

Vietnam experience, Vietnam



Your Charity Challenge ride takes place in Vietnam, a country filled with captivating natural beauty and tranquil village life. En-route, you will cover more than 450kms as you visit some of the most fascinating places the country has to offer.

Having started by exploring Hanoi and its stunning French colonial buildings, you will head down to Hué, dominated by majestic temples, ancient tombs, and the imperial citadel.

From Hué you will ride to Hoi An, a sixteenth century trading town and UNESCO World Heritage Site. After Hoi An you will cycle along quiet back roads to My Son, which was an imperial city during the Cham dynasty.

The ride continues along the coast via the Marble Mountains to Danang and on to Nha Trang with miles of prime beach. Finally, you will reach Ho Chi Minh City where you can celebrate your achievement.

Day 1: International Departure

Meet at London Heathrow Airport check-in desk for the overnight flight to Hanoi. Our airport rep will be there to assist you with the check-in and any last minute questions.

Day 2: Hanoi

Arrive at Hanoi Airport and transfer to your hotel to freshen up. You will then drive to Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum (the interior is only open to the public on Tues, Weds & Thurs mornings) to visit the final resting place of president Ho Chi Minh, his old residence and one pillar pagoda. The mausoleum was built on the edge of Ba Dinh Square, the place where Ho Chi Minh

delivered the Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Viet Nam to half a million of his countrymen in 1945, following the surrender of the Japanese. The angular grey granite edifice stands stern and alone against the skyline. The street and square are usually so abandoned that the whole scene is enormously stately, like a miniature version of Tiananmen Square. From the mausoleum, return in the direction of the Old Quarter for a one hour cycle tour to explore the vibrant street scene. Be sure to bring a camera! Hanoi became Vietnam's capital in 1010, and still has many preserved ancient architectural works including the One Pillar Pagoda (built in 1042) and the Temple of Literature (built in 1070). It has a lovely landscape of lakes, shaded boulevards, verdant public parks, colonial French houses and astounding modern skyscrapers. Hanoi's enchanting Old Quarter is rich with over a thousand years of history. If time permits you will carry out your bike fitting with a test a ride through Hanoi this afternoon (if not, you will do this tomorrow morning). Before dinner there will be a full trip briefing. Dinner and overnight in a hotel.

Day 3: Hanoi (35kms). Overnight on Train

If you wish, you can wake early to join the local Vietnamese & your guide in Tai Chi exercises around Hoan Kiem Lake. Choose to eat local breakfast of Pho Bo (beef noodle soup) in the town or return to the hotel for a continental breakfast. After breakfast depart the hotel early to cycle to the outskirts of Hanoi on a morning loop ride. Most of the ride will be along the Red River on a dyke path and gives a fascinating introduction into life outside the big capital. Return to the hotel to freshen up for lunch. The rest of the afternoon is free, as the bikes will be transferred to the station in preparation for their journey to Hué. Dinner will be early and then you will transfer to the station at 6pm for the overnight train to Hué - once the capital of the Nguyen Dynasty of Emperors from 1802-1945. Overnight on the train.



Day 4: Hué (45kms)

From the station, you will transfer to your hotel for check in, breakfast and freshen up. After preparing the bikes and topping up water, the route takes you into town and across the perfumed river to Hué's Imperial Citadel. Construction of the Hué royal city on the northern banks of the Huong (Perfume) River started in 1805 under the reign of King Gia Long and was completed in 1832 under the reign of King Minh Mang. Explore the Imperial Citadel on foot then ride out to the Mausoleums of Tu Duc (Tomb of Modesty) and Khai Dinh on part dirt tracks, part country lanes. You will be supported by motorbike on the dirt tracks. You will continue riding past relics and ruins to Ho Quyen amphitheatre built in 1830 by Emperor Minh Mang, where Elephants and tigers used to fight. The ride continues along country tracks taking in the lush countryside and unique Hué style architecture, to the beautiful Thien Mu Pagoda situated on the banks of the Perfume river. The biking is very much in contrast to the Delta flatlands around Hanoi. In the evening enjoy *unique Hué cuisine* at a local Hué restaurant. Overnight in hotel in Hué.

Day 5: Hue to Hoi An (100kms+)

Today provides a classic days cycling. After a short transfer beyond the city limits of Hué you will begin riding for 40kms along a picturesque, very narrow peninsular road from Thuan An beach to Vinh Loc. You will then hop on a local ferry to cross the Perfume River estuary before joining Highway 1 at the base of today's 3 hill climbs! After the first 2 moderate climbs of 2-3kms a piece, you will cruise down to the stunning Lang Co Beach for a rest/swim and lunch before tackling the final hill of the day – the Hai Van or Pass of the Ocean Clouds. Now that the new tunnel through the mountain is nearly completed the 11kms of uphill will be on a quiet section of road. The gradient is manageable and the views breathtaking! Time permitting; you will ride to Danang along a new coastal road. You will then transfer the rest of the way to Hoi An, a delightful old trading town and UNESCO World Heritage Site. This ancient town, 30kms south of Danang, lies on the banks of the Thu Bon River. Occupied by early western traders, it was one of the major trading centres of Southeast Asia in the 16th century. Hoi An has a distinct Chinese atmosphere with low, tile-roofed houses and narrow streets; the original structure of some of these streets still remains almost intact. All the houses were made of rare wood, decorated with lacquered boards and panels engraved with Chinese characters. Pillars were also carved with

ornamental designs. Overnight in small 3-star hotel with swimming pool built in traditional Hoi An style.

Day 6: Hoi An to My Son Cham Towers to Hoi An (60kms+ loop)

A challenging ride from the outskirts of Hoi An on a quiet back road to the famous Cham Towers of the UNESCO World Heritage Site, My Son Sanctuary. My Son, located 69kms southwest of Danang, was an imperial city during the Cham dynasty, between the 4th and 12th centuries. The Sanctuary is a large complex of religious relics that comprises of more than 70 architectural temples and towers. The ride is probably the most remote ride of the trip, with some very rough riding. You will transfer 27kms along Highway 1 then turn off and start riding on a narrow country road. The route to Que Son is along traffic free surfaced track through paddy fields. After Que Son there is a hill to climb of approx 4kms. The area is remote and completely unused to the presence of tourists. The road gets rocky as you approach the towers - undulating and steep in parts - along the Song Tranh River. For this rough section there will be motorbike support for approximately 12km. You will arrive tired but triumphant at these most wonderful towers and enjoy a picnic lunch before transfer back to Hoi An. Dinner tonight will be in a local restaurant in Hoi An. Overnight hotel.



Day 7: Hoi An to Danang to Nha Trang (30kms+)

After leisurely breakfast, there will be some free time before cycling back roads via the Marble Mountains to Danang for the 14.30 flight (1hr) to Nha Trang. Arriving in Nha Trang you will visit the SOS Childrens' Village and learn about the orphan's daily lives. From there drive to the hotel to check in. There may be time for a sunset stroll along the beachfront or quick massage before the fun cyclo ride to dinner. Nha Trang is flanked by nearly 10kms of prime beach where the water is warm year round. Today, Nha Trang ranks as a favourite honey moon destination for Vietnamese with great beaches, and good food. Fortunately it still retains its friendly small town atmosphere. Dinner is a delicious cook-your-own BBQ at a local restaurant. Overnight local hotel.

Day 8: Nha Trang - Dalat (100kms+)

After an early breakfast transfer part way along a busy section of Highway 1 to the Po Klong Garai Cham towers. Start riding from here along 40kms of flat road, after which it is up, up, up, all the way! The road is quiet and shady for the most part as you pedal steadily

upwards, past the roar of crickets and fluttering butterflies. You'll be grateful for the cooling air temperature as you climb. The ascent exceeds 1000ms, but it is possible to conquer all the climbs with a steady pace, determination and good use of gears! Since the turn of the century, Dalat has been the holiday spot for well-to-do Vietnamese and foreigners. It is the unofficial honeymoon mecca of Vietnam. Overnight in comfortable hotel. Sample local cuisine in a nearby restaurant.



Day 9: Ride in Dalat and towards Ho Chi Minh City (80kms+)

You will rise very early for a not-to-be-missed Dalat loop ride on quiet back roads in the shadow of Langbian Mountain, stopping en route to visit a flower farm, and enjoy great views of Dalat. Today, ride as far as time permits towards Saigon. It will be a fast ride – downhill all the way! You will then transfer (approx 5-6hrs) to arrive in Ho Chi Minh City in the early evening. Like many cities in Vietnam, Saigon did not escape the wrath of war. Since the beginning, Saigon has had quite a traumatic history. There are many citations to the birth of Saigon and the origin of its name. In the 15th century, the area was full of swamps, marshes and thick forests. By the early 17th century, a small township was formed. According to one theory, Saigon or Sai Con has its root in a Khmer word Prei Kor (Kapok Tree Forest). After the fall of South Vietnam to communism in 1975, the city and many of its inhabitants were in a state of chaos and turmoil. In 1976, the new government renamed the city Ho Chi Minh City and shut its door to the rest of the world. Although recognized world wide as Ho Chi Minh City, to the people of Vietnam, the city is still lovingly referred to as Saigon. Dinner in the town & overnight at a hotel in Ho Chi Minh City.

Day 10: Cu Chi Tunnels Ride and Free afternoon

Depart early and drive to Cu Chi Tunnels. Visit the amazing tunnel network, then cycle a final 25kms along country roads back towards Saigon. Load up and transfer back to Saigon with plenty of time to browse the central Ben Thanh market, visit the War Remnants Museum or take a cyclo ride around the city for an up close view of street life. Please ask your guide if you need help making any other arrangements for today. Celebratory farewell dinner and overnight in the hotel.

Day 11: Ho Chi Minh City

Time permitting there may be some time for some last minute shopping or exploration of the vibrant street life of the city. Transfer to Tan Son Nhat Airport for flight to the UK arriving the following day.

Day 12: Arrival in London

Arrive at Heathrow.

N.B. The itinerary is there as a guide and may change due to unusual weather patterns, the strength of the group and so on. We will do our very best to keep to the set itinerary, however we cannot be held responsible for any last minute changes that might occur. In all such circumstances, your challenge leader will have the final say.

Optional extension:

Phan Thiet and Mui Ne Beach

- Explore the stunning Mui Ne and Phan Thiet in your own time or enjoy a well deserved rest and relaxation on the beautiful beaches.

For cost and further information, please visit the Vietnam Experience challenge page of our website or click on "extensions" in your member's area

