

Vietnam: Birds & Culture
November 4-17, 2022

Itinerary in Brief

Day 1 – Fri, Nov 4: Arrival

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

Day 2 – Sat, Nov 5: Ho Chi Minh City to Cat Tien National Park

Leaving Ho Chi Minh City after breakfast, we drive the ~90 miles to the fabulous Cat Tien National Park, which 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. ***Night in Cat Tien National Park***

Days 3-4 – Sun, Nov 6 & Mon, Nov 7: Cat Tien National Park

We spend another two full days further exploring Cat Tien. There are excellent trails starting right at the park headquarters and for areas further afield such as Crocodile Lake, park jeeps are used. The trail through semi-evergreen forest to Crocodile Lake can be good for the near-endemic Germain's Peacock-pheasant and both Blue-rumped & Bar-bellied Pittas while the beautiful Siamese Fireback can often be seen on an early morning drive to the trailhead. Among the many other avian treats to be found at Cat Tien are Green-legged Partridge, Asian Woollyneck, Lesser Adjutant, White-bellied, Great Slaty, Pale-headed, Black-and-buff & Heart-spotted Woodpeckers, three species of broadbill and the Indochinese-endemic Gray-faced Tit-Babbler. ***Nights in Cat Tien National Park***

Day 5 – Tue, Nov 8: Cat Tien National Park to Dalat

After some early morning birding at Cat Tien, we head up Highway 20 to the cooler climes of Dalat, arriving in the early afternoon. The Dalat Plateau is home to several of Vietnam's endemic bird species as well as many distinctive local subspecies. We will explore some of the area's more exciting birding sites this afternoon. ***Night in Dalat***

Days 6-8 – Wed, Nov 9 – Fri, Nov 11: Dalat

Our next three days of birding include visits to Mount Lang Bian, a 7, 116 ft. (2,169 m) high peak just 20 minutes from Dalat, and the shores of Ho Tuyen Lam, a man-made lake just outside the town. Our main targets the next few days will be the Vietnamese endemics Dalat Shrike-babbler, Vietnamese Greenfinch, Black-crowned Fulvetta, Orange-breasted & Collared Laughingthrushes and Grey-crowned Crocias. Near endemics here include Grey-crowned Tit, Black-headed Parrotbill, White-cheeked & Black-hooded Laughingthrushes, and Vietnamese Cutia. Other birds we will be on the lookout for in this bird-rich area are the elusive Blue & Rusty-naped Pittas, Indochinese Cuckooshrike, Slender-billed Oriole, Manipur Treecreeper, Yellow-billed Nuthatch, and a very distinctive race of Red Crossbill. ***Nights in Dalat***

Day 9 – Sat, Nov 12: Dalat to Hoi An via Danang

After an early breakfast, we depart for Dalat Airport to take the short morning flight to Danang and then drive to Hoi An, where we will enjoy some of the town's cultural attractions. 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, we take a walking tour of the ancient town center to visit former merchants' houses, the 400 year-old Japanese Covered Bridge, a Chinese communal hall, and the colorful market.

Night in Hoi An

Day 10 – Sun, Nov 13: Hoi An to Hue

We depart Hoi An after breakfast for a half-day trip to the capital and religious center of the former Champa Kingdom, My Son. Nestled in a lush green valley, the site contains remnants of ruined Hindi temples - dozens of red brick towers and sanctuaries dating from between the seventh and thirteenth centuries. After lunch, we continue to the former imperial capital of Hue, where we will visit the elaborate mausoleums of emperors Tu Duc and Khai Dinh. ***Night in Hue***

Day 11 – Mon, Nov 14: Hue to Hanoi

Our morning cultural tour of Hue takes us to the Imperial Citadel, where the Nguyen Dynasty (Vietnam's last imperial dynasty) ruled between 1802 and 1945. We will also visit the impressive Thien Mu Pagoda with its seven-tiered tower. In the afternoon we take a short flight from Hue to Hanoi, the modern capital of Vietnam. ***Night in Hanoi***

Day 12 – Tue, Nov 15: Hanoi to Cuc Phuong National Park

After breakfast we make the three-hour drive to Cuc Phuong National Park. 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 center 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. ***Night at Cuc Phuong National Park***

Day 13 – Wed, Nov 16: Cuc Phuong National Park

We spend a full day birding at Cuc Phuong where specialties include Pied Falconet, Bar-bellied, Blue-rumped & Eared Pittas, Silver-breasted Broadbill, White-winged Magpie, White-tailed Flycatcher, Fujian Niltava, Limestone Leaf-warbler and Greyish Limestone-babbler, among many others. ***Night at Cuc Phuong National Park***

Day 14 – Thu, Nov 17: Cuc Phuong National Park to Hanoi

We leave Cuc Phuong after breakfast for the journey back to Hanoi, stopping off at Van Long Nature Reserve en route. We will take a 'sampan,' a type of traditional fishing boat, through flooded rice fields 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. We continue on to Hanoi and enjoy an afternoon city tour of this unique Asian capital, a city of temples, lakes and tree-lined boulevards before transferring to Noi Bai International Airport for return flights.