

Vietnam: Birds & Culture
October 29 – November 13, 2024

Itinerary in brief

Day 1 – Tue, Oct 29: Arrival Ho Chi Minh

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 – Wed, Oct 30: 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 – Thu, Oct 31 & Fri, Nov 1: 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 – Sat, Nov 2: Cat Tien National Park to Di Linh

There is time for some final early morning birding at Cat Tien National Park before heading up Highway 20 to the cooler climes of the Dalat Plateau. The afternoon is spent birding at a forested mountain pass known locally as Deo Suoi Lanh, a short drive from the town of Di Linh. The montane evergreen forest at Deo Suoi Lanh is a great place to become acquainted with some of the Dalat Plateau specialities including Maroon Oriole, Black-headed Parrotbill, White-cheeked Laughingthrush and Yellow-billed Nuthatch. ***Night in Di Linh.***

Day 6 – Sun, Nov 3: Di Linh to Dalat

Return to Deo Suoi Lanh after breakfast for a full morning of birding. Other exciting possibilities to look out for here include Bar-backed Partridge, Blue Pitta, Indochinese Green Magpie, Green Cochoa and Spotted Forktail. After lunch continue north along Highway 20 to the bustling hill resort of Dalat and start exploring some of the exciting birding sites around town. ***Night in Dalat.***

Days 7-8 – Mon, Nov 4 & Tue, Nov 5: Dalat

A full two days of birding includes visits to Mount Lang Bian, a 2,169 m high peak 20 minutes from Dalat, and the shores of Ho Tuyen Lam, a man-made lake just outside the town. Vietnamese endemics found at Dalat include Dalat Shrike-babbler, Vietnamese Greenfinch, Black-crowned Fulvetta, Collared Laughingthrush and Grey-crowned Crocias. Near endemics here include Grey-crowned Tit, Black-headed Parrotbill, White-cheeked & Black-hooded Laughingthrushes, and Vietnamese Cutia. Other target birds 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 – Wed, Nov 6: Dalat to Ho Chi Minh City

A final morning of birding around Dalat before transferring to Dalat Airport in good time for the late afternoon flight back to Ho Chi Minh City. Transfer to hotel on arrival at Ho Chi Minh City. **Night in Ho Chi Minh City.**

Day 10 – Thu, Nov 7: Ho Chi Minh City to Hoi An via Danang

Return to Tan Son Nhat Airport after breakfast to take the morning flight to Danang in Central Vietnam. On arrival at Danang transfer the 25 km to Hoi An by road. 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 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 at Hoi An.**

Day 11 – Fri, Nov 8: Hoi An to Hue

Leave Hoi An after breakfast for a half-day trip to visit the capital and religious center of the former Champa Kingdom, My Son. Here, 40 km south-west of Hoi An, in a lush green valley, are dozens of red brick towers and sanctuaries dating from between the seventh and thirteenth centuries. Visit the museum and the holy site then return to Hoi An around noon. Leave Hoi An after lunch for the former imperial capital of Hue. Transfer to hotel on arrival. In the late afternoon, we visit the elaborate mausoleums of emperors Tu Duc and Khai Dinh. **Night in Hue.**

Day 12 – Sat, Nov 9: Hue to Hanoi

A morning cultural tour of Hue takes in the Imperial Citadel from where the Nguyen Dynasty ruled between 1802 and 1945 and Thien Mu Pagoda with its seven-tiered tower. Transfer to Hue Airport in the afternoon for the short flight north to Hanoi, the modern capital of Vietnam. **Night in Hanoi.**

Day 13 – Sun, Nov 10: Hanoi to Cuc Phuong National Park

Leave Hanoi after breakfast for Cuc Phuong National Park, a three-hour drive south of Hanoi. 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. **Night in Cuc Phuong National Park.**

Day 14 – Mon, Nov 11: Cuc Phuong National Park

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

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

Depart Cuc Phuong after an early breakfast for the journey back to Hanoi, stopping en route at Van Long Nature Reserve to take a sampan through flooded rice fields to the dramatic limestone cliffs that are home to a critically endangered endemic primate, Delacour's Langur. Several interesting bird species can also be found here including White-browed Crake and during the winter months there are often large numbers of storks, herons and waterfowl. Continue on to Hanoi and transfer to hotel. In the afternoon enjoy a city tour of this unique Asian capital, a city of temples, lakes and treelined boulevards. **Night in Hanoi.**

Day 16 – Wed, Nov 13: Departure

Today is at leisure in Hanoi before transferring to Noi Bai International Airport for departure flights.