



EXPLORE NORTH VIETNAM IN 16 DAYS



## **NORTH VIETNAM MOTORBIKE ADVENTURE**

- Duration: 16 days
- Starting in: Hanoi
- Ending in: Hanoi
- Group size: 5 - 8 pax

## **QUICK INTRODUCTION**

Explore Northern Vietnam on this 16 day loop tour:

**Central North:** Relatively easy road riding that takes in rice-terraced mountains, hill tribe cultures, jungle-clad national parks and traditional home stays. Level of difficulty: Easy!

**North East:** Fantastic summer riding through magical limestone karst landscape with side trips to waterfalls, hill tribe cultures, traditional home stays, beautiful lakes and national parks. Level of difficulty: Moderate!

**North West:** Classic road trip out to the former Dien Bien Phu battle field that takes in a huge collection of landscapes, high mountain passes, hill tribe cultures and traditional home stays. Level of difficulty: Moderate!

### **Group Size**

The maximum group size for rides in the north is from 5 to 8 people per group (limited to 5 motorcycles), riders or pillion passengers. This will enhance your experience and ensure a high degree of personal attention. Small groups enable us to trek into remote areas with minimal intrusion to the local cultures.

### **Riding**

Offroad Vietnam does not own rental step through (semi-automatic) moped scooters, motorbikes and motorcycles. They hire from Mr Cuong (also known as Master Mechanic or Minsk Doctor) who owns and operates Cuong's Motorbike Adventure shop at 1 Luong Ngoc Quyen Street in Hanoi. All bikes are supremely serviced and well equipped with quality parts and accessories. They provide all riding and rain gear but still advise you to bring your own as we may not have your size due to limited size availability in Vietnam.

Riding experience is necessary. For non-riders, one person may travel as a pillion passenger on the guide's bike. Pairs or couples can also double up on one bike but this is not recommended as Minsk are under-powered for two people. Ideally, ride with a group of friends and share your adventure together. Offroad Vietnam also provides riding lessons at a small cost for beginners on Honda moped scooters or Minsk dirt bikes.

**DAY 1 HANOI - MAI CHAU, 170 KM, 5 HOURS**

Heading out of Hanoi on road number 6 to Mai Chau, and idyllic valley populated by mainly White Thai ethnic people. Visiting Mai Chau, you have a chance to enjoy folk songs and traditional colorful culture of White Thai in Mai Chau. The scenery of the arrival to Mai Chau is characterized with beautiful limestone mountains and colorful hill tribes who can be seen and visited on the way. We also have an opportunity en route to learn about the culture of the rice cultivating inhabitants in the Red River valley and Da River down stream. After lunch, we have the whole afternoon free to climb up to the top of



Thung Nhuoi pass. From the top of the pass there is a beautiful view of Mai Chau valley, usually and mostly engulfed by clouds still it is a sight to be enjoyed. After visiting this wonderful site, we drop down to further explore the area of White Thai people.

In the evening, we can enjoy a local dinner and overnight in a beautiful village at the edge of a river. After dinner, you can spend the evening sitting together around a fire and join in a Thai traditional

music show. In their traditional attire, typical of their cultural identity, Thai women invite visitors to participate in the Xoe dance. To the rhythmical and ebullient music, the hosts and guests will dance for hours hand-in-hand. When they get tired, they stop for a while to drink special sticky rice liquor called "ruou can". Visitors who participate in the Xoe dance once, especially by the light of a fire at night are likely to remember it forever.

**DAY 2 MAI CHAU - THUNG MAN, 100 KM, 4 HOURS**

Today we continue venturing onto Northern Vietnam by following the old National Highway No 6 which has been left fallow for 20 years. The narrow and bumpy road, cutting through many hill-tops make the topography difficult to maneuver, so the inter-transportation is very limited. Sometimes, if lucky you might catch the appearance of a horse-drawn carriage or buffalo-drawn carriage, but apart from that, this road is quite deserted. Along the way, we have excellent opportunities to learn about the people of different culture, such as the Red Dao, Dao Tien, Muong and Thai ethnic groups. The people living here are very friendly and live a simple lifestyle. They typically live on cultivating dry rice, vegetables and fruit at high altitudes, and hunting in the wild forest.

At noon we stop for lunch at the top of the pass from which a beautiful view of spacious Moc Chau grassland and the Da River can be enjoyed.

The afternoon will provide a real challenge. After heading out of New Highway 6, we make our way onto the torturous and bumpy road. However, the exploring of the H'mong hill tribe's colorful customs and majestic mountainous scenery, it will make the hardship all worthwhile.

**DAY 3 THUNG MAN - PHU YEN, 130 KM, 4 HOURS**

After breakfast and farewell with the hosts, we pay a visit to Thung Mai, the most timeless village of the H'mong ethnic people residing at an altitude of over 1,000 meters above sea level and in complicated topography. The H'mong people have lived here for nearly 100 years. While on the way to Ha Giang, they were forced to run away from French colonialists. That's the reason they are located in this remote area. To reach Thung Man, it takes about one and half hours to the top of the mountain. Upon arrival, you will see a pretty village with about 20 houses built from "stone" surrounding a small, fairy pond at the mountain top. The village seems isolated from mainstream world. There is no appearance of motorbike and karaoke here. The owners of this mountain still retain their age old cultural and traditions. Moreover, visitors to this remote area will have opportunity to discover the unique customs



and the simple lifestyle of the local and even share the culture experience with the elders who enjoy the happiness of living under the same roof with 5-6 generations. You also have a chance to hear the legend story about the "toward South" process from their voice.

After lunch, we have the afternoon free to explore the dreamlike grasslands. These beautiful grasslands of Moc Chau have the best of both words, breath-taking scenery and it's favored

by nature and covered with clouds all year round. So it seems to have the most ideal climate condition in Northwest Mountain. Moc Chau's flora is diverse, ranging from forests and tea plantations to fruit hills.

Besides, we can enjoy walk to visit the local dairy farms and try produce from the local processing factories. Dairy produce is Moc Chau's specialty being exported to many other countries.

After visiting this scenic sight, we drop down to Da River and take a specialized boat to pass the river. Then we ride along the river to visit Phu Yen valley, one of the most prosperous and beautiful villages of Thai people in Northwest.

**DAY 4 PHU YEN - TUAN GIAO, 210 KM, 6 HOURS**

The journey north continues onto Son La, following the 113 Highway. Along the way, there are superb landscapes with green valley and rice fields in terraces. Passing the Bac Yen Mountain top, through Chen Pass to the largest "maize" and "manioc" forest, we arrive at Son La plateau.

After lunch in Son La town, we will visit the former French Prison and provincial museum. It's also time to keep our willingness to climb over a range of passes, such as Son La, Chieng Pac, and Pha Din.

While passing these scenic sites, you can enjoy the beautiful landscape on your way from Son La to Lai Chau town. The afternoon will provide free time to climb over the top of the Pha Din Pass - known as the interference between Heaven and Earth. Pha Din forms a natural border between Son La and Dien Bien Phu, the site of the decisive battle in Vietnam's struggle for independence in 1954. Then we take time to travel to Tuan Giao to view the sunset.

**DAY 5 TUAN GIAO - SIN HO, 150 KM, 5 HOURS**

Today we continue venturing in to northern Vietnam with the 98 km remainder of the historical Highway 6. The road is rough, but the scenery is unbelievably beautiful and magnificent with the 7 tall passes cutting through steep mountain along the Da River flowing around the foot of the passes, which can be found nowhere else in the Northwest route. Moreover, a part of the pleasure of traveling by motorbike in this region is the simple joy of seeing friendly smile and waving of the local people, which



make the hardship all worthwhile. Along the way, we stop to visit the Black Thai, Kho Mu, Lu, Black H'mong, Green H'mong and White H'mong, just some of the many hill tribe groups who have settled there and discover their simple lifestyles and colorful cultures.

After lunch at Lai Chau, we take a boat to travel along the Nam Na River, passing the high, dangerous and sheer rocks, the pretty villages on the two sides of the river and the hillside green rice fields. The boat is not a big

one, but the coxswain is skilled enough to make your cruise safe and adventurous to the next destination. After that we make our way to Sin Ho.

**DAY 6 SIN HO - TAM DUONG - SAPA, 110-170 KM, 4-5 HOURS**

Due to the environment and a height of 1,700m, getting there is very hard journey, so the people living here mostly keep to their very long lasting lifestyle. The unchanged way of life from ancient days is hard to be done anywhere. However, it should be said that there is no way for urbanization to occur in these areas. Moreover, only a handful of travel agencies can bring their customers to this remote area. The reason Sin Ho is regarded as the richest mountain market in the Northwest province, is that anybody who is courageous enough to visit the area is rewarded with the fortune of visiting. This does nothing to limit the motley colors of traditional clothes of various ethics such as the Green H'mong, the Black H'mong, the White H'mong, the Dzao Dau Bang, and the Lu.

We will enjoy a picnic lunch at the top of Tram Ton Pass, the most beautiful one in Sapa. In the afternoon we are free to explore Sapa, usually being engulfed by clouds. After enjoying a cup of Artichaux local herbal tea, a special drink from Sapa, we embark on a walk to discover this charming town and get acquainted with the host people who are the soul of this area.

Sapa was founded in the early years of the last century as a hill resort for the French administration at the time. It soon became famous in Indochina for its ideal climate. Nowadays, Sapa's breathtaking scenery is some of the best in ASEAN.

**DAY 7      SAPA - BAC HA - XIN MAN, 140 KM, 4 HOURS**

In the morning, we go down to Lao Cai town with a visit to Lao Cai border gate with China. Then roll along the route 70 to Bac Ngam for a nice break, taking pictures of beautiful scenery of mountain and river view. We head up mountain pass to Bac Ha for our lunch and short hiking to some H'mong villages there.

In the afternoon we continue the small trail to Xin Man in the rocky wild road.

**DAY 8      XIN MAN - THAC BA, 170 KM, 6 HOURS**

One special day begins by heading South direction on the bumpy, dirty, and muddy road. Luckily, we climb up to top hill on a good condition road, and then enjoy your riding down hill with beautiful scenery of rice paddies on the mountain sides toward Xin Man which seems to be impossible in the rain. Stop at many villages to chat and talk with local people and discover their culture.



After about 3 hours riding, we reach a good road, but still small and wild. That would be great for rolling a bike through rice fields, limestone mountain karsts of Luc Yen.

After lunch, we keep riding for another 60 km to a beautiful village of Dao Quan Trang people on the lakeside. Leave our bikes there to the buffalos, jump on a small boat and enjoy swimming.

**DAY 9      THAC BA - BA BE, 160 KM, 5 HOURS**

Follow beautiful green tea fields and villages to Tuyen Quang town, then ride on the National High Way 2 for half an hour. However, it is boring there, so we turn left on wilder mountain tracks through forest before arriving at Ba Be National Park and lake. Overnight at a Tay ethnic family's house from which we have a beautiful view of rock mountain and rice fields surrounding the biggest natural lake of Vietnam.

**DAY 10      BA BE - BAC ME - HA GIANG, 130 KM, 5 HOURS**

In the early morning, we put our bikes on boats to take 2 hours exploring Ba Be Lake and National Park before landing on a maize field. Unloading our bikes and have good breakfast with the owner of the Nang river restaurant; Mr. Pirrate, who then will give you a lot of helpful advice for an adventure day.

The day begins with 3 km riding along an old hillside trail along Nang River, which is spacious, and more than enough for motorcycle touring. Catch your breath while you can, it's worth it! Then, it's time

to master up all your skills, techniques and experiences for the 80 km of forest road which without the help of our experienced guides you will likely to get lost into one of the 16 branching roads. Along the way, we climb over many tall passes and deep river valleys. This road trip will take you only 3-4 hours during the dry season, but at least 7-8 hours during the rainy season. However, the impression from 'conquering nature' makes the hardship all worthwhile. Upon arrival, we will cross 3 rivers between 20-30m wide but only 70 cm deep, all managed with the instruction of our experienced guides.

The last 50 km will be easy even with some passes to go to Ha Giang.

### **DAY 11 HA GIANG - DONG VAN, 160 KM, 4 HOURS**

Rise and shine for a few hours trek to many of the Heaven Gates such as Quan Ba, Yen Binh, Dong Van. They are called so because one gets the feeling of touching the sky, the heaven gates. This is the



best time and place to enjoy the wonderful sightseeing of the vast limestone mountain range and perpendicular walls of rock, which brings one a feeling of adventure while being lost in a magic land.

Here we are surrounded by many rocks of all shapes and sizes. After lunch at Yen Minh town, the scenic route climbs over a pass before arriving to Pho Bang, also called Bang Street, which was built many centuries ago and features multi-storey houses made of clay bricks and tile roofs. Visit some of our local friends, who are Hoa minority.

Then we continue our trip to visit the infamous Vuong Palace, a H'mong family of high rank during French colonial rule (Vuong Chi Sinh was supported to be the H'mong King in Vietnam). This palace attracts keen interest from architecturally minded visitors due to its mixed style of European and Chinese architecture.

### **DAY 12 DONG VAN - CAO BANG, 140 KM, 5 HOURS**

After bidding farewell, we climb over the Ma Pi Leng Pass from which we can see and enjoy a beautiful view of sunset overlooking the Nho Que River.

Visiting these remote areas, we will bear witness to how hard the local people struggle with their environment for their survival and development. Because the living conditions are extremely hard, there is barely any arable land within the rocky mountains; the people who live there survive on a diet of corn, which is about the only crop able to grow in the rocky soil. Even through this hardship, the local people are very friendly, simple yet have developed a strong attachment to other people. They are the soul of this remote area.

Keep following the river until we meet RC 4C, near China and cross Gam River on bamboo raft into the land of Cao Bang province, where you will meet many Lo Lo, Bo Y, Dao and Giay...and visit their

villages just at the roadside on the way to Bao Lac town.

Good road on RC 4 with beautiful picturesque on the Pac Lung pass before the stop in Nguyen Binh valley with green color of maize and rice fields.

Keep rolling up wild mountain pass into Cao Bang town for lunch and a short walk to see traces from the French colonialism and many stories of 1940s.

### **DAY 13      CAO BANG - PAC BO - TRA LINH - QUANG UYEN, 100 KM, 4 HOURS**

In the morning, we ride up to Pac Bo passing by Nuoc Hai and Ha Quang town.

Visit Pac Bo cave, near China, where our Ho Chi Minh came back after 30 years traveling around the world to find the way for independence of Vietnam. He stayed there working and leading Vietnamese to win the war.

We stay with a local family, sharing stories with old generations about Uncle Ho who lived very close to them and had very simple life.

### **DAY 14      QUANG UYEN - BAN GIOC - HA LANG, 120 KM, 4 HOURS**

Continue along the Chinese border and pass through thousands of innumerable vast steep limestone karsts area and visit many villages which are home to Nung and Tay ethnic people. The Tay and Nung minority in Cao Bang province all migrated from the other side of the border. They have the same local dialect and culture.



Ban Gioc is one of the most beautiful waterfalls in Vietnam, which forms a natural border with China. The echo of the falls can be heard kilometers away. In rainy season, the waterfall makes the scenery even more magnificent. While here we will take a bamboo raft trip and have picnic lunch.

More beautiful ride along the Quay Son River, which on the other side is China, then direction south to Ha Lang. Overnight in local guesthouse.

### **DAY 15      HA LANG - MAU SON, 180 KM, 6 HOURS**

In the morning, hike up to some Tay villages. They live in the wildest area along the border with China. You will be very welcome to local families, who live in beautiful traditional stilt-houses and have a rich culture. Visit more villages around Quang Uyen where in 1950s Viet Minh won the battlefield in Dong Khe and the French ran through jungle toward Lang Son, but they fell into an ambush of Viet Minh and more than 5.000 French was arrested in Coc Xa. At that time, Viet Minh had no prison to keep them and they had kept the French Prisoners of War in many local families and these prisoners worked on the rice fields with local people.



Ride in the middle of magic landscapes with many lovely smiling faces, waving hands from locals on the road. Just right at the conjunction of Bac Vong and Bang Giang river, there is a border gate called "Thuy Khau" - river mouth bordering gate - known in Chinese as Shuikojie.

Cross Bang Giang river down to the other side of Dong Khe valley, the battlefield of Viet Minh and local army.



Ride on the RC 4 to That Khe with visits to more battlefields until Lang Son. Stop at Friendship Border Gate "Huu Nghi Quan" and Dong Dang town where you will see Chinese products flood the town. Minsk riders here drive at full throttle with Chinese products at the back.

Mau Son is about 30 kilometers from Lang Son. The winding narrow mountain path, like a snake, lies tucked between 2 steep mountains. Climb to reach the top of Mau Son which is 1,542 m above of the sea level. This area's picturesque scenery turns it into another Sapa characterized with the beautiful steep mountains. In the late afternoon, we can enjoy a comfortable sight seeing at sunset in Mau Son and observe China at the foot of mountain.

<b>DAY 16</b>	<b>MAU SON – HANOI, 180 KM, 5 HOURS</b>
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On the way going down hill, we will stop for a short walk to visit Dzaio Ta Pan, Nung Phan Sinh villages on the hillside, in which you can have a good time with the family specializing in wine brewery. For hundreds of years, Mau Son wine is the Lang Son's specialty which sells well in Hanoi, the South of Vietnam and even China.

Then we will visit some war relics at the centre of Lang Son town or International Friendship border gate for buying a variety of Chinese goods. Return to Hanoi on the National Highway No 1 with a possible visit to Chi Lang vestige which is surrounded by the steep mountains.

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