

## Tour Activities

### Adventure

#### Trekking

Ha Giang and Cao Bang provinces offer great options for short and long trekking among beautiful scenery and through spectacular countryside. You can trek through the stunningly picturesque rice terraces of Hoang Su Phi district in Ha Giang, an agricultural landscape that is classified as National Heritage by the Vietnamese Government. The rice fields are most beautiful in September and October during the harvest season. The fields will shine in different shades of yellow; the perfect time for landscape photography. You will stay overnight in excellent homestays owned and operated by the hill tribes of north Vietnam including Tay, Nung and H'Mong ethnic groups. Local ethnic groups have retained their unique traditions and continue to pass these down to the next generation, and you will be able to witness cultural performances in the evening at your homestay.



#### Mountain Biking

Cao Bang and Ha Giang provinces offer ideal conditions for mountain biking for both beginners and advanced riders respectively. In the Hoang Su Phi district of Ha Giang you can ride the narrow dirt single trails that have been connecting villages and villagers for generations.. The routes offer spectacular views over picturesque rice-terraced mountainsides and a perfect mix of testing climbs, undulating sections and absolutely amazing downhill rides. You will meet friendly locals from ethnic minority villages that are keen to show their well-kept traditions. Relax your tired legs in the evening with a traditional herbal bath to refuel your energy.



#### Canoeing

A Beautiful and relaxing activity you can do with us is canoeing on Quay Son river in Cao Bang province. Quay Son is a beautiful jade-blue river that feeds the majestic Ban Gioc waterfall. The winding river flows through a spectacular scenery of green rice terraces and limestone mountains. Quay Son river originates from China and constitutes the border to Vietnam in the area of Bản Giốc waterfall. Canoeing on Quay Son river is good for beginners as the waters are mostly calm.



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## Cultural & Social

### Herbal Bath

Herbal bath is a unique tradition of Red Dao ethnic minority people. The bath will recover your body after a long day of travelling, make your skin smooth and claims to cure some diseases like rheumatism, bone pain and colds. The traditional herbs used can include from 10 to 120 kinds of herbs collected in the forest and from the garden. The knowledge required to identify the right medicinal plants is passed from the mother to her daughter in the family. To prepare the herbal bath, the medicinal plants are cut into small pieces and boiled together with bark in a large pot of water over a charcoal fire. You can enjoy the intense smell of these natural medicines as they are brewing. The herbs are boiled for 3-4 hours and then transferred to a wooden barrel tub. The herbal bath is now ready for you to use. Water temperature is around 43 to 48°C. Very tired or less fit people should soak their body in the bathtub for about 20-25 minutes, healthy people 30-35 minutes. After the bath, massage and acupuncture services are also available for those who are interested.



### Cultural Performance

The mountains of North Vietnam are home to an incredible diversity of ethnic minority groups that have a rich cultural life, various beliefs and speak their own languages. Our homestays are located in villages of different ethnic minority groups such as Red Dao and Nung people. Our homestay families are very warm-hearted and eager to show you their local life and ancient traditions. On request they can perform various traditional customs such as the mystical fire dance of the Red Dao people. The Shaman will prepare many items for this ritual such as rice, rice wine, boiled chicken, chicken blood and a silver ring. During a ceremony that lasts for several hours the Shaman worships the Fire God for luck, happiness and to pray for the avoidance of demons and diseases. A pile of wood is set on fire and a group of young men will dance in the fire coal pile without getting burnt. The fire dance is a wild and mystical cultural activity that will certainly touch and captivate you. Other cultural activities that you are be able to witness are singing performances or the magic stick game, a fun activity that you can join in after a good meal at your homestay.



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## Road Building

The roads in our CBT villages are often simple dirt roads that are in a bad condition and need improvement. Good roads are an important life line for the community. Especially during the rainy season roads can get very bad and there is a need for concrete roads. You can help to fund the construction of such roads with your donation but also actively build a road section together with villagers. This activity is a great way of interacting with the local people and helping them with something that is very important to them



## Farming

### Fish Catching

Another fun activity you can do in the rice fields is fish catching. This usually happens 2 weeks before rice harvesting. The water is removed from the fields which makes it easy to catch fish for your dinner. You can also do fish catching all year round from fish ponds with a mosquito net.



### Planting & Harvesting Rice

Rice planting and harvesting is one major activity that is very important in the life of most villages and a fun activity to join as a tourist. The rice-terraced fields are filled with water in May and June and the rice crops planted. Harvesting season is in September and October. At that time the rice is ripe and the rice fields appear in beautiful yellow colours in the autumn sunshine. The water is removed from the fields and the rice crops are cut with simple hand tools like sickles or hand-held knives. After cutting the grains need to be separated from the straw in a process called threshing. The cut rice crops are flailed manually on the fields and the rice corns collected and bagged. Helping local farmers with rice harvesting and being outside in fresh air and beautiful rice terraced fields is a very special experience and a memory that will stay with you for life.



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## Tea picking & processing

Some of our homestays are located in villages that have a long-standing tradition for tea farming. You can participate in tea leaf picking and processing. Early in the morning you will head out to the tea plantation and carefully pick tea leaves under the guidance of local Red Dao villagers. Many of the tea trees are over 100 years old and grow in healthy climatic conditions and in rich soil on the slopes of the mountain at an altitude of around 1000 m and higher. You will carry the leaves back to the village in a basket on your shoulders and process your own tea. Green tea, White tea, Red tea and Black tea are all harvested from the same tree, but are processed differently to attain varying levels of oxidation. Enjoy your freshly brewed cup of tea. Local ethnic minority people believe that their tea is a precious natural medicine and can be used to detox, prevent heart diseases, arthritis and reduce the risk of getting cancer.



## Product Activities

### Paper Making

Paper making uses techniques created by Nung ancestors, which has been passed down from generation to generation. Nung ancestors started making and selling paper to compliment their agricultural activities, as a regular lack of water made making a living from farming alone very difficult.

The paper making technique uses bark from the may sla tree that is found in the local forest, and which is now being planted nearer to their homes to save time having to collect the materials. After multiple processes have been applied to the bark a form of white textured paper is produced, which can be kept for decades.

This paper is often used for spiritual purposes (to burn on the first and middle day of the month, to use in funerals and for Nung's tradition Tet celebrations), education purposes (to write traditions vows, Han texts, to draw on) and to use as cover for cakes, traditional snacks. In our community-based tourism villages, you will have a chance to observe the process of making paper, and make your own paper under the instruction of skilled village papermakers. Before you leave be sure to buy some of the paper to take home with you – it is a great souvenir and helps the local people.



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## Weaving and Dying Textiles And Embroidery

Vietnam has 400 traditional craft villages that make a living from producing some kind of handicraft products. These villages help preserve Vietnam's cultural and historical heritage. In Cao Bang there is a high density of farming villages that are specialised in the production of handicraft products such as for example blacksmith products, rattan, basket-weaving, weaving and dying textiles and embroidery. Depending on which village you visit you will be able to see and participate in the production of different types of handicrafts and buy your own very unique souvenir. You can for example weave textiles and then dye them with natural materials. Making embroidery under the guidance of local ethnic minority women is a relaxing activity and you can see how their beautiful traditional clothes are decorated. By purchasing these unique handicrafts, you are not only giving yourselves, family or friends a special treat but are helping ethnic minorities improve their livelihoods.



## Basket Weaving

Baskets are important items in the household of ethnic minority people in Cao Bang. They are for example used to transport fresh fruit and vegetables to a local market to sell. Baskets are made of guot grass (a species of fern), a very popular grass that is of optimal quality in the mountainous provinces of Cao Bang, Lang Son, Yen Bai and Bac Kan. The guot grass is combined with other materials such as rattan, bamboo, sedge, corn leaves and water hyacinths. Various products with many different designs can be made. In our community-based tourism villages, you will have the chance to weave baskets yourself and purchase a beautiful souvenir that helps ethnic minorities to improve their livelihoods.



## Blacksmith

The forging of knives and agricultural tools has been the craft of the Nung ethnic people in Phuc Sen Commune, Quang Uyen district in the mountains of Cao Bang for hundreds of years. The village is home to around 2000 Nung people and many of them make a living from the blacksmith craft more than from farming. Their handcrafted blacksmith products are famous in the region and neighbouring provinces for their durability and sharpness. Learning to forge is a rite of passage for young men in the village. Local tradition says that a local man who has not learnt the art of forging by the time he reaches the age for marriage is not considered a man. The forging craft requires all senses and particularly good hearing and eyesight since the colour and sound of the metal determine the sharpness of





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the tool. One of the best materials for making products are suspension bars salvaged from motor cars. If you visit Pac Rang community-based tourism village you will be able to see blacksmiths at work. If you want you can later buy a knife or other tool in the many shops that line the street at Pac Rang village.

### Incense Making

Incense sticks are said to provide a sacred bridge between the life of human beings and the spiritual world of Heaven. They have an important significance in the spiritual life of many Asian countries, including Vietnam. The process of making incense sticks is a skilled craftsmanship that you can witness in Phia Thap village, a village of Nung ethnic minority people in Quang Uyen district of Cao Bang province. The knowledge of how to make incense sticks has been passed on from generation to generation and all the 51 families in the village are skilled incense makers. During your visit in Phia Thap village, you can try to produce your own incense sticks under the guidance of a local craftsman. A memorable experience not to be missed. The sticks are cut from bamboo wood and then first soaked into water. The incense maker then takes around 25 sticks into the hands and whirls the wet sticks in a pile of leaf powder until sufficient amount of powder sticks to the incense. The sticks are then soaked in water again and whirled in a pile of wood powder. The two types of powder stick together thanks to the adhesive properties of the leaf powder. The leaf powder gives the incense the characteristic aromatic smell when burning. The incences are then exposed to the sun on a frame. Wind and sun will help to dry the sticks. Unlike some other villages no chemical substances are used in the production of incense sticks in Phia Thap. The special odour of natural herbs will stay for a long time and provide a beautiful scent when burning.



### Tile Making

The craft of tile making is practised in Lũng Rì village and other villages in Quang Uyen district of Cao Bang province. The tiles are made of clay and called Yin and Yang tiles as they are semicircular in shape. The production of the tiles is fascinating to watch and you can try making tiles for yourself in our CBT villages. At first the clay is mixed together with help of a buffalo in a large circular basin. The worker pushes the buffalo to walk around the basin and stamp on the clay in order to smoothen the clay mixture. The clay is then cut into a large block. A special tool with a wire is then used to cut a thin layer from the block of clay. The layer is wrapped around a wooden basket that can be turned on its own axis. By turning the basket the layer of clay is being softened with another tool and unnecessary edges cut off. Finally the basket is removed and the circular layer of clay left to dry. After drying the layer can be folded and will break into 4 pieces of Yin and Yang tiles. The tiles are burnt in an oven and are finally ready to sell.



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