



**Noord Vietnam internationaal gezelschap +
individueel begeleid**

**10 Days/9 Nights
Departure Dates:**

2011

16 Jan – 25 Jan

6 March – 15 March

21 Aug– 30 Aug

11 Sept – 20 Sept

20 Nov– 29 Nov

Prices

US\$1,400 Tour

US\$275 Single Supplement

US\$130 Bike Hire

**De prijzen in Euro vindt u
op de website
www.flyandbike.be**

**individuele reizigers
dagelijks vertrek
prijzen zie website**

Mountain Biking the Northwest Mountains

Vietnam is one of the most delightful places in Southeast Asia. It is a land of stunningly varied landscapes: idyllic beaches in tranquil bays and stunning mountain scenery constantly compete for attention. The warm and hospitable people are now welcoming foreigners in a land that has had more than its fair share of the world's spotlight. Having endured years of colonialism, war and communism, Vietnam is now open and encouraging the outside world to discover a beautiful country and people.

Most people have heard of Saigon, Hue and Danang and when they think of Vietnam think of shimmering rice fields, jungles and beaches, but much of this extraordinarily diverse country is made up of mountains. The Northwestern region is home to the most stunning mountain scenery in Vietnam, if not the whole of Southeast Asia. Fansipan Mountain, Vietnam's highest peak, and the hill station of Sapa, a retreat created by the French at the beginning of the century, is one of the most scenic places in the region.

The valleys of Northwest Vietnam are home to a bewildering number of minority tribes, most of whom retain their unique tribal traditions.

Named Montagnards, or mountain people, by the French, these colourful people still live as they have for centuries, forging a life high in the mountains. Easily distinguished by their colourful tribal costumes, the Hmong, Dai and Tsao are the most conspicuous of more than 100 different ethnic groups in the mountains.

Vietnam's history is inescapable. Dien Bien Phu's place in the country's history was assured when Ho Chi Minh led his People's Liberation Army to a bloody but decisive victory over the French colonizers in 1954. The French, commanded by

General Henri Navarre, had gone to enormous lengths to build a fortified garrison that was considered impregnable. But they underestimated the resolve and resourcefulness of the Vietnamese, who, aided by many of the hill tribes, laid siege to the town. After 54 days of constant battle, the Viet Minh burrowed and fought their way through the French lines until finally on May 7, 1954, they were victorious. All 14,000 French troops were either killed or taken prisoner. The battle ended France's colonial domination of Indochina and was Vietnam's first major victory in a war for independence that was to last another 21 years.



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Trip Profile

Our tour is the ultimate mountain bike adventure. After an overnight train ride from Hanoi, we ride just over 500 kilometres through some of the most spectacular mountain scenery anywhere in the world. The roads are a mixture of good asphalt, broken or potholed roads and some off road cycling tracks. Although the riding is tough it is very enjoyable and anyone who enjoys hill riding will love this tour. The scenery really is fantastic and the people are extraordinarily colourful and friendly. This trip will be supported by a mixture of jeep and motorbike. Due to the nature of some of the trails, the jeep cannot follow, then we will have motorbike support and during these motorbike sections we will have rendezvous points with the support vehicle.

Biking Difficulty



(out of five)

This tour has some long days and is in a mountainous area which fit riders will find challenging. The roads are a mix of asphalt roads and dirt tracks, some technical experience is suggested.

Suitability: This trip is tough due to the nature of the area. It is a very mountainous region and we have to cross many valleys and mountains to get to Dien Bien Phu before descending to Mai Chau. The tour builds up to some tough all day riding with long distances. This trip should only be attempted by those in good physical condition.

Biking Conditions: This tour is mainly on broken and pot-holed roads with significant portions on dirt tracks. While the off road riding is not that technical some experience will help. A support truck or motorcycle is always available to help when required.

Day to Day

B= Breakfast L= Lunch D=Dinner

Day 1 – Hanoi - Lao Cai

We meet in Hanoi, having a bit of a chance to explore Vietnam's capital before we catch the Tulico Express, the overnight train up north and the start of our adventure. Bikes and luggage can be dropped off at our local office so you can head off and visit Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum, the Temple of Literature or have a relaxing massage to help recover from jet lag.

We will all meet up in early evening for dinner and then transfer to the train station along with bikes and bags for the 260km-long overnight train journey to Lao Cai. The train is a very civilized affair with compartments sleeping four and a carriage where you can buy food and refreshments.

Overnight on train to Lao Cai. D

Day 2 – Lao Cai-Sapa

Our train arrives early morning in Lao Cai, a border town with China's Yunnan province. We transfer to the hill station town of Sapa, at an altitude of 1,600m. It will takes us approximately 1 hour to drive up the mountain side and on arrival we have breakfast then check into our hotel. We'll have time to fit bikes before taking in the fresh air and spectacular views on our late morning ride on an off-road track to the village of Ta Phin.

Our bike ride will takes us along the trails used by the locals to get to market and through the hills which have been terraced for wet rice agriculture. On some sections you may be required to carry your bike across paddy fields. Support is for only 40% of the ride, though the jeep will never be too far away and will rendezvous with us at several stops en route.



Cycling Distance

505 kilometers

Cycling Days

5 full, 2 half

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At this altitude the weather can vary, so keep in mind that an alternative route may have to be tackled if the weather is bad.

Chau Long New Wing Hotel. Ride 25 km off road. B L D

Day 3 – Sapa – Tam Duong

This morning we have a long ride ahead of us and our day will start from the hotel with an approximately 16 km uphill to the Tram Ton Pass, at 1,900 m the highest road in Vietnam, so eating a hearty breakfast is recommended. For those not quite up for a challenge so early in the morning a lift to the top can be arranged. The views are stunning from the top of the pass into the next valley we'll be riding through. You can track where we'll be heading by following the road snaking its way 20 km downhill. Time to double check brakes before we let loose on the descent through some tea plantations scattered amidst some truly outstanding countryside.

We stop at Binh Lu to regroup before taking an off-road trail to Tam Duong. This lovely undulating 35 km ride passes through farmland and villages valley inhabited with Lu people. This section is supported by a motorcycle and we'll stop off for a picnic lunch en route. After a fantastic day of varied riding we'll cap it off with a dinner at a local restaurant.

Lan Anh 2 Hotel. Ride 85 km – 35 km off-road. B L D

Day 4 – Tam Duong- Than Uyen

We start the day with an hour transfer to Huoi Ke, from where we'll start our scenic but challenging ride to Than Uyen. The grades are above average today as the winding road twists through the mountains and go over two passes. We'll have a picnic lunch along the way as the hamlets we pass were too small for restaurants. We overnight at the small and rustic town of Than Uyen at a simple guest house.

Phuong Nhung Hotel. Ride 90 km. B L D

Day 5 – Than Uyen- Tuan Giao – Dien Bien Phu

Following an early breakfast we start to ride from our hotel. As we go over three passes today – Muong Mun, Huoi Long and Meo Hoa – the day will entail plenty of ascents and descents. It will take us considerable energy to ride over the three passes, but we will be rewarded with stunning views along the way. It is advisable to wear discreet riding shorts as we'll be passing through many ethnic tribal villages. At the town of Tuan Giao, we will transfer transfer 2.5 hours to Dien Bien Phu.

Him Lam Hotel. Ride 90 km. B L D

Day 6 – Dien Bien Phu Rest Day

After all those hills your legs deserve a rest and what better place to do it than in the history-rich city of Dien Bien Phu. We'll visit the war museum which has interesting displays about the climactic battle of the First Indochina War between French Union forces and Vietnamese Viet Minh communist revolutionary forces. From March until May 1954 the Viet Minh pounded the French positions, killing up to 3,000 men, though it's estimated that the Viet Minh lost more than twice that number. The massive French defeat effectively ended the war. There's also a local market to explore. Dinner is on your own tonight.

Him Lam Hotel B

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We have carefully chosen accommodation that is the best available for the location and offer a good mix, from home stays to luxurious lodges, on our tours.

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We love Asian cuisine, well-known for being hot and spicy and for its use of fresh ingredients, and will make sure you get to sample lots of it.

Day 7 – Dien Bien Phu – Son La

We have an early start to transfer approximately 2.5 hours to Tuan Giao to avoid the dust from construction on the road. In Tuan Giao we'll get back on the bikes and soon start climbing. The climb over Pha Din pass, a famous Indochina War site, won't soon be forgotten as it's an unrelenting 10-18% grade for 14 km. The switch backs lead up a very fertile valley, lined with stair-stepping rice paddies on the pretty ride.



A bowl of pho, a broth soup with beef or chicken and rice noodles, is a perfect lunch for bikers. A bowl comes with plates of fresh herbs, cut limes, hot chilies and bean sprouts to garnish your soup with.

The traditional dress of the locals varies from village to village depending on the tribe they belong to. After lunch at a local restaurant, the road rolls gently downhill with one last 5km climb at the end of the day into Son La.

Hanoi Hotel. Ride 84 km. B L D

Day 8 – Son La – Mai Chau

Today we start the day with a transfer to avoid the main highway, but you'll still get the distance in as today's ride totals 96km! We start our ride on a looping country road that passes through a patchwork quilt of corn, sugar cane and barley fields. We'll ride 51km before we break for lunch at a restaurant in Kim Chung town. We'll then transfer for 2 hours to avoid a rough and steep section. Then it's time to get back on the bikes and enjoy the last 45km which are down, down and down – except for a few small climbs – to Mai Chau valley where our wonderful lodge for the evening awaits you. Enjoy a swim or a sauna before dinner at the luxurious Mai Chau Lodge.

Mai Chau Lodge. Ride 96 km. B L D

Day 9 – Mai Chau – Hanoi

After breakfast, and perhaps a quick walk up to a temple, we pick up our bikes and cycle to the Thai village of Cun Pheo on a mix of good single track paths and undulating rough jeep trails. The views are stunning as the ride passes through many villages and across rice paddies. Pass hot springs, cycle across suspension bridges and follow the contours round beautiful terraced rice fields. On arriving in Cun Pheo we take a break in a local home, then we explore the village trails further by bike. We ride to Buoc Village, where we have lunch in local home then transfer 2 hours to Hanoi, arriving late afternoon. We'll regroup later in the evening for our farewell dinner.

Maison D'Hanoi Hotel. Ride 35 km. B L D

Day 10 – Hanoi

Our trip ends in Hanoi, where you might want to take the morning to pack up your bike and enjoy a cyclo ride around the Old Quarter. Hotel check out is at noon.

B

Nuts & Bolts

Bikes: The bikes are well-known makes of Hybrid or Mountain bikes (depending on the tour) with lightweight alloy frames, 24- to 27-speed gearing, v-brakes and Shimano components and front suspension.

Bike Repairs: Basic spares and tools are carried by the guide and on the support vehicle, though we cannot guarantee having spares for every conceivable problem. Carrying a basic tool kit, a spare tube and a pump while riding is recommended.

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RESERVEREN

Stuur ons een mailtje met uw reisdata of maak even een afspraak op kantoor om de verschillende zaken te bespreken. Wij hechten veel belang aan een persoonlijk contact om samen uw reisdroom in te vullen.

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Subject to Change

In remote destinations abnormal conditions can prevail at any time, and all adventurous holidays can therefore be subject to unexpected change and we will do our best to adhere to the original itinerary and cannot be held responsible for any last minute changes; in order to enjoy them you should be prepared to be flexible when necessary.

Safety: Wearing a helmet is strongly recommended on all our biking adventures and if you choose not to wear one you will be asked to sign a liability waiver. Your tour leader is trained in first aid and emergency rescue, but to a large degree you must be responsible for your own safety while riding. It is therefore compulsory that you take out travel insurance that will cover you for a mountain biking tour.

Support: We will be supported by air-conditioned vehicle that have been specially modified for cycle tours. The vehicles follow us the whole time and are always available for tired cyclists. It is very easy to get bikes on and off, so you can rest when you are tired and cycle whenever you feel like it.

Guides: You will be led by a local English-speaking guide and if the group is 8 people or more we will add another guide to the tour. If there are more than 10 people on the tour a SpiceRoads envoy will accompany the tour. All our guides are well informed in the history, culture and religions of the area where you are biking and are skilled at passing that knowledge on to you. Your guide is also medically trained and an experienced cyclist, able to handle most minor repairs en route.

The Nitty Gritty

Arriving and Departing: This tour begins and ends in Hanoi. International and domestic flights, to and from the start and finish points are not included in the tour price. If you need help or advice arranging flights please contact us.

Passports and Visas: All nationalities require a visa for Vietnam. Visas can be obtained from any Vietnamese embassy worldwide, but please allow up to three weeks for visa processing.

Health: Recommended vaccinations are typhoid, polio, tetanus and hepatitis A. A certificate for Yellow Fever is required when arriving from an infected area within six days. Please speak to your doctor for the most up to date information.

Weather: Weather in Vietnam can vary quite considerably according to distinct climate zones. Due to regional climate differences there are no good or bad seasons to visit Vietnam. The North of Vietnam experiences cool, damp winters between November and April with temperatures in Hanoi falling to around 15°C. The summer months from May to October are hot and dry. A pleasant time to visit is spring (March-April) or autumn (October-December). The best time to visit the north of Vietnam is from September to December when it isn't so humid. The weather turns quite cold and wet in January and this continues until March. The humidity can prove oppressive from May to the start of September and there's a danger of flooding.

Food: Meals are included as per the itinerary where B = breakfast, L = lunch, D = dinner. Most meals are Vietnamese food and features noodles, rice curries and soups. Vietnamese cuisine is world famous and we make sure you sample as much variety as possible. Any special dietary requirements can also be catered for as well. Please let us know at the time of booking.

Drink: Keeping you completely hydrated is a job we take very seriously. Cold water, some energy-restoring local fruit and soft drinks are included in the tour price. Beer is freely available everywhere in Vietnam, but is NOT included in the price.

Extra Expenses: We recommend that you tuck away a few extra dollars, perhaps US\$10, for incidentals. It is customary to tip local tour guides and drivers, however, the amount you give should be dependent on the level of service you receive. As a general guide we suggest US\$3-4 per person per day is appropriate.

Money: The official national currency is the Vietnam dong (d), but the US dollar is widely accepted in tourist centers. However, in smaller towns and villages the dong is preferred. ATMs are available in all major tourist destinations and big cities. Vietcombank has the best network with a limit a single withdrawal limit of 2,000,000d (about US\$125). Most major currencies can be exchanged at leading banks in Vietnam, but the US dollar is preferred away from the tourist centers. Changing US\$100 will make you an instant millionaire! You cannot legally take the dong out of Vietnam but you can reconvert reasonable amounts of it into US dollars on departure.

The information in this document is given in good faith, and covers the average range of conditions likely to be found on this trip. Where differences exist in the information between this and previous information, this document is the correct version and supersedes the brochure or website.