



# Vietnam by Rail

with Scott McGregor

Ho Chi Minh City • Vung Tau • Nha Trang • Hoi An

• Hue • Hanoi • Halong Bay

23 February – 9 March 2012 (16 days)



Renaissance  
Tours



Tour Leader  
**Scott McGregor**

Scott is a well known media personality from 30 years of work as an actor, presenter and producer and has hosted numerous prime time TV programs which have tapped into his passions for Train Travel, History and the realm of the home handy-man.

Well known for his love of train travel through his nationally and internationally broadcast series of programs, *Railway Adventures Across Australia* and *Down The Line*, he's also famous for bursting into peoples houses and doing vast makeovers in a weekend on the ratings hit *Room For Improvement* and for his DIY antics on *Better Homes and Gardens*. More recently however he has been seen on the History Channel hosting such programs as *Australian Icon Towns* and *The Stamp Of Australia*.

Author of two books, *Fix-It* and *Big Boys Toys*, he also owns and operates a luxury, railway themed getaway on the top of a mountain just north of Mudgee in central NSW which he built around a collection of beautifully appointed vintage railway carriages called Ruwenzori Retreat.

## Vietnam by Rail

Don't miss this chance to discover Vietnam by rail! Travel from Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) on the South China Sea to Hanoi along the line of the 'Reunification Express', one of the most fascinating rail routes in the world.

Join Scott McGregor for this unique journey from Ho Chi Minh City in the south, following the scenic coastline of Vietnam and the course of the Red River to Hanoi, in the north. Travel in the comfort of privately chartered sleeping carriages, in which you spend 3 nights, and your own dining / lounge car. Other nights are spent in comfortable four- and five-star hotels. Enjoy a number of great rail experiences on the 'Reunification Express' such as the spectacular Hai Van Pass, the huge rock formations at Tam Coc and the vast historic Gia Lam railway workshops in Hanoi.

On the way, discover the rich culture of Vietnam with its ancient kingdoms, grand colonial architecture, fascinating ethnic diversity and triumphant post war reconstruction, not to mention the legendary food, friendly people and excellent shopping.



Scott McGregor with locals on a Vietnamese train

## ITINERARY

### Thu 23 Feb Australia – Ho Chi Minh City

Morning departure from SYD/MEL on Vietnam Airlines flight, arriving in Ho Chi Minh City mid-afternoon. Transfer to your hotel on arrival. Tonight join Scott McGregor and fellow tour members for a special welcome dinner. (D)

### Fri 24 Feb Ho Chi Minh City – Vung Tau

Travel south to **My Tho** on the Mekong River and gateway to the **Mekong Delta**, South Vietnam's agricultural heart. Explore the Delta and its canals by boat, sampan and canoe. Return to Ho Chi Minh City mid-afternoon and travel via hydrofoil boat to the beautiful resort town of Vung Tau. (BLD)

### Sat 25 Feb Vung Tau – Ho Chi Minh City

After a short coach tour of the city centre of Vung Tau, visit some of the Vietnam War sites that have a great importance for Australians. See the **Long Tan Cross** and visit the Nui Dat area, the base of Australian operations during the war. Visit the Australian-sponsored Ba Ria orphanage, before returning to Ho Chi Minh City mid-afternoon. (BL)

### Sun 26 Feb Ho Chi Minh City – Overnight Train

Your exploration of Ho Chi Minh City starts with a visit to the old Presidential Palace, now known as the **Reunification Palace**, the twin-steeped **Notre Dame Cathedral** and the historic **Post Office**. Explore Ho Chi Minh City's bustling Chinatown and its market. This is the most colourful corner of the city with a lively atmosphere and mysterious temples.

Afternoon at leisure, before the transfer to Saigon Railway Station. Embark on your private train carriages for your first overnight journey to Nha Trang.

Officially the Vietnam North-South Railway, the 'Reunification Express' runs from Ho Chi Minh City to Hanoi with a total length of 1,726 km and a gauge of 1 metre. The railway was inaugurated in 1936 by the French colonists as part of their railway network in French Indochina. After the division of Vietnam in 1954 into the communist North and anti-communist South, the railway was bisected at Hien Luong Bridge. During the Vietnam War, the railway was the target of bombardment by both North Vietnam and South Vietnam. After the Fall of Saigon on 30 April 1975, Vietnam was reunited and so was the railway. On 31 December 1976, the severely war-torn railway was fully restored and put back into operation. (BD)

### Mon 27 Feb Arrive Nha Trang

This morning disembark in Nha Trang, Vietnam's most picturesque coastal town. Palm trees line the dazzling, fine white sands and clear waters of the city's gently curving bay. After checking in to your hotel, take a boat trip to the **Tri Nguyen Aquarium** on Hon Mieu Island followed by lunch on Hon Tre (Bamboo Island). Afternoon at leisure to relax by the beach or the hotel pool, or take a cyclo-ride along the promenade. (BL)



City Hall, Ho Chi Minh City



Floating Market, Mekong Delta



Ga Danang Railway Station



Covered Bridge, Hoi An

## Tue 28 Feb Nha Trang – Overnight Train

This morning rise early to practice Tai Chi with the locals on the beach before breakfast. Then visit the striking **Long Son Pagoda**, founded in the late 19th century, with its giant seated Buddha. Continue to the **Po Nagar**, the best preserved Cham towers in central Vietnam.

Afternoon at leisure. Why not enjoy a mud soak and bath at the Thap Ba Hot Spring mud bath, or visit Dam Market?

After an early dinner, board your train carriages again this evening and head north to Danang. (BD)

## Wed 29 Feb Arrive Danang – Hoi An

After disembarkation in Danang and breakfast, transfer to Hoi An via Marble Mountain, a cluster of five hills rising sharply from the surrounding rice fields and featuring a number of caves, grottoes and Buddhist temples.

The World Heritage listed town of Hoi An was one of South-East Asia's major international ports during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries used by Portuguese, Dutch, Japanese and Chinese traders. Perhaps more than any other place in Vietnam, Hoi An retains the feel of bygone days. Later this afternoon, take a leisurely walking tour through the ancient town centre including the famous **Japanese Covered Bridge**, the **Hoi An Museum of History & Culture**, and visit a silk factory. (BD)

## Thu 1 Mar Hoi An

Day at leisure to further explore this beautiful town. Hoi An is a bargain hunter's paradise, renowned for its wonderful tailors, delightful silk lampshades and a variety of other traditional Vietnamese handicrafts. (B)

## Fri 2 Mar Hoi An

This morning visit the World Heritage Site of **My Son**, the former capital of the Kingdom of Champa and the site of Vietnam's most important Cham ruins. It is a large complex of religious relics that comprises more than 70 architectural works, including temples and towers that connect to each other with complicated red brick designs. The towers date from the 9th through to the 13th centuries. Afternoon at leisure. (BL)

## Sat 3 Mar

## Hoi An – Hue

This morning transfer to Danang by coach and board your private carriages to travel to Hue – by day – via the scenic Hai Van Pass. This spectacular trip is considered one of the most scenic rail journeys in the world. In *The Great Railway Bazaar*, Paul Theroux said about the journey "Of all the places the railway had taken me since London (Europe, the Middle East, and the Indian subcontinent), this was the loveliest."

Hue acted as Vietnam's political and royal capital during the 19th century, and to this day remains one of the countries most important cultural and religious centres. Perhaps more than any other city, Hue reflects the former glory of the nation of Vietnam. The Perfume River, which divides the city, has for centuries been the inspiration of artists and poets alike. This afternoon, take a boat trip along the Perfume River and visit **Thien Mu Pagoda**, the oldest monastery in Hue dating back to the 17th century. A cyclo-tour of Hue in the early evening will take you to a local restaurant for an entertaining dinner. (BLD)

## Sun 4 Mar Hue – Overnight Train

This morning's city tour of Hue includes the **Royal Citadel**, home of the emperors, modelled after Beijing's Forbidden City and today a World Heritage Site, and the **tombs of the Nguyen emperors**.

This afternoon board your private carriages again and travel north, enjoying a spectacular coastal and rural scenery and sunset, followed by an 'Aussie picnic dinner' on the train. (BLD)

## Mon 5 Mar Arrive Ninh Binh – Hanoi

Early morning arrival in Ninh Binh, in the Red River Delta. After breakfast at a local restaurant, visit the region surrounding **Hoa Lu**, a little valley characterised by lotus flower lakes, vast rice paddies and evergreen untouched forests. By sampan, visit **Tam Coc caves**, a flat paddy field surrounded by towering ranges of limestone mountains and aptly called 'Halong Bay on the ricefields'.



Tai Chi, Nha Trang



Po Nagar, Nha Trang



Hai Van Pass

Later this morning resume your journey by coach through the verdant countryside to Hanoi. Vietnam's capital has that attractive aura of a city with a long and diverse culture and history. It is a graceful city of serene lakes, tree-lined boulevards, elegant squares and leafy public parks. Afternoon and evening at leisure. (BL)

### **Tue 6 Mar** **Hanoi**

Full day tour of Hanoi, starting with the **Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum** and the **Presidential Palace**, former residence of the French Governor of Indochina. See the **One Pillar Pagoda**, an elegant wooden structure built in 1049 that sits on stilts over a lake; it is said to represent a lotus emerging from the water. Conclude your morning tour with a visit to the ancient **Temple of Literature**. Initially built as a Confucian Temple by Emperor Ly Thanh Tong, it became Vietnam's earliest university in 1076.

This afternoon, visit the vast old world industrial complex of **Gia Lam railway workshops**. Evening performance of the extraordinary Water Puppets, Vietnam's most famous performance art form, followed by dinner at a local restaurant. (BD)

### **Wed 7 Mar** **Hanoi – Halong Bay**

Morning drive from Hanoi to Halong (190 km, approx. 3.5 hr). Board a traditional 'junk' for an afternoon cruise and overnight on **Halong Bay**, which harbours a stunning scenery of limestone islands and islets. Halong Bay, or 'Bay of the Descending Dragon', with its 3,000 islands rising from the clear emerald waters of the Gulf of Tonkin, is one of the natural Marvels of Vietnam. Sail around the bay to find secluded areas to either swim or kayak in and visit a floating fishing village. In the evening the cook prepares a sumptuous meal whilst at anchor in the heart of the bay. Overnight on board. (BLD)

### **Thu 8 Mar** **Halong Bay – Hanoi**

Rising to the tranquil beauty of the bay, relax on board the boat or visit the Surprise Cave, one of the finest and widest grottoes of Halong Bay. Return to the main harbour at midday and drive back to Hanoi. Afternoon at leisure. Tonight celebrate the conclusion of the tour with a farewell dinner with Scott McGregor. (BD)

### **Fri 9 Mar** **Depart Hanoi**

Morning at leisure for some last minute shopping. Early afternoon transfer to Hanoi Airport for departure on overnight Vietnam Airlines flight to Australia. (B)

### **Sat 10 Mar** **Arrive Australia**

Morning arrival in SYD/MEL.



*Old Locomotive*



*Citadel, Hue*



*Opera House, Hanoi*



*Tam Coc, Red River Delta*

## ABOUT THE PRIVATE RAIL CARRIAGES ...



*Sleeping Car*



*Dining Car*

The rail cars are fully air-conditioned and feature double-glazed windows, western style toilets with wash rooms and each compartment has two lower beds with daily fresh bed linen and towels, complimentary water and fresh flowers.

The dining car is the perfect venue to engage in conversation with your fellow travellers or simply relax and enjoy a drink as you watch the ever changing landscape pass by.

The same crew will remain with our rail cars throughout your journey. Upon reaching each of the various stopover destinations, your private sleeping and dining cars are disconnected and moved to a siding and secured to await your return.

## TOUR PRICES ...

Per person, twin-share

**AUD 7,950**

Single supplement  
(only available in hotels)\*

**AUD 850**

Reduction without flights

**AUD 1,000**

Business class supplement

**On request**

Tour Code

**RLWY VIETNAM**

Deposit (per person)

**AUD 500**

Final payment

**23 December 2011**

*\* Single travellers may request to share.  
Please advise at time of booking.*

## TOUR PRICES INCLUDE

- Return international flights in economy on Vietnam Airlines
- Transfers on arrival & departure if travelling on group flights
- 11 nights accommodation in centrally located 4- or 5-star hotels with daily breakfast (B)
- 3 overnight train journeys in 2-berth sleeper compartments
- 1 night on board a traditional Vietnamese 'junk' boat in twin-share cabins with private facilities
- Meals as per itinerary (L=Lunch, D=Dinner)
- Comfortable air-conditioned coach transportation throughout
- Comprehensive sightseeing including local guides and entrance fees as per itinerary
- Gratuities for local guides, drivers and on board the train
- Porterage at hotels and railway stations (1 piece per person)
- Visa for Vietnam

## DO NOT INCLUDE

- Transfers on arrival & departure if not travelling on group flights
- Drinks with meals, except for welcome and farewell dinners
- Items of a personal nature (e.g. telephone, laundry, minibar etc.)
- Travel insurance

## YOUR HOTELS ...

Renaissance Riverside Hotel

Ho Chi Minh City

★★★★★

Imperial Hotel

Vung Tau

★★★★★

Sheraton Hotel & Spa

Nha Trang

★★★★★

Life Heritage Resort

Hoi An

★★★★★

Hotel Saigon Morin

Hue

★★★★★

Maison d'Hanoi Hanova Hotel

Hanoi

★★★★★

Indochina Sails

Halong Bay

NB: Hotels of a similar standard may be substituted. Early check-ins at hotels, when required, have been requested but not guaranteed.

Please note that travel in developing countries such as Vietnam can be challenging. Government regulations abound and can be changed at any time without prior notice and are beyond the control of Renaissance Tours. Such changes may, at times, necessitate amendments to your itinerary.

A moderate level of fitness and a sense of adventure are required for this tour.

## TERMS & CONDITIONS

### How to Book

Complete, sign and return the Booking Form available from Renaissance Tours with your deposit of \$500 per person. Upon receipt of your Booking Form and deposit, you will receive confirmation of your place from Renaissance Tours.

### Deposit / Final Payments

Deposit (at time of booking) AUD 500

Your deposit is used to pay for flight, train and accommodation deposits and is non-refundable in the event of your cancellation. Your final payment is due 60 days before departure. Failure to make your final payment by the due date may result in cancellation of your booking and loss of deposit.

Payment by cash, cheque, American Express, Diners Club, MasterCard and Visa is accepted. A 3% service charge applies for payment by American Express and Diners Club.

We reserve the right to charge a late payment fee in the event of late booking and/or payment to cover additional communication and other expenses.

### Cancellation & Refunds

a) Cancellation by You - Cancellation charges will be applied as shown below, calculated from the day written notification is received by Renaissance Tours. In addition to cancellation fees for tours operated by Renaissance Tours as shown below, airlines, hotels and other third parties may impose up to 100% cancellation charges.

60 days or more	Forfeit of deposit
59 – 45 days	25% of tour cost
44 – 31 days	50% of tour cost
30 – 15 days	75% of tour cost
Less than 15 days	100% of tour cost

The above cancellation charges include applicable GST.

In addition to the above cancellation charges, the full insurance premium together with any existing administration fees is also payable in the event of a cancellation by the Client. If the reason for cancellation is covered by the insurance policy, you may be able to reclaim these charges.

b) Cancellation by Us - We reserve the right to cancel a tour for any reason (such as failure to reach minimum tour participant numbers). Except for force majeure or the Client's failure to pay the final balance, we will not cancel a tour less than 60 days before departure. Unless the Client fails to pay the final balance, we will return all monies paid, excluding payment for travel insurance and administration fees.

No further compensation will be paid in the event of cancellation by Renaissance Tours. A full refund of monies paid for tour costs will be the full extent of our liability. Airlines may impose up to 100% cancellation charges.

### Passports, Visas and Vaccinations

It is your responsibility to be in possession of a passport valid for 6 months after the date of your return to Australia. You are also responsible for obtaining all necessary visas, inoculations and preventative medicines as may be required for the duration of the tour. Information about these matters or related items is given in good faith but without responsibility on the part of Renaissance Tours.

### Travel Insurance

It is a condition of travel that you are covered by comprehensive travel insurance for international tours. You can make your own arrangements or your travel insurance can be arranged by Renaissance Tours. In either case all participants must provide the following information no later than 60 days prior to commencement of travel:

- a copy of your travel insurance policy (or details of master policy)
- the emergency telephone number of your insurance company
- next of kin emergency contact.

### Fitness and Participation

While our tours do not require a special level of fitness, for the overall benefit of the group, all tour members must possess a moderate level of mobility, including the ability to:

- negotiate airports and railway stations without wheelchair assistance
- use combined shower/bath facilities (it is impossible to guarantee walk-in shower facilities)
- undertake walking tour of 2-3 hours duration, including using stairs, walking over cobblestones and other uneven surfaces
- stand for long periods in museums and other sites
- embark / disembark coaches, trains and other methods of transportation without assistance
- handle your own luggage

If you (or we) have any doubts about your ability to participate in your chosen tour, you may be required to have a doctor's appraisal. This would require a doctor to read the itinerary of your chosen tour and provide you with a written confirmation of your ability to participate.

### Terms & Conditions

You can find the full terms & conditions on the Renaissance Tours booking form. They can also be found at [www.renaissancetours.com.au](http://www.renaissancetours.com.au) or we would be happy to post you a copy on request.



Railway Guard



Lanterns, Hoi An



Narrow gauge tracks, Hanoi



Cover image: Scott McGregor with Vietnamese trains  
Back page image: Halong Bay



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Your travel agent is –