

NotMad

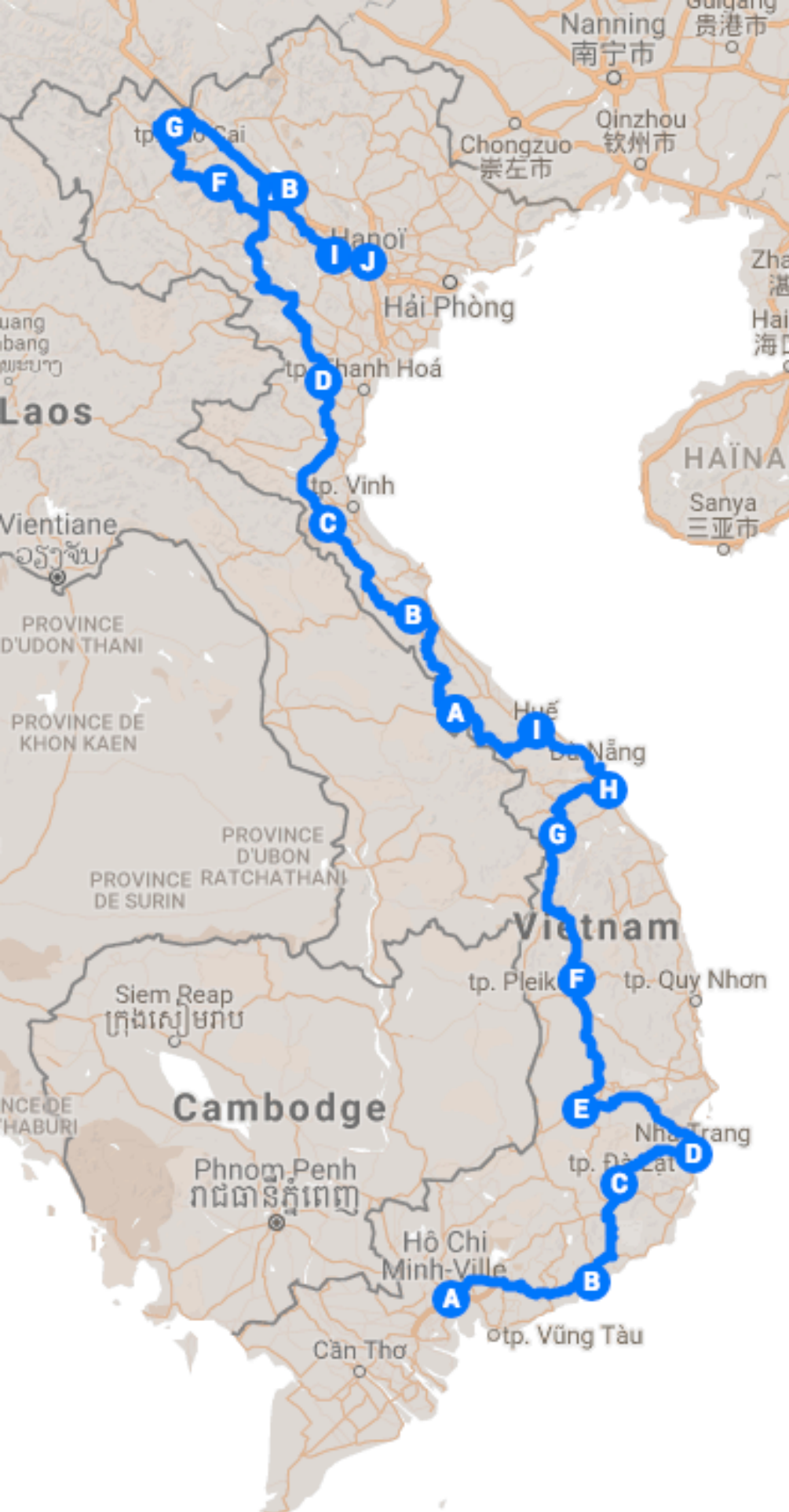
The travel guide on a motorbike in Vietnam



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Introduction: Xin Chào



Xin what ? Xin Chào (pron. « seen' -chao ») means « hello » in Vietnamese. There you go, you already know a little word which will help you and which will please Vietnamese people! ;-)

You're wondering what you'll find in this **NotMad** guide? Well, it's a **digital guide** entirely written and made by myself for you to use on your smartphone as well as on your tablet or on your computer. Thus, you will be able to read it and to bring it with you everywhere easily. By the way, remember to click on the various links! ;-)

Then, the map on your left is **my itinerary on a motorbike in Vietnam** (\pm 3400 km, 2110 miles) in July 2015. And you know what? Before doing this incredible trip, **I've NEVER rode a motorbike in my life!** Hard to believe right? And yet, I learned to ride on-the-spot, in the heart of Ho Chi Minh City before (finally!) **being able to make my dream come true: to travel on a motorbike.**

In this guide, I'm going to give you the tips to allow you to live **an incredible experience on a motorbike in Vietnam** even if you have no experience at all (like me before doing it). Now, you're thinking « ok but where should I start from? ». And this is where **NotMad** comes.

First of all, please note that **NotMad** is a unique travel guide in which you won't find the usual format of famous other travel guides we all know (and which are awesome). **NotMad** wants to be different and to allow you **keeping the essential in order to live an incredible adventure: the unknown and the discovery.**

The aim is not to drown you under too much info about Vietnam but, instead, to let you discover this country so you can enjoy fully YOUR adventure in YOUR way. Do you get the idea? Great.



That's me ! « But what is she doing in there ? »

Well, I rode on the highway which is right behind (and of which you can foresee the crash barriers behind the barbed wire) but I had to leave this highway because it was forbidden for two-wheeled vehicles...

So, the only option was to escape through that gutter. You can see that I had a lot of fun ! :-)

WHY « NOTMAD » ?

You probably wonder why this guide is called **NotMad**. I chose this name on purpose and you're about to understand why:

- In NotMad, there is « nomad » which gives the image of **travel**.
- In NotMad there is « notPad » which goes for writing/reading as in the **guide**.
- In NotMad there is « not mad » which means that **you're not mad** using this guide.

At last, **NotMad is easy to pronounce and to memorize**. You know everything now!

NotMad is a bit like my diary which I share with you. I've lived and experienced EVERYTHING in this guide but if it's not the case, I made sure to specify it. I arrived in Vietnam without knowing where to start from. I got some info here and there and I thought: « why not gather everything I've learned to share it and help other adventurers? ». And **NotMad** was born! So you're reading **a guide based on MY adventure** with the aim of helping you in YOUR adventure.

I sincerely hope that this guide will be up to your expectations and, most of all, that it will allow you, like me, **to live and unforgettable adventure in Vietnam!** Stay safe and enjoy this trip to the full!

And last but not least: **THANK YOU** for choosing and buying **NotMad** to prepare YOUR trip! You'll be able to enjoy to the full this unforgettable experience with the most useful info to know about a trip on a motorbike in Vietnam!

Now, that you've been introduced, shall we get into the subject?

*¿Qué es lo que se pierde al cruzar una frontera?, cada momento parece partido en dos, melancolía por lo que queda atrás y por otro lado, todo el entusiasmo por entrar en tierras nuevas - **Diarios de Motocicleta***

*What do we leave behind when we cross a frontier? Each moment seems split in two: melancholy for what is left behind, and the excitement of entering a new land. - **The Motorcycle Diaries***



Basis : Vietnam

Money : VND (1 EUR \pm 24000 VND, 1 USD \approx 22000 VND).

Language : vietnamese.

I.D. : passport valid 6 months after the visa expiration date.

Visa online : payment is made **online** for the authorization letter. Then you'll need to pay **on arrival** the amount of the visa you've chosen (in VND or in USD only). **Click here to get your visa online**

Vaccination : adult diphtheria and tetanus, hepatitis A-B, measles, mumps and rubella, typhoid, varicella, rabies, Japanese B encephalitis.

Best season : **NORTH** : March to May or September to November ; **CENTER** : March to September ; **SOUTH** : November to March.

Time : UTC+7

Main airports : Ho Chi Minh City (Tân Sơn Nhất) ; Hanoi (Nội Bài).

Money : you'll find ATMs everywhere, even in small villages. Beware of withdrawal fees! By the way, VietinBank + AgriBank + MB Bank do not charge extra fees ;-). (Max withdrawal in VND: 2 000 000 for VietinBank, 3 000 000 for AgriBank, 5 000 000 for MB Bank). Do not hesitate to ask local people for help if needed.

Travel insurance : choose a good travel insurance which covers you to the maximum but keep in mind that it might not cover you regarding your motorbike (I give you more details on this matter in the chapter 4). Check the insurance of your credit card as well.

Internet : internet is everywhere in Vietnam, even in small villages (connection speed is normally good for a basic use of internet).

SIM Card : I suggest you to use **Viettel** or **Vinaphone**, the 2 biggest operators in the country. You can go to any shop called Thế Giới Di Động where you'll be offered various options. You will pay around 75000 VND, \pm 3 USD/EUR.



1. Buying your motorbike

WHY THE MOTORBIKE?

Why not? Just kidding! Well, among the means of transportation that I used for travelling, **the motorbike offered me the biggest freedom.**

By bus or by train, it's awesome because you can interact (or not) with locals and you just enjoy the ride, admiring the landscapes. I love it! However, you stay dependent of a predefined route, you're (most of the time) victim of delays and last minute changes, and if you see an exciting path from the window, unfortunately, you can't take it.

In other words, you can take that exciting path if you're on a motorbike and THAT's what is awesome!

Since I've experienced and enjoyed this freedom, I want you too to **travel on a motorbike as freely!**

You like the adventure? You like two-wheeled vehicles? You like freedom? Then you should know that **Vietnam is the perfect country to be discovered on a motorbike** (and even the Vietnamese people say it)!

(It's also a great way to get in touch with locals and other travelers! Plus, it's also THE mean of transportation the most used by Vietnamese people so it's great to discover the country (a bit) like the locals!)

NB: in this **NotMad** guide, you will get all the tips to make your first step alone BUT you should know that it's much nicer (and safer) to do this trip with someone - either in a couple or with family or with friends. Trust me! I went on this trip alone in 2015 and I could have ended my trip alone but I was really happy to find a partner on the road because we shared incredible moments and we could support/help each other!

WHY BUYING?

I know, I suggest you **to buy your motorbike instead of renting it**. Crossing Vietnam with your bike will make you leave from A to B - let's say from Ho Chi Minh City to Hanoi, for example.

If you rent your motorbike, you can find agencies having multiple offices in various cities and which would allow you to rent/return your motorbike from/to different places.

However, you know how it goes with rental agencies right? You need to sign papers and to declare that the rental agency will not be responsible for any damage in case of an accident. You will be given a telephone number for assistance and some contact numbers in case you need to fix your motorbike but in the end, **it will be more expensive than buying**, especially that you will have to respect the rental dates and conditions (and that is not freedom). Now, it's still a great option if you prefer renting.

Of course, first, it's hard to think that you're going to BUY your motorbike and you will think « and what if I can't sell it? ». Believe me, **you WILL sell your bike!** Buying it will give you two main advantages: first, **you will be absolutely FREE to keep it as long as you want** (according to your visa duration of course), then, you will be able to ride on chaotic roads without thinking that you will need to pay a supplement to anyone in case of damage (you and I both know that **freedom is not full when you are accountable**). Moreover, you will sell your bike at the price YOU want (respecting the « prices of the market » and according to the state of your bike between the day you bought it and the day you will sell it).

In other words, buying your motorbike will be as easy to sell it, more profitable and a big advantage to enjoy your adventure FREELY and without being accountable to anyone.

(I would like to add the exciting side of buying! You will see, it's a special feeling!)



Sergio, Kate and me,
the day when their
motorbike became mine.
(Ho Chi Minh City,
July 2015)

UNDERSTAND THE ECONOMIC BENEFIT OF BUYING A MOTORBIKE

Rental : 9€ / day = 270€ / month

—> (10\$ / day = 300\$ / month)

Gasoline + repairs : ± 130€

Total cost : 400€ minimum / month

Buying garage : from 330€ (—> 350\$) and even 900€ (—> 1000\$) for a new one

Gasoline + repairs : ± 130€

Takeover by garage : 175€ (200\$), 660€/700€ (750\$/800\$) or less if too damaged

Total cost : between 200€ or 285€ minimum / month

Buying second-hand : 254€ (—> 270\$)

Gasoline + repairs : 130€

Selling : 235€

Total cost : 149€ / month

**All these numbers are estimates based on a one-month duration trip*

WHICH MOTORBIKE TO CHOOSE?

You will see quickly that there are two types of two-wheeled vehicles in Vietnam for travelers like you and me: **the scooter or the motorbike.**

Some people prefer the scooter (automatic or semi-automatic) so they're not obliged to shift gears manually and also because the motorbike, at first, can be impressive.

You should know that Vietnamese people mostly ride scooters because it's more convenient for their rides (short distances).

However, **for long distance trips, the motorbike is better and you will see that ALL the Vietnamese people have this motorbike in the mountainous areas** (knowing that gears are really necessary on mountain roads).

For your information, the Honda Win motorbikes (100/110 cc) that you will see are not original ones and have Chinese engines of so-so quality. According to the locals, the Detech ones are more reliable but they're also very old so you shouldn't hope to spend your entire trip with nothing to repair. If you have some mechanical skills, you could also consider getting a Minsk (which I haven't tried so I can't help you about this one but it seems like it's more suitable for experienced bikers).

WHICH MOTORBIKE TO CHOOSE?

As for me, I chose the **replica of Honda Win** so I'm going to share with you what I've experienced and what I know. Indeed, this old bike can't be found as an original one and you will only see fake ones but that is not important at all (especially for the trip you're about to do)! We're talking about adventure, remember!

Obviously, there are things to check before buying your motorbike (I get into details after) BUT this motorbike is known by the Vietnamese mechanics so in case of problems, you can be sure to find someone to fix your bike. It's a huge advantage to know that you're going to do a trip on a motorbike knowing that **it's going to be easy to find everything to fix your little and big problems**. Moreover, you will be told many times that it's the perfect bike for that kind of trip. Now, if you prefer a scooter, you can go for it. By the way, if I don't recommend you the Minsk, it's for 2 reasons:

1- It's more difficult to ride, more powerful and more technical so I don't recommend it to a beginner with motorbikes (and in Vietnam, I've been told many times that it's more suitable for experienced bikers).

2- I haven't tried it so I'm not going to recommend you a motorbike that I don't know.

if you're about to ride many kilometers, even if a scooter can handle a long ride, it's still a better option to go for the motorbike - many locals and bikers will tell you that it's the perfect vehicle to do that kind of trip.

AT WHICH PRICE?

The price of a motorbike Honda Win varies **from 200USD to 300USD**. If it's more expensive:

- The seller wants to rip you off
- The seller customized the bike which would explain its price

Let me be clear: **it's useless to look for a new/perfect motorbike!** Why? Because you might damage it yourself a bit more than it already is. Moreover, you will be less worried about having an imperfect bike rather than a perfect new one which will prevent you from enjoying your adventure to the full! By the way, I also think about the moment when you will sell it: if you buy a more expensive motorbike, either you will have more difficulties to resell it (if you expect to resell it at the price you bought it), or you will have to sell it cheaper and you will lose more money.

The ideal price should not exceed 270/280USD knowing that these bikes are very old and keep covering a lot of miles in the hands of many different ephemeral owners who are more or less careful.

If you really have a low budget, then you can spot travelers in a rush who sell their bikes at low prices because they have to leave the country quickly. BUT BUT BUT keep in mind that you might have to fix a few things that could cost you more. Here, it's double or nothing - even if you will still have to fix stuff on your bike during your trip! ;-)

Don't hesitate to see/try various bikes to compare them, to discover them and to feel what is good or bad from one to another.

You will also see if the seller is of trust!

WHERE TO FIND YOUR MOTORBIKE?

- In the street and parking lots : you will see directly on the motorbikes if they're for sale.
- In hostels : you will see directly on the motorbikes if they're for sale.
- On the Internet: **craigslist** is THE best website to find a motorbike (be careful about the city where the motorbike is on sale) or on Facebook **here** and **here**.
- Word-of-mouth : you will meet a lot of travelers who sell/look for motorbikes.

You have more chances to find a motorbike **in Ho Chi Minh City and/or in Hanoi**. You can also find one in other places (Hue, Hoi An, Da Lat, etc.) but you will have more choices and more power of negotiation in those two main cities.

In **Ho Chi Minh City**, I recommend the area of Pham Ngu Lao.

In **Hanoi**, I recommend the Old Quarter but you can also ask and look around.

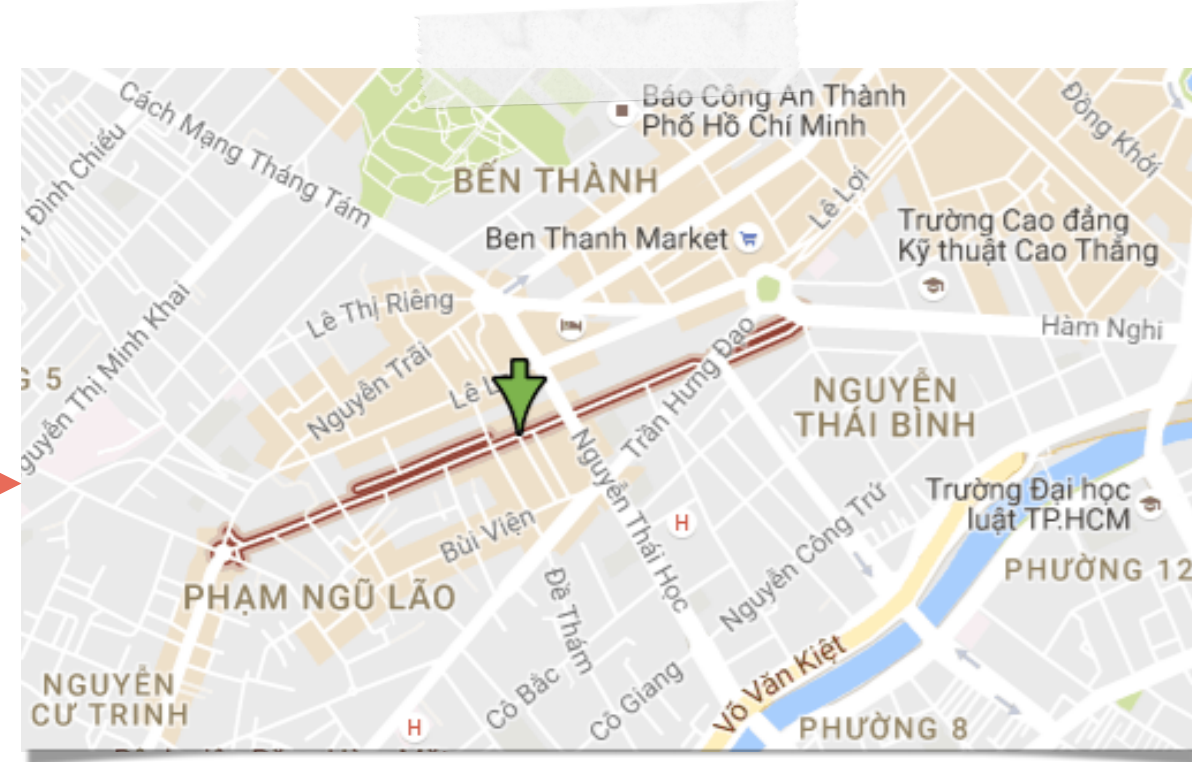
(See next page to get details about those areas.)

WHERE TO FIND YOUR MOTORBIKE?



Hanoi Old Quarter

WHERE TO FIND YOUR MOTORBIKE?



Ho Chi Minh City

TO VERIFY BEFORE BUYING

Lights, tires, wheels, speedometer, brakes (front right hand, rear right foot), fork, shock absorbers, indicators, horn (REALLY IMPORTANT and essential! You will understand quickly once on-the-spot!), kick-starter, electric starter, clutch, stands (central and lateral), oil (ask when the last draining has been done and how often during the entire trip), try the bike to make sure there is no weird sound and pay attention to the engine. Trust your guts in case you feel there is something weird! :-)

You'll find a checklist at the end of this guide to help you (page 82 to 84).

It could be that **the speedometer** wouldn't work well or at all. Don't worry, it's normal and you will notice that you will even be lucky if you'd happen to find a bike with a speedometer that works. You will know how to adapt your speed without the speedo, trust me!

Same goes for **the gasoline gauge** but you know what? It's not a problem at all because you will just need to open the tank cap to check yourself the amount of gasoline you have. You will also learn to anticipate when you will need to fill the tank. Even I, I was worried at first but in the end, it became really natural. ;-)

Your motorbike will NOT be perfect but this is what will make it special! In case you need anything, remember, your best friends the mechanics will be there to help you!

It could be that **the rubber of the hand throttle** gets away. Stay calm: you just need to put it back in place yourself by hitting it and that's it! If it becomes too much of a headache, you know the solution — > your friend the mechanic.

Don't worry, the more you will ride, the more you will get confident with your bike and you will notice quickly when there will be a weird noise or anything not normal. Trust me, as a woman who never rode a motorbike before doing this trip in Vietnam! ;-)

FIRST TIME ON A MOTORBIKE

If like me - before doing this trip - you need to learn everything about how to ride a motorbike, I recommend you to specify it to your seller and to ask him if he can teach you how to ride the bike.

It all depends if you already have some experience with scooters, in which case you can find a street to learn. In my case, - experimented with scooters - I chose to learn how to ride my bike in the heart of Ho Chi Minh City and even if it went well, I don't think it's the best idea to learn. Obviously, I felt the pressure and I didn't feel comfortable right away so it might be better to learn in a wide empty space with the least possible traffic (for example: a car park).

Take advantage of the assistance of your seller to ask him all your questions and to get his help to trust yourself and your bike. Get used to manage your balance, to turn, to brake, to shift gears, to shift in neutral, to use your rear-view mirrors, to stop without panicking, to coordinate your hands and feet which have a particular role each (to brake, to accelerate, to shift gears).

REMEMBER: you must feel at ease, be relax and have trust in yourself and in your bike. Don't worry, if you don't manage right away, it will come little by little but it's really important to be confident! **You should be able to manage yourself and your bike and to know how to (re)act quickly.** Hesitating will get you into troubles.

One last thing absolutely essential to remember: your eyes drive your bike. In other words, if you look on the right, your bike will go on the right. If you look at the gap, your bike will go in the gap. **Stay focus on the road and even if you are confident, be always careful and concentrated.**



NB : do not place your backpack like on this picture (your backpack placed only on the rack)! Why? Because the motorbike is not well balanced (there is too much weight at the back) so you have more chances to fall off it and it's not ideal for the riding comfort.

Ideally, **put your backpack half on the seat and half on the rack** (like the green area). ;-)

2. Equipment



Helmet



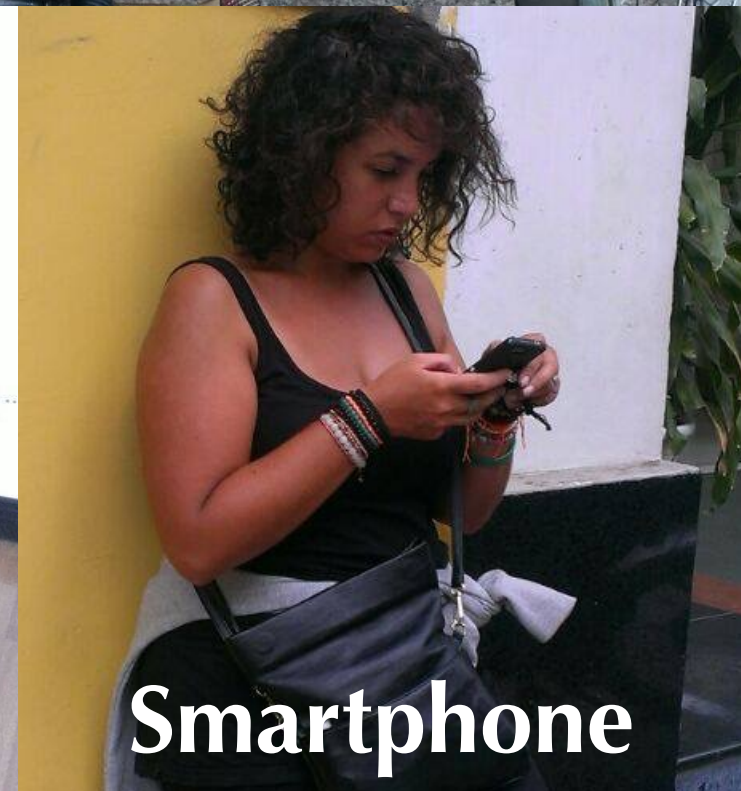
Tarp



Bungee cords



Poncho



Smartphone

MANDATORY EQUIPMENT

A HELMET

Don't play with your safety on a motorbike! **You need a GOOD helmet which fits the size of your head!!!** A visor will be useful too to protect yourself (against dust, insects and other things). Ask around you (travelers and locals) to find a good place where to buy **a good helmet**.

A JACKET

If it's reinforced (like a motorbike jacket) it's the best. Otherwise, choose a leather jacket or in an anti-abrasive material (to protect you from burns in case you fall off of the bike).

MOTORBIKE GLOVES

Yes, even if it's very hot, you need to protect your hands.

SHOES

Leather shoes, solid, ankle boots (to protect your ankles) are the minimum. Forget about your flip-flops!

TROUSERS

Motorbike trousers, in leather or a pair of jeans. Of course, forget about your shorts/dress...

PROTECTION AGAINST THE RAIN

If you can avoid riding under the rain, it's better but sometimes, you won't have the choice so you will appreciate your **fully covering poncho** which will keep you dry in case of heavy rain (I suggest you to take a thick and resistant poncho instead of the basic thin plastic type which will get ruined quickly). This poncho will protect you also against the raindrops which can be « painful » sometimes when you're riding. Otherwise, the best option is to get **a rain suit** (that you will be able to find on-the-spot like the locals).

A TARP

To protect and to hold your stuff on the rack in case of rain/mud/dust. (On the other side, it can also spare you to lose stuff while riding.) (**NB**: keep some stuff within reach to avoid opening/closing the tarp constantly).

BUNGEE CORDS

To hold both your stuff and the tarp on the rack. Check that they are undamaged so they can stay in place properly. Otherwise, you will find new ones easily for a cheap price (10000 VND ± 0,40 EUR/USD).

A HEADLIGHT

If you ride by night, get a headlight in case the front light of your bike doesn't work properly. (**NB**: you can adjust it yourself downward/upward). Otherwise, the best, is to avoid riding at night but you never know...

A SMARTPHONE

For the geolocation, to take pictures/videos and to communicate obviously!

SUNGLASSES

Some people manage to ride without sunglasses but it can be useful when you have the sun right on your face and you can't see anything.

OPTIONAL EQUIPMENT

A MASK

You will appreciate not to eat the dust nor breathe the exhaust gas from vehicles in front of you (you will see that Vietnamese people wear customized masks if you feel like protecting yourself by following the local trends).

A SPARE KEY

It's ideal (especially if you tend to lose your stuff) but it's not mandatory. **NB:** check also that you have the key of your tank if you get the version that comes with a lock.

A LOCK

From experience, you easily find accommodation providing some space where you could park your motorbike safely so you won't need to put any lock. It's up to you. You should also know that in Vietnam (and in Southeast Asia in general), the guys who run the parking lots for two-wheeled vehicles are used to/need to move the bikes for many reasons. Perhaps you will park your bike somewhere and it will have changed place when you will come back but don't worry, it's normal! So, a lock can be a hassle if those guys need to move your bike.

AN ACTION CAMERA

If you have an action camera then take it with you without hesitation! Otherwise, you could buy one because you will see breathtaking landscapes and you will live incredible moments that will deserve to be captured. (You can find affordable ones, I bought mine ±80€ with many accessories included).

FOR YOUR SAFETY

Always ride with **your helmet** on your head!!! Accidents don't always happen to others and, trust me, you don't want to have an accident in Vietnam, even worse without a helmet. You will probably see badly injured people on the road and I can assure you that it's very scary so never ride without your helmet! **NEVER WITHOUT YOUR HELMET!**

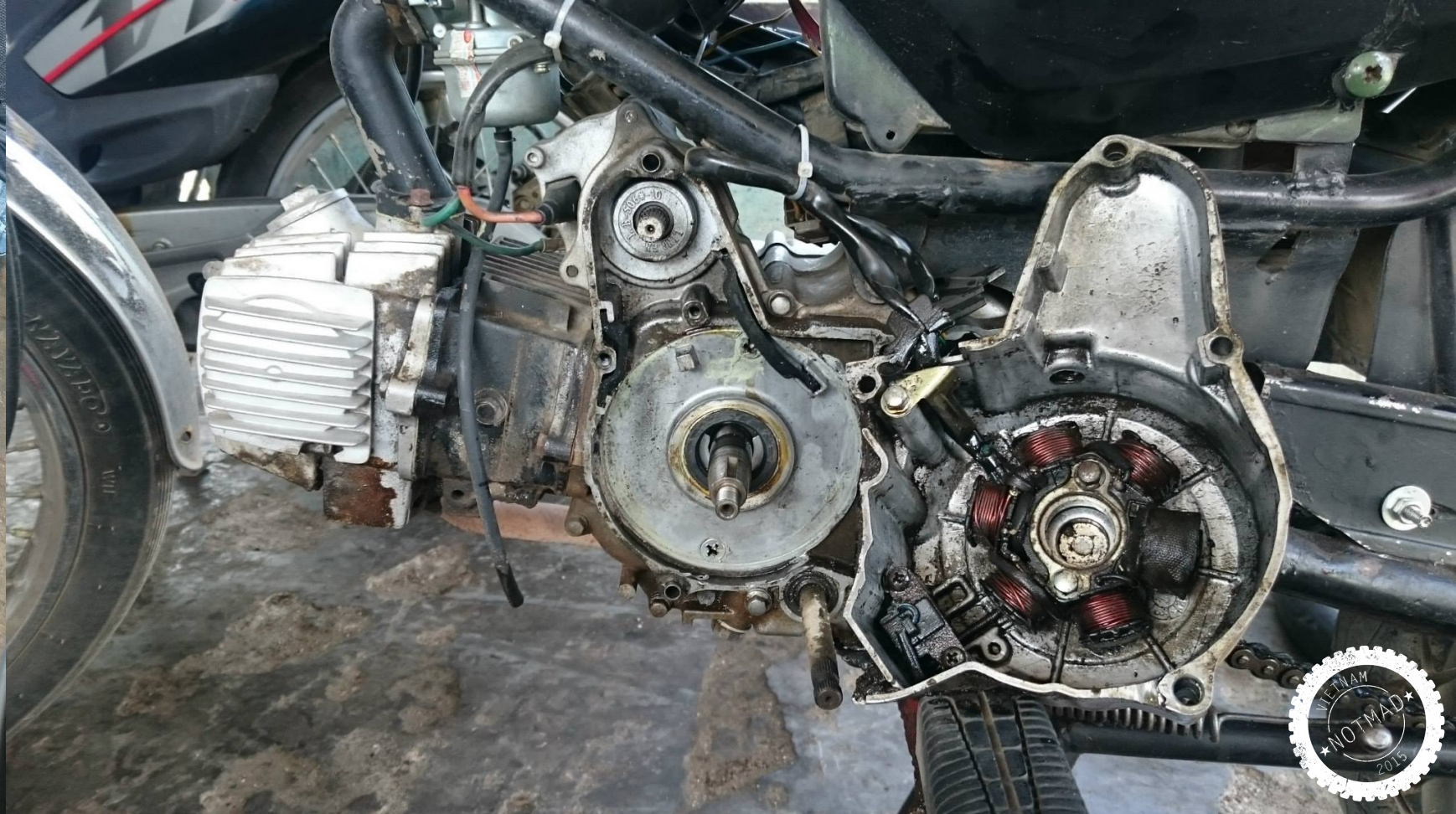
In the list of the mandatory equipment, **even if it's really hot, on a motorbike, safety comes first!** You will think about your tan later. This equipment will protect you (within reasonable limits):

- in case you fall off of the motorbike,
- against the burning exhaust pipe,
- against other burning exhaust pipes (when you will park near other motorbikes, for example),
- against sudden temperature changes.

Riding wearing flip-flops is completely stupid and unconscious! Your feet are near the engine and the exhaust which can burn your feet, you need to shift gears with your foot (which can slip with flip-flops), you often have to put your feet on the ground especially in cities when there is a lot of traffic and when you have to stop frequently... If you wear flip-flops, you will slip and lose your balance until falling and hurt yourself. **On a motorbike you need stability and adherence but it's not possible by wearing flip-flops** so for all these reasons you need to wear closed and appropriate shoes (also to protect your ankles if you are on an unstable ground).

Keep in mind that **the more your body will be uncovered, the more you will be exposed in case of an accident.** Injuries and aftermath can be devastating. They can be painful and expensive too. **Take care of yourself!**

3. Maintain/Fix your motorbike



If you choose a Honda Win, then you basically have nothing to be worried about, well, sort of! This is the motorbike that I had and I recommend it because it's perfect for long distance trips like the one I did but it's true that you will have some stuff to repair during your trip.

Pros: Vietnamese mechanics know Honda Win bikes so they know how to maintain and to fix them.

Cons: these bikes are old and used for thousands of kilometers/miles, sometimes through extreme conditions, in the hands of ephemeral owners who succeed each other and who are more or less careful so repairs will depend on that.

In other words, you will probably have to fix and/or replace things often because of all the kilometers/miles/shocks the bike went through BUT it's also part of the adventure! In case you have doubts, better safe than sorry so **do not hesitate to get your bike checked - especially if and every time you will ride in the mountains and on long distances** - knowing that you won't pay for a check without anything done on the bike. It's better to get your bike checked for nothing than getting in trouble...

Tip : when you feel that something is wrong on your bike, before letting the mechanic start dismantling your it, **tell him to ride it first so he can listen/feel the eventual problem.** From experience, some mechanics love fixing stuff which don't always require to be fixed so I've noticed that the best mechanics mind riding the bike before starting fixing anything. ;-)

WHAT YOU HAVE TO CHECK YOURSELF

TYRES always have to be inflated properly. Also, check eventual cracks.

THE CHAIN should be well oiled and tight properly. Get it oiled often (it's free) and check that it's not too tight or too loose (same here, a mechanic will adjust it for free).

THE OIL needs to be changed every 300-500km (point of views vary on this matter but it's the ideal range). In other words, check yourself the color and the quantity of oil that is left and then, get the draining done by a mechanic when it's necessary. (It's easy, if the oil is black, then you have to change it!).

Remember to do a **general check of your motorbike**. You don't need to take it every day to a mechanic. However, since you will learn to know your motorbike through distance and time, think about doing a general check yourself (an unscrewed item, a flat tyre, a falling indicator, a bad bulb, weakening rack welds, etc.). Some roads will be bumpy so make sure that everything is in place.

Once again, **if you have a doubt, get your bike checked**. It might not cost you a dong! ;-)

With regards to **gasoline**, if you're going to ride through mountain roads and/or remote places, I highly recommend you to have a bottle of gasoline with you! You might ride a few hours without being able to fill your tank. Usually, you're safe with your full tank and you should always find petrol stations but a breakdown/a leak/an oversight on checking the quantity of gasoline in your tank can happen... By the way, in remote places, don't be surprised to get gasoline from plastic/glass bottles (it's common in Southeast Asia)! ;-)

FOR YOUR SAFETY

This is not a race so take your time and ride at a reasonable speed which will allow you to **always keep control of your motorbike!**

Riding your motorbike is not dangerous however, roads have their dangers so be very careful!

Avoid riding at night. Let me tell you a personal story: when I was in Phong Nha-Kẻ Bàng area, I had to ride the last bit of my route at night, in the heart of mountains, on dark and bumpy roads... To make it worse, I had to slow down because bats kept crashing against me... It was fun because I wasn't alone but it could have ended up badly especially because I was exhausted...

Be always careful about your speed. Respect speed limits and stay in the dedicated paths for two-wheeled vehicles! Do not underestimate those two points because not only you will expose yourself to heavy fines but you could be involved in an accident that could hurt you or cost your life and trust me, I know what I'm talking about! You really have to stay as far on the right as possible because some vehicles turn very extensively in turns and nibble the lane on which you are so you have to be able to put yourself in a safe area quickly if it happens.



4. Itinerary, regulation & dangers

ITINERARY

I'm not going to recommend/discourage you about any particular itinerary. Choosing on-the-spot is also part of your adventure! However, I'm going to share with you some bits of mine.

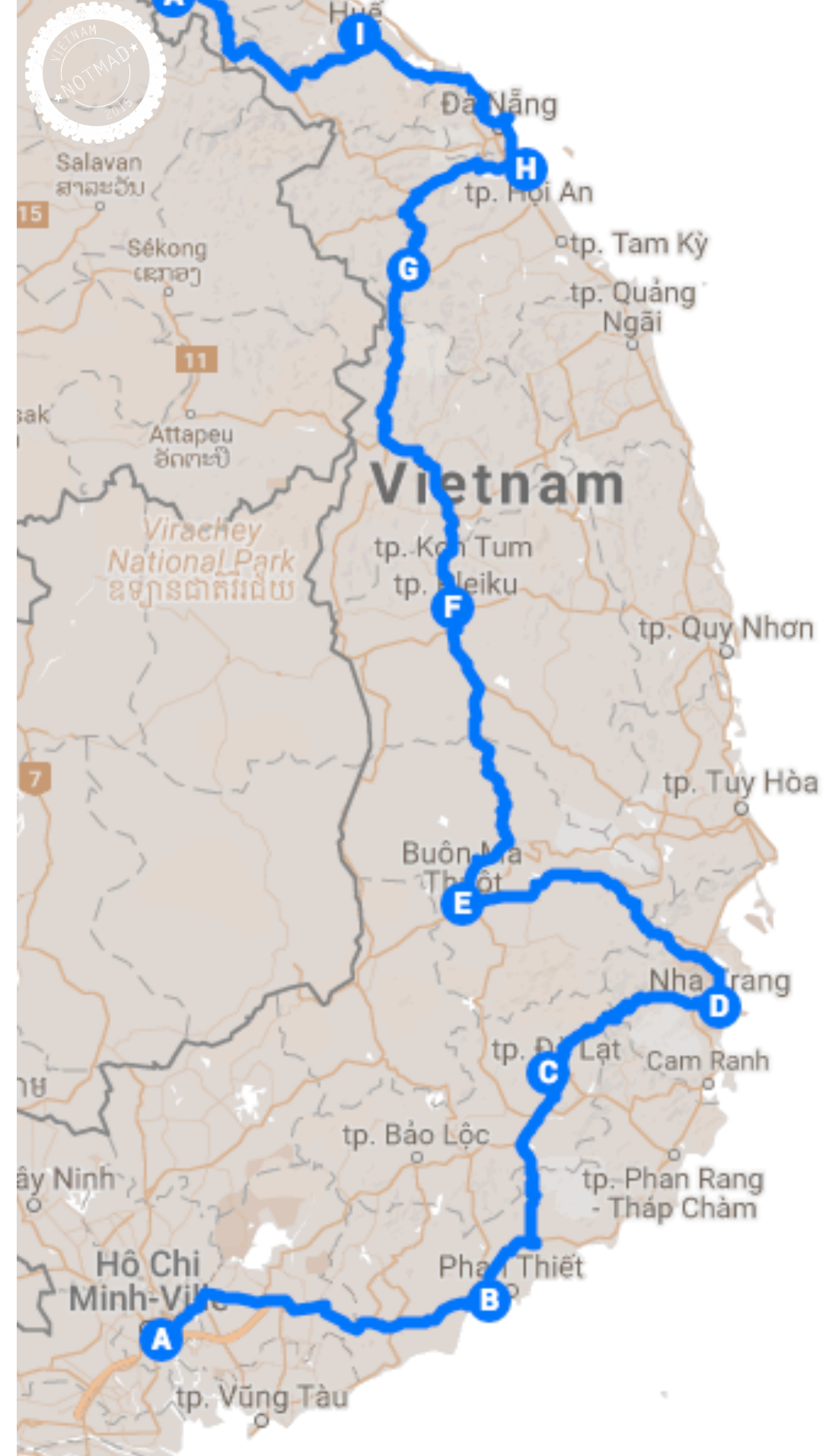
In the Southern part, I started my trip on a boring road with a lot of traffic, pollution and in an environment made of buildings and concrete all around (between A and B). It's clearly a urban area.

It 's only from Mui Ne (B) that the roads became more interesting (at least, for me) meaning with more green, mountains and wilder roads.

The bit between B and D is great (especially between Da Lat and Nha Trang - C and D - in the heart of mountains and on good quality roads). The part between B and D is awesome (especially between Da Lat and Nha Trang - C and D - in the heart of mountains and on good quality roads).

NB: that is my itinerary but you don't have to follow the same one! ;-)

To be honest, **I prefer wild/mountain roads** rather than highways or coastal roads. I like mountain relief! ;-)



ITINERARY

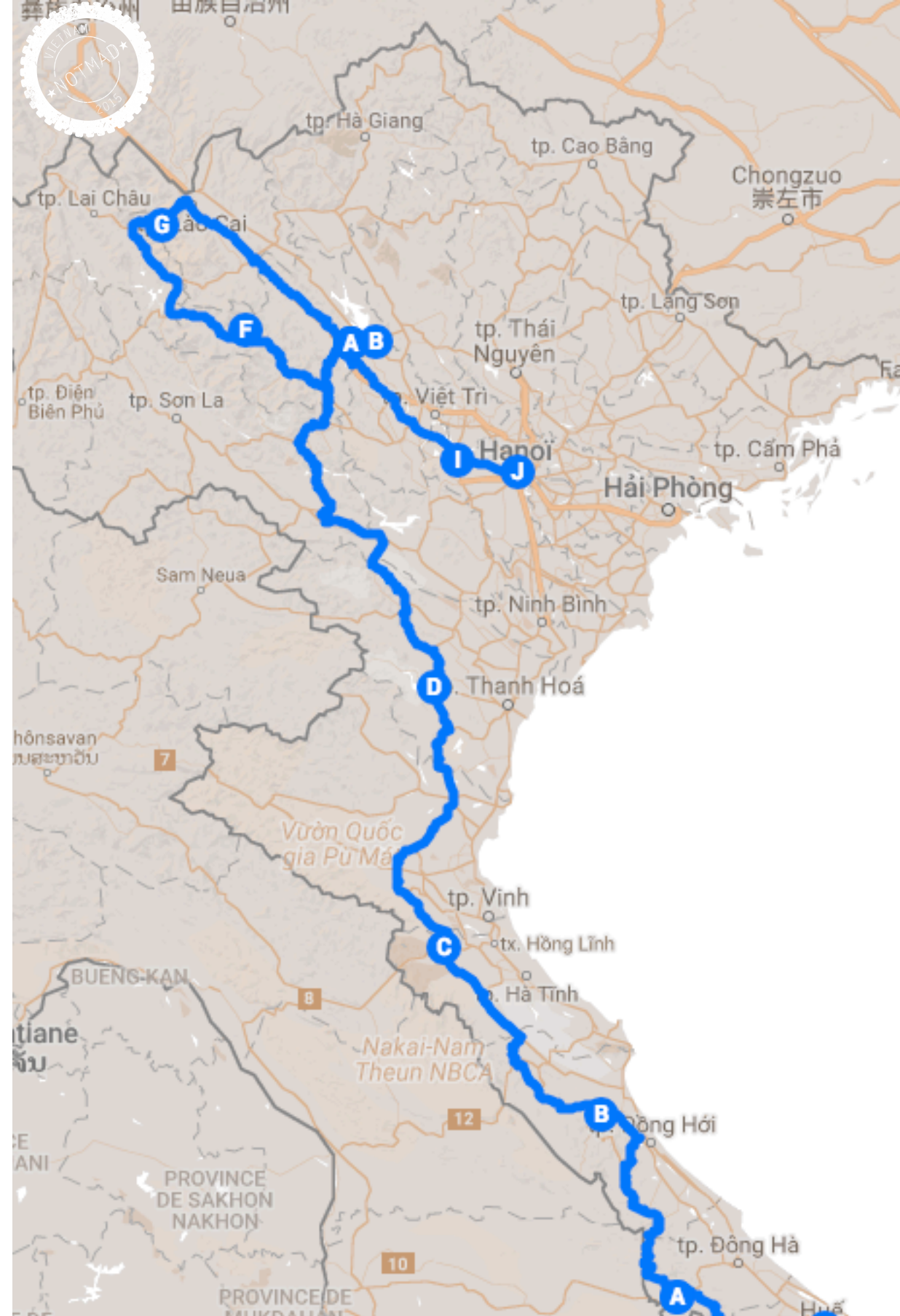
In the Northern part, there were essentially mountain roads (which I chose on purpose) except from areas around Yen Bai and Hanoi (A, B, I and J) which were more urban.

Routes were particularly **long and tiring** on those mountains roads. I often had to ride more slowly (bad visibility, dangerous roads, bad weather, numerous turns, works, etc.). However, with the good weather, it was a real pleasure!

With regards to landscapes, they're often breathtaking!

If you want more info about my itinerary, take a look at **my detailed route** from South to North. I put some comments which might be helpful for you (types of roads, dangers, accommodation, etc.).

In total, I rode approx. 3400 km (2110 miles) on a motorbike from South to North, between Ho Chi Minh City, Sa Pa and Hanoi.



TRAVEL TIME

When I left from Ho Chi Minh City, the only plan I had in mind was to go in direction of the North. Clearly, I didn't have any defined route. I've lived this adventure day by day. It was awesome but still, there are a few details to keep in mind:

never trust your GPS in terms of estimated travel time! From my experience, I was using Google Maps and even if I quickly understood that **instead of 2.5 hours of ride I would have 6 hours or 7 hours**, I had other surprises.

TYPES OF ROADS

On your map, you see a path that looks like a clean highway. Yes but that's just what it seems like... Once you're on that supposedly highway, it could be that you find yourself on a dirt path or even worse... Honestly, I loved that because I had time and I was in a full spirit of adventure. But, **don't ignore your state of fatigue and the eventual unexpected problems with your bike** because that kind of surprises can have two effects: to make you enjoy or to piss you off! I suggest you to have a wider perspective regarding your travel time and regarding the types of roads which will always surprise you.

LANDSCAPES

Trust me, you will be delighted regarding the diversity and the beauty of the landscapes you will be crossing. Mountains, karstic rocks, rice fields, tea/coffee plantations, beaches, villages, etc. But I say no more about the landscapes because as I already told you, I prefer letting you discover all that.



PRACTICAL SIDE

Before taking the leap with or without a route, **you must know how much time you have to do this trip.** Bear in mind:

- the validity of your visa,
- the date when you think about/have to leave Vietnam,
- the location where you will leave Vietnam from,
- the paperwork you will have to do before leaving Vietnam (visa application for your next country, plane ticket booking, etc.) which could require some time,
- the possible national/public holidays (dates when offices will be closed),
- the unexpected (breakdown, encounters, change of route, ...).

TWO OPTIONS: MOUNTAINS OR SEA

In other words, either you choose roads along the coast, either you choose mountain roads, either you mix both (I mixed both with more mountain roads). ;-)

NOTE : if you go for the coastal road, you will mostly be on highways with intense traffic, faster but also less pleasant. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that the entire coastal road is ugly! Anyway, there is no accounting for taste! If you go for the mountains, roads are beautiful but sometimes dangerous (especially when it rains): landslides, rock falls, many turns and ascents/descents...

I'm not saying this to scare you, absolutely not! However, it's important that you know it so you are aware of **the difficulty of knowing exactly how long it will take you from a point to another**. Moreover, it depends if you feel like riding on good quality roads or if you also want to ride dirt roads.

Let me give you an example: when I was approaching Sa Pa (in Northern Vietnam), I rode under the rain and it was probably the most dangerous route of my entire month on a motorbike. Why? Because I was on a mountain road, there were landslides which made the traffic really difficult or even impossible, waterfalls were so powerful that they overflowed on the road and the visibility was terrible. Waterfalls on mountainsides were absolutely gorgeous but riding in those conditions was extremely stressful and risky. All this to say that I had to ride pretty slow (although the road was ideal and perfect - fortunately), especially since there were also trucks.

You can find inspiration with [my itinerary](#) but you will meet bikers including locals who will be pleased to advise you and to direct you according to your concerns/preferences. ;-)

REGULATION

Nothing is specified about the permission for foreigners to ride motorbikes in Vietnam.

If my guide **NotMad** aims to give you as much info as possible to organize your trip on a motorbike in the best conditions, **I disclaim ANY RESPONSIBILITY about the legal or illegal aspect of riding a motorbike in Vietnam.** It is a risk and an experience that I took of my own free will so I will not be responsible for yours.

Please also note that in case of an accident, you can have big troubles which could cost you a lot of money or maybe going to jail so be EXTREMELY careful on the road!

With regards to your **travel insurance**, you must check on which conditions you are covered or not in case of a problem. Most of the insurances will not cover you if anything happens with your motorbike, you should know that, but check before and **read carefully the conditions of the contract.**

Moreover, always keep your **Blue Card**! It's important that you remember that because without this card, you might have problems with the police if you get arrested and you will not be able to resell your bike. This Blue Card is and will always be under the name of a Vietnamese owner who you will never know. That's normal and you don't have to worry about changing it for your name. **This Vietnamese Blue Card always has to be with the related motorbike.** You will buy and resell your motorbike with this card.

Obviously, you must not ride when you have drunk alcohol and you must respect the speed limits. Avoid playing with your life nor with others' lives and having to pay a lot of money hoping to sort you out of big troubles!



WHAT TO DO IF THE POLICE STOPS YOU?

First, you are unlikely to get stopped (you will see that policemen will either ignore you or wave at you) unless you don't respect the rules of the road or if you gave an accident with someone. In other words, if you go over the speed limit and/or if you ride out of the dedicated paths for two-wheeled vehicles and/or if you don't wear your helmet and/or if you have an accident, then yes, you might get stopped by the police.

If you get stopped, it could be that they are fake policemen who could ask you for money (I give you more info on this matter in the next page).

There is no need to get angry (I strongly recommend you not to). However, I will give you a tip which will make you save some dong: if you have a big amount of money with you, make sure you divide this amount. **Hide the biggest half somewhere in your backpack.** Why? Because you will keep that amount and, instead, you will « empty your pockets » only with the remaining smaller amount (not too small because you might be hassled longer). So you keep the smaller amount in your wallet that you will show to the fake policeman (in case he asks you) saying that « it's all what you have ».

Obviously, the best is not to give them any money but I give you those tips because of other travelers experiences. I personally have never been in such a situation.

Then, remember that **some roads are forbidden for two-wheeled vehicles!** If you attempt to ride on those roads, you will be told to go back to where you came from. Actually, it will also help you estimate your route because with smaller roads, it will take you more time but you won't have the choice! On Google Maps, highways forbidden to two-wheeled vehicles are the orange ones (« CT »).

WHAT TO DO IF THE POLICE STOPS YOU?

As I said, you are unlikely to get stopped by the police unless they are fake policemen so here is what you should do if you meet fake policemen:

- If policemen ask you to stop, slow down but make sure to stop somewhere near other people so you're not alone with them. Remove the key from the bike and keep it in your pocket.
- Look at the policemen, see if they are in a hurry or aggressive.
- Do not show them your ID without being sure that they are real policemen.
- Ask to see an official police badge and check if they have name tags on their uniforms. If they have nothing, there are big chances that they are fake policemen.
- Do not hesitate to ask local people to help you. If they are fake policemen, they will run away.
- If you get into troubles, you can ask local people to call the REAL police.
- Emergency numbers:
 - ➔ **Police: 113**
 - ➔ **Firemen: 114**
 - ➔ **Medical emergencies: 115**

DANGERS OF THE ROAD

No, the motorbike is NOT dangerous. Yes, roads and other road users are.

Do not count on me to tell you that you don't risk anything and do not count on me either to tell you that you risk your life. Let's leave the extremes aside.

However, riding a motorbike is a risk that you are free to take or not. I will not convince you nor discourage you to travel on a motorbike but if you are reading those lines, I think there is a reason :-); the decision is yours and I'm not here to hold your hand. I've lived this experience, this trip, and everything went well. It's not the case for everybody but I can only speak for myself and according to my own experience without making you believe fake things. Yet, **be aware of the dangers!**

Yes, travelling on a motorbike in Vietnam - or elsewhere - has its risks but it's all relative. With a minimum of common sense and caution, these dangers give space for a unique adventure. Don't forget that it's an adventure! Do you know adventures without risks? Ok.

First, **remember that riding in Vietnam is not like riding in your country!** The rules of the road might be similar on the paper but they are completely different on-site. Trust me! At first, you might be shocked when discovering the Vietnamese « rules » on the road but after some practice, you will get used to them quicker than you imagine and you won't have any other choice than accommodate yourself to minimize the dangers. Don't worry, I'm going to develop the topic.



When I tell you about the dangers of the road in Vietnam, I mean trucks, busses, cars, tractors, motorbikes, scooters, animals, humans, weather, debris, potholes, landslides, ...

Trucks/busses/cars are bigger than you so there is no need to compete with them. You will notice quickly that they overtake each other (and they will overtake you too), no matter if there is visibility or not. In other words, they will not hesitate to overtake others by going into your lane (dedicated to two-wheeled vehicles). You will actually have to stop sometimes because you will be forced to let them overtake you and also because others will come towards you driving in the wrong direction. But that's how it works in Vietnam and you will have to accommodate yourself.

Tractors and agricultural vehicles (in related areas) also use the path dedicated to two-wheeled vehicles. It doesn't matter if you ride at 30, 50 or 70 km/h (avoid riding at more than 70-80 km/h - depending on the traffic and the state of the road), the agricultural vehicle will not hesitate to cut you off. **You must accommodate yourself and always keep in mind that you are the weakest on the road.**

On their **motorbikes or scooters**, Vietnamese people tend to ride in the wrong direction. You might think they're crazy but no, they're not crazy (I mean, sort of), they're in their country and that's how it works. Full stop. Don't do like them and, more importantly, let them do what they're used to. Respect their way of living and of acting but you, don't do like them. Ride in the right direction and in your dedicated lane.

Humans enjoy taking their time while crossing a street/road and, often, without checking first if the road is clear... You have to be careful!

Weather conditions vary a lot in Vietnam from a region to another, from a day to another, from an hour to another... You might start your ride under a clear blue sky and finish it under heavy rain (which is why the tarp is necessary to protect your stuff on the rack). However, not only the sky will bring you surprises. I already mentioned some examples about the road to Sa Pa with landslides but, yes, it can be very dangerous, especially with the rain and/or the fog on top of that!

Various **debris** (various vehicle items or other unidentified things which are in the middle of the road) and smaller or larger stones could make you fall off of your motorbike if you ride fast and have no chance to avoid them on time (especially in the mountains with rock falls).

Potholes are frequent and can be impressive sometimes which is why you must ride at a decent speed because you might not see them on time to avoid them!

With regards to **animals**, they are numerous, various and unpredictable! Be extremely careful in front of street dogs, cows, buffalos, chickens and other animals coming from nowhere. I remember a route where a little chicken lost its life between the rays of my wheel... I felt bad because I managed to avoid its friends but this one decided to throw itself into my wheel. However, if it was a buffalo, I would have been the one ending badly...

You will hear often that in Vietnam you never pay attention to what happens behind and you must always look in front of you. That's true and you will notice it quickly but be careful everywhere!

Originally, I started my ride alone but I met another traveler who stayed with me until the end of my trip. In the end, I think it's safer and funnier to be with someone. Why? To share magical and exceptional moments, and also to have some support in case of small or big problem - material or human. ;-)

RIDING YOUR MOTORBIKE AT NIGHT

I discourage you to ride your motorbike at night but it can happen for various reasons like a longer route, an endless breakdown, etc. Dangers at night have another dimension: lack of visibility, drunk drivers/riders, animals hard to distinguish, etc. Don't be in a hurry to reach your destination because accidents happen in that kind of situations!

See below some tips to help you riding your motorbike at night with caution:

- **Check your lights** (front/rear). They have to work properly and I recommend you to check that as soon as you buy your bike. At night, check your lights in a dark place and get them fixed if necessary. Always keep a headlight at reach because a bulb out can be a real hassle.
- **Use other vehicles' lights** to get an idea of the road on which you're riding. However DO NOT ride close to the vehicle in front of you, always keep a safe distance between you and that vehicle!
- **Be visible** by wearing colorful clothes and/or have reflective or fluorescent strips (on your helmet, your arms, your legs, your back) so we can see you better. Same goes for your bike.
- **Let other vehicles overtake you.** Be careful and do not hesitate to stop on the side of the road, safely, to let that driver overtake you if he seems « dangerous ».
- **Beware of animals** because they are unpredictable during the day and at night too... Some of them sleep in the middle of the road and you can't always see them from far...
- **Adjust your speed according to your visibility!** In other words, ride peacefully and do not try to go fast by thinking you can guess the road.

MEMO MOTO

Clothes : « thick » trousers and closed shoes are the minimum! Keep your shorts and flip flops when you're not on your motorbike. A leather jacket or a proper motorbike jacket is even better (*more details about the equipment on page 24*).

Hydration : drink at least 1 liter of water per day (dehydration happens fast on a motorbike and you tend to forget about drinking)!

Sun protection : the sun is strong so go for a sunscreen SPF 50 (even if it's always better to cover yourself).

Riding time : don't ride too many km per day (let's say 5-6 hours max but listen to your body and state of fatigue). Your motorbike needs to rest as much as you do!

Traffic rules : the law of the strongest applies to all the roads in Vietnam. You're on a motorbike so you're the weakest so beware of the others (trucks, cars, busses, animals and other two-wheeled vehicles) because they will not care about you! You need to accommodate yourself to the local behavior and to respect the speed limit.

Speed : this isn't a race so it's not necessary to put yourself at risk by riding too fast! Enjoy the scenery, keep control of your motorbike at all times and always keep a safe distance with the vehicle in front of you!

Police : you're unlikely to get stopped by the police except if you don't respect the traffic rules (speed limit + dedicated paths for two-wheeled vehicles + wearing your helmet + accident).

Documents : never without your Blue Card + your international driving license + your national driving license + your passport or a photocopy including the page of your visa.

Petrol : a full tank costs ≈ 120 000 dong which is around 4 euros or 4,50 US dollars.

Flow direction : on the right, like in France or in the USA.

Duration of the trip : 1 month minimum but 2 months or more is ideal to enjoy without rushing (depending on your route).

Emergency: highlight the person to contact in case of emergency if you have an accident or get into trouble (on your smartphone + on a piece of paper that you can put in your passport).

5. Selling your motorbike



SELLING YOUR MOTORBIKE

Here, you must know that it's going to be a « difficult » moment (I put quote marks because not everyone has the same level of sensitivity)

Depending on your itinerary, you will have crossed an entire country, through thousands of kilometers/miles, together with your motorbike. This bike will have covered you with surprises and frights but **your faithful Honda Win will have stayed with you from the beginning till the end of your incredible Vietnamese adventure!**

[Beginning of the touching moment]

Personally speaking, I was very touched to let my bike go. I'm not a materialistic person, at all, but **this bike kept a bit of all the incredible moments I've lived with and thanks to her.** It's like I was saying goodbye to my best friend. Plus, I recalled myself buying her: the seller, Sergio - a really kind Colombian guy - sold me his bike with a palpable emotion and he asked me to take good care of her. I understood his wish and his emotion the day I had to sell my bike to another ephemeral owner.

[End of the touching moment]

(I know it's not correct to say « her » for a bike but it's more than just a motorbike for me. :-))

When selling your motorbike, **specify what is included like the helmet or any other equipment or accessory** that you have used (poncho, bungee cords, tarp, etc.).

Would you like to know how to sell your bike? Ok, let's look into it together.

WRITE DOWN ALL THE REPAIRS DONE

During your trip, I recommend you to **keep a logbook in which you will write down all the repairs done on your motorbike.**

Why?

Because when you resell your bike, it's always good to communicate to your future buyer what you had to repair/change once or fewer times so that he can have an idea of what he will have to deal with (it will reassure him as well).

Think also about his safety —> don't let your future buyer in the complete unawareness! It would be terrible to let him take more risks than he should or to make him worry for nothing!

NB: it will also allow you to know the range of prices for each type of repairs.

Here is a glimpse of my logbook (see next page).

You can check the chapter 6 on page 59 **to know everything about the budget you will need** for such a trip on a motorbike in Vietnam based on one month.

02/07	Achat moto : - HONDA Win 100 - (270\$) 5 890 000 dong
HCMC	incl. guide LP Vietnam, poncho, housse pluie, straps, foulard 2 clés moto + 3 essence, blue card, casque
04/07	12h - Départ pour Mui Ne d'Ho Chi Minh
HCMC	Plein essence : 100 000
Mui Ne	Crevaision - Réparation : 90 000 (donné 100 000)
05/07	Mui Ne : contrôle général de la moto : OK
Mui Ne	
06/07	Vérif. fuite huile ? pas réparée...
Mui Ne	Plein essence : 110 000
Dalat	Changement boulons cache chaîne : 20 000
08/07	Essence : 70 000
Dalat -	Huile moto : 130 000
Nha Trang	
09/07	Check moto : 150 000
Nha Trang	Essence : 100 000
Buen Ma	
Thuat	



A glimpse of my logbook. (Vietnam - July 2015)

Achat moto = buying the bike

Crevaision = flat tire

Essence = gasoline

Contrôle général = general check

Huile moto = oil

ANTICIPATE THE SELLING

Don't wait the day before your departure to hope selling your bike. It could work but if you go for this option, you might find a buyer who will offer you less than the price you ask for because he will know that you will be in a hurry and so he will take advantage of this!

Instead, anticipate! Take a week before the end of your trip to post an advert for selling your bike. I advise you to use the same tips as to buy a motorbike. Let me remind them to you:

- In the street, parking lots, your accommodation: you put an advert directly on your bike using a piece of paper and written with a marker (you can put it in english and in your mother tongue) like:

FOR SALE / À VENDRE
... \$
Contact +33 6 xx xx xx xx
contact@exemple.com
Hostel ...

**(obviously, you have to adjust the country code of your mobile phone! :-))*

- On the Internet : **craigslist** is THE main website to sell your motorbike (take a look at other adverts and make sure you post clear pictures of your motorbike). Don't forget to specify in which city you're selling your bike and also post it on **Facebook** here and there.
- Word-of-mouth : you will meet other travelers who look for motorbikes so talk about yours.

DO THE REQUIRED REPAIRS

It's better if you can sell your motorbike « ready to go »! In other words, **you will sell your motorbike more easily if there are no immediate repairs to do**. If you sell your bike saying « however you will need to change this, that and this too », your buyer will think « well, I'm going to find a better bike than this one! ».

I remember that girl who wanted to sell her bike while holding a piece of the rack in one hand and an indicator in the other hand. Nothing major but I was worried about the general « health » of the bike and I didn't trust her at all to buy hers...

It all depends on the buyer you will find but it's common sense to sell your bike in the best shape possible (and as clean as possible)!

CHOOSE YOUR SELLING PRICE WISELY

As I told you for the buying of your bike, the price needs to be between 200\$ and 300\$ if you want to sell it. Let me give you an example of my case:

I bought my motorbike **270\$** (254€) and I sold it **250\$** (235€). It comes to 19€ difference which was perfect when I think about the route and the repairs I've done based on an entire month. You can also attempt to resell your bike at the same price you bought it, it's up to you!

LAST CHANCE

If you really struggle to sell your bike or if you don't feel like doing any effort, you can sell it directly to a garage. Note that you will sell it for cheaper but at least, you know that you will sell it for sure thanks to this last chance.

6. The budget



In this part, you will have an idea of the budget you will need for such a trip on a motorbike in Vietnam. You will also understand why it's more interesting to buy a second-hand motorbike instead of renting one or buying a perfect/new one (see page 14).

MY BUDGET

To make you understand my budget, keep in mind the duration of my trip (1 month), the period (July 2015), the type of motorbike (Honda Win), the number of kilometers I rode (approx. 3400 km / 2110 miles), my route (HCMC to Sa Pa ending in Hanoi) = **budget of 623,12€**

Accommodation	170,48
Food & beverage	187,72
Motorbike (buying, gasoline, repairs)	149,66
Sightseeing	26,25
Extras	89,01
TOTAL	623,12
<i>(+) Withdrawal bank fees</i>	<i>38,73 €</i>

Extras are for souvenirs, sunscreen, laundry and other uncategorized things.

NB : the buying of my bike comes to 19€ because I bought it 254€ and sold it 235€. Those are the exact amounts according to my bank statement. **My budget of 623,12€ exclude my visa and my plane ticket.** For your info: before going to Vietnam I was in Cambodia so the price of my plane ticket Phnom Penh - HCMC: 127\$ (approx. 112€) + my tourist visa of 1 month single entry: 86\$ (approx. 76€).

BUDGET DETAILED

Regarding the expenses of **gasoline and repairs of my bike**, here are the details:

Details	Date (July 2015)	Where	Dong	Euro
Gasoline	-		₫1 392 000	57,09 €
Rear flat tire	4	Saigon - Mui Ne	₫100 000	4,10 €
Chain cover, oil leak	5	Mui Ne - Dalat	₫20 000	0,82 €
Oil	8	Nha Trang	₫130 000	5,33 €
Clutch (?)	9		₫150 000	6,15 €
Various repairs, oil	11	Pleiku	₫320 000	13,12 €
Mr Kim (general check + various repairs)	15	Hue	₫350 000	14,35 €
Water in tank, electric starter	16	Hue	₫50 000	2,05 €
Rear tire, brake shoes	18	Phong Nha	₫500 000	20,51 €
Oil, rear right indicator, unplugged cable rear light	20	Thuong Xuan	₫100 000	4,10 €
Broken cable clutch	22	Yen Bai	₫40 000	1,64 €
Chain too loose (free but given tip)	27	Yen Bai	₫20 000	0,82 €
TOTAL			₫3 172 000	130,09 €

- **oil change:** max 80 000/100 000 VND
- **lubricate and/or tighten the chain:** free
- **gasoline:** a full tank costs around 120 000 VND

Before letting a mechanic do any repairs, ask him the price first and do not hesitate to ask somewhere else to compare!

BUDGET DETAILED

For the **accommodation**, you can count between 5€ and 10€ per night. For your info, when I continued my trip together with my friend met on the road, we kept on taking private rooms which, sometimes, didn't cost more than 5€ which comes to 2,50€ per person (especially in remote villages) with great comfort and cleanliness. If you are alone, you will mostly pay **200 000 VND (± 8€ / 9\$) for a bedroom with all the necessary comfort** (private bathroom and toilets, hot water, towel, fan and/or air conditioning etc.).

For the **food and beverage**, you can count 2€/meal (even less) which comes to 6€/day if you go for the street/local food. However, it will be more expensive to eat « international » food.

Visits and extras vary so here are the details of my trip:

Visits				
Crazy House incl. parking moto 5000 dong		Dalat	₫45 000	1,85 €
Old Town		Hoi An	₫120 000	4,92 €
Citadelle		Hue	₫150 000	6,15 €
Paradise Cave incl. parking moto 5000 dong		Phong Nha	₫255 000	10,46 €
Ham Rong Mountain		Sapa	₫70 000	2,87 €

NB : in Hoi An's old town, don't be surprised to see people who paid and some others who didn't pay the entrance fee. You will understand why when you will be there (the access is not really checked).

7. My ideal backpack

FORCLAZ 30 AIR QUECHUA



It's hard to say which backpack is ideal since we all have our own vision of it. That is why I speak about **my** ideal backpack and not **the** ideal one.

For my first trip as a « backpacker », I chose a backpack of 60L - which was great - but I never made that choice again. Why? Because I kept filling it and it was really heavy. Now, I prefer travelling light and that is the reason why **I travel with a 30L backpack**. Here are the details:

www.decathlon.fr/sac-a-dos-forclaz-30-air-id_8207915.html (it's in French but you can get an idea of it).

I bought it **39,95€ in February 2015**.

So yes, it's small, but it's my ideal. I don't take much stuff but only what is essential and enough for me.

In other words, I don't have much choice in terms of clothes but it's fine for me like that. I like having a small and light backpack and it's a big advantage on a motorbike because I have less weight and it's easier to carry. I met travelers with big backpacks and they managed to carry them but for my comfort on the motorbike (and in general), I prefer the smaller size. **I recommend you to travel light so it will be much nicer for you and you will have more flexibility.**

You will probably find your happiness with another backpack but I only wanted to share mine with you because I'm happy with it.

If you'd like to **know the content of my backpack in details**, take a look at the next page.

<i>Non extensive list only to help you have an idea about the things you can bring for this trip</i>		
CARE		
Vanity case with a hook (perfect to hang it anywhere)	1	Toothbrush, toothpaste, soap, universal sink tap, earplugs, sleep mask, ... + first-aid kit/medicine
Towel	-	It's really not necessary because you can get one on-the-spot at your accommodation (unless you want to go camping, for example)
1 nail polish, 1 red lipstick, 1 mascara, 1 perfume	1	It's always pleasant to feel like a woman when riding a motorbike !:-)
Cup	1	https://www.amazon.fr/dp/B003A3ZP1I/ref=pe_386181_40444391_TE_item
GoGirl	1	https://www.amazon.fr/dp/B003BEDURW/ref=pe_386181_40444391_TE_item (I don't use it but some girls love it)
UNDERWEAR		
Pairs of socks, bras, panties	3	From 3 to 5 of each
CLOTHES		
Tops	6	Including 1 bustier
T-shirts	2	
« Formal » top	1	
T-shirt Thermolactyl Damart (long sleeves)	1	http://www.damart.fr/F-10091-tee-shirt-de-dessous-f/P-112310-thermolactyl-tee_shirt-thermolactyl-fantaisie-manches-longues
Warm underwear (long sleeves)	1	http://www.decathlon.fr/sous-vetement-ski-simple-warm-id_8186622.html
Hoodie	2	1 with zip + 1 without zip
Pants (jeans/legging)	3	
Raincoat/windbreaker	1	Decathlon - Quechua Arpenaz 300L S14
Full thick poncho	1	Bought on-the-spot
Swimwear	1	
Pyjamas	1	Or anything you like to wear for sleeping
SHOES		
Pair of boots (to ride the motorbike)	1	In leather
Pair of trail shoes (not for riding the bike)	1	Salomon Caliber GTX
Pair of flip-flops	1	
ACCESSORIES		
Pair of motorbike gloves	1	In leather
Scarf	1	To cover yourself OR to cover a dirty pillow OR any other use (it's always useful!)
MoneyBelt	1	Wallet to wear under the clothes
Headlight	1	+ 4 batteries
Sunglasses	1	
Hat	1	
Sleeping bag Quechua Forclaz 15 light	1	http://www.decathlon.fr/sac-de-couchage-rando-15c-light-zip-droit-id_8242831.html
Sleeping bag sheet	1	I use it without the sleeping bag if it's too warm
Smartphone + charger + earphones	1	
Laptop + charger	1	
External hard drive	1	
Action camera + accessories + charger + memory card	1	I recommend you to take an extra battery because one has only 1.5hours of battery life and you might need more
Notebook + pencil case	1	Notebook to buy on-the-spot
Lock	1	For hostels' lockers or homestays
Shoulder bag	1	Big enough to carry my laptop when I'm not carrying my backpack
Small shoulder bag/purse	1	Small size to keep it handy on the motorbike

8. Useful info

USEFUL INFO SOURCES

- Here are the details of my itineraries on a motorbike in Vietnam (you can zoom in and out and click on the icons to read my comments, tips and warnings):
 - general map **2015 and 2016** (\pm 6000 km)
 - detailed map **2015: South to North** (\pm 3400 km)
 - detailed map **2016: North** (\pm 2500 km)
- My articles about Vietnam **to read on my blog** (in French). I give details about my feelings, my emotions, some funny facts and everything about my incredible motorbike trip.
- <https://www.travelfish.org/country/vietnam>
- <http://www.gt-rider.com/se-asia-motorcycling/categories/vietnam.15/>
- Tom's blog, expat' in Vietnam since more than 10 years and expert about the destination: **http://vietnamcoracle.com/** he shares many useful info about Vietnam and many routes for motorbike trips.

- The Facebook page **Vietnam Back Roads** of Sylvio Lamarche (in English) where you could ask all your questions and get many answers from other travelers/riders.
- **Lonely Planet Vietnam** for more info about places to visit, accommodation, restaurants, etc.

USEFUL APPS

- I highly recommend you to download the application **maps.me** which allows you to download maps when you have access to internet to use them offline. It could be your GPS for this trip on a motorbike in Vietnam! ;-). It also works with Google Maps. (***NB: don't trust the estimated travel time indicated because it will be longer depending on your routes and stops.***)
- A **currency converter** to convert VND into your desired currency.
- You can also use the app **samesame.co** which could help you communicate with Vietnamese people if you can't speak - it works without internet once it's downloaded or you can use a basic translator.
- If, like me you love **music**, you can get a music app to have music as much as you want and without needing an internet connection.

GOOD TO KNOW

- You should have at least **2 credit cards** (in case you lose one or if you have issues with one, you can use the other one).
- Always have **small change** especially in remote areas because you will struggle using notes of 200 000/500 000 VND. You can get change in hotels or petrol stations.
- **Always use ATMs with the bank attached to it.** Why? Because if you have a problem and/or if your card gets swallowed by the ATM, you could ask for help from the bank staff. By the way, avoid withdrawing at night and try doing it during the day and during the opening hours of the bank to be sure that someone could assist you in case of need.
- To find **mechanics**, only look for « xe máy » signs.
- To find **where to sleep**, look for « nhà nghỉ » or « khách sạn » which mean guesthouse/hotel/motel. Otherwise, « homestay ». Prices are almost always negotiable so give it a try!
- Remember to **balance your motorbike properly by putting most of the weight towards the front** and not towards the back! By the way, when you're uphill, never accelerate brutally because you could lift the front wheel and end up falling...
- **Avoid riding more than 4 to 6 hours per day** (I don't speak in km/miles because it will depend on the type of roads you will ride - you can ride longer on dirt roads but for less km/miles, for example). Your motorbike is not made for riding too many hours straight so take breaks regularly knowing you will also be tired. Moreover, I recommend you to leave early in the morning to enjoy your day and avoid riding at night (see next page for details about my trip).
- Always have **a bottle of mineral/drinking water to brush your teeth** (to rinse your mouth and your toothbrush because you must not use the tap water).
- **For the girls, little tip to pee on the road:** park your motorbike on a side of the road and pee on the other side (like this, you get attention on the side where your motorbike is and not on you peeing! :-))
- **For the girls, little tip to sterilize your menstrual cup:** use the kettle of your room by keeping the button pressed (using a towel because it will be super hot) or ask for a pan to boil water.

Details of my trip on a motorbike in November/December 2016



	Date	Departure	From	To	Arrival	Time of ride	KM (GG Maps)	Comments
1	23/11/2016	10h30 /13h15	Hanoi	TT. Thanh Son	16h	2h45	92	lost time to get out of Hanoi + lunch break
2	24/11/2016	9h	TT. Thanh Son	Tx. Nghĩa Lộ	11h	2h	107	
3	25/11/2016	9h	Tx. Nghĩa Lộ	Trạm Tấu	11h	2h	30	a lot of roadworks
4	26/11/2016	8h	Trạm Tấu	Mù Cang Chải	13h20	5h	125	incl. 1h break in Nghia Lo (9h30 to 10h30) and Khau Pha Pass into the clouds...
	27/11/2016	8h	Mù Cang Chải	Mù Cang Chải	14h30	6h	110	Khau Pha Pass (two way), La Pan Tan, unknown road (lake, dirt road)
5	28/11/2016	8h15	Mù Cang Chải	tt. Tuần Giáo	14h15	6h	146	
6	29/11/2016	8h	tt. Tuần Giáo	Thị Xã Mường Lay	11h45	3h45	93	Beautiful landscapes
7	30/11/2016	8h15	Thị Xã Mường Lay	Lai Châu	15h30	7h15	121	Via Sin Ho - TL128 (damaged road but beautiful landscapes)
8	01/12/2016	8h	Lai Châu	Sa Pa	10h15	2h15	67	Clouds at 2000m high (a bit before Sa Pa)... Challenging!!!
9	02/12/2016	12h	Sa Pa	Ta Van	12h30	0h30	9	Road in a really bad state
10	07/12/2016	9h20	Ta Van	Sa Pa	-		9	Breakdown 9h50 - lost time at mechanic
		11h30	Sa Pa	Lao Cai	12h30	1h	35	
11	08/12/2016	8h10	Lao Cai	Y Ty	14h15	6h	91	Boring ride but interesting because near the Chinese border + breakdown + stop at mechanic + beautiful landscapes near Y Ty
12	09/12/2016	8h	Y Ty	Sa Pa	11h20	3h20	72	Amazing views and landscapes but road in a terrible state and many uphill/downhill roads
13	10/12/2016	8h30	Sa Pa	Bac Ha	15h30	7h	162	Unknown awesome road between tt. Mường Khương and Si Ma Cai (beautiful landscapes but really bad and challenging road)
14	11/12/2016	8h20	Bac Ha	Coc Pai	14h50	6h30	166	
15	12/12/2016	8h15	Coc Pai	Ha Giang	14h	5h45	142	Many waterfalls on this really nice road
16	16/12/2016	9h15	Ha Giang	Yen Minh	17h15	8h	97	Breakdown broken chain Michael (1h)
17	17/12/2016	8h15	Yen Minh	Lung Cu + Meo Vac	16h15	8h	107	incl. Ma Pi Leng Pass (MAGICAL, WONDERFUL, AMAZING)!
18	20/12/2016	8h40	Meo Vac	Cao Bang	17h	8h20	176	
19	21/12/2016	9h	Cao Bang	Trunk Khanh	11h	2h	61	Ban Gioc waterfall
20	22/12/2016	8h30	Trunk Khanh	Cao Bang	16h	7h30	135	via a really bad road after the waterfall but unexpected places like riding though a cave
21	23/12/2016	10h	Cao Bang	Ba Be Lake	15h	5h	134	Nice road in the Ba Be National Park but in a really bad state
22	25/12/2016	8h15	Ba Be Lake	Hanoi	17h	8h45	248	via Tp. Bắc Kạn - challenging road and unpleasant (trucks, cars, cities, landscapes boring, pollution...)
Total ±							2535	excl. other trips as « ride around »

DETAILS OF MY TRIP ON A MOTORBIKE IN NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2016



Departure from Hanoi clockwise (± 2535 km)

VOCABULARY ENGLISH / VIETNAMESE

Greetings and courtesy

Hello / Bye	Xin chào / Tam biệt	<i>sinne tchào / tame biète</i>
Thank you	Cảm ơn	<i>camonne</i>
Excuse-me/Sorry	Xin lỗi	<i>sinne loy</i>
Yes / No	vâng (North) cô (South) da (N and S, in a family) / Không	

Introduce yourself

My name is .../ I am...	Tên tôi là... / Tôi tên là...	<i>Toy tên la...</i>
I am French	Tôi là tiếng Pháp	<i>Toy la tieingue fap</i>

Counting

0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	Không, một, hai, ba, bốn, năm, sáu, bảy, tám, chín, mười	<i>Mote, ay, ba, bonne, namme, saou, baï, tamme, tchin, mouoy</i>
20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90	hai mươi, ba mươi, bốn mươi, năm mươi, sáu mươi etc.	
100 ; 1000	một trăm, một nghìn (au N) một ngàn (au S)	

Eating

How much is it ?	bao nhiêu ?	<i>bao niéou ?</i>
It's good !	Ngon lắm	<i>n'gonne lamme</i>
I don't like	Tôi không thích	<i>Toy congue triche</i>
The bill please	tính tiền	<i>Tinne tienne</i>

Basic products

Water	Nuoc	<i>nuoque</i>
Bread	Bánh mì	<i>banne mi</i>
Beer	Bia	<i>billa</i>
Tea	Trà	<i>cha/tya</i>
Coffee	Cà phê	<i>cafè</i>
Milk	Sua	<i>soua</i>
Rice	Com	<i>comme</i>
Chicken	Gà	<i>gua</i>
Beef	Bo	<i>bo</i>
Pork	Heo	<i>heo</i>
Duck	Vịt	<i>vite</i>
Dog	Cho	<i>tcho</i>
Fish	Cà	<i>ca</i>
Crab	Cua	<i>coua</i>
Shrimp	Tôm	<i>tomme</i>

Orientation

North	Phía bắc	<i>Fia baque</i>
South	Phía nam	<i>Fia namme</i>
East	Phía đông	<i>fia dongue</i>
West	Phía tây	<i>fia teuille</i>

Conclusion

Dear Adventurer,

It's me, Cynthia Castelletti, who made this guide **NotMad**.

I gave you some information in the introduction but I would like to add that **this guide means a lot to me**. I spent hours, months, a full year to write it, to modify it, to snub it, to fear it, to love it... In other words, I put all of my heart in it, all of my experiences and all of my energy to make it the most useful possible for you.

I love travelling, I love writing and I love sharing so this idea of a travel guide on motorbike in Vietnam was obvious by inspiring myself on my own experience.

Nobody is perfect and this guide **NotMad** is probably not perfect but at least, I hope you like it because I had a lot of pleasure working on it and making it real. Of course, my family and friends supported me and advised me to encourage me finalizing this project which became real.

If you would like to know more about me, you can take a look at [my blog](#) (in French) but please keep an eye on www.notmad.fr where I will publish articles and videos of my motorbike trips in Vietnam!

I hope that you liked this **NotMad** guide, that you enjoyed reading it and, most of all, that it has been useful to make you live this incredible adventure!

If you think that **NotMad** could be of any interest for your friends or any adventurer around you, then do not hesitate to spread the word and suggest them to buy the guide to allow them too to live a beautiful adventure on a motorbike in Vietnam!

Of course, if you have questions or comments, do not hesitate to contact me directly [by email](#); I would be pleased to answer you. If you want to share your adventure, I would also be happy to know about it!

In the meantime, THANK YOU once again for choosing and buying my guide **NotMad** and, who knows, see you maybe on the Vietnamese roads or anywhere else! ;-)

Have a safe trip !

Cynthia

PS: I still have something for you in the next pages...



BONUS

MY THOUGHTS, MY EXPERIENCE

In July 2015, the day I hit the road from Ho Chi Minh City towards the North, **I had no idea of what I was going to live and discover.** I didn't know either who I was going to meet...

After 4 days on the road, alone, even if I was happy to make my dream come true, I started feeling alone, needing and wanting to share what I was experiencing since it was so big and incredible. In that moment, I was in Da Lat, in the southern part of Vietnam and I was in an empty dormitory... I wanted to stay only one night but since it was raining a lot, I extended my stay hoping the weather would get better the next day. Bad luck, it kept raining as much the next day but I was so bored alone that despite this bad weather, I've decided to hit the road carefully. **I was a bit scared to ride under the rain to be honest** but I really didn't want to stay in Da Lat.

On the way to Nha Trang, I saw two motorbikes on the side of the road. I kept riding and 5 minutes later, a traveler/biker reached me (American) and started talking to me so we stopped to chat. A second traveler/biker (German) arrived 5 minutes later (the two motorbikes I saw earlier were theirs).

We decided to keep riding together, the three of us, since we got along with each other. I was so happy to have met them and to have company in that moment! :-)

It was unexpected. A beautiful unexpected encounter!

MY THOUGHTS, MY EXPERIENCE

Now, you might not meet somebody on the road with whom you could or you would ride but it can happen, like it happened to me. If you feel like finding somebody for this trip, you can also post a message in a Facebook group linked to Vietnam and also directly in hostels by meeting other travelers who intend to do this trip as well!

With regards to my experience, **I started from scratch and I've lived an incredible adventure!** I learned how to ride a motorbike on-the-spot, I left alone and then I met a great partner. I enjoyed every moment to the full and I loved this journey! Don't forget that I don't have more abilities nor courage than you have, I simply made my dream come true and if you too want to live this adventure, then you should know that you can absolutely do it! **Trust yourself, be always careful and enjoy every moment!**

You are going to take a trip to the unknown without knowing what you will discover, live or feel and honestly, it's an incredible and unforgettable adventure! :-) Once again, according to your temperament and your needs, you can go on this trip with somebody you already know to share this experience!

You should also know that **you will also have moments of loneliness, sadness, tiredness...** You will experience mood swings but it's normal and natural! Sometimes, your motorbike will give you hard times so it will play with your nerves especially if you add to this the tiredness and the language barrier but don't worry, it will be ok! You shouldn't start this adventure thinking it will be wonderful everyday because it's wrong! However, you will always get something positive out of it and that is what I want to insist on because **despite the hard times you might experience, this trip on a motorbike in Vietnam remains an incredible adventure!**

MY THOUGHTS, MY EXPERIENCE

Sometimes, I was tired, I was fed up of the language barrier, of not getting understood, of not understanding local people, I wasn't feeling at my best, I didn't feel like meeting nor talking to people, I felt lonely, I kept thinking of past memories which made me feel nostalgic... Those are moments more or less unpleasant but necessary to recharge your batteries and make a fresh start! **I admit that sometimes it's difficult and that I have been overwhelmed.**

Sometimes you meet people with whom you really get along with and you live beautiful moments so the « goodbyes » are painful and make you feel happy or sad in an instant... This, you know, is something that really breaks my heart: having to leave people I would love to spend more time with. However, I remind myself that I'm happy I met these people and I will never forget these beautiful moments!

Sometimes, you will be fed up of packing, unpacking, put your bungee cords, remove your bungee cords, riding for hours on shitty roads, etc. But that's the adventure! After all, we are humans and it's normal to have good days and bad days...

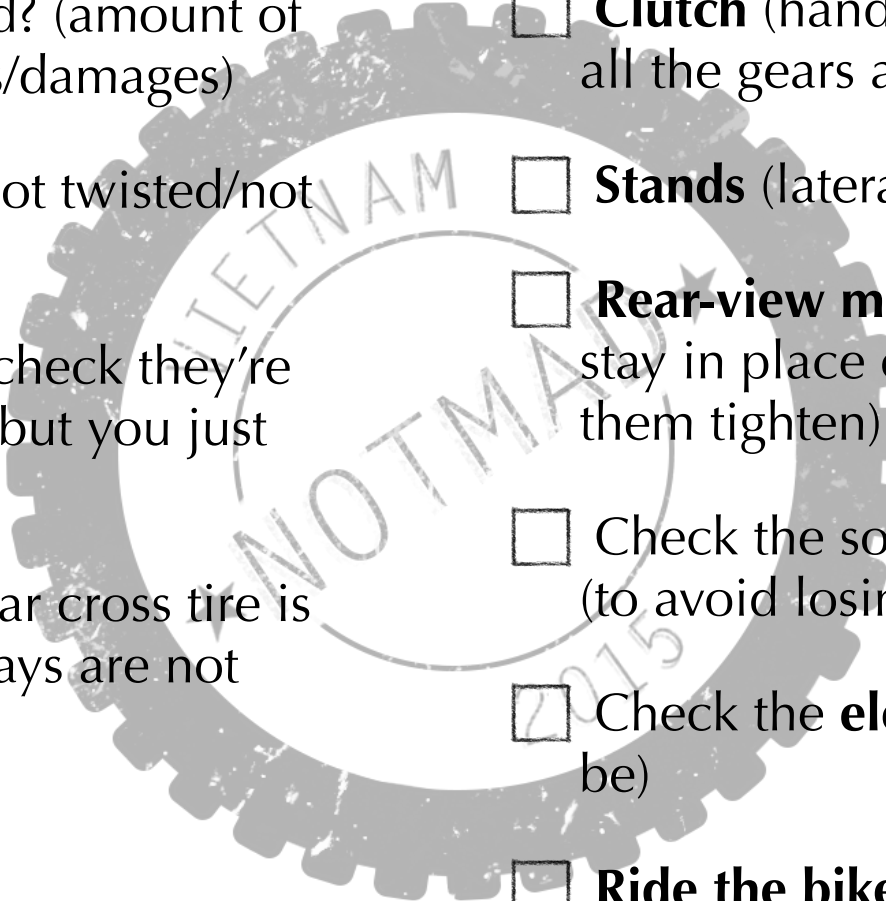
I would lie if I said that such a trip is only made of beautiful days and magical moments. Actually, you shouldn't start your trip with expectations! However, you should let the unknown surprise you, whether it's positive or negative and you will see that, yes, this trip on a motorbike in Vietnam is worth it with its good and bad moments! :-)

NotMad will not help you handling your emotions and feelings but at least, I hope it will help you organise your trip on a motorbike in Vietnam!

More info about Cynthia and NotMad

- My articles about Vietnam on my blog (in French) where you could read my articles about my motorbike trip in Vietnam !
- www.notmad.fr where you will find articles and videos dedicated to my trips on a motorbike in Vietnam.
- You can follow me on my social medias:
 - **Facebook:** @notmadfr and @zetravelerz
 - **Twitter:** @notmadfr and @zetravelerz
 - **Instagram:** @notmadfr and @zetravelerz
- On the next page, check out my « **checklist before buying your motorbike** » including the vocabulary French/English (it could help you getting to know your motorbike and having a clear idea of what you must check before buying your motorbike).

NotMad is only available in a digital format to allow you reading it as easily and as frequently as possible wherever you are!

- 
- ☐ **Blue Card:** you must have it and check that the info the information on it matches the bike (license plate, cylinder capacity - cc)
 - ☐ What has already been **repaired/changed** by the seller? What do you have to **repair/change**?
 - ☐ Which **itinerary** has been followed? (amount of km/miles, types of roads, accidents/damages)
 - ☐ **Handlebar** nice and tight + **Fork** not twisted/not damaged
 - ☐ **Lights and indicators** (front/rear - check they're not about to fall - it happens often but you just need to tape them)
 - ☐ **Tires** (wear, inflation, cracking. Rear cross tire is mandatory) et **wheels** (check that rays are not damaged)
 - ☐ **Brakes** (front/rear - hand and foot)
 - ☐ **Hand throttle** (to check while riding obviously)
 - ☐ **Shock absorbers** (to check while riding - you will feel if they are damaged)
 - ☐ **Horn** (mandatory !)
 - ☐ **Electric starter**
 - ☐ **Kick-starter** (it HAS to work especially if the electric one breaks down)
 - ☐ **Clutch** (hand + foot - ride the bike and check that all the gears are smooth)
 - ☐ **Stands** (lateral/central)
 - ☐ **Rear-view mirrors** (ride the bike and see if they stay in place otherwise, you just need to make them tighten)
 - ☐ Check the solidity/the strength of the **rack welds** (to avoid losing your backpack while riding)
 - ☐ Check the **electric cables** (damaged or about to be)
 - ☐ **Ride the bike, listen to the engine and pay attention to what seems wrong.**
 - ☐ **The oil** (ask when the last draining has been done - every 300 - 500km)



(1) Feux (avant, arrière)/Lights (front, rear)

(2) Pneus/Tires + Roues/Wheels

(3) Indicateur de vitesse/Speedometer

(4) Freins (main droite, pied droit)/
Brakes (right hand, right foot)

(5) Fourche/Fork

(6) Amortisseurs/Shock absorbers

(7) Clignotants (avant, arrière)/
Indicators (front, rear)

(8) Klaxon/Horn

(9) Démarreur au pied, électrique/
Kick-starter, electric starter

(10) Embrayage/Clutch

(11) Béquilles (centrale, latérale)/
Stands (central, lateral)

(12) Huile/Oil





(1) Feux (avant, arrière)/Lights (front, rear)

(2) Pneus/Tires + Roues/Wheels

(3) Indicateur de vitesse/Speedometer

(4) Freins (main droite, pied droit)/
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Kick-starter, electric starter

(10) Embrayage/Clutch

(11) Béquilles (centrale, latérale)/
Stands (central, lateral)

(12) Huile/Oil

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Let's start with you! I thank you for choosing **NotMad** because by making this choice, you trust me and that means a lot to me! I thank you for your interest because thanks to you, I believe that this guide is really helpful (well, I hope)! So once again, **THANK YOU** for choosing and buying **NotMad**.

I'd also like to thank personally: Alexis Catanzaro, Christopher Kulins, Sébastien Simony, Charles Larrieu, Michael Pinatton, Rémi Le Calvez, Rositsa Uzunska, Max Harland and all the people I met and helped me making **NotMad**. Thank you all for advising me, correcting me, defying me, directing me, supported me... Thank you for everything!

Thanks also to my family and relatives who had to tolerate my long days and nights in front of my laptop to give birth to **NotMad**. Thank you for supporting and encouraging me in this awesome adventure!

To keep in touch with me:

- Blog: www.zetravelerz.com/newsletter (you can subscribe to my blog's newsletter in French)
- Facebook: [@notmadfr](#) and [@zetravelerz](#)
- Twitter: [@notmadfr](#) and [@zetravelerz](#)
- Instagram: [@notmadfr](#) and [@zetravelerz](#)
- Email: info@notmad.fr

Once again: THANK YOU all from the bottom of my heart! cảm ơn! ;-)

Final Words

So, here are my final words...

I would just like to tell you once again that this guide NotMad is based on a true story, MY story, my personal experience, my thoughts... I used my memories, my travel diary and some external sources which are in the useful info.

Keep in mind that I'm not smarter and I'm not braver than you are to do this trip on a motorbike in Vietnam! **I started with nothing, without knowing how to ride a manual motorbike, without knowing the country and without knowing where to go to.** However, I've lived an incredible adventure! As a proof, I went on a new trip in November 2016 to enjoy it for a longer period and to add more info and tips in **NotMad**, for you!

Although I left alone, I met people I will never forget and who added a good shot of happiness in my trip!

So, do you believe me now when I tell you that you can do it and that if you really want, you just have to make the first step? I hope so! And if you still doubt about it after having read my guide NotMad, do not hesitate to send me an email and I will do my best to answer you and to help you to prepare your trip! :-)

See you!

Cynthia



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