

Laos & Vietnam

Northern Indochina Trail

10 days Hanoi to Luang Prabang

As the original path between these two countries has now become a giant construction zone, we have moved to the next frontier. Starting in a bustling former French colonial city and finishing in a much quieter, world heritage listed one, we traverse one of the most remote corridors of the former Northern Indochina.

We meet the many hill tribes who inhabit the region and get a taste of their lifestyle, we visit the hide-out of the Pathet Lao during the war that consumed much of this region in the sixties and seventies, and we pass through some absolutely stunning scenery, with limestone karst mountains, forests and picturesque rivers all coming together to make this an unforgettable ride.

To top it off, it's not just a bike ride. We will also kayak down the Nam Ou River and have the chance for some first rate village trekking along the way.



Itinerary

Day 1 | Hanoi

The group will be arriving throughout the day. Our hotel is set just a short distance from the vibrant old quarter in Hanoi, so a good starting point to stretch the flight weary legs. In the evening we will meet up for a group briefing on the adventure ahead and our first meal together. (D)

Day 2 | Hanoi | 25km

After a morning walk to see the buzz of activity taking place around the city, we drive to the far side of the Red River to take a ride through the countryside. We ride along the dykes that partly formed the defence strategy of Hanoi, but also protects from flooding. Most of the families in this area have lived in the same houses for generations. We enjoy a traditional lunch and then drive back to the city where we spend one more night. (BL)

Day 3 | Mai Chau | 40km

This morning we make an early start by car and head into the hills west of Hanoi. We pass through Hoa Binh and onto Mai Chau. Mai Chau is set in a picturesque valley with towering hills around it. Here, only 145 meters above sea level live the ethnic tribe of the White Tai. We take an afternoon ride of the valley and will see rice cultivation in action as well as hand made bricks being fired in cottage kilns and farmers hard at work tending to their crops and livestock. We finish the ride at the Mai Chau Lodge where we enjoy a comfortable bed to prepare us for the challenging ride tomorrow. (BL)

Day 4 | Moc Chau | 95km

We start out on the bike today and start to climb our way out of the valley. We are on a well made road today and we pass through some industrious small towns as we enter the more remote regions of the north-west. We have a couple of nice descents as we near our destination for the afternoon, Moc Chau, a small town of little repute and a perfect place to enjoy some local interaction and real Vietnamese food. (BLD)

Day 5 | Sam Neua, Laos | 70km

After a hearty local breakfast we hit the road in the direction of Laos. We arrive at the border in the late morning and after clearing immigration we meet our Lao support crew who will have a picnic lunch waiting for us. In the afternoon, we push on for a few more hours before boarding our comfortable support vehicle and driving into the next town, Sam Neua. Lao is a small country with small towns and a small population. The persistent din of Vietnam will have faded by now and you will be left with only the roosters to wake you the next morning. (BLD)

Day 6 | Vieng Thong | Vieng Xai Caves

Today we drive to the Vieng Xai Caves. These huge caves were home to around twenty thousand Pathet Lao communist fighters during the secret war of Laos. This war, termed secret because the US was not supposed to be engaged in combat in neutral Laos, was all part of the larger geo-political events and changes of the sixties and seventies. While the communist forces were being bombarded from the air by the CIA funded Hmong Army, they used these caves as a refuge, complete with hospital, school and underground villages. In the afternoon, we will drive onto our next stop Vieng Thong. (BLD)

Day 7 | Nong Khiaw | 90km

Today, after a short drive, we have a challenging ride ahead of us as we ascend and descend numerous times. The scenery of limestone karst mountains and forests, punctuated by small rivers



and villages will be the reward for meeting this challenge. We arrive into the lovely Nong Khiaw in the late afternoon and can relax in a riverside guesthouse with a stunning view and a cool drink. (BLD)

Day 8 | Nong Khiaw | Rest day or trek Muang Ngoai

Today is a day off the bikes. For those who would like to relax with a book by the river, the day is yours to do so. If you crave more action, then you can board a boat and travel up-stream to Muang Ngoi, a small village accessible only by river. Here you can trek into the forest and pass through some of the most remote villages you can imagine. Mentioned by many as the highlight of their travels in Northern Laos, this is an activity that comes highly recommended.

Day 9 | Luang Prabang | Kayaking the Nam Ou

After so much exercise for the legs, today our upper bodies see some action, although, fairly gentle action. We kayak down along the Nam Ou River with its densely forested banks. Along the way children playing in the water will be surprised to see you and will yell out a warm Lao welcome. The river has some small rapids but anyone with basic skills in this area will be able to participate. We will come ashore late morning and find our lunch prepared before driving into Luang Prabang, world Heritage listed city, set on the banks of the Mekong River. This marks the end of our adventure. We will have a meal to celebrate the achievement of the ride. (BLD)

Day 10 | Finish

The tour concludes today. If you haven't had enough cycling, then join our Lao Lao tour and pedal your way to the Lao capital, Vientiane. (B)

Tour Details

Style

Fully supported cycling tour

Inclusions

English speaking tour leader/Guide, bike mechanic, air-conditioned support vehicle, accommodation on a twin/share basis, most meals, entrance fees, kayaking.

Group Size

Minimum 2, maximum 14.

Accommodation

5 nights comfortable hotel, 4 nights guesthouse (all rooms have private bathroom).

Single Room

On Grasshopper Adventures tours single travellers do not have to pay any extra to join our trips - we will match you up with another same sex, single traveller. However, should you wish to choose to take a single room we are happy to book rooms for you for an extra charge. This single supplement is completely voluntary and only applies to hotel accommodation, on overnight train trips there are no single rooms available. We should point out that on occasion single rooms may not be available and in these instances you may need to share for a night or two - we will refund part of your single supplement in these cases.

Extra accommodation

We can book additional accommodation before or after the tour in Yangon at competitive rates. Please book extra nights when you book your tour.

Arrival Details

Meeting Point - this trip will begin at The Imperial Hanoi Hotel.



Address: No 44 Hang Hanh Str., Hoan Kiem Dist., Hanoi, Vietnam
Tel:(84-4) 43933 5555 Fax:(84-4) 43938 1315

Additional nights at this hotel are available for \$85 (single room) or \$95 for a twin/double room. These rates include breakfast and apply to the deluxe room category.

If arriving into Noi Bai International Airport, Hanoi, then you can find Airport Taxis available upon exiting the baggage collection area. These taxis are stationed at a rank with a security guard. Costs are approximately \$12 for a small car or \$16 for a larger 7 seat car. Do not accept cars from other areas around the airport as these can charge unfair rates.

Airport pickups can be arranged at a cost of \$35 per car for up to three people or \$50 for four to eight people. Should you require this, please advise us when you book your place on the tour.

Food

Included meals: 9 breakfasts, 8 lunches, 6 dinners, plus cold water, fruit and biscuits on cycling days. You should consider bringing some of your favourite energy snacks and electrolyte powder for the cycling days.

Cycling Days & Distance

5 days - 320km

Difficulty

Moderate to difficult - This trip involves riding on sealed roads mostly. There are no ride days in excess of 100km on this tour, but there are a number of days spent riding on sustained and continual hills. Most hills, while sustained in length are not overly steep as they have been designed for older vehicles. Anyone with a reasonable level of fitness and some pre-trip training should consider this ride.

Cycling Conditions

90% sealed roads, 10% dirt roads.

Most of the roads are in quite good condition. In Vietnam there is a little more traffic on the road than in Laos, but most are commercial vehicles and display a good level of courtesy. Care must be taken with all those unexpected surprises like chickens, children and dogs running out in front of you. Stay alert.

Bikes

You can bring your own bike for this trip. The best bike for conditions on this ride would be a good working mountain or hybrid bike with 21 gears or more and hybrid tyres to cope with the varying conditions. You should have your bike serviced by a professional bike mechanic before travelling 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

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 Trek 4400 or Merida Matts 40 mountain bikes. These come with hybrid tires for touring and come in various sizes. We will be responsible for any maintenance required during the trip for these bikes. All bikes are fitted with one bottle cage. Pannier racks are not supplied. For added comfort you may consider bringing your own seat and pedals which we can easily fit to your rental bike. Please note, renters will be liable for any damage caused to rental bike which is a result of riding accidents.

Bike rental for this trip is \$145. The performance of our bikes are guaranteed. If we cannot repair a bike to proper working order or replace it inside one day, you will be refunded the bike hire price.

Helmets

For safe cycling helmets are compulsory. If you don't want to bring your own, we can supply a quality



helmet at a cost of \$20. Please give advance notice on this so we can arrange it in time.

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 Vehicles

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

One month single entry visas can be obtained in advance from your nearest Vietnam Embassy. Costs vary on location.

We can arrange Visa on arrival (airports only) provided we have three weeks notice. The cost for this service is \$55.

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of participating in a Grasshopper Adventure 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. All domestic flights as per itinerary are included.

Money

The official currency of Vietnam is the Dong (VND). Money change booths are scattered around Hanoi as are banks. Hotel also change currency. You can easily shop around for the best rate.

The official currency of Laos is the Kip (LAK). There will be places to change money in Sam Neua on our first night in Laos. USD notes usually get the best rate, although any surplus VND can also be exchanged here.

ATM machines are also widely spread in Hanoi, but after leaving Hanoi you may not see another one until Luang Prabang. Credit cards are only accepted by the Hanoi, Mai Chau and Luang Prabang Hotels.

Costs

We recommend that you allow approximately US\$20 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 Asia. You should allow approximately US\$40 for tips. Note: this is a guide only, feel free to tip more or less (or nothing) depending on your satisfaction.

Health

There are no specific health requirements for travelling in Vietnam or Laos, 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. All Grasshopper Adventures Group Leaders are first aid trained, however, they are not permitted to distribute any medications.



Climate

The climate in this region varies throughout the year. From March to late May it can be very hot and dry (16 to 32 degrees celcius). From June to late October, warm and humid (16 to 32 degrees celcius). From November through to February temperatures can get quite low (8 to 22 degrees celcius).

Electricity

Both countries work on a 220 volt system and uses American/Asian 2 flat pin plugs. For more on plug types visit the [World Electric Guide](#). You can easily buy an adapter in Hanoi for much cheaper than in your home country.

Packing

You should consider bringing the following items:

<p>Personal Items</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Backpack or small sized wheelie bag (some of the guesthouses we have do not have lifts so you may need to carry your luggage up some flights of stairs)• Long trousers• Shorts• Shirts• Hat• Sandals/light shoes• Swimming costume• Sunglasses• Light rain jacket• Toiletries• Small towel• Sunscreen• First Aid Kit• Mosquito repellent• Camera• Alarm Clock	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Passport with 6 months validity and spare pages• Passport photo• Travel insurance details• Flight tickets• Money - cash/credit cards/travellers cheques• Phrase book <p>Cycling Gear</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bicycle• <i>if renting</i> - 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
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Positive Impact

An integral part of traveling is to have a positive impact on the country that you are visiting. On this trip there are a number of things you can do to have a positive impact on the communities that we visit.

Dress

Laos and to a lesser extent Vietnam are still quite conservative countries. In rural areas and temples overly revealing clothing is considered offensive. You should make an effort to dress more conservatively in these situations. Walking around a village in bike shorts is not appropriate so if you wish to cycle in just bike shorts you should have something with you on the bike to put on over the top such as long loose shorts or a skirt/sarong. A good solution to this is 'shy shorts' which combine cycling shorts with loose long shorts over the top. When visiting temples shorts are acceptable providing they cover the knee. Sleeveless tops are not acceptable in temples.

Phrase Book

A highly memorable part of your travels will be the local people that you meet. In the tourist areas some people will speak English but away from these areas it is great to learn a few words of Vietnamese and Lao. We will teach you some of the basics but if you want to really interact we



recommend bringing a phrase book.

Donations

Often when coming on trips overseas people like to bring items such as sweets, pens and books for children or old clothing for families. While this is a fantastic idea, if distributed in the wrong way it can actually create more problems. Giving items away to local people can create an expectation that a visiting foreigner equals free give away's. In some communities in Asia this has created whole villages where the only interaction is the locals asking for things. If you would like to donate anything to the communities that we visit we suggest that you give the items to Grasshopper Adventures which we will then pass on to development organisations, schools or whole communities. In this way items are distributed by those working in the communities who understand better the local needs.

Poverty

There is some obvious poverty in this region and in general a much lower standard of living in a developed world sense. You may come across beggars If you choose to give something to a beggar you must bear in mind the value of money in the country you are visiting. Many beggars can earn more than those who work unskilled jobs.

Important

All information in these tour notes is researched with care and provided in good faith. The information subject to change, and does not form part of the contract between the client and Grasshopper Adventures.

