



↑ THE RIVER CRUISE AT MEO VAC MAKES FOR A GOOD OFF-THE-BIKE DETOUR.
→ THE UNIQUE KARST PINNACLE SCENERY IS A MAJOR ATTRACTION OF THE HA GIANG LOOP.

IN NORTHERNMOST VIETNAM, on the country's frontier with China, lies the remote, rugged Hà Giang region. Vivid contours carve terraced fields into the mountains, while picturesque villages perch along narrow roads that weave like noodles around the famed karst pinnacles and valley floors. "Epic scenery, killer climbs, village life ... what's not to like?" says Kenneth Koh. The Hà Giang Loop had long been on his bikepacking to-do list given its unofficial status as the most scenic route in Vietnam (perhaps in all of Southeast Asia). So, once the country was open for tourism post-pandemic, he and his wife, Laura, headed straight to Hanoi with their bikes in tow. "Everyone tends to go to the Sapa region, but a Vietnamese friend told us Hà Giang was a more genuine experience, especially for bikepacking," says Kenneth. "We plotted a seven-day route using the 'main' roads and passes on the official loop route while also seeking out some smaller backroads and trails."

As with many off-road bikepacking routes, intrepid motorcyclists share the roads and trails, with the same desire to head off the beaten track—just with different tools to do so. To that end, the

Hà Giang Loop is actually much more established as a motorcycling route, but the light traffic and generally small roads—ranging from smooth tarmac to broken and loose dirt—make for an ideal cycling route too. The mountainous nature of the region and route, which packs in approximately 8,000 meters (26,000 feet) of climbing over 300 kilometers (186 miles), means the stunning riding comes with a caveat: such terrain commands a steadier daily average, typically 35–50 kilometers (22–31 miles), with 1,000–1,500 meters (3,000–5,000 feet) of climbing. Like the infamous morning mists that rise in the valleys, you'll be climbing through the day as temperatures soar. "Towns and villages are mostly at lower elevations in the plains close to a river, so there's usually a hill to climb as soon as you leave town," says Kenneth. "We kept the days short by hitting the hills in the cool of the early morning and rolling into villages before the heat of the afternoon peaked." Hà Giang's two highest peaks top out at about 2,400 meters (7,800 feet), with the main feature passes of the route—Mã Pí Lèng Pass (which links Đồng Văn and Mèo Vạc) and Quản Bạ Pass (known as Heaven's Gate)—climbing →

