



13 Days

Explore Vietnam

Join us on this active exploration of northern Vietnam and experience the extraordinary beauty, tradition and adventure that this region conjures up so effortlessly. We will hike through rice terraces developed over thousands of years by the locals, visit traditional ethnic minority villages, learn how to cook local delicacies and discover towering limestone scenery by boat. Throughout it all, the magnificent beauty, history, nature and vibrant colours of Vietnam come shining through.

Dates: 21st Oct – 2nd Nov 2019 and
6th – 18th April 2020

-) Experience culture & cuisines of Hanoi
-) Trek through rolling terraced hills
-) Cycle along rice paddy fields
-) Speedboat to Cat Ba Island
-) Yoga and relax on the beach
-) Sail in stunning Ninh Binh
-) Spot wildlife in Pu Luong



About STC Escapes

STC Escapes is part of the STC Expeditions family. We've been organising adventurous school trips and expeditions since 2006. Over the years we have helped school groups summit 6000m peaks in the Himalaya and visit remote tribes deep in the rainforest clad interior of Venezuela. Not all the school trips we arrange are as adventurous as these, yet wherever we operate our key goal is to provide an exceptional educational travel experience.

Escape the Classroom

The idea for **STC Escapes** and our range of holidays to *Escape the Classroom* came from our loyal tribe of teachers. We were tasked with providing an opportunity for teachers to travel together, relax, have fun and explore the world – without having to worry about looking after students at the same time! STC Escapes is about taking a group of teachers on an amazing adventure, helping you return to the classroom feeling refreshed and inspired.

Explore Vietnam - Trip Overview

Experience the fascinating culture and landscapes of Vietnam. Cycle, trek and sail through this itinerary and experience real south east Asia.

Duration: 13 days

Dates: Monday 21st Oct to Saturday 2nd Nov 2019
Monday 6th – Saturday 18th April 2020

Trip Grading: Physical 2/5, Culture 4/5, Comfort 4/5

Cost: £1,450 land only, £2,050 including flights (optional single supplement)

Focus: Culture

Summary: 13 day cultural exploration of north Vietnam, 3 days of trekking and cycling, 3 boat tours, culinary course, 2 nights in traditional homestays, 7 nights in hotels

Itinerary Overview

Day 1-2 Arrive Hanoi

Day 3-4 Pu Luong Reserve

Day 5 Cuc Phuong National Park

Day 6 Ninh Binh, Trang An, Xuan Thuy

Day 7 Xuan Thuy

Day 8-9 Cat Ba Island

Day 10 Ha Long Bay

Day 11 Hanoi

Day 12-13 Depart Hanoi, Arrive UK

Cost

Flights included:

| | | |
|------------------------|--------|------------------------------|
| Deposit | £250 | Due on booking |
| Interim payment | £900 | Due 6 months prior to travel |
| Final payment | £900 | Due 1 month prior to travel |
| Total cost | £2,050 | Including flights |

Land only – meet in Hanoi:

| | | |
|------------------------|--------|------------------------------|
| Deposit | £250 | Due on booking |
| Interim payment | £600 | Due 6 months prior to travel |
| Final payment | £600 | Due 1 month prior to travel |
| Total cost | £1,450 | Not including flights |

What's included

During the trip:

-) Return international flights & airport departure taxes (unless land only)
-) 13 day adventure; all activities as per itinerary
-) 1 day of trekking in Pu Luong
-) 2 cycling tours in Hanoi and Pu Luong
-) 2 boat trips in Ninh Bing and Xuan Thuy
-) 2 days on Cat Ba Island, speedboat transfer
-) Yoga and beach relaxation
-) Ha Long Bay boat cruise
-) 1 culinary course in Hanoi
-) Sightseeing in Hanoi
-) 1 day school visit
-) All accommodation
-) All transportation in country
-) All meals as set out in itinerary
-) FREE trip t-shirt
-) FREE Water-to-Go Bottle & access to daily water refills
-) Bi-lingual, first aid-qualified STC Local Expedition Leader
-) Assistant Leader from STC Expeditions
-) 24/7 UK operational support whilst overseas
-) Permanent operations team in your destination
-) Travel insurance (this does not include cancellation and personal effects insurance)
-) Group first aid kit and prescription meds pack
-) Full support, safety management & emergency plans
-) Carbon offsetting of all flights

Before the trip:

-) Dedicated travel expert from STC Expeditions to help with planning your perfect adventure
-) STC online portal
-) Detailed pre-departure information including kit lists, visa and vaccination information
-) ATOL financial protection

What's not included

- J UK airport transfers
- J Visa if required (British nationals do not require a visa for trips less than 15 days)
- J Any necessary/optional inoculations
- J Tips for guides, drivers and porters (approx. \$40)
- J Alcoholic drinks

Day to Day Itinerary

Day 1 Flight to Hanoi

The group and STC Assistant Leader meet at the UK airport this afternoon 3 hours before our overnight flight to Hanoi.

Day 2 Arrive Hanoi, Sightseeing

On arrival, we meet our STC Local Expedition Leader at the airport and transfer to the hotel in Hanoi. This afternoon we can roam the capital, bustling with centuries-old architecture and friendly traders or stay and 'recharge' in the hotel. This evening we enjoy a welcome dinner and a briefing on what to expect from our journey in Vietnam.

Accommodation: Hotel

Meals: L, D & Water-to-Go

Day 3 Pu Luong Reserve, Trek

This morning we journey east to Mai Chau and walk from Poom Coom Village to visit the ethnic Thai people. After lunch we take a short 1hr transfer to the starting point of our trek through the stunning Pu Luong Nature Reserve. This area is less frequented than the usual trekking areas of Sapa and the route passes through patchwork rice terraces, remote hill tribes and iconic bamboo waterwheels. Arriving in Don Village, we check in to a traditional stilt guesthouse for an evening meal overlooking the incredible lush forest. A local family will act as our hosts and show us how to cook 3 traditional dishes.

Walking time: approx. 3-4 hrs, 7km

Accommodation: Traditional homestay

Meals: B, L, D & Water-to-Go

Day 4 Pu Luong Reserve, Cycle

After a breakfast overlooking the mountains, we begin a cycling tour further into Pu Luong. It is a gentle route along dirt tracks and countryside roads, passing through beautiful valleys, rice terraces and peaceful villages where traditional life goes on as it has done for decades. We return to the guesthouse for a late lunch. After a rest we will be led on a short walk around the nearby villages and visit the local school. The headteacher/teachers will be there to greet us, show us around the school and talk to us about the education system in Vietnam. You are welcome to bring donations for the school. Items like learning and teaching materials such as English reading books, chalk, pencils and paper are much appreciated. Please do not bring sweets, toys or football jerseys as these are less appropriate or unlikely to be shared.

Cycling time: approx. 3-4 hrs

Accommodation: Traditional homestay

Meals: B, L, D & Water-to-Go



Day 5 Cuc Phuong National Park

After a leisurely breakfast, we transfer approx. 3-4hrs to Cuc Phuong National Park. Lunch will be taken in a local restaurant before a nature walk through the forest and botanical gardens. The Primate Rescue Centre is well worth a visit this afternoon. The centre is dedicated to rehabilitating, breeding and studying unique or endangered primates and is home to 150 primates and 15 species. The evening is then ours to relax in the guesthouse and enjoy the gentle birdcalls and night sounds of rural village life in Vietnam.

Accommodation: Guesthouse

Meals: B, L, D & Water-to-Go

Day 6 Ninh Binh, Trang An, Xuan Thuy

Walking out to the National Park Centre takes approx. 2hrs. From here we transfer to Ninh Binh and take local rowing boats to visit Trang An grottos. Trang An was the first World Heritage site in Vietnam. Our small boats meander through the stunning karst landscapes and right into the limestone caves. After lunch we transfer to Xuan Thuy village for a traditional evening of music and feasting with the villagers.

Accommodation: Guesthouse

Meals: B, L, D & Water-to-Go



Day 7 Xuan Thuy, Boat trip

Learn and join in the process of salt making with the local people in Xuan Thuy and visit the countryside museum. Lunch will be served back at the guesthouse before taking a boat trip through the park, passing mangrove forests and spotting countless species of birds. We will return to the guesthouse in Xuan Thuy for dinner.

Accommodation: Guesthouse

Meals: B, L, D & Water-to-Go

Day 8 Cat Ba Island

We say goodbye to our new-found friends over a leisurely breakfast and travel approx. 2.5hrs to Hai Phong on the coast. After lunch we continue our journey to Cat Ba Island by speedboat. Arriving in style, we check in to the hotel and enjoy an afternoon relaxing on the white sand beaches, exploring the markets and finding a hidden gem for dinner.

Accommodation: Hotel

Meals: B, L & Water-to-Go *(feel free to find your own restaurant for dinner)*



Day 9 Cat Ba Island

Today begins with a relaxing yoga class on the beach before a swim in the sea. This afternoon we will meet to take part in a 2hr beach clean along less-visited parts of the coast. This is part of our 'Environment Clean Up' project, helping to reduce waste and pollution along shorelines or inland areas worldwide. The rest of the afternoon is ours to relax and explore before a group meal at a popular local restaurant.

Accommodation: Hotel

Meals: B, D & Water-to-Go *(feel free to find your own restaurant for lunch)*



Day 10 Ha Long Bay

A trip to Vietnam is not complete without visiting the world-famous Ha Long Bay! Today is our chance to explore this spectacular UNESCO World Heritage Site by a private cruise. Fresh seafood is served for lunch while we take in the breath-taking scenery, sailing between enormous limestone karsts, enchanting islets and beautiful caves. Return to Hanoi this evening.

Accommodation: Hotel

Meals: B, L, D & Water-to-Go



Day 11 Hanoi, Cooking Class & Cycling

The first half of today is all about food! We travel out of the city centre and into the countryside to visit small markets, organic farms and fruit gardens to learn about the different types traditional farming techniques and local vegetables. Arriving at our host's home, we are taught to make delicious traditional dishes, 'street-food' and cakes whilst enjoying fresh Vietnamese tea. Our host will demonstrate a range of Vietnamese cooking techniques and share family customs. All ingredients are seasonal and fresh from the farms. After feasting on a lunch of our creation, we will head back in to Hanoi for a sightseeing tour by cycle, stopping at museums, temples, Hanoi's Old Quarter and Hoan Kiem Lake. Tonight, we enjoy a celebratory group meal in the city.

Accommodation: Hotel

Meals: B, L, D & Water-to-Go



Day 12 Depart Hanoi

On our last morning in Vietnam there will be time to visit any remaining sights of interest or pick up souvenirs from the market. We transfer to the airport around midday for our return flight.

Meals: B & Water-to-Go

Day 13 Arrive UK

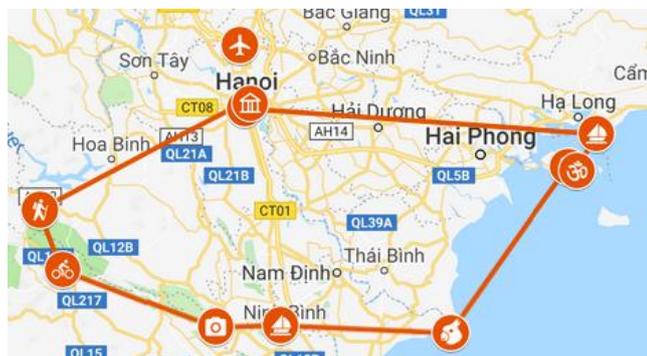
We arrive back in the UK mid-morning.

Whilst every effort will be made to follow this schedule, in the event of unforeseen problems there may be slight changes made. We will do our best to make your trip as enjoyable and hassle-free as possible.

Itinerary Map

You will have a chance to enjoy a variety of cultural experiences on this 13 day adventure, not to mention a range of landscapes from rice paddy fields to floating limestone islands and white sand beaches.

Click on the map below to browse your itinerary online.



Kit & Equipment

You will receive a detailed Kit List, specific to this itinerary, on the STC online portal once signed up. Here you will also find general kit advice and a range of discounts with outdoor retailers.

Below are a few examples of the main kit & equipment items you will need:

-) Well supported trainers suitable for trekking and cycling
-) Large rucksack or duffle bag (55-70 ltr)
-) Smaller rucksack for daily items (20-30 ltr)
-) Cotton or silk sleeping bag liner
-) Lightweight waterproof jacket
-) Walking trousers, shorts & t/shirts
-) Personal first-aid & hygiene kit
-) Sun hat

“On the whole an amazing trip. STC Leader Dan – AMAZING. Food fantastic. Hotel & homestays brilliant. Back up team amazing.”

N.T. Kingdown School, 2017

Trip Grading

Physical Rating: 2/5

Grade 2: Some low-level physical activities included in your trip, including walking on uneven terrain, maybe a morning/afternoon trek of two to four hours. That said, no physical preparation is required to make the most of the tour. High humidity and temperatures can occur at certain times of the year.

Cultural Rating: 4/5

Grade 4: English is unlikely to be widely spoken and the food will be quite different to home, perhaps for extended sections of the trip. You should observe local customs so as not to cause offence. You may be exposed to signs of poverty and some accommodation may have basic facilities. Destinations and trips at this level are likely to involve lots of cultural interaction, perhaps living alongside local people or hosted by families in homestays. This is a fantastic opportunity to see a very different part of the world.

Comfort Rating: 4/5

Grade 4: Whilst some of the homestays may have basic facilities, the accommodation on this trip is likely to be at a comfortable 3-4* standard with some nights in more luxurious hotels or guesthouses. You are likely to have access to showers and washing facilities throughout the itinerary. Journey times are generally only a few hours at a time in private vehicles.

Climate

Being a tropical country, Vietnam's climate is generally hot and humid, with temperatures around the low 30°Cs. The main weather pattern is determined by two monsoon seasons affecting the north and south of the country at different times. From April to October, the south-western monsoon brings warm, humid weather and significant amounts of rain to the whole country except for those areas sheltered by central mountains.

The winter season begins around October-November, bringing cooler and mostly dry days. Rain is possible at any time so we suggest you pack a waterproof jacket / poncho with a hood for all departures although these can be purchased cheaply anywhere in Vietnam. Average temperatures are 17-22°C.

For more information on Vietnam climate, please visit the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) website:

<http://worldweather.wmo.int/en/city.html?cityId=308>

Accommodation

-) Homestays – these are traditional homes, usually on stilts, situated in more remote areas and often with basic facilities. Beds, linens and blankets are provided, but you should bring a sleeping bag liner.
-) Hotels/guest houses – 2-4* twin sharing

Single supplement

Accommodation will be allocated on a twin sharing and 'single sex' basis. If travelling with a friend or partner, you will be able to request to share your room with them.

You can purchase a single supplement if you wish (not possible in traditional homestay nights 3-4) at an additional £200. This will be added on to your final balance payment.

Food

Vietnam is famous for its culinary delights and there will be plenty of opportunity to try traditional dishes at restaurants or local delicacies served family style at homestays. The national dish is 'pho', a noodle soup eaten any time of day consisting of a salty broth, fresh rice noodles, herbs and chicken or beef.

Breakfast, lunch and dinner are included as set out in the itinerary. This does not include dinner or lunch on Cat Ba Island (Day 8-9), where you are welcome to explore and enjoy dinner in smaller groups.

Breakfast – fruit, eggs, sticky rice, pho, Banh Mi (Vietnamese bread) and tea or coffee.

Lunch & Dinner – usually a large selection of small dishes such as pho, spring rolls, rice and raw, steamed or pickled vegetables.

Dietary requirements can almost always be catered for so long as you inform us with enough notice. Please record any allergies or dietary requirements on your online booking form.

Modes of Travel

Transport on this trip will be by:

- ⦿ Private coach or minibus
- ⦿ Trekking
- ⦿ Cycling

Trekking: This mode of transport is as old as time and is tried and tested to ensure you can absorb all the environment has to offer! Your feet, legs and back may get sore with the miles racked up so look after them! If you're carrying a bag you may get sores on your shoulders or bottom of your back due to the sweat. However, trekking can take you to amazing remote locations - places that trucks and bikes simply can't. Yes, there is a physical price to pay for the great rewards, but you will have earned the feeling of accomplishment afterwards. A great bonus is that often you're away from light pollution and the stars will be utterly fantastic!

Cycling: A great way to cover lots of ground quickly whilst being immersed into a culture. Cruising along with the wind in your hair (and helmet!) eating flying bugs as you go! What more could you want? Remember you will get hot and sweaty as it can be quite strenuous, especially when you start to go uphill. Make sure you stay hydrated and eat/sleep well! We always have a support team and vehicle on our cycling trips.



Country Information

Full Country Name: The Socialist Republic of Vietnam

Area: 331,689 km sq.

Population: 92.7 million

Capital City: Hanoi

People: Kinh Vietnamese 85%, plus 53 other ethnic groups

Religion(s): Mainly Buddhism, also Catholicism, Protestantism, Cao Dai and Hoa Hao religions

Time: GMT + 7 Hours

Flight time: Heathrow to Saigon approximately 11 hours 40 mins

Country overview

Vietnam is a fascinating country at the heart of Indochina. A country of inspirational landscapes, culture, history and cuisine and a perfect destination for an active educational journey or adventurous school expedition. Its landscapes, ranging from jagged mountains and brilliant green rice fields, to the limestone pinnacles of Halong Bay and idyllic palm fringed beaches are a sheer joy to behold. However, what makes Vietnam really special and what turns a beautiful country into a stunning travel experience, are the Vietnamese people. Their warm and welcoming nature, as well as their mouth-watering cuisine puts the seal on one of Asia's best destinations.

Geography

Vietnam occupies the eastern and southern part of the Indochinese peninsula in Southeast Asia, with the South China Sea along its entire coast. China is to the north and Laos and Cambodia are to the west. Long and narrow on a north-south axis, Vietnam is slightly smaller than Germany in size. Vietnam holds great geographical variety within its borders including a continuous mountain range along its western border, tropical forests, dramatic limestone landscapes and the vast and intricate river Delta.

Vietnam



Cultural considerations

Handshaking and a vocal greeting are normal. Clothing should be kept simple and informal. When walking or sightseeing around town, shorts should be avoided if possible, as they are usually only worn by children. Footwear should be removed when entering Buddhist pagodas. It is impolite to touch Vietnamese people on the head. It is courteous to ask permission first before taking photographs of people. See www.guide.culturecrossing.net for more information.

Regulations & Red Tape

If you are planning to enter Vietnam for more than 15 days, you are required to obtain a visa. As of 1 July 2015, British passport holders travelling for tourism or business will be able to enter Vietnam for up to 15 days without a visa. More information on how to obtain visas for Vietnam can be found at www.vietnamembassy.org.uk Alternatively, please contact the visa courier agency Travcour for more information on the services they provide in arranging visas (Tel: 020 8543 1846, or visit www.travcour.com). Please note that for security reasons, it is advisable to carry copies of documents rather than originals when in Vietnam.

Foreign office advice

Before travelling, you should familiarise yourself with up to date Foreign Office advice for travel to Vietnam. This is available from: www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/Vietnam and contains useful information including advice about safety and security, health and entry requirements.

Health Information and Vaccine Advice

Shortly after booking, all our groups receive a trip specific health and vaccination briefing letter from our medical advisor. If you want to look up the latest health advice and recommended vaccinations for your destination prior to booking, please visit the TravelHealthPro country specific website on the following link:

<https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/country/240/vietnam>

Pre-departure information

All trip information will be available online on the STC Portal. Log in using the same details as when you first registered (you can click Forgot your Password if needed!). More information will be added in the build up to your trip and we will send you regular email updates so you can plan and prepare as thoroughly as possible.

This information will include advice on:

- J Itinerary & flight details
- J Kit list, advice and discounts
- J Health & hygiene advice
- J Passport and visa requirements
- J Responsible travel guide
- J Country information
- J Training programme (if necessary)
- J Booking conditions
- J Travel insurance policy
- J What to do in an emergency and emergency contact information
- J Team Facebook group
- J Sources of further information about your destination

Meet the Team

3 months before your trip, you will be invited to join a Facebook Group created just for your trip. This is a great opportunity for you to get to know others in your group before you arrive at the airport. Get involved, ask questions and share travel stories!



A Few FAQs

What will the weather be like? In October expect warm, dry days with possibility of rain and temperatures in the low 20s (°C). It is generally humid away from the coast.

Do I need a visa? No if you hold a British Passport, you do not need a visa visiting for less than 15 days. If you do not hold a British Passport, seek advice from either your nationality consulate or us at STC Expeditions.

How fit do I need to be? The fitter you are the more you will enjoy your trip. If you are comfortable hiking or cycling for up to 4hrs on uneven and undulating terrain, you are at an appropriate level of fitness for this trip. Just bear in mind you will be doing this with a light backpack and in humidity.

What's the one meal I shouldn't miss? Goi cuon! A healthy, light and fresh type of spring roll. They look translucent and contain a slither of meat or seafood, vegetables, coriander and are served with fresh greens.

What about vaccinations? You'll be able to consult a health and vaccination brief specific to your trip on the STC portal. We are unable to give further advice on vaccinations and recommend you consult your GP or local Travel Nurse.

What currency shall I bring? The local currency is Vietnamese Dong and £1 = 29397.56 VND (2018). You can bring US dollars to change in country.

You will find more FAQs on our website.

Your STC Contact

Your travel plans are being coordinated by:

Emma Anderson

STC Expeditions
6b King Street
Exeter
Devon
EX1 1BH

Direct dial: 01392 790013

Office: 01392 660056

Email: emma@thstc.co.uk



Responsible Tourism

We are the leading UK expedition company in responsible travel and the only to be Travelife and Child Safe Certified. Our ethos is to educate the next generation of responsible world travellers. You can rest assured any adventure planned with us will be sustainable and ethical.



Here are just a few examples which prove we practice what we preach:

- J Carbon offsetting all flights and donating to Friends of Conservation
- J Members of Tourism Concern's Ethical Tour Operators Group
- J Eco Car Club
- J Pledged to Travellers Against Plastic
- J Employing local leaders
- J Responsible tourism training to in country staff and within UK schools to students and teachers alike
- J Banned use of single use plastic water bottles, instead we give you a free Water-to-Go Bottle
- J Policy against elephant riding and other unethical wildlife activities
- J Fairtrade farm visits in our itineraries to Fairtrade coffee in the office!

Safety & Risk

As an overseas expedition and Duke of Edinburgh provider, we exceed the industry standards in terms of our attitude to safety and risk. We have an unblemished safety record and are confident when we say you couldn't be in better hands.

We are British Standard BS8848:2014 compliant, hold an AALA License and are a Duke of Edinburgh Approved Activity Provider. We also have extremely comprehensive and rigorous systems in place concerning crisis response, safety management, risk assessment and pre-travel screening.

[CLICK HERE](#) for more information on our safety & back up.

Financial Protection

All the flight inclusive tours and expeditions offered by STC Expeditions are financially protected by the ATOL scheme.

Our ATOL license number is **11054**.

On booking, you will be supplied with an ATOL Certificate. Please see our booking conditions for further information or for more information about financial protection and the CAA website for more details on the ATOL Certificate:

<https://www.caa.co.uk/ATOL-protection/Consumers/About-ATOL/>



"Thank you for a fantastic experience. We had a wonderful time and have been highly impressed with STC."

K.W. Kings High Warwick, 2018

How to Book

First, please register your interest by contacting Emma at STC Expeditions. You will then receive a digital booking pack by email to sign up.

To sign up, you will need to complete an online booking form and pay the deposit.

Email: info@thestc.co.uk

Call: 01392 660056

After registering your interest, you will receive the digital booking pack within 1 working day. This provides information on how to complete the online booking form and make the deposit payment.

Deposit & Payment Plan

Deposit payment – of £250 is payable along with completion of an online booking form to secure your place on the trip.

Payments accepted - directly to STC Expeditions by BACS transfer or cheque. Regrettably we are not able to accept credit card payments or take payments over the phone.

Payment Plan – we will invoice you for the interim and final balance payments approx. 10 days before they are due. These can be paid by BACS transfer to the same account as the deposit.

Flights included -

| | | |
|------------------------|--------|------------------------------|
| Deposit | £250 | Due on booking |
| Interim payment | £900 | Due 6 months prior to travel |
| Final payment | £900 | Due 1 month prior to travel |
| Total cost | £2,050 | Including flights |

Land only – You can book your own flights to Vietnam if you prefer. Please note it is therefore your responsibility to meet us on the specified date and time for the trip to start and we cannot be held responsible otherwise.

| | | |
|------------------------|--------|------------------------------|
| Deposit | £250 | Due on booking |
| Interim payment | £600 | Due 6 months prior to travel |
| Final payment | £600 | Due 1 month prior to travel |
| Total cost | £1,450 | Not including flights |

Join the Conversation

We don't just 'do' Escape the Classroom trips! Follow us on social media for new travel inspiration, responsible travel news and ideas for school trips [@stcadventures](https://www.instagram.com/stcadventures).

