

FLC BISCOM / ASIA SPA RETREAT

INAUGURAL GOLF & WELLNESS CHALLENGE
HA LONG BAY, VIETNAM - OCTOBER 7-14, 2023



GOOD morning, Vietnam! Or should we say Vietnam is calling... all golfers looking for the ultimate golf retreat combining a breathtaking international golf challenge at a UNESCO World Heritage Site, regenerative wellness treatments and amazing cuisine in a unique experience at Vietnam's Ha Long Bay.

Leading wellness travel operator Asia Spa Retreat has launched this amazing

golf and wellness package to Ha Long Bay, considered Vietnam's No.1 tourist destination.

The seven-day itinerary (October 7-14, 2023) comprises three rounds of tournament golf on the internationally acclaimed Ha Long Bay Golf Club & Luxury Resort, approximately two hours of post-golf regenerative massage and wellness treatments, and a six-hour cruise around Ha Long Bay at the completion of the tour.

Priced at \$5,499 per person, the package includes return economy airfares to Hanoi, six-night twin-share 5-star accommodation, visa processing, VIP fast-transit through immigration, airport transfers and four dinners (with a cocktail reception and farewell function aligned to the golf challenge). Lunch, carts and caddie fees are all included with the golf.

This inaugural Vietnam vs Australia Golf & Wellness Challenge is capped at

60 golfers per country. It's envisaged that representatives from both governments will officially launch the tournament.

"Vietnam has it all," says tour organiser and host Barrie Whyte, managing director of Asia Spa Retreat. "You've got a beautiful culture, delicious food, stunning golf courses, very pleasant people and it's not overly expensive. It's just a lovely place to visit, whether it be on business or leisure."

The Sheraton Hanoi Hotel, 10 minutes from the city's Old Quarter, will host golfers upon arrival in Hanoi. Then after a three-hour (170-kilometre) journey the next day to Vietnam's north-east coast, FLC Ha Long Bay Golf Club & Luxury Resort will host the remainder of the tour.

Located in the popular tourist city of Ha Long – a UNESCO-recognised natural wonder of the world – Ha Long Bay Golf Club & Luxury Resort is a

rare treat with its prized Feng Shui location on a high mountain presiding over an expansive coastal vista. Every position within the complex promises an unbroken view of either the world heritage site or the alluring Ha Long City.

WHO IS ASIA SPA RETREAT?

Asia Spa Retreat has specialised in providing women-only, fully hosted tours to 16 destinations in the Asia-

Pacific region (asiasparetreat.com). It has focused upon spa and wellness, sophisticated shopping, authentic culinary classes and fine dining.

Melbourne-based tour host Whyte [pictured, right] devised the golf and wellness concept tour after reflecting upon the growth of the spa and wellness industry. He speculated about variations and concluded there would be niche markets for: 1) golf and wellness; 2) culinary and wellness; 3) dental and wellness.

Using insights gleaned from 30 years in marketing, event management and public relations, Whyte thought golf and wellness was an obvious starting point. In the early 2000s he had successfully run golf tournaments in Hawaii as incentive programs for News Corp. However, he knew Australian golfers would be seeking something more exotic for a post-COVID vacation.

Whyte identified Vietnam as a burgeoning golf market and Ha Long Bay as a tourist hotspot. Incidentally, this year marks the 50th anniversary since formal diplomatic ties were established between Australia and Vietnam in 1973.

To provide a tour package at a reasonable cost, Whyte has partnered with FLC, one of Vietnam's largest property developers, the Australian Chamber of Commerce (AUSCHAM) and Vietnam Airlines. FLC owns Ha Long Bay Golf Club & Luxury Resort. Vietnam Airlines is the flight carrier, providing economy airfares from Melbourne and Sydney. (Upgrades to premium economy or business class are available upon application.)

The itinerary has been timed to coincide with the resumption of school in Australia's mainland states. October is ideal to explore Ha Long Bay given daily temperatures range between 22°C and 29°C. The weather tends to be cooler, sunny and breezy during this autumn period. Visitors are unlikely to encounter rain and storms, which are prevalent in the summer months (June-August).

The itinerary allows tourists the flexibility to play more golf or go sightseeing at their own expense. As such, attention to detail is a point of difference with Asia Spa Retreat. It will handle the processing of visa applications and ensure passport validity for tourists. It will even facilitate VIP transit through



both Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi international airport terminals.

Importantly, Asia Spa Retreat is an accredited member of Council of Australian Tour Operators. CATO is a hallmark of competence and integrity for tour operators and wholesalers who supply product for Australians travelling around the world.

VACATION GOLF TO EXCITE THE SENSES

Ha Long Bay Golf Club & Luxury Resort will host the three rounds of tournament golf. The FLC-owned property opened in 2017 and the course has been recognised as one of the top-10 layouts in Vietnam.

Course architect Brian Curley from Schmidt-Curley Golf Design has cleverly routed the layout to maximise vantage points of Ha Long Bay. Some points are 130 metres above sea level. In fact, almost a million cubic metres of earth was moved to transform severe hillsides into interesting holes that are playable for all levels of golfer.

Ha Long Bay is relatively short, playing 5,570 metres (6,092 yards) from the tips. It has the unusual aspect of two back-to-back par 3s in the routing. All five of its par 3s feature spectacular views of Ha Long Bay. The 110-metre 12th requires just a wedge to an infinity green where the putting surface appears to be floating above the bay.

WELLNESS, GREAT FOOD, AND NATURAL BEAUTY

Ha Long Bay Golf Club & Luxury Resort was judged Asia's Leading Conference



Hotel at the 2022 World Travel Awards. The 5-star hotel has 649 modern rooms and suites. Guests have access to the heated indoor swimming pool, outdoor pool, gymnasium and the spiritual/meditation area. The resort's exquisite day spa is open late into the evening to accommodate golfers and day-trippers.

The hotel has plenty of dining options, catering for both Asian and Western tastes at four restaurants, a bayside cafe and pool bar. Guests can also enjoy a cocktail in the lobby lounge, listen to live music in the sky bar or sip a whiskey in the connoisseur cigar lounge.

Ha Long Bay is known for its seafood: shrimp, crab, and squid as well as delicacies such as abalone and lobster. Many popular Vietnamese dishes have originated in Hanoi. In particular, northern Vietnam is famous for pho: the rich broth of rice noodles, herbs and slices of beef.

One of many highlights of the tour package will be the six-hour cruise around Ha Long Bay. The UNESCO World Heritage Site is known for an abundance of towering limestone karsts sprouting out of the emerald waterways.

Approximately 1,600 monolithic islands are spread across the bay's 1,553 square kilometres.

Ha Long translates to 'descending dragon'. According to folklore, the gods sent a family of dragons to help the locals fight against invaders. The dragons spat jewels and jade that turned into islands and islets, forming a protective barrier against the invading forces. Somewhat fittingly, the most recent King Kong movie ("Kong: Skull Island") had many of its closing scenes shot on Ha Long Bay.

Asia Spa Retreat anticipates 60 golfers joining the inaugural tour, welcoming individuals, couples and groups. "Ideally, it's a husband and wife who both play golf," Whyte says. "We want the serious golfer who wants to get away."

"After years of COVID lockdowns, what better way to treat yourself than to take an overseas holiday to an exotic location? Here's an opportunity to enjoy the best of what Vietnam has to offer. A beautiful golf course. Wellness. And what better destination than Ha Long Bay, a World Heritage site?"

THIS YEAR MARKS THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY SINCE FORMAL DIPLOMATIC TIES WERE ESTABLISHED BETWEEN AUSTRALIA AND VIETNAM IN 1973

