



## Cycling the length of Vietnam

### Trip notes

Welcome to RAW Challenges... We witness a real variety of riding and cultural sights as we work our way down the length of Vietnam. At times we will be cycling the scenic highway coastal route and also get off the beaten track into the little visited central highlands with their hilltribe populations. Vietnam is an experience to savour and the bicycle is the ideal way to explore this country of ever changing landscapes, from palm fringed beaches, to ancient towns, fishing villages, misty highlands and bustling Saigon this a trip of real contrasts. This event has enormous appeal to anyone with a sense of adventure and is a worthy goal for cyclists of all levels.

# Itinerary

## Day 1 Arrive in Hanoi

Arrive any time this day and make your way by taxi to our start hotel. There will be a group meeting that evening before going out to dinner.

**Meals included: dinner**

## Day 2 Hanoi & Hue

In the morning we will head out on our first ride in Vietnam on a nice easy ride around the countryside just outside Hanoi. This is a great introduction to the rural face of Vietnam, friendly locals and villages that will be a feature of your cycling in Vietnam. In the late evening we head out to the airport for the flight to Hue.

**Meals included: breakfast only**

## 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**

## Day 4 Cycle to Lang Co

We cycle out of Hue on little backroads following the coast through farmland and small villages. We finish the ride with two climbs and then a descent into the small town of Lang Co, where we stay in a beach resort on this narrow peninsula.

Distance cycled approx. 80 km

**Meals included: breakfast, lunch and dinner**

## Day 5 Cycle to Hoi An

Our day gets off to a spectacular start as we tackle the Hai Van (sea cloud) pass which winds its way through mountains by the sea. The Hai Van pass also marks a climatic change and the weather is decidedly warmer on the southern side. We cycle down the pass, into Danang and then through China Beach to Hoi An.

Distance cycled approx. 70 km

**Meals included: breakfast, lunch and dinner**

## Day 6 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**

### Day 7 Cycle to Tam Ky

We start our journey with a boat ride down the river through the farming communities and fishing villages surrounding Hoi An. We then hit the bikes and ride along quiet coastal roads to a small city called Tam Ky.

Distance cycled approx. 50 km

***Meals included: breakfast, lunch and dinner***

### Day 8 Cycle to Quang Ngai

Our route will take us inland off Highway One and through rural areas; cycling past 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 approx. 90 km

***Meals included: breakfast, lunch and dinner***

### Day 9 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 approx. 110 km

***Meals included: breakfast, lunch and dinner***

### Day 10 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 11 Pleiku & flight to Saigon

Depending on flight schedules that are often changeable, we will have the morning to further explore Pleiku, before we take a short flight to big crazy Saigon and our final night celebration.

***Meals included: breakfast and dinner***

### Day 12 Saigon.& afternoon flight to Australia

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 leave any time on this day.

***Meals included: breakfast only***

Joining Point Hotel

Hanoi Imperial Hotel

44 Hang Hanh Str

Hoan Kiem Dist

Hanoi

Vietnam

Phone: (+84 4) 43933 5555

### Joining Point Instructions

The easiest way from the Hanoi Airport to the hotel is by prepaid taxi. As you exit the arrivals terminal, go outside to where there is a line of taxi companies and their staff waiting. Do not go with any taxi drivers trying to get your business inside the building. Our preferred taxi company is the Noi Bai Taxi Company. For a fixed price of US\$12 to \$15 (depending on the size of the taxi) your driver will take you to the hotel. The Hanoi Imperial Hotel is a well know hotel.

### Finishing Point Hotel

Palace Hotel

Saigon

Tel: +84 8 3829 2860

### Group Size

Maximum of 25 travellers per group

### 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, there is only a squat toilet.

### Meal Inclusions

Most meals included - see itinerary.

### Transport

Private vehicle & domestic flight.

### Physical Rating

Please see our cycling guide on the event page 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!

### Culture Shock Rating

Vietnam is a developing country and can be quite overwhelming (in a positive way) for the first time visitor to Asia. Life is literally on the streets in Vietnam and the pace of life seems chaotic and frantic at first. Your senses will be on overload as you take in this dynamic and exciting culture.

## Important Notes

### 1. Bikes

Please make sure that you let us know your height in cm's so that we can properly size you to the correct frame size.

The bikes that we provide are Trek, 24 gear mountain bikes with front suspension. There are no back racks or bar ends and all have a single water bottle cage. We recommend that if you have a comfortable saddle then bring this with you (without the seat post) or bring a gel seat cover. Bar ends are a useful addition to fit to your handle bars as it gives you more riding positions when cycling up hill. If you are used to cycling with cleat pedals please bring with you.

## 2. Bringing your own bike

Not a problem but any extra charges for taking it on the train or plane are your responsibility. 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.

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.

## 3. Immigration & Customs Form

You will receive this form on arrival. Please do not lose this as you need it to complete the exit formalities on departure. Keep this in your passport attached with a rubber band.

## 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 Challenges 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 on line directly by clicking on this link:

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

## 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](http://www.visalink.com.au)

All nationalities require a visa for Vietnam. Allow 5 working days and don't forget to attach a copy of the challenge itinerary. The cost for a single entry tourist visa is 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](http://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

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

Wide Eyed Tours  
40 Luong Ngoc Quyen  
Hanoi, Vietnam  
Tel: +84 (04) 926 2241

## 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 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 challenge 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 Dehydration Notes below for information on dehydration.

If you are 65 years or older a completed Medical Certificate is required. Please fax this through to 03 9597 0797 prior to departure.

### Physical Preparation

In order to physically prepare yourself to cycle long hours in the saddle for up to 7 hours on successive days it is so important that you undertake a fitness program. Getting yourself fit is all part of the Challenge and one that you'll benefit from long after your trip is over. It is really worth putting in the effort before you go to condition the body (backside, neck, shoulders & leg muscles) as it means you'll enjoy the event rather than it being a struggle.

For a fitness program & advice click here: <http://rawchallenges.com/guide-to-cycling.php>

Build up your base endurance by long and frequent bike rides which will ensure that you are in peak condition for the challenge. 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.

### Money Exchange

Currency exchange rates often fluctuate. For the most up to date rates please refer to the following website: [www.oanda.com/convert/classic](http://www.oanda.com/convert/classic)

It is advisable to take most of your money in cash or travellers cheques in US currency. There can be delays when changing travellers cheques. Major credit cards are accepted in cities only, but cash withdrawals are subject to a 3% to 4% service charge. We recommend that you don't use

money changers on the street.

Hanoi has 24hr ATM's where you can withdraw cash on mastercard, visa and other cards in the cirrus/Plus networks.

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. US\$100 will make you a dong millionaire!! Bring a small calculator with you.

### 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 to go into a kitty to be distributed to the local team at the end of the trip. Usually we do this on the last night at the celebration dinner.

### 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. 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.

### Emergency Contact

In the case of a genuine crisis or emergency, please call RAW Challenges Melbourne Office. Tel: +61 3 9597 0798 / 9597 0210. Outside of office hours please call 0413 703 632

### Your Fellow Cyclists

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.

### 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.

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.

### 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.

### What To Take

You should pack as lightly as possible. Your main luggage will be transported for you on all cycling days in the support vehicle. You will only need a day pack to carry your personal items when cycling. You are expected to carry your own luggage on & off the bus and to your hotel room (which could be located on the 4th or 5th floor). While you will not be required to walk long distances with your luggage we recommend keeping the weight under 12kg.

**Suitcases are not recommended.**

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 as you may be required to negotiate steps.

Any portage fees you may incur is your responsibility.

## Checklist of what to bring:

### 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 room mate snores!)
- Plastic bags for wet or dirty clothing
- 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
- 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 / small day pack for carrying items when cycling
- Cycling gloves

### Optional:

- Multi-tool (allen keys) for minor adjustments to your bike
- 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 homepage to see photo of bikes used and how to customise it.

#### **Other Suggestions:**

- Camera
- 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. 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 and respect our hosts.**

#### **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.

A thorough cycling safety briefing will be given prior to setting off about the bikes (changing gears, brakes etc), Vietnam road rules, cycling on the right hand side of the road, cycling in a group and general hazards to look out for.

### Dehydration

Dehydration is the biggest risk when undertaking a physical challenge such as trekking 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). 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 a 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 diarrhoea ('gastro').

### RAW Challenges Newsletter

We have a free email newsletter full of travellers 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 travellers album for each of our destinations on our website. We need resolution of around 1MB. Please could you send a CD to: RAW Challenges Photo album, 2/24 Bay Road, Sandringham, VIC 3191.

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](mailto:adventure@rawtravel.com). And of course email us if you have any questions leading up to the event. **HAVE AN AMAZING ADVENTURE!**

*The information in this trip dossier 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 Challenges.*