



Free & Easy Traveler - Travel Prep Guide

20 Days in Vietnam: A Cultural Paradise

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The Basics

Duration: 20 Days

Start: Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Finish: Hanoi, Vietnam

Adventure Type: Backpackers (age 18 to 27)

Trip Size: 15 – 22 (+2 group leaders)



Epic Experiences

Included in the Price

- Ride a motorbike on the Vietnamese coast
- Experience a Southeast Asia night train
- 2-day Halong Bay tour
- Party on a Junk Ship in Halong Bay
- Walk through the Cu Chi Tunnels
- Swim in the beautiful Elephant Springs pools
- 3-day Jungle Beach Paradise trip
- Laughing Yoga Experience
- Historical walking tour of Saigon
- Paradise Cave trek
- Cu Chi Tunnels tour
- FNEZ sponsored beach cleanup

Optional Activities

- Get any outfit you can imagine tailor-made
- Go Scuba Diving
- Street side Bia Hoi
- Cooking class
- Snorkel trip
- Bicycle cruise to the beach

Trip Details

What's included?

- Authentic Vietnamese style Welcome Dinner
- Laughing Yoga session
- Walking tour of Hanoi
- All taxes (GST, PST, Airport tax)
- Return international flights (in HCMC/Out Hanoi) and airport transit
- Accommodations for your 20-day Free & Easy experience
- Group travel between destinations
- 2 knowledgeable and fun Free & Easy leaders
- Free and Easy Travel Guidebook
- 15 years of trip leading experience

***Land Only prices do not include your international flight, airport taxes or transfers

What isn't included?

- All meals and drinks (except those mentioned above)
- Activities outside of the ones listed above
- Any Visa or Visa fees

Travel Budget (Canadian \$)

Vietnam is a very cheap place to travel, which is just one of many reasons that makes it so much fun! Your personal spending on the trip will include your food, drinks, shopping, entertainment and any activities outside of those included your FNEZ adventure.

For the entirety of our 20 Day Vietnam Trip -- "A Cultural Paradise", we would recommend a budget of \$700 - \$1200. Any travel budget will fluctuate between personalities, so ask yourself: "What type of traveller are you?"

The Hippie

Brings about \$700-\$850 for the 20 days. Eats local food, bargains well at the market, finds good prices on drinks and picks, and chooses their optional activities wisely! Often likely to continue travelling after their FNEZ trip is complete.

The Backpacker

\$850-\$1000 spending money. A bit more frivolous, but is aware of their budget. Takes in most activities they are interested in, without going too extravagant. Likes to party, but always looking for a good deal.

The Rock Star

Not too worried about their budget, the rock star might spend \$1000 - \$1300 on this trip. They'll do almost everything, including lavish amounts of shopping and tailor-made clothes in Hoi An and partying often. There won't be too much holding them back from activities, as this is their trip and don't want to let anything pass them by.

To help you work out your budget, here are some examples to give you an idea what you will be spending in Vietnam.

Food and Drink

Bowl of Pho: \$1.50 - \$2

Western Meal: \$4-\$6

Two-Liter pitcher of Draft Beer: 60¢ – \$1

3 Course Vietnamese Dinner: \$8-\$12

Iced Coffee: \$0.50

Bottle of Water (1.5L): \$0.80

Cocktail at a Bar: \$2-\$5

Bottle of Beer at Market: \$0.75

Entertainment & Activities

All Day Snorkel Trip w/ lunch: \$40

Full Day Cooking Class: \$25

Fun Dive (Already Certified): \$82

Discover Scuba-Diving (1 Dive): \$70
Discover Scuba-Diving (2 Dives): \$94

Shopping & Miscellaneous

Tailor-made dress: \$15 - \$20
Tailor-made Jacket: \$25-\$35
Tailor-made Suit, w/ shirt and tie: \$90-\$130
T-shirts: \$3 - \$5
1 Hour Thai Massage: \$8

Trip Leaders

Every Free & Easy trip is accompanied by at least two leaders. We like to call them “Leaders” and not “Guides” because they are essentially your well traveled, experienced friends! We hire local guides whenever knowledge of culture, history or safety are necessary (ie; temple tours or jungle treks). Our Leaders main goals are to ensure everyone on the trip is having the best time possible. Our leaders will arrange the group transportation between destinations, sort out rooms at the accommodations, plan any group meals or activities and assist in any additional activities that anyone may wish to take part in, and ultimately show you the best that each destination has to offer. They know the trip locations well, and have great relationships with all our contacts in each destination. Not to mention they are all extremely fun and easy going people who continue to showcase the essence of what makes us Free & Easy!

Flying to Vietnam

Upon registration you can chose between booking your own flights or requesting Free & Easy to book flights for you.

If you book flights with Free & Easy

- A flight itinerary will be emailed to you approximately 2 – 3 months before your trip’s departure. (Assuming you have paid enough money on your account)
- One or both of your leaders will be at the airport in Ho Chi Minh City (SGN) to pick you up and arrange transport back to the guesthouse.
- Transportation will be arranged for you to get from the guesthouse at the end of the trip in Hanoi to get to the airport to catch your flight.
- You can also ask for any custom flights, and our flight team will give you a price quote for booking this for you.

If you don’t book flights with Free & Easy

- You will contacted with information on meeting up with your group for the start of the trip in Ho Chi Minh City.

Meals

The ability to experience local food, whether it's from a street vendor, a home stay, or a restaurant, is a huge part of travelling. You'll be able to ask your guides for great options to check out at every destination we go, but for the most part, the journey finding the food, tends to be just as good as the food itself! There will be times that meals will be provided for you, if you have any allergies or food preferences, i.e. vegetarian, please let your guides know!

Allergies!

If you have any allergies, especially food allergies, it is good to be prepared before coming to Vietnam. Peanuts is the most common one and it is used a lot in Vietnamese cooking. When you try to make special requests when ordering at a restaurant it doesn't always go as planned. Best thing to do is check out Killer Peanut, where you can choose from a variety of food allergies and get it translated into Vietnamese. Simply print out the translation and then show it to the server when ordering food. This will make your life way easier when you arrive in Vietnam!

Types of Transportation on this trip

- Night Trains: Five night trains will be taken on this trip. We cover pretty much the entire coast of Vietnam, so the most efficient way to do this is while sleeping at night, while we make our way to our next destination. This maximizes the amount of time we get in each destination instead of wasting a day on a bus! The trains are comfortable and A/C and bunk bed style. They are perfect for kicking back and chatting and have a few drinks with friends.
- Motorcycles: Perhaps the greatest travel day you will ever have! We ride along the beautiful coastline and through the Hai Van Mountain Pass. which is a beautiful stretch of coastline. Everyone will be provided with a local, experienced driver, and group members will ride on the back while relaxing, and taking in the breath taking views. (If you aren't comfortable with riding on the bike, then other transportation can be arranged)
- Buses: We rent private, A/C buses to accommodate our group transport needs.
- Taxis: On occasion we will take 4 or 5 person taxis to or from the train station.

Accommodations

We have a wide range of accommodations on this trip from beautiful, but slightly rustic, beach bungalows to hotel style rooms with A/C. We have chosen each of our accommodations based on quality, location, and relationships with the establishments. Plus there is so much to do on this trip you won't be spending much time in your room anyway!

All our accommodation is based on at least two-person occupancy. You can arrange to have a specific rooming partner. If you wish you have your own room you can pay an additional fee in order to do so. Please contact travel@fnez.com before your trip begins if you are interested.

Solo Travelers

Lots of solo travelers come on our trips and it's a great way to step outside your comfort zone and make lots of new friends. Since all our accommodation is based on at least two-person occupancy you will be rooming with other members of the same sex in your group.

Packing Suggestions

For a trip to a tropical country, you really don't need any heavy clothing, a sleeping bag, or food/cooking supplies. A light sweater is a good idea for Halong Bay, when we are in the far North. Also, keep in mind that the shopping is cheap in Vietnam, so you may want to only pack half of your backpack, leaving room to buy new stuff once you arrive. Most people end up regretting how much they packed when they realize how easily they could have bought new clothes once they arrived. You can even get any clothes you could ever imagine tailor made in Vietnam, even exact copies of an article you bring from home.

It is good to properly prepare supplies for the trip, but don't stress out too much about having everything you think you might need because chances are that you will be able to find whatever it is during your trip. Good quality shoes and/or sports sandals are an exception to that as they are only really available in larger cities. There are also many pharmacies that have medications and first-aid supplies.

In general, you want to avoid packing things that you really don't need to have. There are definitely certain luxuries that are good to have, but you don't want to lug something around for 6 weeks unless you are going to use it. Also, consider that the weight of your bag will likely be INCREASING throughout the trip, and having a lighter backpack simplifies life immensely. Honestly, look at what you have and cut it in half and you're probably good to go. You're gonna buy lots of new stuff (especially in SE Asia).

Here's some ideas for what you might want to pack:

Travel Essentials

- Passport (digital and hard copies)
- Travel insurance (digital and hard copies)
- Airline tickets (digital and hard copies)
- Credit or debit card
- Any entry visas, additional passport photos or vaccination certificates required
- Cover for backpack/ziplock bags for travel essentials

Electronics/Entertainment

- Alarm clock
- Headlamp
- iPods, tablets

- Books, eReaders
- Camera (bring a few memory cards)
- Speakers
- All chargers

Clothing

- Swim wear
- Walking shoes/sport sandals
- Shorts
- Temple attire (something to cover your knees and your shoulders)
- Shirts/T-shirts
- Rain jacket for May-August
- Underwear
- Sarong (travel towel)
- A fun costume in case we throw down for a cool theme party!

First-aid kit

- All items can be purchased in Vietnam

Toiletries

- Deodorant is not nearly as good and often contains whitening agents. Bring some from home.
- Girls bring feminine hygiene products as they can be hard to find.

Laundry

Laundry facilities are offered by some of the places we stay. Ask your leaders to point out the best places to get laundry done. There will be times when there are no laundry facilities, however your guides will tell you this in advance.

Travel Essentials

There is nothing more important than your health and safety so make sure you read this carefully!

Passports

Everyone **MUST** have a passport for international travel. If you already have a passport, double check to make sure that it is still valid for at least 6 months from the return date of your trip. If it is not valid for a full 6 months from the day you plan on returning to your passport's issuing country, you'll have to apply for a new passport before you leave.

The application process for getting a passport may seem simple, but for most people it ends up taking longer than it first appears. Sometimes it can take a few weeks to complete the entire process, so we definitely recommend not leaving it to the last minute.

Insurance

Everyone **MUST** have Travel Medical Insurance of some kind and bring proof with you for this trip. You might not need to purchase a medical insurance policy though because you may already be covered through some other way:

- Your parent's work health plan.
- With a credit card.
- Through a student or work health plan.
- Through private insurance.

While you are away traveling with us, if you decide to extend your plane ticket, you will also have to purchase an extension to your insurance policy. It is your own responsibility to be making any extension to your insurance so you cannot expect this will automatically happen when you extend your plane ticket.

If you need to extend your TIC insurance please call 1-800-670-4426

PLEASE NOTE: At this time we can only provide Travel Medical Insurance for Canadian citizens.

Immunizations

There are no immunizations that are 'required' for entry into Vietnam. For your own safety, there are some shots that are always recommended for travel to tropical countries.

- Hepatitis A.
- Hepatitis B.
- Typhoid.
- Tetanus.
- Diphtheria.

We also want to warn you that sometimes travel clinics are over cautious to the extreme and try to sell you everything under the sun. If you want a second opinion about something, do some more research online or contact us. Often they will say that you should take malaria pills. We suggest you try to learn more about the exact locations of any malaria danger before you commit to taking the pills. We can say truthfully, that currently none of the Free & Easy staff or owners take malaria medication when we are on any of our adventures. The feeling amongst many people is that the side effects of the pills are not worth the minimal risk in the regions we travel to. Rather than subject ourselves to the medications we choose to be cautious with mosquito repellent

whenever they are present. However, as we are not medical professionals, we urge you to do your own research and make your own informed decision.

Banking & Money

The easiest way of getting and carrying your money is to simply use the bank machines in the country you are travelling. You can use your regular bank card, using your regular pin number, and the money will come out in the local currency (You need to make sure that you have “cirrus” or “plus” written on the back of your card). At nearly every destination on our trips, (except Jungle Beach) you’ll have easy access to a bank machine. This also means you won’t have to get local currency before you leave. Once you arrive, you can just use a bank machine right there at the airport.

Every time you need to make a transaction your account will be charged approx. \$5 fee from your bank and then a possible fee from the local bank. It can get a bit pricey if you’re making withdrawals every few days—so it makes more sense to take out a large sum and then just watch your spending! Although theft does happen sometimes we have found that it is quite rare. So we, ourselves, practice this method.

Be aware that if you are pulling money out on your credit card that this counts as a “cash advance” and you will immediately be charged interest on this amount and not have a grace period or get reward points like you typically would with other credit card purchases. Additionally, you will still be charged those \$5 fees from your bank and the local bank. With this in mind the best option is always to pull out money using your debit card instead of your credit card.

Another suggestion we would like to reinforce is that we highly recommend that you have online banking during the trip. It allows you to check your balances, transfer money, and monitor your transactions from any internet café. In case of any issue with your bank card, online banking always simplifies a situation since you can easily transfer money to another traveler in your group who could then pull out money for you.

Another little helpful hint is signing over power of attorney to someone you trust (i.e., a parent). This means that they can have access to your accounts while you are away. This can help if you lose your bankcard, or there is a problem with it while overseas. It is also useful if you need someone to pay your bills, or make money transfers while you are away.

Vietnam Travel Visas

Vietnam is different from many other Southeast Asian countries, in that you have to APPLY FOR YOUR VISA IN ADVANCE. Here’s how to do so:

- You can apply online up to 6 months in advance of your arrival date [here](#).
- Your purpose of visit is 'vacation', and all you need for this trip is a 1 month single entry.

- You will need a credit card to pay the online application fee of \$19.99 USD.
- You will need to have your flights in and out of Vietnam booked before applying for your visa. Have your flight itineraries, so you know your entry and exit dates and your Port of Arrival is Ho Chi Minh City.
- After applying, you will receive an email from MyVietnamVisa in a few days with you "Visa Approval Letter".
- You must PRINT the "Visa Approval Letter", bring them with you. You will not be allowed to board your flight to Vietnam without this letter!
- In addition, make sure you have, 2 passport photos, and \$45 USD cash (exact change) on hand upon arrival in Vietnam. Hand over your forms, photos, and cash to the visa officers at the airport and your in!

Additional Info for Application

On the application form there are a few questions that require additional information. Please use the following information to complete your Vietnamese Visa application:

Reference/Contact Person in Vietnam

- As a traveler backpacking in Vietnam, you do not need to put a Vietnam contact person on your visa entry, you can leave this section blank.

Address in Vietnam

Duc Vuong Hotel,
195 Bui Vien St.,
Dist 1, HCMC,
Vietnam

[Communication + Payment](#)

Questions

Phone: 1-800-403-5208

Email: travel@fnez.com

Communication

So you have signed up for a Free & Easy adventure and we hope to help make this the easiest travel experience of your life. We want to help you out with anything you need help with. However, there are always things that you will need to take care of yourself and we will make it as easy as possible to explain these things. So we need to have a bit of cooperation from your part and it start with actually **READING** our emails :). Please, make sure you read the emails we send leading up to your trip because we are sending them to make sure that you are as ready as you can possibly be for this travel adventure.

Most of the information we send will be coming through your "Your Trip" account. Please make sure that you have all of the requirements taken care of prior to your trip as well

you can also view your account and balance owing and a place for us to give you your downloads and hear news of the upcoming trip. You should receive an email in your inbox notifying you when we do post something on there. Please notify us if you find that you're not getting the notifications.

Making Payments

Follow this link for a full outline of our payment options.

Check here for the payment schedules for all our trips.

The \$200 deposit reserves your placement on a trip. For all the trips, we have arranged the payment dates to allow you the maximum time to pay for your trip. If you would prefer to pay for the entire trip all at one time, that is no problem. You can also make larger payments earlier whenever it is convenient for you. The payment dates that we have listed are just guidelines that state the last possible date by which payments should be made.

We would greatly appreciate that all payments be made on time. Meeting this simple request makes our job much easier because it allows us to always be looking forward and preparing for the trips, rather than figuring out who and where we need to collect money from. If you expect that a payment will be late, please email us to explain when we can expect the payment. Payment schedules for each of the trips can be reached by clicking the link above.

PLEASE NOTE: All additional costs (for flights, insurance, fees & extras) will be added to your statement of account on the 'your trip' page. Please, ensure that you add any additional charges to your final payment unless we require it sooner.

Cultural

Quick Facts on Vietnam

- According to traditional legends, Vietnam was formed when Kibg Lac Long Quan(also known as the "Dragon Lord of Lac" or the "Dragon Lord of the Seas") married Princess Au Co (a Chinese immortal and descended from the High Mountains). She bore him 100 eggs, out of which 100 sons were born. They soon established a nation that stretched from southern China to northern Indonesia. According to the legend, they were the first Vietnamese.
- The name " Vietnam " means " southern country of Viet's."
- In Vietnam, there is no exact date of the New Year celebration. Every year this date is changed, it is determined by the moon.
- Vietnam has the world's longest cable car. The cable car is in a suburb of the city of Danang.

- In Vietnam, there is an amazing hotel-tree, Hang Nga Guesthouse in Dalat. This building looks like a huge tree. This house was designed by architect named Dang Viet Nga, the daughter of the Vietnamese party leader. Trying to draw people's attention to the environmental issues.
- Vietnam's national costume is called Aozay (Ao Dai). Aozay is a very beautiful outfit. It is a long dress with slits, dressed over pants or skirt. Aozay is still popular today. Vietnamese women believe their national costume is very fashionable and it is their best attire. In Vietnam, Aozay is worth about \$ 40.
- The Halong Bay was declared the heritage of humanity and it is under UNESCO protection.
- Vietnamese beaches are among the most beautiful on the planet, the coast for its beauty, clean water. Something you'll get to witness!
- Vietnam – is the second largest supplier of rice in the world
- The Vietnamese have their national sport – “Takraw”. Resembles volleyball, but you have to play by feet. Championships by Takraw are held annually. Also, takraw is popular in Burma, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand.
- Locals legally are not allowed to play in the casino, but on tourists this prohibition does not apply.
- Only 10% of Vietnamese roads are paved.
- Familiar to everyone and everyone's favorite fruit – mandarin, originally is from Vietnam. It is from this country seedlings were taken all over the planet.
- In Hanoi, there is a unique Water Puppet Theatre – Thang Long . Thang Long is the one such theater in the World.
- Vietnam has the most exotic taxi on the planet. For a fee, an elephant can be your taxi.
- In the ranking of the regions and countries with the best cuisine, Vietnam took the 3rd place in the world in 2008. Vietnamese cuisine is very diverse – there are about 500 different traditional dishes. These dishes include exotic meats and delicious vegetarian products. But the foundation of Vietnamese cuisine is plain white rice, richly flavoured with vegetables, fish, meat, spices and sauce. Biscuits, pasta and steamed rice and dumplings are also very popular – as well as all kinds of soups, including eel soup, vermicelli with minced chicken and bitter soup.
- Vietnam was a colony of France. In any shop you will easily find a fresh baguette and a variety of cheese.
- Vietnam is developing very fast. In terms of economic growth, Vietnam is second only to China.
- Vietnam Airlines are among the best in the world. All thanks to the original service. Stewardesses in national dresses (Ao Dai) offer excellent Vietnamese cuisine. And drinks are served every half hour.
- The most popular form of transportation in Vietnam – this is a bike. Over 20 million Viet use it for transportation.

Quick Facts Source here

Ideas for Reading

Buying some sort of guidebook on Vietnam, would also be a good idea because it'll have lots of information on culture, history, and geography. It'll have maps and in-depth information on traveling the country. Books like the Lonely Planet or the Rough Guide are especially good if you are planning to travel on your own after the trip. These books have all sorts of info on how to get around, where to stay, what to do, and how much things cost. There are also other books like National Geographic and the Insider Guide that have lots of pictures and are better for giving a more in-depth background on the country in general. If you don't need the practical travel information, a book like this might be better.

A good place to start is Amazon, Chapters-Indigo or your favourite local book store!

Trip Locations

Day 1-3: Ho Chi Minh City

Day 4-6: Jungle Beach

Day 7-9: Hoi An

Day 10-12: Hue

Day 13-16: Phong Na

Day 17: Hanoi

Day 18: Halong Bay

Day 19-20: Hanoi

PLEASE NOTE: The above itinerary is subject to change. A confirmed Free & Easy trip itinerary with exact routing will be provided at least 30 days prior to trip departure.

Please be advised we are constantly keeping an eye out for warnings and are well informed on the happenings in the places we go. Our ground team is frequently sending us first hand updates, ensuring the destinations we bring our groups to are safe!

Community Forests International (CFI)

Free & Easy Traveler has joined forces with Community Forests International (CFI) to turn the joy of world travel into an act of global conservation. Travel is an extremely important part of our lives, getting to see and experience the world is what keeps us all connected and reminds us that we all live in the same world and deal with the same problems. But traveling around the world comes at a price and we are well aware of the many buses, planes, ships, etc. that we use to travel that harm the environment. Greenhouse gas emissions are driving increasingly dangerous climate change to the point that some of the places we love most are under threat and we don't want to contribute to the continuing destruction. So we decided to take action.

We Travel Carbon-Free

By tracking the flights of our staff members and calculating the resulting greenhouse gasses, we support CFI to go out and protect and manage a forest in Canada to pull those gasses back out. These emissions become securely stored at CFI's Whaelghinbran Farm. Read more about how CFI offsets our carbon here.

One Traveler, One Tree

But we didn't stop there. Much of the work that CFI does supports community tree planting efforts in Africa and Canada. This work is having incredible results, and we wanted to strengthen their efforts so we decided that for each traveler that comes on a trip with us, we'll provide CFI with the support to plant a tree to help offset that traveler's carbon emissions.

These trees are being used as tools of environmental and social restoration. In Canada, some of these trees were planted along a degraded watercourse and will go on to provide habitat for salmon, trout, hawks and king fisher, just to name a few. In Africa, where CFI was born, these trees were planted as a part of ongoing restoration of degraded lands on the island of Pemba, Tanzania. These trees rebuild the soil that was too poor to grow crops, allowing for trees like mangoes and cassava to thrive and produce food.

We look forward to continuing our relationship with CFI and, along with your help, making the world a greener place to live and travel in! If you want to offset your travel emissions with CFI, or want to support tree planting around the world, find out how here.