

# Cycling Europe

## VIETNAM GUIDED CYCLE TOUR, 2020 HANOI to HO CHI MINH CITY 15 Days/14 Nights



**This two-wheeled adventure will show you all the different sides of this country – wildlife-filled natural landscapes, small villages and ancient ruins, along with the region's liveliest cities**

### ITINERARY

#### Day 1 (Sat) Arrive in Hanoi

Arrival Hanoi and make your way to your hotel adjacent to the old quarter. Despite its three million inhabitants Hanoi's traditional charm is pervasive. The historic old town district is considered as one of the best preserved in Southeast Asia. The colourful and bustling streets contribute to the Asian flair. Around 6.00 pm, meet your tour guide and fellow travellers.

**Meals:** n/a

#### Day 2 (Sun) Hanoi

This morning you'll get the chance to explore the Vietnamese capital by bike on a guided ride through the city (approx. 22kms).



Hanoi is made for exploration by bike, so this is the perfect place to get to grips with Vietnamese street life and traffic. You'll ride through parks, around lakes, and down tree-lined boulevards and visit iconic sights such as the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum complex, which includes the Buddhist temple One Pillar Pagoda and the former residence of Vietnam's most famous revolutionary, Ho Chi Minh.

There's also time to explore the vibrant Old Quarter, an architectural museum where blocks of ochre buildings give off the air of a 1930s provincial French town. In these ancient '36 Streets' discover an amazing selection of shops that sell everything from souvenirs to exquisite silk clothing, jewellery, beautifully embroidered tablecloths, wood carvings and lacquerware - it's a bargain hunter's paradise.

You'll have some free time this afternoon. Perhaps take a walk around the beautiful Hoan Kiem Lake, with the reflection of modern office buildings, old Buddhist temples and the tangle of ancient streets in its still surface, or maybe dive into culture at the Vietnam Fine Art Museum or The Vietnamese Women's Museum. Top off the day with a steaming bowl of fresh Pho from a hole-the-wall eatery – the street food in Hanoi is not to be missed!

**Meals: Breakfast - Cycling approx. 38 km**



### **Day 3 (Mon) Hanoi – Mai Chau**

Saddle up this morning as your cycling adventure kicks into first gear. Leave Hanoi behind and travel by bus to Hoa Binh (approximately 2 hours). When you arrive you'll jump on your bike and cycle 40 kilometres to Cao Phong, through small ethnic Thai villages, g the tranquility of the paddy fields and interacting with the local people. Limestone peaks climb in the background and banks of green line the road, and you'll take regular stops to admire view across the lush valleys. After arriving you'll take a short 30-minute bus ride for the next section, stopping for lunch at Man Duc.

After you fuel up, the bus will take you to the Da River Reservoir. Stretch your legs again cycling along the Da River, passing spectacular karst cliffs, through paddy fields, and admiring the lush panorama of the Mai Chau valley on the way (approximately 20 kilometres). The peaceful town of Mai Chau is situated in a stunningly beautiful valley surrounded by verdant green mountains and is famed for its breathtaking scenery and friendly hilltribe peoples. Tonight you'll enjoy local hospitality in a simple stilt-house homestay in the village of Poom Coong. Your amicable hosts will cook up a fabulous home-cooked meal, and there may even be a chance to sample some of the local rice wine produced in the region.

**Meals: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner – Cycling approx. 38 km + 19 km**



#### Day 4 (Tue) Mai Chau – Ninh Binh

This morning you farewell your homestay hosts and cycle from Mai Chau to Mai Hai, and then on to Co Luong (approx 49kms). You'll ride through more paddy fields and test your riding skills (or suspension) with the shallow potholes that can be found on the road. Pass farmers riding atop their load drawn by lumbering water buffalo, ride through small towns and wave to friendly locals on your way through picture-perfect Vietnam – lush green fields, towering limestone mountains, tranquil waterways and charming historic sites.

A bus trip then takes you along the Ho Chi Minh Road with a lunch stop before Ninh Binh. If you arrive in Ninh Binh with time (and energy) to spare you can take a 36 km cycle around the surrounding area. This is a wonderful chance to see everyday rural life in action as well as take in the beautiful countryside. **Meals: Breakfast, Lunch - Cycling approx. 49 km + 36 km**



#### Day 5 (Wed) Ninh Binh to Hue

This morning you'll cycle from Ninh Binh to Tam Coc, when you'll really have the opportunity to soak up one of Vietnam's most spectacular views – limestone karst peaks thrusting out of serene rice paddies, the sounds and views of the river, which winds through the fields and has boats parading up and down its length. You will also cycle to Hoa Lu, the ancient capital of Vietnam under the 10th-

century Dinh Dynasty, the remains of which can be seen in the lasting beautiful archways and temples. Here you'll take a lunch break at the Dinh or the Le Temple. Today's cycling is approximately 50 kilometres. Then it's back on the bus to return to your hotel, where you can use the day room to take a shower and freshen up. After an early dinner you'll transfer to Nam Dinh for an overnight train to Hue.

Notes: On the overnight train to Hue (approximately 12 hours) conditions are basic, but it is a true Intrepid experience and the best way to travel long distances like a local. Sleeper trains typically have four berth compartments (occasionally six berth depending on seasonal variations and group configuration), which have bench seats that convert into sleeping bunks. A sheet, pillow and blanket are provided, although some travellers prefer to bring their own sleeping sheet. On occasion, passengers of different genders will be required to share a compartment and there will be occasions where you'll be sharing with local travellers or travellers who are not part of your group. Most trains have a dining carriage serving simple food, but some travellers take the opportunity to stock up on fresh bread, cheese and fruit prior to departure.

**Meals: Breakfast, Lunch – Cycling approx. 52 km**

### **Day 6 (Thu) Hue**

Arrive in Hue and hop back in the saddle to begin your exploration of the former imperial capital of Vietnam. Hue holds the treasures of Vietnam's royal past and is a curious mix of bustling streets and tranquil settings. Today you will ride (approximately 20 kilometres) through the fields to visit many of Hue's remarkable sites, including temples, bunkers, tombs, ruins, pagodas and spectacular scenery.



On your cycle you will visit the Imperial Citadel, including the Forbidden Purple City. The latter was almost totally destroyed during the Vietnam War's Tet Offensive, but the foliage-covered ruins are still atmospheric and the gaping holes left by bombs give an idea of the destruction wreaked upon the country during the war. The itinerary is flexible and you have ample time for stops along the way to admire the sites. Later, kick back in a cafe or restaurant. Hue's cuisine is considered by many Vietnamese as the best in the country, and is influenced both by its imperial heritage (small dishes and a focus on aesthetic presentation) as well as its strong Buddhist heritage, reflected in the high proportion of vegetarian restaurants in the region. The bustling Dong Ba Market offers a wealth of goods and foods to see and snack on. It's a good place to try some of the local specialities that graced the Nguyen emperors' banquet tables, such as the 'banh khoai', Hue's answer to the pancake.

**Meals: Lunch, Cycling approx. 20km**

### **Day 7 (Fri) Hue to Hoi An**

Today will be big on riding and big on spectacular views. Leaving Hue, you will do some mountainous riding (approximately 80 kilometres in total) as you conquer the Hai Van (Ocean Cloud) Pass on the way to the tropical south and the laidback town of Hoi An. The pass is a stunning stretch of highway the winds through the Truong Son mountain range for about 20 kilometres (10 kilometres each way), with views across the Bay of Danang to the south. It is 500 metres about sea level and the up/down slope ranges from 5-10%, and there will be plenty of well-earned breaks along the way to take in the views, snap some photos, and rehydrate. After the rewarding vistas on the cycle in, you'll also be spoiled with the town of Hoi An – with lantern-lit streets, vibrant markets, skilled tailors, artisan shops, ancient houses, colourful temples and beautiful smiles, it's a Vietnamese wonderland. Recently declared a World Heritage site, Hoi An is being beautifully restored and preserved, with parts of the town looking exactly like they did more than a century ago. This makes its streets of low tiled buildings perfect for strolling. Take the evening to soak up the atmosphere, or just rest your legs at a local restaurant after a day's riding.

**Meals: Breakfast & Lunch – Cycling approx. 56km + 30km**





### Day 8 (Sat) Hoi An

This morning your leader will take you on a walking tour of the town, which used to be a busy port for the Cham people before the river silted up. There's also a strong Chinese influence, and you'll see it as you walk past the pagodas and assembly halls. On your tour you'll take in a historic house (formerly home to a prominent trader), the Japanese Covered Bridge, a Chinese assembly hall and a museum. The afternoon is free for you to do whatever takes your fancy. For those who love to shop then Hoi An is a mecca, with much to browse and buy. There are original paintings, handcrafted woodwork, ceramics, embroidery, lanterns and more. If you want to get some new threads then the town is also famous for its tailoring – pick a fabric and a design and it'll be ready the same day. If you feel like keeping active then there are the options to take a 15-20 kilometre ride into the surrounding countryside, to cycle to nearby Cua Dai Beach, or to take a stroll through fields of rice, sesame, banana and peanuts.

#### Meals: Breakfast





### Day 9 (Sun) Hội An – Quy Nhon

Continue south, down scenic Highway One on the road to Quy Nhon, one of the routes that is less visited by travellers, past paddy fields, wheat drying for Beer Hoi, and locals playing chess to Phu.

Climb back on the bikes to cycle to the coastal city of Quy Nhon (approx. 45kms). The city is filled with long stretches of beach and relaxed boulevards, and as it's pretty undiscovered by visitors, is a great place to get an authentic slice of coastal life.

**Meals: Breakfast & Lunch. Cycling approx. 45 km**



### Day 10 (Mon) Quy Nhon – Nha Trang

Today's cycle is approximately 95 kilometres, but it is one of the most breathtaking stretches of road you'll ride – the highway hugs huge granite cliffs and looks out across the deep blue sea.

Following parts of the Reunification railway, you'll enjoy scenery of islands, lagoons and sand dunes. Join the scooter riders on the waterfront promenade as you arrive in the idyllic coastal town of Nha Trang, once referred to as the 'Cannes of the Orient', and whose sandy palm-lined beach and island-dotted bay still make a pretty idyllic picture. Here there's consistently good weather, a vibrant nightlife and excellent diving.

**Meals: Breakfast & Lunch, Cycling approx. 75 km + 20 km**

### Day 11 (Tues) Nha Trang

Today you'll swap your bike for a boat as you head out to explore the nearby islands. This excursion is often the highlight of the trip for many travellers, as you'll get to know some of the locals and indulge in the beauty of the place. Starting on the main boat, you'll then take a small basket boat to shore



and visit a fishing village, snorkel in the turquoise waters and feast on a fresh seafood buffet for lunch. You can enjoy this rest day by lazing in a deck chair, going for another swim or perhaps taking a mud baths to soothe away sore muscles.

**Meals: Breakfast, Lunch**



### Day 12 (Wed) Nha Trang - Dalat

Head up through the Bidoup-Nui Ba Pass into the cooler climes of the South Central Highlands (approximately 65 kilometres), where some of the country's best fruits, flowers and coffee beans are grown. The road is winding and steep but if you're fit and ready for a challenge, you may want to conquer the whole mountain on your bike. If you're not so physically inclined, take it easy and flag a lift from the bus. Whichever way you choose to get to the top, you'll still be treated to magnificent views once you reach the summit. After a short photo stop here, you will descend to Dalat. One of Vietnam's most delightful cities, Dalat is a perfect base to explore this pleasant region. With an appealing Swiss-French

feel, along with pleasant lakes, palaces, pine tree-covered hills, flower gardens and pagodas, Dalat is often called the 'city of eternal spring' for its temperate climate.

**Meals: Breakfast, Lunch -Cycling approx. 57km + 15km**

### Day 13 (Thu) Dalat – Phan Thiet

This morning you'll take a city tour of Dalat, making the journey to Bao Dai's striking regal summer palace. He was the final emperor of the Nguyen dynasty, and the last to rule Vietnam until 1945. You'll then discover the wacky and weird architecture of Hang Nga Crazy House. Echoing Gaudi's unconventional designs, and described as a 'fairytale house', explore the twisted tree roots, cave shaped hallways and animal themed rooms of this surreal guesthouse.



Drop by the train station and the central market before continuing to Di Linh, where tea is the main industry and there are large plantations in the surrounding hills. After lunch, pedal down the forest-lined Gia Bac Pass, then cycle along from Malam to Phan Thiet and it's beautiful beaches..

**Meals: Breakfast, Lunch – Cycling approx. 22km + 45km**

### Day 14 (Fri) Phan Thiet - Ho Chi Minh City

You're on the home stretch now and it's time for one last cycling splurge. Before heading for the big city, take in the views along the beach on your ride to Lang Long. After a picnic lunch, keep cycling (approximately 60 kilometres) to Cu Bi. From there it's goodbye to your two-wheeled friend as you take the support bus the final leg to Ho Chi Minh City. Here daily life plays out on the streets and the dynamic atmosphere is a fascinating blend of old and new, East and West. Maybe spend the final night of your Vietnam adventure exploring the food stalls at Ben Thanh market or cheers to yourself and your new friends with a few glasses of street-side beer hoi.

**Meals: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner - Cycling approx. 56 km**



### Day 15 (Sat) Tour ends in Ho Chi Minh City

Arrangements end after breakfast.

**Meals: Breakfast**

#### **GRADE:**

This is an active trip, requiring a reasonable level of physical fitness. While there is flexibility in the distance you can elect to cycle each day, the cycling on this trip can be challenging at times, with the heat and terrain adding to the physical effort.

It is also important that you are both confident and competent in riding a bicycle.

As a general rule, the more preparation you can do for this type of trip, the more you will enjoy it. Prepare for the trip by doing aerobic type exercises before travelling - jogging or swimming are some options, though cycling is best. If possible take some extended day rides before travelling, or spend time on exercise bikes in the gym. The more your muscles (and bottom) are prepared for the riding on this trip the more you will be able to enjoy the wonderful countryside and people you meet while riding. Note that an enthusiasm for bike riding and adventure is essential!

#### **CYCLING DISTANCES:**

The information listed in the itinerary is a guide to the approximate distances and terrain cycled each



day. However, this may vary depending on the physical capabilities of the group, and changes to local conditions. For safety reasons we only cycle during daylight hours, so there may be some early morning starts. We take regular rest breaks throughout cycling days.

### **BIKES:**

Bike helmets & closed toed shoes are compulsory on this trip. We are unable to hire bike helmets locally so please ensure you bring your own bike helmet from home.

We use Giant Rincon Disc bikes on this trip. These bikes are mountain bike-style with flat bars, front suspension and 24 gears.

### **VIETNAM: Country Information**

Vietnam is a country of immense beauty and geographical diversity.

The country is roughly divided into three main areas – Bac Bo (north), Trung Bo (centre) and Nam Bo (south). The main feature of the north of Vietnam is mountains and forests along with the vast Red River Delta. The north is also home to the Gulf of Tonkin and a maze of islands in the bay. Central Vietnam is made up of agricultural plains wedged between the Truong Son Mountains and the South China Sea making some dramatic mountain passes overlooking ocean vistas. The Mekong Delta dominates the south of the country. Vietnam has been the site of battles and invasions for over 2000 years. Influences of invaders or modern day 'liberators' have left the country with a unique cultural identity and a complex and fascinating history. This history has given Vietnam a diverse population made up of different ethnic groups. The predominant ethnic group is known as 'Kinh' and make up about 90% of the population. There are dozens of other ethnic groups including Cham and Khmer particularly in the south of the country.

Since the early 1990's, Vietnam has been opening its doors to tourism and facilities and infrastructure in the country are changing rapidly. Vietnam is still a communist country although the Government is at times very pragmatic and forward thinking. You still need to carry with you an abundance of patience and a good sense of humour to overcome the overt bureaucracy and the inevitable delays, however, the fascinating history and culture; the resilient and proud people; and the beauty of the varied landscape help to overcome any possible frustrations.

### **CLIMATE:**

Vietnam's climate can vary markedly from region to region due to its length stretching 1650 km from north to south. Generally two distinct seasons prevail in Vietnam. From November to April, the temperatures are usually fairly cool, especially in the north of the country. In the mountain areas temperatures can be as low as 0oC (32 degrees Fahrenheit) and there can be a constant light drizzle. Hotter temperatures and heavy monsoon rains characterize the months from May to October although you can experience rain at any time.

The hottest months of the year are June, July and August. Southern Vietnam's weather patterns are more constant with a rainy season from May to October and a relative dry season from November to February. The temperatures in the south can rise as high as 35oC (95 F) from March to May.

### **2020 TOUR DATES:**

**Departs every Saturday from 04 January until 26 December 2020**

*Each tour requires a minimum of 1 participant to guarantee departure (maximum is 16)*

### **2020: COST PER PERSON IN NEW ZEALAND DOLLARS:**

Tour cost Double or Twin Share	from \$2720 - \$3070
Single Supplement:	from \$410 (except on Days 3 & 5)

Extra nights Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh – price on request  
Arrival and departure transfers available on request

#### **INCLUDED IN 14 NIGHT VIETNAM TOUR COST:**

- 14 night's accommodation: 12 nights hotel, 1 night homestay, 1 night sleeper train
- Meals – 13 breakfasts, 11 lunches, 2 dinners
- Bike
- Support Vehicle and Guide
- Several activities as per itinerary

#### **NOT INCLUDED IN VIETNAM TOUR COST:**

- International Flights
- Meals not on itinerary
- Drinks on board boats and in hotels/restaurants
- Private transfers on days other than tour day 1 & 15 – price on request
- Visa Fees for Vietnam & Cambodia
- Departure taxes.
- Tips for guides

#### **VISA REQUIREMENTS**

Your passport must be valid for at least 6 months

**Vietnam:** A visa is required and can be obtained from the Vietnamese embassy in Wellington or online.

#### **INOCULATIONS**

There is no absolute requirement for inoculations for Vietnam - **We recommend that you see your family doctor or a doctor for tropical diseases at least two months before the trip in order to get the necessary advice.** The institutes for tropical diseases, however, recommend a vaccination against hepatitis A and under certain circumstances also against typhoid. Since some of these inoculations have to be repeated, you should plan these in plenty of time. A sufficient tetanus protection as well as an inoculation against polio and diphtheria (single vaccination, so-called three-way combination) should also be guaranteed. A prophylactic malaria treatment is not absolutely necessary. We recommend that you see your family doctor or a doctor for tropical diseases at least two months before the trip in order to get the necessary advice.

***Book through:***

# **A Walker's World**

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