



Private Groups

TRIP NOTES

Private Real Food Adventure – Vietnam – Twofold Travel

Trip code: TVGA160430

Chop, slice and eat your way through Vietnam, experiencing one of the freshest and most fragrant cuisines on the planet. From pho and ancient buildings in Hanoi, banh khoai and imperial citadels in Hue, banh xeo and lantern-lit streets in Hoi An and banh canh and pulsating markets in Ho Chi Minh City, experience Vietnam's cuisine and its tightly woven place within its culture. Drink in cafes and beer halls that sprawl out over city streets, buy fruit from wicker baskets draped over a vendor's shoulders and sit at market stalls as aromatic noodle soups are whipped up in front of you. Experience all of Vietnam's iconic sights, spend time cooking with some of the country's top food experts and get a true taste of Vietnam on this delectable Real Food Adventure.

Style

Original

- Original trips are classic Intrepid adventures. With a mix of included activities and free time, they offer plenty of opportunities to explore at your own pace and take part in activities that really get beneath the skin of a destination. While the occasional meal may be included, you'll have the freedom to seek out your own culinary adventures. Accommodation is generally budget or tourist class (2-3 star), but you're as likely to find yourself as a guest of a local family as staying in a hotel or camping. Transport will vary as well. Depending on the destination and the itinerary you could find yourself travelling on anything from a camel to a train or a private safari vehicle. It's all part of the adventure! Original travellers have a desire to make the most of their travel time and really get to know a place, its people and cultures.

Itinerary

Days 1-2 / Saturday 30th April – Sunday 1st May 2016

Hanoi

Meals: 1 breakfast; 1 lunch; 2 dinner

Xin chao! Welcome to Vietnam.

Your adventure begins with a Welcome Meeting at 6pm on Day 1.

Please look for a note in the hotel lobby or ask the hotel reception where it will take place. If you can't arrange a flight that will arrive in time, you may wish to arrive a day early so you're able to attend. We'll be happy to book additional accommodation for you (subject to availability). If you're going to be late, please inform the hotel reception. We'll be collecting your insurance details and next of kin information at this meeting, so please ensure you have all these details to provide to your leader.

The capital of Vietnam is a charming city with a population of over six million. Hanoi is famous for its beautiful lakes, shaded boulevards, verdant public parks and its thriving Old Quarter, which is an architectural museum piece with blocks of ochre buildings retaining the air of a 1930s provincial French town. As Vietnam develops to compete with other South-East Asian countries, the beautiful Hoan Kiem Lake reflects the contrasts of modern office buildings, old Buddhist temples and the tangle of ancient streets in its still surface.

If you arrive early, why not get your first taste of Vietnam exploring the lovely, laidback capital. You can stroll the tree-lined boulevards to get a sense of the old days, wander the Old Quarter to uncover ancient temples and a rich, religious culture or head to the Temple of Literature, an oasis of calm right at the heart of Hanoi.

Tonight, your first introduction to Vietnam's lively culinary scene will be bia hoi. Bia hoi is a foamy, light-alcohol beer made fresh each day and served in basic, open-walled 'brew halls'. Sip your brew while sitting on brightly coloured plastic chairs.

Banana flower salad (nom hoa chuo), barbecued chicken (ga nuong) and fried rice (com rang) are common dishes on the menu.

Start the next day with a traditional breakfast of pho – a dish that originates from Hanoi and is designed to awaken the senses and prepare you for the day. We'll then embark on a guided tour of Chau Long Market, learning all about the ingredients and flavours of northern Vietnamese cuisine. Get involved in a betel nut demonstration and, for the more daring, try a fertilized egg or silk worm. We'll also be sampling a cup of the local coffee, typically served with yogurt or black sticky rice with yogurt.

Hanoi is renowned for its legendary street food dishes and Dong Xuan Market is one of the top places to get some of the best street food the city has to offer! Enjoy a street food lunch alongside the locals at Hanoi's largest covered market.

Learn about the traditions of Northern Vietnamese cuisine with the experts at the Hanoi Cooking Centre. Chinese culinary influence remains in the capital and the Northern Highlands, but the dishes we will be cooking are truly Vietnamese. Discover some old Hanoian favorites like caramel pork as well as some lesser known dishes from the highlands. Enjoy the fruits of your labour for dinner.

Sample authentic Vietnamese tea at one of Hanoi's hidden teahouses. Tea plays a major role in Vietnamese culinary culture. Vietnamese people generally favor lighter teas with a flowery fragrance, often green or white tea infused with flowers. Vietnamese teahouses offer a place to savour tea and wile away the hours talking and relaxing.

Included Activities

- Hanoi - Street Eats and Market tour
- Hanoi - Cooking class
- Hanoi - Teahouse visit

Optional Activities

- Hanoi - Museum of Ethnology - VND40000
- Hanoi - Fine Arts Museum - VND30000
- Hanoi - Temple of Literature - VND20000
- Hanoi - Ho Chi Minh's stilt house - VND25000

Accommodation

May de ville City Centre 2 Hotel (2 nts)

Days 3-4 / Monday 2nd – Tuesday 3rd May 2016 Halong Bay/Overnight Train

Meals: 2 breakfast; 1 lunch; 1 dinner

Travel by private minibus to the spectacular World Heritage site of Halong Bay (approx 4 hrs).

Halong Bay is a breathtaking secluded harbour with 2,000 limestone islands rising from the emerald waters of Bac Bo Gulf. One of Vietnam's most scenic regions, this area of about 1,500 sq km is dotted with innumerable beaches and grottos, created over thousands of years by waves and wind.

We spend the night on one of the traditional boats cruising Halong Bay. There is a chef on board who will teach us how to make vegetable flowers and how the fishing nets are used by the locals.

Take a bus back to Hanoi (approx 3.5 hrs).

Board an overnight train bound for Hue (approx. 12 hours). Although conditions are basic, overnight trains are a true Intrepid experience and the best way to travel long distances with the locals. Sleeper trains typically have four berth compartments (occasionally six berth depending on seasonal variations and group configuration), which have bench seats that convert into sleeping bunks. A sheet, pillow and blanket are provided, although some travellers prefer to bring their own sleeping sheet. On occasion, passengers of different genders will be required to share a compartment and there will be occasions where you'll be

sharing with local travellers or travellers who are not part of your group. Most trains have a dining carriage serving simple food, but some travellers take the opportunity to stock up on fresh bread, cheese and fruit prior to departure.

Included Activities

- Halong Bay - Overnight boat cruise

Accommodation

Overnight Boat (1 nt), Overnight Sleeper Train (1 nt)

Day 5 / Wednesday 4th May 2016

Hue

Meals: 1 breakfast; 1 lunch

Hue is Vietnam's former royal capital and its cuisine is considered by many Vietnamese as the best in the country. Hue's cuisine is influenced both by its imperial heritage (small dishes and a focus on aesthetic presentation) as well as its strong Buddhist heritage, reflected in the high proportion of vegetarian restaurants in the region.

We enjoy a classic Hue breakfast of bún bò Huế, a popular Vietnamese soup containing rice vermicelli (bún) and beef (bò), before embarking on our tour of the city's imperial monuments.

As passengers on the back of motorbikes we start our tour of Hue with a visit to the Imperial Citadel, which includes the Forbidden Purple City. The latter was almost totally destroyed during the Vietnam War's Tet Offensive, but the foliage-covered ruins are still atmospheric and the gaping holes left by bombs give an idea of the destruction wreaked upon the country during the war. Next is a visit to Thien Mu Pagoda, considered by many to be the unofficial symbol of Hue. It's an active Buddhist monastery with its origins dating back to 1601. One of the most poignant displays is a car belonging to a former monk who in 1963 drove to Saigon and set himself alight to protest against the treatment of Buddhists by the South Vietnamese regime. We then enjoy a dragon boat cruise on the Perfume River for about 40 minutes before getting back on our motorbikes and riding to our special lunch stop in a nunnery. After lunch we visit the royal tomb of Emperor Tu Duc, with its central lake set amid a grove of frangipani and pine trees, before heading back to Hue. A car will be provided for those who do not wish to ride on the back of a motorbike.

Most groups will visit either a Buddhist nunnery or monastery and have lunch while in Hue. Not only does the lunch provide economic benefits to these institutions, which rely on donations to survive, but it also enables our groups to get an insight into the unique traditions and food of Vietnamese Buddhism. Due to the high passenger numbers visiting Hue, six different monasteries and nunneries are visited so as to share the wealth and minimise impact.

This evening you can choose to be guided by your leader on the best place to try imperial street specialties, including the famed banh hue (rice flour cakes stuffed with shrimp, pork and spices).

Included Activities

- Hue - Royal tomb
- Hue - Royal Street Food tour
- Hue - Motorbike trip including lunch

Accommodation

Gold 1 Hotel (1 nt)

Days 6-8 / Thursday 5th – Saturday 7th May 2016

Hoi An

Meals: 3 breakfast; 1 lunch; 1 dinner

Travelling by bus, head south through coastal rice paddies before traversing the spectacularly mountainous Hai Van Pass. After a brief visit to the beautiful China Beach (known officially as My Khe Beach), arrive at Hoi An (approx. 4 hours).

Recently declared a World Heritage site, Hoi An is being beautifully restored and preserved. Known as Faifo to early western traders, it was one of South-East Asia's major international ports during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. Today, parts of Hoi An look exactly as they did more than a century ago and it retains the feel of centuries past, making it the sort of place that grows on you the more you explore it.

It's also a shopping mecca – with much to browse and buy. Choose from original paintings, handcrafted woodwork, ceramics, embroidery, lanterns and more. Hoi An has also become famous for its tailoring, with a great variety of fabrics and tailors to choose from. Bring your favourite piece of clothing or even just a picture, and you'll be able to have it copied.

On arrival, your tour leader will take you on an orientation walk around the Ancient Town, so you can get your bearings.

Tonight, pull up a plastic chair at a communal table alongside locals and learn how to make one of central Vietnam's most celebrated dishes, banh xeo, at a classic streetside, no-menu restaurant in the Ancient Town of Hoi An.

Today we have an introduction to the cuisine of central Vietnam and its signature vegetables, herbs and spices, and how to prepare and use them.

Start with a guided bicycle tour to the herb gardens of Tra Que Village. At the local market we are also introduced to the wealth of produce available in central Vietnam. If you are not up for the bike ride, then you can take a walk around Hoi An market. We'll purchase some ingredients before heading back to Hoi An for a hands-on lesson in some classic central Vietnamese dishes. You'll also pick up some cooking and cutting techniques which will put you in good stead to recreate these dishes at home. Lunch on all that's been created.

The rest of the time is free to pick up any made-to-measure goodies or foodie delights experience one of Hoi An's many acclaimed dining establishments.

Day 8 is a free day for you to relax, do some shopping or spend time at the beach. There is an optional fish market visit for any early risers to learn about some of the best seafood Vietnam has to offer. In the evening, you can choose to head out to the beach for a local dinner favourite of seafood steamed in beer or jump on a boat to enjoy a barbecue feast on a nearby island.

Included Activities

- Hoi An - Bale Well Dinner
- Hoi An - Ancient town
- Hoi An - Herb Garden Bicycle Tour and Cooking Class

Optional Activities

- Hoi An Fish Market - Free

Accommodation

Lantern Hotel (3 nts)

Day 9 / Sunday 8th May 2016

Ho Chi Minh City

Meals: 1 breakfast

Take a short flight to the economic hub of Ho Chi Minh City (approx 1 hr).

Formerly known as Saigon, Ho Chi Minh City is characterised by a vast array of sights and sounds, and is a fascinating blend of old and new, East and West. The huge number of people rushing about their daily lives in Vietnam's largest city gives it a dynamic atmosphere and the French influence is evident in the excellent baguettes and coffee on offer. Much of city life takes place on the busy streets lined with shops, stalls and vendors, who have their wares spread out on the footpath and sell everything from soup to sophisticated electronics.

Get familiar with some of the most famous sites and monuments of the modern-day capital of Vietnam on a city tour, including the War Museum, GPO and Notre Dame Cathedral. We finish up at one of Vietnam's most vibrant markets, Ben Thanh.

Ben Thanh is Ho Chi Minh City's largest market and the perfect place to pick up any last minute snacks, cooking utensils, ingredients and presents for friends, family (and yourself!) before you return home. Perhaps enjoy some of the market fare for dinner as you shop. Or take the chance to sample some of the delights on offer at KOTO café. An inspiring initiative that helps to support the area's street kids by offering them training in hospitality.

Ho Chi Minh City is Vietnam's party capital. If you're not too tired from the day's activities, get involved in the city's vibrant nightlife.

Included Activities

- Ho Chi Minh City - War Remnants Museum
- HCMC - City tour
- HCMC - Ben Thanh market

Accommodation

Asian Ruby 3 Hotel (1 nt)

**Day 10 / Monday 9th May 2016
Mekong Delta Homestay**

Meals: 1 breakfast; 1 lunch; 1 dinner

We take a private bus out to the Mekong Delta (approx. 2-3 hours)

The Mekong Delta is the lifeblood of South-East Asia, and this fertile region within Vietnam is a maze of canals brimming with life, markets and tropical foods.

We will start with a boat ride through Cai Be Floating Market, where we'll cruise among local barges full of fruits and vegetables and other local products, including fish sauce and soya sauce. At the market we will purchase some ingredients for preparing dinner before continuing on to local workshops to observe local food industries, including rice paper, coconut candy, pop-rice and popcorn production.

The boat will then take you deeper into the countryside along smaller canals to past local farms and producers. Depending on the season, there will be an opportunity to see traditional methods of catching fish or collecting fruits.

Check in at the homestay and help cook some local southern Vietnamese dishes alongside our hosts. Enjoy dinner with tea or rice wine and have the opportunity to talk with your hosts about local agricultural life.

At our homestay we'll be sleeping on simple camp beds in a dorm-style arrangement. Bedding and mosquito nets are provided. Shared toilet and bathroom facilities are basic with cold water only.

Included Activities

- Mekong Delta - boat cruise and homestay

Accommodation

Homestay (1 nt)

**Days 11-12 / Tuesday 10th – Wednesday 11th May 2016
Ho Chi Minh City**

Meals: 2 breakfasts; 1 dinner

After being woken by 'cock-larm', we will help prepare a traditional breakfast before farewelling our hosts. On our return trip, we stop at a floating village to learn about catfish farming on the Mekong River then finish our journey at Vinhlong Market. Explore the local produce stands bearing fish, shrimps, prawns, crabs, snakes and rice-field rats alongside tropical fruits and vegetables.

Return to Ho Chi Minh City by bus.

We finish our Vietnam Real Food Adventure with a truly unique experience with one of Vietnam's most celebrated food personalities. For our final evening together we will enjoy a unique cooking class on southern Vietnamese cuisine followed by dinner.

There are no activities planned for the final day and you are able to depart the accommodation at any time.

Included Activities

- HCMC – Cooking class and dinner
- Mekong Delta – Traditional breakfast
- Mekong Delta – Visit to Vinhlong Market

Accommodation

Asian Ruby 3 Hotel (1 nt)

Itinerary disclaimer

Occasionally our itineraries are updated during the year to incorporate improvements stemming from past travellers' comments and our own research. Our brochure is usually released in November each year. The information given in this itinerary may be slightly different to that in the brochure. It's very important that you print and review a final copy of your Trip Notes a couple of days prior to travel, in case there have been changes that affect your plans. For the latest updated Trip Notes please visit our website: www.intrepidtravel.com

Please note that while we operate successful trips in this region throughout the year, some changes may occur in our itineraries due to inclement weather and common seasonal changes to timetables and transport routes. This can happen with little notice so please be prepared for modifications to the route.

Culture shock rating



Expect some culture shock. You'll be exposed to signs of poverty and access to services may be sporadic. The food will be quite different to home and English speakers harder to find. Respecting the local culture will make it easier to fit in and really experience the location.

Physical rating



Some easy physical activities included in your trip. No physical preparation is required to make the most of the journey.

Included activities

Included activities are listed in the day-to-day itinerary, all other activities are optional and at your own expense. If you choose not to participate in the included activities on this itinerary, the cost will not be refunded.

Optional activities

A selection of optional activities are listed in the day-to-day itinerary. This isn't an exhaustive list and should be used as a guide only. Prices are approximate and are for entrance only and don't include transport to and from the sites or local guides unless indicated. All activities are subject to availability and it may not be possible to do all the activities listed in the time available at each destination.

Where activities are considered medium or high risk, we work with operators whose safety and credentials we have sighted and assessed. This means that it is possible that you may find the same activity cheaper with another operator on the ground, however we cannot vouch for the safety or quality of that operator. Activities not listed above have not been assessed by us and as such our staff and leaders are unable to assist you with booking these activities. The decision to partake in any activity not listed is at your own discretion and risk.

The receipt of commissions or kickbacks in exchange for recommending particular shops or services is ingrained in the culture of the tourism industry. Rather than turning a blind eye to this unavoidable issue in some areas, Intrepid has established a centralised fund whereby contributions from recommended suppliers are collected and distributed back into the business. Intrepid aim to provide the best value trips in the market, and this fund assists in keeping operating costs and trip prices low to you.

A priority in establishing this fund is that the experience of our traveller - you - is not compromised in any way. Please let us know via the feedback form completed after your trip if we are successfully meeting this objective.

Money Exchange

The official currency of Vietnam is Dong (VND).

The local currency is Vietnam Dong (VND), but US dollars are also accepted. It is almost impossible to change VND into US dollars without a flight ticket showing your onward destination.

Only change money at official money exchange counters with a clear sign showing this status. Illegal exchange places like gold shops may offer a higher rate you may risk losing your money.

Credit cards are becoming more widely accepted, but outside main centres you may find cash the only acceptable currency. It may be difficult to cash travellers' cheques.

ATMs are widely available in major cities and tourist areas.

You can have funds transferred to Vietnam via international money transfer companies like Western Union or Moneygram.

Spending money

Every traveller is different and therefore spending money requirements will vary. Some travellers may drink more than others while other travellers like to purchase more souvenirs than most. Please consider your own spending habits when it comes to allowing for drinks, shopping, participating in optional activities, and tipping. Please also remember the following specific recommendations when planning your trip.

Tipping

If you're happy with the services provided a tip - though not compulsory - is appropriate. While it may not be customary to you, it's of great significance to the people who will take care of you during your travels, inspires excellent service, and is an entrenched feature of the tourism industry across many Intrepid destinations. Although can be difficult to source we advise you to carry small notes of local currency each day to make tipping easier.

The following amounts are per person suggestions based on local considerations and feedback from our past travellers:

Restaurants: Local markets and basic restaurants - round your bill up to the nearest US\$1. More up-market restaurants we suggest 10% to 15% of your bill.

Local guides: Throughout your trip you may at times have a local guide in addition to your tour leader. We suggest US\$2-US\$3 per day for local guides.

Drivers: You may have a range of drivers on your trip. Some may be with you for a short journey while others may be with you for several days. We would suggest a higher tip for those more involved with the group, however we suggest US\$1-US\$2 per day for drivers.

Your Tour Leader: You may also consider tipping your tour leader for outstanding service throughout your trip. The amount is entirely a personal preference, however as a guideline US\$2-US\$4 per person, per day can be used. Of course you are free to tip more or less as you see fit, depending on your perception of service quality and the length of your trip. Remember, a tip is not compulsory and should only be given when you receive excellent service.

In total, we recommend you budget approx US\$5-US\$10 per day of your trip to cover tipping.

At your group meeting on Day 1 your tour leader will discuss with you the idea of running a group tipping kitty, whereby everybody contributes an equal amount and then your tour leader pays the tips while keeping a running record of all monies spent (except restaurant tips). The record can be checked at any time and any money remaining at the end of the tour returned to group members. This is often the easiest way to avoid the hassles of needing small change and knowing when and what is an appropriate amount to tip.

Please don't tip with coins, very small denomination notes, or dirty and ripped notes. This is regarded culturally as an insult

Departure tax

All departure taxes should be included in your international flight ticket.

Important notes

PASSPORT DETAILS

Please note for all flights and trains in Vietnam, full names as per passport are required, including middle names. Please provide your exact name as per passport at the time of booking. Ticketing fees may apply for updates or amendments to details within 45 days of departure.

TET:

Tet is Vietnam's New Year festival, held annually in late January or early February based on the lunar calendar. While this can be a fascinating time to travel and experience this event, expect some shop closures and busier than usual local transport. Opening hours at some tourist sites may also be affected or closed. Although we make all reasonable efforts to avoid disruption, a flexible approach from the traveller is appreciated.

WET SEASON:

During the rainy months (approx. June to October), our mode of transport can be changed at short notice due to weather conditions.

DIETARY REQUIREMENTS:

Severe food allergies must be advised at the time of booking so it can be assessed whether we can cater for the passenger for the included activities as food allergies could impact the extent of participation in these activities.

Accommodation

Hotel (8 nts), Overnight sleeper train (1 nt), Overnight boat (1 nt), Homestay (1 nt)

OCCASIONAL ALTERNATIVE ACCOMMODATION

The style of accommodation indicated in the day-to-day itinerary is a guideline. On rare occasions, alternative arrangements may need to be made due to the lack of availability of rooms in our usual accommodation. A similar standard of accommodation will be used in these instances.

CHECK-IN TIME

Throughout the trip we request that our hotels prepare rooms in time for our arrival, especially if we're arriving prior to normal check-in time. However this isn't always possible which means we won't be able to check-in immediately on arrival at some hotels. Instead, we can store our luggage and explore our new destination.

PRE/POST TRIP ACCOMMODATION

If you've purchased pre-trip or post-trip accommodation (if available), you may be required to change rooms from your trip accommodation for these extra nights.

Due to limited time and energy supply in some places, please be prepared for some cold showers.

Meals introduction

While travelling with us you'll experience the vast array of wonderful food available in the world. Your group leader will be able to suggest restaurants to try during your trip. On our camping trips we often cook the region's specialities so you don't miss out. To give you the maximum flexibility in deciding where, what and with whom to eat, generally not all meals are included in the trip price. This also gives you more budgeting flexibility. As a rule our groups tend to eat together to enable you to taste a larger variety of dishes and enjoy each other's company. There's no obligation to do this though.

Meals

11 Breakfasts, 5 Lunches, 6 Dinners

Budget for meals not included: USD 200.00

Your group leader will endeavour to cater for specific dietary requirements where possible, and vegetarianism and gluten intolerance will be catered for in most instances. There are, however some meals and activities that are fixed in advance and therefore cannot be modified to suit dietary requirements. These instances will be indicated in the 'trip notes' itinerary. Please notify your group leader of any dietary requirements in your group meeting at the start of the trip.

For those suffering from particular food allergies, your group leader will endeavour to disclose to their fullest knowledge the main ingredients in dishes being consumed. It is, however, your personal responsibility to ensure that you do not ingest any foods to which you are allergic.

Transport

Overnight sleeper train, Private vehicle, Plane, Taxi

Group leader

All Intrepid group trips are accompanied by one of our group leaders. The aim of the group leader is to take the hassle out of your travels and to help you have the best trip possible. Intrepid endeavours to provide the services of an experienced leader however, due to the seasonality of travel, rare situations may arise where your leader is new to a particular region or training other group leaders.

Your leader will provide information on the places you are travelling through, offer suggestions for things to do and see, recommend great local eating venues and introduce you to our local friends. While not being guides in the traditional sense you can expect them to have a broad general knowledge of the places visited on the trip, including historical, cultural, religious and social aspects. At Intrepid we aim to support local guides who have specialised knowledge of the regions we visit. If you were interested in delving deeper into the local culture at a specific site or location then your leader can recommend a local guide service in most of the main destinations of your trip.

Joining point

May de ville City Centre 2 Hotel
57 Pham Hong Thai Street
Hanoi
VIET NAM
Phone: +84 439279999
Fax: +84 4393279899

Joining point instructions

Intrepid can assist with pre-booking an arrival transfer from the airport. Transfers cannot be arranged on arrival. Please advise your flight arrival details at least 14 days prior to your departure.

If you have pre-booked an airport transfer you will be met on arrival, and your driver will be waiting for you as you get out of the customs hall and will be holding an Intrepid sign bearing your name.

If you cannot find your pre-booked, or if your flight is delayed, please call our hotline at +84 903 117 770. Additionally please proceed the Information Counter, your driver will wait here if you do not meet upon arrival.

Please note that neither the driver nor any representative should ask you for additional payment.

Metered taxi ranks are available outside the airport entrance. Go out of the customs hall and walk through the airport exit gates A4 and A5 on level 1, you will find Noi Bai Airport taxis (+84 4 3886 8888) readily available outside. Noi Bai Airport taxi drivers wear yellow uniform shirt. Taxi fare to your hotel in town will cost approx. US\$18 (VND350000) in total. Please note these taxis are not on meter - but generally charge per trip. Please AVOID taxi touts who tell you that they have a metered taxi parked outside the airport.

Normal check in time at the hotel is after 13:00.

Arrival complications

We don't expect any problems (and nor should you) but if for any reason you are unable to commence your group trip as scheduled, please contact your starting point hotel, requesting that you speak to or leave a message for your group leader.

If you have pre-booked an airport transfer (where available) and have not made contact with our representative within 30 minutes of clearing customs and immigration, we recommend that you make your own way to the starting point hotel, following the Joining Instructions in these Trip Notes. Should this occur, please apply to your travel agent for a refund of the transfer cost on your return.

No refund is available on missed transfers or portions of your trip owing to a different flight arrival or delayed flight arrival. Any additional cost incurred in order to meet up with your group is at your own expense.

Finish point

Asian Ruby 3 Hotel
100 Le Lai Street
District 1
Ho Chi Minh City
VIET NAM

Finish point instructions

If you have pre-booked a departure transfer, please inform your leader and they will notify you of your departure transfer time.

If you are making your own way to the airport the hotel will be able to help book you an airport shuttle or taxi. Please ask at reception.

Emergency contact

In the case of a genuine crisis or emergency, Intrepid's Vietnam Office can be reached on Tel: +84 903 117 770. For all other enquiries please contact our Reservations department which is open 24 hours, 6 days per week (excluding Sunday). For further contact details please use the following page:

www.intrepidtravel.com/ourtrips/contact/

Emergency funds

Please also make sure you have access to an additional US\$500, to be used when unforeseen incidents or circumstances outside our control (eg. a natural disaster, civil unrest or an outbreak of bird flu) necessitate a change to our planned route.

Visas

Visas are the responsibility of the individual traveller. The visa requirements for your trip vary depending on where you are from and where you are going. As a general rule most countries expect that you will have at least 6 months' validity on your passport. On arrival visitors may be asked to present return tickets and evidence of means to cover your intended stay.

We keep the following information up to date as much as possible, but rules do change - it's important that you check for yourself. Residents from other countries must consult the relevant embassies or your travel agent.

VIETNAM:

Australia: Yes - in advance

Belgium: Yes - in advance

Canada: Yes - in advance

Germany Yes - in advance over 15 days (Effective 1 July 2015 - Visa free up to 15 days)

Ireland: Yes - in advance

Netherlands: Yes - in advance

New Zealand: Yes - in advance

South Africa: Yes - in advance

Switzerland: Yes - in advance

United Kingdom: Yes - in advance over 15 days (Effective 1 July 2015 - Visa free up to 15 days)

USA: Yes - in advance

When obtaining your visa you should allow 3 weeks for processing, the cost is approximately US\$60 to US\$100. Check with your embassy or consulate for further details.

Some nationalities are exempt from requiring a visa if their stay is less than 15 days, but if you are planning on staying in Vietnam for longer than 15 days you will need to obtain a visa extension in advance (please contact your relevant Consulate or Embassy). Effective from 1st July 2015 - 30 June 2016 exempt visa nationalities will also include British, German, French, Spanish and Italian citizens travelling to Vietnam (for all purposes) for a period of up to 15 days, and on the basis of meeting all conditions prescribed by Vietnamese laws.

Keep the customs and immigration form you receive on arrival, as you need it to complete exit formalities on departure.

If your visa application asks for a point of contact, please write: Intrepid Vietnam 57A Nguyen Khac Hieu St, Hanoi, Vietnam Ph +84 4 3715 0996.

Most nationalities do not require a letter of invitation for Vietnam but if you do need one, please contact your sales agent for more information.

Issues on your trip

While we always endeavour to provide the best possible holiday experience, due to the nature of travel and the areas we visit sometimes things can and do go wrong. Should any issue occur while you are on your trip, it is imperative that you discuss this with your group leader or our local representative straight away so that they can do their best to rectify the problem and save any potential negative impact on the rest of your trip.

We recognise that there may be times when your group leader/local partner may not be able to resolve a situation to your satisfaction - if this is the case, please ask the leader if you may speak to their direct manager.

You may also choose to provide details in your online feedback, which we ask you to complete within 30 days of the end of your trip. But we do ask you to be aware that it is very difficult for us to provide any practical help after the trip is complete.

What to take

What you need to bring will vary according to the trip style you have chosen, the countries you are visiting and when you are travelling. Generally speaking you should pack as lightly as possible. On the vast majority of our trips you are expected to carry your own luggage and although you won't be required to walk long distances with your luggage (max 30 minutes), we recommend keeping the weight under 10kg / 22lb.

Most travellers carry their luggage in a backpack, although an overnight bag with a shoulder strap would suffice if you travel lightly. Smaller bags or backpacks with wheels are convenient although we recommend your bag has carry straps. You'll also need a day pack/bag to carry water and a camera etc for day trips.

You can find Intrepid's Ultimate Packing List on our website. It should be used as a guide only and isn't intended to be a complete packing list.

[Go to Intrepid's Ultimate Packing List](#)

WATER BOTTLE:

Consider bringing your own water bottle to refill along the way. The sale of bottled water contributes to an enormous environmental problem around the world. In addition to the water in bottles, the production of a 1 litre plastic bottle takes 2 litres of water and 200ml of oil. A large proportion ends up in limited landfill or discarded in waterways and natural environments. Although it can be difficult to avoid bottled water when travelling, please consider water purification techniques such as iodine or micropur and use the water dispensers which are provided at some of our accommodation. When unable to avoid bottled water it is better to buy the largest available and distribute into your smaller bottle for the day.

Health

All Intrepid travellers need to be in good physical health in order to participate fully on this trip. When selecting your trip please make sure you have read through the itinerary carefully and assess your ability to cope with our style of travel. Please note that if, in the opinion of our group leader or local guide, any traveller is unable to complete the itinerary without undue risk to themselves and/or the rest of the group, Intrepid reserves the right to exclude them from all or part of a trip without refund.

You should consult your doctor for up-to-date medical travel information or for any necessary vaccinations and anti-malarial requirements before departure. We recommend that you carry a first aid kit as well as any personal medical requirements (including a spare pair of glasses) as they may not easily be obtained at the locations on this trip. For legal reasons our leaders and guides are prohibited from administering any type of drugs including headache tablets and antibiotics. Please ensure that you are adequately prepared.

DENGUE FEVER:

Rare instances of dengue fever have been reported in this region. This virus is transmitted by mosquitoes. There is no vaccination against it, but there are preventative measures that you can take such as wearing long clothing and always using repellent. Please note that this mosquito is most active during daylight hours however care should be taken at all times.

Safety

Many national governments provide a regularly updated advice service on safety issues involved with international travel. We recommend that you check your government's advice for their latest travel information before departure and ensure that your travel insurance covers you for all areas your itinerary covers. Please refer to our website's safety page for links to major travel advisories and updates on safety issues affecting our trip.

We strongly recommend the use of a neck wallet or money belt while travelling, for the safe-keeping of your passport, air tickets, cash and other valuable items. Leave your valuable jewellery at home - you won't need it while travelling. Many of our hotels have safety deposit boxes, which is the most secure way of storing your valuables. A lock is recommended for securing your luggage.

Your leader will accompany you on all included activities, however during your trip you'll have some free time to pursue your own interests, relax and take it easy or explore at your leisure. While your group leader will assist you with the available options in a given location, please note that any optional activities you undertake are not part of your Intrepid itinerary, and Intrepid makes no representations about the safety of the activity or the standard of the operators running them. Please use your own good judgement when selecting an activity in your free time. Please also note that your group leader has the authority to amend or cancel any part of the trip itinerary if it's deemed necessary due to safety concerns.

For more details on the type of conditions and safety standards you can expect on your trip, please refer to Intrepid's operational safety policy on our website. We recommend that you take a moment to read through this information before travelling, and would appreciate any feedback on how well it's being implemented in the field:

www.intrepidtravel.com/safety

FIRE PRECAUTIONS:

Please be aware that local laws governing tourism facilities in this region differ from those in your home country and not all the accommodation which we use has a fire exit, fire extinguishers or smoke alarms.

TRAFFIC AND DRIVING ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ROAD:

Depending on where you come from please note that drivers in this part of the world may drive on the opposite side of the road from what you are used to. Look both ways before crossing any road. Traffic can be a little more chaotic than you might be used to at home. Be aware!

PETTY THEFT AND PERSONAL SAFETY:

While travelling there is always the risk of pick-pocketing and petty theft, particularly in the more touristy cities. We recommend that you exercise caution when walking alone at night and encourage you to walk together and only on main, well-lit thoroughfares. Be particularly vigilant on public transport. Simple measures like carrying your day pack on your front, not hanging your bag over the back of your chair or on the floor and wearing a money belt will reduce any chance that your valuables should go missing.

SWIMMING POOLS:

You may stay at hotels with unfenced pools and no life guard on duty.

BALCONIES:

Some hotel balconies don't meet UK standards in terms of the width of the balcony fence being narrower than 10cm.

SEAT BELTS:

Please be aware that local laws governing transportation safety may differ from those in your home country and not all the transport which we use is able to provide seat belts.

LIFE JACKETS:

While life jackets are generally available on water craft, there may be occasions where they are not provided and child size life jackets are not always readily available. If travelling with children and this safety issue concerns you we will be able to advise alternative methods of transport (where available) for you to travel to the next destination. You can choose to travel independently for this leg of the journey. This would be at your own expense.

MOTORBIKE BAG SNATCHING:

Be particularly aware of motorbike bag snatching, especially in the bigger cities, such as Ho Chi Minh City.

WATER SAFETY:

Please take care when taking part in any activities in the ocean, river or open water, where waves and currents can be unpredictable. It's expected that anyone taking part in water activities is able to swim and have experience in open water. All swimmers should seek local advice before entering the water.

Travel insurance

Travel insurance is compulsory for all our trips. We require that, at a minimum, you are covered for medical expenses including emergency repatriation. We strongly recommend that the policy also covers personal liability, cancellation, curtailment and loss of luggage and personal effects.

When travelling on a group trip, you won't be permitted to join the group until evidence of travel insurance and the insurance company's 24 hour emergency contact number has been seen by your leader.

If you have credit card insurance your group leader will require details of the participating insurer/underwriter, the level of coverage, policy number and emergency contact number rather than the bank's name and credit card details. Please contact your bank for these details prior to arriving in-country.

Please go to our website for links to various travel insurance providers:

www.intrepidtravel.com/insurance

Responsible Travel

We believe strongly in low impact or rather positive impact tourism. Broadly speaking this means that we try to minimise the negative aspects of tourism on the local cultures and environments that we visit and highlight the positive aspects. Please visit our website for further details and suggestions on how you can be a responsible traveller:

www.intrepidtravel.com/ourtrips/rt/responsibletraveller

LOCAL DRESS:

Dress standards are conservative throughout Asia, especially outside major cities. To respect this and for your own comfort, we strongly recommend modest clothing. This means clothing that covers your shoulders and knees by wearing sleeves and long trousers. Loose, lightweight, long clothing is both respectful and cool in areas of predominantly hot climate. In many rural areas women will need to wear modest clothing even to swim. Singlets, tank tops and topless sun bathing are all unacceptable. When visiting religious sites men often need to wear long trousers and women a long skirt or sarong.

A couple of rules

Illegal drugs will not be tolerated on our trips. Possessing or using drugs not only contravenes the laws of the land, but also puts the rest of the group at risk. Smoking marijuana and opium is a part of local culture in some parts of the world but is not acceptable for Intrepid travellers. Intrepid's philosophy of travel is one of respect towards everyone we encounter and in particular, the local people who make our destinations such special places. The exploitation of prostitutes is completely contrary to this philosophy. Our group leader has the right to expel any member of the group if drugs are found in their possession or if they use prostitutes.

Everyone has the right to feel safe and secure on their trip. We don't tolerate any form of sexual harassment at Intrepid, either between passengers or involving our leaders or local operators. Sexual relationships (consensual or otherwise) between a leader and a passenger are unacceptable. If you ever feel another person is behaving inappropriately please inform us immediately by contacting the emergency contact number detailed in these trip notes.

The Intrepid Foundation

Since Intrepid Travel commenced operating in 1989 we've been committed to giving something back to the communities we visit. One way has been through our support for local humanitarian, development and conservation projects. Many of our travellers want to contribute something too. Whilst it is often tempting to give hand-outs to those less fortunate, this has the potential to promote a culture of begging and dependency. Handouts are not a sustainable way for individuals or communities to live. That's why we established The Intrepid Foundation – to make it easier for travellers wishing to give back to communities in an effective and meaningful way.

The Intrepid Foundation is a not-for-profit fund offering a selection of excellent grassroots organisations which you can contribute to. All donations to The Intrepid Foundation will be matched by Intrepid Travel dollar for dollar (up to AU\$5,000 per donor and a total of AU\$400,000 for all donors in each financial year). And every cent gets there as Intrepid Travel pays for all the administration costs. Donating is simple and secure. Please ask your leader for information on the projects we support through The Intrepid Foundation or go to our website:

www.theintrepidfoundation.org

Responsible Travel projects

Organisations and projects currently supported by The Intrepid Foundation in Vietnam include:

* The Blue Dragon Children's Foundation works in northern and central Vietnam with the most vulnerable children: street kids, children with disabilities, children from rural families living in extreme poverty, and victims of human trafficking and slavery. Their primary aim is to rescue kids from danger, reunite them with their families when they can, and provide all the services needed for recovery and growth.

www.bluedragon.org

* Children's Hope in Action (CHIA) provides vital health and disability programs and educational services to vulnerable families in Hoi An and surrounding rural areas. CHIA's holistic Special Education program facilitates the social, physical and intellectual development of children who have motor disabilities and little, or no intellectual impairment.

www.childrenshopeinaction.org

* The KOTO Saigon Training Centre provides training in life skills and hospitality to former street children. Trainees at the Saigon centre will go on to work at KOTO's restaurant in the city (to open in 2011). Travellers may also visit the KOTO restaurant in Hanoi, which also provides training opportunities for disadvantaged youth and great food.

www.koto.com.au

For more information, or to make a donation please visit: www.theintrepidfoundation.org/projects/?projectcountry=vietnam

Feedback

After your travels, we want to hear from you! This is so important to us that we'll give you 5% off the price of your next trip if your feedback is completed online within 4 weeks of finishing your trip.

[Leave your feedback here - www.intrepidtravel.com/feedback](http://www.intrepidtravel.com/feedback)