



OCF Vietnam Cycling Challenge 2010

Pre trip dossier current for departures in 2010

Welcome to RAW Challenges... Come on a real adventure and explore off the beaten track into the fascinating region of NE Vietnam. After starting our trip in the bustling capital of Hanoi we head northwards for one of the best cycling adventures in Asia. Expect great mountain scenery, timeless villages and colourful hilltribes - but very few other tourists! Cycling NE Vietnam is a real challenge because of the mountainous terrain and remoteness but very rewarding. If you want adventure and challenge in your life this is it!

Itinerary

Day 1 Arrive in Hanoi (2nd Oct)

The group will be met at the airport and transferred to the hotel, just near the Old Quarter.

Day 2 Ride around Hanoi and countryside (3rd Oct)

An optional city orientation tour in the morning with the afternoon free to wonder and explore Hanoi in your own time.

Meals provided: Breakfast

Day 3 Ride around Hanoi and countryside (4th Oct)

An early start gets us out on the bikes and into the streets of Hanoi. As the markets are humming and people are exercising around Hoan Kiem Lake, we will ride to visit The Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum and the Temple of Literature. We will then cross the river for a ride around some of the farmlands surrounding Hanoi. The late afternoon is free for you to adjust to Vietnam.

Meals provided: Breakfast , lunch and Welcome dinner

Day 4 Transfer to Ha Giang (5th Oct)

After a morning walk of the Old Quarter, we will leave mid morning for our drive out of Hanoi and into the foothills of Ha Giang Province. We will reach the provincial capital in the late afternoon. This is a small town and gives us a taste of the sorts of places we will be spending out time in for the next week or so. Few travelers make their way to this province and even fewer to the areas that we will be traveling through.

Day 5 Cycle to Tam Son (6th Oct)

Today we begin the challenge. Shortly after leaving Ha Giang, we start climbing and continue an uphill ride through the day. We will climb over the dramatic Cong Troi Pass, we will drop into Tam Son, a very small town on the side of the mountains where we spend the night.

Meals included: Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Distance Cycled: Approximately 60km

Day 6 Cycle to Yen Minh (7th Oct)

We start the day with a fantastic descent into a lush valley. We then follow a small river along the valley and pass the ruins of a French position from the Indochina war. We then start climbing again to reach the top of Doan Kiet pass. We then descend into Yen Minh, which sits at the base of another sub-range of mountains bordering China.

Meals included: Breakfast, lunch and dinner
Distance cycled: 65km

Day 7 Cycle to Dong Van (8th Oct)

We enjoy some level ground as we leave town and then after our first rest stop, start climbing. Today's climbs are harder, but more spectacular, as we move into a higher altitude. We will climb through the black volcanic rock, where you will see various hill-tribes eeking out a living from this infertile ground. The colorful, traditional costumes of these people will help you to face the challenge of the mountains, and the views over these spectacular mountains and through the huge gorges will reward your efforts. Tonight we stay in the mountain town of Dong Van. At this point, we are less than 20km from the Chinese border.

Meals included: Breakfast, lunch & dinner
Distance cycled: 68km

Day 8 Cycle and drive to Ha Giang (9th Oct)

We set off through Chinese, border frontier country. We pass many houses of the hilltribes, constructed from compacted mud. We have some climbing to do, before we enjoy a big descent on our loop back to Yen Minh. From Yen Minh, we will drive back to Ha Giang where we spend the night.

Meals included: Breakfast, lunch and dinner
Distance cycled: 43km

Day 9 Cycle to Vinh Quang (10th Oct)

Today we start with an easy ride along a valley for about 50km, before tackling a climb and then a descent to reach the small town of Vinh Quang.

Meals included: Breakfast, lunch and dinner
Distance cycled: 90km

Day 10 Cycle then Jeeps to Bac Ha (11th Oct)

Today is a relatively easy ride with some rolling hills along a river towards Xemen. From here we meet our hilltribe, bushy mechanics and their Russian built jeeps who will take us over the dramatic range separating Xemen from our overnight home of Bac Ha. Bac Ha is becoming popular with day trippers from Sapa, who come to visit the once a week market. The people of this area are colorfully dressed and even on an ordinary day, there is plenty of interesting merchandise through town.

Meals included: Breakfast, lunch and dinner
Distance Cycled: 21km

Day 11 Cycle to Lao Cai & Overnight train (12th Oct)

We start with a 40km continuous downhill. Your legs will forget what it was like to have to pedal as you sweep down this wide road into the Lao Cai Valley. We then ride along fairly flat ground to reach Lao Cai town. Lao Cai is the border checkpoint town with China. It is also where we catch our overnight train to Hanoi. We will have a shower and dinner before boarding the sleeper train.

Meals included: Breakfast, lunch and dinner
Distance cycled: 60km

Day 12 Hanoi Free time (13th Oct)

We will arrive very early in the morning into Hanoi, so a nap might be a good idea before setting out to explore the city. Tonight we will celebrate our achievements!

Meals included: Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Day 13 Return to Australia (14th Oct)

The group will transfer to the airport for a flight back to Australia.
Meals included: Breakfast

Joining & Finishing Point Hotel

Jasper Hotel
42 Hang Cot Street
Hanoi
Vietnam
Phone: +84 4 39274 888

Joining Point Instructions

It is very easy to find your own way to the start hotel. Noi Bai airport is situated about 40km north of Hanoi. The most convenient way to get from the airport to the start hotel is by taxi. Metered taxi ranks are available outside the airport entrance. Go out of the customs hall and walk outside the airport where there is a table with a sign saying 'metered taxis'. There are two of them, Noi Bai taxi and Viet Thanh taxi. Both of them cost the same, US\$15 (approx. VND240,000) set price for a drive to your hotels in city centre.

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, overnight train & 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

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

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

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. 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 com-

pletely 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

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. 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.