Northern Thailand & Vietnam Highlands Trek with Halong Bay Cruise – 14 Days

14D / 13N	Moderate	Private	USD 1,919 / pax
Duration	Difficulty	Tour Type	Starting From

Embark on a unique 14-day adventure spanning the cultural heartlands and natural wonders of Northern Thailand and Vietnam. This journey combines immersive trekking through remote hill tribe villages with scenic boat trips through limestone karsts and an overnight Halong Bay cruise. Experience authentic local life, ancient traditions, and breathtaking landscapes far from the usual tourist routes.

DESTINATIONS & ROUTE

Chiang Mai → Hanoi → Ninh Binh → Ha Long

TOUR OVERVIEW

Tour Overview

This meticulously crafted 14-day expedition invites travelers to explore the diverse beauty and rich cultural heritage of Northern Thailand and Vietnam. Beginning in the tranquil mountains of Chiang Mai and Mae Hong Son, the journey delves into remote ethnic communities and stunning natural parks. Transitioning to Vietnam, the adventure continues through the serene rice terraces of Pu Luong Nature Reserve, the ancient capital of Ninh Binh, and culminates with an unforgettable overnight cruise on the iconic Halong Bay. This itinerary is designed for those seeking deep cultural engagement, active exploration, and unparalleled scenic beauty.

Experience Highlights

The trip offers a blend of active exploration and cultural immersion. Highlights include navigating mystical cave systems by bamboo raft, sharing meals with local families in traditional stilt houses, and witnessing age-old weaving techniques. Travelers will trek through verdant landscapes, discover historical landmarks, and unwind on a luxurious cruise through one of the world's most stunning natural wonders. Each day provides a new perspective on the region's diverse ecosystems and vibrant traditions.

Journey Through Two Nations

The route seamlessly connects the mountainous regions of northern Thailand with the dramatic karst landscapes of northern Vietnam. From the bustling markets of Chiang Mai to the tranquil rivers of Mae Hong Son, and then from the historic streets of Hanoi to the peaceful rural beauty of Pu Luong and Ninh Binh, the tour showcases the distinct charm of each destination. The grand finale in Halong Bay offers a serene conclusion to an action-packed itinerary.

Who Will Love This Trip

This tour is ideal for adventurous travelers eager to step off the beaten path and engage directly with local cultures. Those who appreciate nature, enjoy moderate physical activity like trekking and cycling, and seek authentic experiences rather than conventional sightseeing will find this journey particularly rewarding. It’s perfect for individuals or small groups looking for a comprehensive exploration of Southeast Asia's highlands and iconic natural attractions.

Essential Travel Information

The tour includes a mix of hotel and cruise accommodations, with most meals provided as specified in the itinerary. Transportation is primarily by air-conditioned vehicle, with an included international flight from Chiang Mai to Hanoi. Participants should be prepared for varying terrains during treks and should consult visa requirements for both Thailand and Vietnam prior to departure. Flexibility is key for this type of immersive travel experience.

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TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

* Discover remote hill tribe villages and traditional lifestyles in Northern Thailand's Mae Hong Son province.
* Experience a traditional Northern Thai Khantoke dinner with cultural performances in Chiang Mai.
* Float by bamboo raft through the stunning Tham Lod Cave and the scenic Tam Coc grottoes.
* Participate in an authentic cooking class and learn local crafts in a stilt house in Pu Luong.
* Trek through the magnificent terraced rice fields and bamboo forests of Pu Luong Nature Reserve.
* Cycle through the peaceful countryside of Ninh Binh, surrounded by dramatic limestone karsts.
* Explore Hanoi's historic landmarks and vibrant Old Quarter on a unique scooter tour.
* Enjoy an overnight luxury cruise through the spectacular UNESCO World Heritage site of Halong Bay.
* Ascend Ti Top Island for panoramic views of Halong Bay's iconic seascape.

DAY-BY-DAY ITINERARY

Day 1 Chiang Mai Arrival & Khantoke Dinner

Meals: Dinner | Stay: Hotel in Chiang Mai

Upon landing at Chiang Mai International Airport, a local guide will extend a warm welcome and facilitate your transfer to the hotel. Take time to settle into this northern Thai city, known for its relaxed pace and mountainous backdrop. The afternoon offers a chance to unwind or begin a gentle exploration of your surroundings.

As evening approaches, prepare for a memorable Khantoke Dinner. This traditional Northern Thai banquet is served on low tables, with guests seated on floor cushions, offering an authentic Lanna dining experience. Indulge in local delicacies while enjoying captivating performances of traditional music and classical dance, providing a delightful introduction to the region's rich cultural tapestry.

Day 2 Journey to Pai: Hot Springs, History & Sunset Canyon

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch | Stay: Hotel in Pai

This morning, depart from Chiang Mai for a scenic drive north towards the charming mountain town of Pai. The journey includes a stop at Mae Malai Market, a lively local hub where you can observe daily life and sample regional produce. Continue to Pong Deuid Hot Springs, a natural forest reserve offering serene mineral-rich pools for relaxation amidst lush surroundings. The route proceeds to the Pai Memorial Bridge, a historical landmark from World War II, offering a moment to reflect on the area's past. After a local lunch, arrive in Pai, a laid-back town celebrated for its peaceful ambiance and diverse cultural mix, where hill tribes coexist with lowland Thais.

In the late afternoon, weather permitting, visit Pai Canyon (Kong Lan). This dramatic geological formation features narrow red ridges and deep gorges, providing spectacular panoramic views, especially as the sun begins to set. The evening is free to

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explore Pai's vibrant walking street market, known for its handmade crafts, diverse food stalls, and live music.

Day 3 Pai to Mae Hong Son: Lahu Village & Tham Lod Cave

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch | Stay: Hotel in Mae Hong Son

After breakfast, depart Pai for the remote highlands of Ban Jabo, a village inhabited by the Black Lahu people. This community offers a rare glimpse into traditional life, where residents maintain their ethnic garments and play ancestral bamboo instruments, preserving their heritage.

Continue to Tham Lod Cave, an extensive limestone system. Board a bamboo raft to navigate its dark chambers, discovering ancient stalactites, winding passages, and mysterious wooden coffins believed to be thousands of years old. A local lunch will be enjoyed en route before proceeding to Mae Hong Son.

Arrive in Mae Hong Son, a peaceful town situated by the picturesque Jong Kham Lake. Here, visit three significant temples: Wat Chong Kham, dating back to 1827 with its Burmese-style Buddha; Wat Chong Klang, notable for its striking chedi; and the hilltop Wat Phra That Doi Kong Mu, which offers sweeping valley views, particularly beautiful at dusk when mist often blankets the surrounding mountains.

Day 4 Mae Hong Son River Cruise & Highland Culture

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch | Stay: Hotel in Mae Hong Son

Begin your day with a tranquil long-tail boat cruise along the serene Pai River. As the boat glides past lush riverbanks and bamboo groves, observe the quiet rhythm of riverside life, from farmers tending crops to traditional wooden houses perched on stilts. The first stop is a Long-Neck Karen village, where women showcase their cultural identity through traditional brass rings. After exploring the village and learning about their unique customs, enjoy a flavorful Thai lunch at a local restaurant.

The afternoon continues with a visit to Su Tong Pae Bridge, Thailand's longest bamboo footbridge, gracefully spanning rice fields as a symbol of community spirit. From there, journey to Baan Rak Thai, a Chinese Yunnanese village nestled near the Thai-Myanmar border, surrounded by emerald tea plantations and a tranquil lake, offering a blend of cultural heritage and natural beauty.

Next, head to the picturesque Shan village of Baan Ruam Thai, also known as Pang Oung. This area is enveloped by pine forests and cool mountain air, featuring a vast reservoir often called

Day 5 Doi Inthanon National Park & Return to Chiang Mai

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch | Stay: Hotel in Chiang Mai

Depart Mae Hong Son and travel south towards Mae Chaem, entering the stunning Doi Inthanon National Park, home to Thailand’s highest peak. Enjoy a refreshing walk along one of the peaceful nature trails, enveloped by cool mountain air and panoramic vistas.

Continue your exploration with a visit to the Royal Twin Pagodas: Napamaytanidol and Phra Mahathat Napaphon Bhumisiri.

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These elegant structures, honoring the late King Rama IX and Queen Sirikit, are set on a scenic hillside amidst vibrant, beautifully landscaped gardens, offering exceptional photographic opportunities.
Next, stop at a local hill tribe market where ethnic communities like the Hmong or Karen sell homegrown produce, fresh flowers, and handmade goods, providing insight into highland life. Before returning to Chiang Mai, visit Vachiratharn Waterfall, a spectacular cascade plunging into the forest, creating a refreshing mist and a perfect photo spot. The day concludes with your return to Chiang Mai, rich in natural beauty and cultural encounters.

Day 6 Chiang Mai to Hanoi: Flight & Free Evening

Meals: Breakfast | Stay: Hotel in Hanoi

After breakfast, bid farewell to the peaceful charm of Chiang Mai. You will be transferred to the airport for your international flight to Hanoi, the vibrant capital of Vietnam. Upon arrival at Noi Bai International Airport, a local guide will warmly greet you and arrange your transfer to your hotel, typically located in the historic Old Quarter or city center.
The remainder of the day is at your leisure. You might choose to relax at the hotel or begin an independent exploration of Hanoi's iconic tree-lined boulevards, tranquil lakeside cafes, and timeless atmosphere. This evening offers a perfect opportunity to soak in the city's unique blend of French colonial architecture and ancient Vietnamese traditions at your own pace.

Day 7 Hanoi Scooter City Tour & Street Food Experience

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch | Stay: Hotel in Hanoi

Prepare for an exhilarating half-day adventure as you embark on a guided scooter tour, experiencing Hanoi like a true local. The tour begins with a hotel pick-up in the Old Quarter, followed by a brief safety orientation over a traditional Vietnamese egg coffee, a signature Hanoi treat, before hitting the road.
Your ride will take you across the historic Long Bien Bridge, a century-old French colonial structure that symbolizes the city's endurance. Continue past Hoan Kiem Lake, admiring the European elegance of the Hanoi Opera House and the neo-Gothic architecture of St. Joseph's Cathedral in the French Quarter. The journey extends beyond the Old Quarter, passing significant landmarks such as the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum and Hoa Lo Prison, both pivotal to Vietnam's rich history (external viewing only for the Mausoleum on specific days).
After a flavorful Vietnamese lunch at a local eatery, your scooter guide will transport you back to your hotel, concluding this immersive cultural city tour.

Day 8 Hanoi to Pu Luong: Nature Reserve & Stilt House Cooking

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner | Stay: Hotel in Pu Luong

This morning, leave the urban landscape of Hanoi behind as you journey to the tranquil Pu Luong Nature Reserve. This serene region is characterized by its terraced rice fields, lush bamboo forests, and authentic ethnic communities. The scenic drive

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typically takes between 4 to 5 hours, offering captivating glimpses of rural Vietnam through winding mountain roads and picturesque countryside.

Upon arrival in Pu Luong, settle into your accommodation amidst this natural haven. The afternoon is dedicated to a special cultural experience: a Thai cooking class held within a charming ancient stilt house. Under the guidance of local residents, you will learn to prepare traditional dishes, utilizing fresh, local ingredients and time-honored culinary techniques passed down through generations. This hands-on activity provides a deeper connection to the local heritage and flavors.

Day 9 Pu Luong Full Day: Culture, Rafting & Waterwheels

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch | Stay: Hotel in Pu Luong

Begin your day with a morning pickup from your accommodation in Don Village, tailored to your tour preference (trekking, biking, or adventure by car/van). At 09:00, immerse yourself in local heritage at an ancient stilt house, engaging in hands-on cultural activities such as pounding, husking, and milling rice, fabric weaving, and traditional rice wine distillation, offering a rare insight into daily Thai ethnic life.

Around 10:00, take a leisurely walk to the bamboo raft area (with an optional ox-cart ride). Embark on a peaceful bamboo rafting journey along the calm stream, soaking in the fresh mountain air and lush scenery. Next, venture into a hidden, untouched cave, spanning over 20km and filled with surreal stalactites and stalagmites – a true off-the-beaten-path wonder. At 11:30, cool off in the crystal-clear waters of Cham Stream and partake in a unique survival cooking session. Learn ancient cooking methods using local tools and ingredients, then enjoy your hand-prepared meal on a floating bamboo raft for a nature-immersed lunch.

The afternoon continues at 13:15 with a visit to the Giant Waterwheel, a brilliant example of local ingenuity in irrigation. From 13:30 to 14:30, explore Lan Ngoai Weaving Village, a hub of traditional Thai brocade weaving. Witness every stage of handmade fabric production, meet skilled artisans, and even try weaving yourself. Finally, at 15:00, return to your accommodation by car or van, concluding a day rich in cultural and natural exploration.

Day 10 Pu Luong to Ninh Binh: Scenic Transfer & Leisure

Meals: Breakfast | Stay: Hotel in Ninh Binh

Following breakfast, bid farewell to the serene mountains of Pu Luong as you embark on a comfortable journey aboard a luxury Limousine bus to Ninh Binh. This region is often referred to as “Ha Long Bay on land” due to its striking landscape of towering limestone karsts emerging from verdant rice paddies and tranquil rivers.

Enjoy the relaxing drive, allowing the picturesque countryside views to unfold outside your window, showcasing the rural beauty of Vietnam. Upon your arrival in Ninh Binh, you will check into your resort. The remainder of the day is yours to unwind, relax, or begin exploring the immediate surroundings at your leisure, perhaps taking a gentle stroll to soak in the peaceful ambiance.

Day 11 Ninh Binh Exploration: Hoa Lu, Tam Coc & Cycling

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Meals: Breakfast, Lunch | Stay: Hotel in Ninh Binh

This morning, your journey takes you to Hoa Lu Ancient Capital, a historically significant site that once served as Vietnam's political and spiritual center under the Dinh and Early Le dynasties. Nestled among dramatic limestone mountains, this peaceful area features ancient temples and stone relics that narrate the nation's heroic past. Continue to the well-preserved King Dinh Temple, a 17th-century sanctuary renowned for its intricate woodwork and classic Vietnamese architectural style.
After a local lunch, the adventure proceeds to the poetic landscape of Tam Coc. Here, you will board a traditional sampan boat, expertly rowed by local villagers, gliding gently along the Ngo Dong River. The route meanders through lush rice fields and beneath dramatic karst cliffs, leading you to explore the mystical cave system of Hang Ca, Hang Hai, and Hang Ba, where shimmering stalactites create a captivating underground world.
Following the boat trip, enjoy a leisurely bicycle ride through Ninh Binh's picturesque countryside. This offers a wonderful opportunity to soak in the quiet charm of rural villages and the breathtaking natural beauty that surrounds you, providing a peaceful conclusion to your day of exploration.

Day 12 Halong Bay Overnight Cruise & Sung Sot Cave Discovery

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner | Stay: Halong Bay Cruise

Today marks a highlight of your journey as you transfer from Ninh Binh to the legendary Halong Bay, a UNESCO World Heritage site celebrated for its towering limestone karsts and hidden caves. Upon arrival, you will board a well-appointed cruise ship, where you'll be welcomed with a refreshing drink and a safety briefing.
As the boat sets sail, a delicious lunch will be served, allowing you to savor Vietnamese cuisine while passing by impressive rock formations and peaceful fishing villages dotting the emerald waters. In the afternoon, prepare to explore Sung Sot Cave, also known as Surprise Cave, famous for its dramatic stalactites and cavernous chambers. Step inside to discover soaring spaces, shimmering formations, and natural rock sculptures resembling mythical creatures, making it a must-see highlight.
Later, relax on the sundeck or participate in a hands-on cooking demonstration. As evening falls, enjoy a freshly prepared dinner while the sun sets over the bay. The evening is yours to enjoy, whether it's trying night squid fishing, socializing at the bar, or simply unwinding in the tranquility of your cabin. Note that the exact cruise route may vary based on your selected vessel.

Day 13 Halong Bay Sunrise, Ti Top Island & Return to Hanoi

Meals: Breakfast, Brunch | Stay: Hotel in Hanoi

Wake early to witness the serene beauty of Halong Bay at sunrise, as soft golden light illuminates the limestone peaks – an unforgettable spectacle best enjoyed from the cruise deck. A light breakfast of pastries, fruit, tea, and coffee will be served in the dining room. Afterwards, rejuvenate your body and mind with a Tai Chi session on the sundeck, flowing gently with the morning breeze and the bay's rhythm.
The cruise continues towards the stunning Ti Top Island, a crescent-shaped gem known for its pristine beach and panoramic views. Spend time hiking up to the hilltop observation point, where a breathtaking 360-degree vista of Halong Bay unfolds,

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perfect for capturing memorable photographs. Afterwards, cool off with a refreshing swim or simply relax on the soft sands of the beach. Return to the boat to enjoy a hearty brunch as you glide back through the majestic seascape, providing a perfect opportunity to pack, relax on deck, and savor your final moments aboard.
In the afternoon, disembark at the port. You will then be transferred back to Hanoi, where you'll be dropped off at your hotel, concluding your Halong Bay experience.

Day 14 Hanoi Departure

Meals: Breakfast | Stay: NA

Today marks the final day of your extraordinary journey through Thailand and Vietnam. Depending on your scheduled flight time, you may have some leisure moments to relax in Hanoi, perhaps enjoying a final Vietnamese coffee or picking up last-minute souvenirs.
At the appropriate time, you will be transferred to Noi Bai International Airport for your departure flight home, bringing your memorable adventure to a close. This concludes your exploration of the diverse landscapes and rich cultures of Southeast Asia.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

INCLUDED

- v 13 Breakfasts, 8 Lunches, 1 Brunch, 3 Dinners
- v 12 nights hotel accommodation
- v 1 night Halong Bay Cruise accommodation
- v Overnight in shared Twin/Double room with Air-condition (AC) at hotel
- v All transport during tour on air-conditioned vehicle as per itinerary (including airport pick up & see off)
- v All entrance fees as itinerary
- v 01 international flight Chiang Mai - Hanoi

NOT INCLUDED

- x International airfare
- x Early check-in and late check-out
- x Peak season surcharges and compulsory gala dinners (if applicable)
- x Visa (passport valid for at least 6 months with a minimum of 3 blank visa pages)
- x Personal expenses (tips, laundry, gratuities, etc.)
- x Meals and drinks not mentioned in the itinerary

PRICE INCLUDES

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CANCELLATION POLICY

Tour Code: IMP-C15D6750CABC