

Vietnam Gemstone and Culture Tour

Start: Monday May 5th, 2025

End: Wednesday May 14th, 2025

Duration: 10 Days

Start and Endpoint: La Siesta Classic Ma May Hotel, Ma May St, Old Quarter, Hanoi.

Cost: \$3495 - Single supplement \$500

Tour Overview

Vietnam offers a vibrant tapestry of food and culture, boundless opportunities for unforgettable fun and a surprising variety of gemmological interest. This tour allows you to immerse yourself in the infectious enthusiasm of the Vietnamese people, known for their warmth, hospitality, and zest for life. From bustling city streets to serene rural landscapes, every corner of Vietnam pulsates with energy and excitement. We'll indulge in diverse culinary delights, explore ancient temples and busy markets, embarking on adventures from exploring gem fields to cruising on emerald waters.

Vietnam's history is a captivating tapestry woven with resilience, struggle, and triumph. From ancient kingdoms to colonial rule and wars for independence, Vietnam has endured centuries of upheaval and transformation. Influenced by Chinese, French, and American occupations, the country has undergone profound social, political, and economic changes. Following decades of conflict, Vietnam reunified in 1975, marking the end of the Vietnam War and the beginning of a new chapter in its history. Embracing economic reforms in the late 20th century, Vietnam embarked on a path of rapid development, transitioning from a war-torn nation to a dynamic emerging economy. Today, Vietnam stands as a testament to the indomitable spirit of its people, blending tradition with modernity, and embracing its rich cultural heritage while charting a course towards a brighter future on the global stage.

Join us on an unforgettable journey through Vietnam, focusing on the vibrant cities of Hanoi, the stunning landscapes of Ninh Binh and Ha Long Bay, and the gemstone-rich region of Luc Yen.

We begin your adventure in Hanoi, where you'll immerse yourself in the rich culture and history of the capital city. Explore iconic landmarks like Hoan Kiem Lake and the Temple of Literature, and wander through the bustling streets of the Old Quarter. Delight your taste buds with the diverse flavors of Vietnamese cuisine as you sample street food favorites like pho, banh mi, and bun cha. We'll venture to the picturesque province of Ninh Binh, known for its breathtaking natural scenery. Glide along the tranquil waters of the Trang An Scenic Landscape Complex, marveling at the limestone karsts and ancient caves that dot the landscape. Discover the remnants of Vietnam's feudal past as you explore the ancient capital of Hoa Lu, nestled amidst

lush rice paddies and limestone cliffs. Gain insight into the local freshwater pearl industry as we tour the mussel ponds and witness the recovery of pearls from the molluscs.

Continue your journey to the iconic Ha Long Bay (Bai Tu Long Bay), a UNESCO World Heritage Site renowned for its emerald waters and towering limestone islands. Set sail on a traditional junk boat and cruise through the otherworldly landscape, exploring hidden caves, secluded beaches, and floating fishing villages along the way. Engage in a hands-on pearl farming experience, learning about the cultivation of pearls and harvesting your own treasures from the sea.

Conclude your tour in the gemstone-rich region of Luc Yen, nestled amidst the verdant mountains of northern Vietnam. Explore bustling gemstone markets, where traders offer an array of precious stones including rubies, sapphires, and spinels. Connect with local miners and gain insight into the traditional techniques used in gemstone extraction, as you wander through open cut and alluvial mines.

Throughout your journey, enjoy comfortable accommodations and personalized guidance from an English-speaking tour guide. Indulge in delicious Vietnamese cuisine, with meals featuring a variety of local specialties. Whether you're captivated by the cultural heritage of Hanoi, the natural beauty of Ninh Binh and Ha Long Bay, or the allure of gemstones in Luc Yen, this tour promises an enriching and unforgettable experience in Vietnam.

Inclusions

- ✓ Accomodation
- ✓ Transport
- ✓ Meals as indicated
- ✓ Entrance fees
- ✓ Local and GAA guides
- ✓ A rollicking good time
- ✓ Stuff ups that you'll look back on and laugh about one day

Exclusions

- ✗ Airfares to and from Hanoi
- ✗ Transfers to and from Hanoi airport
- ✗ Visa fees
- ✗ Personal expenses
- ✗ Booze other than indicated
- ✗ Travel insurance

Itinerary:

Please note that we will do our best to do everything listed below. However there may be times and places where we run out of time, something is unexpectedly shut, we have a weather event or something beyond our control occurs which means we need to vary our plans.

Monday May 5th, 2025. Day 1.

- Arrive throughout the day at Hanoi International Airport and make your way to the hotel. Spend your afternoon wandering the bustling streets of Hanoi, wander down to the lake or indulge in a bit of shopping.
- Meet your hosts for a cocktail party on top of the La Siesta Classic Ma May hotel at the Moonlight Sky Bar (some included cocktails and finger food).
- Overnight in Hanoi at the La Siesta Classic Ma May or similar (4*).

Tuesday May 6th, 2025. Day 2.

Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

- After breakfast at the hotel restaurant, hop on a bus for a city tour of Hanoi. We will visit many of the famous sites of this stunning city, Hoan Kiem Lake, The Old Quarter, One Pillar Pagoda, Hanoi Opera House, Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum, Ngoc Son Temple and Saint Joseph's Cathedral, Imperial Citadel
- Stop at a fun local restaurant for a traditional lunch of beautiful Vietnamese cuisine.
- Venture down to Silver Street (Hang Bac Street) for some retail therapy or have a pre-dinner drink at the hotel bar before heading to one of Hanoi's iconic restaurants for an amazing dinner.
- Water puppet show after dinner.
- Overnight in Hanoi at the La Siesta Classic Ma May or similar (4*).

Wednesday May 7th, 2025. Day 3.

Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

- Up for a big day of exploring and pack your stuff because we're leaving town. After breakfast we will be picked up by coach and taken 130km to the Ninh Binh District, south east of Hanoi towards the coast. We will visit a freshwater pearl farm adjacent to the famous Trang An complex and be shown the ponds where the freshwater mussels grow, how they are seeded and how the pearls are extracted.
- Lunch in Ninh Binh, hopefully sampling some local noodle soup and spring rolls.
- Afternoon exploring the Trang An complex including a boat ride through the lakes amongst the soaring limestone karsts and through several cave complexes.
- Dinner at a local restaurant
- Overnight at the Ninh Binh Hidden Charm Hotel (4*).

Thursday May 8th, 2025. Day 4.

Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

- Breakfast at the hotel then a full day exploring this region. Starting with Hoa Lu this ancient city is one of the most visited places in northern Vietnam. Nestled along a beautiful river, the old city is surrounded by lush green rice fields and picturesque limestone mountain edges. Stops will include the temple dedicated to King Dinh. After that, you'll explore the chambers of Am Tien Cave then the tallest pagoda in Southeast Asia, the Bai Dinh pagoda. Another delectable lunch will follow before more site-seeing and an early return to the hotel for a relax and a swim in the hotel pool.
- Lunch at a local restaurant
- Dinner at the hotel.
- Overnight at the Ninh Binh Hidden Charm Hotel (4*).

Friday May 9th, 2025. Day 5.

Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

- A fairly early breakfast and fresh start to the day with a 200km (3.5hr) coach journey to Ha Long Bay. Catch up on some sleep or admire the stunning countryside as we see the limestone karsts start to get eaten up by the sea, forming the pinnacles Ha Long Bay is famous for.
- Meet up with our sea crew at Halong Bay International Harbour and check in to our cruise of Bai Tu Long Bay on board Athenas Signature junk. We will have two private boats to explore the emerald waters of the bay.
- 12:00 CHECK-IN. A warm welcome by the Signature Team in Halong International Harbour. Complete the luggage check-in procedure at the waiting lounge before boarding for the cruise.
- 12:45 ONBOARD. Transfer to the Signature Cruise by a tender boat. The Cruise Manager and the whole crew member welcome you onboard, a safety briefing and description of the itinerary will be delivered while you are enjoying the Signature welcome drink.
- 13:00 HAPPY LUNCH. Lunch is served on board at the cozy restaurant as the cruise departs towards Bai Tu Long Bay – a hidden gem of Halong Bay Complex. Absorb yourself in the gorgeous scenery and famous sights of limestone.
- 14:45 ACTIVITIES. The cruise stops at Vung Vieng Floating fishing village, a fishing village with a reputation for culturing pearls. Here you have time to discover the life and culture of fishing people by kayaking or being paddled on a rowboat.
- 16:00 RELAX. Back to the Signature Cruise to enjoy your free time. Massages are available - please book in advance with the Cruise Manager.
- 17:00 SUNSET PARTY. We will use the tender to move everyone on board the party deck of one boat and enjoy freshly prepared snacks and your favorite drinks while waiting for sunset (limited cocktails included).
- 17:30 SUNSET PARTY. A Cooking Demonstration of traditional Vietnamese dishes will be organized by the Athena Head Chef

- 19:00 DINNER. Return to your boat or stay aboard for a fusion set menu to warm up your stomach after a long active day
- 20:30 CHEERFUL EVENING. Freetime for evening activities
- Overnight on board the boat.

Saturday May 10th, 2025. Day 6.

Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

- 06:30 TAI-CHI CLASS. Good morning the Bay by joining Tai-Chi Exercise on the sundeck for 30 minutes whilst cruising to “Thien Canh Son” Cave
- 07:00 BREAKFAST. A light breakfast is ready to serve at the restaurant
- 08:00 VISITING CAVE Visit “Thien Canh Son” cave - Thien Canh Son Cave is comprised of three caverns in total, each one strewn with stalactites and stalagmites. 200 steps is waiting for your legs, we’ll take our time.
- 09:00 CHECK OUT. Come back to Signature cruise, relax and pack the luggage. Leave your luggage outside the door. The Signature team will collect and get it ready to disembark.
- 09:30 BRUNCH Enjoy a brunch buffet at the restaurant after check-out while cruising toward the port
- 10:45 GOODBYE Transfer by tender back to Halong International Harbour and disembarkation.
- We will board our comfy coach for a 2 hour journey back to Hanoi and our Hotel.
- Lunch either at the hotel or at a nearby restaurant.
- The afternoon schedule includes an option of either
 - a) A cooking class where you will visit a local market, buy and sample local foods before returning to the kitchen to prepare a selection of traditional dishes. You will cook your own dinner guided by an expert chef and enjoy some beverages.
 - OR
 - b) Jump on the back of a scooter for a hair-raising ride around the local Hanoi beer halls, bars and watering houses. We will visit as many different places as we can squeeze in, enjoying different beers and ales as we go, alongside different snacks and food options.
- Overnight in Hanoi at the La Siesta Classic Ma May or similar (4*).

Sunday May 11th, 2025. Day 7.

Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

- A relaxing start to the morning with hopefully a sleep in and breakfast at the hotel. Then packing our bags again and heading west! We will stop by a hidden gem market in the Hanoi district, open only on a Sunday morning, then make our way towards Luc Yen (230km, 4 hours).
- Lunch will be at a restaurant on the way.

- We plan to arrive mid afternoon and should have time for an explore of Luc Yen town. Luc Yen is only small and well off the beaten path for your average tourist. There should be some opportunity to go gem shopping or find some beer hoi prior to dinner.
- We will need to split the group up amongst one or two hotels and we may need to do the same for dinner.
- After dinner we will check out a water puppet show.
- Overnight at Hotel Tam Anh or similar (2-3*)

Monday May 12th, 2025. Day 8.

Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

- A quick breakfast of bahn mi or a noodle soup if you are keen, hopefully we will be able to arrange coffees too. We will get up early and visit the famous Luc Yen gem market in the morning (open 7:00am to 10:00am), meeting the miners, dealers and cutters. You will have opportunities to buy gems and crystals and get your inner gem nerd on. Then we will split up into mini-buses for an adventurous afternoon.
- We will visit an open cut gem mine in the An Phu community where sapphire, ruby and spinel are found and get shown how the alluvial deposits are worked to obtain the rough gem crystals.
- Enjoy a walk through the rice paddies and explore the local community.
- Lunch will be on the go, street food from local vendors.
- Stop by a marble mine, getting to visit if we can arrange permission on the day.
- Visit a local artist who creates artwork from gemstone gravels.
- Dinner we will split up and visit several of the local restaurants for a down to earth feed.
- Overnight at Hotel Tam Anh or similar (2-3*)

Tuesday May 13th, 2025. Day 9.

Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

- Once again we will be up early for fried egg bahn mi and coffee followed by another visit to the gem market and local gem shops. It is all a bit overwhelming and English is not well spoken so specimen purchases will be a lot of haggling and writing down offers. Hopefully after two mornings you will have the gist of it.
- Lunch will be again at local restaurants in Luc Yen
- We will board the coach for a relatively short drive to Yen Bai (2hrs - 90km), along the way we hope to stop at a hydro-electric dam with a beach of garnet sand. Depending on the water levels we may be able to have a fossick or meet some locals who are combing the shoreline themselves (fair warning, this is a very hit and miss visit!)
- Some free time in the afternoon to explore Yen Bai before dinner.
- Hopefully we will find a restaurant big enough for the whole group for a last group dinner
- We will endeavor to have some dealers and miners meet us at the hotel for a special opportunity to procure some rare gemstones.
- Overnight at Sunrise Plaza Yen Bai or similar (2-3*)

Wednesday May 14th, 2025. Day 10.

Breakfast, Lunch

- Sadly this is our last day. We will have a tearful breakfast and a visit to the Yen Bai gem market, it's a fairly new market to the area so we will be some of the first foreigners to visit.
- Time dependent, we will have lunch in Yen Bai or at a restaurant along the way to Hanoi (2.5hrs - 150km).
- Arrive back in Hanoi about 3pm (very approximately).
- Guests free to depart or continue on their own Vietnam adventure.