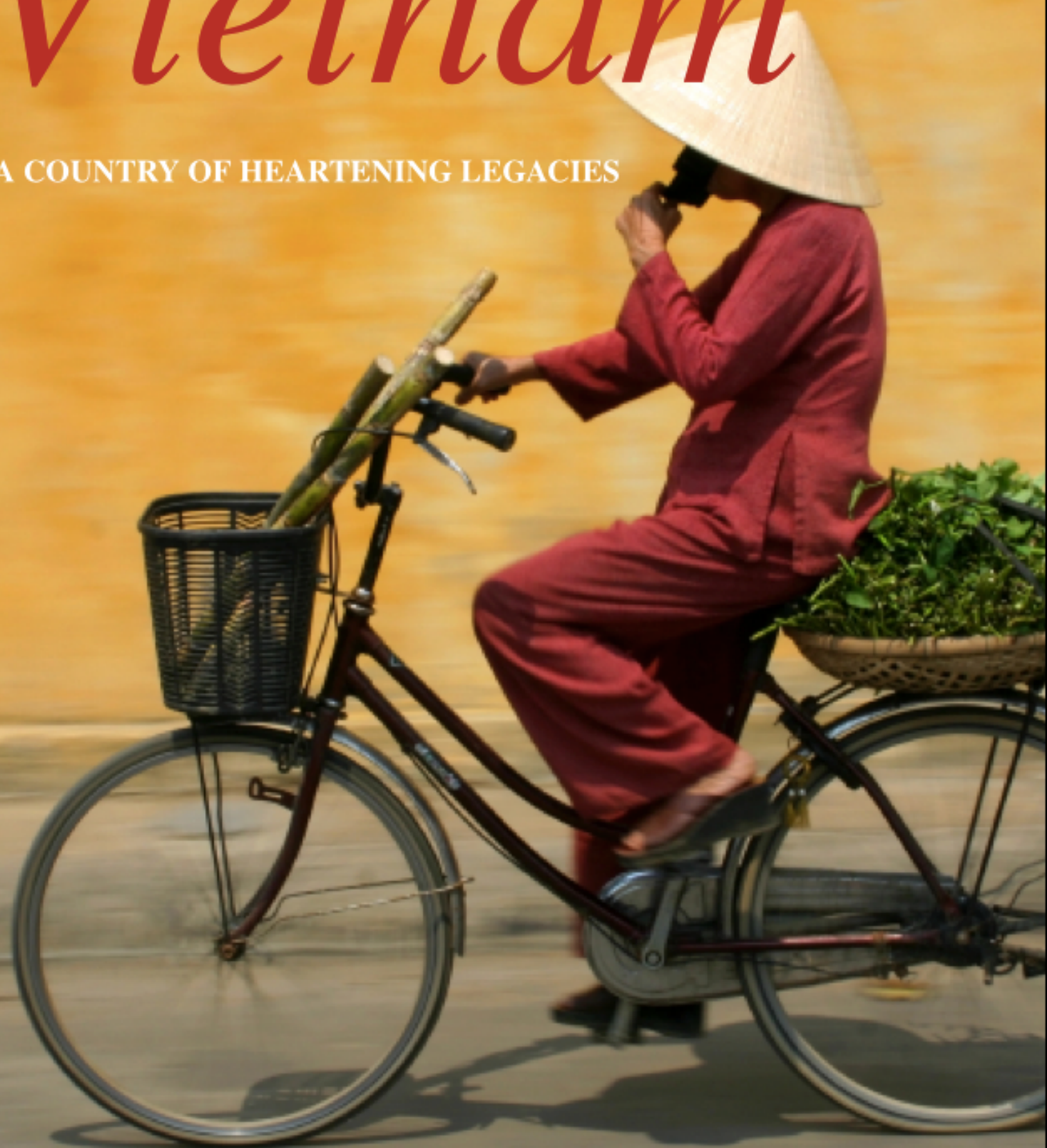


# *Vietnam*

A COUNTRY OF HEARTENING LEGACIES



SAMPLE ITINERARY :: AUTHENTIC ASIA



*This journey takes us from the stunning mountains of Northern Vietnam, home to many colorful hill tribe minorities, along the coast lining the Gulf of Tonkin and the South China Sea with unspoiled beaches and blue lagoons, to the fertile rice paddies of the Mekong Delta in the South.*

## Day 1 | Hanoi

Upon arrival in Hanoi you will be met and transferred to the Metropole Hotel.

**Accommodations:** Metropole Hotel

## Day 2 | Hanoi

Hanoi is a charming city with pleasant lakes, shaded boulevards, and verdant public parks. The city center is an architectural museum piece, its blocks of ochre buildings retaining the air of a provincial French town of the 1930s.

We will spend the morning exploring Hanoi's Old Quarter with over 1000 years of history packed into the maze of streets, alleys, and shops where you can find everything from local food to antiques. During the 13<sup>th</sup> century Hanoi's 36 guilds of craftsmen and artisans established themselves in the Old Quarter. Subsequently each street has been named after the specific product, which was produced and sold here. Even to this day, this area retains the essence of life from centuries.

From here we continue on to visit Ho Chi Minh; Mausoleum, a large memorial to the Vietnamese leader. Ho Chi Minh's body is preserved here and the mausoleum is open for people to come and pay their respects. The mausoleum's design is similar to Lenin's mausoleum in Moscow. Rows of visitors can be seen on any given day. It is said that Ho Chi Minh stated in his will that he wished to be cremated and to have his ashes buried in the hills of the north, center, and south of Vietnam. By building this mausoleum, the successor Communist government intentionally violated his wish.

Continue on to the Temple of Literature and the One Pillar Pagoda. The Temple of Literature was founded in 1070 to pay tribute to education and academic achievement. Six years later, it became home to Hanoi's first university. Even now, more than 200 years after the last national exam, the site's five courtyards still enjoy an atmosphere of higher learning. Today art students sit on the grass and try to reproduce the traditional Vietnamese architecture on paper.

Our last stop for the day will be the unique One-Pillar Pagoda, a wooden structure built in 1049 that sits on stilts over a lake. A king of the Ly Dynasty, Ly Thai Thong had it built after having a dream in which the Goddess of Mercy, presented him with a lotus flower. The existing

pagoda is a miniature reproduction of the original, which represented a lotus emerging from the water. A prayer here is said to bring fertility and good health.

**Accommodations:** Metropole Hotel

*“The world is a book and those who do not travel read  
only one page.”*

*- St. Augustine*

### **Day 3 | Overnight Train**

Set out on a full day excursion to the Perfume Pagoda, located in the Huong Son Mountains 70 km southwest of Hanoi. The pagoda has a long history in Vietnamese literature; its name has been a theme of many songs, topic of poetry, used in literary works as well as backdrop for paintings. The Pagoda is situated in the middle of the great plains of northern Vietnam, amidst mountains and rivers and is the most important place of worship for Vietnamese Buddhists. In order to reach the pagoda we will travel by car for about 1 ½ hours followed by a wonderful boat ride down the Huong Son River for about 30 to 45 minutes and a hike up to the top of the mountain.

Return to Hanoi in the afternoon where we have arranged for a late hotel check-out. Your overnight train departs for Lao Cai in Northern Vietnam at 9.10 p.m. The Fanxipan Express is quite comfortable, each deluxe cabin is equipped with two berths per cabin.

**Accommodations:** Overnight Train

### **Day 4 | Sapa**

The train arrives in Lao Cai at 6.30 a.m. Enjoy breakfast in a local restaurant in Lao Cai before heading to the famous Bac Ha Sunday market (if the itinerary is timed accordingly), the most well-known in all of Northern Vietnam. The market is a gathering place for many of the minorities from across Lao Cai province and is a colorful and lively site, a scene right out of a National Geographic Magazine.

Stop at the Sao Mai Hotel for lunch before continuing on to Sapa.

The northern part of Vietnam is known for its spectacular scenery of plunging valleys, terraced rice paddies, and a backdrop of steep mountain peaks. Sapa's terraced fields are considered to



be among the world's most beautiful. It is the busiest and most colorful town in the area, especially when the hill-tribe people fill the streets wearing their colorful traditional clothing.

**Accommodations:** Victoria Sapa Resort



### Day 5 | Sapa

Spend the day visiting several Hmong villages around Sapa and learn more about the hill tribe people (mainly the Hmong). The Hmong make up the largest population among the minorities living at this altitude. The men are easily recognizable by their indigo dyed clothing and the women by their cylindrical hats and leggings. The history of the Hmong is difficult to trace as their tradition is an oral one but it is believed that they arrived in Vietnam from China during the Ming and Qing dynasties some 300 hundred years ago. Their language and way of life is still very much preserved here in the north of Vietnam.

**Accommodations:** Victoria Sapa Resort

### Day 6 | Overnight Train

You will depart this evening on the overnight train back to Hanoi which will leave you with a full day to explore more the villages and mountains. Today's trip will take you by private boat down the Chay River to Bao Nhai. This is the home of the Nung and Zao people.

The Nung are known as hardworking farmers harvesting mostly rice and corn. The women are renowned for their intricate embroidery skills, many of them will know how to grow, spin, dye, and weave their own cotton. The traditional clothing worn by the Nung varies from group to group, however the women can be recognized by the long skirts they wear over their pants and the men by their small turbans.

The Zao make up the 9<sup>th</sup> largest ethnic group in the country with a population of just under 500,000. Zao women are easily identified by their colorful and richly embroidered clothes.

Take an evening train back to Hanoi.

**Accommodations:** Overnight Train

*“One’s destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things.”*

*- Henry Miller*

## **Day 7 | Hue**

Arrive back in Hanoi this morning in time for the flight to Hue, which traditionally has been one of Vietnam’s cultural, religious, and educational centers. This 19<sup>th</sup> century capital of regal pavilions has preserved its air of gracious reserve and faded glamour and is home to Vietnam’s famous Royal Tombs.

**Accommodations:** La Residence Resort & Spa

## **Day 8 | Hue**

This morning’s sightseeing tour begins with a visit to the famous Citadel and Purple Forbidden City, once reserved for the personal use of the emperor where the only servants allowed inside were the eunuchs who would pose no threat to the women of the court.

The Citadel was constructed in 1805 by Emperor Gia Long, it houses the courtyard for royal ceremonies, the palace of supreme peace, halls of the mandarins, the memorial temple for Nguyen Kings, nine holy cannons, nine dynastic urns and the Forbidden City for the royal families.

Next, set out for the Thien Mu Pagoda. This Buddhist monastery was erected in 1601 by Lord Nguyen Hoang, the ancestor of the Nguyen dynasty. It was renovated in 1844 under King Thieu Tri's sovereignty.

The final visit includes the majestic tomb of Emperor Tu Duc, who had the longest reign of any Nguyen monarch. It is said that Tu Duc had 104 wives but no children. He left behind as his legacy an exquisitely designed tomb.

Conclude the day with a private cruise down the Perfume River accompanied by a concert of traditional music.

**Accommodations:** La Residence Resort & Spa



## Day 9 | Hoi An

A morning drive along a spectacular coastline takes you over the Hai Van Pass and on to Hoi An.

The town of Hoi An was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1999. Foreigners have been coming to Hoi An since the 15<sup>th</sup> century – Dutch, Portuguese, British, French, Japanese, and Chinese – to purchase silk, fabrics, tea, pepper, and Chinese medicine. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century Hoi An trade declined, partly as a result of internal conflicts, but mainly because the mouth of the Thu Bon River silted up, rendering the sea approach too narrow. The port of Danang gradually supplanted Hoi An.

The legacy of maritime trade in Hoi An left an eclectic mix of merchant architecture with housing in French, Chinese or Japanese style. Hoi An is one of the rare places in Vietnam where you can find genuine Vietnamese architecture which miraculously escaped the war. The city is small and compact and the historic quarter is home to 20,000 people.

After lunch spend the afternoon strolling through the town with visits to the Tan Ky House and the famous Japanese bridge.

**Accommodations:** Hoi An Ancient House Village Resort & Spa Hotel

## Day 10 | Hoi An

Morning excursion to My Son, one of the most stunning sites in Vietnam and home to the wonderful open air Cham Museum. The monuments are set in a verdant valley overlooked by the Cat's Tooth Mountain. It is a bit reminiscent of the great monuments at Angkor Wat.

My Son was once a center for spirituality and worship during the reign of the Champa Kingdom. The My Son sanctuary, which exemplifies the height of Cham architectural

*“We travel not to escape life, but for life not  
to escape us.”*

*- Anonymous*

achievement, is a large complex of religious monuments originally comprised of more than 70 structures; the vestiges of 25 of these structures remain today. The builders of My Son were the nobility of the Champa Kingdom who derived their cultural and spiritual influences almost exclusively from India.

My Son represents the longest continuous occupation for religious purposes, not only of the Cham Kingdom, but also within Southeast Asia as a whole. The site was inhabited from the 4th until the 15th century AD, far longer than any of the other Indian-influenced sites in the region including the more famous sites of Angkor Wat in Cambodia, Borobudur in Indonesia, Pagan in Myanmar, or Ayutthaya in Thailand.

My Son was once a veritable forest of towers, many of which were destroyed by the ravages of time and war. This unique site is now in a state of significant disrepair, urgently requiring conservation efforts.



After your visit to the temples, drive to the Cau Lau boat station and board a private motorized river boat heading to the Thanh Ha ceramics village and the Kim Bong carpentry village before returning to Hoi An.

**Accommodations:** Hoi An Ancient House Village Resort & Spa Hotel

## Day 11 | Saigon

Catch a morning flight to Saigon and travel northwest to the outskirts of the city into the rural environment of Tay Ninh. Our first stop will be the Cao Dai temple in Tay Ninh which is home to the headquarters of the unique Cao Dai Sect whose patron saints include Joan of Arc, Victor Hugo, and Winston Churchill to name a few. Their religion is an odd mix of Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, and Christianity.

Then continue on to the Cu Chi tunnels located 75 km outside of Saigon in an area that played an important role during Vietnam's wars for independence and unification. Seeing the 200 km of tunnels built by the Communist guerrillas and experiencing what life was like underground is often the highlight of any visit to Southern Vietnam.

Arrive in Saigon this evening.

**Accommodations:** Caravelle Hotel





## Day 12 | Mekong Delta Cruise

Leave the city early this morning for a drive to Cai Be in time to board the Mekong Eyes Cruise. You will be assigned your own private cabin before the boat embarks on a trip through the Mekong Delta. Throughout the day you will have a chance to relax and watch the fascinating scenery and daily life of the Mekong people go by. If you wish, you can disembark in the afternoon for a leisurely stroll through the villages, fruit orchards, and rice fields. The day concludes with a delicious on-board dinner.

**Accommodations:** Mekong Eyes Cruise

## Day 13 | Saigon

After sunrise and breakfast transfer to a traditional “sampan” for a sail to Cai Rang Market, one of the most lively floating markets in the Delta. Immerse yourselves in the hustle and bustle of the vendors with their small boats laden with fruits. The boat trip continues through the green waterscape, lined by local houses, verdant orchards and ship-building yards.

Before arriving at Ninh Kieu Pier in Can Tho in time for lunch.

Return to Saigon in the afternoon and conclude your journey with a short city tour.

**Accommodations:** Caravelle Hotel

## Day 14 | Departure

Transfer to the airport for your departure flight.

**End of Services.**

*The above is a sample itinerary which covers the highlights and also takes you off the beaten path. We would be happy to discuss your individual travel preferences and amend the itinerary accordingly.*

*Pricing is dependent on your choice of accommodations, time of the year that you will be traveling, the final itinerary, and the number of people in your group.*

*Should you wish to discuss your individual travel plans to Vietnam please do feel free to reach to us via e-mail at [info@authenticasia.net](mailto:info@authenticasia.net) or by phone at 1. 888.586.9958.*



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