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Tour Notes

Highlights of Vietnam

Tour Duration – 13 Days



Tour Rating

Fitness ●●●○○ | Off the Beaten Track ●●●○○ | Culture ●●●●○ | History ●●●●○ | Wildlife ●●○○○

Tour Pace

Busy

Tour Highlights

- ✓ A tour with high local interaction
- ✓ Discover the main highlights of Vietnam
- ✓ Travel through the scenic Hai Van Pass
- ✓ Experience local life on the Mekong Delta





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Tour Map



Tour Essentials

Accommodation:	Mix of Comfortable hotels and an eco-lodge
Included Meals:	Daily breakfast (B), plus lunches (L) and dinners (D) as shown in the itinerary
Group Size:	Maximum of 12
Start Point:	Hanoi – you can arrive any time on day 1
End Point:	Ho Chi Minh - you can depart any time on day 13
Transport:	Minivan or bus, boat
Countries:	Vietnam



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Vietnam – Highlights of Vietnam

Vietnam is a country of extraordinary diversity, and its major cities and landmarks offer a fascinating tapestry of history and culture. Starting in the bustling capital city of Hanoi, ancient temples and pagodas stand in harmony with modern skyscrapers, creating a unique blend of tradition and progress. Continue to the coastal gem of Halong Bay and be treated to a mesmerizing seascape of towering limestone karsts jutting out of emerald waters. Travel to Hoi An, a beautifully preserved ancient town, is a testament to Vietnam's rich heritage then through the stunning Hai Van Pass to the imperial city of Hue and explore a treasure trove of historical relics, including the majestic Imperial City and the Perfume River. The tour ends in Ho Chi Minh City, formerly known as Saigon, a dynamic urban centre and rich blend of cultures, and a poignant connection to the Vietnam War. Vietnam, with its contrast of cities like Hanoi, Halong Bay, Hoi An, Hue, and Saigon, provides an unforgettable journey through time and landscapes, making it a must-visit destination for those seeking a profound cultural experience and a taste of its remarkable natural beauty.

Tour Itinerary Notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested and on occasions alternative accommodation, of a similar standard to that named below, will be used.

Tour Guide

Our guides are a key strength, chosen for their knowledge of and passion for the areas in which they work. All of our guides are carefully hand-picked, and are not just passing through these countries, but are usually locally born. Unlike some companies it should be noted we do not send a guide or tour leader from Undiscovered Destinations in the UK as we have every confidence in our locally appointed representative who is responsible for operating the tour on our behalf. Where possible you will have the same guide throughout your trip but on occasions it may be necessary to change the guide at one or more points during the tour. On this tour you will have station guides for up to 5 pax, and one throughout guide for 6 pax or more.

Itinerary

Day 1: Hanoi Arrival

Arrive in Hanoi and transfer to your hotel. No meals or activities included today. Overnight Oriental Jade Hotel or similar.

Hanoi

Hanoi, the capital city of Vietnam, is a captivating blend of history, culture, and vibrant urban life. Nestled in the northern part of the country along the banks of the Red River, Hanoi carries a rich heritage shaped by centuries of dynastic rule, French colonial influence, and the struggles of the Vietnamese people. The city's heart lies in the atmospheric Old Quarter, a maze of narrow streets brimming with markets, traditional shops, and temples. Iconic landmarks, including the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum and the Temple of Literature, stand as testaments to Hanoi's historical significance. The city's lakes, such as Hoan Kiem Lake, offer serene retreats amidst the urban hustle. Hanoi is a culinary haven, with its street food scene showcasing diverse flavours that delight the senses. This city encapsulates the spirit of Vietnam, seamlessly blending tradition with the dynamism of modern life.

Day 2: Hanoi – Explore Hanoi like a local

This morning it's an early start as you head to Hoan Kiem Lake to join groups of local people practicing tai chi and aerobics – a regular morning routine! After visiting Ngoc Son Temple in the middle of the lake, head to a traditional café where you can try Vietnam's local iced coffee, ca phe sua da, and if you're feeling adventurous – the 'egg coffee'. Continue to a street food stall for a delicious banh mi – a typical baguette





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sandwich filled in with a variety of ingredients. We then head to Hanoi's Old Quarter where you will see some of the French colonial architecture of former times, including St. Joseph's Cathedral – a French gothic building constructed in 1886. Next, walk to the Hoa Lo Prison, where Vietnamese as well as American and French prisoners of war were once held. Our last stop before lunch is Huu Tiep Lake, better known as 'B-52 lake', where the wreckage of a US B-5 bomber can still be seen. For lunch enjoy Hanoi's traditional bun cha noodle dish, made with grilled pork and rice noodles. This afternoon, we visit the Temple of Literature built in 1076, where Vietnam's first university was established to educate Vietnam's royalty, mandarins and members of the elite – a fascinating glimpse into the country's past. Last but not least, head to a street where the tracks of Hanoi's railway pass only metres from the entrance to homes. You can walk along the tracks and take some beautiful photos of the city. The day finishes with a refreshing glass of draught beer at a local bia hoi spot – a chance to mingle with the locals. Overnight at Oriental Jade Hotel or similar (BL)

Note: During the tour, you will be trying different street foods, so we recommend you forgot breakfast at your hotel.

Day 3: Hanoi – Ninh Binh

After breakfast head towards Trang An, a scenic area near Ninh Binh, where you will take a cruise up a river that wends its way through karst mountains surrounded by rice fields. Trang An is also dubbed 'Inland Ha Long Bay', since much of the topography is a landscape of soaring karst mountains, which some consider to be even more spectacular than Ha Long Bay itself. Lunch will take place in a local restaurant and in the afternoon, you will start a bike ride to Hoa Lu, the former capital of Vietnam in the 10th and 11th centuries when Vietnam was under the Dinh and Le dynasties. Before returning to Hanoi, you will explore some of the monuments dedicated to several emperors living during these dynasties. You will then be transferred to your resort. Overnight at Aravinda Resort or similar (BL)

Day 4: Hanoi – Ha Long Bay - Lan Ha Bay

This morning, you will depart for Halong. Join your Halong Bay cruise around noon, where you depart and head for Lan Ha Bay after a delicious lunch. Enjoy kayaking and swimming at the bay, or simply relax on the luxury junk boat. Enjoy the afternoon at leisure before dinner, then relax on board in the evening, or try your hand at squid fishing. Overnight on Mon Cheri cruise (BLD)

Halong Bay

Halong Bay is a UNESCO World Heritage Site renowned for its breathtaking natural beauty. The bay is characterized by emerald waters and thousands of towering limestone karsts topped with lush vegetation, creating a surreal and picturesque seascape. These karsts, some of which are hollow with enormous caves, form a unique geological formation. Halong Bay is dotted with small fishing villages and floating fishing communities, adding to its cultural appeal. Visitors often explore the bay on cruises, allowing them to appreciate the stunning scenery, visit caves, and engage in activities like kayaking. The bay's ethereal beauty and cultural significance make it one of Vietnam's most iconic and visited destinations.

Day 5: Lan Ha Bay – Hanoi – Danang – Hoi An

For early risers you can start the day with some Tai Chi before enjoying the sunrise. Breakfast is served whilst cruising back towards the jetty. Before leaving Halong, we visit Cat Ba World Biosphere and Trung Trang – one of the most impressive caves in Cat Ba island. The limestone cave has thousands of stalactites in various shapes, offering geological values with a typical cave ecosystem. Arrive back at the main jetty after lunch where you will be met and transferred to the airport for your flight to Danang. On arrival transfer to your hotel in Hoi An. Spend the evening at leisure. Overnight La Siesta Hoi An or similar (B)

Hoi An

Hoi An, located on the central coast of Vietnam, is a charming and well-preserved ancient town that reflects a harmonious blend of various cultures and architectural influences. This UNESCO World Heritage Site is



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renowned for its exceptionally well-preserved architecture, with colourful historic buildings lining narrow, winding streets. The town served as a prominent trading port from the 15th to the 19th century, and its architecture is a mix of Vietnamese, Chinese, Japanese, and European styles. Hoi An is famous for its lantern-lit evenings, adding a magical ambiance to the town. Beyond its architectural beauty, Hoi An is celebrated for its vibrant street markets, delectable local cuisine, and traditional crafts. The Thu Bon River flows through the town, offering scenic boat rides and glimpses of the local way of life. Hoi An is a living museum, offering visitors a glimpse into its rich history and cultural heritage.

Day 6: Hoi An

The morning is at leisure. This afternoon, around 3pm, meet your guide for a walking tour through Hoi An's Old Town, with its hundreds of historic houses, congregation halls, pagodas and other notable structures. Visit the Japanese Covered Bridge, the Pottery Museum, 200-year-old Tan Ky House, Chua Ong Pagoda and the local market. You will also have the opportunity to paint your own traditional mask – a memorable souvenir to take home with you. While you are walking, you can try some of the local street food, including, Vietnamese coffee; the best banh my in Vietnam; banh bot loc, clear shrimp and pork dumplings; banh it, sticky rice dumplings; bánh khọt, savory coconut pancake; balut egg; cao lau noodles; and sliced pork wrapped with rice paper, among others. Overnight at La Siesta Hoi An or similar (B)

Day 7: Hoi An – Cooking Class

After breakfast head to Hoi An's colourful central market. Here, you will have the opportunity to interact with local stallholders and learn more about the ingredients typically used in Central Vietnam cuisine, some of which you will be using for your cooking class later. After the market cycle on to Tra Que Vegetable Village. Take a short stroll around the vegetable gardens and learn more about farming life in Hoi An. Next, meet your chef and work with him, learning traditional ways of preparing and cooking Vietnamese food. You will be cooking many local delicacies such as tam huu - Hoi An spring rolls and banh xeo, a Vietnamese pancake. When the cooking class is finished, you will be transferred back to your hotel. Overnight at La Siesta Hoi An or similar (BL)

Day 8: Hoi An - Hue

This morning travel to Hue via the scenic Hai Van pass. Overnight at Eldora Hotel or similar (B)

Hue

Hue, located in central Vietnam, is a city steeped in imperial history and cultural richness. As the former capital of the Nguyen Dynasty, it boasts a wealth of historical monuments, including the imposing Imperial City, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The city is adorned with ancient temples, pagodas, and royal tombs set against a backdrop of the Perfume River. The Perfume River, aptly named for the fragrant flowers that fall into its waters, adds to the city's picturesque setting. Hue's cuisine, known for its royal origins, offers a delightful culinary experience. The city provides a captivating glimpse into Vietnam's imperial past, with its well-preserved architectural wonders and serene landscapes, making it a compelling destination for history enthusiasts and cultural explorers alike.

Day 9: Hue

Today visit the Purple Forbidden City, constructed by Emperor Gia Long in the early 19th century. Located in the Citadel of Hue's Imperial City, it was badly damaged during the Tet Offensive of 1968. Hue was established as the capital of unified Vietnam in 1802, and was not only the political, but also the cultural and religious centre of Vietnam under the Nguyen dynasty until 1945. After exploring the Purple Forbidden City, you will stop for lunch at a local restaurant. Following lunch, you board a dragon boat for a pleasant boat trip down the Perfume River to visit the famous Thien Mu Pagoda. You then visit the tombs of emperors Tu Duc and Khai Dinh. Tu Duc, who was Vietnam's fourth emperor is said to have had 104 concubines. The tomb of Khai Dinh, who was Vietnam's 12th emperor, represents a fusion of traditional Vietnamese style and modern



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influences. It is made almost entirely of concrete and includes many European architectural details. Overnight at Eldora Hotel or similar (BL)

Day 10: Hue – Ho Chi Minh

Transfer to the airport for your flight to Ho Chi Minh City. On arrival you will be met and transferred to your hotel. Before arriving at your hotel, stop to visit the famous Cu Chi Tunnels. The tunnels are 75 km northwest of Ho Chi Minh City, in an area that played an important role during Vietnam's wars for independence and reunification. More than 200 km of tunnels were dug here by the Vietnamese guerrillas and are often the highlight of South Vietnam touring. You will be able to explore the bedrooms, meeting rooms, air-raided shelters, smokeless kitchens, and experience life underground in this extraordinary tunnel complex. After visiting the tunnels, you will be taken to your hotel, and the rest of the day is at leisure. Overnight at Majestic Hotel or similar (B)

Ho Chi Minh City

Ho Chi Minh City, formerly known as Saigon, is the bustling economic and cultural hub of Vietnam, situated in the southern part of the country. This dynamic metropolis is a vibrant tapestry of modernity and tradition, with soaring skyscrapers standing alongside French colonial architecture and bustling markets. Named after the revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh, the city is a testament to Vietnam's rapid development. A mecca for shopping, dining, and entertainment, Ho Chi Minh City offers a lively street life and a wealth of attractions, including the historic Notre-Dame Cathedral Basilica of Saigon and the War Remnants Museum, which chronicles the country's tumultuous past. The city's energy, diverse culinary scene, and rich history make it a captivating destination that reflects the dynamism of contemporary Vietnam.

Day 11: Ho Chi Minh

This morning head out early for an iced coffee at the Bird Café in the beautifully manicured gardens of Tao Dan Park. The café is a popular spot for many locals who come to take in the morning air, show off their prize birds, and chat with friends over a freshly brewed cup of Vietnamese coffee. After a spot of breakfast at a restaurant where you can try pho, the national dish, you navigate the back alleyways and street vendors to Cho Lon, the heart of Saigon's Chinatown. Cho Lon is like no other district in Saigon, it is a hive of activity that holds your attention from the moment you arrive. A district with a long and colourful history, we take you to see a secret bunker and even the former Revolutionary Headquarters, hidden away in plain sight. At this point, you will be getting hot and hungry, so you make your way to a favourite lunchtime watering hole. Getting there is also an adventure in itself as it involves finding your way to an obscure apartment block where you climb to the roof for a delightful lunch overlooking the city rooftops. Lunch is followed by a walk through central Saigon to work off the excess. A bit further, you come across The Café Apartment, an old nine-story apartment building that residents have converted into funky, stylish coffee shops and boutiques. At The Café Apartment, there is a perfect place to relax after a long day of exploring, it is a great way to end the tour. Overnight at Majestic Hotel or similar (BL)

Day 12: Mekong Delta

This morning we depart for Ben Tre (approx. 2.5 hours) in the heart of the Mekong Delta. On arrival stop at the vibrant My Long market where you will witness the daily activities of locals as they sort and sell a myriad of fresh fish and local produce and see the specialty rice paper cake being made. Board your boat as you cruise the waterways, through coconut jungles with a canopy of palm trees and along small canals. Stop at a local farmers house to observe how coconut jam is skillfully crafted. Here, you'll enjoy the flavors of tea and jam while enjoying the charming ambiance. Next a tuktuk ride will take you through local villages where you will stop to see the art of coconut processing in a local workshop. You'll also have the privilege of connecting with local villagers who will regale you with tales of the community's way of life. Enjoy a journey on a wooden rowboat as you gently glide along the shaded waters of some small canals. The picturesque scenery will provide ample opportunities to capture truly mesmerizing photographs. Lunchtime beckons, and you'll be treated to a feast of local specialties at a charming riverside restaurant. Here, you can unwind and savor the



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culinary delights in a serene setting. Following your meal, your boat journey will lead you back towards Ben Tre where you'll make a stop at a traditional brick kiln. Here you will gain an insight into the intricate art of handcrafting bricks and experience more of the local industry. After another short cruise you will be met by your driver for the trip back to Ho Chi Minh city. Overnight at Majestic Hotel, Deluxe Pool view room (BL)

Day 13: Ho Chi Minh Departure

Today, you will have a free day until be transferred to airport for flight home. (B)

Tour Inclusions/Exclusions

Inclusions:

Arrival and departure transfers
All accommodation
Services of English-speaking guides (station guides for up to 5 pax)
Meals as listed (B – Breakfast, L – Lunch, D – Dinner)
All ground transport, including travel by minivan, river and local bus
Entrance fees for sites listed as part of the itinerary

Excluded:

International flights
Any airport taxes (included for flights within the itinerary)
Travel insurance
Visas if applicable
Drinks
Items of a personal nature
Tips (Discretionary)

Important Information

Foreign Government Travel Warnings

We constantly monitor the advice posted by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). In particular we will always advise clients of any travel warnings. At present there are no warnings against travel to any of the areas we visit in Vietnam. It should be noted that this information applies to British citizens. Other nationals are asked to check the current position of their respective government.

Accommodation and Meals

Hotel Check-in Times

As a general rule most hotels will allow guests to check-in from 2pm. Please note that the price of your tour does not include guaranteed early check-in. Therefore please advise us if you would like to ensure that your room is available for an earlier arrival. This is particularly relevant on the first day of the tour and for early morning arrivals. One option is to pre-book and pay for an extra night at the beginning of your tour which will guarantee your accommodation is available irrespective of what time you arrive. Please contact us for information and costs.



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It should also be noted that on many of our tours we have set-aside Day 1 of the itinerary as an 'arrival day'. For this reason and because tour participants are likely to be arriving at different times, and often from different countries, guided sightseeing or other activities are not included. If you are arriving early or before the start date of the tour and would like to organise some extra arrangements on a private basis please contact us.

Accommodation Rating

At Undiscovered Destinations we know our travellers prefer to stay in comfortable, mid-range accommodation. With a few exceptions you can expect rooms to be en-suite, with private bathroom and when necessary air-conditioning will be provided. In general you will find your hotel has a restaurant and/or bar. Please note that you will stay in local homestays and an eco-lodge on this tour where facilities are basic, with shared bathroom facilities.

We welcome solo travellers and single rooms will be allocated subject to the applicable tour supplement. Please note that on occasions you may not always be allocated a double or twin room, as some hotels have designated single rooms. These may be smaller in size. However, the supplement payable takes this into consideration.

Food & Drink

The daily meal basis is shown in the tour itinerary; breakfast (B), lunch and dinner (D). Please note that lunch may be a picnic. Drinks are not included and will be payable locally in cash.

Dietary Requirements

If you have any special dietary requirements you must notify us at the time of booking. While we will make every effort to cater for you, we cannot guarantee that this will be possible.

Budgeting for your Tour

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the tour price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Vietnam

Lunch £5 - £7

Dinner £9

Drink

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

Vietnam

Water £0.50

Bottle of Beer £2 - £4



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Tipping – Guide and Drivers

Tipping is common practice in Asia. If your local guide has been helpful then you could think about tipping. As a rough guide, drivers can be tipped between \$2-4 per day and guides between \$7-15 per day – these figures are per group, not per person.

Foreign Exchange

ATM Availability: Available in main cities

Credit and Debit Card Acceptance: Larger hotels take Visa or Mastercard

Local Currency: Vietnamese Dong (VND)

Recommended Currency for Exchange: US Dollar

Where to Exchange: Your guide will advise you

Joining your Tour

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will receive an airport transfer, both on arrival and departure include in the tour price. In order that the transfer can be arranged please ensure that you advise us of your flight information once available. Please advise the date, time and flight number for your arrival/departure. If we have not been advised of this information at least 2 weeks before travel, then you will be required to make your own way to the hotel on Day 1 of your tour.

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Undiscovered Destinations that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country and be valid for the entire duration of your holiday.

Visa Information

At the time of writing British citizens do not require a visa for stays of up to 45 days. Please refer to the FCDO website for further details - www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

US and Australian nationals require a visa for a tourist visit to visit Vietnam. For further details please visit the applicable website shown below.

US Nationals - <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/international-travel.html>

Australian Nationals - www.smartraveller.gov.au/

Other nationals should check the latest requirements with the authorities in their home country, or with the destination's nearest embassy or consulate.

Should you require any documentation to support a visa application, such as a letter of invitation, upon request this will be provided by Undiscovered Destinations after receipt of your balance payment.



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As it is the travellers' responsibility to ensure that they meet all entry requirements it is essential that you check the rules and any other conditions at the time of booking and again when making your balance payment. In addition, we would strongly advise that you make a final check around two weeks before your arrival. This is important as requirements can change at short notice. Undiscovered Destinations, when possible, will provide guidance about entry rules, but in the first instance please contact the relevant authorities, including the applicable embassy or consulate for assistance.

Passports

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, valid for at least six months after the date of return to the UK.

We strongly advise that your passport contains a minimum of two blank pages, as this may be a requirement of the local immigration authorities. In addition certain countries will stipulate that the two blank pages are opposite each other. If you are unable to meet these requirements you may be refused boarding by your airline or denied entry by the immigration authorities.

For specific information about the requirements for your destination please check with the country's embassy or consulate. Alternatively UK citizens can visit www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice

Vaccinations & Protection

As with travel to most parts of Asia, we strongly recommend that you contact your doctor's surgery or a specialist travel clinic for up-to-date information, advice and the necessary vaccinations.

For a visit of less than one month, almost certainly you will be advised to have immunisations against the following: Diphtheria and Tetanus, Hepatitis A, Typhoid, Meningitis. Anti-malaria medication will also be required and the use of a DEET-containing insect repellent is highly recommended.

The legal status and regulation of some medicines prescribed or purchased in your home country can be different in other countries. If you're travelling with prescription or over-the-counter medicine, read this guidance from NaTHNaC on best practice when travelling with medicines. For further information on the legal status of a specific medicine, you'll need to contact the embassy, high commission or consulate of the country or territory you're travelling to.

Preparing for your tour

Climate

The weather in Vietnam is split into regions; northern, central and southern Vietnam. Northern Vietnam has two distinct seasons: October to late March is the dry season and April to September is the wet season. Central Vietnam's hot and dry season is January to August, with rainfall September-December. Southern Vietnam is generally dry and hot from November – April.

However, Vietnam is a year-round destination, with travel being possible in all seasons.

Clothing

When it comes to clothing it is usually recommended that lighter clothes are worn through the day, and warmer ones at night. A hat is also advised to be worn through the day to protect from the sun, along with at least one piece of waterproof clothing for any days that the weather may be wet or windy.

Equipment



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The first thing on your list should be a first aid kit. Whilst there is no undue cause for alarm, travellers are best advised to travel well-prepared: adequately immunized, with sufficient supplies of prescription drugs, along with a medical kit. Suncream/sunblock is a must. Insect repellent, including a bite spray will also be useful to have.

Footwear

Comfortable and sturdy walking shoes/boots are recommended.

Luggage on tour

Your luggage should not exceed 20kgs (44lbs). One large rucksack or soft type bag, and one small hand luggage rucksack is acceptable.

Electric Supply & Plugs

Electrical supply is 220V and plugs generally have two-prong round or flat pins.

Tour Itinerary Versions

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes. These tour notes were prepared 22 November 2023.

