

The best MARCO POLO Insider Tips

Our top 15 Insider Tips

INSIDER TIP ▶ Perspectives in black and white

Long Thanh is one of Vietnam's best photographers. You can buy prints of his remarkable work in his *gallery in Nha Trang* → p. 31

INSIDER TIP ▶ Accommodation Vietnam-ese-style

One little gem is the traditional-style *Viethouse Lodge*. Panoramic view of Ha Long included → p. 38

INSIDER TIP ▶ Coffee history

The collection of the *Trung Nguyen Coffee Museum* in Buon Ma Thuot reflects the culture of coffee around the world. Fresh coffee is also on offer → p. 56

INSIDER TIP ▶ Smart eaterie

This stylish mini-boutique hotel is a peaceful refuge in the at times chaotic Old Quarter of Hanoi. *Green Mango* also serves exquisite Asian nouvelle cuisine – classic Vietnamese fare with some surprising culinary fusions → p. 47

INSIDER TIP ▶ Shopping spree

Need a buddha for the terrace at home? *The Nguyen Frères shop* in Saigon is the perfect place to browse – it's tourist souvenir heaven. Everything from old furniture, objets d'art, jewellery and ceramics to pure kitsch → p. 97

INSIDER TIP ▶ Eat like an emperor

Truc Lam Vien, a delightful garden restaurant in Da Nang, serves a wide range of tasty dishes → p. 62

INSIDER TIP ▶ Painted with sand

So lovely! Artists in Nha Trang, Phan Thiet or Saigon use natural sand in different colours to create decorative *sand art* with motifs ranging from Santa Claus to the pope → p. 30

INSIDER TIP ▶ Limestone giants

The *Ha Long Bay* (photo right) and the *Lan Ha Bay* near Cat Ba have become a climbers' paradise in Vietnam → p. 117

INSIDER TIP ▶ Sleep in style

A new chain has brought modern, stylish and friendly hostel accommodation to Saigon. Backpackers are spoilt with well-designed rooms and lots of fresh fruit, for example at *Town House 50* → p. 87

INSIDER TIP ▶ Explore the underworld

Amazing dripstone formations in *Phong Nha Cave* in central Vietnam → p. 114

INSIDER TIP ▶ Cooking and boat tour

Combine exquisite Vietnamese dishes with an atmospheric cookery course cruise along the Thu Bon river to the *Red Bridge Restaurant* in Hoi An. You also get to see the fishermen at work → p. 67

INSIDER TIP ▶ Jungle tour

Visit *Bach Ma National Park* near Hue for breathtaking views over central Vietnam's mountains and at "ground floor" level a wide range of fauna in the rain forest (photo left) → p. 74

INSIDER TIP ▶ Enlightenment

There's lots to see and do in Hoi An during the day. But every month on the 14th day of the lunar calendar, there's the *Hoi An Legendary Night*, when the narrow lanes are illuminated by the glow of Chinese lanterns, candles and fairy lights → p. 64

INSIDER TIP ▶ Honeymoon dream & desert island

Lonely, secluded, idyllic – a beach resort in luxurious rustic style. The villas of the *Six Senses Ninh Van Bay* are situated on a jungle peninsula near Nha Trang → p. 84

INSIDER TIP ▶ Classic cuisine with charm

In an old villa from the architect Tran Binh in Saigon, you can enjoy fabulous traditional food. The finest Vietnamese home-style dishes are served at *Cuc Gach Quan*: hidden away, intimate and very unique → p. 95



BEST OF...

GREAT PLACES FOR FREE

Discover new places and save money

● *An early-morning work-out with the locals*

Join the early-bird athletes, who meet up every morning between 5am and 7am by *Lake Hoan Kiem* in Hanoi for aerobics, badminton or a jog around the lake. You don't have to be a tai chi expert! (photo) → p. 43

● *Queuing for Ho Chi Minh*

Tourists are invited to show reverence to the country's revered father figure at Hanoi's *Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum*. After queuing up among Vietnamese people from all over the country, you shuffle respectfully past the glass sarcophagus → p. 43

● *Be a guest of the Jade Emperor*

Admission to the incense-shrouded world of the Taoists and their ruler in the Saigon pagoda *Ngoc Hoang* is completely free of charge – for outsiders, it's a confusing array of folk heroes, gods and demons → p. 92

● *Militarily precision – experience the "old" Vietnam*

At 9pm on the dot, and with great military pomp, the Vietnamese flag is lowered on *Ba Dinh Square* in Hanoi. In today's turbo-capitalism it's a nostalgic trip down memory lane, providing a glimpse of the "old" Vietnam with its parade ground discipline without a museum ticket → p. 43

● *High above Saigon*

Instead of paying for admission to the viewing platform on the 49th floor of the *Bitexco Financial Tower* in Saigon, take the lift from the shopping centre to the café on the 50th floor, enjoy a cappuccino and then go down a flight of stairs → p. 91

● *The multi-colour world of the Cao Dai sect*

Admission to the main Cao Dai temple in Tay Ninh is not free. But you can visit the *Cao Dai temple* in Da Nang free of charge and even take part in a service – but you'll have to be as quiet as a mouse → p. 61

●●● Dots in guidebook refer to "Best of..." tips

ONLY IN VIETNAM

Unique experiences

● *In the footsteps of Confucius*

The *Van Mieu Temple of Literature* in Hanoi is the epitome of Confucian architecture. It was built almost 1,000 years ago in honour of the wise master. A very imposing structure and a must for any visitor to Vietnam → p. 43

● *Shake the wok!*

Hoi An without a *cooking course* is like a trip to Vietnam without buying a souvenir straw hat. There is no better place to learn how to prepare spring rolls or a hot pot. For sensory impressions at the market and by the stove, try the *Brother's Café* → p. 77

● *Amphibious action on the Mekong*

Barges full of coconuts and rice, sampans with watchful eyes painted on the bow – the waterways of the Mekong Delta are like a marine motorway with *Cai Rang Floating Market* near Can Tho the service station. The hardest part is knowing where to start → p. 78

● *A cyclo adventure*

A tourist on a three-wheeler *cyclo tour* might justifiably feel a little anxious, as the driver cycles straight into the mêlée at a congested crossroads – but as if by divine intervention a gap miraculously appears in the avalanche of sheet metal → p. 90

● *Dine like an emperor*

Be like the emperors of yesteryear and enjoy a nine-course *Royal Dinner* in the superb *Ancient Hue* restaurant – with lots of different tastes and in classy surroundings → p. 72

● *David versus Goliath*

When you're on your Vietnam trip, don't miss the opportunity to crawl through Saigon's *Cu Chi tunnels*, the underground galleries used by the Viet Cong. After this experience you will understand a little better how a small, but determined David defeated the giant Goliath with its vast stocks of napalm bombs (photo) → p. 100

● *A look into the future*

The Vietnamese like to have their future told. You too can *look into the future*: at one of the hill tribes in Cao Bang or Sa Pa → p. 36



ONLY IN



DISCOVERY TOURS

1

VIETNAM AT A GLANCE



START: ① Saigon

END: ⑫ Hanoi

Distance:

→ approx. 1,900 km/1,180 miles

21 days

Driving time

(without stops)

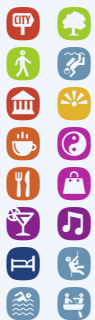
30 hours

COSTS: approx. 45,360,000 dong (approx. 25,204,830 dong for car/driver/petrol plus approx. 20,155,770 dong per person for accommodation, food & drink and admission fees)

WHAT TO PACK: swim gear, hiking boots, raincoat, sun protection

IMPORTANT TIPS: options for car bookings: *Trails of Indochina* (tel. 08 38 44 10 05 | www.trailsofindochina.com); *Handspan* (tel. 04 39 26 28 28 | www.handspan.com); *Exotic Voyages* (tel. 04 39 33 62 60 | www.exoticvoyages.com)

If you do not want to visit the ⑩ **Phong Nha Cave**, you can save time by flying north from Hue and then continuing the route.



Every corner of the earth has its own special charm. If you want to explore all the many different facets of this region, head off the beaten track or get tips for the best stops, breathtaking views, hand-picked restaurants or the best local activities, then these customised discovery tours are just the right thing. Choose the best route for the day and follow in the footsteps of the MARCO POLO authors – well-prepared to navigate your way to all the many highlights that await you along the tour.

This route along the coast from south to north stops at historically significant sites and great places to swim. Take in some of Vietnam's most beautiful areas such as the dry Ha Long Bay with its fairy-tale mountains and experience the adventure of exploring the fascinating Phong Nha Cave.

Breathe in the city air of ① **Saigon** → p. 90 to kick-off this tour. Explore the bustling "Chinatown" **Cho Lon**, go for a "walk" with a cylon and visit the Jade Emperor in his pagoda **Chua Ngoc Hoang**. Coffee and a snack can be had at **Chu Bar** during the day or a glass of wine in the evening.

DAY 1-2

① Saigon

