

Vietnam Northern Highlights

12-day itinerary taking in the best of northern Vietnam, including Hanoi, Ninh Binh, Cuc Phuong National Park and Sapa



Day 1 – Arrive Hanoi

You will be met on arrival in Hanoi and transferred to your hotel in the city centre. 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. In an Orwellian, quasi-religious display, visitors to the mausoleum form a silent procession as they are led to the central chamber where the body rests. It's a ritual that attracts pilgrims from across Vietnam, as well as curious travellers.

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 outside. At its centre are a series of 82 stelae going back to the 15th century and recording the names, achievements and dates of the Temple's most famous students.



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.

For more information see our booking terms and conditions.

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 beautiful Ngoc Son Temple, accessed via a traditional red wooden bridge.

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



Day 3 – Ky Son village tour; Hanoi to Lao Cai by train

Depart Hanoi this morning and drive 55km north-west to **Ky Son Village**. Take a pleasant walk or bike ride around the village and get a feel for the northern country lifestyle. Around midday, visit the **Moon Garden**, a local homestay, for lunch. If you'd like, you can help with the food preparation and learn a bit about the local culinary techniques!

Relax before setting out on a bike ride to **Duong Lam Village**, stopping along the way to take photos and greet the locals. Visit Mia Pagoda, Mong Phu communal house, Ngo Quyen and Phung Hung temples, and a traditional farmhouse, before returning to Ky Son Village. In the late afternoon, drive back to Hanoi and transfer directly to the train station.

Board the overnight sleeper train to **Lao Cai** on the Vietnam-China border.

Day 4 – Lao Cai to Sapa

Arrive in Lao Cai this morning and, after a stop for breakfast at a local restaurant, set off for the mountain town of **Sapa**. On arrival in Sapa, tour the local market, a lively meeting and trading place, before checking in to your hotel. The rest of the afternoon is free to explore the town and its surrounds. Sapa is a wonderfully picturesque town, with an attractive colonial quarter and stunning views of the Muong Hoa Valley from its hillside location. It's a pleasure to explore on foot or by bike.



Day 5 – Sapa

At leisure in Sapa. Visit the local markets, or explore one of the region's many beautiful trails at your own pace.

Day 6 – Trekking in Y Linh Ho; Sapa to Hanoi

Depart for **Y Linh Ho** in the morning, where a scenic trail will take you down into the **Muong Hoa Valley**, festooned with lush terraced paddy fields (at their best September to October). Enjoy a 3-hour trek along the **Hoang Lien Mountain Range**, stopping to admire the scenery, before continuing to the **Lao Chai Junction** for a stunning panoramic view of the valley. Return to Sapa by car.

In the afternoon, take a stroll around 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 the region. From Matra, continue hiking through rice paddy fields and stunning natural scenery. Your trek ends at the **church of Taphin**, where your car will take you to the Lao Cai train station for your return journey to Hanoi. Overnight on the sleeper train.



Day 7 – Hanoi to Ha Long

Arrive in Hanoi early morning and have breakfast at a local restaurant. Then, depart Hanoi for **Ha Long Bay**.

Arrive Ha Long Bay midday and board a traditional Vietnamese sailing boat, or junk, for an overnight cruise among the hundreds of islets that dot the Bay. You'll enjoy a seafood lunch shortly after boarding; then, in the afternoon, visit some of the larger islands in the Bay, a floating market, and, if the weather permits, go for a swim or kayak in the calm waters. Of course, you may prefer to just lounge on the deck of the ship. When the weather's right, there's nothing more relaxing!

Drop anchor late evening and retreat to your cabin for an overnight stay among the dramatic limestone peaks of Ha Long Bay.

Ha Long Bay is generally best visited in the early spring, when the weather is clear. But some prefer the winter, when the Bay is chill and misty, and wonderfully atmospheric!



Day 8 – Ha Long to Ninh Binh

Spend the morning cruising through the limestone cliffs and emerald waters of Ha Long Bay before returning to the wharf, where you'll meet with your guide and your driver and set off south for **Ninh Binh**. Overnight at the Emeralda Resort, or similar, in Ninh Binh.



Day 9 – Ninh Binh; Dong Tam and But Cave Complex

Start the day with a leisurely bike ride (~5km) through paddy fields to **Dong Tam Village**, where you'll enjoy a traditional lunch prepared by a local family. After lunch, embark on a sampan ride through the **But Cave Complex**, exploring a mixture of dry caves and water caves. The boat trip ends at **Thung Nham Dock**, where your driver will be waiting to return you to Emeralda Resort.



Day 10 – Ninh Binh to Cuc Phuong National Park

After breakfast at your hotel, depart with your driver and guide for **Cuc Phuong National Park**.

One of Vietnam's most beautiful protected areas, Cuc Phuong National Park comprises over 120ha of primary rainforest and mountains, and is home to a marvellous variety of flora and fauna. Explore the park on foot and by car, with an optional visit to the Cave of Prehistoric Man, before stopping for lunch at a local restaurant.

After lunch, drive to Bong Station and take a walk through the forest to witness the diverse flora and fauna highlighted by a backdrop of perennial trees.

Overnight in **Cuc Phuong**.

Day 11: Cuc Phuong National Park – Hanoi

Start the day with a visit to the Endangered Primate Rescue Centre – a project overseen by the Frankfurt Zoological Society – where you can view some of the rarest primate species in the world, including various species of gibbon, loris and monkey.

Then, late morning, embark on a 7km hike in the forests of Cuc Phuong, stopping for a picnic lunch along the way.

Late afternoon, meet with your driver and return to Hanoi.

The evening is free to relax. We can arrange a meal at an Hanoi restaurant to mark your last night in Vietnam, or you may prefer to relax and take things at your own pace after this afternoon's long hike!

Overnight in Hanoi.

Day 12: Hanoi – Departure

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

Price Guide:

The cost of this itinerary is from **£1,495 per person**, based on two persons in 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 (B&B basis; full-board in Ha Long Bay)
- Lunch on days 3, 7, 9 and 10. Otherwise to own account.
- All transfers as described in private vehicles
- All entrance fees
- 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

