

HEALTH AND FITNESS COMBINE WITH CULTURAL IMMERSION, AS ADVENTURE TRAVELERS EMBARK ON THE LATEST TREND IN TOURISM: MOUNTAIN CYCLING. HF TAKES A LOOK AT THE ALLURE (AND THE WOES) OF THIS FORM OF TRAVEL.

A cyclist in a blue and black jersey is riding away on a dirt path that winds through a rugged, mountainous landscape. The terrain is covered in brownish, dry-looking vegetation and scattered dark rocks. In the background, there are layers of blue-toned mountains under a clear sky. The overall scene conveys a sense of adventure and outdoor activity.

CYCLING  
**JOURNEY**

The sun is scorching. Forest rain is fast and thick. Mountain air spreads; mist unravels in every direction. No matter what the weather, a highland bicycle ride is tortuous. Gliding between high and dangerous cliffs, this adventure promises breathtaking views.

Within the world of modern sports, mountain biking is an increasingly popular pleasure for athletic adventure-seekers. The journey is relatively cheap, but best suits those with free spirits, a love for the outdoors, and (of course) a strong pair of legs.

Starting from Hanoi, a car transports professional or amateur cyclists through villages, fields, and mountains to gather in a starting location in the Northern highlands. With its natural beauty, friendly locals, and established tourist infrastructure, Sapa is one starting point that is quite convenient.

With mountain bikes maintained at Western standards and multi-lingual service suitable to all nationalities, this activity has caught the attention of international travel groups and individuals interested in a close-up view of the rhythms of mountainous life. The quality of the tour depends on the competence of the tourist company--as each is different. But no

matter who arranges the trip, all mountain cycling shares common points--the danger, the long roads, and the sights.

Riding up inclines through high mountain passes requires patience and exertion. The long way is at times tortuous, but accompanied always with the calming sounds of the forest.

And the views are spectacular. Surrounding villages, full of bright colors and sounds, stir up emotions that are buried beneath the harsh pressures of urban life. The sound of water buffalo's wooden bells resounds at sunset; the roosters crow at sunrise. Gurgling streams reflect the blue sky and the stepped rice paddies are a photographer's dream.

Sapa, fog-covered Sky Gate, Nghia Lo, Khau Pha mountain pass, Meo Vac crossing, Ma Pi Leng. The road brings cyclist through many towns and sites. Groups take a break at high peaks, overlooking the abyss of valleys below; others seek the shade of an ancient tree by the roadside; some are invited into unknown cottages by friendly villagers.

Discovering mountainous regions by bicycle is slower than a car or motorbike, but that makes it possible

to stop and smell the rice fields. Cyclists can go where bigger vehicles cannot, passing over delicate bamboo bridges across streams or following thin paths into mountain villages.

Meals in the early evening are served in stilt houses--a special meeting between foreign travelers and native people. Some meals are devoured along the banks of the Gam River--a spot that only a cyclist could find.

Following the bike tour regulations, guides accompany cyclists with a car to transport food, furniture, and medical equipments as well as to ensure security.

This service provides an element of comfort that, after 10 kilometers of cycling through mountain passes, comes as a relief. At the end of the day's journey, cyclists can collapse into the outdoor furniture that was set up alongside a spread of coffee, tea, biscuits, fruit and other snacks.

Revitalized, cyclists continue the trek. The total route is usually about 100 kilometers--to be completed under the scorching sun, the forest rain, and the perpetual mountain mist. 🌿

For more details: <http://www.bikingvietnam.com>

