



# VIETNAM & THE REUNIFICATION EXPRESS

Classic Tour | 15 Days | Physical Level 1  
Hanoi – Halong Bay – Hue – Hoi An – Saigon

Take in the highlights of Vietnam as you journey down the spine of this incredibly diverse country. From cities bursting with charm and history, the striking landscapes of Halong Bay and the ancient treasures of Hue and Hoi An, you will experience the best of Vietnam. Embrace the beauty of rail travel, rumbling through rural countryside and coastal paths as you journey along the iconic Reunification Express route, the tracks which once divided the nation.

- Experience one of the most iconic rail routes on the Reunification Express
- Take a two-night cruise through scenic Halong Bay
- See the sights of Hanoi Old Quarter by cyclo
- Discover the picturesque and ancient city of Hoi An
- Meet a Vietnamese war veteran at the Cu Chi Tunnels

## TOUR MAP



## VIETNAM & THE REUNIFICATION EXPRESS TOUR INCLUSIONS:

- Return international economy flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation
- All meals – 12 breakfasts (B), 11 lunches (L), 12 dinners (D)
- All sightseeing and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English speaking National Escort (if your group is 10 or more passengers) or Local Guides
- Vietnam visa fees for NZ passport holders (see visa section below for further information)
- Specialist advice from our experienced travel consultants
- Comprehensive travel guides
- Safe and secure with IATA

*The only things you may have to pay for are personal expenditures e.g., drinks, optional excursions or shows, insurance of any kind, tipping, early check in or late checkout and other items not specified on the itinerary.*

## CLASSIC TOURS:

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These tours are designed for those who wish to see the iconic sites and magnificent treasures of Southeast Asia on an excellent value group tour whilst travelling with like-minded people. The tours are on a fully inclusive basis so you will travel with the assurance that all your arrangements are taken care of. You will be accompanied by our dedicated and professional National Escorts and local guides, whose unparalleled knowledge will turn your holiday into an unforgettable experience.

## PHYSICAL LEVEL 1:

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All our tours feature a physical rating to help you select the right holiday for you. To travel on any of our tours requires unaided mobility and the ability to stroll around the sights.

‘Vietnam & the Reunification Express’ is rated as a **physical level 1** tour. A reasonable level of fitness is required, and you should expect to be on your feet for much of the day. You will be getting on and off coaches, trains or boats and walking around the sights, often including steps, plus occasional longer walks.

Please Consider:

- Sightseeing may often involve walking for a reasonable duration, sometimes over multiple steps, or uneven surfaces.
- Boarding and alighting from various boat sizes independently is part of the experience.
- You will spend one night on an overnight train. See Trains in Vietnam sections below for more details.

Of course, our National Escorts and local guides will always endeavour to provide the highest level of service and assistance; however, they cannot be expected to cater for customers who are unfit to complete the itinerary.

If you require any more information about the pace of our tours, please contact our reservations team who will be happy to answer your questions.

## JOINING YOUR TOUR:

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The tour is 15 days in duration including international flights.

Travellers booked on a ‘Land Only’ package, the price includes your arrival/departure airport transfers if arriving/departing on the start and conclusion date of your tour. Please advise your international flight times to our reservations team.

Join the tour on Day 2 in Hanoi and end the tour on Day 14 in Saigon. Please refer to your final itinerary for more specific meeting instructions pertaining to your departure.

## TRAINS IN VIETNAM:

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This tour includes two journeys along Vietnam's North-South Railway which runs from Hanoi to Saigon and vice versa. The route is famously known as the Reunification Express and refers to the route as opposed to a specific train.

Train travel in Vietnam is relatively modern, though not as advanced as infrastructure in China or Japan. We book soft-seat carriages with air conditioning for your journey between Hue and Danang. Soft-seat carriages have a Western-style toilet at the end of each carriage.

Scheduled journey times are as below. Timetables are relatively reliable, but subject to change. Delays do sometimes occur, so please listen to your national escort for the latest information.

- Hanoi to Hue: ~ 13.5 hours on the SE19 20:10 – 09:42 (Day 7)
- Hue to Danang: ~ 3 hours on the Heritage train HD1 07:45 10:35 (Day 9)

For your overnight journey, there will be a maximum of two passengers in a 4-berth cabin, with the top two bunks folded up for your comfort to provide more head room. Solo guests will have their own private cabin. You will travel in a Lotus Express or similar cabin, which are equipped with soft sleeping berths (190cm x 65cm), air-conditioning, basic Wi-Fi, as well as a shared western toilet in each carriage. Although best efforts are made to maintain cleanliness and provisions in the WC, it can be advisable to bring some toilet paper tissue on board with you. Some passengers may prefer to pack earplugs for comfort. Your luggage will be with you in your cabin.

On the morning following your overnight journey from Hanoi to Hue, a breakfast box will be provided in your cabin. Please note, there is no dining carriage on the Lotus Express, however water, coffee, snacks and seasonal fruit will be available in your cabin, and you may also wish to purchase snacks in advance to bring on board with you. Guests staying on the Lotus Express can also order additional food using a QR code in their cabins, with a menu featuring traditional Vietnamese meals like rice and hot noodles, which will be delivered to the cabins.

Your second journey along the Reunification Express route will take you from Hue to Danang in approximately three hours. For this journey you will be on board the Heritage Train in soft seats. For this journey, your luggage will travel separately by road. This journey will not coincide with mealtimes as you will have an early breakfast at the hotel before you board the train, however you may wish to buy snacks in advance. There is also a snack carriage on the Heritage Train if you wish to purchase refreshments on board.

## ITINERARY CHANGES:

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We intend to adhere to the day-to-day itinerary as printed; however, the order of events or sightseeing may change as we look to improve our tours, or as dictated by local conditions. In

these circumstances, we will endeavour to make the best possible arrangements whilst maintaining the integrity of your trip.

### DETAILED ITINERARY

#### Days 1-2: Arrive Hanoi

Meals: D

Upon arrival into Vietnam's charming capital city of Hanoi, you will be met at Hanoi Airport by your guide. Together with all other group members who may be arriving at a similar time, travel to your hotel.

*Early check-in is not included. Additional nights before and after your tour can be arranged. Please contact our Reservations team to book.*



#### Destination Information

**Hanoi** – With a population of approximately four million, Hanoi is a charming and richly historic city of lakes, shaded boulevards and leafy open parks. The centre is an architectural museum piece housing groups of ochre coloured buildings holding the air of French towns of the 1930s; a “Paris of the Orient”, as people have called it.

#### Day 3: Hanoi by Cyclo

Meals: B, L, D

Begin your day at the Ethnology Museum, with its mesmerising displays exploring the country's 54 ethnic minority groups. In its grounds are a range of full-size replica longhouses demonstrating traditional ways of life in rural Vietnam.

After lunch, take a visit to the Thang Long Citadel before a cyclo tour of Hanoi's Old Quarter and its 36 streets before visiting the Ngoc Son temple set on a tiny island on the picturesque Hoan Kiem Lake.



Round off the day with an evening culinary tour around the alleys of the Old Quarter. Starting with a demonstration of the local specialty of Vietnamese 'egg coffee' before venturing out to try an array of flavours of the North, from 'pho' a world-renowned beef noodle soup to 'banh mi' a classic Vietnamese sandwich. End your gastronomy immersion with a cold beer at Bia Hoi Corner.

*Please note: Each cyclo takes one passenger and is operated by a cycle driver behind the carriage.*

#### Destination Information

**Hanoi Old Quarter** – A maze of streets weaving through Hanoi and dating back to the 13th century. Each street specialises in merchants and artisans selling their wares of silk, silver, wood and more.

**Imperial Citadel of Thang Long** – Built in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, this UNESCO World Heritage Site was constructed on the remains of a Chinese fortress dating from the 7th century, and marks the independence of the Dai Viet.

**Day 4: Hanoi**

Meals: B, L, D

Discover the sights of Hanoi. Stroll around the Ho Chi Minh Quarter for an insight into the Vietnam War, before a visit to the Humble House on Stilts, where Ho Chi Minh lived in the grounds of the Presidential Palace and see his Mausoleum in Ba Dinh Square along with the impressive One Pillar Pagoda. After lunch, visit the serene Temple of Literature, Hanoi's first university.



### Destination Information

**Ho Chi Minh Quarter** – Dedicated to the father of modern Vietnam and where Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum stands in Ba Dinh Square. Ho Chi Minh first declared independence from French rule in 1945.

**Humble House on Stilts** – In the grounds of the Presidential Palace sits the 2-storey wooden home of Ho Chi Minh who ruled Vietnam from here until his death in 1969.

**Ba Dinh Square** – Ba Dinh Square was named after a Vietnamese uprising against colonial rule in the 1880s. It was here that President Ho Chi Minh read the Proclamation of Independence in 1945, when North Vietnam declared its independent status. Its dominant landmarks are Ho Chi Minh's mausoleum, where his embalmed body lies on display, and the National Assembly Building.

**Presidential Palace** – This distinctly European yellow building was built by the French as the Palace of the Governor-General of Indochina in the early 1900s. When Vietnam achieved independence, President Ho Chi Minh refused to live in the grand structure, instead building the Humble House on Stilts on its grounds. He used the Palace only to receive guests; it is still used for major political meetings.

**Temple of Literature** – Hanoi's first university, dating back to 1070; now dedicated to Confucian worship.

**One Pillar Pagoda** – Rebuilt in 1955 after damage during the French evacuation, the pagoda is made of wood and sits on a single pillar. Designed to reflect the shape of a lotus flower emerging from the water, it has become a popular spot for locals to enjoy the tranquil surroundings.

**Day 5: Halong Bay**

Meals: B, L, D

Drive around two and a half hours to Halong Bay and embark on a two-night scenic cruise to the far-most corners of the bay by boat. Sail through this famous UNESCO-listed bay, known for its emerald waters and towering limestone islands. There is usually a crowd of boats at the docks; however, the cruise itself will be scenic and relaxing.



Boarding your boat could involve navigating your way over and through other boats, moored between it and the dock, sometimes without handrails, ladders or assistance from staff.

Enjoy lunch on board as you cruise out into the bay, stopping to anchor for an afternoon of activities (which are subject to change due to cruise selection and weather conditions). Sightseeing may include kayaking in a hidden bay or visiting underground caves on the islands, which require climbing up and down steps inside and outside of the caves. End the day on deck with a drink in hand to watch the sunset over the bay followed by a freshly prepared dinner, before retiring to your cabin for the night.

*You will need to pack a smaller overnight bag for your trip to Halong Bay. Main luggage will be left in safe storage at the hotel in Hanoi and picked up on your return.*

*Please note: Weather conditions such as mist, fog, wind, rain and storms may delay the departure time of your cruise, or in some cases your cruise may be cancelled. Notifications of any delays or cancellations may not be known until your group's arrival in Halong Bay. If your cruise is cancelled after your arrival in Halong Bay, you will have lunch in Halong City and return to Hanoi. If notification of the cruise cancellation is given prior to your departure for Halong Bay an alternative day trip will be arranged to Hoa Lu and Tam Coc or 'Halong Bay on Land', an area located approximately 2 hours from Hanoi. Our guides will make every effort to inform the group at the earliest possible moment should there be any itinerary changes.*

### **Destination Information**

**Halong Bay** – Compared to the landscape of the limestone islets of Guilin in China and Krabi in southern Thailand, Halong Bay shares a common border with China in the north and harbours some of the most stunning scenery in Vietnam. Unique rock sculptures jut out dramatically from the clear emerald waters of the Gulf of Tonkin and numerous grottoes have created an enchanting, timeless world, looking out onto the horizon with the sails of the junks and sampans completing the picture.

**Day 6: Halong Bay**

Meals: B, L, D

Rise early for Tai Chi on deck! After breakfast, cruise towards Luon Cave, a picturesque water cave filled with delightful details of karsts and limestone structures that requires guests to visit by traditional rowing boats.

Later, see the bay through a local's eyes as you cruise to Cua Van Floating Village, and enjoy the opportunity to meet the local fishermen who will row you through their floating village, where many families have lived for generations. Later, head to one of the bay's beaches for a chance to sunbathe on the sands, before returning to your junk for your candlelit dinner on the sundeck.

**Day 7: Reunification Express Hanoi - Hue**

Meals: B, L, D

Spend the morning sailing through Halong Bay, and after an early lunch, cruise back to the port.

Disembark and drive two and half hours back to Hanoi, where you will board the Reunification Express to begin your iconic journey to the imperial city of Hue. Travel in the comfort of the Lotus Express Carriages on this epic 13-and-a-half-hour journey and be captivated by Vietnam's diverse landscapes as you travel through the spectacular scenery.

**Destination Information**

**Reunification Express** – Not a train but rather a nickname given to the North-South Railway route. The original line was completed under French colonial rule in 1936, and operated until the country was divided in 1954. It was rebuilt after major destruction in the Vietnam War, reopening in 1976 and the route between Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh became reconnected, marking a reunified Vietnam! The full 1,726km journey takes 35 hours, with 4 trains operating daily.

**Day 8: Hue**

Meals: B, L, D

Enjoy breakfast on board as you arrive into Hue this morning, before beginning your exploration of the former imperial capital. Hue is the physical embodiment of Vietnam's dynamic past and considered a scholarly city.

Visit the Imperial Citadel and the Forbidden Purple City, heavily influenced by the Forbidden City in China. Continue by road to Thien Mu Pagoda and relax as you take a cruise on the Perfume River.



### Destination Information

**Hue** – Having been the imperial capital from 1802 until 1945 after the last emperor abdicated, Hue is still regarded as the centre of Vietnam’s culture and religion. The city is dominated by the Imperial Citadel, modelled on the Forbidden City in China. There are many wonderful pagodas and temples of high significance and it contains the Grand Tombs of the Nguyen Emperors.

**Imperial Citadel** – A walled fortress accompanied by cannons, artilleries and surrounded by a moat for protection. Inside the Citadel are numerous gates, courtyards and the Forbidden Purple City.

**Forbidden Purple City** – Constructed for personal use by the former Imperial family, their concubines and eunuchs. This royal structure is still being restored many years after the destruction caused by street fighting and bombing during the war.

**Thien Mu Pagoda** – This seven-storey octagonal tower, built on a hillock overlooking the Perfume River, is Hue's oldest and most beautiful pagoda. Wander the grounds, where bonsai, ponds and the smell of incense create a peaceful backdrop.

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### Day 9: Reunification Express Hue to Danang

Meals: B, L, D

Following an early breakfast at your hotel, transfer to Hue train station where you will board your scenic train to Danang as you continue your rail journey along the picturesque North-South Railway route. Board the comfortable Heritage Train for a 3-hour journey along the coast hugging the South China Sea and through the Hai Van Pass.



On arrival in Danang, travel by road to the quaint city of Hoi An. Today’s explorations being with a visit to Tra Que Village, a local farming project just outside of Hoi An. Here, the community has come together to create a large vegetable farm. Learn the traditional methods used by the farmers, then try your hand at raking the ground and sowing seeds, before relaxing with a herbal foot bath massage.

Next, see a short cooking demonstration, followed by lunch featuring the delicious vegetables straight from the farm to the plate! After lunch transfer to your hotel.

### Destination Information

**Hoi An** – Perhaps more than any other place in Vietnam, Hoi An retains the feel of centuries past. Once known as Faifo, Hoi An was an influential port along the Silk Road. For over 500 years, merchants from China, Japan, France and Portugal settled in the prosperous town, resulting in a distinctive blend of culture.

**Day 10: Hoi An**

Meals: B, L, D

This morning, enjoy a walking tour of Hoi An's narrow ancient streets and hidden alleys. We will visit one of the town's oldest homes, built by a merchant family over 200 years ago, which is still occupied by their descendants. We will also visit the traditional Hoi An Market, the Quan Cong Chinese Temple and the Japanese Covered Bridge. After, a visit to the Hoi An Folklore Museum will give you an insightful look into the life of Hoi An's people.



Enjoy the rest of the day at leisure. Perhaps take a visit to one of Hoi An's traditional tailors or spend an afternoon relaxing at the beach.

**Destination Information**

**Japanese Covered Bridge** – First constructed in the 1590s to link the Japanese and Chinese quarters of the town, this iconic pink hued bridge has been restored to its former splendour.

**Day 11: Saigon**

Meals: B, L, D

Transfer to Danang airport this morning to board your 1 hour and 30-minute flight to Saigon, Vietnam's bustling southern city.

Enjoy an afternoon at leisure as you start to soak up the vibrant atmosphere.

This evening, experience the spectacle of the must-see A O show, a thrilling performance of talented local circus performers, dancers, athletes and artists.

**Destination Information**

**Saigon** – Formally renamed Ho Chi Minh City, but still locally known by its older name of Saigon, this exuberant city is driving Vietnam forward into the modern world, but is also a treasure trove of fascinating heritage. It was a major base of the American military during the Vietnam War, and was the seat of the South Vietnam government until the events that led to the country's reunification. Today, the old mixes seamlessly with the new and you can wander through timeless alleys to incense-infused temples before catching up with the present in designer malls beneath sleek skyscrapers.

**Day 12: Saigon**

Meals: B, L, D

Today, confront the reality of guerrilla warfare at the Cu Chi Tunnels. The cramped tunnels were central to a few of the war's strategic operations, including the famous 1968 Tet Offensive, and they did not escape damage. American B52 bombers dropped hundreds of missiles leaving huge tell-tale craters behind.



The Cu Chi experience can be emotional for some visitors, but it offers a fascinating window into the hardship and traumas of war. Sightseeing here involves two hours on foot on uneven mud paths through the bush and, if you choose, crawling through some of the tunnels.

Afterwards, your guide will introduce you to a Vietnamese war veteran, who will tell you about his personal experiences as a Communist soldier during the war, offering an authentic insight into the experience and hardships of war. You will be able to ask some questions; we ask guests to be respectful of the individual regardless of your political views.

Return to Saigon after lunch and continue the day with an afternoon tour to explore the city's heady mix of local culture and colonial influences. See the Notre-Dame Cathedral and visit the Central Post Office, the poignant War Remnants Museum. The latter is an emotional visit; you will be given time to explore independently.

*Please note: Depending on the individual veteran available on the day of your visit, it is likely that your guide will need to act as a translator. Due to the age and health of the veterans, a specific individual cannot be guaranteed.*

*Please also note: Due to ongoing restorative construction works at the Notre-Dame Cathedral, the tour will include an outside visit.*

**Destination Information**

**Cu Chi** – The tunnels of Cu Chi are an immense network of connecting underground tunnels located in the Cu Chi district of Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon). They are part of a much larger network of tunnels that underlie much of the country. The Cu Chi tunnels were the location of several military campaigns during the Vietnam War, and were the Viet Cong's base of operations for the Tet Offensive in 1968. The tunnels were used by Viet Cong soldiers as hiding spots during combat, as well as serving as communication and supply routes, hospitals, food and weapon caches and living quarters for numerous North Vietnamese fighters. The tunnel systems were of great importance to the Viet Cong in their resistance to American forces.

**Notre-Dame Cathedral** – The 60-metre bell towers of Saigon's Notre-Dame Cathedral overlook downtown Saigon. It was consecrated in 1880 by the Roman Catholic Church to provide religious services for French colonialists. All the building materials were imported from France, including the red bricks, which came from Toulouse and have retained their vivid colour.

**Central Post Office** – This colonial-era landmark, constructed in the late 19th century, stands beside the Notre-Dame Cathedral. Its Gothic and neoclassical design is strongly reminiscent of 20th century European train station.

**War Remnants Museum** – Comprised of numerous buildings displaying military equipment, photographs and artefacts relating to the Vietnam War and focusing especially on the years from 1961-1975. This museum illustrates a harrowing period in this nation’s history.

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**Day 13: Saigon**

Meals: B, L, D

Drive two and a half hours down to the picturesque province of My Tho, situated along the mighty Mekong Delta. This area is known as the ‘Rice Basket of Vietnam’, because its rich and fertile lands produce huge amounts of rice, coconuts, vegetables and tropical fruit.



Spend the day cruising and exploring, travelling by motorised, wooden boats between the islands and changing to smaller, paddleboats in the canals. Return to Saigon this afternoon.

*Please note: Sightseeing involves hopping on and off these boats, often on unsteady and slippery surfaces, sometimes without handrails or assistance.*

**Destination Information**

**Mekong Delta** – Although primarily rural, the Mekong Delta is a densely populated area where life progresses around its fertile banks. The Mekong Delta is the 13th longest, and the 10th largest, by volume alone and people live, trade, travel and even go to school on the riverbanks. The rice which is cultivated in the many farming lands is said to be enough to supply the entire country.

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**Day 14 - 15: Depart Saigon**

Meals: B

You will be transferred 1 hour from the hotel to the airport, according to the departure time of your international flight. Any time before your flight is at leisure.

*Please note: Only breakfast is provided on the group’s day of departure; no refund will be given for meals missed.*



## TRAVEL INFORMATION

### VISAS:

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Vietnam visa for New Zealand passport holders is required to enter Vietnam for a stay of up to 30 days. Wendy Wu Tours Visa Department can assist you with the process of obtaining a visa. Please be advised that your passport must have at least six months validity left on it when you arrive back into New Zealand.

Please note the visa procedures and requirements may change at any time. These changes are often made by the relevant embassy or consulate, Wendy Wu Tours acts as a third party and has no influence on the process of a visa.

### INSURANCE:

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We strongly recommend that you take out a policy as soon as you pay your deposit. Wendy Wu Tours cannot in any way be made liable for any additional cost incurred by the customer on any tour due to the customer not having adequate travel insurance.

We also encourage all customers to take a copy of their travel insurance documents (especially relevant international contact numbers) with them while on tour. We advise that you check the inclusions and procedures for lodging claims prior to your departure. These documents should be stored separately from the original.

### ACCOMMODATION:

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Your accommodation is selected for convenience of location, comfort or character, and can range from a business hotel in one city to a family run guesthouse in a smaller town. In more remote areas, accommodation may be of a lower standard and may not have all western amenities. Hotels are generally rated as local three to four-star standard, but please note that there is no international classification system for hotels and differences in facilities and quality do exist between New Zealand and Southeast Asia.

All group tour hotels have private western bathroom facilities, air conditioning, TV and telephone. Plumbing and electricity supplies can be erratic and quite often the power in hotel rooms is turned off while guests are out of the room. If you experience any difficulty, please speak to your National Escort or Local Guide. Rest assured that all hotels used by Wendy Wu Tours are regularly inspected by our staff and our partners to ensure that standards meet your needs.

### DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHEAST ASIA:

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Although Southeast Asia is developing quickly, it still lacks the international standards of civil infrastructure and tourist facilities. Concepts of personal responsibility are also different to those in New Zealand.

Consequently, tourist and public facilities may not uphold the same safety standards as in New Zealand; for example, you may see a hole in the road without a warning sign or safety barricade. All of our suppliers meet local safety standards as a minimum. We want you to have an enjoyable holiday, so we ask that you take extra care, use your common sense, refer to notices and follow advice from your National Escort or Local Guides.

### **EATING IN SOUTHEAST ASIA:**

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Southeast Asia is home to an incredibly rich food history. The local cuisine is known for its intense flavours, spices and some of the freshest ingredients you can find. In general, meals include either rice or noodles and are packed full of flavour. Lemongrass, ginger, lime leaves, coriander, fish sauce and soy sauce are used in many local dishes. Whilst Southeast Asian food has a reputation for being hot and spicy, each region actually has its own distinct characteristics. Vietnam, for example, is perhaps best known for its fresh and aromatic dishes – relying heavily on flavours from fresh herbs such as mint, basil and dill.

When dining in Southeast Asia, although some restaurants have adopted a western approach to dining, expect some restaurants to follow the traditional communal style of eating. Typically, this will mean each diner has their own small bowl and may serve themselves from a variety of shared dishes. At some local restaurants, appetizers and main courses might be served when they are ready instead of following a particular order.

Determining when it is appropriate to use chopsticks, forks or spoons can be challenging for some travellers, even other Asians, as each country has different customs. In Vietnam, dishes are normally placed in the centre and people serve food for themselves with their own chopsticks and bowl. Usually, chopsticks or other utensils are provided to scoop the food into your bowl to prevent your own chopsticks from touching the food that remains on the table. Dining in Southeast Asia is fairly casual with not too many rules. Leaving food on the plate is not considered rude.

### **APPROPRIATE DRESS:**

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When visiting temples or mosques, both men and women should dress in conservative, non-revealing clothing. Full-length trousers with a shirt or t-shirt for men; and pants or skirts well below the knee with a top that covers the shoulders and upper arms for women. Women might also consider carrying a ‘modesty shawl’ in their daypack – this could be a sarong or light scarf – which they can wear over their shoulders and heads to feel more comfortable while sightseeing at mosques.

Religious sites and homes throughout Southeast Asia – for Hindus, Muslims or Buddhists to name a few – require all visitors to remove their shoes to enter. Even if you then need to walk outdoors, over hot or rough ground, you will not be allowed to wear shoes. You will often find shoe storage rooms near the entrance of a site where it is customary to leave your shoes near the entrance.

Occasionally there are 'shoe minders' who will offer to keep your shoes safe for a 'tip' – this is not compulsory, so each customer can choose to tip for this service or not. If you do not want to remove your shoes, you will have to remain outside.

We recommend shoes that easily slip on and off and carry a pair of thick socks in your daypack, which you can wear to protect your feet from any rough or hot surfaces. The following itinerary will indicate when you need to consider this.

### TRANSPORT:

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**Coaches:** Coaches with air conditioning are used on our group tours for city sightseeing, short excursions to the countryside and longer transfers where necessary. However, minibuses may be used for smaller groups (under 10 passengers). Roads in Southeast Asia have generally improved over recent years, but traffic and/or weather conditions may extend driving times. Road construction work usually covers an enormous section of road - not just one or two kilometres as you may be used to. For this reason, the timings listed in the itinerary are approximations only.

**Trains:** Please refer to page 4 for more information on the Reunification Express.

### EXCHANGING CASH:

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It is highly recommended that extra care and attention is paid when exchanging money when travelling outside major cities in Vietnam. US Dollars are easily exchanged throughout Vietnam however other currencies such as New Zealand Dollars can generally be exchanged in hotels and airports provided notes are undamaged. We suggest for your convenience that you ensure your US Dollars are from the new series to avoid any difficulties exchanging money during your trip. Old series notes can be difficult to exchange.

We suggest exchanging your money before travelling to remote areas and smaller towns, as exchange facilities can be limited. Your National Escort will remind you to do this before departure.

### PERSONAL EXPENSES AND OPTIONAL TOURINGS:

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**Personal Expense** - You will need to take some extra money to cover drinks, laundry and souvenirs, plus any additional sightseeing that may be offered to you. Based on the advice of previous customers an approximate amount of £150 per person, per week should be sufficient; however, for those that can't resist a bargain or may wish to participate in all of the optional excursions, consider allocating a higher amount.

**Optional Tours** - May be offered in each city you visit during your tour. These are not included in the standard itinerary and will only be available if time permits and if seats are available.

In your Final Documentation an Optional Excursion Sheet will be included outlining the activities available in each city and local cost associated. Please ensure you have additional funds available if you feel you may wish to participate in any extra activities. Each option will be arranged locally by your National Escort/Local Guide, participation and tipping for optional excursions is completely at your discretion.

### **SOUVENIRS:**

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We want to be able to give you an opportunity to buy souvenirs, so we include some stops at museums or exhibitions which demonstrate a craft or product unique to that region with pieces available to buy. We understand that souvenir hunting is not for everyone, so we aim to take you to places, which hold local interest. We trust you will enjoy these opportunities to learn about local arts and crafts and understand their historical and cultural importance.

### **PUBLIC HOLIDAYS:**

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If you are travelling within the below Vietnamese Public Holidays, please note that celebrations can last a couple of days and during these times some businesses will be closed and coach, air and train travel may be affected. Tourist attractions will be open but may be crowded.

In Vietnam, Tet Holiday is 29<sup>th</sup> January 2025 & 17<sup>th</sup> February 2026; International Labour Day is on 1<sup>st</sup> May every year; Reunification Day is on 30<sup>th</sup> April every year and National Independence Day is on 2<sup>nd</sup> September every year.

### **CLIMBING STEPS:**

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Sightseeing at nearly all of the palaces, fortresses and some temples involves climbing quite a number of steps. These palaces were built to provide defence against potential invaders so nearly all of them stand on top of a hill, while the interiors have layers of narrow hallways and steps to slow down the advance of enemies once they were inside. The steps tend to be quite large, not level and sometimes without handrails. Hindu and Buddhist temples or pagodas also tend to be built at an elevation, as this is the most auspicious position according to ancient beliefs. This means you sometimes need to walk from the bus park to the entrance, and/or need to climb some steps inside.

People with knee or hip injuries, who have poor balance or are otherwise unable to complete these activities independently should consider the suitability of this itinerary carefully.

### **GROUP SIZE:**

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Our groups will be accompanied by a National Escort. There will usually be no more than 18 travellers in each group although you may encounter other Wendy Wu tour groups while you are travelling.

All our departures are guaranteed to operate with a minimum of 8 travellers booked (unless cancelled due to factors beyond our control). However, at our discretion we may operate departures with a smaller group size as we try to operate advertised departures wherever it is viable to do so. For groups with fewer than 10 travellers, departures will operate with local guides, instead of a National Escort.

### LUGGAGE:

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All travellers are limited to two items of luggage each: a suitcase with a maximum weight of 20kg and one piece of hand luggage with a maximum weight of 5kg. It is essential that your luggage is lockable.

Please bear in mind that when travelling on the overnight train, your luggage will be stored with you in your cabin. Dependent on the size of your luggage, you will be able to store your belongings in the central aisle between the beds or under the beds (please see dimensions below). If storing your luggage in the central aisle, please be aware this may leave little room for manoeuvring around your cabin.

*Distance between the beds: approx. 60cm; distance from the floor to the bed: approx. 30cm.*

Your National Escort, along with the two porters and station attendees will be able to assist with getting your luggage on and off the train.

While we aim for every passenger to have assistance with transferring their luggage on and off the train, the trains are only stopped in the station for around 10 minutes, and they therefore may not be able to assist everyone in the group in this time.

### PORTERAGE:

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Please be aware that portering is not included on our tours in Vietnam. You will therefore need to be able to handle your own luggage within the hotel and when using transportation like trains and coaches.

### TIPPING POLICY:

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Tipping while on holiday is common in most parts of the world and Southeast Asia is no exception. However, it is not always clear who it is appropriate to tip and how much. Furthermore, travellers may not have the right amounts of cash available at the right time. In order to avoid any inconvenience Wendy Wu Tours operates a tipping policy where a stated amount is given to your National Escort at the beginning of your tour and tips are disbursed to local guides and drivers throughout your tour. The amount is designed to be at a reasonable level for travellers while being fair to the local people and includes a gratuity for the National Escort.

If you are travelling in a smaller group with local guides only, then tipping is paid in each destination. To be fair to the guides we ask for slightly higher amounts per traveller with small groups.

We generally find that most customers appreciate the convenience of our tipping policy but we do recognize that it may not suit everyone. However, as this is a group tour we ask that everyone follows the same protocol to be fair to other group members and to ensure smooth operation of your tour.

### VACCINATIONS AND YOUR HEALTH:

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We recommend that you contact either your doctor or local Health Centre for advice on vaccinations and travel health. Safe Travel has a comprehensive website that you may also find useful [www.safetravel.govt.nz](http://www.safetravel.govt.nz)

### BEFORE YOU LEAVE:

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We strongly recommend registering your travel plans with [www.safetravel.govt.nz](http://www.safetravel.govt.nz) as in the event of an emergency, New Zealand Consular assistance will be more readily available.

Up until the day you travel, it is vital you keep up to date and familiarised with the entry requirements as these can change at short notice. You are personally responsible for completing any entry forms, conducting any covid tests (if necessary), etc and adhering to countries' specific entry requirements.

You can also access the New Zealand Government's travel advisory service for up-to-date information about your destination on the same website.

### AFTER YOUR BOOKING:

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Once you have booked with Wendy Wu Tours, you will receive a confirmation along with a link to our website where you can find your visa information (if applicable) and other important information. Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately 2-3 weeks prior to departure.

### ITINERARY CHANGES:

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It is our intention to adhere to the day-to-day itinerary as printed; however, the order of events or sightseeing may change as we look to improve our tours or as local conditions dictate; in these circumstances we will make the best possible arrangements whilst maintaining the integrity of your trip.

Updated: May 2026