



# Ho Chi Minh Trail

## Vietnam and Laos



### DAY 1 Hoi An

On arrival you will be met and transferred to your hotel. This evening there will be a tour briefing.

**Accommodation: Hoi An Historic Hotel**

### DAY 2 Hoi An

Hoi An is a world cultural heritage site and a delightful town to commence our journey in Vietnam. In the narrow streets we will see architecture from the 17th and 18th centuries influenced by Chinese and Japanese traders who regularly used the port of Hoi An until the river silted up in the late 19th century. There are many shops selling handicrafts, numerous tea and coffee houses, and there is a relaxed ambiance amongst the locals. There will be an orientation walking tour that introduces the highlights of the old town.

**Accommodation: Hoi An Historic Hotel**

### DAY 3 Hue

This morning we leave Hoi An and drive north through Danang, past China Beach, and over the Hai Van pass *'where the clouds meet the ocean'* to the picturesque fishing town of Lang Co. Here we will stop to stretch our legs and try some local coffee. Later this afternoon we will visit the Citadel, the former residence of the Nguyen dynasty (1802 to 1945) in Hue.

**Accommodation: Le Residence Hotel**

### DAY 4 Dong Hoi

We leave Hue and drive north to our destination of Dong Hoi passing through the former Demilitarised Zone (DMZ 1954-75) and across the Hien Luong River. This river symbolised the divide between North and South Vietnam during the American war. The original bridge remains, which we will walk across, to a small museum recalling the battles that took place here.

**Accommodation: Sun Spa Resort**

### DAY 5 Dong Hoi

Today we will explore the town of Dong Hoi and the surrounding area. We travel on the Truong Son Road, or former Ho Chi Minh Trail, to visit Dong Loc T-junction. There are many stories of bravery under fire by the local people of Quang Binh province. Here we will learn a story of heroism by ten Vietnamese women who suffered during the war. Our day trip continues with a visit to Phong Nha National Park. We travel by private covered boat on the Son River to visit caves, including the spectacular Phong Nha Cavern, amongst the largest in the world.

**Accommodation: Sun Spa Resort**



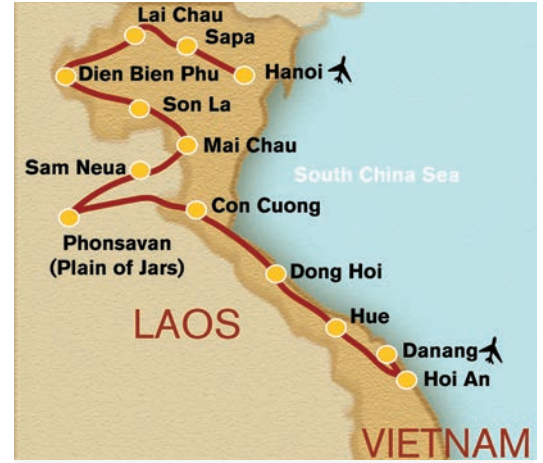
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## DAY 6 Dong Hoi to Con Cuong

We depart this morning on Highway One, past the northern city of Vinh in Nghe An province. During the American war, this area was a strategic point and stockpile for arms and equipment destined for the southern battlegrounds. Here we will visit President Ho Chi Minh's birthplace at Kim Lien Village, where the local authorities have faithfully restored the original house of bamboo and palm leaves. We continue our journey to the foot of the Truong Son mountain range and lodge in the picturesque town of Con Cuong.

**Accommodation: Con Cuong Muong Thanh Hotel**



## DAY 7 Con Cuong to the Plain of Jars

We continue this morning along the former Ho Chi Minh Trail towards the border with Laos. The landscape becomes more mountainous as we leave the coastal plains and head into the Truong Son Range. The border crossing is at the Vietnamese village of Nam Khan where we complete the necessary formalities and head into Laos. We will meet our local Lao guide and continue to the town of Phonsavan.

**Accommodation: Phou Pha Deng Hotel**

## DAY 8 Phonsavan

We will pass many Hmong villages built along high crests, the local people practising slash and burn agriculture and still following animist beliefs. Eventually, the mountains give way to small hills. We arrive on the Plateau of Xieng Khouang, where bomb craters scar the barren landscape. It is reported that during the war years of 1967 and 1968, 500,000 sorties were flown by the American Air Force – a bomb dropped for every minute of the day for two years. In this area there were fierce clashes between Pathet Lao rebels and Nationalist troops of the Lao government. The North Vietnamese used the area as a staging point for supplies and equipment travelling to southern Vietnam. The Plain of Jars consists of a number of sites where large stone jars are perched on the crests of surrounding hills. These jars are shrouded in mystery and are believed to be over 2000 years old. As for their purpose it is thought they were funerary, however, the locals have legends that suggest the jars were built as giant storage containers for rice wine. We will discover the different jar sites and wander among these amazing structures.

**Accommodation: Phou Pha Deng Hotel**

## DAY 9 Sam Neua

We take the road heading eastwards then at the market town of Muang Khan we turn to the north and continue to the village of Nam Neun. We follow the road across hilltops – the road is steep and winding. The flora of this area differs from the lower lands and in some areas the habitat of tigers still remains. We will pass numerous villages mainly of Hmong people. The key characteristics of Hmong dwellings are their large size and wooden construction with no windows and thatched rooves. We continue to the northern outpost of Sam Neua, remote in the Lao mountains.

**Accommodation: Xayphasouk Guesthouse**

## DAY 10 Vienxay Caves

This morning we will take the 45 minute drive to the town of Vienxay, travelling across a mountain pass to visit the famous caves of this area. After admission at the Kaysone Phomvihane Memorial Cave office, a guided tour will take us to visit the major caves that transformed Vienxay during the second Indochina war into a de-facto city between 1964 and 1973. It was during these years that Lao became involved in a 'secret war', which still remains largely ignored in war history. War was never declared on Lao (by the USA and its allies); however, military action was justified at the time because the North Vietnamese were using Lao as a base for their fight against the south. The caves were used to house leaders and fighters of the Pathet Lao army. We will take as much time as we need to discover this unique area then head back to Sam Neua for the evening.

**Accommodation: Xayphasouk Guesthouse**

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## DAY 11 Sam Neua to Mai Chau

We depart early this morning in order to reach the town of Mai Chau in Vietnam. The drive is spectacular and remote with steep hill-sides of slash and burn agriculture and limestone cast mountains rising where rice farmers cultivate their crop. Few foreigners venture along this way. After immigration and border formalities we meet our Vietnamese guide and drive to Mai Chau.

**Accommodation: Mai Chau Lodge Resort**

## DAY 12 Mai Chau

We will take an easy walk around the villages that form Mai Chau. There are small markets, ethnic minority groups and the area was once a French hill station. Today we have the opportunity to relax and reflect on our journey so far in very picturesque surroundings.

**Accommodation: Mai Chau Lodge Resort**

## DAY 13 Mai Chau to Dien Bien Phu

The roads are winding and undulating in the far north-west of Vietnam – our destination today is Dien Bien Phu. This once small town became the centre of world attention in 1954 when the French garrisoned their forces in an attempt to block the supply lines of the Viet Minh revolutionary army. The Vietnamese encircled the French, taking the high ground and laying siege until the French finally capitulated bringing an end to the first Indochina war. This afternoon we will explore the Dien Bien Phu area.

**Accommodation: Muong Thanh Hotel**

## DAY 14 Dien Bien Phu

We visit the Dien Bien Phu Museum, the notorious hill A-1 battlefield, the former French command post and a captured tank. Very few foreigners make the journey to this remote outpost which arguably is where one of the most significant events in Vietnam history took place.

**Accommodation: Muong Thanh Hotel**

## DAY 15 Lai Chau

We continue to Lai Chau through spectacular scenery of mountains and terrace rice farming offering fine opportunities for photography. We will make plenty of stops along the way to meet the locals including the Hmong and Dzao hill tribes who form part of the 54 ethnic minority groups in Vietnam

**Accommodation: Lai Chau Muong Thanh Hotel**

## DAY 16 Sapa

The road snakes up to Binh Lu, another breathtaking location with a bowl of terraced rice paddies ringed by mountains – an excellent place to view the surrounding countryside. From Binh Lu we drive through 'heaven's gate', the pass between Vietnam's two highest peaks and continue through rolling hills to the former French hill station of Sapa, a busy town nestled on a hilltop with views to mountains all around. Most of the inhabitants are local ethnic minorities who trade with tourists and locals alike.

**Accommodation: Victoria Hotel**

## DAY 17 Hanoi

This morning there will be an optional walk around the rim of the valley to a rattan bridge and the ethnic Ta Van village inhabited by Dzay people. The walk is comfortable along well-established tracks, with spectacular views all around. Later this afternoon we drive to Hanoi.

**Accommodation: Sofitel Legend Metropole**

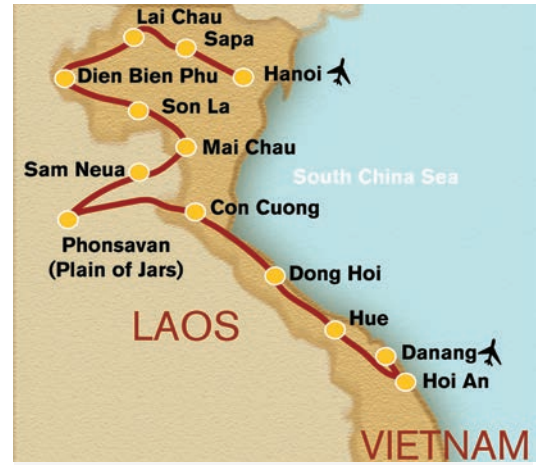
## DAY 18 Hanoi

We will start the morning with a walk through the old quarter of Hanoi. Here we find 36 streets that became known for the trade that they plied, silk street, chicken street, funeral street etc. Hanoi is a kaleidoscope of sights and sounds that challenges the senses. We will complete our sightseeing with a visit to Ho Chi Minh`s mausoleum located in Ba Dinh square, it was here on September 2 1945 that Vietnam first proclaimed its independence.

**Accommodation: Sofitel Legend Metropole**

## DAY 19 Departure

We will be met and transferred to the airport. Farewell to the Ho Chi Minh Trail



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