



Santa Fe Workshops

Vietnam: Land of the Blue Dragons

with Jennifer Spelman

September 8 – 20, 2026



Daily Itinerary

Please note: While we do our best to follow the above itinerary, changes may be made to any aspect of the tour due to a variety of potential situations or unforeseen circumstances.

September 8th: Ho Chi Minh City / Arrival Day

Upon arrival, you'll be picked up at the airport and taken to our hotel in the city center. For those who arrive early or those who are interested in some activities on this day, our team will be on hand to assist. After getting settled and having a good rest, we'll start off with an evening orientation and group dinner at one of the city's excellent restaurants, offering a first taste of authentic Vietnamese cuisine.

Accommodation: 5 hotel*

Included meals: Dinner

September 9th: Ho Chi Minh City

Today we'll dive into the heart of Ho Chi Minh City, beginning with a ride through the streets in traditional xích lô (cycle rickshaws), a perfect way to explore the city and capture its everyday movement through your lens. Along the way we'll stop at a few important landmarks, including the Notre Dame Cathedral, a striking symbol of French colonial presence built entirely with materials imported from France, the Central Post Office, designed by Gustave Eiffel, and the Reunification Palace, once the presidential home of South Vietnam. We'll also visit a tucked-away café inside an old apartment block for a coconut coffee with a view and take time to stroll through a local flower market where we'll frame vendors creating their elaborate bouquets. We'll close the day with dinner at a cozy café, ending with another chance to enjoy the variety of Vietnamese cooking.

Accommodation: 5 hotel*

Included meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

September 10th: Ho Chi Minh City / Da Nang / Hoi An

After breakfast we'll take a 1-hour flight from Ho Chi Minh City to Danang, followed by a short drive to Hoi An, a small riverside town known for its laid-back atmosphere and well-preserved historic charm. Once a major port, Hoi An blends centuries-old Chinese, Japanese, and French influence in its architecture and street layout, creating a setting that's both photogenic and full of character. After checking into our hotel in the center of town, we'll head out for lunch and a coffee at one of Hoi An's traditional cafés. In the late afternoon, as the golden light begins to settle over the town, we'll take a slow walk

through the Old Town, passing lantern-lit alleys, undisturbed courtyards, and riverside corners that show us an atmospheric side of this charming destination.

Accommodation: 4 hotel*

Included meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

September 11th: Hoi An

Today we'll head out on foot to explore the streets of Hoi An, taking in the small details that give the town its charm. We'll stop by a time-honored merchant house, a simple but well-kept reminder of the town's trading history, with wooden interiors and serene courtyards that give a glimpse into life centuries ago. As we walk through the narrow streets, we'll see the mix of architectural styles, Chinese shophouses, French-style balconies, and the Japanese Covered Bridge, one of Hoi An's main landmarks. In the afternoon we'll meet up with a chef for a walk through the town market, where locals shop for fresh herbs, spices, and produce. After the market we'll join a cooking demonstration to learn how a few everyday Vietnamese dishes come together, ending the day with a shared dinner made from the recipes we've just prepared.

Accommodation: 4 hotel*

Included meals: Breakfast, Dinner

September 12: Hoi An / Cua Dai / Hoi An

Early in the morning we'll take a short drive to the coast at Cua Dai, arriving just as the fishing boats come ashore with the day's catch. It's a quiet but active scene, fishermen hauling nets, sorting fish, and exchanging quick conversations as the sun rises over the water. The soft morning light makes this a great moment for photography, but also for simply observing the rhythm of daily life in a coastal village. After spending time along the shore, we'll head back to Hoi An for breakfast. Later in the day we'll visit the Precious Heritage Museum, where we'll explore a thoughtful collection of photographs, clothing, and artifacts gathered from Vietnam's many ethnic communities. The museum offers a closer look at the country's cultural diversity, with each room dedicated to a different group's history, traditions, and way of life.

Accommodation: 4 hotel*

Included meals: Breakfast, Lunch

September 13: Hoi An / Hai Van Pass / Lang Co / Hue

Today we'll travel to Hue by jeep, taking the scenic route over the Hai Van Pass, a winding mountain road known for its coastal views and photo-worthy stops along the way. We'll pause at the top to explore a few abandoned bunkers, learning about their role during past conflicts and taking in the view where mountains meet the sea. On the

other side of the pass, we'll reach the Lang Co Fishing Village and stop for lunch at a laid-back beachfront spot, where the catch of the day is served fresh from the sea. From there we'll visit An Bang Cemetery, known for its elaborate and colorful tombs, each one built by families who often spend years saving to honor their ancestors. We'll also make a short stop in a rural farming area to see how mushrooms are grown and harvested, a staple ingredient in many Vietnamese dishes. By late afternoon we'll arrive in Hue and check into our hotel in this former imperial capital, ready to settle in and relax.

Accommodation: 4 hotel*

Included meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

September 14th: Hue

After breakfast we'll set off on a full-day photography journey through Hue's countryside, riding on the back of motorcycles driven by local professionals (with the option to travel by van for those who prefer). As we wind through quiet roads and small villages, we'll make several stops, starting with a lively morning market, an ideal place to observe the colors, textures, and daily rhythm of rural life. We'll then stop at a café, where our host will introduce us to Hue's unique take on coffee: a salted caramel version that's both sweet and savory. Later we'll visit a nearby workshop where a local artisan will demonstrate how Vietnamese conical hats (nón lá) are made, shaping each one by hand in the same way generations before her have done. For lunch we'll be welcomed into a Buddhist nunnery, where the resident nuns will prepare a homemade vegetarian meal. After a short break back at the hotel, we'll head out to Hue's evening walking street for dinner, where food stalls, lights, and music bring a different kind of energy to the city as night sets in.

Accommodation: 4 hotel*

Included meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

September 15th: Hue / Phong Nha

Today we'll hop into our vintage 1960s jeeps and head north along coastal roads, passing small fishing villages and stretches of empty beach, an ideal route for capturing a different side of Vietnam. Our first major stop will be the Vinh Moc Tunnels, a vast underground network carved deep into the earth, where families lived for months during the war. As we explore the narrow passageways, living quarters, and meeting rooms dug into the red clay, this will offer a rare chance to photograph and reflect on the resilience of the people who once called this space home. After a fresh seafood lunch by the sea, we'll visit the former DMZ and walk across the Hien Luong Bridge, the historic dividing line between North and South Vietnam. From there we'll continue through open countryside toward Phong Nha, a peaceful farming region framed by rice paddies, rivers,

and dramatic limestone peaks. We'll check into a local homestay with views of the fields, then settle in for a relaxed evening and a farm-to-table dinner made with regional ingredients, while learning more about the food traditions of the area.

Accommodation: 4 hotel*

Included meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

September 16th: Phong Nha

After breakfast we'll head out for a full day exploring the Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park, a UNESCO-listed area known for its wild jungle, dramatic limestone peaks, and some of the most impressive cave systems in the world. We'll make our way through the park by vehicle or on the back of a motorbike with a local driver, passing through spectacular landscapes with rainforest-covered mountains, lush green valleys, waterfalls, and limestone karst cliffs. Our main stop will be Paradise Cave, one of the area's most impressive natural wonders. Here we'll walk over a mile into its cool, quiet interior, where the massive chambers, soaring ceilings, and intricate rock formations make for incredible photos and an unforgettable atmosphere. In the evening we'll return to our homestay and sit down to another home-cooked dinner, winding down after a full day out in one of Vietnam's most scenic regions.

Please note: Visiting Paradise Cave requires a 1500 foot / 500 meter walk along an uphill switchback path, followed by 300 steps down into the cave, and back out again. Once inside the cave, the 1.3 mile (2 kilometer) walk takes place on a wooden boardwalk.

Accommodation: 4 hotel*

Included meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

September 17th: Phong Nha

After a leisurely breakfast we'll head into the countryside around Phong Nha, where daily life moves at a slower pace and is still untouched by mass tourism. As we make our way through small villages and farmland, you'll have the chance to photograph everyday moments, such as farmers working the fields, families going about their routines, and children playing along the roadside. One of our main stops will be at a duck farm, where we'll learn about a native Vietnamese breed and take time to capture the movement of the ducks as they're guided through shallow ponds and fields. We'll keep things flexible, stopping when something catches the eye and allowing plenty of time to take in the atmosphere of this serene part of the country.

Accommodation: 4 hotel*

Included meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

September 18th: Phong Nha / Dong Hoi / Hanoi

Off to Hanoi we go! This morning we'll take a 1-hour drive to the Dong Hoi Airport for a short flight to Vietnam's capital. Once we arrive, we'll head straight to our hotel in the center, where tree-lined streets, small cafés, and the hum of motorbikes give us our first feel for life in Hanoi. After time to settle in we'll head out in the late afternoon for a relaxed introduction walk in the city. We'll visit one of Hanoi's lakeside parks, a nearby temple, and get a sense of the city's mix of old and new, where traditional architecture sits just blocks from modern buildings and busy streets. In the evening, we'll sit down to dinner at a restaurant known for its Northern Vietnamese flavors, a great way to start exploring the region's food scene.

Accommodation: 4 hotel*

Included meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

September 19th: Hanoi

Today we'll kick off the day with a deep dive into Hanoi's history and culture, starting with a visit to the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum. This massive structure offers some powerful images, as we learn about the leader who played a key role in Vietnam's path to independence. From there we'll explore the Temple of Literature, a peaceful and well-preserved site that was home to Vietnam's first university. Our next stop will be Hoa Lo Prison, known by American POWs as the "Hanoi Hilton", where we'll get a closer look at the more sobering chapters of Vietnam's 20th-century history. Afterward, we'll grab lunch at a banh mi spot famous for its crisp baguettes and flavorful fillings. The afternoon will be free for you to relax or work on your photo collection. In the evening, we'll come back together for a final dinner featuring classic Northern Vietnamese dishes.

Accommodation: 4 hotel*

Included meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

September 20th: Hanoi / Departure Day

You will be picked up at the hotel by a private driver who will take you to the airport for your departing flight.

Included meals: Breakfast