



Hoi An to Angkor Wat Cycle Discovery

Trip Code

Version: HPB Peaks of the Balkans



WALK & TREK



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Siem Reap and the UNESCO-listed temples at Angkor Wat
- Meet the Bahnar and Jarai ethnic minorities of the Vietnamese highlands
- Free day and market visit at Banlung, a remote Khmer provincial town
- Take a boat trip on the River Mekong in search of rare Irrawaddy dolphins

AT A GLANCE

- Group Size 4 to 16
- 11 days biking
- 790 kilometres
- 90% surfaced road - 100% vehicle supported
- Max altitude - 1200 metres
- Join In Hoi An, Siem Reap

ACCOMMODATION & MEALS

- 13 Breakfasts
- 11 Lunches
- 12 Dinners
- 6 nights Hotel with swimming pool
- 7 nights Hotel

Day 1: Meet at the group hotel in Hoi An

Meet at the group hotel in Hoi An. Airport transfers are not provided and we recommend that you use the safe and reliable taxi service from Danang International Airport - 30 kilometres to the north. This provides the most cost-effective way of getting from the airport to the group hotel - for details see Holiday Information and the section on Joining Arrangements & Transfers. Hoi An was one of South-East Asia's major trading ports during the 17th and 18th centuries. An important point of call for Chinese, Japanese and Portuguese traders the architecture reflects its cosmopolitan past. More than anywhere in Vietnam, Hoi An retains the feel of the past and is now protected as a UNESCO World Heritage site with more than 844 structures of historical significance. It is a fantastic place to spend some time, wandering the narrow streets and rubbing shoulders with the locals. There will be a rendezvous in the early evening with the guide and other group members. KE Land Only package services begin with dinner and overnight at the group hotel.

Day 2: Cycle out to the UNESCO site of My Son and a second night in Hoi An.

After breakfast, we meet outside the hotel to check our hire bikes and have a pre-ride briefing from our tour guide. We then start our tour with a quite leisurely rural ride which takes us inland from Hoi An to the World Heritage Site and temple complex of My Son, the ancient centre of the Cham Civilization. We have a short transfer to avoid a busy section of road, then cycle on scenic back-roads, amongst rice fields, eucalyptus forest and many scenic villages. Climbing away from the coast, we have stunning views, as we reach a section of rough gravel road leading into an increasingly more remote region. This 14 kilometre road cuts a gorge through the lush jungle alongside the Song Tranh River and eventually leads us to My Son, which was once Champa's greatest city. Although many of the temples were destroyed during the war, there is still enough of the archaeological site to impress most visitors. We take lunch before spending the afternoon visiting this atmospheric site which is nestled in a jungle valley with a pretty stream and overlooked by Cat Tooth Mountain. In the afternoon we transfer by bus back to Hoi An after a great introduction to the holiday. There are many excellent eating places close to our hotel and this evening you are at leisure to choose one that suits you.

Day 3: Transfer to Quang Ngai and loop ride via the Vietnam War memorial at My Lai.

This morning we transfer 50 kilometres southwards down the coast towards Quang Ngai, a small regional town beside the Tra Khuc River and just a few kilometres inland. We unload the bikes at a small village and set off on an easy loop ride out to the coast. The road is shaded by arching palm trees and surrounded by

tended rice paddies and by lunchtime we will have arrived at My Lai, the site of one of the worst massacres of the American/Vietnam War. After lunch, we will be able to take a guided tour of this sobering site and its included museum. After our visit, the cycling continues out into the Vietnamese countryside where we stop to visit a traditional pagoda before heading to our hotel in Quang Ngai.

Day 4: Cycle inland from Quang Ngai to Kon Tum.

Today is a more challenging day as we leave the coast and head into the central highlands towards Quang Nam and on to Kon Tum. We will start out with a transfer of around 2 hours to the town of Bato in the highlands. From here, we have a challenging climb over 15 kilometres to the top of the Viloluk (or Mang Den) Pass (1200m). The road leads up through thick pine forests and with stunning photo opportunities to the eco-tourism centre of Mang Den which is currently under development. This part of Vietnam is home to several ethnic groups, including the Mo Nam, Ca Dong and Hre, each with distinctive cultures. Having properly warmed up our legs with this climb, the remainder of the day offers an incredible experience that starts with a 20 kilometre descent to the bottom of the pass, followed by an undulating route on quiet and scenic roads, through tropical forest and by way of remote villages. Finally, we reach our hotel in Kon Tum (530m), a small and laid-back Central Highlands town on the Dak Bla River.

Day 5: Ethnic villages ride, from Kon Tum to Pleiku.

This part of Vietnam's Central Highlands is home to around 700 hill-tribe villages and today's ride will allow us to visit several of them. The people living in these villages are mainly of the Bahnar ethnic group, but there are also Sedang and Jarai people in this area. These tribes still practice animism and worship a number of natural spirits including those of the banyan and fiscus trees, as well as the spirits of their ancestors. Buffalo are considered to be sacred by the Bahnar people. As we travel between villages, we will be amazed by the 'rongs', communal houses which have steep-sided roofs and can be 30 metres high. Each village takes great pride in the unique design of their 'rong'. Our ride takes us on quiet country roads and after a stop to sample lunch in the local style, we will continue our ride to Pleiku (740m) which is known to have the best coffee in Vietnam. This is an easier day and largely cycling through a wide valley surrounded by mountains and with both tea and coffee plantations in places along the route. Overnight in a central hotel in Pleiku.

Day 6: Transfer to the Cambodian border and cycle to Banlung.

Today, we cross over into Cambodia and this involves a 2-hour transfer by car to the border post at Cua Khau Le Thanh. At this point we have to say goodbye to the Vietnamese team. Then, after going through the immigration formalities, we will meet our Cambodian team and set off on our first cycle ride in the 'Land of the Khmer'. We are now in the Ratanakiri Province of Cambodia and our ride will take us across country and very gradually uphill with a final short descent to Banlung, one of the most remote of the Khmer provincial capitals. We spend the night in a 'boutique' hotel, beside Banlung's Kan Seng Lake. This accommodation takes the form of a traditional style Khmer house and simply oozes old world charm.

Day 7: Free day in Banlung. Take it easy or do some exploring.

This is a welcome day off the bikes and a chance to either take it easy or to do some independent exploration. For the early bird, there is the option to visit the morning produce market which bustles with merchants of every description hawking their wares. After this colourful interlude, you could take a picnic lunch and explore the mysterious crater lake of Boeng Yeak Laom (about 3 kilometres walk from the hotel). Surrounded by lush forest, this almost circular pool is believed to be the home of water demons and is so deep its bottom has never been touched. Alternatively, of course you can simply enjoy the facilities at the accommodation, which include sun deck and pool. The group will meet up for dinner.

Day 8: Cycle across to Stung Treng beside the River Mekong.

After a day of rest it's time to get back in the saddle and so we set out on our bikes for the long and relatively flat ride into the province of Stung Treng. Following a raised tarmac road, we can expect to get a good feel for the rural heartland of Cambodia today, as we cycle amongst rice paddies and rubber tree plantations. The level, green expanse of the landscape is met by electric blue skies. En route we stop to enjoy the simple pleasures of rural life in Ratanakiri. Then, crossing into Stung Treng we are welcomed by the shade of lush green plantations lining the road as we cycle towards the setting sun. Stung Treng is on the Mekong, just about 30 kilometres downstream from the Laos-Cambodia border. After checking in at our hotel, we will go out to dinner at the Le Tonle Tourism Training Center, where young locals are being trained in the principles of hospitality to ensure a better future in Stung Treng. We can expect delicious Khmer food paired with a very personalised service. The students are as excited to meet their guests as the guests are to meet the students.

Day 9: A morning ride to Kratie and afternoon riverboat cruise on the Mekong.

We will have an early breakfast in town, as we have a full and action packed day ahead of us. Our destination today is the small provincial capital of Kratie, about 100 kilometres away, due south and also alongside the Mekong. We will ride the greater part of this distance during the course of a long morning of cycling, but there will also a couple of short transfers. Our route follows the true left bank of the river and takes us through a number of rural villages where we need to watch out for playing kids, chickens, cows, dogs, ducks and oxen. Shortly before we reach Kratie, we will stop off at Kampi and have lunch. Here, after lunch, we will go out on the river in a small boat in search of Irrawaddy dolphins. A small population of these otherwise rare creatures can be found in this part of the river. After our boat trip, we will transfer just a few kilometres down the river to Kratie, a town with a central marketplace and a number of old French colonial buildings. Our hotel is by the river and we can chill out on the roof top terrace and watch the Mekong flow by.

Day 10: Cross the river by ferry and cycle from Phnom Han Chey to Kampong Cham.

After breakfast we get into the support vehicle and drive just a short distance south to the small town of Chhlong. The many French colonial buildings in this town, including the yellow and white old governor's residence, are among the most beautiful in Cambodia. We then take a ferry to the true right bank of the Mekong and set off on our bikes on quiet roads along the river, through small rural villages and pretty countryside. It is a scenic ride, as we pass many Cham communities which are predominantly Muslim. Buddhist pagodas form a pretty contrast with small mosques and the particularly friendly locals will welcome you warmly in each village you pass. We cycle up to Wat Hanchey, a small hilltop pagoda that houses an 8th century pre-Angkorian temple and offers spectacular views over the Mekong. Here, we can enjoy a well-deserved picnic lunch, before completing our ride beside the Mekong to Kampong Cham. One of the features of this sleepy riverside town is the bamboo bridge (rebuilt every year) that links it to Koh Pen Island). A dip in the hotel pool before dinner is tempting.

Day 11: Cycle away from the Mekong on a quiet road to Kampong Thom.

This morning, we cycle on a mix of dirt and tarmac roads, firstly alongside the Mekong and then turning away from the river on a quiet secondary highway towards Kampong Thom. Today's ride will take us through rubber plantations, paddy fields and typical Khmer villages and provides us with another chance to observe the way of life of rural Cambodia. Kampong Thom is a bustling town on the banks of the Stung Saen River and provides a logical stopping off point on our journey to Siem Reap.

Day 12: Transfer to Kampong Kdei and cycle to Siem Reap.

Today we avoid some of the poorer roads in Siem Reap province by driving for the first couple of hours,

with a stop off after 85 kilometres at Kampong Kdei, where there is one of the best examples of Angkor-era bridges in Cambodia, this one is reckoned to be 1000 years old. Back in the support vehicle as far as the village of Domdek, we then set off on our bikes on a back road that was once the historic highway connecting the province of Kampong Thom with Angkor Wat. We will find a suitable roadside restaurant for lunch in local restaurant, then continue our ride which will take us all the way to the Western Gate of Angkor Wat. After checking in at our hotel, we will go out for a celebratory Khmer dinner at Viroth's, a stylish and comfortable restaurant set in a quiet garden.

Day 13: A day to explore the UNESCO World Heritage listed site of Angkor.

This morning we start our day with a bike ride to the entrance of the UNESCO-listed Angkor temple complex. We will enter from the south and ride on sections of tarmac road interspersed with jungle paths, until we reach the first of the temples we will see today, Tah Prohm. After our visit here, we'll carry on through the jungle and toward the eastern gate of Angkor Thom, which was the ancient capital of the Khmer Empire. Close to the centre of this massive enclosure, we'll find the enigmatic temple of Bayon. This temple is known for its many smiling faces. As the sun reaches its high point, we'll take a break and have lunch, before visiting the grandest temple of them all Angkor Wat. After this, depending upon the time, there is the option to return to our hotel for a rest, before returning to the Angkor complex to enjoy the sunset experience. We have a final, celebratory evening meal before spend a second night at our Siem Reap hotel.

Day 14: Depart from Siem Reap. A single group transfer is provided.

Vietnam Travel Memories only packages services end after breakfast. A single group transfer to Siem Reap Airport is provided, usually shortly after midday.

ADVENTURE CYCLING. This cultural journey by mountain bike takes us from the coast of Vietnam, through the central highlands to the heart of Cambodia. We cycle approximately 790 kilometres in 11 cycling days, with lots of time spent sightseeing and exploring the countryside. The cycling is non-technical on a mixture of well-surfaced roads and good quality dirt tracks. The terrain varies from flat days to hilly and undulating days. Ride at your own pace after consulting the guides about the route ahead, stop to take photographs and to soak up the magnificent sites we visit. Starting out with a couple of shorter rides, the itinerary does also have several days with approximately 100 kilometre rides. To get the most out of this road cycling tour you should be a regular weekend rider with a good level of physical fitness. However, the bus is always close at hand for those who need to take a break. **BIKE HIRE AVAILABLE LOCALLY**

We start cycling in Hoi An, once the largest harbour in South-East Asia and nowadays famous for its tailoring and colourful lantern-lit bridges. Our introductory ride takes us out to the Champa site at My Son and then, on the following day, we quickly move forward to the 20th Century as we cycle to Mai Lai, where there is a Vietnam War memorial. Then, climbing up into the highlands, we find ourselves in the homeland of the Bahnar and Jarai ethnic minorities who still practice animism and a subsistence lifestyle. Crossing the border into Cambodia and the lands of the former Khmer Empire, we encounter more ethnic tribes in a remote region where foreigners on bicycles are still very much a novelty. A day off the bikes at Banlung gives us the chance to do some exploring, including the chance to take a dip in a mysterious crater lake. Then, it's on to the mighty Mekong River, where we will be hoping to catch a glimpse of endangered Irrawaddy dolphins. Continuing our ride through the Cambodian countryside, we see more ancient sites, such as the 1000 year old bridge at Kampong Kdei. But, these are just tasters ahead of one of the major highlights of the holiday; our full-day visit on our bikes to the Angkor Wat temple complex at Siem Reap. This is a brilliant cycle journey through one of the most culturally fascinating parts of South-East Asia.