

Northern Indochina Trail

Bike tour in Laos & Vietnam | 13 days Luang Prabang to Hanoi | US\$1980
Luang Prabang - remote Northern Laos - Dien Bien Phu - Sapa - Hanoi

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General Introduction

A new border crossing is now open in the far reaches of Laos, so to make the most of this opportunity here is our newest tour. Cycle from beautiful Luang Prabang in Laos to the capital of Vietnam, travelling up rivers and over the mountains through a remote corner of the world.

We start in World Heritage Listed Luang Prabang with its French architecture, abundant temples and beautiful natural surrounds. Take a boat up the Mekong and Nam Ou rivers before cycling through the remote and densely forested areas of northern Laos meeting its charming inhabitants. Forge your way through the Vietnamese mountains, stopping to learn about the events of the Indochina War. Meet the minority hill tribes and learn about their history and their lives now. Finish the adventure with a relaxing cruise on Halong Bay to celebrate and reflect on our adventure. This is the Northern Indochina Trail and we can't wait to show it to you!

Itinerary

Days 1-2 | Luang PrabangWe start our adventure in the ancient city of Luang Prabang. Enjoy a warm up ride to the amazing Kuang Si waterfall where we can enjoy a swim in fresh, aqua colored water and enjoy the town's many temples, shops, markets and great restaurants.

Day 3 | Nong KhiawToday we begin our epic journey towards Hanoi with a ride alongside the Mekong and Nam Ou rivers before boating to our destination for the night at Nong Khiaw, which sits at a dramatic location between mountains and river.

Days 4-9 | Cycle to Dien Bien PhuThree days of riding takes us deep into a remote corner of Laos before crossing at the newest international border crossing and onto the Vietnam town of Dien Bien Phu. Here we will take a rest day so you can relax by the pool or explore this important town where the Vietnamese achieved a decisive victory over the French in their battle against colonial rule.

Days 10-11 | Cycle to SapaIt's mountain riding for the next three days as we climb and descend over dramatic mountain scenery. We finish the ride with a 27Kilometer ascent into the popular town of Sapa. Here we will relax in a comfortable hotel and take in the relaxed vibe of this mountain town.

Days 12-13 | HanoiSapa is renowned for its trekking, but there it's a fair bet that you will find the markets, the restaurants and the view from the verandah a little more appealing after your epic bike ride. After a free day to relax,

we will board the sleeper train to Hanoi. We arrive in the early hours of the morning and check into some day rooms for a shower. The tour concludes today.

Facts and Information

Dates

2010 May 30 - 2010 Jun 11

2010 Aug 08 - 2010 Aug 20

2010 Dec 15 - 2010 Dec 27

2011 Jun 05 - 2011 Jun 17

Bike Tour Map

Stylefully supported cycling

Tour LeaderThis tour will be lead by Adam Platt-Hepworth who lives in Bangkok and spend his days leading bike groups around Southeast Asia - much better than his old office job!

Inclusionssupport vehicle, local guide, tour leader, most meals, entry fees, boat trip in Laos

Group Sizeminimum 3, maximum 12

Accommodation3 nights comfortable hotel, 8 nights guesthouse, 1 night train

Meals Included10 breakfasts, 9 lunches, 9 dinners

Days Cycling8

Kilometres Cycledapprox 700km

Difficultydifficult

Cycling Conditions

Roads in Lao are sealed and generally in good shape, although some sections may have deteriorated. Potholes and sections of dirt are common. In Vietnam, we spend most of our time on well made, sealed roads. There are currently some construction zones though, so there may be some stretches of dirt riding.

Detailed Cycling Information

Lao is sparsely populated, naturally spectacular and welcoming country where the people are friendly and relaxed. With the exception of the Colonial French influence, Lao people still enjoy a traditional lifestyle that is only now showing increased signs of external influence.

The northern landscape is mountainous with green jungle and forest, broken occasionally by rivers and springs.

Vietnam is known for its vibrant culture, involved history, village life and is a great traveling experience. And, of course, cycling is the best way to explore this country dominated by two wheels. Our route sees us forge our way from one French Colonial City to another. Luang Prabang, now Heritage listed with its beautiful architecture and temples to Hanoi with its dense population, and culture rich streets. The land in between is mountainous and remote. Where the minority groups of both countries eek out a living. The mountain climbs will be worth the view and the downhill!

Itinerary

Day 1 | Luang Prabang

Today we meet in the afternoon at our accommodation in Luang Prabang and hit the town for some tasty local cuisine. (D)

Day 2 | Luang Prabang | 60km

Today we set off on a scenic ride of 60km return to the amazing Kuang Sii waterfall where we can enjoy a swim in fresh, aqua colored water. We can visit Phet the tiger who resides in her shelter here and also the Asiatic Black Bears who are housed in the Free The Bears shelter. (B,L,D)

Day 3 | Cycle to Nong Khiaw | 75km

Today we begin our epic journey towards Hanoi with an undulating ride along the Mekong and Nam Ou Rivers with the surrounded mountains, often shrouded in fog. We will board a small boat to reach our destination of Nong Khiaw, where we stay in riverside bungalows. (B,L,D)

Day 4 | Cycle to Uudom Xai | 108km

After a start on rolling hills, we will hit the first significant climb of the trip.

This is hill-tribe country where we will see many Hmong and Khmu villages. The climb is worth the great views and the descent down into Oudom Xai which sits in a valley surrounded by dramatic mountains.

(B L D)

Day 5 | Cycle to Muang Khua | 95 km

An easier ride today, following a small river down to the town of Muang Khua takes us to our last night in a Lao town before hitting Vietnam. Muang Khua is a very small town on the Nam Ou river where electricity is not a full time luxury. A meal overlooking the river will give us time to ponder the next leg of our journey. (B,L,D)

Day 6 | Cycle to Dien Bien Phu | 80km

Today's road starts out in rough repair, but improves as the day goes on. We will say goodbye to Laos and meet our Vietnamese crew who will be with us through to Hanoi. Tonight we stay in Dien Bien Phu. (B,L,D)

Day 7 | Dien Bien Phu

Today is a rest day for you to learn about the historical importance of the battle at Dien Bien Phu where the Vietnamese communists achieved a decisive win over the French in their battle against imperial rule. The afternoon will allow plenty of time to relax by the pool and prepare yourself for the next part of our adventure.

(B)

Day 8 | Cycle to Lai Chau | 93km

Today we ride out of the basin that accommodates Dien Bien Phu and over a mountain pass into another valley to find our home for the night, the small town of Lai Chau. Lai Chau is situated in a valley that has been ear-marked for a hydro-electric project, causing the town to be demoted from provincial capital. It is a charming spot with a character filled guesthouse.

(B,L,D)

Day 9 | Cycle to Tum Duong | 92km

We continue into the remote and sparsely populated mountain areas and will experience mind-blowing views over the valleys. You will become more and more of a curiosity to the locals as they will have seen very few bike travelers in this area. Tonight, we are again in a small town with a basic hotel.

(B,L,D)

Day 10 | Cycle to Sapa | 80km

This is possibly the most stunning ride of the trip as we climb to Sapa and cross the pass that divides Vietnam's hottest and coldest provinces. The ascent is on a nicely made road, that snakes up to the top, past small waterfalls and skirting deep valleys.

A small descent takes us into town where we find our comfortable hotel. (B,L,D)

Day 11 | Sapa

It's time to rest and take in the relaxed vibe of Sapa. If your legs are up to it, there are some short treks, otherwise the markets, restaurants and the view of Mount Fansipan will more than suffice. In the evening we will board the overnight train to Hanoi. (B,D)

Day 12 | end

We arrive into Hanoi early morning. We will have some breakfast and then check into day rooms at our hotel to shower and prepare for the flight home or the next leg of your travels. You may wish to explore Halong Bay or head down one of South East Asia's most diverse coastlines to Saigon.

(B)

Tour Details

Style

Fully supported bicycle tour.

Inclusions

Entrances, local guide, tour leader, most meals, support vehicle.

Group Size

Minimum 3, maximum 12.

Food

Included meals: 10 breakfasts, 9 lunches, 9 dinners, plus water, fruit and biscuits on cycling days.
You should consider bring some of your favourite energy snacks and electrolyte powder for the cycling days.

Accommodation

3 nights comfortable hotel, 7 nights guesthouse, 1 night train
Arriving
in Luang Prabang
Upon your arrival at Luang Prabang International
Airport you
will need to make your own way to the starting point hotel.
The easiest way is to take a prepaid taxi which is \$6-8USD.
A
pre-arranged transfer is available for \$12USD (2 person) or
\$20 2-6 person.

Cycling Details

Cycling Days and Distance

8 days
- 700km

Difficulty

Difficult - this trip involves some sustained hill-climbing and long distances over 80km. Riders should have a good level of cycling fitness but feel free to hop in the support vehicle if any of the riding is too hard.

Cycling Conditions

Road conditions in Lao are good. Most roads are sealed with minimal traffic. There is generally a bit of road damage in places, consisting of potholes and short unsealed sections.

Road conditions in Vietnam are good in most places, with the exception of one day that is a road under construction, which can mean uneven dirt surface.

We will be on well made road for most of the Vietnamese part of the trip, this can mean some traffic. This will include trucks, buses, motorbikes, bicycles, pedestrians, children, dogs, chickens, and other fun things.

You will need to stay alert at all times.

Bikes

You will need to bring your own bike for this trip or rent one from us. The best bike for conditions in Laos and Vietnam would be a good working mountain or hybrid bike with 21 gears or more and hybrid tires to cope with the varying conditions. You should have your bike serviced by a professional bike mechanic before traveling to ensure that it is in good working order. While we do provide mechanical assistance and carry some spare parts during the trip you will need to bring spare parts (including tubes) for your bike as different bikes use different parts and we cannot guarantee that we will have a part to suit your bike.

Bike Hire - US\$130

If you don't have a bike or don't want to bring your own you can hire a bike from us for the entire trip. We provide well maintained imported mountain bikes in sizes 16"-22" and will be responsible for any maintenance required during the trip for these bikes. Please note, renters will be liable for any damage caused to rental bike which is a result of riding accidents. For added comfort you should consider bringing your own seat and pedals which we can easily fit to your rental bike.

Helmets

For safe cycling we highly recommend wearing a helmet whilst cycling on our trips.

We do have some helmets for use, however, for best fit you should bring your own.

Transporting your bike

Most international airlines consider bicycles as part of your regular luggage weight allowance, so you will need to pack light. The best way to transport a bicycle is to package it in a bike box. Most bicycle stores are happy to give away boxes for free. You will need to remove the front wheel (and sometimes the rear wheel), handle bars, pedals and seat post. Tape any loose parts to the bike frame and pack a few extras in the box such as your helmet. You can keep your box until the end of the trip to pack it for the trip home.

Support Vehicle

For the cycling days we will have the backup support of a small bus that will carry our luggage, snacks, water, and anybody not cycling.

You can use the support vehicle whenever you feel like no longer cycling.

Travel Details

Visas

Lao Visas are available in advance from a Lao embassy or on arrival in Luang Prabang. A standard 30 day, single entry Visa is available for a varying fee depending on your nationality. In Vietnam 30 day visas need to be obtained in advance from your embassy.

Make sure that you enter the correct dates for your visa as they are quite restrictive and need to be detailed properly.

Before you travel check your passport to ensure that there is room for a visa and entry/exit stamps (at least 3 pages) and that it has at least 6 months validation remaining.

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of participating in a cycling tour that you hold travel insurance for the duration of the trip. Insurance must include comprehensive medical and emergency evacuation. Your travel insurance details will be checked by your group leader on arrival at the starting point hotel.

Flights

International flights to the starting point and from the finish point are not included in the price of this tour. We can assist with the purchase of inter-Asia flights and provide advice if you are considering overland travel.

Money

The official currency of Lao is the Kip which should be used for most transaction. US dollars are also widely accepted, especially for larger transactions. There are no ATM's in Luang Prabang or anywhere that our ride takes us. For this reason, travelers cheques and cash, in US dollars are recommended. Other currencies can also be exchanged, but only in Luang Prabang. You will be able to make a cash advance from a credit card at the banks when they are open.

The official currency of Vietnam is the dong which should be used for most transactions. Vietnam now has a modern banking system, but the North-west area is a little behind in this respect. So it is a good idea to take US cash for use until we get to Sapa where there is an ATM. Travellers Cheques in USD can act as a good backup.

For current exchange rates visit:

www.xe.com

Packing

While we do have a support vehicle to carry your luggage during the cycling days, you will be required to carry your own luggage at times. Luggage will need to be loaded on and off buses and up and down stairs at hotels. For this reason we recommend that you pack as lightly as possible in a backpack.

You should consider bringing the following items:

Please note if traveling to Laos in December/January it can get quite cold at night and in the early morning.

You should bring a wind breaker and cold weather clothing.

Personal

Backpack

Long trousers

Shorts

Shirts

Hat

Sandals/Light Shoes

Swimming Costume

Sunglasses

Light Rain Coat

Toiletries

Small Towel

Sunscreen

First Aid Kit

Mosquito Repellent

Camera and Film/Memory

Alarm Clock

Travel

Passport with 6 months validity and spare pages

Passport photo

Travel insurance details

Flight tickets

Money - cash/credit cards/travellers cheques

Phrase book

Bicycle

Bicycle

if renting - your own seat & pedals (optional)

Something to carry your
personal belongings in while
cycling, eg. day pack, bum
Bag, handlebar bag

Helmet

Cycling gloves

Bicycle water bottle

Bike shorts with something to
put on over the top while
off the bike

Costs

We recommend that you allow approximately US\$10 for food and general living costs per day. Shopping money should be considered extra to this amount. It is customary to tip the guides and drivers in Laos. You should allow approximately US\$20 for tips. Note: this is a guide only, feel free to tip more or less (or nothing) depending on your satisfaction.

Electricity

Laos and Vietnam work on a 220 volt system and uses two flat pin plugs which is standard in South East Asia. You can easily buy an adapter for much cheaper than in your home country.

Plugs look like this: | |

Health

There are no specific health requirements for travelling in Laos and Vietnam, however, we recommend that you visit a travel medicine doctor before travelling. You should carry a well stocked first aid kit with you when you travel. The Group Leaders are first aid trained, however, they are not permitted to distribute any medications.

Climate

Most of North Lao and Vietnam are just above the tropical areas, so they essentially have four seasons. It can be quite cold in the winter months (7-15 degrees Celsius) and quite hot in the summer months (anything up to 32 degrees Celsius).

Booking Form

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