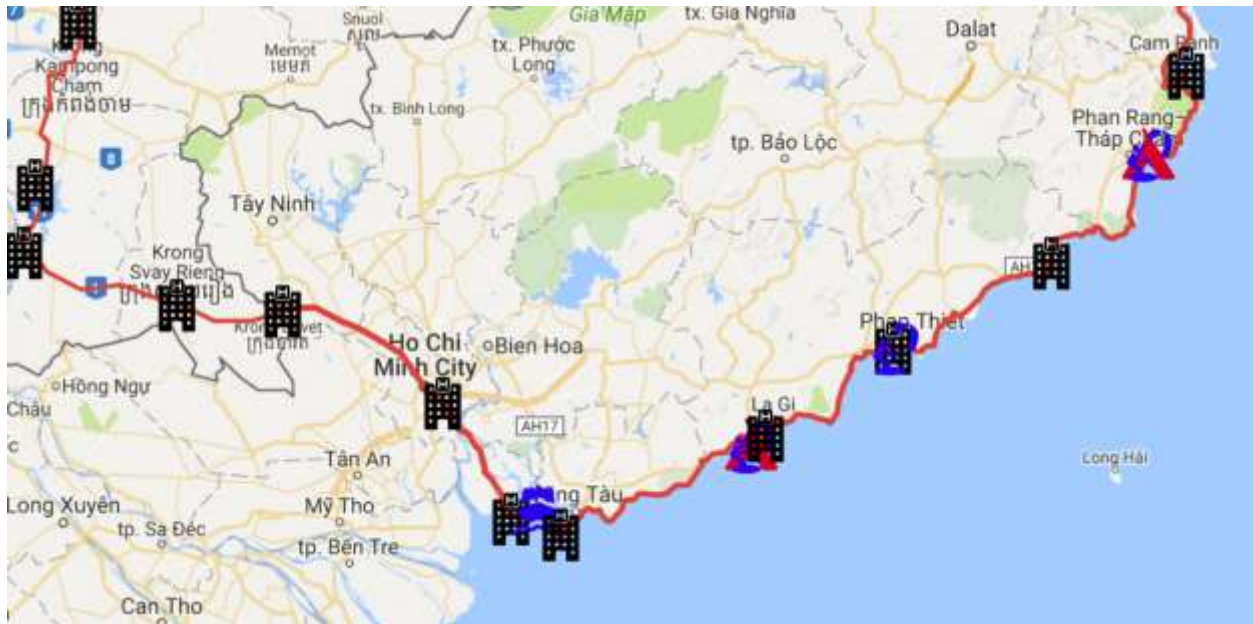


Season 9 – Part 1. In and out of Ho Chi Minh



Sa 18.6.2016, day 342. Crazy bike ride into the big city. (Bavet – Ho Chi Minh, 85 km)

We had heard quite bad stories about biking in Vietnam and were quite apprehensive as to what lay ahead of us. We arrived at the border at 7am sharp, got our Cambodian Visas stamped then rode over to the Vietnam checkpoint. A stern faced customs official minutely inspected my passport and the visa. We had to bring the bikes into the customs hall and take off all the bags and pass them through the x-ray machine. The officials didn't lift a finger to help, so I didn't care too much either, dumped all my bags on a big heap on the belt, dumped the entire and fully packed trailer on the belt as well, is just about passed through and walked through the metal detector pushing my bike with the frame bags and saddle bags still mounted. Of course the thing beeped like crazy but no one cared. The security check is a farce!

Soon we were out and on Vietnamese soil. We ceremoniously mounted the Vietnamese flag to our flagstaff, the 15th flag in all, and biked off along the main highway direction Ho Chi Minh. After about 10 km we stopped in a small village to find something for breakfast. We went into a tiny place that had a "Café" sign posted outside. We ended up having a great time with a mother, who ran the place, and her two teenage daughters. They were lovely people and we later reflected on how important such positive first impressions are on how we perceive a new country.

Because we had heard such bad things about Vietnam, our plan was to make a large curve around Ho Chi Minh, however we found that biking on the main road was not so bad at all and somehow we spontaneously decided to bike straight into Ho Chi Minh after all. It turned out to be a great decision. The ride into Ho Chi Minh was actually fun, most of the time we were immersed in a sea of scooters and we simply went with the flow. We headed straight for the epicenter of tourist activity, Sector 1, and again were lucky as we stopped in front of a small hotel run by an elderly couple. After bargaining we got a nice big room with all the gimmicks for 16\$ per night. The best thing was that our bikes went into

the lobby along with a bunch of scooters and the landlady literally sat on the porch from sunrise 'till late at night. Our bikes were very safe indeed.









Su 19.6.2016, day 343. A day in the big city (Ho Chi Minh, 0km)

We thoroughly enjoyed Ho Chi Minh. It really is a great and buzzing city. We decided to split up so we could both take in the atmosphere at our own pace. I first went for a long walk through the narrow streets, down along the Mekong and back up through a large park. I then went for a coffee and wrote to ask where Siria was. After a while I decided to join her and left. But when I got to the place she had been she had already left. So I wrote again and learned that she was now at the place I had been. So much for our communication skills! We finally joined up, had some great noodle soup at a street corner and soaked up the atmosphere a bit. Later I decided to go and watch Ireland – Belgium in an Irish pub. Unfortunately, the atmosphere was not so good as Ireland was 0:3 behind after 60 minutes...







Mo 20.6.2016, day 344. Southwards. (Ho Chi Minh – Can Tanh, 81 km)

We had heard that there might be a small boat going to Vung Tau from a peninsula south of the city. It sounded like a nice trip, so we decided to take the risk and find out if there really was a boat. If there wasn't we'd have to ride all the way back into Ho Chi Minh. We decided to leave really early so there wouldn't be too much traffic. Once again we found that riding in the city was a piece of cake. There were so many scooters and they were all going relatively slowly, that we really just had to follow the flow. After maybe 30 km we had to take a ferry over the Mekong. From there onwards there was no traffic whatsoever on the road. The funny thing was that the road was huge, sometimes a 6-lane highway. It was really bizarre: Why would anyone build such a huge road leading to this tiny fishing village?

We made good time and arrived at the village where the ferry was supposed to leave from at 11 am. We started asking around for ferry. Of course no-one spoke English, but we made sounds of a ferry and signs of waves and finally some people seemed to understand and directed us down to the pier. However there were also a lot of hand signs for "no", did this mean there was no ferry?

At the pier finally things looked promising, however we finally found out that there were only two boats per day, one at 8 am and one at 10am. So we had missed the boat for the day. No problem at all, we are thankfully not on a schedule and so we ambled round the village, had something for lunch, stopped at a place, ordered fruit shakes and got green tea, had a long chat with an American schoolteacher who was teaching at the local school 2 days a week and then took a nice ride along a dirt track along the coast to a region where there were supposed to be some hotels. Indeed, there was one huge beach side resort (only the beach was closed off as there was massive construction going on) and some small cheaper hotels. We booked into the latter exactly when the heavens opened up for the daily downpour. We lay on the bed enjoying the deluge outside and when things had cleared took a stroll over to the resort hotel to look for some food as they had a very nice restaurant. Unfortunately, prices were a bit steep, so we had some fried rice. This didn't really fill us up, so we hunted round some more and found a little market where one lady was still selling food, everything else was closing down. We had some great noodle soup for a quarter of the price of the fried rice at the resort.

On the way back to our hotel we passed a marshy pond. The noise of the frogs was absolutely deafening, it was fascinating to just stand there and listen. I hunted round trying to find one of these noisy creatures. Then finally I found one and was amazed to see that he was tiny! How such a small creature can make such a racket is beyond me. Nature is pure magic!

















Tu 21.6.2016, day 345. Taking the Ferry (Can Tanh – Vung Tau, 35 km)

We got to the ferry with plenty of time to spare. The boat was already there. No one seemed in charge, there were plenty of people already on the boat and others milling round. Already some scooters had been loaded together with some odd bags and boxes. So we simply lifted our bikes from the pier onto the foredeck of the boat concentrating to make sure neither we or our bikes fell into the water.

We then sat down and waited. Plenty more boxes and bags came aboard and more and more people. No one seemed to mind our bikes and still no one seemed to be in charge. Finally one guy took the helm, fired up the old diesel and the boat chugged off. It was a lovely 2h ride across the Mekong delta. Arriving in Vung Tau was absolutely spectacular. There were hundreds and hundreds of fishing boats moored up the river and small rowing boats were ferrying people to and from the boats. The rowing was done with the feet while sitting on a raised chair in the back of the boat. Almost like riding a bicycle. I've never seen anything like it. It was absolutely fascinating to watch. We left the traditional fishing harbour behind us and rode into the touristy side of Vung Tau that is built up along the beach. We stopped for some delicious (but pricy) frozen yoghurt and then started to hunt for a hotel. There was a bewildering number of hotels. In some streets every single house seemed to be a hotel. We chose one at random and got chatting to the manager, who actually didn't speak a word of English, but somehow we got along. He was fascinated by our bikes and I let him have a nice long spin on mine.

We actually quite enjoyed Vung Tau. It was great to be at the ocean again and to walk along the beach. Also we enjoyed a nice Frappuccino in one of the many coffee places and had some great Indian food for dinner.











