



TRIP OVERVIEW

Discover the unspoilt natural beauty of Lan Ha Bay on this truly unique swimming holiday in one of Vietnam's most breathtaking locations. Situated adjacent to Ha Long Bay, Lan Ha Bay is a much quieter location which covers an area of more than 7,000 hectares and is made up of beautiful emerald water and over 300 towering limestone islets and karst islands.

Often referred to as Ha Long Bay's twin, Lan Ha Bay is ideal for open water swimming as it has much less boat traffic. The largest island in Lan Ha Bay, and our base for the duration of our trip, is the rugged, jungle-filled Cat Ba island. The island is famous for its history during the Vietnam War and boasts a large array of flora and fauna which is protected by its status as a National Park.

Our accommodation for the week is at Cat Ba Paradise Hotel, situated on the water's edge in the heart of Cat Ba town and includes a spa, restaurant, rooftop plunge pool and bar which offers panoramic views of Cat Ba Town and the ocean bay in front of us.

WHO IS THIS TRIP FOR?

This trip is designed for those who want to combine spectacular swimming amongst the karst islands and limestone outcrops of Lan Ha Bay with optional hikes around the area's dramatic landscapes and a taste of Vietnamese culture. Swims include a mix of coastals and crossings, and because of the geography of the bay it is usually possible to find sheltered waters to avoid any choppiness. Swimmers should have a basic understanding of open water swimming and be capable of completing the average daily swim distance of around 4km (split over a minimum of two swims) prior to the start of the trip.

LOCATION SUMMARIES

Vietnam is an increasingly popular tourist destination, famous for its history, culture, food and dramatic landscapes. The country enjoys a very long coastline on the South China Sea, teasing many different swimming adventures, especially with its balmy climate and warm waters.

Our adventure is set in the north Vietnam, starting in the capital, Hanoi, before heading east to the coast and our base on Cat Ba Island.

Hanoi

Our trip starts at the Hanoi Opera House, in central Hanoi, just south of the city's Old Quarter. Hanoi is a city with a long and interesting history, and we recommend staying for an extra day or two before or after your trip to explore this city. Stroll around Hoan Kiem Lake, sample the fantastic street food and



excellent coffee on offer, and enjoy the sights and sounds of this bustling city.

Cat Ba Island

Cat Ba is the largest of the 367 dramatic and rugged islands that make up the Cat Ba Archipelago on the southeastern edge of Ha Long Bay in Northern Vietnam. Approximately half of the island is covered by a National Park, which is home to the highly endangered Cat Ba langur. The wide variety of natural ecosystems, both marine and terrestrial, have led to incredibly high rates of biodiversity. Types of natural habitats found on Cat Ba Archipelago include limestone karsts, tropical limestone forests, coral reefs, mangrove and seagrass beds, lagoons, beaches, caves, and willow swamp forests.

Ha Long Bay and Lan Ha Bay

No trip to Vietnam is complete without a visit to the Ha Long Bay region. This region is actually made up of three provinces - Ha Long, Bai Tu Long and Lan Ha. Each province boasts the same scenic beauty, with hundreds of scattered, limestone-infused islands scattered through the stunning emerald waters. Around 200 species of fish, 400 species of arthropod and numerous hard and soft coral live in the waters here, while larger marine animals include seals and three species of dolphin.

TRIP SCHEDULE

Start Point	Hanoi Opera House (Front Entrance), Hanoi, Vietnam
Start Time	10:30 on Day 1
Finish Point	Hanoi Opera House, Hanoi, Vietnam
Finish Time	17:00 on Day 7

Please note that the below daily itineraries are an example of the swims that may take place during the course of your trip, however, actual swim locations and distances will vary according to local weather and sea conditions. Your SwimTrek guides and local boat pilot will determine the most suitable swim locations each day and will communicate the plan with all guests as soon as possible.

Day 1

Whether you are staying in Hanoi prior to your trip or arriving on Day 1, you will need to make your way to the front entrance of the Hanoi Opera House at 10:30 in order to meet the rest of your group. We then transfer you over land and sea to our hotel on Cat Ba Island which takes approximately five hours. Once we arrive and have had a chance to settle in, we'll take a short ride to the local beach for our acclimatisation swim. This is an excellent chance to get familiar with the local conditions before we



head back to the hotel for our welcome meeting and then first dinner of the trip in Cat Ba town.

Day 2

This morning we head straight out into Lan Ha Bay for our first swim amongst the limestone islets. Leaving Ben Beo port, we travel past traditional floating fishing villages, where many families still live and work today. We arrive at the Nam Cat islands where we carry out our first swim. On the way, we pass Castaway Island and Moody Beach, finishing at Turtle Island (Hòn Rùa). It is a magical place to finish our first full swim of the trip.

After taking lunch on-board the vessel prepared by our boat crew, we'll head over to Viet Hai Port, where we will take a scenic walk through the forest to a small village. After a quick break we take an electric car back to our boat and then continue on to our afternoon swim. We move further into Lan Ha Bay, cutting into a series of small bays, before finishing our swim at Temple Beach.

Day 3

We set out in the morning to continue island-hopping in the bay, dropping in to some of Lan Ha Bay's deserted beaches as we go. In the morning, we swim across six idyllic yellow sand beaches, before completing a crossing over to Ba Trai Dao – or Three Peaches Island – where we explore some of Lan Ha bay's stunning arch formations.

After lunch on the boat, we head off from Ba Trai Dao, exploring some of the bay's hidden caves and lakes! We finish the swim off of one of Ba Trai Dao's many sandy beaches.

Day 4

This morning we head out to Cat Dua Island (also known as Monkey Island), where we will undertake a circumnavigation of the island. Take the time to look out for black kites, hawks, hornbills and cuckoos which can be present above the water. We'll then relax and have lunch on the boat after our morning swim is complete.

After getting back on board we return back to our hotel, where the afternoon is yours to do what you wish. You may wish to explore Cat Ba town, visit the national park, undertake the spectacular cliff-side walkway or just relax at the rooftop pool at our accommodation.

Day 5

Today we start travelling further afield and make our way out to the bay's eastern flank and Dau Be Island – the most remote part of Lan Ha Bay. There are some wonderful swim throughs along these coastlines, as well as sea stacks and high cliff walls. There are hundreds of swimming options and we will pick the best one based on local conditions.

After lunch on our boat, we will head off to complete a swim along the cliffs of Hang Trai. These



dramatic cliff walls are home to caves, hidden inland lakes, beaches and limestone outcrops.

Day 6

On our last full swimming day, we head off to towards Hang Sang, the most Northerly part of Lan Ha Bay. From here, we will work our way down the coastline, exploring bays as well as entering an inland lake. Keep your eyes peeled for monkeys! We finish the swim at Hòn Bút (otherwise known as Candle Island), one of the thinnest limestone stacks in the whole bay.

After lunch, we head back closer to home, to Bai Lut (flooded beach). This tiny beach joins together two limestone islands and completely disappears at high tide. After stopping on the beach to enjoy the stunning views out over the bay, we swim along a series of bays to finish at an abandoned beach resort.

Day 7

On our final morning, there is a chance for a pre-breakfast swim before we take a walk up to Cannon Fort, an historical site used to defend the island in no less than three wars. Sitting at over 170m high, it offers a stunning view that Lonely Planet has named as one of the best in Vietnam.

This is a fantastic final activity on an amazing SwimTrek adventure before we transfer everybody back to Hanoi Opera House in central Hanoi in order to extend your Vietnamese experience on the mainland or make your own way to the airport for onward travel.

TRIP INFORMATION

Equipment Checklist

In addition to your daily non-swimming clothes, we also recommend that you bring the following items:

✓	ITEM	✓	ITEM
<input type="checkbox"/>	Swimming Costume (x 2)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sweater / Fleece
<input type="checkbox"/>	Swimming Goggles (x 2)*	<input type="checkbox"/>	Waterproof Jacket
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sun Hat and Sunglasses	<input type="checkbox"/>	Walking Shoes / Sandals
<input type="checkbox"/>	Waterproof Sun Cream	<input type="checkbox"/>	Aqua Shoes / Sandals
<input type="checkbox"/>	Small Daypack	<input type="checkbox"/>	Insect Repellent
<input type="checkbox"/>	Towel	<input type="checkbox"/>	Lykra skin or rash vest

*Try to bring one clear lens and one tinted lens for different light conditions.

Please note that SwimTrek will supply swim hats and provide water and electrolyte drinks in shared water bottles on your safety boat. If you prefer to use your own drink bottle, please feel free to bring



one along. If you would like to use a wetsuit, lycra skin, rash vest or fins during your swims, please ensure that you bring these with you.

Group Size and Boat Support

This trip has a maximum group size of 16. The group will be split into a maximum of three groups, based on speed, with each group being accompanied by their own safety vessel/escort.

Boat support on this trip includes a main boat, three support watercraft and three kayaks crewed by local pilots and your SwimTrek guides. Please note that this boat support is subject to change without notice and cannot be guaranteed.

TRIP GRADING

Swimming Distances

Swim	Distance	Swim	Distance
Nam Cat - Hòn Rùa	2.5km	Viet Hai - Temple Beach	1.5km
Temple Beach - Ba Trai Dao	3km	Ba Trai Dao Circumnavigation	2km
Monkey Island Circumnavigation	3km	Dau Be	2.5km
Hang Trai	2km	Hang Sang - Candle Island	2.5km
Bai Lut - Abandoned Hotel	2km		

Swimming Conditions

Swimming in the sea is a fantastic experience, however you should be aware that certain marine life such as jellyfish, sea lice, sea urchins and coral could be present during the swims. In all cases we will work on reducing your contact with these creatures, however, if you suffer from anaphylaxis, please consult the office prior to booking.

Due to the runoff from the lush, green islands which make up this beautiful corner of the world, water clarity is sometimes lower than in other open ocean locations, however, it is still suitable for swimming.

Walking Distances

There are optional walks on this trip, for which we recommend that you wear comfortable walking shoes or sandals.

- A scenic walk from Viet Hai port on Day 2 of the trip through the forest to a small village. This walk is approximately 3.5km along a paved path, with an electric car shuttle for the journey back.
- On Cat Ba Island, there is an early morning walk (45 minutes each way) up to Cannon Fort, with stunning views over Cat Ba and the karst-punctuated sea beyond.



Temperatures

Month	Water Temperature*	Air Temperature*
April	22-26°C / 72-79°F	25-28°C / 77-82°F
October	25-29°C / 77-84°F	26-29°C / 79-84°F

* Please note that these temperatures are indicative and should be used as a guide only.

Weather Caveat

For safety reasons, we rely on decent weather conditions when carrying out our swims. As a consequence, open water swimming holidays require a certain degree of on-trip flexibility which can result in changes to the planned itinerary. These changes often add a touch of uniqueness to your trip and will be communicated to you by your SwimTrek guides as quickly as possible.

GETTING THERE

Vietnam has two main international airports, Tan Son Nhat Airport (SGN) in Ho Chi Minh City and Noi Bai Airport (HAN) in Hanoi, which are both serviced by a large selection of domestic and international flights.

The easiest way to get to the start of your trip is to fly into Hanoi and then catch a taxi or public transport to the city centre to meet your group at the Hanoi Opera House on Day 1.

While we have outlined various travel options below, they are subject to change and should be used as a guide only. We suggest that you use [Skyscanner](https://www.skyscanner.net) to search for alternative flight options for this trip.

Whichever route you choose to take, we recommend confirming your flights and other travel arrangements as early as possible in order to avoid price rises and availability issues.

Flights to Noi Bai Airport (HAN), Hanoi

To search for available flights into Noi Bai Airport (HAN) International Airport in Hanoi, please visit www.skyscanner.net.

Transport from Noi Bai Airport to Hanoi Opera House

The easiest option, a journey from Noi Bai Airport to Hanoi Opera House in the city centre by taxi will take approximately 30 minutes and will cost approximately 320,000 VND. Alternatively, airport minibus shuttles operate from the airport into the city centre, as well as public buses.

For more information, please visit: www.hanoiairportonline.com/hanoi-airport-transportation

SwimTrek Transfer from Hanoi Opera House to Cat Ba Paradise Hotel

A designated SwimTrek transfer departs **Hanoi Opera House** at 10:30 on Day 1 of your trip. From the Opera House, it is a two-hour drive to Hai Phong, where we catch a boat across to Cat Ba Island and



then a bus to the hotel. The total journey time from the Opera House to our accommodation is approximately five hours. Please note that this transfer is included in the price of your trip.

Return Transfer to Hanoi Opera House

At the end of your trip, you will be transferred back to Hanoi Opera House, where your trip ends. Please note that this transfer is included in the cost of your trip and is expected to arrive in Hanoi at approximately 17:00.

Public Transport from Hanoi Airport to Cat Ba Paradise Hotel

If your flight arrival or departure times don't coincide with the SwimTrek transfer, it's also possible to reach Cat Ba Paradise Hotel from Hanoi via public transport, however, please be aware that this often includes significantly longer travel time. For further information about public transport options from Hanoi Airport to Cat Ba Paradise Hotel, please visit: www.rome2rio.com

Additional general information about public transport in Vietnam is available from Lonely Planet via: www.lonelyplanet.com/vietnam/transport/getting-around/local-transport

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Accommodation

Our accommodation throughout the duration of our trip is at the Cat Ba Paradise Hotel, which is located in the heart of Cat Ba Town. The hotel features a spa, restaurant, bar and rooftop pool, all of which offer panoramic views of Cat Ba Town and the ocean bay in front of us. The hotel is also located close to local cafes and restaurants, and sits directly opposite the Harbour with views out to Lan Ha Bay and beyond.

Our accommodation is based on double and twin-share rooms with en suite facilities. There are a limited number of single supplement rooms which can be reserved during the booking process, subject to availability.

Pre/Post Trip Accommodation and Trip Extension Options

If you would like to extend your stay on Cat Ba Island and need to book additional nights' accommodation or extend your Vietnam stay with an optional extension tour before or after your trip, please contact our local representatives Khiri Travel via email: sales.vietnam@khiri.com. Please mention that you are travelling with SwimTrek as part of your enquiry.

Food and Drink

Lunches are included in your trip price. Breakfast and evening meals are at your own expense, which



gives you a fantastic opportunity to explore and experience the local street food, cafes and restaurants of your choice over the course of your trip. The hotel restaurant serves a mix of Western favourites and Asian specialties, while there is a range of local restaurants and street food vendors in nearby Cat Ba Town. The average cost for a meal in Cat Ba is around 100,000 VND per portion.

Extra Activities

This trip starts and finishes in Hanoi, where there is the option to extend your Vietnamese adventure with a tour or extension, through our partners Khiri Travel. This could include a walking tour through Hanoi's Old Quarter to witness the city's French architecture, soaking up the city's rich history with a visit to Huu Tiep Lake ('B-52 lake') where US B-5 bomber wreckage can be seen, discovering temples including Hanoi's Temple of Literature or even sampling the local Vietnamese cuisine. To enquire about adding a tour or extensions, please contact: nhi@khiri.com

Money, Extra Expenses & Tipping

You should bring extra money with you to cover such items as drinks, breakfasts, evening meals, entertainment, and souvenirs. The local currency in Vietnam is Vietnam Dong (VND). While USD is widely accepted, the conversion rate that is offered is usually poor, which makes it cheaper to pay in VND in most locations. While there is one ATM in Cat Ba town, please note that debit and credit cards are not widely accepted in Vietnam and it is suggested that carry enough cash with you for your daily expenses.

Responsible Travel

SwimTrek is conscious of the importance of protecting the world's natural wonders. We are acutely aware of our responsibility to not only take care of the natural environments which we are lucky enough to explore, but also to educate our guests about the importance of conservation efforts and responsible tourism. It's for this reason that we have worked so closely with our partners to ensure that our trips are conducted in the most responsible and sustainable way possible, working tirelessly to minimise the impact of our presence on local marine life and the natural habitat.

Passports and Visas

Non-residents of Vietnam require a full passport to enter the country, which should be valid for six months beyond the expected length of stay.

Visa requirements for entry into Vietnam vary according to the nationality of the applicant. Until 30 June 2021, 'British Citizen' passport holders travelling for tourism can enter Vietnam for up to a maximum of 15 days (inclusive of dates of entry and exit) without a visa. If you have a different type of



British nationality – for example 'British national (overseas)' you'll need to get a visa before entering Vietnam. 23 other countries, including Germany, France and Sweden are also 'visa exempt' for certain lengths of stays (*the number of days visa-exempt are dependent on country*). Visitors from these visa-exempt countries will be required to apply for the 30 day e-visa (*as mentioned below*), if staying longer than their maximum 'visa-free' stay. Visitors from other countries, including the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and *most* EU member states, are required to apply for an e-visa prior to travel, which is valid for a period of up to 30 days. For further information about the new e-visa system, (including a list of the countries that it applies to) and to make your application online, please visit: evisa.xuatnhapcanh.gov.vn

For citizens of countries which are not included on the list above, or for those who want to either enter Vietnam multiple times during their visa period or extend their stay beyond the 30-day e-visa limit, please contact your nearest Vietnamese embassy for further information.

Please note that visa regulations are subject to change and we advise that you check your own visa requirements prior to travel.

Travel Insurance

We consider comprehensive travel insurance to be essential, and we strongly recommend that you purchase insurance which includes, but is not limited to, cover for illness, accident, emergency repatriation, ambulance, air ambulance, helicopter rescue services, cancellation, lost luggage and delays. Your travel insurance should also cover you for open water swimming and any other activity listed in your trip itinerary (including races and competitions, where applicable). Please read your policy details carefully and remember to take them with you on your trip for your own reference. For further information about travel insurance, please visit: www.swimtrek.com/travel-insurance.

Health Information and Recommended Vaccinations

For comprehensive health information for people travelling to Vietnam, including all recommended and required vaccinations, please visit www.travelhealthpro.org.uk/countries. Please note that this information is subject to change and you should re-check this site regularly prior to your trip.

Travel Plugs & Electricity

For a useful source of information on the different electrical outlets, electrical plugs, and electric sockets, please visit www.worldstandards.eu/.