



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

## 22 March - 8 April 2012

### Tour 1166

This is an adventurous, moving on tour through the mountainous northern provinces of Vietnam. Luggage transfer and vehicle support will be provided, but the tour is best suited to fit, experienced cycling enthusiasts. Vietnam's far north is undoubtedly the best place to cycle in the country as the roads see virtually no tourists and avoid Vietnam's notorious highways. Starting in vibrant Hanoi, the road winds through superb scenery of limestone karstic rock formations, gorges and rice paddies up 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 will have a rest day at Bac Ha to visit the colourful Sunday market before climbing Tram Ton, Vietnam's highest pass, at 1900metres. After returning to Hanoi on the overnight train, we will continue by road 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 22 Mar Fly from London Heathrow on Thai Air flight TG911 to Bangkok, departing at 1150.
- Fri 23 Mar Arrive in Bangkok at 0610. Onward flight Thai Air flight TG682 to Hanoi, departing at 0750. Arrive at 0935. Transfer to hotel. Assemble bikes. Evening at leisure. Stay 1 night.
- Sat 24 Mar Vehicle transfer and short cycle ride to Ba Be National Park. Stay 1 night.
- Sun 25 Mar Morning boat cruise then cycle to Bac Me. Stay 1 night.
- Mon 26 Mar Cycle to Dong Van. Stay 1 night.
- Tues 27 Mar Cycle to Yen Minh. Stay 1 night.
- Wed 28 Mar Cycle to Ha Giang. Stay 1 night.
- Thurs 29 Mar Cycle to Nam An Village Eco-site. Stay 1 night.
- Fri 30 Mar Cycle to Hoang Su Phi. Stay 1 night.
- Sat 31 Mar Cycle to Bac Ha. Stay 2 nights.
- Sun 1 Apr Day at leisure in Bac Ha to visit Sunday tribal market.
- Mon 2 Apr River trip and cycle to Sapa. Stay 1 night.
- Tues 3 Apr Cycle to Than Uyen via Tram Ton pass, the highest pass in Vietnam. Stay 1 night.
- Wed 4 Apr Part cycle, part vehicle transfer to Lao Cai to board the overnight train to Hanoi.
- Thurs 5 Apr Arrive Hanoi early morning. Transfer to Ha Long Bay. Afternoon cruise. Overnight on luxury junk.
- Fri 6 Apr Morning cruise before returning by road to Hanoi. Pack bikes for journey home. Stay 1 night.
- Sat 7 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 8 Apr Onward Thai Air flight TG910 to London Heathrow, departing at 0110. Arrive at 0715.
- Mileage 60 - 110 kilometers per day

#### Luggage carrying

A support vehicle carrying the luggage will accompany the group on all moving on days. There will be space for a couple of passengers and bikes should the need arise. Coach transfers will be provided as per the Itinerary. There may be other short transfers due to distance/terrain which are not indicated in the Itinerary.



## Accommodation and meals

Accommodation on most nights will be in 2- or 3-star guesthouses/hotels with en-suite facilities. One night will be spent on an overnight sleeper train (4 berth carriages), and one night on a comfortable luxury junk, two per cabin with attached bathroom. 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 - £1999**

The price is based on a minimum number of 16 participants taking part in the tour and is calculated at a rate of 1.58 US Dollars to £1 sterling (based on exchange rates published on [www.x-rates.com](http://www.x-rates.com) on 2 October 2010; please note Booking Conditions, clause 4). If there are insufficient bookings by the closing date of 12 January 2012 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-Hanoi, and Hanoi-Bangkok-London
- 13 nights hotel accommodation, half board basis, sharing rooms
- 1 night overnight sleeper train from Lao Cai to Hanoi
- 1 night luxury junk, shared cabins, lunch, evening meal and breakfast
- Lunches and light refreshments on route on all cycling days
- Coach transfers between Hanoi airport and hotel and from Hanoi to Ha Long Bay and return
- Other vehicle transfers as per itinerary
- Support vehicle to transfer luggage and cycles as necessary
- The services of local English-speaking guides
- CTC Cycling Holidays & Tours costs

Price does not include:

- Meals in transit
- Drinks with evening meals
- Lunches and daytime refreshments on non-cycling days
- Entry fees to any attractions – budget £10
- Vietnam visa costs – budget £30
- Gratuities for support crews; tips in restaurants / 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 £400 per person is due by 28 September 2011. The final balance of £1399 per person is to be paid ten weeks prior to departure, by 12 January 2012. 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 28 September 2011	Deposit (£ 200)
28 September 2011 to 11 January 2012	30% (£ 600)
12 January 2012 through to departure	100% (£1999)

## 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

Visas are required for both Vietnam and Laos. Information on how these 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 also take adequate supplies of a suitable malarial prophylactic. 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*** ***22 March - 8 April 2012*** ***Tour 1166***

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

This tour uses a new route through the far north of Vietnam, undoubtedly the best area in the country for cycling as the roads see virtually no tourists and avoid Vietnam's notorious highways. From Hanoi we go to Ba Be National Park with its breathtaking scenery of towering limestone mountains, forests, waterfalls and lakes, then cycle north through the mountains to Bac Me and on to Meo Vac. Here, close to the Chinese border, is reputedly one of the best road trips in Vietnam, the road 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.

On to the Lung Cu commune, the northernmost point in Vietnam, before continuing through limestone peaks and perpendicular rock walls to Yen Minh then over the Quan Ba pass and down through amazing rice paddies to Ha Giang. A more leisurely ride takes us to 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.



More challenging long climbs take us through the Thong Nguyen and Nam Dich communes, then we use a new road, built on the former trail of the Flower H'Mong tribe, following the Chay River to Bac Ha with its interesting Sunday market, frequented by colourful Tay, Nung, Dao, Flower H'Mong, Giay and Phu La hill-tribes. We continue to Sa Pa, established as a hill station by the French, in a beautiful setting surrounded by mountains. A climb to the Tram Ton Pass, the highest pass in Vietnam, is followed by a fantastic descent then further climbs along the Hoang Lien Son mountain range to Than Uyen and more stunning scenery.

The final three days, cruising through the supernatural beauty of the limestone islands of Ha Long Bay, visiting a

floating village, swimming or trekking, then exploring Hanoi's old town and/or Ho Chi Minh's mausoleum provide a perfect wind-down to a challenging but fantastic bike ride.

### **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. The day we leave Hanoi will also be a non-cycling day, involving a transfer followed by an afternoon's cruise through the spectacular seascape of limestone pillars of Ha Long Bay.

### **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 be either at the hotel or at 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. Road/race bikes with narrow tyres not recommended. Low gears are advisable. 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 Sa Pa. Beer and snacks should cost no more than £10 per day. Currency exchange (US dollars and UK sterling) is available at Hanoi airport. The local currency is the Vietnamese Dong, with approximately 30,000 VNG to £1 sterling.

### **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. We will be supplying a photocopy of maps for Vietnam and Laos showing an outline of the route.

### **Travel Insurance and Advice**

Make sure you have read Clause 8 in the Booking Conditions. 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 19 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.

***Note: we will be on tour in Sikkim prior to this tour and will travel direct to Hanoi from Delhi. We will meet the group at Hanoi airport on Friday 23 March.***

### **John and Pat Ashwell**

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