

# Vietnam Hill Tribe Trek AND BEAR SANCTUARY VISIT

24th October - 3rd November 2018

**Trip Dossier**



Join this exclusive challenge to help support Animals Asia end bear farming and improve the welfare of animals in Asia.

This trip is operated by The Different Travel Company (ATOL 6706) for Animals Asia Foundation UK (Registered Charity No. 1086903). All the flights in this brochure are financially protected by the ATOL scheme. When you pay you will be supplied with an ATOL Certificate. Please ask for it and check to ensure that everything you booked (flights, hotels and other services) is listed on it. Please see our booking conditions for further information or for more information about financial protection and the ATOL Certificate go to: [www.atol.org.uk/ATOLCertificate](http://www.atol.org.uk/ATOLCertificate).





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**AnimalsAsia**  
Until the cruelty ends

## Vietnam Hill Tribe Trek & Bear Sanctuary Visit

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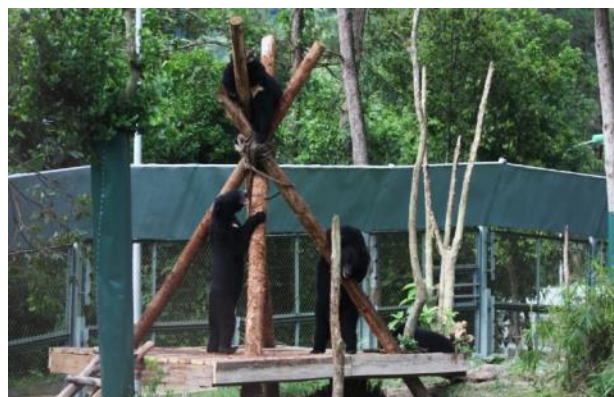
### About Vietnam

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 country in the world with 80% still living 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. Hanoi is a paradox but fascinating and beguiling.



### The Bear Sanctuary

Over 11,200 bears are held on bile farms throughout China and Vietnam and undergo torturous extraction methods for their bile because it is believed to be effective as an ingredient in traditional Asian medicine despite the availability of inexpensive and effective herbal and synthetic alternatives. With assistance of local government forestry departments, Animals Asia's Moon Bear Rescue Centre in Tam Dao, Vietnam has

saved over one hundred bears from the cruelty of the country's illegal bear bile industry. After months of surgery and physiotherapy to mend shattered bodies, the bears are rehabilitated and live out their lives in semi-natural enclosures and dens positioned on 12 hectares of land just outside of the beautiful Tam Dao National Park. The Rescue Centre also conducts ground-breaking research to help educate and change the attitudes of those who use traditional Asian bile medicines.





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### Trek Overview

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 trek is graded moderate to challenging.



### 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 170km<sup>2</sup>, the nature reserve is home to 600 animal, bird and reptile species, and over 1000 species of plant.

### Who accompanies us?

You will be accompanied by professional English-speaking local guides 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, and a Different Travel Company tour manager who together will support you and make your challenge memorable.



### What's 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. You will cover approximately 15-20km per day which will take around 6-7 hours. The itinerary is subject to change depending on the weather and, particularly, rainfall.



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## What is the weather like?

Temperatures are closely linked with the weather conditions but you can expect highs of 28°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 occasional short rain downpours and high humidity. It's important to be prepared for all weather conditions and temperatures so ensuring 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.



## Where do we stay?

While staying in the cities (Hanoi and Tam Dao) you will stay in a hotel, twin or triple rooms with en-suite facilities. During the trek, the group will stay together in a village, in one traditional stilt house. 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. Underneath the house is where you will be served your breakfast and evening meals. 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).



## Where will we sleep?

The sleeping area is very large; occasionally accommodating up to 25 people. The entire group will share one room together 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 will 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.





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### What is the food like?

The food served will be traditional Vietnamese with some Western dishes too. The food is freshly prepared, delicious 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. 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.



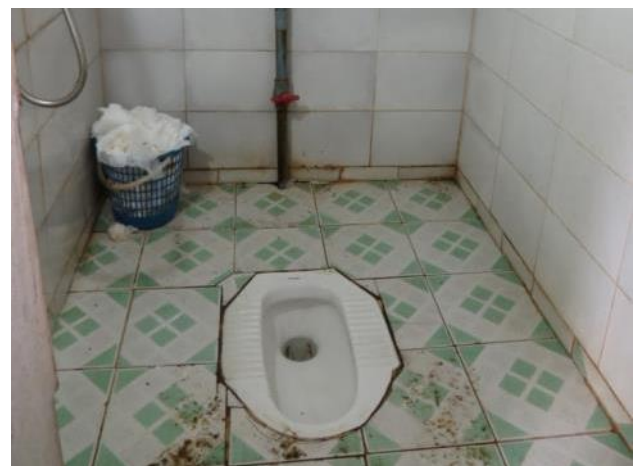
### What are the bathroom facilities like?

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 any warm water can be shared. You should also bring a small pack of baby wipes to freshen up during the trek day.



### What about toilet facilities?

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 flush but some you may to flush using a bucket of water. Toilet paper is not usually provided so you should bring your own which **must** only be put into the bins provided, never flushed. The 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. During the trek you will need to pack up any toilet paper you use to dispose of properly at the village. **NEVER** leave toilet paper or other litter on the trail.





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## How fit do I need to be?

It is advised that you start training at least 6 months before departure to ensure your best chance of success and enjoyment on the challenge. Hill walking while carrying a backpack should form a major part of your training as this will most closely replicate the actual trek, and be the best way to prepare your body for what is involved.

Increasing your cardiovascular endurance and core and leg strength will benefit you greatly too so hill walking can be complemented with swimming, running, cycling, gym workouts, team sports, boot camps etc. You can download a number of free apps which will help you train and track your progress. E.g. MapMyWalk, couch to 5k, MyFitnessPal etc. If you attempt to complete the challenge without training it will make the trek unnecessarily difficult and may hinder your experience, and the experience of your team mates.



## Will I receive advice and support on training?

In addition to supplying training tips, The Different Travel Company has a link with online personal training company Brightside Personal Training, who offer online training packages for those who may not have access to fitness advice tailored to their requirements: <http://brightsidept.kajabi.com/sp/34357>. Try it out for just £1!



## Who can take part?

The trek can be undertaken by anyone with a good level of fitness, who is healthy and determined. Adequate preparation, planning and training is important because the fitter you are the more you will enjoy this experience. An ideal candidate would be an open-minded person with a sense of adventure or someone who would like to take part in a life-changing fundraising experience in the beautiful landscape.

## Medical 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 noted and (if relevant) signed by your GP. Any conditions that develop must be declared and a new medical form completed and signed.



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### Is there an age limit?

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

### Medical Declaration

All participants must complete a medical declaration form upon registering, and any pre-existing conditions, medications used and other medical issues must be noted and (if relevant) confirmed by your GP. Any conditions that develop must be declared and a new medical form completed.

### How much does it cost?

There is a £345 registration fee payable at the time of booking then you must fundraise a minimum of £2,990 for Animals Asia. You may also pay this figure yourself.



**What is included?** Return flights from London (*including* current taxes and charges), all local transfers and transport, all accommodation (hotel in Hanoi and Tam Dao, traditional stilt house on trek), all meals, trek permit, expert English-speaking local guides, porters, UK tour manager.

**What is excluded?** Personal expenses (drinks, laundry, trek gear, souvenirs etc.), travel insurance, tips, Vietnamese visa (if required), vaccinations or medication required, transport to/from UK airports etc.



N.B. The itinerary is complex and details may change due to unusual weather patterns, wildlife movements, and the ability of the group and so on. We will do our best to keep to the set itinerary however we cannot be held responsible for changes that might occur outside of our control. In all such circumstances your guide and tour manager will have the final say in the interest of the health and safety of the group. Adventure travel is often unpredictable so flexibility and an open mind is recommended.



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### Itinerary

**Day 1 (Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> October): London to Hanoi.** Depart London for an indirect overnight flight to Hanoi.



**Day 2 (Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> October): 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.

*Accommodation: hotel.*  
*Meals: Dinner.*



**Day 3 (Friday 26<sup>th</sup> October): Hanoi to Hang Village.** After breakfast we depart Hanoi for a scenic drive to Pu Luong Natural Reserve (approx. 4 hours). We will stop for lunch in Mai Chau before driving a further 22km into the reserve where we will begin our trek, a gentle 3-hour trek to Hang Village, home to a Thai ethnic minority where 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. 3 hours / easy terrain.*  
*Accommodation: Traditional stilt house.*  
*Meals: BLD.*



**Day 4 (Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> October): Hang Village to 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*  
*Accommodation: Traditional stilt house.*  
*Meals: BLD.*





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**Day 5 (Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> October): Kho Muong – Nua Village.** The trek is a little harder day today, as we trek uphill into the Pu Luong 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, where we spend the night in local homes.

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

*Accommodation: Traditional stilt house.*

*Meals: BLD.*

**Day 6 (Monday 29<sup>th</sup> October): 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. 5 hours, undulating terrain.*

*Accommodation: Traditional stilt house.*

*Meals: BLD.*

**Day 7 (Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> October): Hieu Village – Pho Doan – Tam Dao National Park.** This morning our final day of trekking takes us along the Ma River where we will enjoy lovely views of the river, rice fields and waterwheels until we reach the small market down of Pho Doan where we stop for lunch. After lunch we will meet our vehicle and drive to Tam Dao National Park (approximately 5 hours), where we check into our hotel and have dinner.

*Trek: approx. 2-3 hours, long descent.*

*Accommodation: Hotel.*

*Meals: BLD*

**Days 8-9 (Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> October – Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> November): Tam Dao Bear Sanctuary.** The next two days are spent at the Tam Dao Moon Bear Rescue Centre where you will gain a deep understanding of the plight of the bears and the incredible work of Animals Asia.

*Accommodation: Hotel*

*Meals: BLD*



**Day 10 (Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> November): Tam Dao – Hanoi.** Today you will transfer from Tam Dao to Hanoi for the indirect flight home.

*Meals: BLD.*

**Day 11 (Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> November): Hanoi – London.** Arrive back into London.



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## BEFORE YOU GO!

### An A-Z of information on Vietnam

**A is for Arrival.** Until 30<sup>th</sup> June 2018 the immigration department of Vietnam will permit British citizens to enter Vietnam for up to 15 days (inclusive of the date of entry and exit) without a visa. If you have a different nationality the advice may be different so you should visit the Vietnamese Embassy website for details: <http://www.vietnamembassy.org.uk>. At the time of writing (June 2017) the visa requirements for travel after 30<sup>th</sup> June 2018 had not been announced but The Different Travel Company will provide full visa information at least 2 months prior to departure. You can also visit <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/vietnam/entry-requirements> for updates.

**A is also for Accommodation.** While you are in Hanoi and Tam Dao you will stay in a hotel with air conditioning and en-suite facilities with two or three to a room (single rooms may be possible upon payment of a single supplement). During the trek you will stay in traditional stilt house accommodation. Please see above for more information about the trek accommodation.

**A is also for Altitude.** You will not be trekking at altitude. The highest point on the trek does not exceed 1500m.

**B is for Begging.** 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.

**B is also for Books.** There are several guidebooks about Vietnam including:  
**Lonely Planet Vietnam** (Aug 2016) ISBN 978-1743218723. £15.99  
**Lonely Planet Vietnamese Phrasebook** (Sept 2013) ISBN 978-1743214367. £4.99  
**Rough Guide to Vietnam** (April 2015) ISBN 978-1405371861. £15.99

**B is also for Boots.** You will need to wear hiking boots for each trek day. You are recommended to try on lots of pairs of boots at a specialist outdoors store such as Cotswold or Ellis Brigham where the staff can advise you on the correct boot and fit for you. Do not leave it to the last minute to purchase hiking boots as you will need time to break them in. It is important that your boots are waterproof (e.g. Gore-Tex or eVent), have good ankle support and have a good quality sole (e.g. Vibram). Trainers are not suitable for the trek. You are strongly recommended to wear your boots on the plane, or carry them in your hand baggage, in case there are any problems or delays with your luggage.



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**B is also for Bottle.** You will carry your own drinking water (up to 3 litres per day) and you must be able to carry this yourself. Most people bring a two-litre CamelBak or Platypus hydration system plus a one-litre bottle to carry the third litre. Please note that 'own brand' and cheap hydration systems are notorious for splitting, leaking or valves not functioning properly. CamelBak and Platypus brands are the leader 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. **See D for Dehydration and W for Water.**

**C is for Communications.** 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 and Tam Dao there should be Wi-Fi at the hotel.

**C is also for Clothing.** For your time in Hanoi and Tam Dao 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.

**C is also for Clothing on the Trek.** 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. Rainfall is inevitable during the trek so do not bring waterproofs that are very old or that you know leak. A poncho is more comfortable than waterproof trousers and jacket and is a better choice.

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.

**Please note:** Your clothes should be made of technical non-cotton fabrics designed to wick sweat away from your body which subsequently keep clothes dry and smelling fresh for days so you don't have to pack as much.

Nylon, polyester, polypropylene and bamboo fabrics are all effective technical fabrics.

**Never bring cotton clothing to trek in.** Sweat is absorbed by cotton fibres (rather than forced to evaporate as with technical fabrics), leaving clothes damp and smelly. You can find technical clothing in all reputable outdoors stores. Check the garment label to ensure the clothes contain 0% cotton.



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**C is also for 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. See also **B is for Begging**, **E is for Etiquette** and **H is for Haggling**.

**D is for Daypack.** You will need a daypack or backpack for your trek which you will carry yourself. This will contain the items you need to sustain yourself during the trek day. We recommend a 25-30 litre pack, with a **chest strap and hip belt** for optimal comfort and support. High quality brands to consider when looking for a suitable pack are Osprey, Berghaus and Lowe Alpine (amongst others) and you are strongly advised to visit a reputable store like Cotswold to have your backpack fitted, as they come in a variety of sizes, and some brands offer male and female specific fits. Your daypack will contain essentials such as sun cream, insect repellent, 3 litres of water, toilet paper, small first aid kit,

energy snacks and camera etc. Your main trek luggage (spare clothes, toiletries etc.) will be transported by moped between villages and this will be waiting for you when you arrive in the village each night.

**D is also for Dehydration.** 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) with you 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. **See also B is for Bottle and W is for Water.**

**D is also for Dietary Requirements.** 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.

**D is also for 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



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done some fitness training in order to get the greatest enjoyment from the challenge.

**D is also for Discount.** Nomad Travel Stores ([www.nomadtravel.co.uk](http://www.nomadtravel.co.uk)) kindly offer a 10% discount against any purchase of kit and equipment online or in-store and 10% discount off vaccinations at their travel clinics. Also Cotswold Outdoor (<http://www.cotswoldoutdoor.com>) offer our clients 15% discount for use at their stores or online. Please contact us for a voucher.

**D is also for Dry bag.** 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.

**E is also for 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.

**E is also for 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.

**E is for 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 on. A donation is expected when visiting a temple or pagoda. Photography is restricted at ports, harbours and airports, and it is polite to ask permission before taking photographs of people, especially of ethnic minorities.

**E is also for Expenses.** Please remember to allow extra money for guide/support staff tips (approx. £35 per trekker), laundry, drinks, souvenirs, and any other personal spending. Vaccinations, medication, travel insurance and personal equipment are not included in the cost and you should budget for these expenses before departure too.

**F is also for 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,



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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. Your tour manager and local guide will also have a first aid kit in the event of any medical issues.

**F is also for Fitness.** The conditions on this trek differ to that in the UK and plenty of training and preparation is essential for your optimal enjoyment. The Different Travel Company reserves the right to refuse anyone to take part if they are not fit enough. Regular breaks are taken but long days walking are inevitable. You cannot be *too fit* for this challenge so you should train before your departure. 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. **See the feature on page 5 about fitness.**

**F is for 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.

**G is for 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.

**H is also for 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.

**H is also for 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.

**H is for Health.** 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 on vaccinations, visit <http://www.fitfortravel.scot.nhs.uk> but your GP or travel health professional should be the first stop for an in depth consultation tailored to your medical history. Different Travel regrets that we cannot provide medical advice or recommendations on vaccinations you should have. If your GP does not specialise in travel vaccinations, please contact a private clinic such as Nomad Travel Clinics. Different Travel and Nomad have teamed up to offer you a 10% discount on kit and vaccinations (discount code given on booking). See also M is for Malaria.



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**H is also for 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.

**I is for 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. See also M is for Malaria.

**I is for Insurance.** The Different Travel Company will do everything possible to ensure a safe and enjoyable trip however unexpected things can occur such as your cancellation, delays, medical problems and baggage loss etc. Thus, the purchase of travel insurance for our expeditions, such as a policy from Campbell Irvine, is mandatory and you are advised to organise this at the time of booking to ensure you are covered immediately. Travel Insurance is a cost effective way to protect yourself and your equipment.

<http://www.campbellirvinedirect.com/different-travel>

*Please note: most travel insurance policies protect you before departure too so it is advised to buy insurance as close to booking as possible to protect the loss of your registration*

*fee as a result of cancellation due to injury, illness etc.*

**K is for Kit bag.** 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 duffle 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.

**L is for 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)



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**Goodbye** - Tam biet

**Yes** - Vang

**No** - Khong

**Sorry** - Xin loi (pronounced Sin loy)

**See you again** - Hen Gap Lai

**Thank you** - Cam on (pronounced Come on)

**How much?** - Bao nhieu? (pronounced Bow knew)

**1-** Mot; **2-** Hai; **3-** Ba; **4-** Buon; **5-** Nam;

**6-** Sau; **7-** Bay; **8-** Tam; **9-** Chin; **10-** Muoi

**L is also for Luggage.** You will need **four** different luggage items as follows:

- 1. A small daypack** of around 25-30 litres capacity. You will carry this yourself while you trek, and you may be able to use this as hand baggage on the plane (check that the size is airline compatible). **See D is for Daypack.**
- 2. 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, holdall or duffle bag** which will hold your trek luggage (e.g. spare trek clothes and toiletries) and will be transported by motorbike from place to place during the trek. Most people will pack this kit bag flat into their large main suitcase. **See K is for Kit Bag.**
- 4. 1 or 2 combination padlocks** for keeping your baggage secure.

**M is for Malaria.** Some travel clinics and GP practices deem the Mai Chau/ Pu Luong 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.scot.nhs.uk>.

**M is also for Money.** The official currency of Vietnam is the Dong (VND). The exchange rate at time of writing is £1 = 28,974 VND.

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 so please bring English Pounds Sterling. Don't forget to change any leftover Vietnamese currency before leaving the country otherwise you may be stuck with cash that cannot be changed.





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

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. **See also E is for Expenses.**

### Handy currency converter (correct June 2017)

£1	28,974 Dong	£10	289,740 Dong
£1.72	50,000 Dong	£17.20	500,000 Dong
£3.45	100,000 Dong	£20	579,457 Dong
£5	144,878 Dong	£25	724,392 Dong
US\$1	22,690 Dong	US\$10	226,900 Dong
US\$2.20	50,000 Dong	US\$11.01	250,000 Dong
US\$4.40	100,000 Dong	US\$20	453,800 Dong
US\$5	113,450 Dong	US\$25	567,250 Dong

**N is for Nibbles.** You are recommended to bring a small selection of high energy snacks for the trek for energy and a great pick-me-up. Dried fruit, nuts, Jelly Babies, individual cake bars etc. are all fantastic snacks. **Please only bring snacks you have tried before and enjoy eating!** Chocolate is likely to melt very quickly so is best avoided! You do not need to bring too much – you will be fed really well.

**P is for Personal 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 it is best

not to bring expensive jewellery or watches to Vietnam. Do not carry unnecessarily large amounts of cash with you at any time, or if this is unavoidable, ensure it is divided into different pockets. You are recommended to bring a credit card for emergencies.

**P is for Photocopies.** Remember to photocopy of all your documents (insurance details, flight numbers, passport, credit/debit cards etc.) and take a copy with you during the trip, separate 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.

**P is also for 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 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.

**P is also for Poverty.** 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





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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.

**R is for 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.

**S is for Shoes.** 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.

**S is also for 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 or cotton sleeping bag liner for your additional comfort. These can be bought cheaply online (particularly on eBay) and a small single duvet cover will actually perform the same function as a cotton liner! Silk is slightly more comfortable to sleep in as it will keep you warm on cooler nights but keep you cool on warmer nights.

**S is also for Socks.** Socks must be good quality, supportive, **non-cotton** and fit you well so they

don't slip down or sag in your boots, which is one of the main causes of blisters. During your trek you will be wearing breathable boots and so you should wear socks to complement these. Cotton socks absorb sweat and hinder its evaporation, making them damp and therefore likely to rub against your feet, causing blisters. Socks containing Coolmax (a brand of polyester), nylon, or Merino wool all have wicking properties so instead of the fabric absorbing sweat it pulls it away from the skin for it to evaporate. When you wear socks like these your feet will stay cool and you will avoid blisters. Changing your socks regularly will prevent athlete's foot and will also allow you to notice and treat any foot conditions that may be developing.

Good brands to look out for are Bridgedale, Smartwool, Brasher and 1000 mile but please note that their socks occasionally include cotton mix fabrics; check the packaging before you buy!

**S is also for 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!

**T is for Tickets (e-tickets).** These will be sent to you 2 weeks before departure.

**T is also for Tipping.** We would recommend tipping your trek guides and support team, and your bus driver. Overall you should allow approximately £30-35 per trekker for tips for the trip local staff. You do not need to tip the



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owners of the stilt house accommodation although cultural sharing, e.g. showing family photos or information about the area you live is always welcome.

**T is also for Toilets.** 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. At the trek accommodation, toilets will be basic, Asian squat style, with the occasional Western sit-down toilet. If you need to use the toilet during the trek day, you will need to utilise a private place along the trail. If using 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.

**T is also for Towel.** You will need to bring a towel during the trek. A highly absorbent but lightweight and fast drying trek towel is recommended.

**W is for Weather.** Vietnam has a tropical monsoon climate with wet and dry seasons. In general, the dry season lasts from October to April in the north. During the trek you can expect temperatures of 19-28°C (although we cannot guarantee there will not be deviations outside of this range). There may be some rain so waterproofs are recommended.

**W is also for 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. **See B is for Bottle, D is for Dehydration.**

**W is also for Waterproofs.** The best waterproof gear to bring with you for the trek is a poncho. The temperatures will be high and a poncho will allow the air to circulate so you stay dry and don't get too hot. Waterproof jackets and trousers are fine but not as comfortable to wear as a poncho. You can purchase ponchos very cheaply online or locally in Hanoi.

**W is also for 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.

**Z is for Zinc Oxide tape.** When your boots start to rub against your feet, you can apply zinc oxide tape to the hot spot to stop a blister developing. Prevention is better than cure!



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### Suggested Packing List

#### ESSENTIALS

- E-tickets + pre-departure info
- Passport & copy
- Vietnam visa (*if applicable*)
- Insurance policy details
- Pen for immigration forms
- Cash (£) + Credit/ATM card(s)
- LED head torch + spare batteries
- Adaptor (multi-option)
- Sunglasses
- Plastic bags – various sizes
- Camera + spare batteries

#### HYGIENE

- Shampoo / conditioner
- Toothbrush/toothpaste
- Antiperspirant/deodorant
- Shower gel/ shave kit / loofah
- Wet wipes
- Toilet paper
- Sun cream (high SPF)
- Hand sanitizer
- Small travel towel
- Feminine hygiene products
- Nappy sacks (for used toilet paper)

#### OPTIONAL

- Video camera + charger
- Mobile phone + charger
- MP3 player/iPod
- Walking pole(s)
- Sewing kit
- Notebook/diary
- Books/playing cards

#### LUGGAGE

- Suitcase for luggage
- Trek kit bag
- Daypack (25-30 litres)
- Padlocks

#### CLOTHING & FOOTWEAR

- Hiking boots
- Slip-on sandals or trainers for evenings at village stilt house
- Trek socks & underwear
- Base layer top (long sleeved)
- Non-cotton t-shirt
- Long sleeved light warm layer
- Lightweight trek trousers
- Lightweight poncho
- Change of clothes for evenings
- Sun hat
- Buff [www.buffwear.co.uk](http://www.buffwear.co.uk)
- Scarf/pashmina (for temples)
- Casual attire for sightseeing
- Swimwear
- Gaiters (optional)*

#### FIRST AID KIT

- Prescription medicine
- 50% DEET insect repellent
- Ibuprofen and Paracetamol
- Plasters & blister plasters
- Imodium (Loperamide)
- Rehydration (e.g. Dioralyte)
- Muscle rub (e.g. Deep Heat)
- Anti-histamine tablets/cream
- Antiseptic cream (e.g. Savlon)
- Indigestion remedy (e.g. Gaviscon)
- Lip balm with SPF protection
- Scissors/tweezers
- Zinc oxide tape (optional)*
- Throat lozenges (optional)*
- Decongestant (optional)*
- Spare glasses/contact lenses*

#### EATING AND DRINKING

- 2 litre water bottle (CamelBak)
- 1 litre spare bottle
- Energy snacks
- Electrolyte tablets (e.g. NUUN)

#### SLEEPING

- Ear plugs (essential)
- Sleeping bag liner
- Pyjamas

**PLEASE NOTE:** This list is a guideline and is not exhaustive – it does not take into account your personal preference or requirements.

If you have any questions about anything on this packing list, please contact [info@different-travel.com](mailto:info@different-travel.com) for more information.