



Vietnam - North to South Classic

Explore from top to tail of “the land of the blue dragon”. A journey of cultural discovery...and some of the most stunning coastal scenery in South East Asia.

A marvelous mix of exploration and indulgence awaits anyone choosing this adventure. Your trip from north to south will uncover the true variety of culture and geography that Vietnam has to offer.

You'll see all the sights and cities on other tourist trails but also a lot more. Our version of this classic ride starts in Hanoi then heads south by train to Historic Hue. It's from here that we really get off the beaten track, following a network of back roads to discover the vibrant village life that's so characteristic of Vietnam. You'll veer off to visit misty highlands and their hilltribe populations, ancient towns, sleepy villages and ever changing landscapes that never fail to amaze.

As we follow the coastal backroads from Hoi An southwards, you can expect to savour some of the most sublime palm fringed beaches in South East Asia. One of the great attractions of Vietnam is its cuisine so be prepared to reward yourself after all the exercise and experience seafood heaven as we pass through fishing communities! Our days in the central highlands show us a side of the country less known to visitors and the enthusiastic welcomes from local people are a real highlight.

From small, rural communities, to the high up hilltribes, to the beaches and then bustling Saigon, this adventure is one of true contrasts in culture. We welcome anyone who can ride a bike, has a sense of exploration and loves indulging themselves with good food and scenery.

Itinerary

Day 1 Arrive in Hanoi

We arrive in Hanoi in the evening, after a flight from Australia. Your Intrepid leader will meet you in the arrivals hall. We will transfer by private bus to our hotel which is centrally located in the old quarter of Hanoi. We will have a late dinner with a trip briefing and general introduction to the challenge that lies ahead.

Meals included: dinner

Accommodation: 4* hotel

Day 2 Reunification Express to Hue (overnight)

Morning tour of Hanoi with visits to the Ho Chi Minh mausoleum, Uncle Ho's house & the Temple of Literature. Lunch at KOTO's which is a restaurant run by orphans who have received a vocational training in hospitality. Wonderful food and an inspiring charity. Free afternoon to

further explore the old quarter and buy some food for the overnight train journey. We will meet later afternoon back at the hotel and transfer to the train station to catch the Reunification Express to Hue.

Meals included: breakfast only

Accommodation: Overnight on train in 4 berth compartment

Day 3 Hue - start of cycle challenge

We arrive early morning and transfer to our hotel for breakfast. We then have a bike fitting with a safety briefing before setting off for a gentle ride around the historic city of Hue. We visit the old Imperial Citadel which is enclosed within 7 metre high walls.

We then cycle narrow roads

following the Perfume River to visit the famed Thien Mu Pagoda. After lunch we cycle out to one of the Nguyen dynasty tombs before returning late afternoon to our hotel.

Distance cycled approx. 40 km

Meals included: breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodation: Vi Da Hotel

Day 4 Cycle to Hoi An

Our journey through Vietnam gets off to a spectacular start as we tackle the Hai Van (sea cloud) pass which winds it's way through mountains by the sea. The Hai Van pass also marks a climactic change and the weather is decidedly warmer on the southern side. We cycle to the approaches of Danang where we will board a coach to take us for the last leg of the journey into Hoi An.

Distance cycled approx. 65 km

Meals included: breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodation: Hoai Thanh Hotel

Day 5 Hoi An (Free day)

There are so many options to explore this hidden back water gem which is now a UNESCO heritage site with its crumbling colonial architecture. In the morning we will visit an orphanage sponsored by the Lifestart Foundation. It was founded by Karen Leonard who will be on this challenge where the main aim is to help orphans, street kids and families in Vietnam to become self sufficient. Later that day kick back and enjoy this wonderful place to rest for a day, with its excellent restaurants, colonial architecture, art galleries, curio shops, skilled tailors and a nearby beach.

Meals included: breakfast only

Accommodation: Hoai Thanh Hotel

Day 6 Cycle to Quang Ngai

It is sad to leave Hoi An behind as we have an early start. Our route will take us inland through rural areas and passing a landscape of paddy fields where women hard at work will always have time to wave and smile. We will cycle to the village of My Lai where horrific atrocities were committed by an American platoon back in 1969 which then became a turning point in the Vietnam war. We visit the memorial and pay our respects before continuing to our hotel.

Distance cycled options upto 70 km

Meals included: breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodation: Petro Song Tra Hotel

Day 7 Cycle to Kon Tum

Just south of Quang Ngai we cycle along the quiet back roads and start our climb into the Central Highlands past 'montagnard' villages with locals dressed in traditional costumes. This area was also the scene of fierce fighting and major battles during the Vietnam War. We will drive part of this route according to how the group manages today's distance. Remember there is always a support vehicle.

Distance cycled options upto 110 km

Meals included: breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodation: Dakbla Hotel

Day 8 Cycle to Pleiku

A shorter day after the hill climb yesterday with a chance to visit the nearby 'montagnard' villages, Kon Tum prison and the local orphanage. Kon Tum is a sleepy and friendly town with its terraces of shop houses left over from the French era. Our cycling today will be a mixture of exploring the quiet back roads and chatting with the local ethnic minorities. Overnight in Pleiku.

Distance cycled approx. 46 km

Meals included: breakfast, lunch and dinner

Day 9 Cycle to An Khe

Today is a long day but we will be riding through an area rarely ridden by bike. There will be a few hilly sections that pass through beautiful forested areas and small villages. In the second part of the day the road flattens out on it's way to An Khe, a small town that you've probably never heard of! Staying in these kinds of rarely visited towns is a real Vietnam experience!

Distance cycled approx. 95 km

Meals included: breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodation: An Khe Hotel

Day 10 Cycle to Quy Nhon

Our final day of riding has a couple of final hills to get over before descending to the coastal city of Quy Nhon. We stay right across the road from the beach in a great hotel - a fitting way to celebrate the end of this challenge.

Distance cycled approx. 76km

Meals included: breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodation: Saigon Quy Nhon Hotel

Day 11 Quy Nhon & flight to Saigon

The morning will be yours to enjoy the town, hang out on the beach, visit the Ngyugen Nga Centre (for kids with disabilities) or just wander the streets of this friendly town. In the afternoon we take a short flight to big crazy Saigon and our final night celebration.

Meals included: breakfast and dinner

Accommodation: 4* hotel

Day 12 Saigon

Spend your last morning exploring the city and endless sights which include the Saigon River waterfront, lively markets and shopping boulevards, the Reunification Palace, Notre Dame Cathedral and for war buffs the Revolutionary museum. You can depart at any time today or extend your stay on in Vietnam.

Meals included: breakfast only

Accommodation

Accommodation on this trip is of a 3 - 4 Star standard in the major cities and the best available in the more remote towns. You will always have a clean comfortable twinshare room with ensuite facilities.

Meal Inclusions

Most meals have been included on this trip and are indicated in the itinerary each day. The food is of an excellent standard and a good quantity and variety throughout. Vietnamese cuisine uses a lot of fresh produce and seafood, (particularly fish sauces) bearing influences from China and France. There is generally always something to please very palate and most people regard the food as a highlight of their Vietnamese experience.

When cycling you will be provided with plentiful water, fruit and biscuits at rest stops. It's also a good addition if you bring some of your favourite energy snacks and electrolyte powder for the cycling days.

Transport

Private vehicle for any transfers required and comfortable sleeping berths on the Hanoi to Hue section of the Reunification express. You will also be taking a domestic flight from Qui Nhon to Saigon with Vietnam airways or similar reputable airline. For the cycling days we will have the backup support of a small bus that will carry our luggage, snacks, water, and anybody not cycling.

Physical Rating

You don't need to be a highly experienced cyclist to join these multi-day trips but a reasonably good level of fitness is required to participate fully. Though full support is provided throughout, so you can ride as much or as little as you want to. Be prepared for moderate to strenuous physical activity as you will be cycling for between 5 and 7 hours each day on average and some pre-trip training is recommended to get the most from your adventure. Terrain is varied but generally on sealed roads and no technical skills needed to enjoy the trip.

Visas

Please note that visas are the responsibility of the individual traveller. The visa requirements for your trip vary depending on where you are from and where you are going. We keep the following information up to date as much as possible, but rules do change. It is important that you check for yourself. It is your responsibility to arrange visas before you travel.

Vietnam: All nationalities require a visa. Download an application form from the website along with instructions. Allow 5 working days and don't forget to attach a copy of the travel itinerary.

For all Australian residents please send your application to:

Consulate General of Vietnam
Suite 205, Level 2, Edgecliff Centre,
203 -233 New South Head Road,
Edgecliff, NSW 2027
Tel: 02 9327 2539 / 9327 1912
Fax: 02 9328 1653
E-mail: vnconsul@ihug.com.au

www.vnconsulate.org.au

Instructions for visa application: <http://vietnamconsulate.org.au/content/view/12/26/>

A visa application form can be downloaded by clicking on this link:

<http://vietnamconsulate.org.au/forms/VisaApplicationFORM.doc>

Check list for a postal application: - original passport

- 1 completed application form
- 1 passport photo
- copy of challenge itinerary
- stamp addressed envelope
- cheque or postal order

The cost for a single entry tourist visa is: \$70.

Important Notes

Cycling Days and Distance

8 days - 567km

1. Cycling Conditions

Road conditions in Vietnam are good. Apart from some short sections on dirt the entire ride is on sealed roads. We will spend a little time on Highway One so be prepared for traffic that can (and probably) will include trucks, buses, motorbikes, bicycles, pedestrians, children, dogs, chickens, and other fun things. You will need to stay alert at all times.

2. Bikes

Bikes are provided for this trip with our fleet of Trek 4400's.

Equipped with Shimano's ever reliable Deore rear derailleur, gear shifts will be smooth and precise, while adjustable suspension forks with lockout absorb the bumps and holes to give you more precise handling in the rough stuff.

Please note that the bikes only have one water bottle cage and no back rack. The pedals are standard platform and have no cleat or foot strap/cage. To customize the bike you can bring out your own seat, bar ends which give more riding positions and your own pedals (SPD cleats or cage). Our team will help you with the set up.

Bike specifications:

Frame Size variety of frame sizes

Frame Alpha SL Aluminum

Wheels Alloy front, Shimano RM60 rear hub: Bontrager Camino rims

Shifters Shimano Alivio

Front Derailleur Shimano Acera

Rear Derailleur Shimano Deore

Pedals Alloy platform

We provide standard mountain bike seats. If you have a comfortable/wider seat on your bike at home then please bring with you as it can be attached to the seat post. Alternatively you can bring a gel seat cover.

3. Helmets

For safe cycling we highly recommend wearing a helmet whilst cycling on our trips.

4. If bringing your own Bike

If you are bringing your own bike please note that the best bike for conditions in Vietnam would be a good working mountain or hybrid bike with 21 gears or more and hybrid tyres to cope with the varying conditions. You should have your bike serviced by a professional bike mechanic before travelling to ensure that it is in good working order. While we do provide mechanical assistance and carry some spare parts during the trip you will need to bring spare parts (including tubes) for your bike as different bikes use different parts and we cannot guarantee that we will have a part to suit your bike.

It is best to pack your bike in a bike box available from any bike shop. We can then carry the box in the truck. Please note that while every effort is made to maintain all the bikes in good condition on each trip, we cannot guarantee that some small damage such as scratching will not occur as a result of the daily loading and unloading of bikes into and out of the support vehicle. Any extra charges for taking it on the train or plane are your responsibility.

Please note - If you are bringing your own bike and it has disc brakes, hydraulics, rear suspension, oil units or special pumps for adjusting the suspension pressure, please make sure that you bring the necessary spares and parts with you.

Checklist (suggested list):

Travel Documents

- Passport (with photocopies) and Vietnamese visa
- Travel insurance (with photocopies)
- Airline tickets (given at the airport)
- USD cash and travellers cheques
- Credit card

** Tip: use a money belt for security (put documents inside a plastic bag)

Personal Items

- First Aid kit (see the health section)
- high factor sunscreen
- mosquito repellent
- sunglasses
- toiletries (biodegradable)
- watch or alarm clock
- ear plugs (in case room mate snores!)
- plastic bags for wet or dirty clothing (waterproof items on pack)
- wet wipes or antiseptic hand gel

Clothing

- 3 T-shirts (lightweight quick drying fabric) / long sleeved T-shirt
- 2 pairs Cycling shorts (padded)
- 1 pair of comfortable shoes for cycling
- pair of sport sandals
- socks (for cycling)
- 1 pair of knee length shorts
- 1 pair lightweight long trousers
- Lightweight waterproof top
- Light sweater/fleece for evening
- Small towel and swim wear
- Sarong (useful for ladies unscheduled toilet stops / temple visits)
- Sun hat
- Clothes to relax in

Cycling Equipment

- Helmet - (compulsory)- bring one with good ventilation
- 1 water bottle (min. 750 ml capacity recommended) or 'Camel Bak' hydration pack
- Handlebar bag / pannier (as bikes have rear racks) / small day pack for carrying items when cycling
- Cycling gloves

Optional:

- Multi-tool (allen keys) for minor adjustments to your bike
- Bar ends (to give more choice of riding positions)
- Your own saddle or gel seat cover
- Your own SPD pedals
- Mini bicycle pump
- Favourite snacks for cycling energy boost e.g. 'PowerBars', sports gel (a concentrated carbohydrate that delivers immediate energy when you feel tired or flat), dried fruit or nuts

***Please refer again to our Cycling guide on the RAW Travel website to see photo of bikes used and how to customise it.

Other Suggestions

- Camera and plenty of film
- Adapter for recharging digital camera (sockets are the 3 pin variety but can also accommodate 2 pin plugs)
- Spare batteries
- Reading / writing material
- Penknife (put in main luggage at airport)
- Torch
- toilet paper
- Small calculator (when out bargaining!)
- Photos of family or postcards of Australia (great way to have fun with locals you meet)
- Vietnamese phrase book, map and Lonely Planet guide
- Small padlock for securing your luggage during flights

In the Vietnamese winter (December-February) it can get quite cold in Hanoi so bring something warm to wear.

Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is compulsory for all our trips. We require that, at a minimum, you are covered for medical expenses including emergency repatriation. We strongly recommend that the policy also covers personal liability, cancellation, curtailment and loss of luggage and personal effects. When travelling on a group trip, you will not be permitted to join the group until evidence of travel insurance and the insurance company's 24 hour emergency contact number has been seen by your leader. If you have credit card insurance your tour leader will require proof of purchase of the trip (a receipt of credit card statement) with a credit card in your name. Contact your bank for details of their participating insurer, the level of coverage and emergency contact telephone number. Please go to www.RAWtravel.com/insurance.php for links to various travel insurance providers.

Health

All RAW travellers need to be in good physical health in order to participate fully in the group travel experience. If, in the opinion of our group leader, any traveller is unable to complete the itinerary without undue risk to themselves and/or the rest of the group, RAW Travel reserves the right to exclude them from all or part of a trip without refund. We therefore ask that you read the itinerary in these trip notes thoroughly and then realistically self-assess your physical ability to complete the trip as described. Please consult with your doctor if you have any doubts.

There are no specific health requirements for entry into Vietnam. However, you should consult your doctor for up-to-date information and prescriptions for vaccinations and anti-malarial requirements. We would recommend protection against typhoid, polio, tetanus and hepatitis. Please seek up to date advice from your doctor on what you should take. These countries are also a low risk malarial area and we recommend that you take a course of suitable malarial prophylactics. As some vaccinations require a course over weeks or months, contact your doctor as early as possible prior to departure. Generally, six to eight weeks' notice is adequate.

We recommend that you carry a basic First Aid kit as well as any personal medication (e.g. a spare pair of prescription glasses). Suggestions include paracetamol, traveller's anti diarrhoea medication, oral rehydration solution (Gastrolyte sachets), blister pads & band aids, antihistamine, throat lozenges, antiseptic wipes for cuts & scrapes, eye drops, lip salve, insect repellent and a high factor, water resistant sunscreen.

Given the physical nature of this trip we strongly advise bringing some sachets of an oral rehydration solution (available at chemists) as this aids recovery following activity and dehydration and also helps replace lost body salts should you suffer from 'gastro'. Just add a sachet to your water bottle each day. Please scroll down to the Special Safety Notes below for information on dehydration.

For more detailed travel health advice please refer to your local Travel clinic.

For all challenge participants a completed Medical Certificate is required. RAW reserves the right to exclude any traveller from all or part of a trip without refund if in the reasonable opinion of our group leader they are unable to complete the itinerary without undue risk to themselves and/or the rest of the group.

Money Exchange

The official currency of Vietnam is the Dong which should be used for most transactions. Vietnam now has a modern banking systems with ATMs and money changers in everywhere. In Vietnam it is possible to use Visa/Mastercard or Cirrus/Maestro cards to access cash at an ATM at the airport and in the larger towns and cities that we visit (subject to a 3% to 4% commission charge). You should, however, carry travellers cheques as a backup. Most international currencies can be exchanged so it is not necessary to bring only US dollars—AUD, EUR, CAD, NZD are all accepted at banks in major centres. We recommend that you don't use money changers on the street.

1 AUD\$ = 11600 Dong (10/10/08)

Currency exchange rates often fluctuate. For current exchange rates visit:
www.oanda.com/convert/classic

When changing money try and get a mix of denominations (your leader will advise you on this). Keep smaller notes with you when on the cycle ride as it can be difficult to change larger notes once out of the city.

Spending Money

We recommend that you allow approximately US\$10 for food and general living costs per day. Shopping money should be considered extra to this amount. It is customary to tip the guides and drivers in Vietnam. You should allow approximately US\$20 for tips. Note: this is a guide only, feel free to tip more or less (or nothing) depending on your satisfaction.

Every traveller is different and therefore spending money requirements will vary. Some travellers may drink more than others while other travellers like to purchase more souvenirs than most. Please consider your own spending habits when it comes to allowing for drinks, shopping and tipping. Please also remember the following specific recommendations when planning your trip.

Any tip that you wish to give your local guides or leader in recognition of excellent service is always appreciated.

Climate

Most of Vietnam is a classic tropical climate with generally warm to hot days and warm nights. The north is sub-tropical so if visiting in winter (Dec-Feb) expect cool days and nights (January average is 14 to 19 degree).

Emergency Funds

Please also make sure you have access to an additional USD\$400, to be used when unforeseen incidents or circumstances outside our control (eg. a natural disaster, or an outbreak of bird flu) necessitate a change to our planned route. This is a rare occurrence but it is well worth being prepared!

Keeping In Touch - communication while on the road

If you need to be contacted while travelling we recommend that you set up an email address that can be accessed on the road,

rather than relying on snail mail. Email has quickly become the preferred way for our leaders and travellers to stay in touch and email cafes are commonplace throughout the regions we visit. If someone wishes to contact you in an emergency while you are on one of our trips we recommend that they contact your local booking agent, or refer to our emergency contact. We don't recommend that family and friends try to contact you through hotels, as they are subject to change and the reception staff may not speak English.

Your Fellow Travellers

As you travel on a group trip you will be exposed to all the pleasures and maybe some of the frustrations of travelling in a group. Your fellow travellers will probably come from all corners of the world and likely a range of age groups too. We ask you to be understanding of the various needs and preferences of your group - patience with your fellow travellers is sometimes required for the benefit of everyone's travel experience. Remember too that you have responsibilities to the group. If you are requested to be at a place at a certain time, ensure that you don't keep the rest of the group waiting. We have found time and time again that the very best trips we operate are those where the dynamics within the group work well - this takes just a little effort on your part.

Group Leader

All RAW group trips are accompanied by one of our group leaders. The aim of the group leader is to take the hassle out of your travels and to help you have the best trip possible. They will provide information on the places you are travelling through, offer suggestions for things to do and see, recommend great local eating venues and introduce you to our local friends.

While not being guides in the traditional sense you can expect them to have a broad general knowledge of the countries visited on the trip, including historical, cultural, religious and social aspects. We also use local guides where we think more specific knowledge will add to the enjoyment of the places we are visiting - we think it's the best of both worlds.

Responsible Travel

We believe strongly in low impact or rather positive impact tourism. Broadly speaking this means that we try to minimise the negative aspects of tourism on the local cultures and environments that we visit and highlight the positive aspects. Please refer to our website for further details and suggestions on how you can be a responsible traveller.

www.rawtravel.com/responsibletravel

A Couple of Rules

Illegal drugs will not be tolerated on our trips. Possessing or using drugs not only contravenes the laws of the land but also puts the rest of the group at risk. Smoking marijuana and opium is a part of local culture in some parts of the world but is not acceptable for RAW travellers. RAW's philosophy of travel is one of respect towards everyone we encounter, and in particular the local people who make our destinations such special places. The exploitation of prostitutes is completely contrary to this philosophy. Our group leader has the right to expel any member of the group if drugs are found in their possession or if they use prostitutes.

Local Dress

When packing be aware that dress standards are conservative throughout Asia. Vietnam is a conservative country and you should dress accordingly. Loose, lightweight, long clothing is both respectful and cool in the predominantly hot Asian climate. As a general guideline shoulders and knees should be covered at all times. The wearing of shorts and halter tops away from the beach or swimming pools are not allowed as they will restrict your entry into buildings of a religious nature and family homes.

Cycling shorts and tops are ideal, though we do insist that you cover up when coming off the bike or stopping in villages as local people will be shocked and sometimes offended by the sight of tight body hugging lycra! So please be a good ambassador for your country and have a loose pair of shorts to put over your cycling shorts or a sarong to wrap around.

Safety

Many national governments provide a regularly updated advice service on safety issues involved with international travel. We recommend that you check your government's advice for their latest travel information before departure.

We strongly recommend the use of a neck wallet or money belt while travelling, for the safe-keeping of your passport, air tickets, cash and other valuable items. Leave your valuable jewellery at home - you won't need it while travelling. Many of our hotels have safety deposit boxes, which is the most secure way of storing your valuables. A lock is recommended for securing your luggage.

Your leader will accompany you on all included activities however during your trip you will have some free time to pursue your own interests, relax and take it easy or explore at your leisure. While your group leader will assist you with the available options in a given location, please note that any optional activities you undertake are not part of your RAW itinerary, and RAW makes no representations about the safety of the activity or the standard of the operators running them. Please use your own good judgment when selecting an activity in your free time. Please also note that your group leader has the authority to amend or cancel any part of the trip itinerary if it is deemed necessary due to safety concerns.

Dehydration

Dehydration is the biggest risk when undertaking a physical challenge such as cycling over undulating terrain. It is so important to be aware of your fluid intake especially at altitude and to constantly drink water throughout the day (even when you do not feel thirsty).

Participation

All RAW Travel passengers are required to sign a Participation Form on day 1 of the trip. Please note that signing the form is a prerequisite of travelling with RAW Travel. The wording of this form follows:

"I understand that travelling with RAW Travel may involve risks (and rewards) above and beyond those encountered on a more conventional holiday, and that I am undertaking an adventure trip with inherent dangers. I understand that I am travelling to geographical areas where, amongst other things, the standard of accommodation, transport, safety, hygiene, cleanliness, medical facilities, telecommunications and infrastructure development may not be of the standard I am used to at home or would find on a conventional holiday. I have read and understood the RAW Travel Pre-Trip Dossier for the trip I am undertaking and have provided details of any pre-existing medical conditions I have, to RAW Travel's representatives. I accept these risks and obligations and I fully assume the risks of travel. I release RAW Travel from any liabilities connected to these risks to the maximum extent permitted by law."

RAW Newsletter

We have a free email newsletter full of traveller's stories and experiences as well as news on new trips that we are running. Please send us an extract from your travel journal at the end of the trip.

If you have any suggestions to add more information to our trip dossier that you think other walkers would find useful please email: adventure@rawtravel.com. And of course email us if you have any questions leading up to the event.

We hope you will love the Vietnam cycling as much as we do and we look forward to you joining us on other RAW experiences.