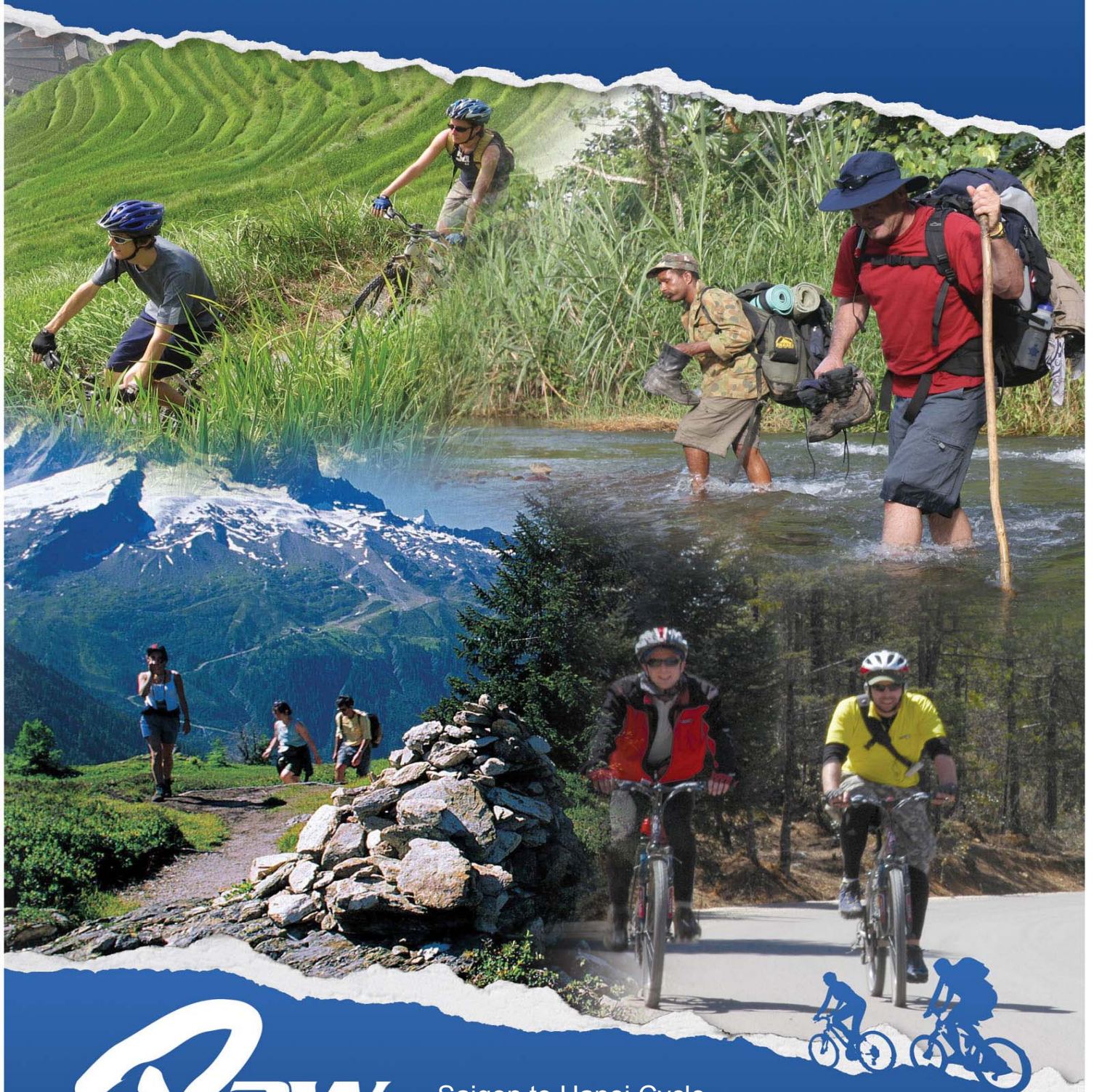


Experience is Everything



Saigon to Hanoi Cycle -
Vietnam

(03) 9787 4366 ■ www.rawtravel.com ■ www.rawchallenges.com



Saigon to Hanoi Cycle

Vietnam is known for its vibrant culture, long history, village life and is a great traveling experience. And, of course, cycling is the best way to explore this country dominated by two wheels.

One of Asia's classic cycling journeys, riding from Saigon to Hanoi is the ultimate Vietnam adventure. Heading out from the commercial heart of Vietnam in Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) and finishing up in the charming city of Hanoi.

Those who have travelled here speak of a stunning and diverse geography of towering mountains, picturesque coastline and endless green rice fields. They speak of the naturally friendly people, of the delicious cuisine and of the intrigue at such a long culture of independence and national pride.

Along the way you'll also stay in smaller towns, pass through tiny villages and enjoy the beautiful coastline - the true essence of exploring Vietnam.

Itinerary

Day 1 Arrive into Saigon

Today group members will be arriving throughout the day so the day will be free to explore the sights of this charming city. We'll all meet in the evening for a group meeting and head out for our first dinner together. (D)

Day 2 Hanoi - Quy Nhon

After a morning flight to Quy Nhon, we spend the afternoon exploring this pleasant seaside town and learning about the work of a dedicated lady who has single handedly established a centre to provide vocational training for young, disabled Vietnamese. We will fit our bikes and test them out around town. (B,L,D)

Day 3 Quy Nhon to Quang Ngai 42km

This morning we set out on our bikes for our first real day of riding. We leave the city by a huge suspension bridge and then cycle along a sand-dune peninsula and u some beautiful coastline. We have a few hills today where we get a great view out over the sea. Small fishing villages are nestled into each valley where squid fishing earns most household incomes. We reach highway number one in time for lunch and we then drive the remainder of the distance up to our home for the night, the steadily growing city of Quang Ngai. This city is well and truly off the tourist route. (B,L,D)



Day 4 Quang Ngai to Tam Ky 89km

This morning we start with a short cycle to the site of one of the many dark moments of the Vietnam War - the My Lai Massacre Memorial. The Monument stands as a great antiwar statement. We then proceed down to the coast to a fishing village and back up through bright green rice paddies and sleepy villages. The last part of today's ride will be on the famous highway number one. This is the main north south highway, linking Saigon to Hanoi. (B,L,D)

Day 5 Tam Ky to Hoi An 49km

Today we cover a surprisingly remote section of coast. We ride on a peninsula, lined with small houses that have evidently been battered by many a typhoon. Children who don't often see foreigners here will be delighted to see you and will yell out hello! We eat lunch in a local home before taking a boat up the river into Hoi An which is a world Heritage listed old town. (B,L,D)

Day 6 Hoi An

Hoi An has a long history. It was the home to the largest port in SE Asia in the 1st. century when the Champa people inhabited this area and controlled the lucrative spice trade. In the 15th and 16th centuries the estuary town of Hoi An served as an important trading port and was settled by Chinese, Japanese, Indians and even Dutch. Today Hoi An is a charming town where you can wander for hours, soaking up the atmosphere and inspiring old architecture of the various parts of town. Hoi An is also famous for its tailors who number in the hundreds and are eagerly waiting to create a garment for you. You may also wish to spend some time on the beach, a good place to sip a fresh coconut. (B)

Day 7 Hoi An explorer 50km

Today we explore the surrounding countryside by bike. The area surrounding Hoi An is a collection of sleepy villages and picturesque countryside. We may see rice paper making, silk lantern making or one of many ancient traditions that the people of Hoi An keep alive. We will visit the beach in the late afternoon and may have a chance to paddle in a round basket style boat, just the way the locals do. (B,L)

Day 8 Hoi An to Lang Co 69km

We start out up the beach road to Danang. This city has suddenly exploded with development in recent times, and as such there is a new bridge to improve our ride a little. We pass many of the new multi-million dollar Condo and Resort projects before popping out the other end of town into the Vietnam we have come to know and love. We then climb Hai Van Pass and while the incline is a challenge, the view is more than sufficient reward. Each turn in the road brings us around a bluff and serves you another stunning ocean view. As we descend the other side, we see the famous Re-unification express, weaving its way out of the tunnel and along the base of the mountain. At the foot of our descent, on a sandy peninsula between a lagoon and the sea, sits Lang Co, a peaceful less visited beach where you can soak your muscles in the ocean while we wait for our fresh seafood dinner to be prepared. (B,L,D)

Day 9 Lang Co to Hue 80km

Today we spend only a short time on highway one before riding the back roads to Hue. The areas we are cycling through today were the leaving point for many of the "boat people". As the communist forces declared victory over the South and their American allies, many families who were fearful of persecution and a grim economic future chose to exit overloaded and poorly maintained fishing boats. While many made it to the shores of Australia and some neighboring Asian countries, many did not. After 80km of cycling, we reach the last Imperial city of Vietnam before the French Occupation, Hue. Time permitting, we will pay an afternoon visit to our friend Oanh who paints egg-shell lacquerware paintings of a more contemporary style. (B,L,D)

Day 10 Explore Hue 40km

We start off today with a visit to the Forbidden City. This was the seat of power in Vietnam during the most recent Imperial rule. We then take a ride up small paths, alleyways and country trails to see a variety of places, including a small produce market, some old French gun positions and even a fighting arena where beasts once did battle for the Emperor's entertainment. What a way to finish our ride. We head back into Hue City for a victory lap around the walls of the Citadel. (B,L,D)



Day 11 Hanoi

We take a morning flight to Hanoi today. We then take a walk to explore this bustling and vibrant city where the old and the new hold close quarters with each other and Vietnam's rapidly increasing wealth is immediately evident. We will visit some famous sights and some not so famous sights as we wrap up our great adventure. A celebratory meal this evening will be our last one as a group. (B,D)

Accommodation

Hotels and guesthouses: The standard will vary according to where we are and we ask for your patience, as at times things do not work the way you are used to at home. Sometimes there may be no electricity, the plumbing may be temperamental or there is only a squat toilet.

Extra accommodation

We can book additional accommodation before the tour in Saigon or after the tour in Hanoi at competitive rates. Please book extra nights when you book your tour.

Meal Inclusions

Most meals are included in this trip and the food is generally of an excellent quality. Please refer to the itinerary for exact inclusions. We like to sample the best of local dishes and produce so you enjoy an authentic taste of the region which you're travelling through. Vietnamese food is rightly regarded as one of the great Asian cuisines with its own distinctive flavours and influences from China and France.

Please note on the itinerary B, L, D stands for breakfast and lunch and dinner.

Transport

Any transport required is generally by private vehicle and a domestic flight.

Is this the right trip for me?

When considering booking a trip it's important that you look at the descriptions in these trip notes relating to the accommodation, food and difficulty level to ensure that it matches your expectations. Particularly with the physical difficulty rating it's vital to select a trip that is realistic for your ability.

With physical gradings it's important to understand that a label, of say 'moderate' can mean two completely different things to two different people depending on their experience, fitness level and mental attitude.

For our Australian based walking trips there is now a track grading scale that we refer to (developed as an industry standard). For overseas walking or cycling trips you need to rely upon interpreting the information given and relating it to your own fitness levels and abilities.

So if a trip describes daily activity of 5-7 hours a day walking or cycling then you must ask yourself are you currently doing walks or rides of that distance in comparable terrain? So if a walking trip involves ascents of 500-1000m each day then you should go and walk a mountain with a 1000m ascent and see how you cope. If a trip is a cycle ride with average distances of 80km a day then go out and ride a comparable distance to see how you cope.



While we often see amazing improvements in people's fitness with a programme of regular training before a trip you have to be realistic about whether you can commit to regular training with your current lifestyle. If you feel that you would be unable to commit to doing the training to achieve that level of fitness then you should consider another trip that is less demanding. This is the only way to accurately judge whether you can cope with the demands of any given trip.

Physical Rating

Introductory

Please see our cycling guide on the website for an indication of what you should be doing to prepare yourself for this trip. The fitter you are, the more you will enjoy your holiday. Remember there is always a support vehicle with you!

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.

If you would like someone to take the hassle out of your visa application please visit the following website:
www.visalink.com.au

Vietnam:

Allow 5 working days and don't forget to attach a copy of the itinerary. The cost for a single entry tourist visa is approximately AUD \$70.

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 www.vnconsulate.org.au

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

For the section on the application form 'proposed address for contact in Vietnam' please put:

Buffalo Tours/ RAW travel
94 Ma May Street
Hoan Kiem District
Hanoi
Vietnam
Tel: 84-4-3828-0702



Fax: 84-4-3826-9370

Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is compulsory for all our trips. We strongly recommend that you take out insurance the moment you register for a trip as you are then covered should you not be able to go in the event of illness or accident. Please send these details (name of insurer, policy number and their 24 hour emergency contact number) to RAW prior to departure.

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.

Our preferred insurance company is CoverMore as they provide an excellent service. You can apply online directly by clicking on this link:

<https://b2c.covermore.com.au/index.jsp?alpha=AAV0231>

What to take?

You should pack as lightly as possible. You will only need a day pack to carry your personal items when cycling. You are expected to carry your own luggage on and off the bus and though you will not be required to walk long distances with your luggage we recommend keeping the weight under 12kg. Big suitcases are not recommended as they are awkward to store in the vehicle.

Most travellers carry their luggage in a backpack, although an overnight bag with a shoulder strap would suffice if you travel lightly. Smaller bags with wheels are acceptable, although we recommend your bag has carry straps as well.

Checklist (suggested list)

Travel Documents:

- Passport (with photocopies) and Vietnam visa
- Copy of travel insurance
- Airline ticket
- USD cash
- 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 roommate snores!)
- Plastic bags for wet or dirty clothing
- Wet wipes or antiseptic hand gel

Clothing

- 3 T-shirts or long sleeve tops (lightweight quick drying fabric) / long sleeved T-shirt
- 1 pairs walking shorts
- 1 pair of comfortable shoes for walking
- pair of sport sandals
- 1 pair of knee length shorts
- 1 pair lightweight long trousers
- Lightweight waterproof top
- Light sweater/fleece for evenings
- swim wear
- Sun hat
- Clothes to relax in

Other Suggestions:

- Camera and plenty of film
- Adapter for recharging digital camera (American style with 2 parallel flat pins)
- Spare batteries
- Reading / writing material
- Penknife (put in main luggage at airport)
- Torch
- Small calculator (when out bargaining!)
- Photos of family or postcards of Australia (great way to have fun with locals you meet)
- Phrase book, map and Lonely Planet guide
- Small padlock for securing your luggage during flights

Local Dress

When packing be aware that dress standards are conservative throughout Asia. We will be spending a lot of time in the more conservative rural regions of Vietnam. Please remember that as visitors to someone else's home it is our responsibility to fit with the local customs by wearing appropriate clothing (irrespective of what other travellers are wearing). 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 in villages. The wearing of swimwear, short shorts and halter tops away from the beach or swimming pools is not encouraged as they will restrict your entry into buildings of a religious nature and family homes. Long shorts / skirts and loose tops are ideal.

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.

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. Email cafes are commonplace throughout the regions we visit. If someone wishes to contact you in an emergency we recommend that they 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.

Group Leader

RAW has both resident western and local leaders who lead our trips in this region. Where the group size is smaller or with a private booking for a few people you will have a local leader. All our staff are first aid trained and experienced with the special nature and demands of our tours and are able to give you support and insights into the local culture.

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 tour 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 area 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. When we are cycling children will ask you for pens, money etc. It is always hard to resist giving them small gift. However we ask you not to do this as it encourages a culture of begging and often parents will take their children out of school and get their children to prey on tourists. Ask your leader what is the best way to give.

RAW Travel has taken an active approach to helping communities in destinations that we visit and raising money for grass roots projects aimed at alleviating poverty and conservation of the natural environment. For more details please visit our website where we have a download document detailing our responsible travel practice and philosophy:

<http://rawtravel.com/resptravel/responsibletravel.pdf>

Health & Safety

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 reserves the right to exclude them from all or part of a trip without refund.

Please let us know of any medical conditions on the registration form and if you are currently taking prescription medicine as it is important that our leader is aware of your circumstances. 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 or travel clinic for up to date information and prescriptions for vaccinations and anti-malarial requirements. We would suggest that you are up to date with immunisation protection against typhoid, polio, tetanus and hepatitis. 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 First Aid kit as well as any personal medical requirements (such as a spare pair of prescription glasses). Please be aware that for legal reasons our leaders are prohibited from administering any type of drug including headache tablets/antibiotics etc. Your first aid kit should include:

- Headache tablets
- Diarrhoea treatment (both a blocker to bring relief from the symptoms and an antibiotic)
- Band-aids
- Antiseptic for cuts & scrapes



- lip balm
- Insect repellent
- High factor 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.

If you are 65 years or older a completed Medical Certificate is required.

Please let us know and we can post you a copy which then needs to be signed by your GP and posted faxed through to 03 9787 0136 prior to departure.

Physical Preparation

Build up your base endurance by long and frequent cycles which will ensure that you are in peak condition for the trip. You can also mix this up by taking other forms of regular exercise which you currently do such as yoga, spinning classes, walking and swimming.

The heat is a consideration as your body make take a few days to adjust to the more humid climate. We try and avoid cycling at the hottest times of day and favour early mornings and late afternoons on long days.

Money Exchange

Currency exchange rates often fluctuate. For the most up to date rates please refer to the following website:
www.oanda.com

Vietnam: \$1 AUD =20,000 Dong.

Clean bills of small denominations are best because travellers cheques can be difficult to change. ATM's are appearing in larger cities in Vietnam and credit cards can be used to advance cash in banks in major towns but attract a high fee. We recommend that you don't use money changers on the street. 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 as it can be difficult to change larger notes once out of the city.

Spending Money

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. Any tip that you wish to give to your local guides or leader in recognition of excellent service is always appreciated. We recommend approx. US\$30 (or the equivalent of) each to go into a kitty to be distributed to the local leader (s) at the end of the trip. Usually we do this on the last night at the celebration dinner or at the end of a day with a local guide employed for the day.

Emergency Funds

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

Emergency Contact

In the case of a genuine crisis or emergency, please call the RAW Office. Tel: +61 3 9787 4366.

Outside of office hours please call 0413 703 632

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. 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.

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.

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 itinerary, and 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 in hot temperatures over undulating terrain. It is so important to be aware of your fluid intake especially if at altitude and to constantly drink water throughout the day (even when you do not feel thirsty). Symptoms of mild dehydration include:

- Flushed face
- Extreme thirst, more than normal or unable to drink
- Dry, warm skin
- Cannot pass urine or reduced amounts, dark, yellow
- Dizziness made worse when you are standing - weakness - cramping in the arms and legs
- Sleepy or irritable
- Headaches
- Dry mouth, dry tongue; with thick saliva

The simplest way of monitoring your fluid intake is by checking the colour of your urine. If it is clear or slightly yellow you are well hydrated but once it is dark yellow you are in the danger zone and need to increase your fluid intake immediately. Ensure that you bring some Gastrolyte sachets as these help your recovery after trekking with the replacement of electrolytes. Gastrolyte is also the recommended treatment for dehydration caused by diarrhea ('gastro').

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. We would also love to receive any photos after the event as we are starting to build up a traveller's album for each of our destinations on our website. We need resolution of around 1MB.

Please could you send a CD to: RAW Travel Photo album, Suite 1 / 7 Davies Ave, Mount Eliza, VIC 3930.

If you have any suggestions to add more information to our trip dossier that you think other travellers 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 Nepal as much as we do and we look forward to you joining us on other RAW experiences.

The information in these trip notes has been compiled with care and is provided in good faith. However it is subject to change, and does not form part of the contract between the client and RAW Travel.