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PLAN YOUR TRIP

YOUR PLANNING TOOL KIT

Photos, itineraries, lists and suggestions to help you put together your perfect trip

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GET MORE FROM YOUR TRIP

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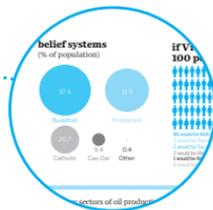
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THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

Iain Stewart,

Brett Atkinson, Peter Dragicevich, Nick Ray

Vietnam

Top Experiences >

Sapa

Atmospheric old French hill station (p125)

Hanoi

Captivating capital steeped in history (p42)

Halong Bay

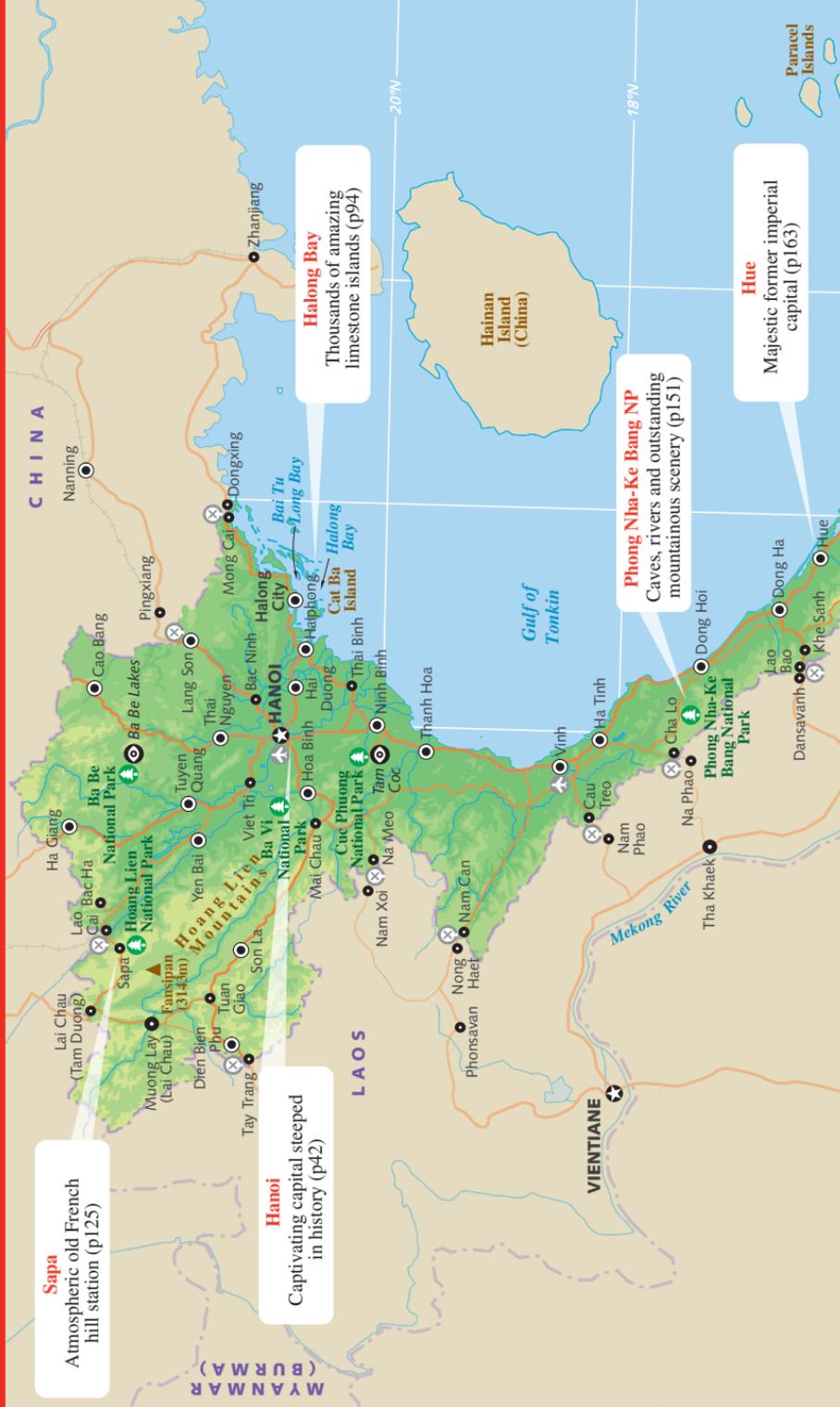
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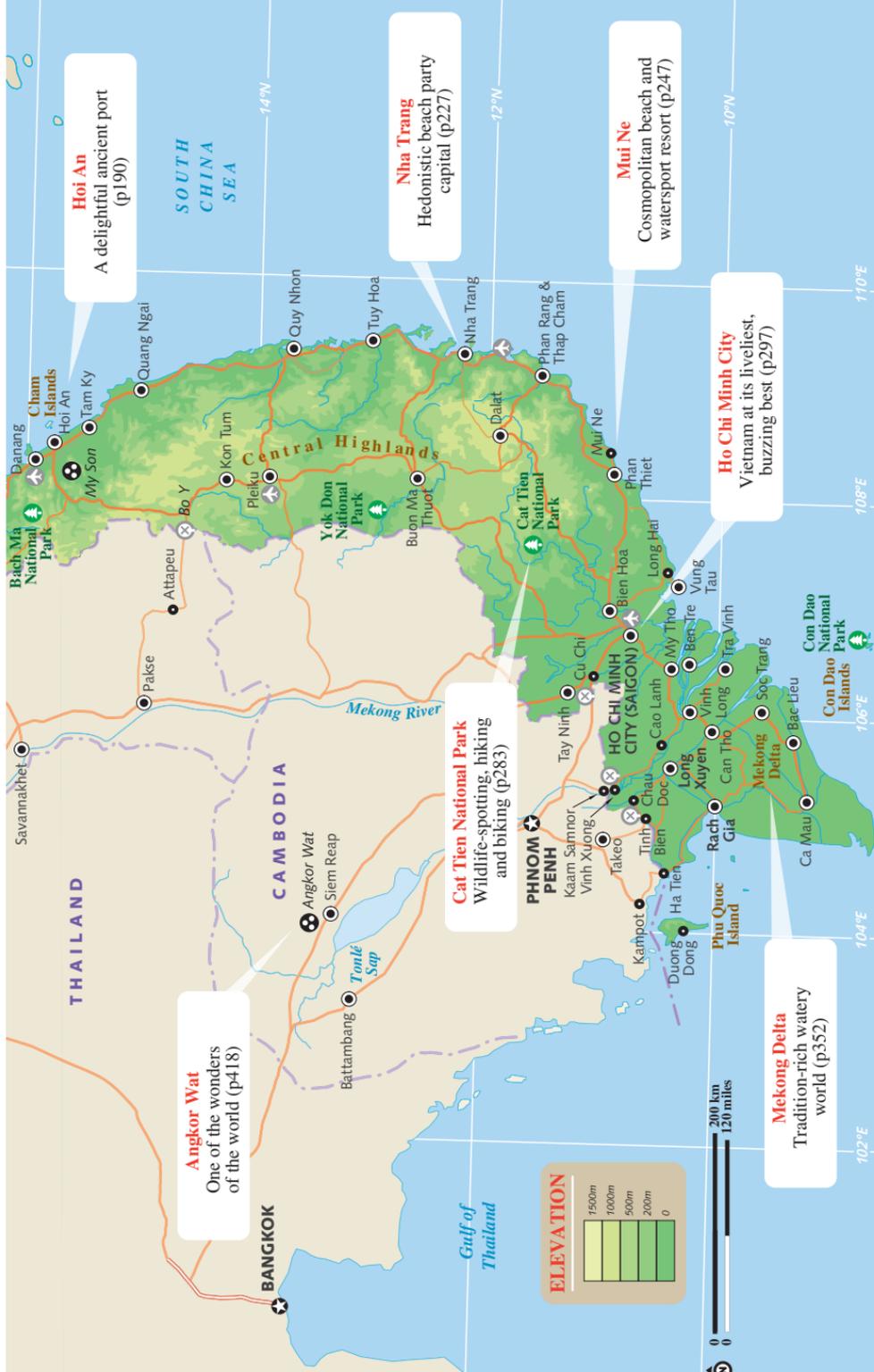
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Caves, rivers and outstanding mountainous scenery (p151)

Hue

Majestic former imperial capital (p163)





Hoi An
A delightful ancient port
(p190)

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Hedonistic beach party
capital (p227)

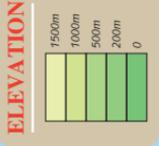
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Cosmopolitan beach and
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Vietnam at its liveliest,
buzzing best (p297)

Cat Tien National Park
Wildlife-spotting, hiking
and biking (p283)

Angkor Wat
One of the wonders
of the world (p418)

Mekong Delta
Tradition-rich watery
world (p352)



102°E 104°E 106°E 108°E 110°E
14°N 12°N 10°N

itineraries

Whether you've got six days or 60, these itineraries provide a starting point for the trip of a lifetime. Want more inspiration? Head online to lonelyplanet.com/thorntree to chat with other travellers.



Two Weeks The Great Ocean Road

Acclimatise in the capital, **Hanoi**; see the sights, wine and dine, take in a temple or two and experience the Old Quarter's street life. Then head to nearby **Ninh Binh** for a couple of days. It's the gateway to the striking scenery of **Tam Coc** and the primates and trails of **Cuc Phuong National Park**. Next it's a long train or bus journey south to experience **Hue**, imperial and irresistible capital of old. Then head up and over (or under) the mighty Hai Van Pass before hitting charming **Hoi An**, the perfect place for some time out – sightseeing, shopping and sunning yourself on the beach. Enter **Nha Trang**, the biggest and brashest beach resort in Vietnam, and try a hedonistic boat trip to nearby islands. If that's all too much, carry on south to **Mui Ne Beach**, a tropical idyll with smart resorts, blissed-out budget options, towering dunes and crazy kitesurfing. Finish up in **Ho Chi Minh City**, where you can indulge in sophisticated shopping, delectable dining and the liveliest nightlife in the country.



One Month The Works

Run this one in reverse, and start out in the cauldron of commerce that is **Ho Chi Minh City**. Spend three days hitting the markets, browsing museums and eating some of the globe's best cuisine. Take a day trip to discover wartime history at the **Cu Chi Tunnels** and then carry on to **Tay Ninh**, headquarters of the Cao Dai religion, and its fairy-tale temple. Dip into the Mekong Delta for a day or two. Stay at **Can Tho**, the social and commercial heart of the region, and take to the water to cruise through the floating markets. Head up into the central highlands to the romantic hill station of **Dalat** to tour its quirky sights. Back down on the coast, the beach resort of **Nha Trang** has some serious partying, boat trips, scuba diving and snorkelling. Ease your way up the stunning central coastline stopping at beaches like **Doc Let** or **My Khe** when you fancy, visiting **Whale Island** and taking in Cham ruins including **My Son**. Cultured charmer and culinary mecca **Hoi An** is the next essential stop, before a quick look at booming **Danang** and on to the old imperial capital of **Hue** and its citadel, tombs and pagodas. Take a day trip to the former Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) where you'll find famous sites from the American War, including **Khe Sanh Combat Base** and the **Vinh Moc Tunnels**. Then head into the hills to the **Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park**, a World Heritage site where the world's largest cave has been discovered. From here, follow the stunning Ho Chi Minh Highway to the capital, stopping to see **Cuc Phuong National Park** and the surreal landscapes around **Ninh Binh**. To the east lies **Halong Bay**, with more than 2000 limestone outcrops dotting the scenic bay. Stop for a couple of days on rugged **Cat Ba Island**, an important adventure-sports centre, before looping back to the capital. Arrive in time to catch the night train to **Sapa**, unofficial capital of the northwest hill-tribe region and a beautiful base for hiking and biking. Be sure to take a side trip to **Bac Ha** to catch its famous markets and tribal villages before the return journey to Vietnam's intoxicating capital, **Hanoi**, and its evocative Old Quarter.



JERRY ALEXANDER / LONELY PLANET IMAGES ©



PETER UNGER / LONELY PLANET IMAGES ©

- » (above) Street vendors selling vegetables, Hanoi
- » (left) Tourist junks glide past a floating village near Cat Ba Island, Halong Bay



Seven Days Vietnam in a Week

Vietnam is a large, densely-populated developing country where journeys are slow. To get an overview of the nation in a week you're going to have to take a couple of internal flights (or overnight train journeys). Begin in **Hanoi**, basing yourself in the Old Quarter, for a full-on introduction. Hit the ground running, spend a day touring the capital's sights and a night munching street food and sampling *bia hoi*. Then take a day-trip to **Halong Bay** for magnificent scenery and revitalising sea air. Day three takes in a morning flight to **Hue** and an afternoon exploring the imperial citadel (with a good guide to make the most of your time).

On day four bus, train or automobile down to **Hoi An**, making sure you have dinner at one of the town's sublime Vietnamese restaurants. The following morning, soak up Hoi An's unique atmosphere and explore its pagodas and temples on foot. If the sun's out, hit nearby An Bang Beach for a swim later on. On day six it's up to **Danang** airport and a flight to **Ho Chi Minh City**, for a brief taste of Vietnam's most dynamic city: its fabled restaurants, nightlife and sights.

10 Days Northwest Loop by Bike

Northern Vietnam is a world unto itself, a land of brooding mountains, a mosaic of ethnic minorities, a region of overwhelming beauty. It's ideal terrain to cover on two wheels with light traffic, breathtaking views and pretty decent paved roads. Leaving **Hanoi**, head west to **Mai Chau**, home to the White Thai people, for your first two nights; it's a perfect introduction to the life of the minorities. Northwest of here, where the road begins to climb into the Tonkin Alps, a logical stop is **Son La**. **Dien Bien Phu** is a name that resonates with history; it was here that the French colonial story ended with defeat. Plan on two nights here. Tour the military sights then revel in the stunning alpine scenery to the north, breaking the journey with a night in **Muong Lay**. On day seven, climb over the mighty **Tram Ton Pass** to **Sapa**. This is the premier destination in the northwest, thanks to the infinite views (on a clear day!), an amazing array of minority peoples and some of the region's most colourful markets. On your last day, head down to **Lao Cai**, then let the train take the strain – load your bike on a goods carriage while you slumber on a sleeper berth back to Hanoi.

➤ Every listing is recommended by our authors, and their favourite places are listed first

➤ Look out for these icons:



Our author's top recommendation



A green or sustainable option



No payment required

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OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Melbourne, London and Oakland, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

OUR WRITERS



Iain Stewart

Coordinating Author, North-Central Vietnam, Central Vietnam Iain Stewart first visited and was captivated by Vietnam as a traveller in 1991 (armed with a trusty Lonely Planet). He's now a Brighton-based writer, specialising in hot countries a long way from his English seaside abode. Iain has written over 30 guidebooks for destinations including Guatemala, Ibiza and Indonesia, for many publishers. This trip was quite a blast – motorbiking the Ho Chi Minh Highway, sailing to the

Chams, partying in Saigon, exploring the heart of Phong Nha and eating the best food in the world.

Read more about Iain at:
lonelyplanet.com/members/iainstewart



Brett Atkinson

Hanoi, Northeast Vietnam, Northwest Vietnam Brett Atkinson first visited Vietnam in late 1993, a few months before the United States lifted their trade embargo. For this trip he dived headfirst into Hanoi's brilliant street food scene, returned to Halong Bay, and explored northern Vietnam's emerging destinations for intrepid travellers: Ha Giang province and Bai Tu Long. When he's not home in Auckland, Brett's exploring the planet as a food and travel writer. See

www.brett-atkinson.net for what he's been eating, and where he's headed next.



Peter Dragicevich

Ho Chi Minh City, Mekong Delta Being a self-declared big-city junkie, Peter was thrilled to return to Vietnam to write about Ho Chi Minh City after a four-year hiatus. Things change quickly in Vietnam, but despite a few new skyscrapers and a fresh crop of international bars and restaurants, he was pleased to find Saigon just as crazy, chaotic and thrilling as ever. This is the 21st Lonely Planet guidebook that he's contributed to, including a previous edition of this book. When he's not slurping up noodle soup on motorcycle-clogged streets he's based in his hometown of Auckland, New Zealand.

Read more about Peter at:
lonelyplanet.com/members/peterdragicevich



Nick Ray

Central Highlands, South-Central Coast, Siem Reap & the Temples of Angkor A Londoner of sorts, Nick comes from Watford, the sort of town that makes you want to travel. As he lives in Phnom Penh, Vietnam is Nick's backyard. He has co-authored *Cycling Vietnam*, *Laos & Cambodia*, as well as the *Cambodia* book for Lonely Planet. Nick has been to almost every province from Ha Giang in the north to Ca Mau in the south. He was exploring in-between this time around and enjoyed motorbiking the Central Highlands and hanging out on Con Dao.

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