

Ninh Binh by bike

VIETNAM

FOR BIKERS LOOKING to go beyond the frenzied pace of Hanoi, Wide Eyed

Tours has added a five-day trip through the northern Vietnamese countryside.

The tour starts off with an early departure from Hanoi for the town of Ninh Binh, situated in the Red River Delta. After staying overnight in the town, ride to the village of Tam Coc, famous for its spectacular karst scenery. Take a boat through the waterways, past tall limestone cliffs, villages amid the rice paddies, and into a series of caves. You'll also cycle the countryside of Hoa Lu, capital of Vietnam in the 10th and 11th centuries.

The next day a 21-kilometre run will take you to the village of Kenh Ga, where you'll journey on to Cuc Phuong National Park, which hosts a well-preserved rainforest and a Primate Rescue Centre.

From Cuc Phuong you'll cycle towards Mai Chau, located in a mountainous region some 135 kilometres from Hanoi. There you'll settle into your homestay and be able to wander around the village, the centre of an area known for its stilt houses in bamboo and timber. The final morning will be spent biking around the area before heading back to Hanoi by bus.

Rates begin at AU\$870 per person, including vehicle support, bikes, meals, an English-speaking guide and four nights' accommodation. Check out www.wideeyedtours.com for more.



Pilgrimage to Pemako

INDIA

HIDDEN THROUGHOUT the Himalayas, *beyul* are remote valleys reached only by getting well off the beaten track. For centuries, pilgrims have journeyed to these distant places to seek out inner wisdom and enlightenment.

Now you can mount a pilgrimage of your own with Greener Pastures, Northeast India specialists who offer a three-week expedition to Beyul Pemako, 'hidden land in the shape of a lotus'.

From Dibrugarh, the nearest town with an airport, a three-day drive through the countryside and a ferry crossing on the Brahmaputra is necessary to reach the trailhead at Tuting, near India's border with South Tibet.

The expedition involves trekking through remote landscapes of the eastern Himalayas, taking in virgin forests rich in aromatic plants and endangered flowers. In this region 44 new species of rhododendron were discovered as recently

as 2005. The area is part of the Dibang Valley Biosphere Reserve, and local wildlife include musk deer, ibex, snow leopards and red panda, along with many species of birds.

Explore the sacred site and temple of Dewakota, and Buddhist villages as well as those of the Khampa and Adi tribes. Titapori Mountain, at over 4,200m high, is accessible after a strenuous four-day trek, and it is here that the landscape forms the 'opened lotus' of its name. Situated in the sacred lake of Danakosha, believed to be a haven of tantric powers, Tseta Island is said to be 'the heart of the world'. Trekkers will do a kora around five sacred lakes of the region.

A challenging 22-day adventure, the expedition is suitable for pilgrims, adventure enthusiasts, naturalists and birders. Travel is possible August-November and February-April. To find out more, look up the 'adventures' tab on www.thegreenerpastures.com

Andaman edge

SUMATRA

FANCY DIVING UNCROWDED sites off the northwestern tip of Sumatra? AquaMarine is offering a special on six days/five nights at Pulau Weh Dive Resort, with up to three dives per day. Accommodation is in air-conditioned, sea-view chalets with private gardens, housing up to three.

Located at the meeting point of the Andaman Sea and the open waters of the Indian Ocean, Pulau Weh is home to a protected Marine Park and more than 20 recognised diving and snorkelling spots. Its coral-rich waters offer something for everyone, from slow, relaxing

macro spotting to full-adrenaline dives. Divers may spot rare megamouth sharks, along with mantas, whale sharks, dolphins and other pelagics.

The trip is priced at US\$1,030 per person, including airport transfers, accommodation, all meals as well as tanks and weights/belts. Booking through AquaMarine guarantees discounted domestic flights between Jakarta and Banda Aceh, available for travel before December 31, 2013. Dive equipment rental costs an extra US\$36/day. For more on this and other trip ideas, email Info@AquaMarineDiving.com or look up www.aquamarinediving.com/indonesia-diving/