

## 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 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 Sea Pearl Cat Ba 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 offer panoramic views of Cat Ba Town and the ocean bay in front of us.

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## 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. Swimmers should have a basic understanding of open water swimming and be capable of completing the average daily swim distance of around 4 km (split over a minimum of two swims) prior to the start of the trip.

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## LOCATION SUMMARIES

### 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

<b>Start Point</b>	Hanoi Opera House (Front Entrance), Hanoi, Vietnam
<b>Start Time</b>	10:30 on Day 1
<b>Finish Point</b>	Hanoi Opera House, Hanoi, Vietnam
<b>Finish Time</b>	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 complete a welcome meeting and safety briefing, before taking 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 first dinner of the trip.

### 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 Hòn Rùa Island with its stunning natural beach from where we carry out our first proper swim of the trip towards Nam Cat Island. On the way, we pass Castaway Island before arriving at Moody Beach which is surrounded on three sides by limestone cliffs. It's a magical place to finish our first full swim of the trip.

After taking lunch onboard the vessel prepared by our boat crew, we'll continue in the afternoon for a second swim, moving further into the bay and featuring our first island-hop as we swim towards Bova Island.

### 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. The morning swim is from Dao Vang Island to Dao Thoi Island. We are on the exterior of the bay here so on one side we are surrounded by islets and outcrops and on the other side, just the expanse of the South China Sea.

After lunch on the boat, we head to Ba Trai Dao, where we carry out a full circumnavigation of this island. Ba Trai Dao or Three Peaches Island consists of three small islets which resemble three peaches, which is where it gets its name from. Idyllic yellow sand beaches dot this swim route and make sure to keep an eye out to see if you can spot any red haired monkeys along these tree lined islands.



## Day 4

Today we start travelling further afield and make our way out to the bay's eastern flank and Dau Be Island. There are some wonderful swim throughs along these coastlines as well as sea stacks and high cliff walls. There are literally hundreds of swimming options and we will pick the best one based on local conditions. The island is situated at the confluence of three major ocean basins which are connected through a meandering cave which enters into Ba Ham Lake situated in the island's interior.

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, undertake the spectacular cliff-side walkway or just relax at the rooftop pool at our accommodation.

## Day 5

Time to head east and this time we spend the day at the remote Hang Trai island. This island features inland lakes, beaches, limestone outcrops and cliff edged swims. It really is a swimmer's paradise.

In the morning, we swim off the northern part of Hang Trai, starting at Hang Dau Island and then via Con Nhia Island before finishing at Lang Chai. It's probably the most remote swim we will do all week.

After an onboard lunch, we then travel down by boat to the island's east coast where we undertake a stunning swim down the archipelago of islands that make up this section of Hang Trai.

## Day 6

On our last full swimming day we stay slightly closer to home and head across the bay 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 hawks, hornbills and cuckoos which can be present above the water as well as over 100 different fish species below. We'll then relax on the boat after our morning swim is complete.

After lunch, we head back out to the bay for our final afternoon and we'll swim back home from Cat Dua Island back to our accommodation on Cat Ba. It's an ideal way to arrive and to top off a wonderful week of swimming around this unique environment.

## 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"/>	Lycra 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.

### Swimming Distances

Swim	Distance	Swim	Distance
Hòn Rùa - Nam Cat	2km	Nam Cat - Bova Island	2km
Dao Vang Island - Dao Thoi Island	3km	Ba Trai Dao Circumnavigation	2½km
Dau Be	3½km	Hang Dau - Lang Chai (Hang Trai)	3km
Hang Trai Eastern	1½km	Cat Dua Circumnavigation	2km
Cat Dua - Cat Ba	1½km		

### Walking Distances

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

- On Cat Dua Island, we undertake a short walk (30 minutes each way) up to a summit which offers beautiful views over that day's swims.
- 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*
May	24-30°C / 75-86°F	24-31°C / 75-88°F
October	25-29°C / 77-84°F	22-29°C / 72-84°F

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

## 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, there is still plenty of marine life to be seen, including coral, fish, seals and dolphins.

## 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.

## Group Size

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 and support watercraft crewed by local pilots and your SwimTrek guides. Please note that this boat support is subject to change without notice and cannot be guaranteed.

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## 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](#) 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, Hanoi

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

## SwimTrek Transfer from Hanoi Opera House to Sea Pearl Cat Ba 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 Sea Pearl Cat Ba Hotel

If your flight arrival or departure times don't coincide with the SwimTrek transfer, it's also possible to reach Sea Pearl Cat Ba 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 in Vietnam (including a 'Plan Your Trip' function), please visit: [www.baolau.com/](http://www.baolau.com/).

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

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## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

### Accommodation

Our accommodation throughout the duration of our trip is at the Sea Pearl Hotel, which is located in the heart of Cat Ba Town. The hotel features a spa, restaurant and rooftop pool and bar 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 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.

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](mailto:sales.vietnam@khiri.com). Please mention that you are travelling with SwimTrek as part of your enquiry.



## Meals

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 Expenses

You should bring extra money with you to cover such items as drinks, evening meals, entertainment, souvenirs, etc. 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.

## 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 to Vietnam vary according to the nationality of the applicant. From 30 June 2018, visitors from 46 countries, including the UK, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and *most* EU member states, have been 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 46 countries that it applies to) and to make your application online, please visit: <https://evisa.xuatnhapcanh.gov.vn/>

For citizens of countries which are not included on the e-visa list, 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.

## 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](http://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/electricity/plug-voltage-by-country/](http://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/plug-voltage-by-country/).