 – Son La

Start the day with a visit to Son La's **Old French Prison**, originally a penitentiary built by the French in 1908, now a museum.

Between 1930 and 1945 thousands of Vietnamese were imprisoned in Son La, among them many who would later become leaders of the revolution (such that, in 1962 it was classified as one of the country's 'revolutionary heritage sites'). The prison was partially rebuilt after the 1952 bombings and it's still possible to visit the subterranean cells equipped with food-serving hatches and leg irons. It provides a fascinating, albeit bleak, insight into the events leading up to the First Indochina War.



In the afternoon, proceed to **Dien Bien Phu**, the provincial capital and site of the famous Viet Minh victory against the French in 1954, a battle that precipitated the fall of French Indochina.



## Day 6 – Dien Bien Phu

Drive to **Muong Phang**, the former headquarters of Vo Nguyen Giap & Hoang Van Thai, the generals who led the Dien Bien Phu campaign. After a tour of the generals' headquarters, take a cruise on **Pa Khoang Lake**, stopping to explore a quiet lakeside village.

Late morning, check out of your hotel and drive to **Lai Chau**, where you rest tonight. The drive to Lai Chau takes you through beautiful hill country, with scenes of thatched-roofed cottages and seemingly endless rice terraces set against a backdrop of the Hoang Lien Son Mountains. There will be plenty of opportunities to stop along the way for photos.

Arrive in Lai Chau late afternoon and check into your hotel.

## Day 7 – Lai Chau to Sapa

After breakfast, depart for **Sapa**, arriving midday. Sapa is one of many picturesque hill towns in the region of North Vietnam, but it stands out for its stunning location and lovely French colonial centre. Set in the hills, the town overlooks a deep valley ringed with rice terraces, and enclosed by mountains on all sides. On a clear day, the views are wonderful.

In the afternoon, visit **Ta Van Village**, home to H'mong and Zay minorities. Unlike some of the earlier villages visited during your tour, Sapa is firmly on the tourist circuit, so you can expect to be approached by canny local traders urging you to buy their crafts. Spend a while bartering if of interest, or just exploring the village and learning about the local way of life, before returning to your hotel in Sapa. You'll trek about 6km today, along mostly easy terrain, but the route can easily be extended or shortened according to your preferences.



## Day 8 – Sapa

Leaving Sapa this morning, you drive to the tranquil village of **Y Linh Ho**, the starting point for today's scenic trek. The walk will see you journey down into the **Muong Hoa Valley**, festooned with lush terraced paddy fields (at their best between September and October), and along the **Hoang Lien**

**Mountain Range.** You'll trek for approx. five hours, before continuing to the **Lao Chai Junction** for a stunning panoramic view of the valley. Return to Sapa by car.



## Day 9 – Sapa; night train to Hanoi

Morning at leisure in Sapa. In the afternoon, follow a trail out of Sapa and along walking trails flanked by serene gardens and pine forests. Proceed to the Black Hmong ethnic minority village of **Matra**, a small and isolated village typical of this region. From Matra, continue hiking through rice paddy fields and stunning natural scenery. The trek ends at **Taphin church**, where your driver will be waiting to transfer you to the **Lao Cai** train station for your return journey to Hanoi.

Overnight on the sleeper train.

## Day 10 – Hanoi

Arrive in Hanoi and drive to **Bat Trang Village**, renowned for its ceramics. On arriving in the village, take a stroll through the narrow lanes and learn more about the art of pottery and ceramics. Under the guidance of skilled artisans, you will learn how to shape ceramics, before continuing your trip to **Dong Ho Village** to see the final product and have a go at Dong Ho block printing!

Return to Hanoi late this afternoon. Overnight in a centrally-located hotel.

## Day 11 – Ha Long Bay

Today you leave Hanoi for **Ha Long Bay**, a drive of approx. 4 hours to the coast.



On arrival at Ha Long Bay, board a traditional Vietnamese sailing boat, or junk, and set off on a cruise of the hundreds of islets that dot Ha Long Bay. A seafood lunch will be served on board shortly after you set sail.

In the afternoon, visit some of the more accessible islands, a floating market, and, if the weather permits, swim or kayak in the calmer waters of the Bay. Of course, if you prefer you can just lounge on the deck of the ship—when the weather’s right, there’s nothing more relaxing!

Drop anchor in the late evening for an overnight stay among the dramatic limestone peaks of Ha Long Bay.

### Day 12 – Ha Long Bay to Hanoi

Spend the morning cruising through the limestone cliffs and emerald waters of Ha Long Bay, before returning to the wharf around lunch time. Transfer back to your hotel in Hanoi.

### Day 13 – Departure

Transfer to the airport for your international flight home or onward transfer.



### Price Guide:

*The cost of this itinerary is from **£1,950 per person**, based on two travellers in shared twin/double accommodation. For more information, or if you would like to enquire about a tailor-made holiday combining part or all of the above itinerary, please [contact us](#).*

#### Includes:

- Twin/double accommodation on B&B basis (full-board in Mai Chau and Ha Long Bay)
- Private transfers
- All entrance fees
- Activities mentioned in itinerary
- Experienced regional guides

#### Excludes:

- International flights – please ask us for a quote
- Visas
- Personal travel insurance
- Personal expenses and tips
- Lunch and dinner to own account unless stated otherwise in itinerary