



Trek through Northern Vietnam before giving something back:

VIETNAM HILL TRIBE TREK + HOSPICE PROJECT

21 - 30 September 2024



www.different-travel.com

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Trip overview

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This 5-day trek takes you far off the beaten track and into the remote and beautiful hills of Northern Vietnam in the Pù Luông Nature Reserve area. Passing through remote villages and staying at different local stilt house accommodations each night will give you an authentic insight into the lifestyle of the ethnic minority people who live in the area.

The Project

You will also spend time in the Mai Chau region working at a palliative care project at the local community hospital. The specific tasks will be determined closer to the time of departure, depending on the most urgent need in the local area at the time but are likely to include painting, decorating, gardening and other hands-on refurbishment type tasks. There will be no clinical or healthcare volunteering involved.

Vietnam

Vietnam shares its borders with Cambodia, Laos, China and 3,000km of coastline facing the South China Sea. Vietnam is one of the most densely populated countries in the world and 80% still live a rural existence. The majority of the population (87%) are Viet or 'Kinh' people; the remaining 13% is made up of over 50 ethnic hill tribe peoples who live mostly in the central and northern mountainous areas of the country. Each hill tribe has its own unique customs and dialect.

Hanoi

Vietnam's leafy capital is a city of lakes, shaded boulevards and public parks. With narrow alleyways lined with shops selling traditional handicrafts and arts, the old centre is an enchanting place to wander. A chaotic mass of motorbikes swarms through the tangled web of streets, locals sip coffee and take part in synchronised Tai Chi. Designer clothing stores sit next to noodle bars and the colonial legacy of Vietnam's past is complimented by the modern high-rise buildings.

The Pù Luông Nature Reserve

The Pù Luông Nature Reserve is located on two parallel mountain ridges which are separated by a valley which contains several villages and lots of agricultural land. You will trek in both the reserve and in this central valley which offers a unique range of experiences and landscapes. Covering over 170km², the nature reserve is home to 600 animal, bird and reptile species and over 1000 species of plant.

What is the experience like?

Who accompanies us?

You will be accompanied by professional English-speaking local guides and support staff who have an excellent knowledge of hiking and culture in the region and are first-aid trained. You will also be accompanied by an excellent support team at the community project, and a Different Travel Company tour manager who together will support you and make your challenge memorable.

How tough is it?

The trek is graded moderate to challenging. You will be trekking for 5 consecutive days, over varying and sometimes challenging terrain. You will cover approximately 15-20km per day which will take around 6-7 hours.

What is the terrain and scenery like?

The terrain will vary throughout the 5 days but in general it is mostly flat and on established routes through villages and jungle, and occasionally along short sections of road. There are some steep sections to contend with, but your guides will support you all the way. The route offers an interesting variety of scenery as you pass through rice terraces, cross shallow rivers, ascend into cloudy forests and enter remote villages. Underfoot the terrain will vary each day but may be quite stony, on roads, grass, over large natural limestone slabs, and depending on the weather, potentially very muddy trails. The itinerary is subject to change depending on the weather and, particularly, rainfall.

What is the food like?

The food served throughout the trip will be traditional Vietnamese with some Western dishes too. Meals are freshly prepared and plentiful. Vietnamese food isn't spicy but if you like your food with a kick, chilli or chilli sauce is often available if you ask. You will have breakfast and dinner at the stilt house you are staying in or local restaurants when you are staying at hotels. Lunch will be eaten at local homes along the way.

Typical dishes include:

Breakfast: Pancakes, fruit, coffee, bread, eggs, omelette, fruit fritters.

Lunch: Fried noodles with vegetables and/or egg, bread rolls

Dinner: Rice, fried chicken, meat stir fry, chips, spring rolls, omelette, eggs, fish, vegetable dishes, fresh fruit, noodles.





Where will we stay?

While in Hanoi you will stay in a hotel in twin or triple rooms with en-suite facilities. During the trek and project, the group will stay together in villages, in traditional stilt houses.

At the stilt houses, the main house is laid out over one upstairs level, with one very large living/sleeping area and a kitchen in an adjoining room or at the end of the living area. Beneath the house, between the stilts, your breakfast and evening meals will be served. Tables, chairs, plates, mugs and cutlery are provided. You may be able to purchase soft drinks or beer at the village depending on availability (payable locally).

The sleeping area is very large; accommodating up to 25 people. The entire group will share one room to sleep. You are strongly recommended to bring ear plugs (which you have tried out in advance and are comfortable using) so you can block out the inevitable snoring which may otherwise disturb your sleep.

You are provided with a thin mattress, pillow and blankets but you are recommended to bring a silk or cotton sleeping bag liner for additional warmth and comfort as it can get cool at night. Mosquito nets are provided for you each night.

Flip flops, slip-on sandals or pumps are advised for use around the village, particularly for back and forth between the shower/toilet facilities as shoes are not to be worn inside, and your hiking boots will be muddy from walking.

Practical information

Is there an age limit?

You must be 18+ to join this trek. It may be possible for you to participate if you are 16 or 17 years old if accompanied by a parent or guardian. There is no upper age limit.

Who can take part?

An ideal candidate for the trek would be someone who enjoys being out of their comfort zone and trying something new.

How fit do I need to be?

You are strongly advised to train to a good fitness level before departure to ensure fast recovery from each day's walk. The distances covered may not be great, but you must be prepared for, and be capable of, trekking for many hours a day on steep, rough terrain while carrying a daypack of around 6-8kg in weight. If you attempt to complete the trek without training, it will be unnecessarily challenging and will hinder your experience, and the experience of your teammates.

How should I prepare?

If you do not already regularly exercise it is advised that you start training (including plenty of hills) as soon as you book to ensure your best chance of enjoyment on the trip. This could include speed walking, hill walking, swimming, running, cycling, gym workouts, team sports, boot camps, yoga etc. You can download a number of free apps, which will help you train and track your progress. E.g. iMapMyRide (for cyclists), C25K (couch to 5k run), MyFitnessPal (for a variety of sports). It is possible to complete the trek without training, but it will be difficult and may hinder your experience, and the experience of your teammates.

Health declaration

We require a medical form to be completed by everyone upon registering, and any pre-existing conditions, medications used and other medical issues must be specified. All your medical details are treated in the strictest confidence.

The information will be securely screened by a qualified medical professional, and details provided to your tour manager and local guides so our staff are adequately informed and prepared to support you during the trip. By completing our booking form you are giving consent for us to contact you confidentially with any follow up questions regarding your health.

If you declare any medical conditions you may be asked to provide more information, or we may request to contact your GP.

In the event that your medical issues at the time of booking represent a concern for your safety and wellbeing, or the safety and wellbeing of others in the group, you may be recommended not to take part. If this happens your booking will not be confirmed and the deposit will be refunded.

We must be informed if any conditions or medication change, or if new conditions develop. If necessary confirmation of fitness to travel from your GP or specialist may be required.

Please note that we will never unreasonably deny participation on a trip nor contravene the Equality Act 2010.

Covid-19

Your health and safety is our top priority so rest assured that we are taking steps to ensure you not only have a memorable experience, but a safe one too.

We constantly monitor and follow the advice of the British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) who provide recommendations and advice to British travellers about travel to a certain destination.

Health and safety is our top priority so we will **NEVER** operate a trip in an area where there is clear and present risk to our team members, whether that is due to a health outbreak, political instability, natural disasters or anything else.

If travel restrictions either in the UK or Vietnam prevent safe travel we will look to either postpone or cancel your trip at no cost to you.

Please note that at the time of travel there may be enhanced safety and security measures in airports, bag drop may take longer, and you may need to provide a certificate of health or proof of vaccination.

We will inform you about any information pertinent to your travel arrangements.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us on info@different-travel.com.

Trip cost

A £350 registration fee is payable at the time of booking. You can then choose one of the three payment options:

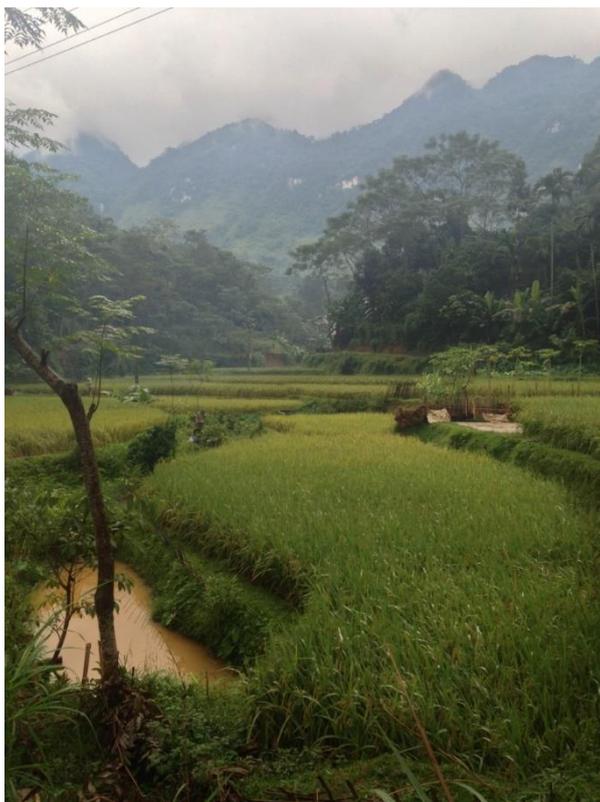
1. **Self-funded:** Pay your own tour costs balance of £1,900 by 12 July 2024. You are welcome to fundraise separately for any charity of your choice, but this is not mandatory. Any fundraising undertaken cannot be used for your trip costs.
2. **Sponsorship:** Fundraise £3,800 for your chosen charity by 28 June 2024. This includes your £1,900 tour costs balance and a £1,900 donation to charity.
3. **Flexi:** Pay your own tour costs balance of £1,900 and fundraise £1,900 for a charity of your choice by 12 July 2024. Any fundraising undertaken cannot be used for your trip costs.

Trip Includes:

- ✓ Return flights from London to Hanoi (inc. airport taxes)
- ✓ Local transfers and transport in Vietnam
- ✓ Accommodation throughout as per itinerary (twin/triple share in hotels, dormitory style during the trek)
- ✓ Meals as per itinerary (from dinner on day 2 to breakfast on day 10)
- ✓ English-speaking local guides and support crew
- ✓ Project materials and co-ordination
- ✓ UK Different Travel tour manager

Trip Does Not Include:

- ✗ Vietnamese visa (if required)
- ✗ Personal expenses (e.g. drinks, snacks, souvenirs, etc.)
- ✗ Any vaccinations required
- ✗ Travel insurance
- ✗ Tips (approx. £40-50 per person)
- ✗ Personal Trek kit and equipment
- ✗ Optional single occupancy room (£175 – hotels only)



Itinerary

Day 1 (Saturday 21 September 2024):

London – Hanoi

Depart London for an indirect overnight flight to Hanoi.

Day 2 (Sunday 22 September 2024):

Hanoi

Arrive in Hanoi and transfer to a central hotel. You will have the rest of the day at leisure to settle in and explore independently. This evening you will gather together for a welcome dinner at a local restaurant.

Meals: Dinner

Overnight: Hotel

Day 3 (Monday 23 September 2024):

Hanoi - Mai Chau

After breakfast we depart Hanoi for Mai Chau (approx. 4.5 hours), the village and project site where you are staying is a further 25km from Mai Chau town and is our base for the next two nights. This afternoon we will have an introduction to the community project! After completing the day's tasks we will enjoy a hearty dinner and spend the night in a traditional stilt house!

Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner



Overnight: Hotel

Day 4 (Tuesday 24 September 2024):

Mai Chau

Today we will spend the whole day at the project. Our work is likely to involve painting, decorating or gardening, depending on the needs and requirements which will be determined closer to the time. The evening will be spent celebrating our achievements with the villagers!

Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner



Overnight: Hotel

**Day 5 (Wednesday 25 September 2024):
Mai Chau – Hang Village**

We say our farewells this morning and set off to commence our trek. It is a drive of around an hour, and then a trek of about 4 hours to reach our first base, Hang Village, home to a Thai ethnic minority. We spend the night with local Thai families in their traditional stilted houses, and have the chance to stroll around the village before dinner.

Trek: Approx. 4 hours / easy terrain.

Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Overnight: Traditional stilt house

**Day 6 (Thursday 26 September 2024):
Hang Village - Kho Muong**

Today we will trek for around 6 hours on a path which runs mostly through jungle. We make a lunch stop in a small village along the way before setting off again this afternoon passing several Thai villages. Tonight we will stay in Kho Muong village, a Muong minority village.

Trek: Approx. 6 hours; slightly uphill, rocky path

Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Overnight: Traditional stilt house



**Day 7 (Friday 27 September 2024):
Kho Muong – Nua Village**

The trek is a little harder day today, as we trek uphill into the Pù Luông range, passing through a number of small hamlets and minority villages en route. After 3 hours of gentle ascent, we will then descend to the village of Nua, a village of Thai ethnic minority people.

Trek: Approx. 6 hours, gentle uphill trail and a gradual descent.

Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Overnight: Local homes

**Day 8 (Saturday 28 September 2024):
Nua Village – Hieu Village**

Today's trek through the verdant countryside will take around 6 hours as the path runs up and downhill through forests, rice terraces and scenic villages. Along the way we are likely to see farmers working on rice paddies and children going to school. We spend the night in the Thai village of Hieu.

Trek: Approx. 6 hours, undulating terrain

Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Overnight: Traditional stilt house



Day 9 (Sunday 29 September 2024)

Hieu Village – Pho Doan – Hanoi

It is an approximate 3 hour trek following the Ma River this morning to Pho Doan, where we will visit the local market. After lunch in this small town we will be picked up and transferred to Hanoi, in time to enjoy a celebratory farewell dinner.

Trek: Approx. 4 hours, long descent

Meals: Breakfast, lunch, dinner

Overnight: Hotel



Day 10 (Monday 30 September 2024):

Hanoi

Today is free for you to explore Hanoi at leisure before your indirect overnight flight home.

Meals: Breakfast

Day 11 (Tuesday 31 September 2024):

Hanoi – London

Arrive back to London.

N.B. *This itinerary has been prepared in advance so while we do not anticipate changes, this itinerary may be subject to alteration due to flight schedules, hotel availability and other factors outside our control. During the trip itself the itinerary will depend on the group ability, weather and the daily circumstances. Any changes in the itinerary will be made in the interest of group safety and enjoyment. In-country, your guide and tour manager will have the final say in the interest of the health and safety of the group.*

Before You Go!

Important information to help you prepare for the Hill Tribe Trek and Project

Travel practicalities and country information
Trek knowledge
Food and drink
Kit tips
Luggage
Responsible travel and culture
Fitness, health and safety
Kit list

Travel practicalities and country information

Visas

From 15 March 2022 Vietnam has reintroduced visa waivers for the nationals of 13 countries including the UK. Visa waivers allow for visits to Vietnam for up to 15 days without needing to apply for a visa. However, we cannot guarantee that visas will continue to not be required and recommend you look at visa requirements for your trip nearer the time, on the Foreign and Commonwealth website: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/vietnam>. We will also update you with any further advice closer to the departure date of your trip. If you have a different nationality the advice may be different so you should contact the Vietnamese Embassy <http://www.vietnamembassy.org.uk>.

Your passport should be valid for a minimum of 6 months on the date you enter Vietnam. Please make sure your passport is in good condition and not damaged as damaged passports may result in entry being refused.

Travel insurance

The Different Travel Company will do everything possible to ensure a safe and enjoyable trip however unexpected things can occur such as delays, medical problems, baggage loss, cancellation by you etc. The purchase of travel insurance is mandatory; you are advised to organise it at the time of booking to ensure you are covered immediately.

Different Travel is an Unregulated Introducer of Campbell Irvine Ltd who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

You can find out more here: <https://microsite.campbellirvinedirect.com/differenttravel>

Please note: most travel insurance policies protect you before departure too so it is advised to buy insurance as close to booking as possible as it may protect you against the loss of your non-refundable, non-transferable registration fee if you cancel due to injury, illness etc.

Phone and Wi-Fi access

Mobile phone signal is fairly good throughout the trek so subject to your phone handset compatibility, UK network and roaming capabilities you should be able to make calls and send text messages. Please contact your mobile provider for details of charges. You should turn off data roaming to avoid high and unexpected data charges. Internet access is not possible throughout the trek however in Hanoi there should be Wi-Fi at the hotel.

Religion

Buddhism is the most common religion in Vietnam with about 60 per cent of the population practicing some form. About 8 per cent are Catholic. Other religions include Confucianism, Taoism, Islam, Hinduism and Caodaism.

Electricity

The sockets in Vietnam vary between the two flat parallel prongs (USA style) – most common, two round pins (European style) and three square pins (British style). You will be able to charge electrical items in the stilt houses each night as a limited number of electric sockets are available. It is advised that you take a multi-adaptor which will be suitable for any type of electrical socket.

Tipping

While tipping is not mandatory, it is recommended and greatly appreciated by the local staff and the trek team. We would recommend allowing around £40-50. You do not need to tip the owners of the stilt house accommodation although cultural sharing, e.g. showing family photos or information about the area you live in is always welcome.

Money

The official currency of Vietnam is the dong (VND). The exchange rate at time of writing is £1 = 28,409 VND (correct at February 2023).

Prices may be given in Vietnamese dong or often US dollars, but you are recommended to make all purchases in dong as using other currencies will attract a poor exchange rate. It is easy to obtain Vietnamese dong:

1. There are several ATMs available in Hanoi where you can withdraw cash. Please notify your bank that you plan to use your card abroad in case it is cancelled and check transaction and withdrawal fees which may be expensive.
2. Vietnamese dong can be ordered in the UK, but it attracts a very poor exchange rate, so it is much more cost effective to withdraw cash from an ATM or exchange cash in Hanoi.
3. Do not purchase US dollars with the intention of exchanging them to dong. If you exchange pounds to dollars, then dollars to dong you will lose out twice on the exchange. If you want to exchange cash locally, please bring cash in English pounds. *Please note: Scottish or Channel Islands notes will be rejected by local bureau de changes.* Don't forget to change any leftover Vietnamese currency before leaving the country otherwise you may be stuck with cash that cannot be changed.

Make sure that Vietnamese notes you receive are not torn as many shops and restaurants will not accept them. Also try not to change too much money at one time, as you may end up with a large wad of notes.

Please remember to allow extra money for guide/support staff tips (approx. £40-£50 per trekker), laundry, drinks, souvenirs, and any other personal spending.

Visa, MasterCard and American Express are accepted at some large hotels, restaurants and shops but will not be accepted in small shops or at markets.

Photocopies

Remember to photocopy all your documents (insurance details, passport, credit/debit cards etc.) and take a copy with you during the trip, stored separately from the original copies. You should also scan and email these documents to yourself and leave a copy with a trusted family member or friend. If you lose any of your documents, you will then have access to a copy with you and online. You may also wish to upload your documents to cloud storage such as Dropbox or Google Drive.

Photography

When taking photographs of the local people, it is polite to ask their permission first. Taking a photograph of someone without their permission, especially those of ethnic minorities and in rural areas, can cause offence. Older people, particularly ladies, prefer not to be photographed but in contrast, young children are often very keen to be photographed. Photography is restricted at ports, harbours and airports.

Language

Vietnamese is a tonal language that uses the Roman alphabet together with tone and diacritical marks. A few helpful words / phrases:

Hello	Xin chao (pronounced Sin Chow)	1	<i>Mot</i>
Goodbye	<i>Tam biet</i>	2	<i>Hai</i>
Yes	<i>Vang</i>	3	<i>Ba</i>
No	<i>Khong</i>	4	<i>Buon</i>
Sorry	<i>Xin loi (pronounced Sin loy)</i>	5	<i>Nam</i>
See you again	<i>Hen Gap Lai</i>	6	<i>Sau</i>
Thank you	<i>Cam on (pronounced Come on)</i>	7	<i>Bay</i>
How much?	<i>Bao nhiey (pronounced Bow knew)</i>	8	<i>Tam</i>
		9	<i>Chin</i>
		10	<i>Muoi</i>

Books

There are several guidebooks about Vietnam including:

Lonely Planet Vietnam (Aug 2018) ISBN 978-1786570642. £15.99

Lonely Planet Vietnamese Phrasebook (Sept 2018) ISBN 978-1787013469. £4.99

Rough Guide to Vietnam (March 2018) ISBN 978-0241306451. £15.99

Souvenirs

Southeast Asia is renowned for its various forms of lacquer ware and for its silk industry. An array of other handicrafts includes quality hand embroidery, woodcarvings, brass and marble figurines. Paintings, silk screens and hand-painted ceramics can be found in Hanoi as well as a wide range of hand-woven products. There will be lots of souvenir choices!

Trek knowledge

Accommodation

While in Hanoi and during the project, you will stay in a hotel in twin or triple rooms with en-suite facilities. During the trek, the group will stay together in a village, in a traditional stilt house.

A single-occupancy room may be possible subject to availability (at the hotels only) upon payment of a single supplement.

Stilt houses

The main house is laid out over one upstairs level, with one very large living /sleeping area and a kitchen in an adjoining room or at the end of the living area. Beneath the house, between the stilts, your breakfast and evening meals will be served. Tables, chairs, plates, mugs and cutlery are provided. You may be able to purchase soft drinks or beer at the village depending on availability (payable locally).

The sleeping area is very large; accommodating up to 25 people. The entire group will share one room to sleep. You are strongly recommended to bring ear plugs (which you have tried out in advance and are comfortable using) so you can block out the inevitable snoring which may otherwise disturb your sleep.

You are provided with a thin mattress, pillow and blankets but you are recommended to bring a silk or cotton sleeping bag liner for additional warmth and comfort as it can get cool at night.

Mosquito nets are provided for you each night.

Flip flops, slip-on sandals or pumps are advised for use around the village, particularly for back and forth between the shower/toilet facilities as shoes are not to be worn inside, and your hiking boots will be muddy from walking.

Hygiene and bathroom facilities

The hotels have en-suite facilities with flushing toilets and hot showers.

There are shower facilities located across the courtyard next to the main stilt house. There may not be hot water and the quality of the facilities will vary so please do not expect hotel standards. We recommend that you take quick showers, turning off the water when lathering up, so warm water can be shared.

Vietnamese toilets are generally of the squat variety, although Western toilets are often found in hotels, guesthouses and restaurants catering to foreign visitors. You should always carry toilet paper with you as it is rarely provided in public toilets. Always put used toilet paper into the bin provided – never put it in the toilet. Toilet facilities at each village will vary but you can expect Asian-style squat toilets, and possibly an additional Western sit-down toilet. Some toilets have a flush, but some may only be supplied with bucket of water to flush. Toilet paper is not usually provided so you should bring your own which must only be put into the bins provided. Sewer pipes are not large enough to cope with toilet paper so if you attempt to flush it, you are likely to block the pipes and make the facilities unusable for everyone.

If you need to use the toilet during the trek day, you will need to utilise a private place along the trail. If going to the toilet along the trail, never leave toilet paper on the ground; you must put it in a sanitary disposal bag (e.g. nappy sack) and carry it to the village for proper disposal. Please bring your own nappy sacks with you. NEVER leave toilet paper or other litter on the trail.

You are advised to bring a small pack of baby wipes to freshen up during the trek day and use natural or biodegradable soap/shampoo. You will need to bring a towel during the trek. A highly absorbent but lightweight and fast drying trek towel is recommended.

Difficulty

This trek is considered moderate to challenging due to there being some small uphill sections, rocky areas underfoot, shallow river/stream crossings and possibly slippery terrain. The temperatures and humidity may be high, and accommodation is comfortable but basic. The trek will be strenuous for those who are unfit. You should have a good level of general fitness and have done some fitness training in order to get the greatest enjoyment from the challenge.

Weather

Temperatures are closely linked with the weather conditions but you can expect temperatures to be around 30°C during the day, dropping down to 19°C at night. Weather conditions will vary but in general you will experience hot but cloudy days with high humidity and occasional short rain downpours. It's important to be prepared for all weather conditions and temperatures so you should ensure you have the correct kit, such as a waterproof dry bag for inside your daypack and a lightweight poncho to keep you dry but cool when walking. When the sun comes out it can feel very hot and be very bright so wearing sunglasses and a hat, and keeping well hydrated is crucial.

Food and drink

Water

Tap water is not safe to drink in Vietnam. You must not brush your teeth or rinse your mouth with the tap water, only use bottled or purified water. Avoid getting water in your mouth when showering. You will be provided with bottled mineral water on the trekking days.

Keeping hydrated

Electrolyte tablets (e.g. Nuun, High5, PowerBar etc.) are flavoured effervescent tablets which contain salts, sugars and minerals which are naturally lost from your body when you sweat. By adding these tablets to your water it not only offers flavour to your water, but it can help prevent dehydration before it begins. Electrolyte tablets are widely available in outdoors stores and online for around £8 for 12 tablets. You may also wish to bring a small supply of rehydration salts (e.g. Dioralyte) which treat dehydration. You can buy these from chemists in different flavours and you simply add the powder to the quantity of water mentioned on the packet.

Water bottle

You will need to bring your own bottles to carry at least three litres of water per day. Some people will bring a 2-3 litre CamelBak hydration system (for effortless access to water while you trek) plus one 1-litre water bottles (e.g. plastic Nalgene or metal Sigg bottle). Some people prefer to bring three 1-litre bottles. The choice is yours. If you're bringing a CamelBak hydration system, a separate 1-litre bottle is essential as it can be used as a backup if your hydration system fails.

Please write your name on all your bottles in marker pen. Please note that 'own brand' and cheap hydration systems are notorious for splitting, leaking or valves not functioning properly. CamelBak and Platypus are the leaders in this market because their products are significantly better quality and more reliable. You must test your hydration system before the trip to check for problems and learn how to use it properly.

Food

Due to its mixed cultural history, Vietnamese cuisine is unlike any other in Asia. The closest comparison is a mixture between Thai and French cuisine. Food is generally very mild although chilli and chilli sauce is sometimes provided as a condiment. Fish, chicken, and/or pork dishes served with cooked vegetables and rice, or noodles form a typical meal. The distinct flavours of Vietnamese food come primarily from mint, coriander, lemon grass, shrimp, fish sauce, ginger, black pepper, garlic and basil.

The food served throughout the trip will be traditional Vietnamese with some Western dishes too. The food is freshly prepared and plentiful. You will have breakfast and dinner at the stilt house you are staying in or dinner at local restaurants when staying at hotels. Lunch will be eaten at local homes along the way. Typical dishes include:

Breakfast: Pancakes, fruit, coffee, bread, eggs, omelette, fruit fritters.

Lunch: Fried noodles with vegetables and/or egg, bread rolls

Dinner: Rice, fried chicken, meat stir fry, chips, spring rolls, omelette, eggs, fish, vegetable dishes, fresh fruit, noodles.

Dietary requirements

The majority of special diets, such as vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, etc., can be catered for if we are notified in advance. Please ensure that you notify us of any dietary requirements at the time of booking or as soon as possible. Please note that we cannot guarantee that food preparation will have taken place in a contamination free environment.

Snacks

You may wish to bring a selection of snacks for energy, a pick-me-up or a little taste of home. Please bring snacks you have tried before (and enjoy!) so they are appetising to you. Items such as sweets, individually wrapped cake bars, protein bars and dried fruit are ideal but don't forget to bring savoury treats also such as salted nuts, Cheddar biscuits or salted crackers.

Kit tips

Discount

When you book you will receive a discount and vouchers booklet. Please check the documents section of your online profile.

Footwear

You should bring lightweight, breathable trekking boots with good ankle support and a high quality flexible sole such as Vibram; walking trainers are unsuitable. If you are buying a new pair of boots, please try on lots of pairs before you buy; don't buy online unless you've tried them on first. Please ensure you buy new boots well in advance of departure so you have time to break them in properly. You are strongly advised to wear your boots on the plane (or take in your hand baggage) in case there are any problems or delays with your luggage. Comfortable boots are the most difficult item to replace at short notice.

In addition to your hiking boots, you will also need some shoes for the evenings at the villages.

You must take your shoes off when entering the stilt house living/sleeping area, so you are strongly recommended to bring lightweight slip-on shoes that are easy to take on and off between toilet or shower visits and meal times etc. so you don't have to use your hiking boots. Slip-on sandals, pumps, lightweight trainers or Crocs are ideal as you can wear socks with them which will prevent mosquito bites in the evenings, but flip flops are okay if you are vigilant about using repellent.

Trek clothing

During the trek the humidity will be high so you should bring non-cotton breathable trekking gear. A lightweight, long-sleeved shirt is recommended as it will keep you cool by keeping the sun off your skin and you can roll up your sleeves if you wish. Convertible trek trousers that can be zipped off to shorts are great so you can adjust your clothing depending on the conditions and terrain. There may be areas where you trek through jungle and to avoid insect bites and contact with foliage you can protect yourself then adjust to shorts when you leave this area.

You are recommended to invest in trekking gear which can be worn in layers (base layer, warm layer, shell layer) which can be added and removed easily to manage your temperature and the climate. Your clothes should be made of technical fabrics designed to wick sweat away from your body which keep clothes dry and smelling fresh. Merino wool, nylon, polyester, polypropylene and bamboo fabrics are all effective technical fabrics. Never bring cotton clothing to trek in. Cotton clothing can be hazardous to wear in cool conditions because when sweat is absorbed by cotton fibres (rather than forced to evaporate as with technical fabrics), it leaves clothes damp. Damp clothes make you cold and uncomfortable and could even leave you vulnerable to hypothermia. You can find technical clothing in all reputable outdoors stores. Check the garment label to ensure the clothes contain 0% cotton.

Rainfall is inevitable during the trek; a poncho is more comfortable than waterproof trousers and jacket and is a better choice. The temperatures will be high and a poncho will allow the air to circulate so you stay dry and not get too hot. You can purchase ponchos very cheaply online or locally in Hanoi. Most people will trek in the same outfit for the duration of the trip and have one spare full outfit in their kit bag (weight limit 6kg), just in case.

Non-Trek Clothing

For your time in Hanoi you should wear smart casual clothing, suitable for the hot conditions. Vietnamese men tend to wear jeans or trousers and t-shirts and shirts, and Vietnamese women tend to wear jeans, loose trousers, long skirts and dresses and casual tops. Revealing clothing may attract unwanted attention and is best avoided. T-shirts should never display obscene, offensive, suggestive or potentially insulting writing or logos. When entering temples, you should cover shoulders and legs entirely.

Socks

It is important that the socks you choose are high quality, non-cotton and will not slip down in your boots which causes blisters. Never wear cotton socks which absorb sweat making them damp and more likely to rub against your feet, causing blisters. Socks containing Coolmax (a brand of polyester) or nylon have wicking properties which means that it pulls sweat away from the skin for it to evaporate. Good brands to consider include Bridgedale, Smartwool and Brasher.

Gaiters

If the weather has been very wet the trails will become very muddy and trousers and boots can get thick mud on them. If you have a pair of gaiters already it may be worthwhile bringing them along, but this is optional.

Hiking poles

Hiking poles can be very useful for taking pressure off the knees and can make trekking easier, particularly during the descent and walking on uneven or slippery terrain. If you haven't used poles before, you are advised to try them during training walks to familiarise yourself with how to use them. If you bring hiking poles they must fit inside your suitcase/kitbag for the purposes of the international flight.

Sunglasses

These are important even on overcast days. They must offer a minimum of 100% UV protection, and polarized sunglasses are ideal. Taking a spare pair is recommended.

Head torch

This is a vital piece of kit. Petzl is one brand which makes good quality headlamps but there are many head torches available from other companies. Please ensure you take an LED torch as ones with bulbs are not bright enough. Bring your head torch with fresh batteries inside it and take a full set of spare batteries. Do not bring a wind-up head torch as these are unreliable.

Luggage

You will need the following luggage items:

1. A small daypack

You are responsible for carrying your own daypack containing essentials for each day. We recommend you bring a 25-30 litre rucksack which must have a hip belt and a chest strap. High quality brands to consider when looking for a suitable pack include Osprey, Berghaus, and Lowe Alpine (amongst others) and you are strongly advised to visit a reputable store like Cotswold Outdoor to have your backpack fitted, as they come in a variety of sizes, and some brands offer male and female specific fits. You can expect to carry your personal first aid kit, sun cream, three litres of water, snacks, toilet paper, wet wipes, and camera. It could weigh 6-8kg when packed, so you should make your selection carefully and ensure it fits correctly and is comfortable. You will not have access to your main pack while trekking.

You are advised to use a waterproof rucksack liner or dry bag (e.g. Exped dry bag) inside your daypack to keep your belongings dry in the event of inclement weather. It should be large enough to fit inside your entire backpack. Rucksack covers are not effective at keeping your kit dry in wet conditions.

2. Suitcase or large holdall

A large suitcase or holdall which will hold your entire luggage when you check in for the flights. This will be stored securely containing anything you don't need for the trek (e.g. extra toiletries, travel clothes etc.).

3. A kit bag or holdall

During the trek your main luggage (change of clothes, toiletries etc.) will be transported by motorbike between the villages. You will need a kit bag for these items to be carried on the motorbike. Your bag must be strong, lightweight and waterproof. If the kit bag is not waterproof, you will need to ensure the items inside are watertight by using drybags. The total weight of your kit is a maximum of 6kg per trekker. Some examples of kit bags include:

- North Face Base Camp duffel bag
- Mountain Equipment Wet and Dry Bag
- Vango Dry Holdall

Please note that some kit bags can weigh up to 2kg empty so bear this in mind as it will reduce the amount you can pack in the 6kg weight limit. A large rucksack with your gear packed inside a waterproof rucksack liner is perfectly suitable too.

The capacity of your kitbag should be around 60-70 litres but as long as all your gear fits and is within the weight limit it doesn't matter if it is a different size. A solid suitcase or a holdall with wheels is not suitable.

Any items not required for the trek (e.g. travel clothes, travel items, extra toiletries) will be stored securely for you. Most people will pack this kit bag flat into their large main suitcase.

4. Combination padlocks

1 or 2 combination padlocks for keeping your baggage secure.

Sleeping bag liner

At each stilt house a sleeping area will be set up with a mattress, pillow, blanket and mosquito net but you are advised to bring a silk sleeping bag liner for your additional comfort. Silk sleeping bag liners are quite expensive if purchased on the high street, so consider eBay where you can purchase directly from the manufacturers (usually Vietnam or China) at a fraction of the price. Make sure you search for 'pure silk' sleeping bag liners, not 'satin' (which is usually low quality and synthetic).

Responsible travel and culture

Culture Shock

Vietnam is very different to other places in Asia and as such you may experience a certain amount of culture shock initially. In Hanoi the streets, markets and roads are jam-packed; hundreds of mopeds whizz by at full speed swerving around people, caged dogs and animals can be seen traded on the street and vendors cover the pavement with their wares so you have to walk on the road. During the trek you will be walking through minority tribe villages where culture is different again. For example, in these regions unusual meat is sometimes eaten; this has historical contexts your guide will be happy to explain to you. If you are unsure about something you have seen or have any questions, your local guides will explain for you so you can gain a deeper understanding of the cultural differences in the region. Just take it slowly and try to learn about the local culture to put into perspective these differences.

Haggling

When shopping for gifts in market places where there are no price tags on items it is expected that you will haggle. The first price is sometimes up to 5 times more than the value of the item but remember that you should pay what you think is a good price for the item, not trying to get the price as low as possible. Haggle in good humour with a smile and you will enjoy the experience.

Begging and poverty

Begging in Vietnam has become more prevalent in recent years especially where tourists congregate due to the good, but ultimately misinformed, intentions of tourists. As part of our responsible tourism policy we advise against giving any money or gifts directly to beggars or even local children. Doing so reinforces the belief that begging is a sustainable way to make a living. Please note that in particular we ask you not to offer sweets to children, as dental hygiene is poor in these regions and dental care difficult or expensive to access. There are responsible ways of giving which your tour manager and local guide can assist you with.

It is important not to underestimate the psychological impact of viewing extreme poverty and a sense of helplessness and guilt that often comes from it. Some people respond by feeling they must do everything they can to help everyone. The risk is that it leads to disappointment and disillusionment as no one person can do everything. Be aware of the signs (feeling emotional, guilty, frustrated and angry) and set realistic goals about what you can and cannot do. We also recommend that you avoid acting on impulse especially when it comes to giving away money. People may seem genuine, but very many people still regard tourists as 'cash cows' and act dishonestly and unethically. Do check with your guides before giving money.

Environment

The wonderful environment of the Vietnamese hill region is also an extremely fragile one. Increasing population density and number of trekkers threatens to destroy the very beauty which attracts us in the first place. We are extremely environmentally conscious and aim to minimise our impact as much as possible. Toilet paper should always be packed up and carried to the village to be disposed of in the bin – it should never be left on the trail. Our aim is to help protect and preserve this beautiful environment for future generations of trekkers to enjoy.

Key points:

- Never leave toilet paper or litter on the trail.
- Don't dispose of fruit peel, cores or seeds on the ground; although they decompose eventually, they are unsightly and may attract animals.
- Turn off lights when not in rooms.
- Minimise your water usage by having short showers.
- Be considerate of other trekkers.

Etiquette

- Never leave chopsticks sticking upright in a bowl of rice as it has strong death connotations.
- If you enter religious sites, you must cover up and shoes must be removed.
- A donation is expected when visiting a temple or pagoda.
- Always endeavour to be polite and respectful. If you show respect, then it will be reciprocated.
- At accommodation, particularly stilt houses, keeping noise to a minimum, especially early in the morning and late at night.
- Be respectful to your guides and hosts; don't forget to say please and thank you.
- Be considerate of the feelings of other group members.
- When taking photographs of the local people, it would be wisest to ask their permission. Taking a photograph of someone without their permission, especially those of ethnic minorities and in rural areas, can cause offence. Older people, particularly ladies prefer not to be photographed but in contrast young children are often very keen to be photographed.

Wildlife

During the trek you will pass through villages where farming and animal rearing is a way of life. You will see many animals along the way including dogs, cats, pigs, goats, sheep, chickens, cows, geese, ducks and water buffalo. You may also see a number of insects and other creatures such as butterflies, stick insects, dragonflies, geckos, katydids, praying mantis, leeches, beetles of all shapes, sizes and wonderful colours and a number of mosquitoes. There are snakes and spiders in the area but you are unlikely to see these; they are more afraid of us than you are of them.

Fitness, health and safety

Vaccinations and travel health

Different Travel regrets that we cannot provide medical advice or recommendations. You are advised to seek medical advice at least 8 weeks before travelling to ensure that all appropriate vaccinations are up to date. For general information visit www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk or www.travelhealthpro.org.uk but your GP or travel health professional should be the first stop for a consultation tailored to your medical history. Please note that failure to be adequately vaccinated or take necessary prophylactic medication can invalidate travel insurance policies as it is considered that you have not taken necessary precautions.

First aid kit

Especially whilst on the trek you should have a small first aid kit of essential items which is for your own personal use. Please ensure you have access to your own first aid kit in your daypack each day. Items to include: personal prescription medicine, painkillers, plasters, insect repellent (containing 50% DEET), anti-histamine tablets and cream, Imodium (Loperamide), rehydration sachets, throat lozenges, decongestant, lip balm with SPF, antiseptic cream, scissors, zinc oxide tape etc.

Zinc Oxide tape

This tape is really useful to prevent blisters. When you feel your boots start to rub against your feet, you should stop and remove any debris from your boots and check your feet. If a hot spot is developing (a red, sore area without broken skin) you can apply zinc oxide tape to the area and it will stop (or slow down) a blister developing. If you are too late to prevent the blister, you should clean the area and apply a Compeed blister plaster instead.

Insect Repellent

There are many mosquitoes in Vietnam so you will need to take repellent with you to use during the day and evening. 50% DEET is the most effective repellent available; as recommended by The Department of Health. Do not bring 100% DEET as this is not suitable for use on your skin, but is intended for use on clothing (e.g. mosquito repellent wrist bands etc.) Be aware that DEET can melt plastic, stain clothes and remove dye so be careful when using any DEET product and apply it as recommended on the bottle.

Malaria

Some travel clinics and GP practices deem the Mai Chau/ Pù Luông Nature Reserve area as a malaria hotspot so malaria prophylaxis may be recommended for you. You must see your own GP for advice and a risk assessment. Regardless of whether anti-malaria medication is prescribed for you, it is essential that you protect yourself against mosquito bites both during the day and at night by using 50% DEET repellent, covering your skin and sleeping under a mosquito net (provided). For general information on vaccinations, visit <http://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk>

Safety

Vietnam is widely acknowledged to be one of the safest destinations in the world. In almost all cases the Vietnamese people regard tourists with the highest level of respect as guests in their country. However petty theft and pick pockets do exist in the larger cities. In other areas, reports of these activities are almost unheard of. You should be aware of your surroundings, ensure that all bags have locks and are not left unattended. Leave flashy jewellery, watches and accessories at home; keep wallets out of sight stowed in a handbag or backpack rather than sticking out of a pocket and carry cameras in their cases rather than carrying them openly with the camera strap. Do not carry unnecessarily large amounts of cash with you at any time, or if this is unavoidable, especially immediately after you have used an ATM, please ensure it is divided into different pockets. You are recommended to bring a credit card for emergencies.

Altitude

You will not be trekking at altitude. The highest point on the trek does not exceed 1500m.

Fitness training

You should start training as soon as you book onto the trip. The best form of training for a trek is get outside and start walking. If you're not a regular walker, start slowly with short distances then as you get more comfortable, increase your mileage and add in more challenging terrain until you can comfortably walk for several consecutive days, for around 8 hours at a time, on hilly terrain while maintaining a comfortable pace without needing to stop more than frequently than once an hour for a 5-minute rest.

Hill walking while carrying a fully packed backpack while wearing your hiking boots should feature predominantly in your training as this will help prepare your body for the terrain and baggage load you will experience during the trek.

Other activities which can complement hill walking include running, cycling, gym workouts and boot camps etc. Developing your core and leg muscle strength is also important so exercises such as squats, lunges, push-ups, planks and crunches will really enhance your training. These exercises can be done at home; no gym needed.

You can download a number of free apps, which will help you train and track your progress. E.g. MapMyWalk, C25K (couch to 5k run), MyFitnessPal.

Please note that attempting to complete the trek without any training may make the experience unnecessarily difficult and hinder your experience, and also the experience of your teammates. The local guides, in consultation with your Different Travel tour manager, may advise that if you are not fit enough to continue that you leave the trek.

Emergencies and evacuations

In the unlikely event of a serious illness or accident, the local team will ensure you are transferred as swiftly as possible to the nearest hospital. Please ensure your travel insurance covers you for airlifting/emergency evacuations as this can be required to reach casualties on more remote trails in an emergency. You are recommended to bring a credit card during the trip in the event that you need to pay for medical treatment upfront in the event of an emergency.

Last updated February 2023

KIT LIST - VIETNAM HILL TRIBE TREK AND COMMUNITY PROJECT

The kit you take on your trek can make the difference between being 'just a trek' or a 'memorable trek'.

Our kit lists are put together with feedback from our own experiences and that of participants who have taken part in our previous trips.

The items on this list do not take into account your personal preferences based on your previous trekking experiences, or individual requirements.

PLEASE NOTE: This list is just a guideline and is not exhaustive or take into account personal preferences.

For information about items on this list please refer to the trip dossier or contact The Different Travel Company on info@different-travel.com

ESSENTIAL	SUGGESTED	OPTIONAL
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DOCUMENTS + FLIGHT ESSENTIALS	✓
Passport and Copy	
E-Tickets	
Visa (if required)	
Travel insurance	
ATM and credit card (s)	
Cash (£ Sterling)	
Pen for immigration forms	
Sunglasses (preferably polarized)	
Mobile phone + charger	
Camera + spare batteries	

LUGGAGE	✓
Suitcase/large holdall kitbag	
Daypack (25 – 30 litres)	
Hand Luggage (take note of dimensions from airline)	
Combination padlocks	

CLOTHING AND FOOTWEAR	✓
Trekking boots: either worn on flight or carried in hand luggage	
Sturdy boot or steel-toe capped boots for project	
Trainers/casual shoes for evenings	
Trek trousers (zip off trousers ideal)	
Non-cotton, technical t-shirts	
Non-cotton long sleeved top/shirt	
Socks and underwear	
Warm fleece layer	
Warm jacket (e.g. down or Primaloft)	
Waterproof jacket and trousers	
Old clothes for project	
Casual clothes for time with community and sightseeing	
Thermal base layer top and trousers	
Sun hat with brim	
Warm hat	
Flip-flops for showers	
Gloves (for trekking and also heavy duty for project)	
Scarf/pashmina for temples	
Neck cooling 'Cobber'/cooling towel and Buff	

HEALTH AND HYGIENE*	✓
Hygiene kit to include: toothbrush and toothpaste, antiperspirant deodorant, wet wipes, shampoo, conditioner, shower gel, nail brush and nail care kit	
Personal first aid kit to include: prescription medicine, insect repellent, ibuprofen, paracetamol, plasters, blister plasters (e.g. Compeed), Imodium, rehydration salts (Dioralyte), antiseptic cream (e.g. Savlon), Anti-histamine cream/tablets, lip balm with SPF protection, zinc oxide tape, nail scissors/tweezers, muscle rub (e.g. Deep Heat),	
Hairbrush/comb	
Travel towel	
Lateral flow tests (min x2)	
Disposable masks	
Feminine care products	

OTHER KIT	✓
Sleeping bag liner (silk/thermal)	
Sun block (high SPF)	
Toilet bag: toilet paper, wipes, hand sanitiser, nappy sacks	
2 ltr water hydration system (e.g. Camelbak)	
1 ltr water bottle	
LED head torch + spare batteries	
Adaptor (US 2 flat pin and European 2 round pin)	
Ear plugs	
Hiking poles – to be stowed in hold luggage for flight	
Energy food/snack bars	
Electrolyte (e.g. NUUN)	
Water purification tablets (e.g. Biox Aqua)	
Swimwear	
Travel pillow	
Portable power bank	
Spare glasses/contact lenses	
Video camera + charger	
MP3 player/ipod	
Books/pack of cards	