



## TOUR PROSPECTUS

This prospectus sets out the contents of the tour and together with the Booking Conditions and Booking Form is the basis of our contract with you.

# ***Vietnam – The Far North*** ***24 March – 10 April 2011*** ***Tour 1073***

We are excited to offer this new adventure tour in the far north of Vietnam.

Starting in Hanoi, the road winds into the remote northern provinces that extend to the Chinese border. This area contains some of Vietnam's most spectacular mountain scenery and is populated by the greatest concentration of ethnic tribal groups in Asia.

We'll stay in Ba Be National Park, with its emerald lakes and waterfalls and surrounded by lofty mountains. Passing through superb scenery of limestone karstic rock formations, gorges and rice paddies, the route continues north to the Chinese border. We'll cross several high passes before reaching Bac Ha in time for the colourful Sunday market and the opportunity to rub shoulders with the greatest concentration of ethnic hill tribes in Asia. Next stop is Sa Pa town and market, a great place to shop for local souvenirs and a photographer's paradise. We will leave Sa Pa via Tram Ton Pass at 1900 metres, the highest pass in Vietnam, before returning to Hanoi on the overnight train before going on to world heritage Ha Long Bay, where we will cruise on a luxury junk amidst the surreal beauty of the limestone islands. The last night is spent in Hanoi with time to explore the old town and to visit Ho Chi Minh's mausoleum.



### **Itinerary**

Thurs 24 Mar	Fly from London Heathrow on Thai Air flight TG911 to Bangkok, departing at 1150.
Fri 25 Mar	Arrive in Bangkok at 0610. Onward flight TG682 to Hanoi, departing at 0750. Arrive at 0935. Transfer to hotel. Assemble bikes. Evening at leisure. Stay 1 night
Sat 26 Mar	Vehicle transfer and short cycle ride to Ba Be National Park. Stay 1 night.
Sun 27 Mar	Morning boat cruise then cycle to Bac Me. Stay 1 night.
Mon 28 Mar	Cycle to Dong Van. Stay 1 night.
Tues 29 Mar	Cycle to Yen Minh. Stay 1 night.
Wed 30 Mar	Cycle to Ha Giang. Stay 1 night.
Thurs 31 Mar	Cycle to Nam An Village Eco-site. Stay 1 night.
Fri 1 Apr	Cycle to Hoang Su Phi. Stay 1 night.
Sat 2 Apr	Cycle to Bac Ha. Stay 2 nights.
Sun 3 Apr	Day at leisure in Bac Ha to visit Sunday tribal market.
Mon 4 Apr	River trip and cycle to Sapa. Stay 1 night.
Tues 5 Apr	Cycle to Than Uyen via Tram Ton pass, the highest pass in Vietnam. Stay 1 night.
Wed 6 Apr	Part cycle, part vehicle transfer to Lao Cai where we board the overnight train to Hanoi.
Thurs 7 Apr	Arrive Hanoi early morning. Transfer to Ha Long Bay. Afternoon cruise. Overnight on luxury junk.
Fri 8 Apr	Morning cruise before returning by road to Hanoi. Pack bikes for journey home. Stay 1 night.
Sat 9 Apr	Time to explore Vietnam's vibrant capital, Hanoi. Visit old quarter and Ho Chi Minh mausoleum. Afternoon transfer to Hanoi airport for Thai Air flight TG565 to Bangkok, departing at 2025. Arrive Bangkok 2215.
Sun 10 Apr	Onward flight TG910 to London Heathrow, departing at 0110. Arrive at 0715. Tour ends.
Mileage	60 - 110 kilometers per day

### Luggage carrying

Support vehicles for the transfer of the group, luggage and cycles will accompany the group on all moving on days. Coach transfers will be provided as per the itinerary. There may be other short transfers due to distance/terrain which are not shown in itinerary.

### Accommodation and meals

Accommodation will be in 2 or 3 star guesthouses/hotels, with en-suite facilities. Rooms are based on two people sharing. All meals are provided apart from lunches on non-cycling days. Most evening meals will be taken at hotels or local restaurants. Vegetarian food is available.

### Price - £1850

The price is based on a minimum number of 16 participants taking part in the tour and is calculated at a rate of 1.50 US Dollars to £1 Sterling (based on exchange rates published on [www.x-rates.com](http://www.x-rates.com) on 10 May 2010; please note Booking Conditions, clause 4). If there are insufficient bookings by the closing date of 13 January 2011 we will contact you and return all monies paid, though in certain circumstances the tour may still run at below minimum numbers but at the same price.

### Price includes:

- Flights London-Bangkok and Bangkok-Hanoi, Hanoi-Bangkok and Bangkok-London
- Coach transfers between Hanoi airport and hotel, from Hanoi to Ha Long Bay and return. Other transfers as per itinerary
- Vehicle to transfer luggage and cycles as necessary
- 13 nights hotels, breakfast and evening meals, sharing rooms
- 1 night overnight sleeper train from Lao Cai to Hanoi
- 1 night luxury junk on Ha Long Bay, lunch, evening meal and breakfast
- Light lunch and morning and afternoon refreshments on cycling days
- The services of a local English-speaking guide
- CTC Cycling Holidays costs

### Price does not include:

- Meals in transit
- Drinks with evening meals
- Lunches and daytime refreshments on non-cycling days
- Any other personal expenses
- Travel Insurance
- Vietnam visa cost – budget £30
- Entry fees to any attractions – budget £10
- Gratuities for support crews/Tips in restaurants and hotels
- Any other personal expenses
- Travel Insurance

### Payment schedule

A deposit of £200 per person must accompany the Booking Form and an interim payment of £300 per person is due by 30 September 2010. The final balance of £1350 per person is to be paid ten weeks prior to departure, by 13 January 2011. Cheques should be made payable to **CTC Tours** or complete the credit/debit card slip in the booking pack.

### Cancellations

Should you be forced to cancel your booking for any reason you must notify us in writing. Cancellation charges are as follows:

Written notice received:	Cancellation charge:
Before 30 September 2010	Deposit (£200)
30 September 2010 through to 12 January 2011	27% (£500)
13 January 2011 through to departure	100% (£1850)

### To make a booking

Complete, sign and return the Booking Form together with your deposit and the relevant part of the Travel Insurance Declaration Form **directly to the leader** (address on Booking Form).

### Passports, Visas and Health

A visa is required for Vietnam. Information on how this can be obtained will be provided by the leader.

There are no compulsory vaccinations for EU residents although it is strongly recommended that you are vaccinated against: Typhoid; Hepatitis A and B. Tetanus and polio vaccinations should also be up to date at the time of travel. You should contact your doctor at least 3 months prior to travel to obtain these vaccinations and the latest advice to travellers.

### Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking that you are adequately insured for this tour. Whether you already hold a policy or will be taking out a new one, the cover it offers must be comparable to that stated in clause 8 of the Booking Conditions, and you must complete the enclosed Insurance Declaration Form and return it with your Booking Form. CTC Cycling Holidays & Tours Ltd can accept no responsibility for any costs you may incur due to insufficient insurance cover.

## LEADER'S INFORMATION SHEET

The information below is given by the tour leader to help enquirers decide if the tour is suitable for them.

## **Vietnam – The Far North** **24 March – 10 April 2011** **Tour 1073**

### **The area covered by the Tour**

An adventurous moving on tour with vehicle support on a route new for 2011 through the far north of Vietnam. Undoubtedly the best area to cycle in the country as the roads see virtually no tourists and avoid Vietnam's notorious highways.

After exploring vibrant Hanoi, we will take a vehicle transfer to Ba Be National Park with its breathtaking scenery of towering limestone mountains, forests, waterfalls and lakes. After a short boat ride, our route winds north through the mountains to Bac Me and on to Meo Vac. Between Meo Vac and Dong Van, close to the Chinese border, is reputedly one of the best road trips in Vietnam. The road has been cut into the side of the rock face. Far below is the Nho Que River and towering above, the rock face of the mighty gorge.



Beyond Dong Van we will cycle to the Lung Cu commune, the northernmost point in Vietnam, before continuing through limestone peaks and perpendicular rock walls to Yen Minh.

Between Yen Minh and Ha Giang is Quan Ba pass. Once over the pass, we descend through amazing rice paddies to Ha Giang.

Our next ride is more leisurely and we should reach our overnight stay at the Nam An Village Eco site with plenty of free time for swimming and/or boating on the emerald blue water of the lake and to visit the village of the Red Zao nearby.

Next day is more challenging with long climbs through the Thong Nguyen and Nam Dich communes.

The road to Bac Ha is new, follows the Chay River, and has been built on the former trail of the Flower H'Mong tribe. Bac Ha has an interesting Sunday market. We'll take a day off the bikes to explore the market which is frequented by colourful Tay, Nung, Dao, Flower H'Mong, Giay and Phu La hill-tribes.

A mixture of cycling and boating will take us to Sa Pa, established as a hill station by the French. Mountains surround the town. The setting is beautiful, tourism is booming. There's a great choice of restaurants and it's a good place to shop for tribal souvenirs.

15kms of climbing from Sa Pa will take us to the top of the Tram Ton Pass at 1900 metres, the highest pass in Vietnam. The downhill ride to the junction at Bhin Lu is fantastic. After several hard climbs along the Hoang Lien Son mountain range we'll descend to Than Uyen.

Our final ride from Than Uyen to Van Ban will take us through more stunning scenery before loading our bikes onto the support vehicles and continuing on to Lao Cai. We'll have dinner here before boarding the overnight train to Hanoi (4 per compartment). From Hanoi, we will transfer by coach to Halong Bay where we'll discover the supernatural beauty of the limestone islands whilst cruising and over-nighting on a luxury junk. With time to visit Cua Van floating village, trekking or swimming at Soi Sim Island, this will be the perfect wind-down after a challenging but fantastic bike ride.

On the last day of the tour there will be time to explore Hanoi's old town or to visit Ho Chi Minh's mausoleum before transferring to the airport for the journey home.

### **Rides and rest days**

The riding will be challenging at times as the distances are between 60-100kms most days and the terrain is hilly and mountainous in places. Most of the route is paved but there are some unmade sections. This tour is best suited to experienced adventure cyclists who can competently cope with the occasional unmade sections and the daily distances. You will be free to ride at your own pace, allowing you to interact with the local population and enjoy the magnificent scenery. There will be vehicle support on all cycling days.

There will be one rest day at Bac Ha, which we have timed to coincide with market day. Early Sunday mornings, villagers from various ethnic communities gather to sell their products and livestock at the market, which then transforms into what may well be one of the most colourful markets in Vietnam. Many people arrive on foot or ponies. The Flower H'Mong women are extremely colourful, with their gorgeous attire in vibrant colours, layers of dresses and underskirts of printed and embroidered fabrics, heads covered with interesting shaped and folded scarves. A photographer's paradise.

After experiencing the overnight sleeper train from Lao Cai to Hanoi, we'll transfer to Ha Long Bay for more r and r, cruising through the spectacular seascape of limestone pillars on board a luxury junk

### **Accommodation / Meals**

The guesthouses/hotels we use are reasonable, generally equivalent to our 2-3\* with private facilities, flush toilets and showers. There will be one night on a luxury junk, and one night on the overnight sleeper train from Lao Cai to Hanoi (4 persons per carriage). Breakfast will be taken at hotels, snacks will be provided whilst cycling, and dinner will either be at the hotel or a local restaurant. Food is plentiful, typically Vietnamese style stir fries, rice, noodles and small amounts of meat or fish. There will be fresh fruit. Mineral water is readily available throughout the tour.

### **Group information**

The maximum group size will be 20 including the leaders.

### **Weather and Clothing**

Daytime temperatures should be warm with the risk of some rain. Evenings will be cool and night-time temperatures may be cold. Bring appropriate warm clothing, wet-weather cycling gear and sun cream.

### **Cycles / Equipment**

Touring, ATB or hybrid cycles will be suitable if well maintained and fitted with good wheels and fairly wide road tyres. Low gears are recommended. You will not need to carry luggage, but a bar bag or rack-top pack will be useful for spare clothing, camera, sun cream, snacks etc. You should be able to carry 2 water bottles. It is advisable to fit a calibrated cycle computer, as this will aid navigation. Lights will not be necessary. Each participant will be expected to carry sufficient spares and tools to deal with punctures and minor repairs. Once we leave Hanoi, cycle spares will not be available on route. Helmets are not mandatory but if you do not intend to wear one, please check that your travel insurance will cover you in the event of a claim.

### **Money**

There will be very few opportunities to spend money other than in Hanoi and SaPa. Beer and snacks should cost no more than £10 per day. Currency exchange (US dollars and UK sterling) is available at Hanoi airport.

### **Maps**

As the roads are few, navigation is simple so detailed route descriptions will not be necessary, but you should carry a map in case you become separated from the group. Recommended maps – Reise Know-How Verlag Northern Vietnam, ISBN 3-8317-7151-0, available from Stanfords ([www.stanfords.co.uk](http://www.stanfords.co.uk)). We will be supplying a photocopy of maps showing an outline of the route.

### **Travel Insurance and Advice**

Information on CTC Cyclecover Travel Insurance is available from CTC (0870 873 0068) or can be found at [www.cyclecover.co.uk](http://www.cyclecover.co.uk).

Before booking you should check the Foreign Office 'Travel Advice by Country' at [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk) or on 0845 850 2829.

### **About the leaders**

We are both enthusiastic cyclists and have been CTC members for 17 years. We have led tours to many worldwide destinations, and each year we look forward to the reunion with regular travelling companions but also get great satisfaction from introducing new members to the unique camaraderie of CTC holidays. We do not have a set style of leadership but adapt to suit the needs of the group. We encourage all prospective participants to contact us to talk through the tour prior to booking.

**John and Pat Ashwell**

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