

Vietnam's Hidden Gems: Past and Present

with Dr. Nam C. Kim (January 2027)
or Dr. Edward G. Lengel (April 2027)

January 4–14, 2027 | April 5–15, 2027



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Join The Great Courses Journeys on an immersive journey exploring Vietnam's rich culture, history, and hidden gems. From Hanoi's ancient citadels and vibrant street markets to the serene landscapes of Ninh Binh and the historic temples of My Son, your Great Courses Journeys expert will share information about Vietnam's layered history and diverse communities.

Cruise through the stunning karsts of Halong Bay on a chartered cruise, witness an exclusive water puppet performance and learn about the revival of this traditional art form, and delve into ancient Cham heritage in Hoi An and Da Nang. This thoughtfully curated itinerary blends scholarly insight with authentic local encounters, offering a deeper understanding of Vietnam's past and present.

Your Journey Expert



Dr. Nam Kim (January 2027) is a professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is an anthropological archaeologist whose work focuses on Southeast Asia and, since 2005, he has been conducting fieldwork in Vietnam at the Co Loa settlement in the Red River Delta. Professor Kim's research extends to the archaeology of warfare, ancient cities, and the relationship between modern politics, cultural heritage, and the material record. He has been published widely, including books such as *The Origins of Ancient Vietnam*, *The Oxford Handbook of Early Southeast Asia* (coauthor), and *Emergent Warfare in Our Evolutionary Path*. He is currently developing his first Great Course on Vietnam.



Dr. Edward G. Lengel (April 2027) is a professional author, public speaker, and historical tour guide. He received his PhD from the University of Virginia, where he was a full professor and directed the Washington Papers Project for many years. He served as Chief Historian of the White House Historical Association, wrote the new history of Colonial Williamsburg as a Revolutionary in Residence, and worked at the National World War II and Medal of Honor Museums.

Mr. Lengel has written 14 books on American history, including *To Conquer Hell: The Meuse-Argonne, 1918* and *Never in Finer Company: The Men of the Great War's Lost Battalion*. Mr. Lengel is a co-recipient of the *National Humanities Medal* and has won two writing awards from the Army Historical Foundation. He has made frequent television and radio appearances on The History Channel, SiriusXM, National Public Radio, and many other media outlets.

Highlights

- Enjoy a welcome dinner hosted at a master chef's private home, savoring northern Vietnamese dishes and hearing her inspiring story.
- Learn about the restored art of water puppet theatre and meet with the person who has helped revitalize this tradition before observing a private performance.
- Special access to archaeological sites such as the Co Loa Citadel, Vietnam's oldest fortress, including an opportunity to visit areas of previous excavations and to meet local site preservation officials.
- Take a chartered cruise through the limestone karsts and hidden caves of Halong and Lan Ha Bay.
- Visit UNESCO World Heritage Sites—including the Thang Long Imperial Citadel in Hanoi, Hoi An Ancient Town, and My Son Sanctuary—and learn about the diverse people and cultures who have called Vietnam home.

Vietnam's Hidden Gems: Past and Present

Itinerary



Day 1: Your Vietnamese Voyage Begins

Arrive in Hanoi today and transfer to your hotel overlooking Hoan Kiem Lake. This evening, meet your Great Courses Journeys expert and fellow travelers for an exclusive welcome dinner at the home of a renowned Vietnamese master chef. Learn about her inspiring story in an intimate setting over an authentic and delicious meal.

Included Meal: Dinner

Accommodations: Le Jardin Hotel Haute Couture

Day 2: City of Citadels, Culture, and Kings

Your day begins with a visit to the National Museum of History, tracing Vietnam's story from prehistory to modern times. Continue to the Thang Long Imperial Citadel, a UNESCO World Heritage site that once housed Vietnam's ancient kings. After lunch, travel to the outskirts of the city to explore the Co Loa Citadel, Vietnam's oldest fortress and a symbol of the nation's early civilization. This evening, explore Hanoi at your own pace, with time to absorb its vibrant street life and historic charm.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodations: Le Jardin Hotel Haute Couture

Day 3: Contemporary Culture

Start your day with a leisurely walk through Hanoi's iconic Train Street with your expert—where trains pass inches from the adjacent storefronts—to the nearby Kim Lien Market. Visit the Temple of Literature, Vietnam's first university and a symbol of Vietnamese intellectual tradition and culture since its founding in 1070. Gather for lunch at KOTO ("Know One Teach One"), a social enterprise that provides vocational training for disadvantaged youth. Continue to learn about Vietnam's cultural diversity this afternoon with a visit to the Museum of Ethnology, followed by a lecture from your expert. This afternoon, take a guided cyclo tour of the Old Quarter. Later, indulge in a street food tasting where you can sample local favorites like egg coffee, crispy fried nem (spring rolls), steaming bowls of pho, sweet banh ran, and banh mi.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Accommodations: Le Jardin Hotel Haute Couture

“Hidden within the bustling country of Vietnam is a deep and complex history, layered upon millennia of traditions, legends, and cultures. I have been exploring this history for years and I am excited to share it.”

–Dr. Nam Kim



Day 4: Delta Drive and Dynasties

Travel through the scenic Red River Delta to Ninh Binh, passing peaceful villages and lush rice fields. Visit the Dinh and Le Temples, two sacred sites that honor Vietnam’s early kings from the ancient capital of Hoa Lu. Continue to the nearby archaeological site, where remnants of palaces and citadel walls reveal the legacy of Vietnam’s first centralized kingdom. After lunch, enjoy a tranquil boat trip along the Tam Coc River, often called “Halong Bay on land” because dramatic jungle-covered limestone mountains (karsts) rise from flat rice paddies, creating an inland version of Halong Bay’s iconic marine landscape. Glide through scenic caves and beneath dramatic karst cliffs while soaking in the peaceful rhythm of rural life. Spend the evening at leisure in the serene countryside.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodations: Emeralda Tam Coc



Day 5: Stitching Tradition

Your day begins with a lecture from your Great Courses expert about forms of tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Then, visit Van Lam Hamlet, a local village that has preserved the art of embroidery for more than 700 years. Meet skilled artisans in their homes and learn about their craft before trying your hand at stitching. After a group lunch, the afternoon is yours to relax and reflect in the peaceful rural surroundings, with time to enjoy the natural beauty and quiet rhythm of village life.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodations: Emeralda Tam Coc

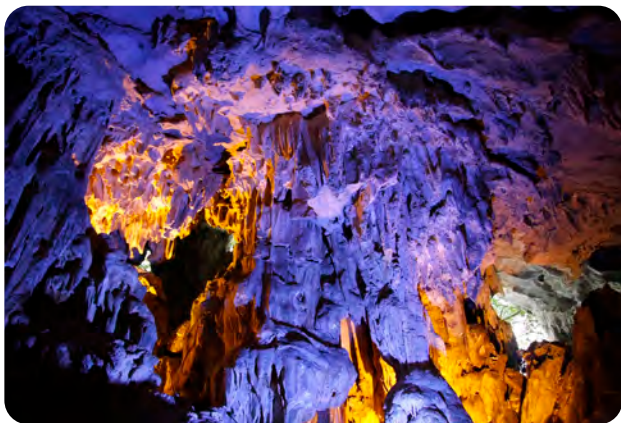


Day 6: The Beauty of Halong Bay

Take a scenic drive through some of northern Vietnam’s most picturesque landscapes from Ninh Binh to Halong Bay. Then, embark on a luxury overnight chartered cruise through the stunning seascapes of Ha Long and Lan Ha Bays. Explore the Dark and Bright grotto, swim in the bay or pool, and relax on the sundeck. In the evening, enjoy a cooking demonstration with the ship’s chef followed by a gourmet dinner at sunset, surrounded by karst formations.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Accommodations: Orchid Cruise



Day 7: Caves, Culture, and Craftsmanship

Begin the day with an expert-guided sunrise Tai Chi session before exploring the Trung Trang Cave on Cat Ba Island. After breakfast, transfer by speedboat to the pier and visit Dao Thuc Village for a private water puppetry performance. Meet an artisan who helped revive this 300-year-old tradition. Enjoy a private 30-minute performance accompanied by live music, as puppeteers stand in chest-deep water, skillfully bringing wooden figures to life. Then, fly to Da Nang and continue to your boutique hotel in the center of Hoi An, a World Heritage Site known for its lantern-lit streets, preserved merchant houses, and fusion of Asian and European architecture.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Light Lunch

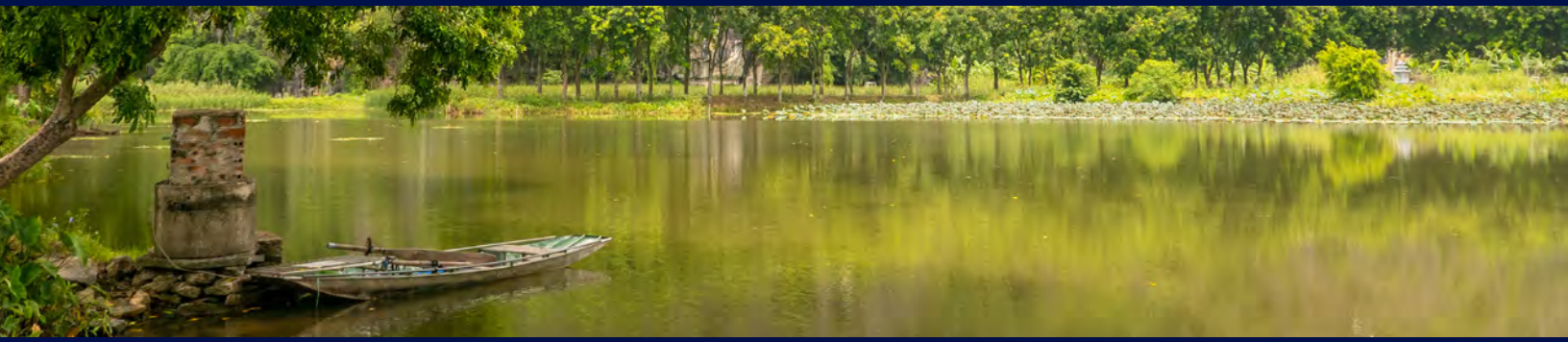
Accommodations: Hoi An Central Boutique Hotel

Day 8: At Home in Hoi An

Visit a community organic farming project surrounded by lush rice paddies. Learn traditional farming techniques and participate in a hands-on gardening experience. Enjoy a farm-to-table cooking demonstration and lunch. In the afternoon, take a guided walking tour through Hoi An's UNESCO-listed Old Town, wandering past former merchant houses, colorful communal halls, and the iconic Japanese Bridge. Once a prosperous trading port, Hoi An attracted Chinese, Japanese, Dutch, Portuguese, and Spanish ships. Today, the World Heritage city is recognized for its well-preserved architecture, pedestrian streets, and distinctive local cuisine. Visit the Folklore Museum to learn more about the daily life and heritage of the people. Share tea with a passionate guardian of Cham culture in her café and hear about her experiences preserving local traditions.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodations: Hoi An Central Boutique Hotel



Day 9: My Son Immersion

Take a short (one-hour) drive to My Son Sanctuary, the ancient capital of the Cham civilization. Explore 20 temple towers nestled in a jungle valley and learn about the rich history of this once-thriving culture that ruled central Vietnam from the 2nd to the 13th centuries. Meet a local wildlife expert to learn about the region's biodiversity and ongoing conservation efforts. After lunch, return to the hotel to continue learning with your expert, who will share additional insights into Vietnam's cultural and historical legacy. The rest of the day is yours to explore Hoi An's charming streets on your own.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodations: Hoi An Central Boutique Hotel



Day 10: Discover Da Nang

After breakfast, depart from Hoi An for Central Vietnam's vibrant coastal city, Da Nang. Your visit begins at the Cham Museum, home to the world's largest collection of Cham sculptures. Continue south to the Marble Mountains—said to represent one of the five elements of the universe: water, wood, fire, metal, and earth. Learn about their role during the Vietnam War, when the mountains were transformed from temples to battlegrounds. Continue to Linh Ung Pagoda on the Son Tra Peninsula, featuring an imposing 67-meter Buddha statue and sweeping coastal views. Return to Hoi An this evening for a final reception with your fellow travelers and a farewell dinner featuring contemporary Vietnamese cuisine along the Thu Bon River.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Accommodations: Hoi An Central Boutique Hotel

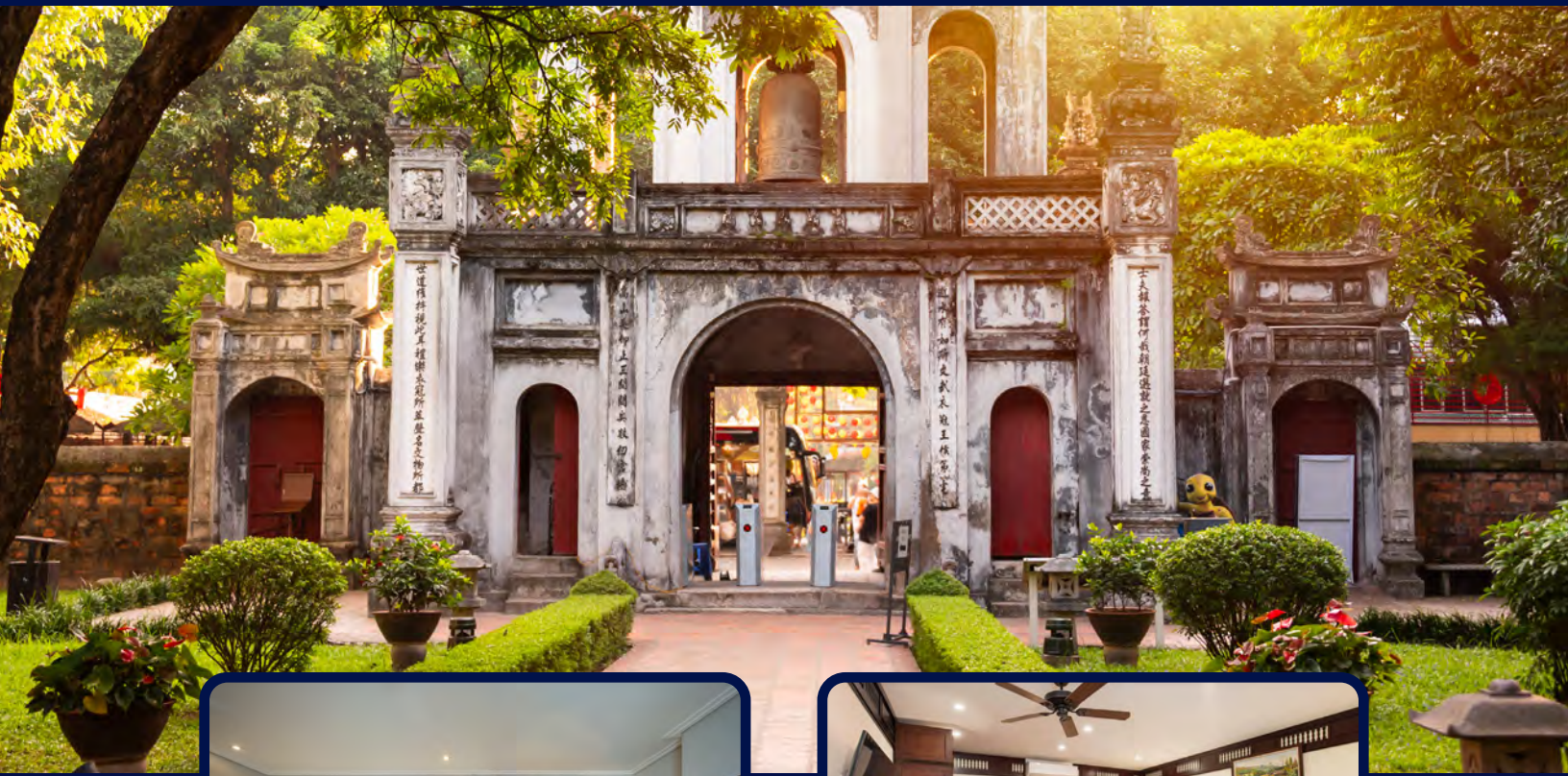


Day 11: Departure

After breakfast, transfer to the airport for individual flights home.

Included Meal: Breakfast

Accommodations



Le Jardin Hotel Haute Couture

Hanoi, Vietnam

Nestled between Hanoi's Old Quarter and West Lake, Le Jardin Hotel Haute Couture is steps from Hanoi's most popular attractions, including Truc Bach Lake and the Tran Quoc Pagoda. The boutique property blends French colonial elegance with modern Vietnamese charm. Its 74 stylish rooms offer either city or lake views. On-site dining options include the rooftop Bar Dinh and the November Restaurant, which serves refined Vietnamese cuisine. Guests enjoy access to a rooftop pool, spa, fitness center, and a serene garden courtyard. **(3 nights)**



Emeralda Tam Coc

Ninh Binh, Vietnam

Emeralda Tam Coc is a luxurious eco-resort set amid the dramatic karst landscapes of Tam Coc. The resort's architecture reflects traditional Tonkin design, with tiled roofs, wooden accents, and lush gardens. Spacious rooms feature private balconies, river or garden views, and elegant furnishings with Vietnamese flair. Guests can unwind at the La Cochinine Spa, swim in the heated outdoor pool, or dine at the on-site restaurant offering local and international cuisine. Located near Thai Vi Temple and the Trang An Scenic Complex, the resort is a gateway to Ninh Binh's natural and cultural wonders. **(2 nights)**

Accommodations



Orchid Cruise

Halong Bay, Vietnam

Experience the beauty of Halong Bay aboard an exclusive Orchid Cruise, where luxury meets nature. Cabins feature private balconies, windows, and an elegant Indochine-modern aesthetic: warm teak, handwoven rattan, soft linens, and subtle lotus and bamboo motifs. Indulge in gourmet Vietnamese and international cuisine, unwind at the spa, or join kayaking, cave exploration, and cooking classes. Start your day with a sunrise Tai Chi class on the deck. Experience an unforgettable journey through Vietnam's most iconic seascape. **(1 night)**



Hoi An Central Boutique Hotel

Hoi An, Vietnam

Located in the heart of Hoi An's UNESCO-listed Ancient Town, the Hoi An Central Boutique Hotel & Spa combines colonial architecture with contemporary Vietnamese design. Its 108 rooms feature heritage-inspired décor, balconies overlooking the Old Town, and modern comforts. Guests can relax at the outdoor pool, rejuvenate at the spa, or dine at Cinnamon Restaurant, which serves Vietnamese and Western cuisines. The hotel offers easy access to the Japanese Bridge, Hoi An Market, and a private beach via shuttle. **(4 nights)**



Pricing:

Departure	Double Occupancy	Single Occupancy	Deposit	
January 4–14, 2027	\$4,795	\$5,570	\$650	BOOK NOW
April 5–15, 2027	\$4,795	\$5,570	\$650	BOOK NOW

What's Included:

- All accommodations for the duration of the tour
- Meals, as noted in the itinerary
- All sightseeing and visits as noted in each itinerary
- Expertise of The Great Courses Expert, travel director and local guides throughout the tour
- All gratuities for on-tour guides, drivers, hotel and restaurant staff as part of the group program
- All on-tour transportation, unless otherwise noted
- Quietvox listening devices to facilitate audibility and social distancing on tour
- The assistance of an ATA professional travel team to assist with pre-trip questions, travel arrangements, including flights, extra hotel nights and other services
- Comprehensive pre-departure mailings and materials with information about the destination and what to expect on tour, including a suggested reading list
- Emergency evacuation insurance
- Ground transfers to and from airports
- Internal flight from Hanoi to Da Nang