

Vietnam Food and Culture Adventure

May 1-16, 2008-luxury-15 nights/16 days

\$3,895 per person (double occupancy, single supplement \$950)

Itinerary

The following itinerary is correct at time of posting. The actual trip may differ slightly. Occasionally, our itineraries change as we make improvements that stem from past travelers' comments or to take advantage of opportunities that present after the itinerary is published and during the trip itself. Daniel will advise you of any changes at the initial group meeting.



Day 1 Thursday, May 1-Saigon arrival

Meet at the airport and transfer to the beautifully restored, *Majestic Hotel*, oozing with historic French colonial character. We will be staying in Colonial Poolside Deluxe rooms. Afternoon off to rest, take a massage or we will accompany you while you explore central Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) on foot. Welcome dinner at *Luong Son* (Bo Tung Xeo), one of our favorite restaurants with charcoal grills right at the table to grill your own dinner. Overnight in Saigon

Meals-1, D

Day 2 Friday, May 2-Saigon

Breakfast at the hotel followed by a market tour and cooking class at *Dzoan Restaurant*, owned by celebrity chef Miss Nguyen Dzoan Cam Van and operated by her son Khai, who is the executive chef and who will be our instructor. You will learn some of the basics of Vietnamese cooking and prepare lunch under the guidance of Chef Khai, a creative master chef in his own right, setting new trends in modern Vietnamese cooking. Free late afternoon for wandering about town, shopping, sightseeing, a nap, catching up on email, etc. Dinner at *Lang Nuong Nam Bo Restaurant*, for a feast of grilled Vietnamese specialties.

Meals-3, B,L,D

Day 3 Saturday, May 3-Mekong Delta/Saigon

Breakfast at the hotel followed by an all day tour to the countryside in Ben Tre province in the Mekong Delta; a three to three and a half hour drive. We will go to Phuong's family home far from the typical tour routes. You can watch her family prepare lunch for us and see how the average Vietnamese family cooks and eats. This is rural and rustic. There is clean water but no toilet. You will see what very few tourists see – the daily life of rural Vietnamese families and we will get to see some of the work that the *Vietnam Project* has accomplished, giving you a first-hand look at what can be done for less fortunate people in this area. Return to Saigon for an independent dinner (option for a street food crawl with Daniel and Khai).

Meals-2, B,L

Day 4 Sunday, May 4-Saigon to Hoi An

Breakfast at the hotel (or join Daniel for Pho, the national breakfast of Vietnam). Free morning for independent sightseeing tours of Saigon including the former US embassy site, Reunification Hall, Old post Office, Notre Dame Cathedral, various pagodas and temples and the many colorful waterfronts around the city, (Phuong and Marny will be available if you want company); or an optional visit to *Binh Tay*, the big market in *Cho Lon* (Chinatown) with Daniel. After lunch at *Ngon Restaurant*, a unique concept, where you are seated in the lush garden courtyard of a restored French villa and you can order from dozens of street food vendors who have their kitchens set up in the streets surrounding the villa, we will transfer to the airport for an afternoon flight to Da Nang and transfer to Hoi An, a former port city and UNESCO World Heritage Site. The city is a photographer's paradise, is full of character, with Japanese and colonial architecture, and is a wonderful shopping place that is famous for locally-made clothing. Check in at the *Hoi An Beach Resort* on the beach just 5 km from town where we will stay in Deluxe Riverview Villa rooms. Free late afternoon to discover Hoi An (easily explored on foot after taking the free hotel shuttle), shop, relax or take a dip in one of the pools. Dinner of fresh seafood at an outdoor restaurant along the beach.

Meals-3, B, L, D

Day 5 Monday, May 5-Hoi An

Optional early morning market visit with Daniel. This is your chance to see the market as it is before the tourists arrive later in the day. We will watch the fresh fish being unloaded from the boats on the riverbank and listen to hundreds of local vendors haggle over prices and quality. Then we will watch the vegetable and fruit vendors get set up for the day's business and enjoy some Vietnamese coffee or tea at one of the sidewalk cafes.

Breakfast at the hotel. Tour of the old city with a local guide and lunch in town. Optional afternoon cooking demonstration with Miss Vy of the *Cargo Club Restaurant* or free afternoon for exploring town and shopping or a walk on the beach and dip in one of the pools at the hotel. Independent dinner at one of the many good options here in Hoi An.

Meals-2, B,L

Day 6 Tuesday, May 6-Hoi An to Hue

Breakfast followed by check out and drive to the village of *Tra Que* to visit the herb farms that supply most of the restaurants in this region and then on to *Hue*, the Imperial City, over picturesque *Hai Van Pass*. We will stop for coffee or tea and photos at the summit of the pass. Check in at the elegant *Saigon-Morin Hotel* built by the French Morin brothers in the late 19th century, near the Perfume River.

Free afternoon for lunch (we will give you some suggestions, there are a number of good choices near our hotel), shopping, a walk in the park along the river or an optional *Xe Om* (motorbike) or *Cyclo* (pedi cab) ride across the river with Daniel to visit the market and the Citadel, the former, walled-in, imperial city.

Dinner at *Paradise Garden* restaurant.

Meals-2, B,D

Day 7 Wednesday, May 7-Hue

Breakfast at the hotel. Boat trip on the lovely perfume river with a local guide to visit the Thien Mu Pagoda, and the tomb of Emperor Tu Duc. Our driver will then pick us up and we will pass through the picturesque countryside surrounding Hue, full of rice and vegetable fields and small villages, including a stop for lunch. Late afternoon cooking class with Miss Huy, a chef recognized for her expertise in Hue Royal Cuisine, where we will prepare some of the dishes Hue is famous for and then enjoy the fruits of our labors with a multi-course dinner. OR Dinner at the *Folksong* restaurant with some of our local Vietnamese friends. (*Depending on Ms. Huy's availability*)

Meals-3, B, L, D

Day 8 Thursday, May 8-Hue to Hanoi

Breakfast at the hotel. Transfer to the airport for our flight to the historic old city of Ha Noi, the nation's capital. Transfer to the luxurious *Melia Hotel*, in Ha Noi's central district.

Lunch at *Season's of Hanoi Restaurant* situated in a historic French Villa and serving great Vietnamese cooking. The afternoon is free for you to go sightseeing or to relax, shop, etc. In the evening we will take a cyclo ride through the old merchant district and then on to the *Highway 4 Restaurant* (recently featured on Andrew Zimmern's Discovery Channel show) for dinner, where they serve northern Vietnamese and indigenous specialties.

Meals-3, B, L, D

Day 9 Friday, May 9-Hanoi

Optional early morning stroll with Daniel through the markets and narrow streets of the Old Quarter to interact with the people of Ha Noi and view the produce of the area.

Breakfast at the hotel. Cooking class at the *Hoa Sua Cooking Training School*, where we will learn about the cooking of the north and enjoy the lunch we have prepared. Late afternoon water puppet show followed by an independent dinner where you can choose from the countless dining choices in Hanoi. We will be happy to give you recommendations.

Meals-2, B, L

Day 10 Saturday, May 10-Hanoi to Loa Cai

Breakfast at the hotel. All day guided tour of the city (lunch included) in air conditioned vehicles. We will visit the Temple of Literature, The Museum of Ethnography, the Ho Chi Minh museum, his mausoleum, the stilt house from which he conducted much of the American War, and Ba Dinh Square, where he delivered the Declaration of Independence (much like ours) in 1945 and other sites as time and inclination permit. Dinner at *Le Tonkin Restaurant*. We will then be picked up and transferred to the train station to board the *Tulico Express* luxury sleeper coach for the trip to *Loa Cai*, on the Chinese border. The train has secure, 4-person, air-conditioned, sleeping compartments with comfortable foam mattress beds.

Meals-3, B, L, D

Day 11 Sunday, May 11-Bac Ha to Sapa

Upon our early-morning arrival in Loa Cai, we will have breakfast and then our local guide will drive us to *Bac Ha* for the fabulous Sunday market. There you will see a number of the Ethnic Minority groups, dressed in the colorful clothing that represents each groups' and villages' unique style, as they gather to purchase or sell local handicrafts, food, animals, tools and other essentials of daily life. The market is also a social event for the people, many who live in remote mountain communities and walk for hours to attend this market. Lunch in Bac Ha and then we will take an approximately 2 hour drive back through Loa Cai and on to Sapa on the hillsides overlooking the *Muong Hoa* river valley and surrounded by Minority villages and terraced rice paddies, with a view of *Fan Si Pan*, Vietnam's highest mountain. Check in at the *Victoria Sapa Hotel*. Dinner at the hotel.

Meals-3, B, L, D

Day 12 Monday, May 12-Sapa

Breakfast at the hotel. Market visit and guided walking tour of the Sapa area including the Ham Rong Mountain Park, the French-built Sapa Church, and *Cat Cat* H'mong village, where you will observe the way of life of this ethnic minority group. Lunch included. Shopping opportunities will abound. We will then drive to a Red Dao village to observe their culture, a cooking demonstration and to interact with the local villagers. Independent dinner. Overnight at the *Victoria Sapa Hotel*.

Meals-2, B, L

Day 13 Tuesday, May 13-Sapa to the night train back to Hanoi

Breakfast at the hotel. Optional day-long hiking trek to several of the ethnic minority villages in the valley, including lunch. *This trek consists of hiking on moderate to difficult, sometimes wet and slippery, trails with steep climbs and descents. The scenery is spectacular and the experience is memorable; however, it should not be undertaken unless you are in rather good physical condition, as it is fairly demanding.* Phuong will remain in Sapa and will spend the day enjoying Sapa with anyone that wishes to skip this excursion.

Day 13-continued

In the afternoon, we will have a little more time for last-minute shopping in Sapa or a snack before we depart at 6 pm to Loa Cai to catch the 9 pm sleeper train back to Ha Noi. There will be time for dinner at one of the many restaurants surrounding the train station before we board.

Overnight on the train

Meals-2, B, (L if on trek), D

Day 14 Wednesday, May 14-Ha Long Bay cruise

Arrival in Hanoi where we will stop for a famed Hanoi Pho breakfast. After breakfast we will drive to Ha Long Bay where we will embark aboard our private luxurious Chinese junk. We will tour through the thousands of limestone islands visiting Thien Cung cave, Dau Go cave, circling Tuan Chau island, Dinh Huong island as well as Ga Choi island, Dog island and Sail island; stopping at Titov beach and anchoring overnight. Onboard, we will enjoy special Vietnamese meals prepared with fresh seafood from the area. There will also be optional sea kayaking and night time squid fishing. Overnight on the boat in air conditioned, private cabins.

Meals-3, B, L, D

Day 15 Thursday, May 15-Hanoi

Breakfast on the Boat. Visit Man's Head Island, Tortoise Island, Luon Cave, Bai Tu Long Bay, Toad Island and Bai Tho mountain. Lunch on the boat, and then we debark and we will be driven back to Hanoi to check in at the *Hotel Melia*. Farewell dinner at *Emperor Restaurant*

Meals-3, B, L, D

Departure Day-Friday, May 16

Breakfast at the hotel followed by transfers to the airport for flights home.

You may also extend your stay in Han Noi or fly back to Saigon for an extended stay or head to the nearby countries of Laos, Cambodia or Thailand. We are happy to make recommendations for extended stays and additional tour options

Meals-1, B

Information in this itinerary has been compiled with care and is provided in good faith, however, it is subject to change, and does not form part of the contract between the client and WELL EATEN PATH-CHEF'S TOURS.



Trip Information and Tips

Travel style

FUN, relaxed (most of the time), educational, with luxury accommodations and minimal hardships.

Group size

Minimum 8, Maximum 16

Accommodation

12 nights Luxury accommodations in Saigon, Hoi An, Hue, Hanoi and Sapa, 2 nights on the *Tulico Express* luxury sleeper train from Hanoi to Sapa and return, 1 night on a luxury Chinese junk on Halong Bay..

Transport

Vans, domestic air flights, taxis, cyclos/motorbikes (optional), walking, trains..

Physical rating-This is a relatively undemanding trip. There will be some moderate walking and there is one optional day trek that is challenging. Temperatures in Vietnam can become fairly hot and the humidity is usually high. All of our accommodations and most transportation are air conditioned; however, you should be prepared for tropical heat.

Culture shock rating-

The hotels used in this trip are top-notch, luxury hotels with a high level of service and amenities. The emphasis of the trip is primarily on food, cooking and culture, and there may be a wide range of food encountered. Every effort is made to ensure that meals are taken in known quality establishments but occasionally the group will be eating “pot luck”. There will be opportunities to try unfamiliar foods and beverages. Some areas will have limited English speaking; however an interpreter is usually available. The tour also includes some opportunity to pursue individual interests.

Local Payment - Allow USD \$200 per person for the local payment.

This will be collected by Daniel at the start of the trip and is included in the total quoted cost of the trip. The local payment is to facilitate the payment of fees for the tour that often are in cash.

Travel insurance

Travel insurance including emergency medical repatriation coverage **is required**. You will not be permitted to participate in the trip until evidence of medical travel insurance has been shown to Daniel.

(Trip interruption coverage in conjunction with the medical is recommended and usually may be combined for minimal additional cost.)

Health

Please contact your doctor for up-to-date information and prescriptions for vaccinations, anti-malarial requirements (not usually necessary) and any reasonably foreseeable illnesses while traveling in Vietnam. We recommend that you carry a simple First Aid kit as well as any personal medical requirements (including a spare pair of glasses). Please be aware that at times we are in remote areas and away from medical facilities during this trip, and for legal reasons our guides are prohibited from administering any type of drug including headache tablets, antibiotics, etc. Please ensure that you are adequately prepared.

Spending money

Personal Spending Money

How much you take is obviously a personal matter. If you intend to purchase many souvenirs or if you enjoy a couple of extra glasses of wine or beer with meals, we would recommend that you take more than the daily average estimate. Credit cards and debit cards are very useful for cash advances. Visa cards are the most widely accepted cards. While ATMs are widely available in the major cities, there are no guarantees that your credit or debit cards will actually work in Vietnam. Check with your bank. You should be aware that to purchase products or services on a credit card a fee of 5%-10% may apply. Do not rely on credit or debit cards as your only source of money. A combination of US dollars cash (clean, unmarked bills), traveler's checks and cards is best. Always take more rather than less, as you don't want to spoil the trip by constantly feeling short of funds.

Tipping

There are several times during the trip where there is opportunity to tip the local guides or service industry personnel. You may do this individually, or Daniel will be happy to collect the money and tip as a group. Tipping is strictly optional. All guide services, hotel personnel, drivers, etc., are paid a gratuity for their contracted services, and **WELL EATEN PATH-CHEF'S TOURS** pays at or above the going rate for services, however, there may be circumstances where extra service or assistance was required, or when outstanding services were rendered. A little generosity can go a long way in creating good will!

Optional Tipping suggestions: (US dollar bills are ok for tipping but US coins are practically worthless. If tipping less than a dollar you should use Vietnam Dong.) \$1 US = 16,000 Vietnam Dong (approximately)

- Hotel rooms 15-20,000 VD per person per night for room cleaning, etc.
- Bell person 15-20,000 VD for luggage assistance per person
- Taxi rides independent of the group -10% of the fare
- Cooking instruction (classes and demos) 30-60,000 VD/person to the local instructor
- Independent tour guides and interpreters- as you see fit (35-70,000 VD/person per day for an interesting and helpful guide is nice)
- Driver- 10-25,000 VD/person per day

Budget

Meals not included - \$75-200 USD per person (depending on your choices)

Snacks and beverages \$75-200 USD depending on your personal habits. (All provided meals come with a beverage, sometimes this is beer or wine, if desired; if you want additional drinks you should budget for that. The hotels often provide bottled drinking water, but water away from the hotel must be purchased.

Tips- nothing required, I would bring between \$75-175 USD to cover the optional contingencies.

Local Payment - \$200/person US (part of quoted tour price)

Note on Paying Locally: Most of our tours involve a local payment. Paying locally allows us to keep the overall cost of our tours competitive and pass the savings on to you. These funds are put towards local expenses. In some developing countries the transferring of funds is at times problematic so this is a way to help us serve you while saving you money. Payment is to be made to Daniel upon arrival.

Shopping- depends on your desire for souvenirs, gifts, artwork, etc.

Film/video tape- also depends on what you use. It is more economical to bring these with you but you will have opportunities to purchase if you need to.

Keeping in touch - communication while on the road

If you need to be contacted while traveling we recommend that you set up an email address that can be accessed on the road, rather than relying on postal mail. Hotmail, Gmail or Yahoo are good for this. Our hotels all have internet access and Email cafes are becoming increasingly commonplace and cheap throughout the regions we visit.

If someone wishes to contact you in an emergency while you are on the trip we recommend that they contact your email address. If you plan to phone home during the trip it is recommended that you purchase a phone card or use internet calling. Some tri-band cell phones will also work here. Check with your provider about connectivity and rates.

Arrival complications

We don't expect any problems, and nor should you, but if for any reason you are unable to commence your trip as scheduled, please make the following contacts as soon as possible:

The first contact should be your starting point hotel. You will receive this information when confirmed.

If this is unsuccessful, contact Daniel by email on daniel@welleatenpath.com

Your group leaders

Daniel Hoyer and Kim Phuong Nguyen (assisted by her husband, Marny Freedman) will be the group leaders. Some of you have met Daniel through cooking classes. Marny is a Vietnam Vet and has lived periodically in the country and visited over 20 times. He and Phuong, who is a native Vietnamese, operate the *Vietnam Project*, a humanitarian organization that helps people around the country. The group leaders are there to take the hassle out of your travels and to help you have the best trip possible. They will provide information on the places you are traveling through, offer suggestions for extra things to do and see, introduce you to our local friends and participate in all the scheduled activities. While not being a guides in the traditional sense you can expect them to have a broad general knowledge of the places visited on the trip, food especially, but also including historical, cultural, religious and social aspects. We also use local guides and interpreters where we think more specific knowledge will add to the enjoyment of the places we are visiting- we think it's the best of both worlds.

Responsible travel

We believe strongly in low impact or rather positive impact tourism. Broadly speaking this means that we try to minimize the negative aspects of tourism on the local cultures and environments that we visit and highlight the positive aspects. We always show respect for the local culture and customs.

Conservative attire is sometimes required when visiting religious sites. Always ask before photographing indigenous people. A smile goes a long way. Daniel will keep you informed on special customs or dress requirements.

Meals

Most meals are provided (see itinerary for details), in fact you will help prepare several of them. All efforts will be made to accommodate differing tastes of travelers; however, we ask that you bring an open mind (and palate) to enjoy the regional specialties.

Visas

Visas **are required** for US citizens visiting Vietnam. IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO HAVE THE CORRECT TRAVEL DOCUMENTATION.

HOW TO APPLY FOR A VISA TO VIETNAM?

A **VISA to Vietnam** can be applied for **by mail** or **in person** at the Embassy of Vietnam as early as six months prior to the date of travel. The applicant must submit:

- Original PASSPORT.
- One completed and signed **visa application form** ([PDF Form](#)) with 01 passport-size photo glued or stapled.
- **VISA fee** in the form of MONEY ORDER, or CASHIER'S CHECK, or CERTIFIED CHECK payable to "THE EMBASSY OF VIETNAM." Applicants applying together may submit the fee in one money order.
- A prepaid return envelope, if the applicant requests the visa be returned by mail. Please use [US Express Mail](#) (**UPS and DHL are not accepted for the return envelope**). Applicants applying

Processing Time:

- 5 - 7 business days are required to process visa applications.
- Expedited processing requires 2 - 3 business days after the Embassy has received the application (additional fee required).
- Please keep the tracking numbers of the envelopes to and from the Embassy. When the above deadlines have passed, use the tracking number to check with the mailing service first. Please do not make telephone inquiries on the status of your application (make sure that you keep your passport number for this request) until after the 3rd business day for an expedited case and the 7th working day for a regular case.
- The Embassy will be closed on **Vietnamese and US holidays 2007**. Please take account of the observed holidays in planning for your visa application and travel.

For further information, please [contact the Visa Section](#) of the Embassy:

Opening hours: 9:30 – 12:30 Monday through Friday

The Embassy is closed on Saturday, Sunday, and US and Vietnamese holidays.

Phone: (202) 861- 2293, (202) 861-0694 and (202) 861- 0737

Fax: (202) 861- 1297 and (202) 861- 0917

EMBASSY OF VIETNAM

1233 20th Street, NW, Suite 400

Washington, D.C. 20036

Website: <http://www.vietnamembassy.us>

What to take

Check list

Documents:

- *Passport (with photocopies)
- *Travel insurance (with photocopies)
- *Airline tickets (with photocopies)
- *USD cash and travelers checks
- *Credit or debit card (see personal spending money)
- *itinerary

Items

- First-aid kit**
 - Sun block and sunburn treatment
 - Sunglasses
 - Toiletries
 - Watch or alarm clock
- Clothing (suggested minimum, less is better to keep your baggage light)
- Light jacket or sweater
- and/or
- Windproof/waterproof jacket (May is not the rainy season but it is always a possibility)
 - Small towel and swim wear (if desired)
 - 4 shirts/t-shirts
 - Sun hat
 - 1 or 2 pair of shorts
 - 2-3 pairs of long trousers (1 long skirt, dress or wrap for women)
 - plenty of cotton socks (it is often very humid)
 - Sturdy, comfortable walking shoes
 - Sport sandals and/or casual shoes

**First aid kit should contain lip salve, Aspirin or Tylenol, Band Aids, anti-histamine, Imodium or similar tablets for mild cases of diarrhea, motion sickness medicine (if needed), extra prescription drugs you may be taking.

Optional

Camera, batteries and film, reading/writing material, Vietnamese dictionary or phrase book, binoculars, cover for backpacks, flashlight, concealable money belt.

Safety

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

Note that your group leader has the authority to amend or cancel any part of the trip itinerary if it is deemed necessary due to safety concerns. Your leader will accompany you on all included activities. During your trip you will 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 options available in a given location please note that any optional activities you undertake are not part of your itinerary, and **WELL EATEN PATH-CHEF'S TOURS** makes no representations about the safety of the activity or the standard of the operators running them. Please use your own good judgment when selecting an independent activity.

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