**Classic Images of Vietnam Today 13D12N**

**Overview:** This 13 day tour takes you from the elegance and excitement of Hanoi to the mountainous North with the Ethnic minority groups and spectacular scenery. You will see rock formations unlike anything else in the world in Ha Long Bay and the unique ‘Ha Long Bay on land’ area of Ninh Binh. Moving south to the Central Region, you will visit the ancient capital of Hue, the blossoming town of Da Nang and the awe-inspiring preserved town of Hoi An. Moving further south, we arrive at the modern, lively city of Ho Chi Minh. As well as showing us many jewels itself, this is also a starting point for the amazing Mekong Delta area of rivers and river life.

If you want a north to south look into the life and times of this amazing country, this is the trip for you. It shows you a range of countryside, the main ‘not to be missed’ tourist hotspots while introducing you to the culture, history and current way of life of the Vietnamese people.

**The HGH Difference**

* Explore the Hanoi Old Quarter and its historic atmosphere
* Meet the ethnic minority groups with their colorful custumes and authentic culture
* World Heritages listed Halong Bay, Hue, Hoi An;
* Enjoy a vegetarian lunch at one pagoda in Hue City and take the chance to chat with the nuns to learn more about Buddhism and gain insight into their daily lives and their calligraphy art.
* Visit fascinating floating markets in Mekong Delta

**Brief Itinerary:**

Day 1: Ha Noi – Arrival

Day 2: Ha Noi – Hoa Lu – Ha Noi – Night train to Lao Cai

Day 3: Sapa

Day 4: Sapa – Lao Cai – Night train back to Ha Noi

Day 5: Ha Noi – Ha Long

Day 6: Ha Long – Ha Noi

Day 7: Ha Noi – Hue

Day 8: Hue

Day 9: Hue – Da Nang – Hoi An

Day 10: Hoi An

Day 11: Hoi An – Da Nang – Ho Chi Minh City

Day 12: Ho Chi Minh City – Vinh Long – Ho Chi Minh City

Day 13: Ho Chi Minh City – Departure

**Detailed Itinerary:**

**Day 1: Ha Noi**

On your arrival at the Noi Bai International Airport, you will be welcomed by our guide and driver who will bring you to Hanoi City. Hanoi is over 1000 years old and is currently the capital of Vietnam as well the commercial, political, and cultural heart of the country.

A city tour of Hanoi starts with a visit to the **One-Pillar Pagoda**. We will then take a drive to visit the **Temple of Literature**. The templewas built in October 1073 to worship Confucius and is considered to be the first university in Vietnam. We will then drive to **Hoan Kiem Lake** where you will see Ngoc Son Temple which worships Van Xuong saint and Tran Hung Dao, a former general commander. Hanoi is one of the few places found in this part of the world that has such elegance. Walk down the tree lined boulevards where we see many French influences such as Hanoi Opera House, the State Bank, the former Governor's palace, and the Hanoi Cathedral (Saint Joseph’s built in the late 19th century).

Later in the afternoon, you will get a chance to enjoy a **1-hour cyclo ride around the 36 streets in the Old Quarter of Hanoi** followed by a welcome dinner at one of the many local restaurants. After that, you are free to explore on your own or take it easy and relax in your hotel room. You will spend the night in Hanoi.

**Day 2: Ha Noi – Hoa Lu – Ha Noi – Night train to Lao Cai**

Today you will experience the ancient culture and history of Vietnam as well seeing the stunning landscape and beautiful scenery when we travel to the Ninh Binh Province. This area is known as “Ha Long Bay on land” and is located 80 km South of Hanoi.

We will go for a relaxing sampan ride through the gentle and elegant landscape of plains and mountains leading to the beautiful and mysterious Tam Coc Grottoes followed by a gentle cycle ride (4km) and boat ride to Bich Dong Cave and Pagoda. This journey takes you through breath taking scenery of rice fields and imposing mountains. We then move on to the Thai Vy Temple where we will have lunch. Being built in the 13th century, the Thai Vy Temple offers magnificent insight and depth into the ancient Vietnamese culture. Once departing the Thai Vy Temple, we then head off to Hoa Lu, formally the capital of the Dinh and early Le dynasties between the 10th and 11th centuries.

We will then head back to Ha Noi where, later in the evening, we will enjoy dinner at one of the local restaurants before going to see the unique and intriguing **Water Puppet Show**,a traditional folk performance held on the Red River Delta. At the end of the day, we take the overnight express train from Hanoi to Lao Cai – Sapa. There is a soft bed onboard the train for you to get some sleep.

**Day 3: Sapa**

You will be met at Lao Cai railway station, and taken to a local restaurant for breakfast. You will then be driven the 35kms to the former French Hill Station of Sapa. Sapa sits snugly into the mountain side at 1.560 meters. The drive offers beautiful panoramic scenery of mountains and valleys that are typical of the region. You will take a short trip into Cat Cat Valley where you will meet some of the local H’mong people. Cat Cat is an agricultural community that was founded in the 19th century and preserves its old architectural monuments such as Pomu timber plank – roofed triple – room houses. You will visit Ham Rong (Dragon Raw) to see a fantastic view of the town and rice paddy fields on terraces that are carved out of the mountainside. Moving on, you will visit one of the most beautiful waterfalls in Sapa, the Silver Waterfall. Finally, you will head back to the hotel in Sapa where you will then be able to relax in your hotel room for the night.

**Day 4: Sapa – Lao Cai – Night train back to Ha Noi**

Today we will take you on an excursion to a local Ethnic minority market. Depending on the day of the week, we may visit Bac Ha Market (only held on Sunday) or Can Cau Market (only held on Saturday). It is a precious opportunity for you to take photos of the colorful market before heading back to Lao Cao for the night train back to Hanoi.

**Day 5: Ha Noi – Ha Long**

In the morning, we leave Hanoi and travel to the astonishing and mystical Ha Long Bay which is described by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site and is one of the most beautiful places in the region. Located in the Gulf of Tonkin, it is an spectacular collection of 2,000 islands covering an area in excess of 1,500km. This forms a spectacular seascape of limestone pillars and cliff faces.

Our crew will welcome you on board with drinks and a fresh seafood lunch. You will check into your cabins and start cruising around the bay to see the amazing rock formations (karsts). You will cruise towards Bai Tu Long Bay, passing the towns of Hon Gai and Cam Pha, Oan Lagoon, Mat Quy (Monster Head) and Am Tich (Teapot) Islets and Vung Vieng fishing village.

We will explore the mystery of Sung Sot Cave which is one of the most beautiful caves in Ha Long Bay. Later on, you will have plenty of time for swimming and kayaking to the Tunnel Cave. During the evening, relax to the casual and comfortable atmosphere held on the luxury boat where you will have an elegant dining experience. If we are in the right season, we can see fresh squid being caught the traditional way.

Get your cameras ready for a spectacular sunset, lounge under the clear, star filled sky and retire to your cabin at your leisure where you will spend the night on the luxury boat near a remote island.

**Day 6: Ha Long – Ha Noi**

After breakfast, we will continue to cruise through the karsts some of which display fantastic and mystical shapes before getting into a small boat to visit the Luon Cave. Back on board for an early lunch before saying goodbye to our boat and crew and heading back on the road to Hanoi stopping off at the Bat Trang ceramics and pottery village. The village sells all kinds of ceramics, embroidery and marble statues. Dinner will be served at the “Rung” Restaurant. You will stay the rest of the night in Ha Noi.

**Day 7: Ha Noi ✈ Hue**

After breakfast, you will be transferred to Noi Bai Airport to catch the flight to Hue City in the central region of Vietnam. During the Nguyen Dynasty (1802 – 1945), Hue was the political, economic and cultural capital of Vietnam.

Our tour of Hue starts at the beautiful **Imperial Citadel**, a World Cultural Heritage Site by UNESCO since 1993. Here we will see the Imperial City and Forbidden City, the home of previous Emperors. Enjoy the various palaces, ornate halls, libraries, residences, colleges, Flag Tower and Noon Gate. After the Citadel, we go to the Truong Tien Bridge and traditional Dong Ba Market which is rarely seen anywhere in the world. The Dong Ba Market is a typical market of centuries ago where vendors sprawl their goods out for you where you can walk and select the items you want. Dinner will be served at Y Thao Garden Restaurant. You will stay the rest of the night in Hue.

**Day 8: Hue**

We spend the entire day exploring ancient Hue and finding its beauties and marvels. We first start off by taking a boat trip down the romantic Perfume River to the **Thien Mu Pagoda**,one of the oldest and most beautiful pagodas in Hue. After that we move on to see the **Minh Mang Tomb** who was emperor of Vietnam from 1820 to 1841. Enjoy a vegetarian lunch and take the chance to chat with the nuns to learn more about Buddhism and gain insight into their daily lives and their calligraphy art.

In the afternoon, we will start our journey by heading to the outskirts of Hue to explore the **Tu Duc Tomb.** On the way back to Hue, you will get to see a traditional village where they make conical hats and incense.Enjoy dinner and relax to traditional folk music on the mystic dragon boats down the beautiful Perfume River. You will spend the night in Hue.

**Day 9: Hue – Da Nang – Hoi An**

Out of ancient Hue and into a more modern setting of Da Nang then onto the exotic Hoi An. You will depart from Hue and travel to the rapidly growing city of Da Nang. Along the way, you will have the opportunity to stop en route to take pictures at the summit of **Lang Co Beach**, **Hai Van Pass** and visit the **Cham Museum** located in Danang City. The museum offers the most extensive collection of Cham art sculptures throughout the world. The sculptures date from the 7th to the 15th century.

Finally, you will head to Hoi An, another UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site. Dinner will be served at Sakura Restaurant, a beautiful Japanese – Vietnamese restaurant on the banks of the Thu Bon River. You will spend the night in Hoi An.

**Day 10: Hoi An**

Today we enjoy a walking tour through the narrow and ancient streets of this charming town. 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, cuisine, religions and architecture. In 1999, the town was declared an UNESCO World Heritage Site listed for having the most unique architecture in Southeast Asia. It has been restored and protected by both the UNESCO funding and proud locals ever since. Lunch will be served at the Cargo Restaurant.

The rest of the afternoon is free to enjoy at your leisure. (Optional: Visit My Son sanctuary which was the site of religious ceremonies of kings of the Champa dynasty, and was also a burial place of Champa royals and national heroes. Though the complex has been destroyed over time, we still see many majestic ancient ruins of temples in the area). You will spend the night in Hoi An.

**Day 11: Hoi An – Da Nang ✈ Ho Chi Minh City**

In the morning, you will be able to walk around Hoi An and take in the beauty of this magnificent town. You are free to go shopping and eat lunch at any of the wonderful restaurants. In the afternoon, we leave Central Vietnam and head for the more fast-paced modernized city of Ho Chi Minh City, formally known as “Saigon”. We drive back to Da Nang to catch the flight to Ho Chi Minh where you will be picked up and brought to check into your hotel.

The HCM tour starts with a visit to the imposing **Dong Khoi Street** (formerly Rue Catinat). Next we will go to the **Notre Dame Cathedral,** the most famous landmark in Vietnam as the twin bell towers can be seen from a long distance. In the same square is the famous **Saigon Post Office,** the largest functioning post office in Vietnam. What makes this Post Office so extraordinary is that it was designed and built by Gustave Eiffel who also designed and built the Eiffel Tower and Statue of Liberty. It is a building not to be missed.

After some history and culture, we will take you to do some shopping at the **Ben Thanh Market**.The rest of the night is yours to venture out on your own or take it easy and relax in your hotel room.

**Day 12: HCM City – Vinh Long – HCM City**

We leave Ho Chi Minh City for a beautiful scenic drive through the Mekong River Delta, home to the richest agricultural lands in Vietnam. Enjoy a boat trip to an island that houses orchard gardens and the beautiful **Cai Be floating market**,a famous place in the Mekong Delta. The Cai Be floating market is a magnificent site to see as hundreds of small merchant boats anchor alongside the banks of the river trading their commodities. We continue with our cruise through the maze of canals that crisscross around An Binh island.

Lunch is served at Mr. Muoi Huong old house. We can enjoy the delicious fresh tropical fruits of the Delta as we continue to cruise through islands and cross the Mekong River to Vinh Long (2km). On our way back to Ho Chi Minh City, we will visit the bonsai garden. Enjoy dinner with delicious dishes and elegant music. You will spend the night in Ho Chi Minh City.

**Day 13: HCM City – Departure**

After breakfast, there is a half day tour around the city and a visit to the **Thien Hau Temple**. Thien Hau is a 16th century Chinese temple in Cholon, which is dedicated to Thien Hau or the goddess of the sea who is said to protect fishermen and sailors. A trip to the **War Remnants Museum** will introduce some culture but some history as you experience this tribute to the Vietnam War. Lunch will be served at Chateau 1 Restaurant. In the early evening, it is time to go to the airport to catch the flight home.