



# Best of Vietnam Birding & Culture (21 Days)

Ho Chi Minh City ♦ Mekong Delta ♦ Cat Tien National Park ♦ Dalat  
Hoi An ♦ Hue ♦ Cuc Phuong National Park ♦ Halong Bay ♦ Hanoi



Green Peafowl

## Day 1: Arrive Ho Chi Minh City

Arrive at Ho Chi Minh City's Tan Son Nhat International Airport and transfer to hotel. The rest of the day is at leisure. Overnight at Ho Chi Minh City.

## Day 2: Ho Chi Minh City to Mekong Delta

Leave Ho Chi Minh City after breakfast and head south by road to Can Tho in the Mekong Delta. On arrival at Can Tho board the Bassac, a converted traditional wooden rice barge and enjoy a welcome drink with the crew. After checking in, lunch is served on board as the Bassac departs downstream on the Hau River toward Mang Thit. Relax on deck and take in the lush tropical scenery of the verdant delta waterways, fruit orchards and fields of sugar cane. A visit to a village on the banks of the River Mang Thit offers an opportunity to appreciate the way of life and hospitality of the locals. Returning to the Bassac enjoy a pre-dinner drink on the upper deck as the sun sets before dinner. Overnight on board the Bassac.

## Day 3: Mekong Delta to Ho Chi Minh City

Breakfast is served while the Bassac cruises towards Cai Be, crossing the Co Chien River and Co Lach Canal, sharing the waterway with rice and sand barges. Boat building yards where wooden

boats are constructed in the traditional way and fruit drying facilities line the riverbanks. Transfer to a sampan to explore some quieter backwaters before visiting a local handicraft market at Cai Be and disembarking to travel back to Ho Chi Minh City mid-morning. Note: Depending on the day the cruise schedule may be reversed. In the afternoon visit some of Ho Chi Minh City's famous landmarks including the Notre Dame Cathedral, Old Saigon Post Office, the former Presidential Palace and Ben Thanh Market. Overnight at Ho Chi Minh City.

#### **Day 4: Ho Chi Minh City to Cat Tien National Park**

Leaving Ho Chi Minh City after breakfast, transfer by road the 150 km to Cat Tien National Park. Cat Tien National Park contains the largest remaining area of lowland tropical forest in southern Vietnam and an incredible diversity of birds and mammals. Endangered birds found at Cat Tien include Germain's Peacock-pheasant, Green Peafowl and the elusive, Orange-necked Partridge while the mammal list includes Leopard Cat, Lesser Mousedeer, Gaur and three beautiful primates, Black-shanked Douc Langur, Silvered Langur and Buff-cheeked Gibbon. Overnight at Cat Tien National Park.

#### **Days 5 & 6: Cat Tien National Park**

Two full days of birding at Cat Tien National Park. There are excellent trails starting right at the park headquarters while areas further afield such as Crocodile Lake can be reached by park jeeps. Spectacular avian delights to be found in Cat Tien's semi-evergreen forest include Germain's Peacock-pheasant, Siamese Fireback, Blue-rumped and Bar-bellied Pittas, Dusky, Black-and-red and Banded Broadbills, Orange-breasted Trogon, Great, Oriental Pied and Wreathed Hornbills. Cat Tien is woodpecker heaven with 17 species on the park list including Heart-spotted, Pale-headed, Black-and-buff, Great Slaty and White-bellied. Lesser Adjutant, Asian Woollyneck and Crested Serpent-eagle can often be seen circling over the forest. Overnight at Cat Tien National Park.

#### **Day 7: Cat Tien National Park to Dalat**

There is time for some final early morning birding at Cat Tien National Park before heading up Highway 20 to the cooler climes of the Dalat Plateau. In the afternoon start exploring some of the exciting birding sites around town. Overnight at Dalat.

#### **Days 8, 9 & 10: Dalat**

Three days of birding in the montane evergreen and coniferous forests around Dalat includes visits to Mount Lang Bian, the shores of Ho Tuyen Lam and the Ta Nung Valley. The Dalat Plateau is one of the endemic hotspots of South-East Asia and is home to many unique species and subspecies including Dalat Shrike-babbler, Annam Minivet, Annam Prinia, Annam Grasshopper-warbler, Black-crowned Fulvetta, Collared Laughingthrush, Grey-crowned Crocias, Langbian and Annam Sunbirds and Vietnamese Greenfinch. Other local specialities include Lowe's Green-pigeon, Red-vented, Necklaced and Annam Barbets, Rusty-naped and Blue Pittas, Slender-billed Oriole, Yellow-crowned Green Magpie, Langbian Tit, Brown-backed Bulbul, Grey-crowned Tit, Black-headed Parrotbill, Vietnamese Cutia, Black-hooded and White-cheeked Laughingthrushes, White-spectacled Sibia, Plain Minla, Manipur Treecreeper, Yellow-billed Nuthatch, Langbian Lesser Shortwing and Red Crossbill. Overnights at Dalat.

#### **Day 11: Dalat to Hoi An via Danang**

Depart for Dalat Airport after breakfast for the short morning flight to Danang in Central Vietnam. On arrival at Danang transfer the 25 km to Hoi An by road. Hoi An was a major trading port in the 17th and 18th centuries and its architecture and relaxed lifestyle has changed little over the years. In the afternoon take a walking tour of the ancient town centre to visit former merchants' houses, the 400-year-old Japanese Covered Bridge, a Chinese communal hall and the colourful market. Overnight at Hoi An.

#### **Day 12: Hoi An**

Hoi An is known throughout Vietnam for its wonderfully unique cuisine and a morning cooking class is a great way to discover some of Hoi An's culinary delights. The morning starts with a visit to the local market to buy ingredients, followed by a short boat trip along the Hoi An River to the school, where students are treated to demonstrations of Hoi An specialties before being let loose in the kitchen. The afternoon is free at leisure to further explore this delightful town or perhaps shop for souvenirs. Overnight at Hoi An.

#### **Day 13: Hoi An to Hue**

Leave Hoi An after breakfast for a half-day trip to visit the capital and religious centre of the former Champa Kingdom, My Son. Here, 40 km south-west of Hoi An, in a lush green valley, are dozens of

red brick towers and sanctuaries dating from between the seventh and thirteenth centuries. Visit the museum and the holy site then return to Hoi An around noon. Leave Hoi An after lunch for the former imperial capital of Hue. Transfer to hotel on arrival. In the late afternoon visit the elaborate mausoleums of emperors Tu Duc and Khai Dinh. Overnight at Hue.

#### **Day 14: Hue**

A morning cultural tour of Hue takes in the Imperial Citadel from where the Nguyen Dynasty ruled between 1802 and 1945 and Thien Mu Pagoda with its seven-tiered tower. The afternoon is free to relax. Overnight at Hue.

#### **Day 15: Hue to Hanoi**

A morning at leisure in Hue before transferring to Hue Airport for the early afternoon flight to Hanoi. On arrival in Hanoi transfer to hotel. Overnight at Hanoi.

#### **Day 16: Hanoi to Cuc Phuong National Park**

Leave Hanoi after breakfast for Cuc Phuong National Park, a three-hour drive south of Hanoi. The first national park to be established in Vietnam, Cuc Phuong is an area of limestone hills covered in primary rainforest. The best birding is at the centre of the park where there are several excellent trails including the Loop Trail and the Valley Trail. The main road through the park can also be very productive especially for over-wintering thrushes early in the morning. Overnight at Cuc Phuong National Park.

#### **Days 17: Cuc Phuong National Park**

A full day of birding at Cuc Phuong where specialities include the elusive, Red-collared Woodpecker, Pied Falconet, Bar-bellied, Blue-rumped and Eared Pittas, Silver-breasted Broadbill, Ratchet-tailed Treepie, White-winged Magpie, White-tailed Flycatcher, Fujian Niltava, Limestone Leaf-warbler and Greyish Limestone-babbler. Overnight at Cuc Phuong National Park.

#### **Day 18: Cuc Phuong National Park to Hanoi**

Depart Cuc Phuong after breakfast for the journey back to Hanoi, stopping en route at Van Long Nature Reserve to take a sampan through flooded rice fields to the dramatic limestone cliffs that are home to a critically endangered endemic primate, Delacour's Langur. Several interesting bird species can also be found here including White-browed Crake and during the winter months there are often large numbers of storks, herons and waterfowl. Continue to Hanoi and transfer to hotel. In the afternoon enjoy a city tour of this unique Asian capital, a city of temples, lakes and tree-lined boulevards. Overnight at Hanoi.

#### **Day 19: Hanoi to Halong Bay**

Leave Hanoi after breakfast for the two-hour drive to Halong Bay, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the natural wonders of the world. At noon board the Bhaya, a luxurious oriental cruise boat. With comfortable air-conditioned cabins, a restaurant, bar and a sundeck this is the ultimate Halong Bay experience. After a sumptuous buffet lunch enjoy the wonderful natural scenery while relaxing on deck or exploring some of the spectacular caves on a shore excursion. Other options include kayaking, spa treatments and a cooking demonstration. Overnight on board the Bhaya.

#### **Day 20: Halong Bay to Hanoi**

Wake up to fresh coffee and a wholesome breakfast or join one of the early morning Tai Chi classes that are held daily on the sundeck before breakfast. Disembark at Tuan Chau Quay mid-morning and transfer back to Hanoi by road. The rest of the day is at leisure in Hanoi. Overnight at Hanoi.

#### **Day 21: Depart Hanoi**

Today is free at leisure in Hanoi until transferring to Hanoi's Noi Bai International Airport for departure flight.