



Vietnam

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Best Regional Specialities

- » White rose (p856)
- » Pho (p819)
- » Catfish spring rolls (p817)
- » Banh xeo (p877)

Best Places for Cultural Connections

- » Hiking the highlands (p838)
- » Floating lodges (p886)
- » Thai stilt-houses (p836)
- » Cooking courses (p874)

Why Go?

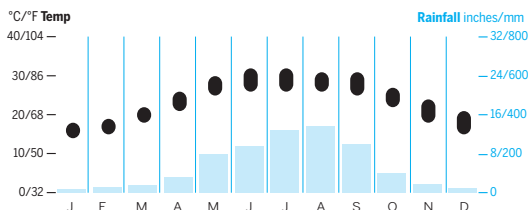
One of the most intoxicating destinations on planet earth, Vietnam is a kaleidoscope of vivid colours and subtle shades, exotic sights and curious sounds, grand architecture and deeply moving war sites. The nation is a budget traveller's dream, with inexpensive transport, outstanding street food, good-value accommodation and *bia hoi* – perhaps the world's cheapest beer.

Nature has gifted Vietnam with soaring mountains in the north, emerald-green rice paddies in the Mekong Delta and a sensational, curvaceous coastline of ravishing sandy beaches. Travelling here you'll witness children riding buffalo, see the impossibly intricate textiles of hill-tribe communities and hear the buzz of a million motorbikes.

This is a dynamic nation on the move, where life is lived at pace. Prepare yourself for the ride of your life.

When to Go

Hanoi



Dec–Mar Expect cool weather north of Hue as the winter monsoon brings cloud, mist and drizzle.

Apr Danang's riverfront explodes with colour and noise during the city's fireworks festival.

Jul–Aug Perfect beach-time on the central coastline, with balmy sea and air temperatures.

AT A GLANCE

- » **Currency** Dong
- » **Language** Vietnamese
- » **Money** ATMs are widespread
- » **Visas** Mostly required in advance
- » **Mobile phones** Pre-pay SIM cards available for a few dollars

Fast Facts

- » **Area** 329,566 sq km
- » **Capital** Hanoi
- » **Country code** 84
- » **Emergency** Police 113

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	21,650d
Canada	C\$1	20,850d
Euro zone	€1	27,500d
Japan	¥100	25,150d
New Zealand	NZ\$1	16,900d
UK	£1	33,600d
US	US\$1	32,950d

Set Your Budget

- » **Budget room** US\$8–15
- » **Filling meal** US\$1.50–4
- » **Beer in bar** from US\$0.75
- » **Short taxi ride** US\$2

Entering the Country

- » **Ho Chi Minh City Airport** Taxi to centre 100,000d, 30 minutes; bus (Route 152) 4000d, every 15 minutes, 6am–6pm, 40 minutes.
- » **Hanoi Airport** Taxi to centre US\$14.50, one hour; Vietnam Airlines minibus US\$3, every 30 minutes.

Don't Miss

Northern Vietnam comprises one of the world's most impressive limestone landmasses, a vast swath of spectacular scenery that has been eroded into ethereal rock formations. The myriad pinnacle-like islands of **Halong Bay** are one superb example of this spectacular karst scenery, or head to neighbouring **Lan Ha Bay** for less crowds.

Near **Ninh Binh**, the jagged limestone mountains of Tam Coc are a surreal sight, while further south the extraordinary **Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park** is home to three gargantuan cave systems (including the world's largest cave) set in tropical forest studded with towering peaks.

ITINERARIES

One Week

Begin in Hanoi, immerse yourself in Old Quarter life and tour the capital's sights for a couple of days. Then it's a day-trip to Halong Bay to lap up the surreal karst scenery. Move down to Hue to explore the imperial citadel and then shift to Hoi An for two days of foodie treats, old world ambience and beach time. Finish off with a night in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon).

Two Weeks

Acclimatise in the capital, see the sights and experience Hanoi's unique streetlife. Tour incomparable Halong Bay, then take in the extraordinary caves and karsts of Phong Nha. Hue, city of pagodas and tombs, beckons next. Then push on to charming Hoi An, where you can rest up. Party in Nha Trang then continue south to idyllic Mui Ne Beach. Round things off Saigon-style in Vietnam's liveliest metropolis, Ho Chi Minh City.

Essential Outdoor Activities

- » **Cat Ba region** (p831) Sail through the idyllic islands of Lan Ha Bay, kayak through lagoons, climb karst walls, and hike or bike trails inside Cat Ba National Park, fast becoming one of Vietnam's adventure-sports epicentres.
- » **Trekking the trails of North Vietnam** (p838) Experience hill-tribe life, learn about highland culture and support minority people financially (and a get workout thrown in).
- » **Mui Ne Beach** (p865) Feel the rush of the wind at Vietnam's premier kitesurfing hot-spot and, if conditions allow, the thrill of riding some of Vietnam's best waves.