SPICE ROADS
CYCLING

GRAVEL

NORTH VIETNAM BY GRAVEL BIKE

Tour Code
VNM-CAO

9 DAYS
8 NIGHTS

Destinations	1
Tour Meets	Hanoi
Tour Ends	Hanoi
Fly in to	Noi Bai International Airport (HAN)
Fly out of	Noi Bai International Airport (HAN)
Group Size	2-14 riders
Minimum Age	18 (on scheduled departures)

ACTIVITY PROFILE

7 Cycling days	**518** km Total cycling distance
74 km Avg distance / day	**1744** m Avg climbing / day

PRICING

Price	US$ 2,250
Bike Hire (Gravel Bike)	US$ 240
Single Supplement	US$ 250

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- ✓ SpiceRoads jersey
- ✓ Water bottle
- ✓ Support vehicle
- ✓ Guide(s)
- ✓ Meals (as indicated)
- ✓ Accommodation
- ✓ Snacks and drinks
- ✓ Entrance fees

WHAT'S EXCLUDED

- ✗ International flights
- ✗ Domestic flights
- ✗ Airport pick up
- ✗ Airport drop off
- ✗ Visa fees
- ✗ Alcohol
- ✗ Tips

DEPARTURES

26 Sep - 04 Oct 2026
24 Oct - 01 Nov 2026
06 Mar - 14 Mar 2027
27 Mar - 04 Apr 2027
01 May - 09 May 2027
22 May - 30 May 2027
25 Sep - 03 Oct 2027
23 Oct - 31 Oct 2027

TRIP PROFILE

We ride a total of 518 km over 7 days of cycling, for an average of 74 km per day.. Day 2 (our first ride) is a moderate elevation gain of just over +1200 m. From then on, each ride will feature elevation gains of at least +1500 m per day, with over +2000 m on Days 3 & 7. Daily distances vary: Days 2-5 are approx. 60-70 km, while Days 6 & 7 are 100 km each. The final day's ride dials back the distance once more to 61 km. Your guide's expert knowledge of the area and terrain ensures you always know what is coming up in terms of distance and difficulty. This makes a tremendous difference, as does the constant supply of water and refreshments along the way.

Suitability: This tour is for cyclists in very good physical condition who can handle distances of 60-100 km per day, and daily elevation gains of over +1500 m, in potentially hot, humid conditions, for a full week. The climbs can be quite steep at certain sections, and at certain moments, it may be advantageous to walk for a short distance to reach a gentler grade. Certain descents will require advanced ability to control braking and steering. Our support vehicle will be available at regular intervals, but there are sections throughout the tour where the vehicle cannot enter the cycling route, meaning communication with the guide will be very important, and each rider will need to know their comfort level with the sections ahead.

Biking Conditions: roads with moderate traffic. The riding surfaces are also diverse, including broken asphalt or concrete; champagne gravel; occasional chunky sections; and some smoothly-paved sections here and there. With ongoing road works and periodic damage, road surfaces can also change with little notice before the ride. You may encounter some traffic in villages and towns (the busiest being the town of Cao Bang). The roads are relatively seldom-traveled, but it's always important to be aware of obstacles on the road (such as branches, stones, and livestock), as well as the unexpected approach of vehicles.

You will sometimes be separated from the support vehicle when it cannot enter a particular section of narrow road, but your guide will always indicate these sections in advance. When you rendezvous with the van, it's always possible to take a break and skip ahead to a later section in the ride, or directly to the end.

Air quality is generally very good in this region, with the exception being the periodic burning of rice fields and other organic debris, which can result in some smoke. The weather in the mountains can change quickly, from hot and sunny one moment to a downpour the next. Microclimates result in considerable temperature variation. We generally ride rain or shine, but based on the guide's discretion or your level of comfort, modifications to the planned route can be made. It's all part of the adventure!

Hotels: We have chosen hotels, resorts and guest houses that combine location, comfort, and authentic connections with local communities to ensure that your experience of Vietnam's north is truly memorable and enjoyable. For our first night in Hanoi, our hotel is within walking distance of the Old Quarter's many attractions, and features a rooftop bar, pool, and gym, as well as a spa. At Ba Be Lake, our uniquely-constructed hillside resort overlooks the lakeshore. For the evening of Day 3, Kolia Organic Farm welcomes us to its exclusive setting near one of the region's highest peaks, with massages available if booked in advance. In remote Thong Nong, we will stay in a basic but comfortable local hotel, allowing us to have the best tour flow and cycling experience, while engaging with this small village, seldom visited by outsiders. Our accommodations for Days 5 & 6 are charming guesthouses built with natural materials and traditional techniques, in stunning locations amid mountain ridges and nearby rivers. Day 7, in Cao Bang town, we will stay in a modern, central hotel overlooking the Hien River, just a short walk away from the town's thriving main street and riverside promenades. Day 8 features a return to our initial hotel in Hanoi, the perfect place to recover and unwind from your cycling tour.

Day 1: Meet in Hanoi

We first meet in Hanoi's charming city centre for a dinner, setting the stage for the journey ahead. If you arrive in the city early, make sure to walk the streets of the Old Quarter, and visit some of the city's many attractions like the Temple of Literature, Hoan Kiem Lake, the Museum of Ethnology, and the Fine Arts Museum.

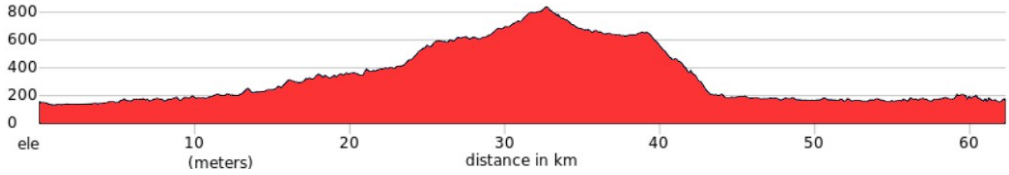
Le Jardin Hotel Haute Couture, Minasi Premium Hotel, or similar | Dinner

Day 2: Hanoi - Bac Kan - Ba Be Lake

This morning, we will leave Hanoi by transfer to Bac Kan, about 3 hours away. Upon arrival, we will get fitted on our bikes, followed by an early lunch. We warm up with very pretty riverside trail riding out of Bac Kan, then begin climbing on some village roads interspersed with a larger tarmac road to take us into the imposing natural fortress of Cao Bang Province. Descending via the old road, now crumbling asphalt, through the scenic village of Bang Phuc, with wondrous views over the rice-terraced valley. Soon after, a fun, winding gravel descent brings us down from the mountain - you will use your brakes a lot in this section! The landscape levels off for the last 20 km along a beautiful valley floor, and we reach a few last hills along the shores of Ba Be Lake, Vietnam's largest body of freshwater. Our hotel for the night is just steps away from the

lake, so you can walk along the shore to spot wildlife, and maybe even hop in a kayak or boat for a little cruise before gathering for dinner.

Ba Be Lakeside Bungalow Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

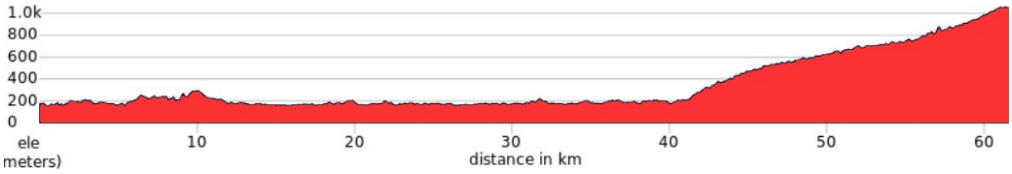


Ride 61km +1241m -1218m

Day 3: Ba Be Lake - Phia Den

The shimmering waters of Ba Be Lake greet us this morning as we wind our way along the shoreline with some great vantage points along the way. Leaving the lake behind, we enter a fast 10 km stretch of tarmac provincial road, then turn off onto a cyclist's dream of small farm roads and tracks that alternate between broken concrete, asphalt and gravel. Meet members of various local ethnic groups in the increasingly remote villages as we get deeper into the maze of valleys. The van will not be able to support the ride throughout these narrow paths, so communication with the guide regarding rendezvous points will be crucial. Emerging onto the mountainside road ascending towards Phia Oac, navigate the broken road surface with breathtaking views over jungle and rice terraces as you reach an elevation of over 1000 m ASL. Spend the night in this serene milieu at an organic farm, and enjoy the bounty of local foods for dinner with a view!

Kolia Organic Farm Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

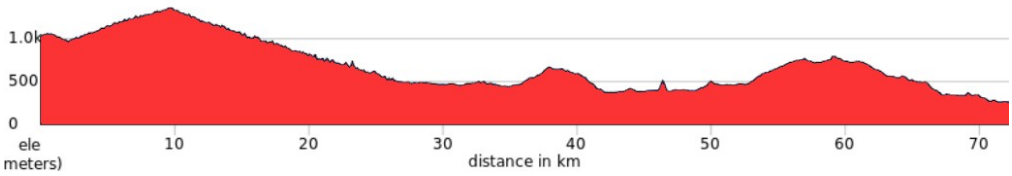


Ride 62km +2111m -1257m

Day 4: Phia Den - Thong Nong

Leaving our organic farm, rejoin the road up towards the Phia Oac summit; reaching an altitude of over 1300 m before beginning your descent. Though the road is nominally tarmac, the potholes and broken sections will make our gravel tyres useful! Take in the sweeping panorama of endless spiky limestone ridges receding into the distance; the locals call this reptilian topography "The Dragon's Back." Descend a series of switchbacks to the thriving town of Nguyen Binh, perhaps stopping for a snack and coffee in town. From here, the road will be more remote, with gravel trails winding along steep mountainsides above rushing streams and waterfalls. Each bend in the road will be photo-worthy, and you will see local farming practices in action, with the crops drying on the roadside. Take the opportunity for a dip in the stream as we near our destination, Thong Nong. This charming village, tucked away among the mountains, is a friendly place to spend the night. Wander through its streets and spend time in the main square, which is overlooked by a sacred banyan tree.

Hoang Trang Hotel Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

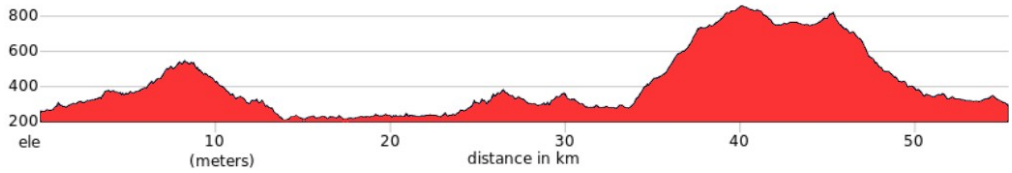


Ride 72km +1695m -2466m

Day 5: Thong Nong - Pac Bo

Follow the river out of Thong Nong, then begin a challenging 8.5 km climb of about 360 m. Pause at the top and take in the views down towards the Bang River, then ride down this fun stretch of road. Gliding alongside the river, a rolling, narrow road takes you through jungle groves and villages, then into wider valleys with where goats and water buffalo graze. Pause for a break in the village of Xuan Hoa, then begin a steep, winding climb into a seemingly lost landscape of small villages in rock-strewn fields under dramatic cliff faces. This fantastical section brings us to a steep descent to the Lenin Stream (as the Bang River is called near its source). The Communist name is no accident, as this was the birthplace of Ho Chi Minh's guerrilla campaign in the 1940s as he mustered his forces against the French colonial regime. This afternoon, you may visit Pac Bo Cave, headquarters of the movement, which even features a flat-topped rock known as Uncle Ho's Desk. From here, it's an easy, flat ride to our rustic homestay for the night, just near the banks of the famous little steam.

Me Farmstay Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

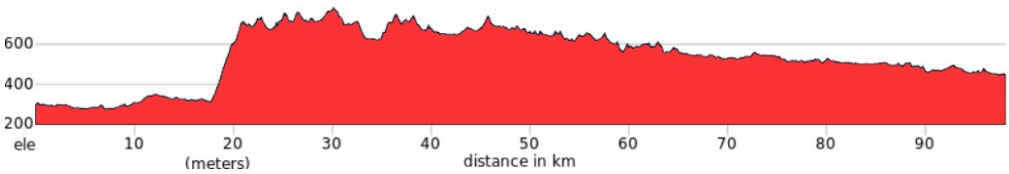


Ride 61km +1592m -1556m

Day 6: Pac Bo - Ban Gioc

Ease into the day's ride with a flat section of some 15 km, then enter a steep climb to a plateau near the Chinese border. This rugged land with a patchwork of different road surfaces will undulate and gradually descend towards the Quay Son River. Along the way, browse the countryside markets and stop for refreshments and lunch in isolated hamlets where we will no doubt be the object of much curiosity and speculation! Approaching the end of a ride, pass by yet another famous cascade, the Co La Waterfall. Dropping into the wide valley of the Quay Son, we will settle into our utterly enchanting accommodations for the night. Taking a walk in this beautiful border district, you will see birds and other river fauna, along with traditional mud-walled houses, as the shadows of the surrounding limestone monoliths grow larger in the twilight. Later, gather for a delicious dinner of local specialties prepared by our gracious hosts!

Lan Rung Homestay Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



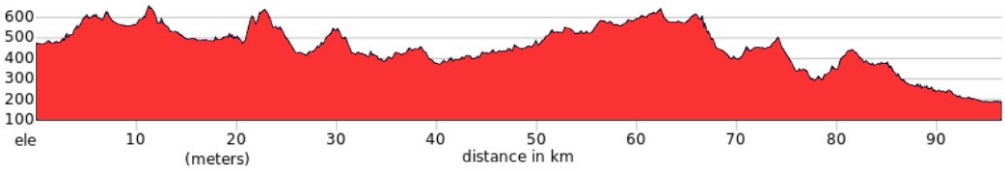
Ride 98km +1896m -1746m

Day 7: Ban Gioc - Cao Bang City

In the morning light, we will visit the Ban Gioc Waterfall, famed throughout Vietnam and beyond for its many torrents of water that gleam like ornate drapery in a great palace of nature. Beholding this awe-inspiring natural marvel, we will then transfer a short distance to the start of our cycling route. Today's ride is still a challenge, but it features fewer steep, sustained climbs than the other days. Cross small bridges over little streams flowing among jungle and mountain vistas, stopping for a bowl of pho or other hearty local foods in the villages. After descending the beautiful Kneeling Horse Pass (named after an ancient legend of a brave Vietnamese warrior),

you will enter a 15 km stretch of pure gravel bliss, which then segues into the final descent into the town of Cao Bang. Though referred to as a "city", it is actually a very walkable town with a main street, parks and riverside promenades. If you take a walk in the town centre this evening, you may come across many dance and musical performances, as well as traditional handicrafts and food.

Indigen Boutique Hotel Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

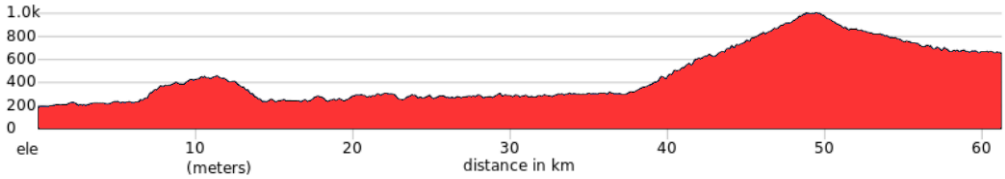


Ride 103km +2048m -2333m

Day 8: Cao Bang City - Hanoi

This morning, enjoy the view from your riverside hotel, and perhaps walk into town for a coffee at one of the many friendly shops. We will cycle directly out of town by a small road that leads us into hushed villages deep in small valleys by the Hien River. After some early climbs, the ride settles into a rhythm of gentle undulations for the next 20 km. At 38 km, we begin our big challenge of the day: a gain of +730 m over a distance of 12 km. As we climb, the road surface will alternate between pavement and fairly chunky broken surface and gravel sections. From the summit at 1000 m ASL, take a look back at the mind-boggling topography of the mountain country from which we are emerging. Then it's a gentle 12 km descent to the village of Ban Dam, where we will end our gravel bike journey through Cao Bang Province. We'll stop for lunch nearby, then continue back to Hanoi (a total transfer of about 4 hours to our hotel). On arrival, we'll freshen up and gather for a celebratory dinner to reflect on our utterly unique riding and cultural experience of Vietnam's wondrous north country!

Le Jardin Hotel Haute Couture, Minasi Premium Hotel, or similar Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



Ride 61km +1627m -1161m

Day 9: Departure from Hanoi

This morning, head to the airport or train station for onward journeys, or linger longer in Vietnam's endlessly fascinating capital. Hen Gap Lai!

Breakfast

Disclaimer: The adventure cycling tours we operate often go beyond the beaten track, and the countries where we ride are not always predictable. Due to these reasons, it is occasionally necessary to reroute or update itineraries. Our guarantee is that we will not change a trip unless for safety or to improve it. Our listed hotels are always accurate at the time of writing, but should we have to change any hotel, it will always be for a similar or better one.

NUTS & BOLTS

Bikes

Because some people can't imagine going on a trip without their own beloved bicycle, we do not include them in the price as part of this tour. However, we offer high-quality Giant Contend AR 2 endurance road bikes for hire, fitted with 38c width tires, at the price listed in the tour pricing section. Depending on the size required and availability, a different model of equal quality may be used. While not purpose-built gravel bikes, this configuration is ideally suited to the road surfaces encountered on this tour. If you bring your own bike, please make sure it is a similarly fitted road bike or gravel bike in good mechanical order.

Bike Repairs

Basic spares and tools are carried by the guide and on the support vehicle, though we cannot guarantee having spares for every conceivable problem. Carrying a basic tool kit, a spare tube and a pump while riding is recommended.

Safety

Wearing a helmet is required on all our biking adventures and is non negotiable. If you do not wear a helmet you will not be allowed to cycle. Your tour leader is trained in first aid and emergency rescue, but to a large degree you must be responsible for your own safety while riding. It is therefore compulsory that you take out travel insurance that will cover you for a mountain biking tour.

Guides

You will be led by a local English-speaking guide and if the group is 9 people or more we will add another guide to the tour. All our guides are well informed in the history, culture and religions of the area where you are biking and are skilled at passing that knowledge on to you. Your guide is also medically trained and an experienced cyclist, able to handle most minor repairs en route.

THE NITTY GRITTY

Passports and Visas

The visa requirements for Vietnam can be divided into three sections, dependent on your nationality and the point of entry/exit. Please review the details below to determine which applies to you. Visa policies are subject to change, and it is the traveler's responsibility to confirm their visa requirements for Vietnam before departure.

E-Visa

The Vietnam e-visa is now available to almost all nationalities. You can apply for a single or multiple-entry visa valid for up to 90 days. Application is through the Vietnam **visa portal**. Please note that e-visas cannot be used if you are joining Road Biking from Saigon to Angkor (more information in the **Visa on Arrival** section below).

Please carefully fill out the form and check the information you have entered. Even minor spelling errors will render the visa invalid and your entry to Vietnam will be denied.

For peace of mind, we suggest applying for your e-visa as early as possible, and no later than 2 weeks before your expected arrival in Vietnam. While processing time is generally no more than 1-3 working days (not including weekends and Vietnamese holidays), it is wise to give yourself some buffer time in case there are any issues.

If you are joining a multi-country trip beginning in Vietnam, please be sure to select the correct exit point from the list below:

- Saigon to Bangkok by Bicycle and Biking Saigon to Angkor Wat: Vinh Xuong Landport
- Remote Vietnam and Laos by Bike: Na Meo Landport
- Biking Hanoi to Luang Prabang: Tay Trang Landport
- Cultural Road from Hoi An to Angkor Wat: Le Thanh International Border Gate

If your SpiceRoads trip will end in Vietnam, please choose your point of exit as the airport, port or land border through which you have arranged to leave Vietnam.

Please keep a printed copy of your e-visa with you at all times, as it may be requested at some exit points.

Visa Exemption

Citizens of certain countries (including many European and Asian nations) can enter Vietnam visa-free for up to 45 days. Please check if your nationality is exempt here before applying for an e-visa. If you are on the exemption list, you still need to make sure that your passport is valid for at least 6 months from your date of entry and has at least two blank pages. You do not need to apply for anything in advance; you will simply receive an entry stamp at immigration upon arrival.

Visa on Arrival

If you are joining "Road Biking from Saigon to Angkor", **e-visas are not permitted for the exit through the land borders we cross during the tour.** Before the tour, our sales team will collect your passport and flight information from you, and we will provide you with the Visa on Arrival letter within 10 business days.

When you arrive in Vietnam, you will need to present the following at the Visa on Arrival counter:

- a printed copy of the Visa on Arrival letter, which we will have sent to you by email. You will also likely need this printed letter to check in and board your flight to Vietnam.
- the visa stamping fee (USD $25 for a single-entry visa). Please prepare the visa fee amount in cash, using USD or the equivalent in Vietnam dong to avoid unfavourable airport exchange rates.
- two printed passport photos.

Your Visa on Arrival will be processed quickly, and you may then proceed to immigration to enter Vietnam.

Please ensure that you update our sales team if your passport or flight details change before the tour, as mismatched information will result in entry to Vietnam being denied. Changes to this information when a Visa on Arrival letter has already been issued will result in a charge for a new letter to be processed.

Important Update: Effective immediately, all non-Vietnamese nationals entering the country in Hanoi (Noi Bai International Airport - HAN), Danang (Danang International Airport - DAD), Ho Chi Minh City (Tan Son Nhat International Airport - SGN) and Phu Quoc (Phu Quoc International Airport - PQC), must complete the **Digital Pre-Arrival Declaration** form before arrival. Please fill out the details on the official website here **within three (3) days before your arrival in Vietnam**. This is a free process - beware of fake websites that charge a fee. If you are already travelling within the three days before your planned arrival in Vietnam, then we suggest completing the form while you are at a hotel with reliable Wi-Fi. It only takes a few minutes. After submission, you will receive a QR Code. Please save a screenshot of this code on your phone to present at immigration.

Health

See here for recommendations and detailed information.

Weather

Weather in Vietnam is divided into 4 main regions - the far north, north, central and south.

The far north can get very cold in December and January while the dry season runs from October to late March and the wet season between April to September.

In Hanoi & the north, it is hot, wet and humid from May to October while November to April is cooler and dry.

Central Vietnam experiences hot, dry weather between January & August with temperatures ranging in the mid 30°C. High levels of rainfall are during September - November.

Southern Vietnam is dry and hot from November to April, and warm and wet between May & October, with the highest rainfall in June, July & August.

Food

Meals are included as per the itinerary where B = breakfast, L = lunch, D = dinner. Most meals are Vietnamese food and features noodles, rice curries and soups. Vietnamese cuisine is world famous and we make sure you sample as much variety as possible. Any special dietary requirements can also be catered for as well. Please let us know at the time of booking.

Drink

Keeping you completely hydrated is a job we take very seriously. Cold water, some energy-restoring local fruit, and soft drinks are included in the tour price while riding. Soft drinks and other beverages during meals are not included. Beer is freely available everywhere in Vietnam but is NOT included in the price.

Solo Travelers

SpiceRoads does not require you to pay a surcharge for traveling alone. We will arrange for you to share accommodation with another traveler of the same gender and if we can not match you up we will provide a single room at no extra charge. If you prefer not to share a single supplement is payable to guarantee your own room. The cost of the single supplement is listed above.

Extra Expenses

We recommend that you tuck away a few extra dollars, perhaps US$10, for incidentals. It is customary to tip local tour guides and drivers, however, the amount you give should be dependent on the level of service you receive. We will send you a tipping guideline before the tour begins.

Money

The official national currency is the Vietnam dong (d), but the US dollar is widely accepted in tourist centers. However, in smaller towns and villages the dong is preferred. ATMs are available in all major tourist destinations and big cities. Vietcombank has the best network with a single withdrawal limit of 2,000,000d (about US$125). Most major currencies can be exchanged at leading banks in Vietnam, but the US dollar is preferred away from the tourist centers. Changing US$100 will make you an instant millionaire! You cannot legally take the dong out of Vietnam but you can reconvert reasonable amounts of it into US dollars on departure.

GENERAL BOOKING INFO

If this is the tour for you here's what you need to do to confirm your place:

FLEXIBLE BOOKING CONDITIONS

Booking a SpiceRoads cycling adventure is easy and we try to do everything possible to make sure you have full flexibility and peace of mind. We do not require a deposit to hold your place on a tour and once full payment has been made your money is protected in our client account and you have the flexibility to cancel or change your booking if needed.

CONFIRMING YOUR BOOKING

Just complete our online booking form or send your booking details offline (email or post), and we will confirm your participation. No deposit is needed to confirm your place on a SpiceRoads tour.

You are advised to read our Booking Conditions in full before you make your payment and should you require further clarifications of any of the conditions below, please email us or call our office.

TRIP STATUS

There is a minimum number of participants (usually 2) required to enable the trip to go ahead. Once the minimum number is reached, the trip status will change from 'Available' to 'Guaranteed to Depart'. Once a trip is guaranteed to depart you are free to book your flights and make other travel arrangements. If the trip status is 'Limited' will mean we have only a small number of spaces available for booking. If you are unsure about the trip status, please email us or call our office.

BOOKING ONLINE

From the tour page, click the 'Book Now' link. All departures for this tour will appear, just select the date you'd like to travel. For the next steps, you'll need to know the names of the people travelling. If you wish you can also provide extra details such as passport numbers, height (for bike hire), or you can add that later by logging into Manage My Trip (we'll set up an account for you automatically if you don't already have one). Our system will contact you from time to time to fill in the missing information, as it will be required before departure. However, if the trip that you are booking offers a child discount, you will have to fill out the date of birth of each rider (so we can calculate the appropriate discount).

If you are having any problems please send us an email, or give us a call (+66 026 3295) and one of our travel specialists will assist you with your booking.

BOOKING OFFLINE

Just call us or send an email indicating which trip you want to join and we will happily send you a list of questions and process your booking for you.

DEPOSITS AND PAYMENTS

We do not require a deposit or full payment to book a place for you on a tour.

The balance of the tour's cost (final invoice) will need to be paid 60 days before the departure date with fees for any bicycle rental(s), single supplement(s) and extra hotel nights.

In the case where a booking is made when there are less than 60 days until the tour departure date, the tour's cost should be paid in full within 72 hours of receiving an invoice from SpiceRoads. Payment can be made by credit card using our online payment gateway or by bank transfer. When making payment online you will need to confirm that you have read these booking conditions during the "checkout" process, which equates to agreeing to the terms of services and stipulations as indicated in this document.

In all cases, tour fees need to be paid "in full" before participation in a tour. No person(s) will be allowed to join a tour without fully settling their invoice and receiving a confirmation number from SpiceRoads.

The exception can be made for last-minute miscellaneous fees that can be paid locally (visas, additional local hotel bookings, etc.) can be settled on the day of arrival.

FULL FLEXIBILITY FOR TOUR CANCELATIONS

If the tour is cancelled or postponed by SpiceRoads because we didn't make the trip numbers and the tour can't run, we will make a full cash refund (by bank transfer or on your credit card).

If the tour is cancelled for any other reason, including due to Covid related travel restrictions, we will give you a full credit (with no deductions for admin or any other small-print item) to use on any SpiceRoads tour with no time limit. (Exceptions being flights, special permits and other non-refundable items and these will be advised when booking the trip).

Before paying for your tour, you can cancel your booking with no charge and up until 40 days before departure, you can change your booking to another travel date or move your booking onto another SpiceRoads tour with no charges.

If you need to cancel after you have made full payment, please see our cancellation policy.

Loyalty Riders Club

For those who have been on several long tours with us, we reward customer loyalty by offering repeat customers a special discount off the tour price (excludes single supplement and bike rental). If this is your fourth scheduled tour or more you will receive a 5% discount. If this is your eighth scheduled tour or more we will extend a 10% discount. The discount will be reflected in your online booking, but please contact us if any questions. Loyalty discounts cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer. Note: Only tours of 7 days or more will be applicable for a loyalty discount.

International Flights

International flights, to and from the start and finish points are not included in the tour price. Once your tour is Guaranteed to Depart you can book your flight. Please contact us for advice before arranging flights for the best arrival and departure times. We would only cancel a trip for an extreme circumstance, but in that case, where we cancel your trip, we cannot be liable for losses incurred relating to any flight booking you have made. Please claim any losses from your travel insurance that you acquired when you booked your holiday.

Newsletter

Our adventure travel e-newsletter is full of travel news, trip information, interesting stories and contests. To avoid missing out on special offers and updates from SpiceRoads, be sure to subscribe.

CONTACT US

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