

UN

URBANE NOTES

The Vietnam Itinerary Planner

How to build the right route without wasting days

A practical route-planning guide for first-time travellers, families and anyone trying to decide what is realistic in Vietnam.

LOCAL GUIDANCE FOR SMARTER VIETNAM ROUTES

WELCOME

Plan the route before you plan the details.

Most Vietnam itinerary problems start with a route that looks possible on a map but feels exhausting on the ground. This guide helps you decide how many regions to include, how long to stay in key places and where travel days quietly eat into the trip.

How to use this guide

Use it as a planning framework, not a fixed rulebook. Transport times, weather, ticket availability and personal pace can change what makes sense. Check time-sensitive details before booking.

Best for

First-time visitors, families, slower travellers and anyone unsure whether their route is too rushed.

What it solves

How many places to include, where to slow down, what to cut and when transport choices matter.

What it adds

A simple way to think about Vietnam as regions, routes and recovery days.

What it is not

It is not legal, immigration, weather or transport schedule advice.

ROUTE REALITY

How many regions should you visit?

Vietnam is long. The mistake is not wanting to see a lot; it is forgetting that every extra region adds a transfer day, decision fatigue and less time in the places you came to enjoy.

Trip length	Comfort zone	Planning note
7 days	1 region	Stay focused. North only or Central only usually feels better than racing the country.
10 days	1-2 regions	A strong North route or North + Central can work if transfers are sensible.
14 days	2 regions	North + Central or Central + South is often more comfortable than all three.
21 days	2-3 regions	Enough time for a broader route, but recovery days still matter.

RULE OF THUMB

If you are choosing between adding one more destination or making the existing route calmer, the calmer route usually wins.

NORTH VS CENTRAL VS SOUTH

Think in regions, not just cities.

Most strong Vietnam routes start with a regional decision. Once you know the type of trip you want, the destination list becomes easier to edit.

North

Hanoi, Ninh Binh, Sapa, Ha Long, Ha Giang. Best for culture, mountains, landscapes and cooler-season variety.

Central

Hue, Da Nang, Hoi An, Phong Nha. Best for a balanced route with heritage, food, beaches and easier transfers.

South

HCMC, Mekong Delta, Phu Quoc, Con Dao. Best for city energy, islands, food, short escapes and warmer weather.

Route logic

Do not pick places just because they are famous. Pick the region mix that fits your dates, pace and season.

A useful question

Are you trying to build one coherent trip, or are you collecting places from other people's itineraries?

SAMPLE ROUTES

Sample routes: 7 and 10 days

These are starting points, not commandments. The best version depends on flights, season, energy levels and who is travelling.

7 days: focused North

- Hanoi - 2 nights
- Ninh Binh - 2 nights
- Ha Long or Lan Ha Bay - 1 night
- Hanoi - 1 final night

Why it works: fewer big jumps, good variety, and enough time to recover before departure.

10 days: North + Central

- Hanoi - 2 nights
- Ninh Binh - 2 nights
- Ha Long or Lan Ha Bay - 1 night
- Hoi An or Da Nang - 3 nights
- Departure buffer - 1 night

Planning note: this route usually needs one domestic flight or a carefully placed train/transfer decision.

SAMPLE ROUTES

Sample routes: 14 and 21 days

Longer trips do not mean every famous place must be included. They mean you can add depth, slower transfers and better recovery.

14 days: North + Central, done properly

- Hanoi - 2 nights
- Ninh Binh - 2 nights
- Ha Long or Lan Ha Bay - 1 night
- Hue - 2 nights
- Hoi An or Da Nang - 4 nights
- Buffer or extra Hanoi/HCMC night - 1 night

21 days: broader Vietnam, with breathing room

- Hanoi and North landscapes - 6-8 nights
- Central Vietnam - 6-7 nights
- HCMC and Mekong or island time - 5-7 nights
- Keep at least 2 flexible or recovery nights

If you add Sapa, Ha Giang, Phu Quoc or Cao Bang, remove something else or give the trip more time.

HOW LONG TO STAY

How long do you really need?

Use this as a quick reality check. Add time for children, older parents, slower travel, remote work, weather changes or late arrivals.

Place	Typical stay	Why
Hanoi	2-3 nights	First-timers, food, Old Quarter, day-trip connections.
Sapa	2-3 nights	Worth slowing down for scenery; travel time is the catch.
Ninh Binh	1-2 nights	Overnight is calmer than a rushed day trip.
Hoi An	3 nights	A balanced base for old town, food, beach or tailoring.
Da Nang	2-4 nights	Useful beach/city base; pairs easily with Hoi An.
HCMC	2-3 nights	City energy, food, history and Mekong connections.
Phu Quoc	3-5 nights	Works best when you want genuine beach downtime.

COMMON MISTAKES

The itinerary mistakes we would fix first

Too many one-night stops

They look efficient, but they often create packing fatigue and shallow days.

Counting transport as sightseeing

A scenic transfer can still be tiring, especially with luggage or children.

Adding both Sapa and Ha Giang too casually

Both can be brilliant, but they need time and route logic.

Using Google Maps as the whole plan

A map does not show check-in times, delays, weather or energy.

No final buffer

Leaving no margin before an international flight is rarely worth the stress.

Copying someone else's pace

A backpacker route, honeymoon route and family route should not feel the same.

TRANSPORT CHOICES

When to fly, train or book a private transfer

The best transport choice is not always the cheapest or shortest. It is the one that protects your time, energy and next day.

Fly when

The route crosses regions, time is limited, or an overnight train would ruin the next day.

Train when

The route is classic, the timing works, and the experience is part of the trip.

Private transfer when

You have children, older parents, awkward connections, luggage or multiple stops.

Bus or van when

The route is common, budget matters and you are comfortable with less control.

Routes that often need extra thought

Sapa -> Ha Long, Ha Long -> Ninh Binh, Ninh Binh -> Da Nang, Hue -> Hoi An, late airport arrivals, and any route with children or older travellers.

FAMILIES AND SLOWER TRAVEL

If you are travelling with children or older parents

The route should change. Not because Vietnam is too difficult, but because comfort, recovery and transfer quality matter more.

Reduce one-night stays

Two or three nights in fewer places usually feels better than constant movement.

Pay attention to arrival times

Late arrivals plus early transfers are where family routes often fall apart.

Upgrade key transfers

A private driver can be worth it when luggage, heat, naps or mobility matter.

Keep flexible mornings

A calmer start can save the whole day, especially after long travel.

SIMPLE TEST

Would this route still feel good if one person sleeps badly, the weather changes, or a transfer takes longer than expected?

PLANNING WORKSHEET

Blank itinerary planning worksheet

Use this page before booking. If the route looks crowded here, it will probably feel crowded on the ground.

Day	Where you sleep	Main plan	Transfer?
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			
14			

NEXT STEP

Not sure if your route works?

Urbane Notes can review your itinerary and help fix the timings, transfers and unnecessary travel.

What we can help with

- Check whether your route is realistic for your dates
- Flag wasted travel days and awkward transfers
- Suggest what to cut, reorder or slow down
- Add verified local contacts for drivers, guides and transfers where useful

Send us your actual route

If you want a second pair of local eyes on the plan, send us your dates, route order and main concerns.

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