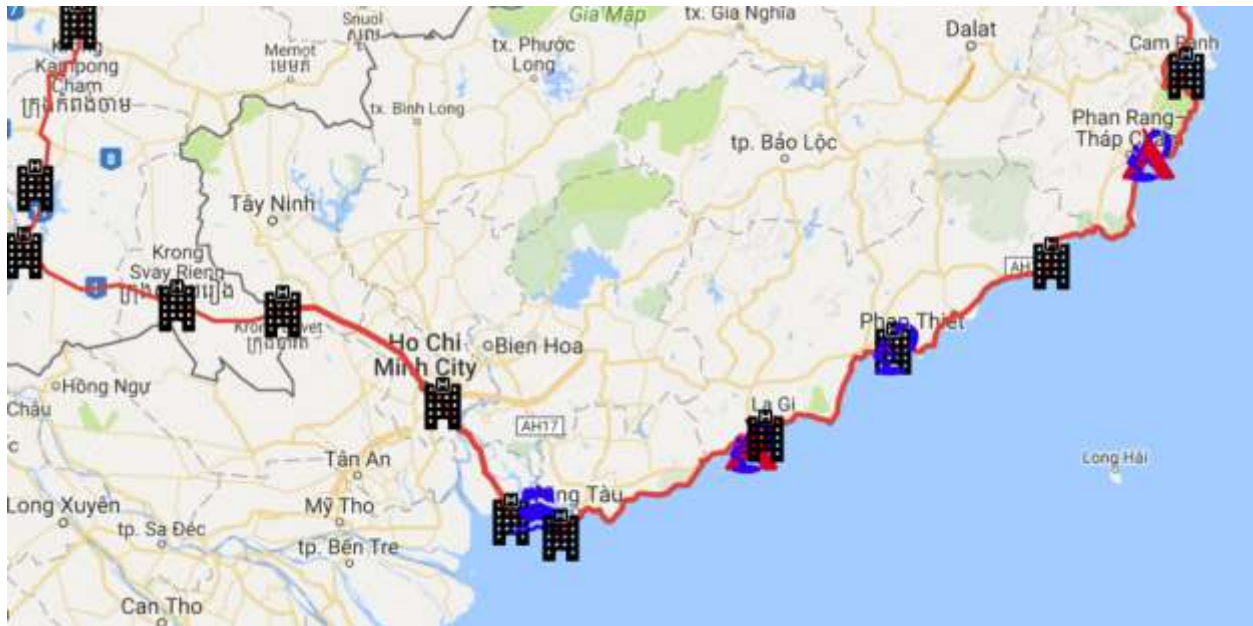


Season 9 – Part 2. Up the coast of Vietnam.



We 22.6.2016, day 346. Bike and kite and camping! (Vung Tau – Coco Beach Camp, 105 km)

It was quite a long ride, but it was very nice, all along the coastline through small villages. Most of the time we stayed on small roads that were quite quiet. One problem we are starting to have is that Siria is having a lot of punctures in her rear wheel. The tire is completely worn out. We finally decided to switch her front and rear tire. This seems to have fixed the problem for now, but we definitely need to find new tires!

Just before arriving at La Gi we saw a sign saying Coco Beach Camp so we decided to check it out. Just as we were riding down the small lane towards the complex we saw a kite up in the air. I got all nervous, this could mean some more kite surfing! The place turned out to be a resort with a couple of bungalows and lots of tents for rent. As we had our own stuff they gave us a spot under a large sun shade for 10\$. I quickly dumped all my stuff and got out all the kite equipment. The guy who was kiting turned out to be Le, the owner of the place. Soon we were both out on the water. The wind was variable and not quite strong enough, also there were quite big waves making the going tough, but it was great fun! However, there were very dark clouds approaching fast and I also saw the odd flash of lightning. Le seemed completely unconcerned about the approaching thunderstorm and I somehow thought he should know, as he probably kites here every day. Still I thought it was high time to get out of the water, better not to re-enact Benjamin Franklin's experiments! Just when I was out of the water the first heavy raindrops started to fall and I hurried up to pack everything up. Suddenly I heard Le calling out to me, the wind had become very gusty and he could hardly control his kite so I ran down to him and helped him land it. I grabbed all my stuff and ran to our camp spot. The rain was now pouring down. Luckily good old Siria had piled up everything and draped the tent over it to keep it dry. The storm soon passed and we started putting up the tent, which was quite a job, as we first had to reconnect the outer and inner tent. Everything was wet and sand stuck to everything.

The resort was a really nice place and was quite full, mostly young well to-do Vietnamese kids. They were definitively out to have a party and soon there was loud music going all over the place. We were quite tired and headed off for bed before 10pm, in spite of the noise, I fell asleep immediately.











Th 23.6.2016, day 347. Short ride into town (Coco Beach Camp – La Gi, 15 km)

I had slept wonderfully, Siria on the other hand had a terrible night as her mat that already had blown two chambers, blew another one with a loud bang at about 3 in the morning resulting in a very uncomfortable bed. We enjoyed a slow start to the day with a noodle soup overlooking the beach. We also saw what made this place so popular with all the young people. It was designed like one big photo shoot set. There were swings, decorated fishing boats, sofas, colourful chairs and little huts all carefully placed so that photos could be taken. This concept worked unbelievably well. All the young kids went from one installation to the next taking photos of each other with their smartphones. It was so funny to watch and it was also interesting to see how well practiced they were at posing for the photos. After breakfast we did the same and went around taking photos of ourselves.

We then started discussing what we should do. Should we stay another night or push on towards Mui Ne? We finally decided to leave, mainly because everything was so expensive and we were somewhat trapped in the resort with no nearby village or something to get reasonably priced food. Also it didn't look as if there would be enough wind for kitesurfing. We did the short ride over to La Gi where we found a simple guesthouse. The town was quite dark and lifeless and we had trouble finding a place to get something to eat.

























Fr 24.6.2016, day 348. Ride along Beach Resort Desert. (La Gi – Mui Ne, 95 km)

I was quite looking forward to the ride up the coast and indeed it turned out to be a great and interesting ride. Again as the days before we had a tail wind which made the going significantly easier. Most of the ride was along beautiful coastline with sandy beaches with wonderful round granite rock outcrops. What was really sad, was to see how much of the coast was ruined by huge resort complexes. Most of them looked in a pretty dilapidated condition and many were simply abandoned or hadn't even been fully completed. It is really depressing to see how pristine nature is callously destroyed by greedy people hoping to make a quick buck. It is so short sighted.

Weather wise we were lucky two times. The first short rainstorm came in just as we were sitting on a stone wall looking out to sea and munching some sandwiches. There was a café right next to where we were sitting where we took refuge. The next squall came in just after we arrived in Phan Thiet, it took us a while to find a place to eat something, but we finally found a great place! We had noodles, followed by pancake with cream and ice cream, then some vanilla pastries, then we finished off with some banana cake. We were quite stuffed when we set out for the last short lap over to Mui Ne.

And so we arrived at the place we had been talking about for quite some time. The kite surf Mekka Mui Ne! The first impression confirmed our prejudices. The beach is lined with one resort after the next. But the beach is nice, our hotel is tucked away up a hill away from the beach and nice and quiet. Now the only thing to hope for is wind!













Sa 25.6.2016, day 349. Relax day (Mui Ne, 0 km).

Mui Ne is a bit like Boracay in the Philippines. There is (or rather was, as all the sand in the northern part has been washed away) a nice beach and so resorts were built. Now it is actually difficult to get to the beach, the small access roads are few and far between. The whole place seems to have been overrun by Russians. Everything is signposted in Russian. The only problem is that the Russian Rubel has collapsed and now only few Russians come. The place is therefore looking quite dead and derelict. In fact, there are decaying empty resorts even in the middle of town.

We checked out the kite surf schools and found a rather sympathetic place. They wanted 5\$ per day to store our stuff and to let us hand out at their place, trying to make money wherever possible!

But it was OK for us and so we spent all day just hanging out. In the evening a small bit of wind came and I rigged up everything and had a go, but no chance to get up on the board. It was frustrating as some other kites with larger kites and probably bigger boards were out having loads of fun.

In the evening we had a long walk all along the beach to the centre of the resort. There really isn't anything charming about the place. We had some great Indian food for dinner and got back to our street just in time to watch the game Switzerland – Poland. Unfortunately, the Swiss lost...



Su 26.6.2016, day 350. Hoping for better wind but got rain (Mui Ne, 0 km).

The story of the day is quickly told. The rain poured down all day. No wind, nothing much to do, it was actually quite a nice day. The street our hostel was on was the backpacker's neighbourhood and there

were quite a number of reasonably priced street food places. And so we passed the day drinking banana shakes, eating fried rice and in the evening watched the game France – Ireland. Unfortunately Ireland lost. We are running out of teams to support! Only Italy and England remaining.

Mo 27.6.2016, day 351. More hoping for better wind (Mui Ne, 0 km).

The wind forecast was hopeful for the day, and so we headed for the beach and indeed a bit of wind came and we got in some quite decent kiting, even though it has to be said that Mui Ne really isn't such a good place for kiting even if it is THE place in Vietnam. The water gets deep immediately and there are big waves. Siria decided to rent equipment and take a lesson and she also had a tough time, but it was nice to see that she managed to get on the board and ride in spite of the conditions.

I also had my kite repaired by the young guys working at the school. Was great to watch and learn how it is done. The bad news is that my kite is starting to get old. I guess more repairs will follow...





Tu 28.6.2016, day 352. Up the coast... (Mui Ne – Lien Huang, 82 km)

We said goodbye to Mui Ne Hills Hostel and to Mr. Song who still couldn't really believe that we had biked all the way from Switzerland with a kite board. He wanted some selfies with us to advertise his hostel and to show his friends. He is really a very nice guy and I love the way he was always doing something to his hostel, planting some flowers, making a new pathway, looking after his fish, taking care of his trees, etc. While we were there gave us dragon fruit every day and also freshly pressed lime juice out of his garden. In retrospect it was a really nice place to stay.

The ride up the coast was very nice and we were helped by a nice tail wind. We soon left the resorts of Mui Ne behind us and bikes along pretty untouched beaches. After about 40 km we came to some sand dunes. This was absolutely fascinating. There was a small lake and behind it huge mountains of sand rose up. The wind was blowing very hard and it was fascinating to watch the drifting sand. For a moment I was thinking of getting out my kite stuff and kiting on the lake, but sense prevailed.

The ride got nicer and nicer as we rode through empty sandy landscapes along the coast. Problem was it was so empty that we also didn't find anything to eat. So we were really hungry when we arrived in Lien Huang. First thing we did was buy a couple of baguettes at one of the ubiquitous little street corner stalls. We randomly chose one of the many Guest Houses (this one was, as so often, actually a 24h love hotel, but we couldn't care less), had a shower and when we headed out to find something to eat we were surprised to see that two touring bicycles were parked next to ours! They looked very Chinese with Chinese writing on the bags and we guessed they belonged to two Chinese touring cyclists. As we were walking back we saw a young western couple turn into the driveway of our guest house just as we were

arriving. It turned out that the bikes belonged to this young couple from Finland, who had taken the Trans-Siberian Express to Irkutsk, then travelled through Mongolia to Peking where they bought the bikes and now they were heading down Vietnam by bike. Quite a cool trip!























We 29.6.-3.7.2016, day 353-357. Days in Paradise! (Lien Huong – Minh Chu Bay, 80 km)

I can't even remember where the idea of bike and kite came from. I think I simply thought it would be cool to have something else to do other than just biking and also it would slow me down a bit when going uphill. I still remember when I bought the trailer and tried to figure out how best to attach a kite surf board using an old ironing board. Back then it was all more of a joke, I thought I would send all the gear back before too long. But somehow, day after day, hill after hill, flight after flight and bus ride after bus ride, the trailer with all the gear has been accompanying us even if I cursed it over and over again. Now I have dragged it over 15'000 km, climbed a total elevation of almost 90'000 m and kite surfing has become a more and more important fixture of our trip. My original idea was that every couple of days or so we would pass by a nice lake or beach and I could simply rig up the kite surfing stuff and go kiting a bit. But this turned out to be very much a utopian idea. Very often we had water but no wind or lots of wind but no water. Sometimes we had both wind and water, but no safe spot to launch the kite or the wind was off-shore. And sometimes, even if the conditions were more or less OK, I simply didn't have the energy to strip off the sweaty biking clothes, rig up all the stuff, go kiting in the salty sea, then pack all the wet gear away again, put back on the sweaty biking gear and continue biking 40 or 50 km or however far we were from the next hostel or campsite. And so, our trip so far has been definitively more biking than kiting and we had quite a number of frustrating experiences where we made detours to promising beaches with promising wind forecasts only to find that there was -after all- not enough wind.

Mui Ne was such a case. This is THE kitesurf Mekka in Vietnam and we heard there was good wind, even if it was low season. But by the time we arrived, the wind had died. One more frustrating experience! We heard that there was another kite surf spot just over 100 km north of Mui Ne called Ninh Chu Bay.

We weren't all that hopeful, but it sounded like a nice place and apparently they offered a spot to pitch a tent for free. Also this part of the coast of Vietnam is really nice to bike up, so we headed up there. We arrived in Ninh Chu Bay in the early afternoon. We didn't know exactly where the place was, so we asked around a bit, mimicking a kite surfer, but we only got blank looks, the poor locals didn't have a clue what we were trying to say. Suddenly we saw a kite up in the air right in front of us and sure enough, a bit further on there was a rather inconspicuous gate with a couple kite surf posters hanging beside it. We went in. There was some laid back music coming out of a large open building with a bar at one end, behind the bar a large screen showing the current wind conditions and in front of the bar a scattering of blue and white couches around low tables. The building opened out to an immaculate white beach and flat blue water beyond. And sure enough, there were three or four kites out doing their stuff. We were warmly welcomed by the owners of the place, Mark and Tao, and yes, we could certainly pitch our tent anywhere we wanted! I was so afraid the wind would die any moment, that I rushed to unpack all the gear. Soon I was out on the water. It was the first of five wonderful days we spent at Ninh Chu Bay. We had wind every day, sometimes it picked up at 10 am, sometimes only at 1 pm, sometimes it died at 4 pm and sometimes it blew right up to sunset. There was a sand bank just off shore that broke the waves and so there was a small pool of flat butter soft water just off the beach. There was a bit of surf just off the sand bank and further our nice rolling waves. We couldn't have hoped for more perfect conditions. We kited until every muscle ached taking turns with the kite. If there was a short lull in the wind we would relax on the couches, enjoy the music and have a ginger lime mint lemonade, a frozen banana with coconut and peanut or a large fruit bowl with banana, pineapple, passion fruit and grapes best enjoyed dipped into salt mixed with chilli. When the wind finally died for the day it was time for sunset watching and a nice cool beer before eating our way through the selection of Mexican, Vietnamese and European foods on the menu.

We both agreed that this was kite & bike to perfection. It was exactly the place we had been looking for all along and when we were least expecting it, we stumbled upon it.















































Mo 4.7.2016, day 358. Wonderful ride up the coast (Minh Chu Bay – Hai Lam, 69 km)

It was hard saying goodbye to Mark and Tao from Minh Chu Bay. They invited us for coffee and tea and we had a nice long chat before we left. Their place really is a little secret kite surfer's paradise. But for us it was time to hit the road again. We first headed back to the village to get some breakfast (fresh hot baguettes and eggs and 10 deep fried sesame pastries from the market) and headed off.

The ride turned out to be absolutely magical. There is a relatively new road all along the coast with virtually no traffic whatsoever that passes by the most pristine sandy bays (except of course for the rubbish on the beach) with turquoise water (with some colourful dabs of floating plastic bags), small fishing villages with the decorative blue fishing boats (with their noisy engines belching out black smoke) and floating restaurants. The road climbs some hills through Mediterranean like vegetation growing out between huge rounded granite boulders. The only problem was the heat. We had a slight tailwind, which meant that we didn't even have the slightest breath of air in our faces as we climbed the hills. The sweat was simply pouring off us and we had to stop a couple of times in the shade of some tree or other to cool off. We decided to take a small detour out onto a peninsula where we (or rather Siria) had read up about a nice place with cheap dorm rooms. This meant one more very steep hill, but again it was a wonderful ride. Just before we arrived the usual afternoon thunderstorm hit us and drenched us with beautifully cooling rain.

The hostel we stayed at was really very nice with a great garden to sit out in. They had a couple of set meals on offer and so we had something different to eat for once: fish and squid. It was really delicious and I certainly would eat more, but knowing how the fishing industry works and seeing the fleets of fishing boats head out every night with their lights ablaze making the horizon look like a big city, really puts me off seafood.













