

vietnam experience, q&a



how big is the group?

Each group is intended to be a minimum of 12 people in order to run and a maximum of approximately 25 people due to the wilderness environment in which the expedition is taking place.

what are the details of our international journey?

You will be flying with from London to Hanoi, and returning from Ho Chi Minh City Airport, to London. The flying time is approximately 14 hours. Your flight tickets will be issued to you upon departure at the airport.

what's the luggage allowance?

As no formal clothes are needed, luggage should be kept to the absolute minimum - details on what to pack are provided in your kit list. Your rucksack (suitcases are not appropriate) must not exceed 15kgs in weight. Each day when you begin to ride, your personal kit will be transported to the next hotel. In addition to this, have a day bag handy that can be kept accessible on the support vehicle, and for riding, you will need a bum-bag, camel-back or handlebar bag to transport snacks, camera and sunscreen.

what will the accommodation be like?

The hotels are all basic but clean and comfortable with air conditioning. You will be sharing in rooms of two or possibly three. If you are travelling with a friend or partner who you wish to share with, please let Charity Challenge know in advance.

will my valuables be safe?

While we will do everything to provide adequate safety for the group and security for your possessions, the general rule is that if you don't need it, don't bring it. This includes jewellery, necklaces, rings and even watches. Your passport and money should be kept on you at all times. You should take a photocopy of your passport, visa, and any vaccination certificates and leave a copy at home with a friend/relative in case of loss or damage to the originals.

what is the food and drink like?

Food in Vietnam is a delight. It is a blend of Thai and Chinese food and is always freshly cooked with plenty of vegetables. Food is usually prepared with a minimum of oil and served with ubiquitous fish sauce called *nuoc mam*. Typical Vietnamese dishes include *pho*, a type of rice noodle soup eaten for breakfast, *cha gio*, deep fried spring rolls and *goi ngo sen*, a delicious salad made with lotus stems, shrimps and peanuts. Saigon/Hanoi Beer are the local brews. Wines are very expensive unless you want to sample locally made rice wine – 'Roau' (pronounced zeeo). Please let Charity Challenge know prior to departure if you have any specific dietary requirements or allergies.

who will be leading the group?

We employ a number of first aid qualified biking leaders, all of whom speak fluent English. They will be ultimately responsible for the running of the itinerary and the safety of your group.

what is a typical day?

During the cycling days you will cycle for 4-6 hours. Your support vehicles will back up the group and will choose shady rest stops every 15–20kms. Here you will be able to re-energise with fruit, snacks and fill water bottles. At lunch you will re-group at a local restaurant or beauty spot for a picnic lunch. In the evening there is usually an hour or so free time before you meet to discuss the next day's adventure. Dinner follows the briefing.

what the bikes like?

The bikes are good quality lightweight Trek 4700 27speed Mountain bikes with Shimano Deore components, V Brakes and Rock Shock front suspension and 24spd Challenger Sport Mountain bikes. We can offer a range of frame sizes from 13" to 23.5". You will be asked to sign a waiver issued by our local ground handler on arrival in case of incident caused by yourselves. **Please indicate your height on your booking form so that we can book the correct size well in advance.**

how fit do I need to be?

Training and fitness is definitely required. It is important that you work specifically on your stamina, leg and joint strength, and balance in order to get as much out of the challenge as possible. Don't forget that the temperature and climate is different to the UK and that you will be exercising constantly for a number of days. Also see Fitness Training Advice notes.

what if I can't keep up?

The event is not run as a race and there is always a large discrepancy in people's cycling abilities. We allow for this. There will always be a staff member at the back of the group to ensure you are not left behind and can take things at your own pace. If we find somebody is unable to cycle at all, then we can transport him or her from one location to the next, as the support vehicle will only ever be 15kms behind.

what happens if I fall ill, can't keep up or there is an emergency?

It is policy that participants must wear a helmet. We can provide helmets in Vietnam but advise you to take your own for comfort reasons. Be aware that cycling can be dangerous and accidents can happen, you must be responsible for your own safety whilst riding. Throughout the expedition, back-up support will be close by, and we maintain phone contact with the back up team. If for any reason any injury should occur, or continuation is not possible, a relief vehicle will be made available. The relief vehicle will be a private air-conditioned bus, minibus or jeep that will support the riding throughout the tour.

The support bus is there for clients who need to rest, to carry the spare bike parts, and will often contain refreshments such as water, snacks and soft drinks to make riding more enjoyable. The support bus will follow at a discreet distance all the time. During transfer sections, the bikes will be carried in the bus where necessary. When riding off road on single track trails support will sometimes be by motorbike. The guide will carry water and the first aid kit with him/her until the trail joins the main track where the bus will be waiting.

what is included in the cost of the expedition?

Your international flights to and from Vietnam, all meals and drinking water unless otherwise stated in the itinerary, all transfers, all hotel accommodation, bikes, group first aid supplies, an English-speaking expedition leader and full local support team, a Charity Challenge T-Shirt, US\$20 to the local community project, and discount from Nomad Travellers Stores for personal equipment. We also make a contribution through Climate Care to offset the equivalent CO2 emissions of your international flight.

what is not included in the cost of the expedition?

The following items are not included in your expedition and will be at your own expense - tips for the local support team, activities not mentioned in the itinerary, visa, departure tax (approx USD\$12), personal spending money and travel to and from UK airports.

what shall I do about spending money?

You will not need large amounts of money during this trip and other than at the start and end of the trip, you may well be in the countryside away from any foreign exchanges or banks. We recommend that you take sufficient amount of cash in small denominations. Travellers' cheques or credit cards will be accepted only in major towns – Hanoi, Hoi An, Nha Trang and Saigon. Bring a small supply of US\$ cash in US\$20 denominations. Typically £200 is an average ball park figure. Bring more if you wish to buy souvenirs!

how much would you recommend for tips?

Tipping is personal and at your sole discretion. You should only tip if you feel that you have received good service. We recommend approx. USD\$9 per person per day and this should be given to the expedition leader who will distribute it evenly among the support team.

should I take gifts or clothes for the locals?

We advise against giving small gifts to children as it can encourage begging. However, if you have any small items or clothing that you would like to donate, your expedition leader will collect it from you at the end of the expedition and make sure that it is distributed where it is needed most.

what is the weather likely to be like?

Vietnam is generally hot and sunny. But it is a tropical climate and you may therefore experience tropical rain and very occasionally storms. During the wet season it may be very humid. Hanoi can be cool and cloudy from December to early March.

what do you do to protect the environment?

We are keeping to a relatively small group so that we limit the impact we have on the surrounding environment. We follow the local guidelines on cultural respect and environmental protection. We will also be donating US\$20 per participant towards the Nha Trang SOS Children's Village. Also see Responsible Tourism notes.

can you recommend any literature about the region?

- ? *Catfish and Mandala* by Andrew X. Pham. A cycle journey through Vietnam made by a young American Vietnamese man. Great read. Published by Picador Books
- ? *The Quiet American* Graham Greene's 1954 novel set during the last days of French rule
- ? *The Sorrow of War* – one of the finest books about the war written by Bao Ninh, who fought for North Vietnam.
- ? *The Rough Guide to Vietnam*, 4th edition.

english

Hello
Goodbye
Please
Thank you
How are you?
I'm fine
You're welcome
Excuse me/I'm sorry
I understand
I don't understand
Yes
No
How much?
Too expensive
What is your name?
One
Two
Three
Four
Five
Six
Seven
Eight
Nine
Ten

vietnamese

Xin Chao
Tam biet
Xin
Cam un
Co khue khong?
Toi Khue
Khong co gi
Xin loi
Toi hieu
Toi Khong hieu
Vang
Khong
Bao nhieu tien?
Dat qua!
Ten la gi?
Mot
Hai
Ba
Bon
Nam
Sau
Bay
Tam
Chin
Muoi

NB: The information provided above was correct at the time of going to print.