



Vietnam

84 / POP 92.5 MILLION

Includes →

Hanoi	816
Northern Vietnam	831
North-Central Vietnam	844
Southeast Coast	868
Southwest Highlands	879
Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon)	883
Mekong Delta	894
Understand Vietnam	901
Survival Guide	907

Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Nha Hang Ngon (p887)
- ➔ Hill Station Signature Restaurant (p842)
- ➔ Mermaid Restaurant (p866)
- ➔ KOTO (p825)
- ➔ Lac Canh Restaurant (p872)

Best Markets

- ➔ Bac Ha (p839)
- ➔ Sapa (p840)
- ➔ Ben Thanh, HCMC (p889)
- ➔ Phong Dien (p896)

Why Go?

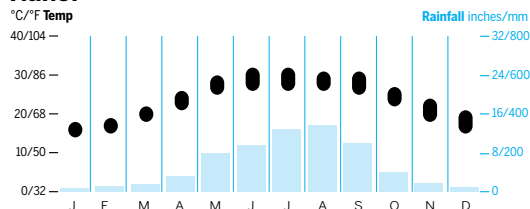
Astonishingly exotic and utterly compelling, Vietnam is a kaleidoscope of vivid colours and subtle shades, grand architecture and deeply moving war sites. The nation is a budget traveller's dream, with inexpensive transport, outstanding street food, good-value accommodation and *bia hoi* – perhaps the world's cheapest beer.

Nature has gifted Vietnam 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, taste the super-fresh and incredibly subtle flavours of Vietnamese cuisine 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 Huế as the winter monsoon brings cloud, mist and drizzle.

Apr Danang's river front 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.

Don't Miss

Northern Vietnam comprises one of the world's most impressive limestone landmasses, a vast swathe 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 (p833) 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 (p846) 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. Then it's a day trip to Halong Bay to lap up the surreal karst scenery. Move down to Hué 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

Check out the capital, seeing the sights and experiencing Hanoi's unique streetlife. Tour incomparable Halong Bay, followed by the highland mountains and epic mountain scenery around Sapa. Then it's the extraordinary caves and karst hills of Phong Nha. Hué, city of pagodas and tombs, beckons next. Push on to charming Hoi An, where you can rest up for a day or two. Continue south along the coast via party capital Nha Trang. Round things off Saigon-style in Vietnam's liveliest metropolis, Ho Chi Minh City.

Essential Food & Drink

- **White rose** An incredibly delicate, subtly flavoured shrimp dumpling topped with crispy onions.
- **Pho** Rice-noodle soup. A good *pho bo* (beef noodle soup) hinges on the broth, which is made from beef bones boiled for hours in water with shallot, ginger, fish sauce, black cardamom, star anise and cassia.
- **Banh xeo** This giant crispy, chewy rice crepe is made in 12- or 14-inch skillets or woks and amply filled with pork, shrimp, mung beans and bean sprouts.
- **Bia hoi** 'Fresh' or draught beer brewed daily, without additives or preservatives, to be drunk within hours.
- **Vietnamese coffee** Often served iced, with condensed milk.

AT A GLANCE

- **Currency** Dong (đ)
- **Language** Vietnamese
- **Money** ATMs are widespread
- **Visas** Mostly required in advance
- **Mobile phones** Prepay SIM cards available for a few dollars

Fast Facts

- **Area** 329,566 sq km
- **Capital** Hanoi
- **Emergency** Police ☎113

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	19,045đ
Cambodia	10,000r	53,250đ
Euro Zone	€1	28,960đ
Laos	10,000K	26,330đ
UK	UK£1	35,110đ
US	US\$1	21,085đ

Set Your Budget

- **Budget room** US\$8–18
- **Filling meal** US\$2–4
- **Coffee** from US\$0.75
- **Short taxi ride** US\$2

Entering the Country

Fly into Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City, or cross at one of the many land borders with Cambodia, China and Laos.