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# Explore Indochina

adventure expeditions in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam

## The Ho Chi Minh Trail

## HT#2

The legendary Ho Chi Minh Trail was the supply line used by North Vietnam to link North and South Vietnam during the American War. Soldiers, ammunition, weapons and supplies were carried by hand, bicycle and truck for hundreds of kilometres through the otherwise impenetrable jungle that covered Vietnam's mountainous border with Lao. A testimony to the ingenuity, fortitude and commitment of the North Vietnamese, the Trail slipped from use at the end of the war and was taken back by the jungle. Recent road works that follow original sections of the Trail have changed this. Besides incredible driving, deep in the Vietnamese countryside, this ride takes in the former imperial capital of Hue, the ancient trading town of Hoi An, Khe Sanh battle site, the infamous A Shaw valley, China beach, Vietnamese war museums and the DMZ. We also take time to stay overnight in a traditional Thai hill tribe village and visit the former Imperial Tombs of Hue. Take this one off chance to be among the first to traverse the Ho Chi Minh Trail!

Length: 2,033km - Difficulty: Moderate

Hanoi - Mai Chau - Vinh - Dong Hoi - Khe Sanh - Hue - Hoi An - Kon Tum - Buon Me Thuat - Nha Trang (13 days, 12 nights)

**Day 1 :** In the morning we visit the Ho Chi Minh Trail museum on the outskirts of Hanoi. Then we jump on the bikes and pass extensive farming lands comprising a sea of paddy fields split by tree-lined roads punctuated by limestone karst scenery. After a light lunch near Hoa Binh we cross two mountain passes before descending to the mountain valley settlement of Mai Chau. Overnight in a Thai ethnicity stilt house in Mai Chau (B, L, D) 140km

**Day 2 :** In the morning we explore the mountains to the north of Mai Chau, passing Hmong and Dao hilltribe communities living as they have for centuries. In the evening we enjoy a traditional music and dancing performance. Overnight in a Thai ethnicity stilt house in Mai Chau (B, L, D) 80km

**Day 3 :** We head south on a beautiful winding road which follows the banks of the Ma River until we join the new Ho Chi Minh Highway. This newly carved route leads us due

south, through remote back country, not far from the Lao border. In the afternoon we cut eastwards towards the coast and stay overnight in the coastal city of Vinh, which is close to where Ho Chi Minh was born. Overnight in Vinh. (B, L, D) 286km

**Day 4 :** We head south along Highway One, before heading inland towards the Lao border. We pass the Dong Loc intersection, (main junction for supply lines during the War) which is widely regarded in Vietnamese eyes as the beginning of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. We then pass through remote back country, close to the border, as the scenery steadily becomes dominated by karst limestone rock formations. We pass two famous intersections where until 1972 most of the Trail's traffic passed over into Lao. In the afternoon we arrive at the World Heritage site of Phong Nha where local civilians and military sheltered from incessant bombing during wartime. Then we drive down to the coastal town of Doing Hoi, which was heav-

CINC	ASST	F/JLT	C/S	C/S	INSP	PA	JT	SEC	PER	INF	DPS	LOG	PLN	CEL	TRD	SEC	ASST	OPR	INT	OPR	NOG	SSG
100	1001	1002	1003	1004	1005	1006	1007	1008	1009	1010	1011	1012	1013	1014	1015	1016	1017	1018	1019	1020	1021	1022

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ily shelled by US warships during the war. At a hotel overlooking the beach, we can take in some sunbathing by the beach. Overnight in Dong Hoi. (B, L, D) 231km.

**Day 5 :** We strike south through foothills which were once sprayed heavily by Agent Orange towards the former DMZ. There is still much evidence of bombing on the mountain sides and from time to time we will see remnants of the original Trail. We take in the famous Hien Luong Bridge (former demarcation line between North and South Vietnam, Khe Sanh (former US Marine base), Lang Vie (former US special forces base) and the Truong Son Cemetery. Overnight in Khe Sanh. (B, L, D) 145km

**Day 6 :** In the morning we head south over the Da Krong Bridge (built by the Cubans in 1973) into the infamous A Shau valley, an area of intense wartime activity. Passing Hamburger Hill and mountains still barren due to the extended effects of Agent Orange, we arrive at A Luoi, where there are many Bru Van hill tribe people. Then, cruising through green back country down the steep Me Oi Pass, we continue on to the beautiful city of Hue which lies along the banks of the Perfume River. Overnight in Hue. (B, L, D) 171km

**Day 7 :** Hue is the former imperial capital of feudal Vietnam and is a perfect place to relax after our driving to date. Take a boat cruise along the Perfume River to visit the tombs of the former Emperors Minh Mang and Tu Duc or visit the remains of the Imperial Citadel, which was largely destroyed during the Tet Offensive in 1968. Overnight in Hue. (B, L, D)

**Day 8 :** We head back up the Me Oi pass to A Luoi in order to rejoin the Trail. Many Ta Oi and Co Tu people will be seen tending their fields. We then skirt the Lao border on the side of a large mountain covered in thick jungle. At the remote town of Hien we turn off the trail and drop down the Ba Na mountain range to the World Heritage site of Hoi An, a major trading centre in SE Asia in the 16th and 17th centuries. Overnight in Hoi An. (B, L, D) 278km

**Day 9 :** Those who wish can ride up to China Beach, where US marines first landed, otherwise enjoy a free day to explore Hoi An by foot or by bike. With fine wining and dining (including a range of Hoi An specialties), impressive architecture, fantastic tailoring, endless shopping, and a glorious beach, there is no shortage of activities to indulge in. Overnight in Hoi An. (B)

**Day 10 :** We strike back up to the mountains, rejoining the Trail at Kham Duc. From there we head up the towering Lo So Pass, passing through remote areas thinly populated by peoples of the Ba Na ethnicity. Edging close to the border with Laos, where a number of Trail arteries crossed over in Lao, we continue on to Kon Tum. Overnight in Kon Tum. (B, L, D) 284km

**Day 11 :** In the morning we head south through the 'Tay Nguyen' (Central Highlands), passing Plei Ku and the Ia Drang valley battle site, before continuing onto Buon Ma Thuot, the city where northern forces launched their final assault on the then Saigon. Overnight in Buon Ma Thuot. (B, L, D) 235km

**Day 12 :** We take an easy drive back down off the Tay Son highlands towards the coast, arriving at Highway One some 30km north of Nha Trang. Taking in this scenic coastal stretch past turquoise waters and scarlet fishing boats, we arrive in the bright lights of Nha Trang and its relaxing holiday options. Overnight in Nha Trang. (B, L) 183km

**Day 13 :** A free day by the beach before gathering for a seafood feast to recount our adventure and toast the Ho Chi Minh Trail. (B, L)

CINC	ASST	F/JLT	C/S	REP	INSP		JT	PERS	INF	DPS	LOG	PLN	C&L	PAO	SEC	ASST						SSA
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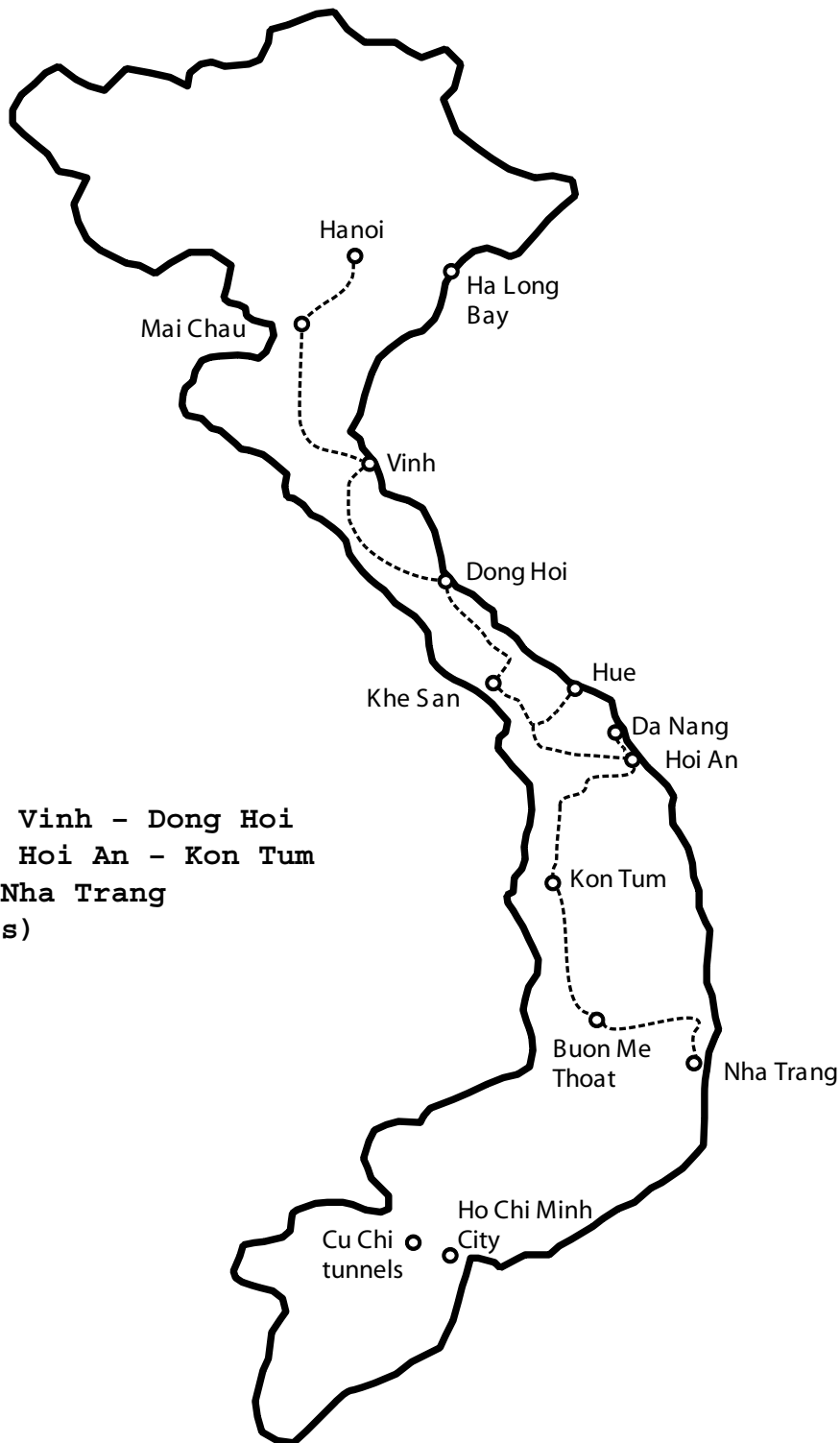
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