

Reader Q&A: How to explore Vietnam with kids



A family rides to the markets in Hoi An, a historic city on Vietnam's coast. (Charlie Harding/Getty)

Last week, we called for advice from some of the world's best explorers – our readers! Responses poured in on Facebook, providing tips for BBC Travel reader Donita Richards, who asked: "Is there anything that is a must do or must avoid for families in Vietnam? We are planning to take our children (3½ and 1½ years old) next February."

Check out some of the advice we received from our travel community.

From Noelle Morgan: "Beautiful county, lovely people. They drive like nuts so look left and right and 20 times more before crossing the road. I got bitten to death, so maybe bring mosquito nets for the kids' beds."

From Kristy McGregor: "I don't have children but I have led tour groups through Vietnam. Like almost everywhere around the world – everyone loves children. Highlights for me were always the food (hire a babysitter for a couple of nights and enjoy some adult time – the seafood is to die for), wandering the markets (expose your children to the wonderful sights and smells), and some beach time. One of my favorite places was Hoi An – so beautiful at night with lanterns, markets, shopping, restaurants, boat rides on Perfume River, safe at night, traffic not as busy as Saigon or Hanoi, beachside close by and just a lovely atmosphere. Whatever you choose to do I am sure you will enjoy!"

From Vy Nguyen: "During February, we celebrate The Lunar New Year. There are loads of things to do: visit the flower market, eat delicious foods and wander around Saigon. Be careful with the traffic. I hope you will enjoy my country."

From Robin Mason: "Before going, get vaccinations and do not venture into chicken-chopping markets. Sapa is fine, we drove from Haiphong to Sapa – it was a windy road so train is best from Hanoi. Halong Bay is wonderful, as is most of Vietnam."

From Rachel Lynn Collins: "Be very careful in traffic. Before I went to Ho Chi Minh City, I was given lessons on how to cross the road. Sounded silly at the time but it's very different there! Traffic does not stop, you just walk at an even pace in a straight line and vehicles swerve around you."

From Anne Bendiksbj: "Loved travelling in beautiful Vietnam with my 5-year-old! I can't recommend it enough. It is such a child-friendly nation! It's so easy travelling in Asia with children! Be sure to visit the stunning island of Phu Quoc. Get up at 4 am and wander down to the beach in Nha Trang – you'll mingle with thousands of locals, families with children, all enjoying the cool part of the day... it's amazing! The amusement park in Nha Trang is fabulous! The Waterpark in Ho Chi Minh is a must! Your children will love it! Happy travelling."

From Lilli Maier: "Seriously, bring mosquito nets, thin long sleeves and trousers, and baseball caps (for the sun) and kids-friendly sunscreen. Food is good in Vietnam – rice with veggies is always okay. I travelled with my eight-month-old daughter for eight months through Africa, so I think nothing would go wrong in Vietnam with kids."

From Sean Sager: "Go to the Thang Long Water Puppet Show in Hanoi! Also, go to the Vinpearl Amusement Park in Nha Trang (get a ride in the longest over-water cable car). Expose them to some of the best food in the world. And be careful crossing the roads!"

From Travel Junkie Diary: "Take a good first aid kit, travel insurance and a baby backpack. Do: Thang Long Water Puppet Show, Hanoi Water Park. Stay away from the highlands, hugging the coast from Hanoi down to Saigon. Stock up on sanitizers."

From Alfred Tann: "When someone wants to carry things for you in train stations, be careful. Either you won't get them back or this person would charge you \$5 to \$10."

From Constant Traveller: "Do not miss Hoi An and Hué for anything. Lots of history, clothes and good food to indulge in."

From Ulli Maier: "Depends what you want: if you really want to get the feeling of a Vietnamese family with two kids, rent a motorbike and drive around the city. Based on firsthand experience, let somebody take pictures – your friends at home won't believe it otherwise."

From Michelle Shoucair Karam: "Hygiene, hygiene, hygiene when traveling with kids to Southeast Asia. Visit temples but read what to do and what not to do as they are very strict and religious. Always stay safe and don't forget the anti-bug gels, especially for kids!"

From Cecile De Forest: "Don't miss the Highlands! Take the overnight train from Hanoi to Sapa. Gorgeous! When crossing the street in Hanoi, go! Don't stop! The motorcyclists figure out your pace and avoid you. If you stop, you are in trouble. I loved Hanoi but hated Saigon. Halong Bay would be fun for the kids if they like boats."

From Corbett Villarrial: "I lived in Hanoi for six months opening a children's fitness center. I had an amazing experience. The last 10 days of the trip, I went on a tour of five cities from Hanoi to the centre of Vietnam. People are lovely. Traffic is dangerous. Vietnam is a great way to get good food delivered for great prices. If you go to Hoi An, you can buy custom tailored shoes and clothes for good prices. If you see something you really like but the price is expensive, it's ok to barter – just keep it light and

fun. Don't eat fresh leafy greens... they can lead to tummy problems. Take bug repellent and sun screen. Hanoi has some great French architecture. Halong Bay might be fun for the kids, plus you can swim and explore some caves. The beaches of Da Nang are safe and fun. If I were to plan a trip again, I would prefer to do more 'hands-on' tours, like the lantern making and rice pancake making in Hoi An."