

# Further Information



This document has been compiled by our cycling expedition leader. **Please do take into account your own personal preferences and common sense!**

We welcome feedback on how this document can be improved upon your return from your Challenge.

A few notes.....

**VIETNAM**, officially the **Socialist Republic of Vietnam**, is the easternmost nation on the Indochinese Peninsula. It borders China to the north, Laos to the northwest, and Cambodia to the southwest. On the country's east coast lies the South China Sea. The Mekong delta, covers about 40,000 square kilometers and is a low-level plain not more than three meters above sea level at any point and criss-crossed by a maze of canals and rivers. Hanoi in the North is the capital city but Ho Chi Minh City, formerly Saigon, is the largest city.

With a population of over 85 million, Vietnam is the 13<sup>th</sup> most populous country in the world. Vietnamese people, also called "Viet" or "Kinh", account for most of the population, but there are more than 54 ethnic minorities throughout the country. Vietnam is predominantly a Buddhist country.

Most of the population speaks Vietnamese as a native language but various other languages are spoken by the minority groups in Vietnam. French is still spoken by some older Vietnamese as a second language, a throwback from colonial times, but is losing its popularity. In recent years, English has become the most popular foreign language, with English study being obligatory in most schools.

After a troubled past - most notably, The Vietnam War (called the American War in Vietnam) that broke out in 1959 and lasted until 1975 - the economy of Vietnam has achieved rapid growth in agricultural and industrial production, construction and housing, exports, and foreign investment. It is now one of the fastest growing economies in the world and the largest producer of cashew nuts and second-largest rice exporter in the world. Besides rice, key exports are coffee, tea, rubber and fishery products.

The Kingdom of **CAMBODIA**, is a country in with a population of almost 15 million people, with Phnom Penh being the capital city. A citizen of Cambodia is usually identified as "Cambodian" or "Khmer," but the country also has a substantial number of predominantly Muslim Cham, as well as ethnic Chinese, Vietnamese and small hill tribes.

Most of the population speaks Khmer which has three main dialects – Phnom Penh, Northern Khmer and Cardamom Khmer. As in Vietnam, French is still spoken by some of the population but English is becoming more popular especially in Phnom Penh.

The country borders Thailand to its west and northwest, Laos to its northeast, and Vietnam to its east and southeast. In the south it faces the Gulf of Thailand. The geography of Cambodia is dominated by the Mekong river (colloquial Khmer: *Tonle Thom* or "the great river") and the Tonlé Sap ("the fresh water lake"), an important source of fish.

War and brutal totalitarianism under Pol Pot from 1975-1979 created famine in Cambodia. Desperate farm families had no choice but to eat their rice seeds and only in 2000 was Cambodia once again self-sufficient in rice.

Despite recent progress, the Cambodian economy continues to suffer from the effects of decades of civil war and corruption. The standard income of most Khmer is increasing, but is low compared with other countries in the region. Most rural households depend on agriculture - rice, fish, timber, garments and rubber are Cambodia's major exports. Cambodia's main industries are garments and tourism.

## Climate & Temperatures

Vietnam and Cambodia have a tropical monsoon climate, with humidity averaging 84% throughout the year. The winter or dry season, is roughly from November to April. The average day time temperature in November is 25-30°C, Average humidity – 75-79%

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## Time

Local time is +7 GMT

## Food

Breakfast and dinner on the trip will be provided at the hotels we stay in or at local restaurants and lunch stops will be en route in a café/restaurant if possible or if not, a packed lunch will be provided. The cuisine of VIETNAM's southern region is influenced by the French colonial era and you will see baskets of baguettes for sale in the markets. The people of the south prefer to serve several small dishes at mealtime. There are a few staples that you should be ready for - one is pho, or beef noodle soup. *Pho* is the fast food of Vietnam and come lunch time, it's the noodle house. Almost anywhere you go you will also find *gio lua* (pork sausages), *nem ran* (spring rolls), and *cha ca* (fish balls), and seafood is abundant - crabs, shrimp, squids, mussels, an untold variety of fish and even lobster are fished from the waters off Vietnam's coast or from the rivers. You will also find *nouc mam* (fish sauce) on almost any table and it may be added to almost anything. You will find fresh vegetables, sliced cucumbers, hot peppers, coriander, bean threads, a little basil or mint, and a few other herbs on the table to complement the meal. Most of the meats you will be offered will be familiar: beef, chicken, pork, shrimp, and fish.

The food of CAMBODIA is relatively unknown to the world compared to its neighbours but is similar to Thai food. Many of the people who knew how to cook authentic Khmer cuisine were killed during the Khmer Rouge Regime. Cambodian cooking also uses fish sauce widely in soups, stir-fries and as dippings and there are many variations of rice noodles. Beef noodle soup known as *Kuyteav* is a popular dish. *Prahok*, a type of fermented fish paste, is used in many dishes as a distinctive flavoring. Coconut milk is the main ingredient of many curries and desserts. Almost every meal is eaten with a bowl of rice. Typically, Cambodians eat their meals with at least three or four separate dishes. Each individual dish will usually be one of sweet, sour, salty or bitter. Chili is usually left up to the individual to add themselves (thank goodness!!).

## Difficulty

The cycling is not physically demanding in terms of terrain - we cycle through very pretty landscapes, rice paddies and local villages - but the high temperatures and humidity make it tough, especially for the first couple of days until you acclimatise and it is essential to stop often to cool down and replenish yourself with water and snacks. You will have to drink much more than you think – between 8-15 litres per day!

The daily distance cycled is usually 50-80 km, although sometimes it may be a little more or a little less. Even though these distances may not seem too far to some of you, remember, **this is a Challenge and you will be cycling all day in the heat.**

We recommend that you train for a few months before the cycle ride. You should build up week by week so that by the time you are ready to undertake your challenge, you are used to riding long distances for consecutive days. Any form of endurance exercise would be good training. Please see the Global Adventure Challenges training guide for more details.

## Equipment

All equipment that you should bring is shown on the Kit List.

## Luggage

Main luggage will be transferred each day to our hotel in the support vehicles.

## Health/Vaccinations

It is highly recommended you consult your Doctor about what immunisations are required for Vietnam and Cambodia.

**The vaccinations below are given as a guideline only – always consult your own Doctor:**

Hepatitis A, Typhoid, Tetanus and Polio. Risk of Malaria is present throughout both Vietnam and Cambodia

# Further Information cont.



## Accommodation and Sleeping arrangements

We will be staying in air-conditioned hotels with en-suite washing facilities, usually 2 people to a room. The hotels are clean and comfortable but possibly much more basic outside the cities.

## Toilets

In **VIETNAM** toilets are widely referred to as “rest rooms” and are available at all hotels, restaurants and cafes we stop at and public toilets are often found at larger ferry terminals. Some shop/café owners will let you use their toilet for 1000 Vietnamese Dong (about 3p!) but facilities are scarce elsewhere so you will have to be prepared to use the great outdoors when necessary!

In **CAMBODIA** toilets are available at hotels and, possibly, restaurants we stop at. Public toilets are non-existent elsewhere so participants will have to be prepared to use the bushes when necessary but should not wander too far away from the road because of the rare possibility of undiscovered land mines.

## Security and Safety

Our group will be accompanied by experienced, local English-speaking cycling guides, in addition to a Global Adventure Challenge Expedition Leader from the UK. Full comprehensive medical kits will be taken and Satellite Telephones will also accompany the group ensuring safety.

Although it is estimated that only 15% of Cambodia still has undiscovered minefields and these are thought to be mostly around the border regions with Thailand, it is still sensible not to walk too far off local paths and to avoid kicking any chunks of metal lying about.

## Passport/Visa

You will need a visa to enter **VIETNAM** which you must apply for at least six weeks before your challenge. Global Adventure Challenges will write to you approx. 12 weeks before departure enclosing details on how to obtain your Vietnamese Visa. You will need to bring two passport photos and \$20-25 for a visa to enter **CAMBODIA** which will be obtained at the border crossing.

You will need to pay Departure tax at the airport in Siem Reap on leaving Cambodia which is currently \$25.

## Water

Bottled water is carried by the support vehicles and is supplied throughout the day during cycling. It is not safe to drink any water except bottled in both countries.

## Currency & Spending Money

In **VIETNAM**, money can be exchanged at all hotels. Current exchange rate is US\$1 to 16000 Dong. US\$ are accepted most places especially in Ho Chi Minh City but Dong is needed in smaller places and for smaller purchases. It is best to take either cash or travellers cheques in US\$.

In **CAMBODIA**, to change US\$ to riel you will need to go to a money changer in Phnom Penh, although it is unnecessary to do so as **US\$ are accepted everywhere and are the preferred form of currency anywhere in Cambodia**. Current exchange rate is US\$1 to 4000 Riel. If you pay in US\$ you will receive change in US\$ and very small amounts in Riel, so you will still be able to acquire a Cambodian note for a souvenir without the hassle of changing currency. It is best to take cash in US\$. Travellers cheques are difficult to cash anywhere except banks in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap and only in US\$.

## Tipping

The average tip amount in Vietnamese hotels for bell boys, waiters, etc is US\$1 or 16000 Dong. In both countries, outside top hotels tipping is not expected but a couple of thousand Dong or a few hundred Riels for a nice meal is very much appreciated. Tipping your guide(s) is appropriate, customary and always appreciated. Your guides work in teams and evenly split all gratuities they receive. Your gratuity should reflect the quality of service you received and anything special your guide(s) did to enhance your trip.



## Valuables

You can put passports, tickets and other valuables in the safe in your hotel room when leaving the hotel for the evening, but don't forget to take them with you the next morning!

## Health & Hygiene

Hygiene is very important to avoid stomach upsets – wash hands wherever possible, especially before eating and after using the toilet. If washing facilities aren't available use antibacterial dry wash or wipes.

High factor sunscreen is a must – the sun is particularly strong in the Mekong Delta and even the local guides use sunscreen there.

## Local Life

You will see Western travellers in Ho Chi Minh City, however once we start to leave the city behind we will travel through areas that are off the usual tourist route. In the Vietnamese countryside the villagers are much more traditional than in the towns. Vietnamese women usually dress very modestly, especially outside the cities, so it is best to avoid skimpy tops and "short" shorts. Public displays of affection between men and women are frowned upon. Children will come up to you in droves and gather in a throng around you the moment you stop, but will be satisfied if you smile and wave or shout "hello" back. The Vietnamese are very welcoming but you will be stared at from morning till night! People are only curious though and usually if you take the trouble to give them a smile they will be ecstatically happy.

On reaching Phnom Penh you will notice a marked difference from Vietnam which is still under a communist government – initially the city seems much more familiar, but as you explore further a field you will find that Cambodia has its own unique culture and lifestyle. After everything they have endured over the previous decades, the people are remarkably tenacious. Cambodian women also usually dress very modestly, so as in Vietnam, it is best to avoid skimpy tops and "short" shorts, especially while visiting temples or pagodas and shoulders should be covered. Public displays of affection between men and women are frowned upon and may be considered offensive. If it is possible, Cambodian people are even more curious and surprised to see Westerners than the Vietnamese, and once again, you will be the star attraction wherever you go. People are incredibly friendly though and will often come and stand next to you and smile or strike up a simple conversation if they speak even the tiniest smidgen of English, such as "hello"!

## Traffic

Traffic in **VIETNAM** seems completely chaotic and a little daunting to the uninitiated – motorbikes, cyclo's, bicycles and pedestrians just seem to swarm about each other with no 'rhyme or reason' – especially in the cities. However, the simple technique to mastering cycling is to 'go with the flow' – don't stop suddenly if you are crossing to the left or tackling a roundabout – just take it slowly and keep going and the bigger, faster traffic will find it's way around you. All motorised vehicles 'honk' incessantly – this isn't aggressive and is a friendly way of saying, "don't pull out suddenly, I'm just behind you".

Traffic in **CAMBODIA** in the towns and cities is as manic as Vietnam but with cars too! Caution is needed when cycling and out walking. The same techniques apply - 'go with the flow.'

The same rules apply while on foot – although it goes against everything you've ever been taught, to cross the road just take the plunge and start walking – the traffic will avoid you. The most dangerous thing to do is stop or panic and run across – if you take it slowly you will be fine.

## Telephone Signals

Mobile signals can be found all over Vietnam and most of Cambodia.

Please note that the information above is correct at the time of going to publication