



# 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 ♦ Van Long Nature Reserve  
Halong Bay ♦ Hanoi



Bar-bellied Pitta

## 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 Tra On via Cai Be

Leave Ho Chi Minh City after breakfast and head south to the Mekong Delta by road. Board the Bassac, a converted traditional wooden rice barge, at Cai Be at noon and enjoy a welcome drink with the crew. As the Bassac departs towards Cho Lach on the Tien Giang River enjoy lunch on the upper deck. Relax on deck and take in the lush tropical scenery of the verdant delta waterways and fruit orchards. 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. Back onboard enjoy a drink as the sun sets before dinner. Overnight on board the Bassac.



The Bassac

### **Day 3: Tra On to Ho Chi Minh City via Can Tho**

Breakfast is served while the Bassac cruises to the Tra On floating market. The Bassac then departs towards Can Tho. After arrival at Cai Rang floating market, transfer to a smaller boat for a closer look at the floating market, the nearby arroyos and gardens – a real photographer's paradise. Arrive at Can Tho late morning and return to Ho Chi Minh City by road. In the afternoon visit some 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 very elusive Orange-necked Partridge while the mammal list includes Leopard Cat, Lesser Mousedeer, Sambar, Gaur and two endangered primates, Black-shanked Douc Langur and Buff-cheeked Gibbon. Overnight at Cat Tien National Park.



Jonathan C. Eames

Siamese Fireback

### **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 and for areas further afield such as Crocodile Lake jeeps are used. The 5 km walk through semi-evergreen forest to Crocodile Lake is a great place to look for the near-endemic Germain's Peacock-pheasant, Blue-rumped and Bar-bellied Pittas while Siamese Fireback can often be seen on an early morning drive through the park. Among the many other avian treats to be found at Cat Tien are Scaly-breasted Partridge, Woolly-necked Stork, Lesser Adjutant, White-bellied, Great Slaty, Pale-headed, Black-and-buff and Heart-spotted Woodpeckers, three species of broadbill and the Indochinese-endemic Grey-faced Tit-Babbler. 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 Dalat. In the afternoon make the first of several visits to the Ta Nung Valley, a small but bird-filled area of remnant evergreen forest 10 km from Dalat. This is the most accessible site for the rare and endemic Grey-crowned Crocias and Orange-breasted Laughingthrush. In addition the very distinct local subspecies of Blue-winged Siva, Black-headed Sibia and Black-throated Sunbird are common here. Overnight at Dalat.



Vietnamese Cutia

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

There are several other excellent birding sites around Dalat. At Mount Lang Bian, a 2,169 m high peak 20 minutes from Dalat, Hume's Treecreeper, Yellow-billed Nuthatch, Grey-crowned Tit, Vietnamese Cutia and Black-crowned Fulvetta can be found in the remaining evergreen forest below the summit. The most sought-after species here however is the beautiful and skulking endemic Collared Laughingthrush. Ho Tuyen Lam, a man-made lake just out of town, is a great place to look for some of the local pine specialists such as Indochinese Cuckooshrike, Slender-billed Oriole, Burmese Shrike, Red Crossbill and Vietnamese Greenfinch. Overnight at Dalat.

#### **Day 10: Dalat to Ho Chi Minh City**

A final morning of birding around Dalat before transferring to the airport for the short afternoon flight back to Ho Chi Minh City's Tan Son Nhat Airport. On arrival transfer directly to hotel. Overnight at Ho Chi Minh City

#### **Day 11: Ho Chi Minh City to Hoi An via Danang**

Transfer back to Tan Son Nhat Airport after breakfast for the mid-morning flight to Danang. On arrival in Danang transfer the 25 km to Hoi An by road. The afternoon is free at leisure in Hoi An. Overnight at Hoi An.

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

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. 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. 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 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.



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, Thien Mu Pagoda with its seven-tiered tower and the elaborate mausoleums of emperors Tu Duc and Khai Dinh. 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 in 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.

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

A full day birding at Cuc Phuong where specialities include Silver Pheasant, Pied Falconet, Bar-bellied, Blue-rumped and Eared Pittas, Silver-breasted Broadbill, White-winged Magpie, White-tailed Flycatcher, Fujian Niltava and Limestone Wren-babbler. Overnight at Cuc Phuong National Park.

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

Leave Cuc Phuong after breakfast for the journey back to Hanoi, stopping off at Van Long Nature Reserve en route. Take a sampan ride through flooded rice fields leads to the dramatic limestone cliffs that are home to the largest population of one of Vietnam's critically endangered primates, Delacour's Langur. During the winter months large numbers of waterfowl can be seen here as well as a raptor or two. Continue on 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 and a half hour drive to Halong Bay, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the natural wonders of the world. Board the Emeraude, a luxurious replica of a classic colonial cruiser. With luxurious air-conditioned cabins, a restaurant, two bars 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. Sunset cocktails served on the sundeck in the late afternoon are followed by a buffet dinner. Overnight on board the Emeraude.



The Emeraude

**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 around 9.30 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.