Vietnam

South and Central (Relaxed)



Siamese Fireback by David Hoddinott

Vietnam has rapidly emerged as one of Asia's most exciting birding destinations, offering a remarkable mix of Indochinese endemics, localized specialties, and charismatic mammals set against a backdrop of lush tropical forests, scenic highlands, and dramatic limestone landscapes.

We begin in Ho Chi Minh City, traveling to the superb Cat Tien National Park, one of Southeast Asia's most biodiverse reserves. Here, we'll explore lowland tropical forest and riverine habitats for a dazzling array of species, including Germain's Peacock-Pheasant, Green Peafowl, Siamese Fireback, Bar-bellied and Blue-rumped Pittas, and the localized, Orange-necked Partridge. Other highlights may include Orange-breasted Trogon, Black-and-buff Woodpecker, and a wide variety of broadbills and bulbuls. Night excursions offer chances for Great Eared Nightjar, Collared Scops Owl, and possibly Blyth's Frogmouth. Mammals are a real draw here too - Southern Yellow-cheeked Crested Gibbon and the critically endangered, Black-shanked Douc are both possible, along with macaques, civets, and even Pygmy Slow Loris.

From Cat Tien, we ascend into the cooler highlands, visiting Di Linh and the charming hill town of Da Lat. These areas are home to Vietnam's most sought-after endemics and near-endemics, such as Collared Laughingthrush, Grey-crowned Crocias, Black-crowned Fulvetta, Vietnamese Cutia, Vietnamese Greenfinch, and Black-headed

Parrotbill. We'll explore a mix of pine forest and montane evergreen habitats where mixed flocks and colourful sunbirds, laughingthrushes, and minivets abound.

Continuing north, we fly to Da Nang before travelling inland to Khe Sanh, our base for exploring Sa Mu Pass in Bac Huong Hoa Nature Reserve. The extensive evergreen forests here support an exciting selection of Annamite specialties, with the localized Rufous-cheeked Laughingthrush our primary target. Other possibilities include Short-tailed Scimitar-Babbler, White-cheeked Laughingthrush, Austen's Brown Hornbill and Red-collared Woodpecker, while Great Hornbill and several other forest species add further interest.

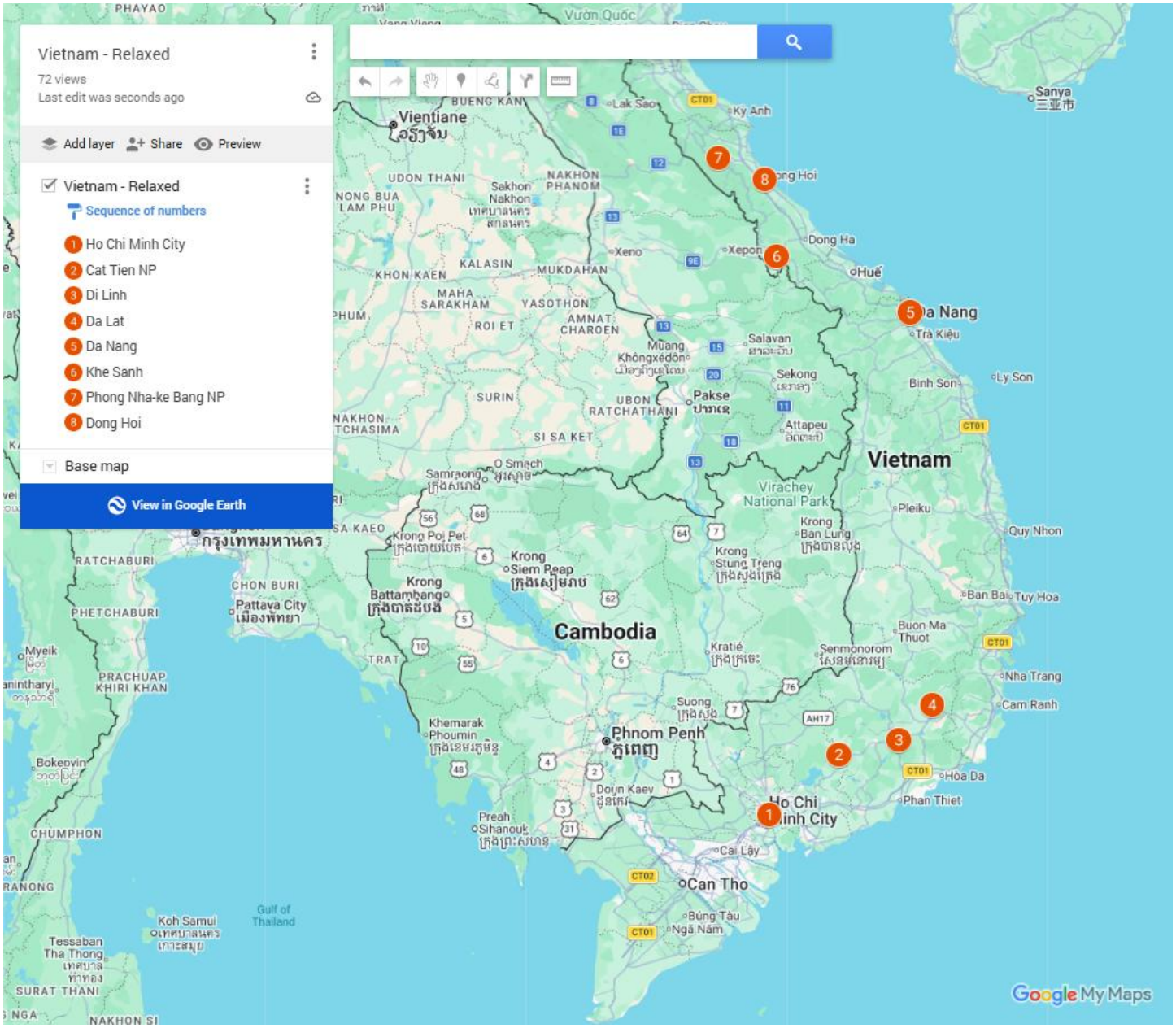
From Khe Sanh, we continue north to the dramatic karst landscapes of Phong Nha–Ke Bang National Park, home to some of Vietnam's most restricted-range species, including the near-endemic Sooty Babbler and Limestone Leaf Warbler. The park also holds Austen's Brown Hornbill, White-winged Magpie and rare primates such as the Hatinh Langur.

With its combination of spectacular scenery, comfortable accommodations, and an outstanding suite of birds and mammals, this Relaxed tour is the perfect way to discover the natural wonders of Vietnam at a measured pace.

Itinerary & Map

Relaxed

Day 1	**Arrival in Ho Chi Minh City**
Day 2	**Ho Chi Minh City to Cat Tien National Park**
Days 3 to 5	**Cat Tien National Park**
Day 6	**Cat Tien National Park to Di Linh**
Day 7	**Di Linh**
Day 8	**Di Linh to Da Lat**
Days 9 & 10	**Da Lat**
Day 11	**Da Lat; flight to Da Nang, transfer to Khe Sanh**
Day 12	**Sa Mu pass (Bac Huong Hoa Nature Reserve)**
Day 13	**Khe Sanh to Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park**
Day 14 & 15	**Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park**
Day 16	**Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park to Dong Hoi; flight to Ho Chi Minh City**


Vietnam - Relaxed
72 views
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Sequence of numbers
1 Ho Chi Minh City
2 Cat Tien NP
3 Di Linh
4 Da Lat
5 Da Nang
6 Khe Sanh
7 Phong Nha-ke Bang NP
8 Dong Hoi
Base map
View in Google Earth
Vietnam
Cambodia
Vientiane
Phnom Penh
Ho Chi Minh City
Can Tho
Da Nang
Google My Maps

Birding sites in detail

Cat Tien National Park. Cat Tien National Park protects the largest remaining expanse of lowland tropical forest in southern Vietnam and is home to an astonishing diversity of wildlife, including more than 330 bird species. Among its most prized residents are endangered species such as Germain's Peacock-Pheasant, Green Peafowl, and the highly elusive, localized, Orange-necked Partridge.



Green Peafowl by Lev Frid

Our time here will be spent birding along the park's extensive network of tracks and trails. We will target a range of forest specialists, including the shy Bar-bellied and Blue-rumped Pittas, the near-endemic Germain's Peacock-Pheasant, immaculate Siberian Blue Robin, striking Banded Kingfisher, superb, Orange-breasted Trogon, and Siamese Fireback. Other highlights may include Yellow-bellied Warbler (a bamboo specialist), wintering Pale-footed Bush Warbler, the elusive Pale-legged Leaf Warbler, Orange-necked and Green-legged Partridges, Pale Blue and Indochinese Blue Flycatchers, Scaly-crowned, Puff-throated, and Buff-breasted Babblers, White-rumped Shama, Forest Wagtail, and Purple-naped Spiderhunter.

The park's narrow tracks, some drivable and others best explored on foot, wind through dense forest and natural clearings, offering excellent access to a variety of habitats. Birding slowly along these tracks is highly productive. Here we may find the species mentioned above, as well as Black Baza, Square-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo, Blue-bearded and Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters, Oriental Dollarbird, Great Slaty, White-bellied, Laced, and Grey-headed Woodpeckers, plus the scarce Black-and-buff Woodpecker. Greater and Lesser Yellownapes, Common Flameback, and the bamboo-loving Pale-headed Woodpecker add to the excitement. Other highlights include Black-and-red, Dusky, and Banded Broadbills; Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike; Large Woodshrike; Great Iora; Swinhoe's and Scarlet Minivets; Ashy, Bronzed, Hair-crested, and Greater Racket-tailed Drongos; several bulbuls including Stripe-throated, Ochraceous, Black-headed, and Grey-eyed; Racket-tailed Treepie; Dark-necked Tailorbird; Velvet-fronted Nuthatch; Yellow-vented, Thick-billed, and Plain Flowerpeckers; Ruby-cheeked, Scarlet, and Olive-backed Sunbirds; Blue-winged and Golden-fronted Leafbirds; Little Spiderhunter; and the Indochinese endemic Grey-faced Tit-Babbler.



Orange-breasted Trogon by David Hoddinott

An open-air safari drive to the park's southwestern edge will take us through more open grassland and savanna habitats. This area is excellent for species such as Green Peafowl, Siamese Fireback, and Red Junglefowl, along with Plaintive, Asian Emerald, and Violet Cuckoos, Green-billed Malkoha, Racket-tailed Treepie, Greater and Lesser Coucals, Lesser Adjutant, Painted Stork, Grey-headed Fish Eagle, Germain's Swiftlet, Silver-backed Needletail, Burmese Myna (Vinous-breasted Starling), Red Collared Dove, White-rumped and Scaly-breasted Munias, Yellow-bellied and Rufescent Prinias, and Chestnut-capped Babbler.



Bar-bellied Pitta by Carlos Bocos

Mammal sightings are also possible and may include Wild Boar, Gaur, Northern Red Muntjac, Sambar, Lesser Mouse Deer (Chevrotain), and Leopard Cat. While traveling through denser forest, we might encounter the striking Southern Yellow-cheeked Crested Gibbon, the critically endangered, Black-shanked Douc, Long-tailed (Crab-eating) and Northern Pig-tailed Macaques, Crab-eating Mongoose, and Northern Smooth-tailed Treeshrew.

Fruiting trees often attract frenzies of bird activity, and we'll watch for Thick-billed, Pin-tailed, and Ashy-headed Green Pigeons; Green Imperial Pigeon; Golden-crested and Common Hill Mynas; several barbet species including Coppersmith, Red-vented, Lineated, Green-eared, and Blue-eared; Vernal Hanging Parrot; Red-breasted Parakeet; and both Oriental Pied and Great Hornbills.

Evening excursions are optional but highly recommended. Night walks near camp and along the main track often produce Collared Scops Owl, Brown Hawk-Owl, Asian Barred Owlet, Large-tailed Nightjar, the spectacular Great Eared Nightjar, and Common Palm Civet. With luck, we may encounter rarities such as Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl, Blyth's Frogmouth, Oriental Scops Owl, Brown Fish Owl, and the tiny, elusive Pygmy Slow Loris.



Great Hornbill by Glen Valentine

Di Linh area. Deo Nui San provides another opportunity to find Da Lat endemics and rarities, such as Black-hooded and Orange-breasted Laughingthrushes, Black-headed Parrotbill, Vietnamese Cutia, Yellow-vented Green Pigeon, and Indochinese Green Magpie. Other specialties include Blue Pitta, Bar-backed Partridge, Green Cochoa, Red-billed Scimitar-Babbler, and

Yellow-billed Nuthatch. Mixed flocks may yield Arctic, Blyth's, Yellow-browed, and Kloss's Leaf Warblers, Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo, Flavescent Bulbul, Mountain Fulvetta, Black-throated (Grey-crowned) Bushtit, Maroon Oriole, White-cheeked Laughingthrush, White-bellied Erpornis, Mugimaki and Verditer Flycatchers, Rufous-capped Babbler, Dalat and Clicking Shrike-Babblers, White-throated Rock Thrush, Swinhoe's and Scarlet Minivets, Large Woodshrike, Fire-breasted Flowerpecker, and Streaked Spiderhunter. After dark, we may search for Hodgson's Frogmouth if not yet seen.



Collared Laughingthrush by Glen Valentine

Da Lat. We will explore the varied habitats around this former French colonial hill station, focusing on four core birding sites: Mount Bidoup Nui Ba National Park, the Ta Nung Valley, the forests surrounding Ho Tuyen Lam Dam, and the classic Mount Lang Biang.

Ta Nung Valley remains an excellent location for Da Lat's specialties, despite increased development. Key species include Grey-crowned Crocias, local subspecies of Blue-winged Minla (Plain Minla), Rufous-backed (Annam) and Black-headed (White-spectacled) Sibias, Black-throated (Lang Biang) and Mrs. Gould's (Annam) Sunbirds, White-cheeked Laughingthrush, Red-billed and White-browed Scimitar-Babblers, Indochinese Barbet, Vietnamese Greenfinch, and Black-headed Parrotbill. Supporting species include Barred Cuckoo-Dove, Thick-billed and Mountain Imperial Pigeons, Greater Yellownape, Bay Woodpecker, Indochinese Cuckooshrike, Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike, and Fire-breasted Flowerpecker.

Mount Bidoup Nui Ba is a priority site for many of Da Lat's toughest endemics: Collared Laughingthrush, Vietnamese Cutia, and Black-crowned Fulvetta. Other highlights include White-tailed Robin, Mountain Fulvetta, Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher, Large Niltava, White-cheeked Laughingthrush, the endemic, yellow-crowned Common Green Magpie, Long-tailed Broadbill, Blue Pitta, endemic Lesser Shortwing, ocularis White-spectacled Warbler, Grey-cheeked and Chestnut-crowned Warblers, Kloss's and Blyth's Leaf Warblers, Dalat and Clicking Shrike-Babblers, Spotted Forktail, and Grey-bellied Tesia. Lucky birders may even encounter Green Cochoa, Siberian Thrush, or Orange-breasted Laughingthrush.



Blue Pitta by Carlos Bocos

Mount Lang Biang serves as a backup for missed Bidoup species and offers additional chances for Hume's Treecreeper (endemic subspecies), Indochinese Green Magpie, Yellow-billed Nuthatch, Mugimaki Flycatcher, and Pygmy Cupwing.

Ho Tuyen Lam Dam combines pine and evergreen forests and is superb for Vietnamese Cutia, Vietnamese Greenfinch, Slender-billed Oriole, Green-backed Tit, endemic Red Crossbill subspecies (may be split as Vietnamese or Dalat Crossbill), Chestnut-vented Nuthatch, Long-tailed and Grey-chinned Minivets, Grey-faced Buzzard, Eurasian Jay, Indochinese Cuckooshrike, Burmese Shrike, Grey Bush Chat, Yellow-eyed Babbler, and two recently described endemics: Annam Prinia and Dalat Bush Warbler. Night outings may produce Hodgson's Frogmouth, Oriental Scops Owl, and Grey Nightjar.



Grey-crowned Crocias by Glen Valentine

Sa Mu Pass (Bac Huong Hoa Nature Reserve). Located in north-western Quang Tri Province near the Laos border, Bac Huong Hoa protects extensive lowland and mid-montane evergreen forest typical of the Annamese Lowlands. More than 200 bird species have been recorded, including numerous restricted-range and threatened species. Sa Mu Pass reaches approximately 1,100 metres and provides access to some excellent montane forest birding.

Our primary target is the localized Rufous-cheeked Laughingthrush, which is regularly encountered around the higher sections of Sa Mu Pass. Other important species include Short-tailed Scimitar-Babbler, White-cheeked Laughingthrush, Austen's Brown Hornbill, Red-collared Woodpecker, Great Hornbill, Crested Kingfisher and Blyth's Kingfisher. The forests also support several highly sought-after but considerably more difficult species. With luck we may stumble upon such rarities as Edwards's Pheasant, Vietnamese Crested Argus or Siamese Fireback.

Birding is principally along the road and accessible forest around the pass, with the higher elevations particularly productive for Rufous-cheeked Laughingthrush. Short-tailed Scimitar-Babbler is more typical of somewhat lower elevations between approximately 600 and 800 metres.



White-tailed Robin by Glen Valentine

Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park. This famous park is dominated by broad-leaved forest growing over unique limestone karst formations. Its key specialties are the Indochinese endemic Sooty Babbler and the recently described Limestone Leaf Warbler, both restricted to limestone habitats. Additional targets include Austen's Brown Hornbill, White-winged Magpie, Indochinese Yuhina, Slaty-backed Forktail, Japanese Thrush, Black-throated Laughingthrush, Fork-

tailed and Crimson Sunbirds, Great Myna, and Cook's Swift. Pittas such as Blue-rumped, Bar-bellied, and Eared occur but are difficult to see. With luck, we may also encounter Hatinh Langur or Red-shanked Douc, two rare and localized primates.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Fairly easy. Comfortable pace with multiple-night stays, minimal long drives, and no strenuous hikes. Hot and humid in lowlands; cooler in highlands. Early starts and night birding are optional.
Birding Ease		Moderate. Focus on attainable specialties without chasing every skulker. Some forest species can be elusive, but most birding is relaxed.
Accommodation		Comfortable to good standard throughout, all with private facilities and air-conditioning where needed.
Walking / Trails		Easy to moderate. Mostly on roads or wide tracks.
Vehicles / Roads		We use a minibus or coach for most of the tour. Roads are sealed, mostly of a good standard. Traffic in Ho Chi Minh City is heavy.
Photography		Moderate. Typical forest conditions but decent opportunities along tracks and open areas.
Annoyances		Lowland heat and humidity; occasional leeches after rain; food can be repetitive in some areas.

As in much of Southeast Asia, Vietnam is heavily impacted by the capturing of wild songbirds of almost every native species for the local caged bird trade. The impact is patently evident to the visiting birder, who will find bird densities very low, some forests almost devoid of life and many species nervous, skittish, or secretive. Consequently, many sightings are distant or fleeting. The use of playback and multiple visits to several feeding stations are necessary to ensure reasonable sightings of the many target species.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 16;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including bottled water or mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry, and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

Our Relaxed series of tours are designed to focus on having an enjoyable holiday with a bird and wildlife focus. Where possible; we have reduced or removed long drives, single night stays and poor/rustic accommodation. We have also sought to reduce or remove difficult hikes, narrow/muddy trails and otherwise oppressive environmental conditions. Early starts and night birding are mostly optional, and we will not spend much time searching for difficult and/or skulking species. These tours are not suitable for hardcore birders and listers, or dedicated photographers.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- Some time is spent in vehicles, as we several medium distance drives to get to the best birding areas. It is important for the comfort of yourself and your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20kg (44lb) for check in luggage and 8kg (+-18lb) for hand luggage.
- Land leeches do occur in some of the reserves, though encountering them depends on recent rainfall. We recommend that you bring leech socks.
- Vietnam is a developing country with a limited, though rapidly changing infrastructure which, together with the incredible seasonal changes, means that schedules need to have a degree of flexibility.
- This tour does require a reasonable level of fitness, and participants should be in good general health as much of the birding will be done on foot and may require walking or standing for several hours at a time.
- Should you have any physical limitations, please notify us in advance of departure.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour begins with a welcome dinner at our Ho Chi Minh City hotel in the evening of day 1 and will conclude after an internal flight into Ho Chi Minh City on the morning of day 16.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Tan Son Nhat International Airport, Ho Chi Minh City (IATA: SGN) is the main port of entry and departure for this tour.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.