



# VIETNAM

TOP SIGHTS, AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES

THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

Iain Stewart,  
Brett Atkinson, Anna Kaminski, Jessica Lee,  
Phillip Tang, Benedict Walker

## Welcome to Vietnam

***Vietnam is a country of breathtaking natural beauty with a unique heritage. Blessed with a stupendous coastline and towering mountains, historic sites and one of the world's best cuisines, the nation is a sensory overload.***

Self-confident and fast-developing, Vietnam is a country going places. Economic progress is booming in the country's metropolises, where the pace of change is intoxicating. Here ancient, labyrinthine trading quarters of still-thriving craft industries are juxtaposed with grand colonial mansions from the French era, all overseen from the sky bars of 21st-century glass-and-steel high-rises.

Away from the urban centres, you'll find unforgettable experiences everywhere. There's the sublime: gazing over a surreal seascape of limestone islands from the deck of a traditional junk in Halong Bay. The inspirational: exploring the world's most spectacular cave systems in Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park. The comical: watching a moped loaded with honking pigs weave a wobbly route along a country lane. And the contemplative: witnessing a solitary grave in a cemetery of thousands of war victims.

Take time to savour Vietnam's incredibly subtle, flavoursome national cuisine on a street-food tour or attend a cooking class. Scoot around the rural back roads that fringe the historic old trading port of Hoi An or hike the evergreen hills of Sapa. And for horizontal 'me' time, you'll find outstanding spas – from marble temples of treatments, lotions and potions, to simple, inexpensive family-run massage salons.

“...you'll find unforgettable experiences everywhere.”

Ship sailing on Halong Bay (p66)  
LENA SERDITOVA/SHUTTERSTOCK ©





# Contents

## Plan Your Trip

Vietnam's Top 12 .....	4	Local Life.....	20	Itineraries .....	26
Need to Know .....	16	Month by Month.....	22	Family Travel .....	32
Hot Spots For.....	18	Get Inspired.....	25		

<b>Hanoi</b>	<b>35</b>
at a Glance...	36

<b>Hoan Kiem Lake .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Old Quarter .....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Walking Tour:</b>	
<b>The Old Quarter.....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Ho Chi Minh</b>	
<b>in Hanoi.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Hanoi's Museums.....</b>	<b>50</b>
Sights.....	52
Activities.....	56
Tours.....	56
Shopping.....	57
Eating.....	58
Drinking & Nightlife.....	63
Entertainment.....	64
Where to Stay.....	65

<b>Halong Bay</b>	<b>66</b>
at a Glance...	68

<b>Cruising</b>	
<b>Halong Bay.....</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Exploring</b>	
<b>Cat Ba Island .....</b>	<b>74</b>
Halong City .....	76
Cat Ba Island .....	76

<b>Sapa</b>	<b>80</b>
at a Glance...	82

<b>Hiking</b>	
<b>Around Sapa .....</b>	<b>84</b>
Sights.....	88
Activities.....	88
Shopping.....	89
Eating.....	90
Drinking & Nightlife .....	91

<b>Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park</b>	<b>92</b>
at a Glance...	94

<b>Phong Nha's Cave Systems .....</b>	<b>96</b>
Son Trach.....	100

<b>Hue</b>	<b>102</b>
at a Glance...	104

<b>Hue Citadel .....</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>Hue's Pagodas</b>	
<b>&amp; Tombs .....</b>	<b>114</b>
Sights.....	116
Tours .....	116
Shopping.....	117
Eating.....	117
Drinking & Nightlife.....	120

<b>Hoi An</b>	<b>123</b>
at a Glance...	124

<b>The Old Town .....</b>	<b>126</b>
<b>Cooking Courses .....</b>	<b>132</b>
<b>Tours Around</b>	
<b>Hoi An .....</b>	<b>134</b>
<b>My Son Ruins.....</b>	<b>136</b>
Sights.....	140
Activities.....	140
Shopping .....	141
Eating.....	143
Drinking & Nightlife.....	145

<b>Mui Ne</b>	<b>147</b>
at a Glance...	148

<b>Adrenaline Sports ...</b>	<b>150</b>
Sights.....	152
Activities.....	152
Eating.....	153
Drinking & Nightlife.....	155

<b>Dalat</b>	<b>157</b>
at a Glance...	158

<b>Adventure Sports ...</b>	<b>160</b>
Sights.....	164
Tours .....	164
Eating.....	165
Drinking & Nightlife .....	167



## Cat Tien National Park 168

## Ho Chi Minh City 173

at a Glance... 174

Dong Khoi.....176

Walking Tour:

Old Saigon.....180

City of Culture:

HCMC's Museums ...182

Reunification

Palace .....184

Cholon .....188

Day Trip: Cu Chi

Tunnels .....192

Jade Emperor

Pagoda.....194

Sights.....196

Activities .....196

Courses .....197

Tours .....197

Shopping .....201

Eating.....201

Drinking & Nightlife... 206

Entertainment..... 209

Where to Stay.....211

## Con Dao Islands 213

at a Glance... 214

## Best Beaches .....216

Sights.....219

Activities.....219

Eating & Drinking ..... 220

## Mekong Delta 223

at a Glance... 224

## Floating Markets .... 226

Can Tho .....230

Chau Doc .....232

## Phu Quoc 237

at a Glance... 238

## Beach-Hopping on Phu Quoc .....240

Sights.....244

Activities .....245

Tours .....245

Eating.....246

Drinking & Nightlife....247



## In Focus 249

Vietnam Today ..... 250

History .....252

People & Culture ..... 261

Arts & Architecture....265

Food & Drink..... 269

Environment.....273

## Survival Guide 276

Directory A-Z .....277

Transport ..... 284

Language .....287

Symbols

& Map Key ..... 298



## 4

## Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park

### *Caves on a simply staggering scale*

With jagged hills shrouded in verdant rainforest, and mountain rivers coursing through impressive ravines, above ground the Phong Nha-Ke Bang region (p92) contains one of Vietnam's most spectacular national parks. Head underground for even more delights. A fortunate few can experience Hang Son Doong, the world's largest cave, but more accessible are the ziplining and kayaking thrills of Hang Toi (Dark Cave), and the ethereal beauty of aptly named Paradise Cave (pictured).



## 5

## Hue

### *A majestic, fascinating former imperial capital*

The capital of the nation for 150 years in the 19th and early 20th centuries, Hue (p102) is perhaps the easiest Vietnamese city to love and spend time in. Its situation on the banks of the Perfume River is sublime, its complex cuisine justifiably famous, and its streets are relatively traffic free. And that's without the majesty of the Hue Citadel to explore. On the city's fringes are some of Vietnam's most impressive pagodas and royal tombs, many in wonderful natural settings. Right: Thanh Toan Bridge, Hue







## Hanoi

### *Captivating capital steeped in history and culture*

Ancient but dynamic, the nation's capital hurtles towards modernity, cautiously embracing visitors. Sample Hanoi's (p35) heady mix of history and ambition by wandering the streets of the Old Quarter (pictured), sipping drip-coffee and slurping on a hearty bowl of *bun rieu cua*. When you're done, check out the crumbling decadence of the French Quarter then zip up to cosmopolitan Tay Ho for finer dining and the low-down on Hanoi's burgeoning art scene.

6



# Plan Your Trip

## Need to Know



### When to Go



### High Season (Jul & Aug)

- Prices increase by up to 50% by the coast; book hotels well in advance.
- All Vietnam, except the far north, is hot and humid, with the summer monsoon bringing downpours.

### Shoulder (Dec–Mar)

- During the Tet festival the whole country is on the move and prices rise.
- North of Nha Trang can get cool weather. Expect cold conditions in the very far north.
- In the south, clear skies and sunshine are the norm.

### Low Season (Apr–Jun, Sep–Nov)

- Perhaps the best time to tour the whole nation.
- Typhoons can lash the central and northern coastline until November.

### Currency

Dong (d)

### Language

Vietnamese

### Visas

Complicated and fast-changing: some nationalities need a visa in advance for all visits, some don't (for 15-day stays).

### Money

ATMs can be found throughout the country, even in small towns, though charges for withdrawals can be quite steep. In general cash is king in Vietnam, though credit and debit cards can be used in many hotels.

### Mobile Phones

To avoid roaming charges, local SIM cards can be used in most European, Asian and Australian (and many North American) phones.

### Time

Vietnam is seven hours ahead of GMT/UTC.