

NORTHERN VIETNAM ESCAPEDE – TRIP NOTES

TRIP CODE: TAGVS115

Valid until 31 Dec 2025

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 Binh Lieu 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'll meet your tour guide for an informative briefing, setting the stage for the exciting days ahead. Later, why not join your fellow travelers for an optional dinner? It's a great chance to bond, share stories, and enjoy a glass of fresh "Bia Hoi" at one of the lively street corners, soaking in the vibrant atmosphere of the city.

Accommodation

- Hotel in Hanoi

Meals included

No meal is included on this day

Special notes

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. If, for any reason, you are unable to attend the meeting, please inform your travel agent or the hotel reception. You can also check with the hotel reception or look for a notice in the lobby for the meeting location.

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

For early risers, Hanoi's parks and lakes are the perfect spots to join the locals for morning exercises. Try participating in Tai Chi, aerobics, traditional dance, or even a casual game of badminton. You might also be treated to a fun and unique back-flapping massage from the friendly locals!

After breakfast, embark on a guided tour to discover Hanoi's cultural and historical treasures. First, visit the Ho Chi Minh Memorial Complex, which includes the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum, the Presidential Palace, Uncle Ho's stilt house, and the Ho Chi Minh Museum. Within the complex, you'll also find the iconic One Pillar Pagoda, a nearly 1,000-year-old structure perched on a single stone pillar in a tranquil garden.

Next, head to the Temple of Literature, Vietnam's first university, founded in 1076. Admire the traditional architecture and stroll through peaceful courtyards, where stone stelae inscribed with the names of past scholars line the paths.

In the afternoon, enjoy free time to explore at your own pace. Stroll through the bustling Old Quarter, shop for souvenirs, or relax at one of the many local cafés. If you're looking for more cultural experiences, consider joining an optional Hanoi cooking class or a motorbike food tour to dive deeper into the city's vibrant street food scene.

Included activities

- Ho Chi Minh Memorial complex
- Temple of Literature

Meals included

- Breakfast

Accommodation

- Hotel in Hanoi

Optional activities

- Hoa Lo Prison: US\$ 2
- Water puppet show: US \$4
- Hanoi cooking class: US \$55

Day 3: Ninh Binh karst landscapes

After breakfast, set out for Ninh Binh, a region famed for its ancient capital of Hoa Lu, picturesque countryside, and dramatic karst landscapes rising from lush rice paddies.

Upon arrival in Hoa Lu, the former capital of Vietnam in the 10th century, explore the historical temples dedicated to the Dinh and Early Le dynasties. Built on the remnants of ancient palaces, these temples offer a glimpse into Vietnam's royal heritage and architectural splendor. For a breathtaking panoramic view, take a short hike to the mountaintop, where the King's grave rests, offering stunning vistas of the surrounding landscapes.

After visiting Hoa Lu, hop on a bicycle and enjoy a leisurely ride through the charming countryside. Pedal along peaceful village roads, past golden rice fields, limestone peaks, and quaint local homes. Feel the refreshing breeze as you weave through scenic paths, greeting friendly locals along the way and soaking in the tranquility of rural Vietnam.

Following a delicious local lunch, embark on a serene two-hour boat ride along the Ngo Dong River. Glide past verdant rice paddies, towering karst mountains, and hidden caves, witnessing locals farming and fishing with time-honored techniques.

Return to the quay and drive back to Hanoi, where the rest of the day is yours to unwind at your leisure.

Included Activities

- Hoa Lu Ancient Capital
- Country cycling

- Tam Coc rowing boat & cave exploration

Meals Included

- Breakfast
- Lunch

Accommodation

- Hotel in Hanoi

Day 3: Binh Lieu hill tribe trek

After breakfast, leave Hanoi behind and journey along the scenic highway to Binh Lieu, a tranquil gem nestled in Northern Vietnam. This remote mountain district is home to ethnic groups such as the Tay, Dao, and San Chi.

Upon arrival, enjoy a local lunch before heading to Song Mooc village, home to the high-hat Dao minority. The villagers are known for their warm hospitality, eager to share their traditions and way of life. As you wander through the village, you'll have the chance to visit local homes, where artisans skillfully craft intricate textiles and traditional handicrafts. Interacting with the villagers will offer you insights into their rich heritage and the traditions that shape their daily lives.

Next, embark on a scenic trek through the terraced fields of Song Mooc. As you walk along the winding paths, take in the breathtaking views of lush, rolling hills and rice terraces that stretch across the landscape. Along the way, stop to interact with the local farmers, and learn about traditional agricultural practices that have been passed down through the generations.

After the trek, head to Khe Tien village, where you will check in for the night in a traditional rammed-earth farmhouse. In the evening, enjoy a delicious home-cooked dinner made from fresh, locally sourced ingredients, complimented by homemade rice whiskey. Afterward, sit down with your hosts for a warm conversation, learning about their daily routines, traditions, and the stories that shape their lives. Finally, settle in for a restful night in the cozy, peaceful surroundings of your farm stay.

Included activities

- Binh Lieu hill tribe trek
- Farmstay traditional house with home meals

Meals included

- Breakfast
- Lunch
- Dinner

Accommodation

- Farm stay in Binh Lieu

Day 4: Binh Lieu hill tribe trek

Awake to the tranquil sounds of nature as the sun rises over Khe Tien. After breakfast, begin your trek along pristine trails, meandering through anise and cinnamon farms, terraced fields and tropical jungle toward the stunning Song Mooc Waterfall, a hidden gem surrounded by breathtaking landscapes. Along the way, discover the diverse flora and fauna of the tropical forest, learning how the local communities have lived in harmony with nature for generations.

Return to your farm stay for lunch, and spend the rest of the day joining your local hosts in farming activities, such as tending to vegetable gardens, caring for rice fields, or venturing into the nearby jungle to collect herbal medicine. Alternatively, you can simply relax with a refreshing swim in the nearby stream.

End your day with a delicious dinner and a restful night in a cozy, traditional rammed-earth farmhouse.

Included activities

- Binh Lieu hill tribe trek
- Farming experience with locals
- Farmstay traditional house with home meals

Meals included

- Breakfast
- Lunch
- Dinner

Accommodation

- Farm stay in Binh Lieu

Day 5: Halong Bay cruise

Wake up to the stunning view of mist-covered mountains, inhale the fresh air, and take a moment to soak in the tranquil atmosphere.

After breakfast, you'll be transferred to the bus for your journey to the breathtaking Halong Bay. Upon arrival at the pier, board your cruise and set sail through this mesmerizing seascape.

Halong Bay is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is one of Vietnam's most iconic natural wonders. It's known for its thousands of limestone islands that rise out of the emerald-green water. Shaped by nature over millions of years, the bay is home to pristine beaches, floating fishing villages, hidden caves, and unforgettable vistas, making it a must-see destination.

Indulge in a delicious lunch on board as you cruise through the bay, admiring the towering karst formations and the serene beauty of the surroundings.

In the afternoon, relax on the deck or take a swim at a quiet beach. As the sun sets, join happy hour on the top deck and watch the sky turn beautiful shades of orange and pink. The cruise will then anchor for the night, giving you a peaceful rest surrounded by the islands.

End the day with a lovely dinner on board and fall asleep under the stars, surrounded by the beauty of Halong Bay.

Included activities

- Halong Bay cruise & sightseeing
- Cave exploration
- Halong kayaking/swimming
- Overnight aboard the boat

Meals included

- Breakfast
- Lunch
- Dinner

Accommodation

- Overnight on board the boat

Day 6: Halong Bay cruise

Start your day early to witness the beautiful sunrise as it lights up the stunning landscape of Halong Bay. After breakfast, take a peaceful rowing boat ride through a natural tunnel and exploring a charming floating village.

Return to the main boat and continue your relaxing cruise to uncover another scenic part of the bay while enjoying a delicious lunch on board.

Arrive at the harbor in the early afternoon (around 11:00 - 11:30, depending on the boat and tides). Disembark and make your way back to Hanoi.

As tonight is your last evening, why not join your fellow travelers for a farewell outing? It's the perfect opportunity to share memories, try local delicacies, and soak up the vibrant atmosphere of the city one last time.

Included Activities

- Halong Bay cruise
- Boat rowing & floating village

Meals Included

- Breakfast
- Lunch

Accommodation

- Hotel in Hanoi

Day 8: 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

Special notes

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 allow you to meet and connect with others, adding fun and enriching your local experiences. During the trip, and at certain locations, you may join other travelers for specific activities. To ensure quality, group sizes are limited to no more than 16 people, except on larger cruisers or public transportation.

Most day tours and excursions are directly organized and operated by Travel Authentic Asia. Occasionally, some activities may be conducted by our trusted local partners, following agreed-upon standards. In such cases, Travel Authentic Asia guarantees the quality of your trip and takes full responsibility for addressing any issues or complaints with our local service providers on behalf of our customers.

Physical Grading: 3/5

This tour involves moderate physical activity and is suitable for those with a reasonable level of fitness. Expect some longer walks, uphill treks, or uneven terrain, but nothing too strenuous. You'll need to be in good health and prepared for some physically engaging activities, but it remains accessible to most active travelers.

Price inclusions

Meals: 7 breakfast, 5 lunches, 3 dinner

Transport: Bus, Boat

Accommodation: Hotels (4 nights), Farm stay (2 nights) Overnight boat (1 night)

Included activities: Hanoi: Ho Chi Minh Memorial complex, Temple of Literature; Ninh Binh: Hoa Lu Ancient Capital, Country village cycling, Tam Coc rowing boat & cave exploration; Binh Lieu: hill tribe trek, Farming experience with locals, Farm stay with local meals; Halong Bay: Halong Bay cruise & sightseeing, Cave exploration, Halong kayaking/swimming, Boat rowing & floating village, Overnight aboard the boat

Price exclusions

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

Optional activities

In addition to the activities included in the day-to-day itinerary, you may also pursue your own interests and adventures during your free time by participating in optional activities, where available.

Please note that optional activities are not necessarily endorsed or recommended by Travel Authentic Asia, nor are they included in the price of the trip. Participation in any optional activities is at your own risk. It is important to understand that your decision to participate is entirely yours and does not form part of your contract with Travel Authentic Asia. For some optional activities, you may be required to sign a waiver or receipt.

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.

Tour guide

During your trip, you will be guided by tour guides specific to each region. This ensures you receive the benefit of their deep knowledge of the area's history, culture, and hidden gems, making your

experience richer and more authentic. Their familiarity with local customs and practices will enhance your understanding and connection to the destination.

Tour guides will manage all organized activities, including pickups and drop-offs when necessary. However, they may not accompany you at all times, giving you the freedom to explore independently when desired.

For your peace of mind, our operations team and 24/7 customer care service are always available. You can reach us easily via phone, WhatsApp, or Messenger to ensure any concerns are promptly addressed.

Meals on tour

When traveling with Travel Authentic Asia, you'll have the opportunity to experience a wide variety of delicious cuisine unique to each country you visit. While some meals are included in the trip price, you will also have the freedom to choose where, what, and with whom to dine, based on your own budget and preferences. This flexibility allows you to explore local food at your own pace.

Your tour guide will offer restaurant suggestions throughout the trip, and group members are welcome to dine together or explore their own culinary choices for privacy and personal enjoyment.

Transportation

Most of the vehicles used during the trip are air-conditioned and designed for tourist comfort. For short distances or specific activities, we occasionally incorporate local transportation options, such as taxis, tuk-tuks, or cyclo, to offer a more authentic travel experience.

In certain cases, domestic or regional flights may also be arranged to save time or accommodate long-distance travel efficiently.

For overnight train journeys, we use local trains with air-conditioned, 4-berth compartments featuring lockable doors. These cabins are shared with fellow travelers or, occasionally, with other passengers not part of the group. During peak travel seasons, when availability is limited, 6-berth compartments may be provided as an alternative.

Accommodations

Our accommodations on this trip are typically 2 or 3-star hotels, offering comfortable stays throughout the trip. The standard check-in time is 14:00 PM. If the group arrive early in the morning, we will arrange a day room for showering and luggage storage. While we always strive to have rooms ready upon our arrival, if we arrive close to the standard check-in time, this isn't always possible, meaning that check-in may not be immediate at some hotels.

In larger, more populated cities, hotel rooms tend to be smaller compared to those in smaller towns, and some rooms may not have windows due to high population density. Although hotels are of the same standard, facilities may vary slightly depending on the location.

Single Travelers

On our joined group trips, you will typically share a room with another group member of the same gender. However, if you are traveling alone and there is no one else available to share the room with, you may be required to pay a single supplement. Alternatively, you have the option to pay for

a single supplement in advance to ensure that you have your own room throughout the trip. Please note that single supplements are not available for overnight trains or local homestays.

Start - Ending-points

Hanoi HM Boutique Hotel

3 Hang Dau street – Hoan Kiem - Hanoi – Vietnam

Phone: +8424 3266 8586

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.

Notes: If local conditions require a change to the starting hotel, we will select an alternative of the same standard and notify you via email at least one month before your arrival to ensure you arrive at the correct location.

Arrival complication

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

Upon arrival at the airport, you will be greeted by our representative holding a sign with your name and our company logo in the arrival hall. Please note that neither the driver nor the representative will request additional payment. If you cannot locate our representative or have concerns about your transfer, contact our hotline at +84 903432999 or +84 912221442 for immediate assistance.

To ensure a smooth airport transfer, please provide your flight details at least 14 days before your departure. If the transfer (included in the tour price or booked as an extra service) or any portion of your trip is missed due to a flight schedule change without prior notice, no refund will be issued. Any additional costs incurred to rejoin your group will be your responsibility.

If you need to arrange your own taxi from the airport to the starting-point hotel, metered taxis are available at the airport's ground-floor exit gates. Alternatively, you can approach airport taxi service counters managed by uniformed staff. To ensure a safe and reliable service, seek assistance from airport security or staff. Avoid unsolicited offers from taxi touts claiming to have metered taxis parked outside the airport.

Money

The official currency of Vietnam is the Vietnamese Dong (VND). According to government regulations, all prices for goods and services must be quoted in VND. Foreign currencies can only be exchanged through authorized exchange bureaus or used with special permission.

In practice, USD is widely accepted in tourist areas and is often considered a secondary currency. Other foreign currencies, such as EUR, AUD, and GBP, are also accepted in some locations, though less commonly. In tourist hotspots, establishments like restaurants, bars, travel agencies, and souvenir shops may accept both USD and VND, with prices sometimes displayed in both currencies. However, outside tourist areas or in remote regions, only Vietnamese Dong is accepted. During your trip, it's best to carry a mix of VND and USD for convenience. Ensuring that any bills, particularly USD, are in good condition without tears or excessive wear, as damaged bills may be rejected. Vietnamese Dong (VND) can be easily withdrawn from ATMs, which are widely available on street corners throughout the country. Having both currencies on hand ensures you are well-prepared for transactions in both tourist hubs and more remote areas.

Tipping

Tipping is not compulsory, but it is greatly appreciated. If you are satisfied with the service provided, offering a tip is a meaningful way to show your appreciation. It is especially significant to those who take care of you during your travels and helps inspire excellent service. Tipping should be given directly to the recipient.

Here are some suggested tipping amounts based on local practices and feedback from previous travelers:

Local Restaurants: If dining alone, a tip of around US\$2 is appropriate. In more upscale restaurants, tipping ranges from 10% to 15% of your bill. For group dining, a collective tip of US\$5 to US\$8 is suggested, depending on the group size.

Drivers: For a single traveler, a tip of US\$5 is recommended. For a group, a total tip of US\$10-15 per day is appropriate.

Tour Guides: Tipping for guides depends on the level of service, and US\$2-4 per person per day is typical for group tours. Free to tip more as you see fit. The amount is entirely up to your discretion based on service quality.

Visas

Visas are the responsibility of the individual traveler. Visa requirements vary depending on your nationality and destination. Generally, most countries require that your passport be valid for at least six months beyond your intended stay. Upon arrival, you may be asked to show return tickets and proof of sufficient funds to cover your stay.

Travel Authentic Asia offers e-visa and visa-on-arrival services, which can be arranged by booking the additional service when you make your tour reservation or by contacting us via email.

For more details, please visit our 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 depend on the trip style, the countries you are visiting, and the time of year. Generally, we recommend packing as lightly as possible. You'll be expected to carry your own luggage on excursions, though you won't be walking long distances with it. We suggest keeping the weight under 20kg/44lbs.

You can choose to carry your luggage in a backpack or suitcase, but with wheels is most convenient. An overnight bag or a small backpack with a shoulder strap is useful for carrying essentials like water and a camera on day trips.

Depending on the season and the activities included in your trip, be sure to bring appropriate clothing. In winter (November to February), North Vietnam can be cold, so warm clothing is necessary. During other times of the year, light and comfortable clothing will be sufficient. If your trip involves trekking, make sure to bring trekking shoes or sandals. You'll find that most items can be purchased locally at reasonable prices, so there's no need to pack everything; only bring the essentials.

Health

There are no specific health requirements for this trip. However, we recommend consulting your doctor for up-to-date medical travel advice before departure. It's a good idea to bring along a basic First Aid kit, hand sanitizers, antibacterial wipes, and any personal medications or medical items you may need during your journey.

Safety and Security

Before departure, we encourage you to seek advice on international travel safety and familiarize yourself with potential situations you may encounter during your trip. Traffic can be more chaotic than what you're accustomed to at home, so take your time to adjust to the new environment. Your tour guide and locals are great resources to learn how to navigate local traffic safely.

For added security, we recommend using a neck wallet or money belt to store your passport, air tickets, travelers' cheques, cash, and other valuables. Only carry the amount of money you'll need for the day, and leave the rest in the hotel's safe. We also suggest using a lock to secure your luggage.

While the cities visited are generally safe during the day, we advise caution when wandering at night. It's best to stay in small groups and take taxis to and from restaurants or on evening excursions.

In certain situations, your tour guide has the authority to amend or cancel any part of the itinerary for safety reasons.

If engaging in water activities in oceans, rivers, or open water, be aware that waves and currents can be unpredictable. All participants should be able to swim and have experience in open water, and we recommend seeking local advice before entering the water.

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

Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is mandatory for all Travel Authentic Asia travelers and must be obtained independently. It is your responsibility to carefully review your insurance policy before traveling to ensure it provides adequate coverage for personal accidents, medical expenses, evacuation and repatriation, baggage loss, and cancellation or curtailment of your trip. Please note that any local travel insurance included in sightseeing tickets at certain sites is limited and does not replace comprehensive travel insurance. Travelers with pre-existing medical conditions must confirm that their chosen insurance policy covers these conditions. If such conditions are not covered, it is understood that the traveler assumes full financial responsibility for any issues or costs arising from treatment or complications related to their pre-existing medical condition. Travel Authentic Asia is not liable for any problems, delays, or expenses resulting from such conditions.

Responsible travel

At Travel Authentic Asia (TAA), we operate with a strong commitment to Responsible Travel. We believe that both tour operators and travelers play a vital role in making the world a better place. By traveling responsibly, we not only contribute to the advancement of tourism but also enhance the overall travel experience.

Responsible travel is not an abstract concept; it is reflected in the actions, behavior, and appearance we exhibit every day during our travels. With small efforts, each of us can make a significant difference in the places we visit.

Issues on your trip

While we always strive to provide the best possible holiday experience, we understand that travel can sometimes present challenges due to local conditions or unforeseen circumstances. If something goes wrong, the best way to address the issue is by discussing it with your tour guide or one of our travel consultants or customer care personnel. This allows us to resolve the problem and minimize any negative impact on the rest of your trip.

We acknowledge that there may be situations where a tour guide or our local partners may not be able to resolve an issue to your satisfaction. If that occurs, please feel free to reach out directly to our travel consultant or management team via chat or email, and we will do our best to assist you.

Trip review & feedback

After traveling with us, your feedback is invaluable in helping us improve our services and ensure a better experience for you and future travelers. You are the best person to tell us what we need to do to meet your expectations. Therefore, your comments and suggestions are highly appreciated.