



North-Central Vietnam

Includes »

Ninh Binh Province	143
Vinh.....	149
Around Vinh.....	151
Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park.....	151
Dong Hoi & Around	153

Best Places to Eat

- » Thuong Hai (p150)
- » Huong Mai Restaurant (p144)
- » Visitor Centre, Cuc Phuong National Park (p148)

Best Places to Stay

- » Phong Nha Farmstay (p153)
- » Nam Long Hotel (p154)
- » Thanh Thuy's Guest House & New Hotel (p143)

Why Go?

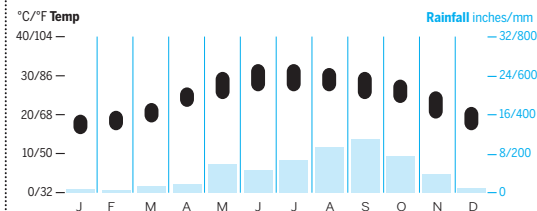
North-central Vietnam is never going to be Asia's next beach mecca or cultural hub – it's a poor, traditional region with a cool winter climate where cities like Vinh still bear the scars of the American War. And yet if you budget a little time here, you'll find some curious sights, outstanding scenery and wonderful excursions.

The one place that everyone's talking about is the extraordinary Phong Nha region, home to three gargantuan cave systems (including the world's largest cave) set in a stunning national park of towering limestone hills and pristine forests.

Ninh Binh, a region blessed with more karst-studded mountains, also has its charm, as well as the fecund beauty of Cuc Phuong on its doorstep. On the coast, port-resort Dong Hoi makes a pleasing base away from the tourist trail for a day or two.

When to Go

Ninh Binh



Apr Winter winds subside, temperatures rise and Phong Nha's rivers are perfect for cooling off.

Oct The ideal time to visit, with warm days, mild evenings and sea temperatures at their highest.

Dec Witness the faithful fill the Catholic cathedral and town of Phat Diem at Christmas time.



North-Central Highlights

- 1** Believe the hype, **Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park** (p151) offers simply astonishing scenery, hiking and biking
- 2** Head out for a nature ramble at delightful **Cuc Phuong National Park** (p147)
- 3** Step up to the task and explore the pristine **Paradise Cave** (p152)
- 4** Gawk at the limestone monoliths of **Tam Coc** (p145) as you're lulled in a rowboat down the Ngo Dong River
- 5** Lap up the royal view at **Hoa Lu's ancient temples** (p145)
- 6** Confound your imagination with the East-meets-West architecture at **Phat Diem Cathedral** (p149)
- 7** Go with the flow into colossal **Phong Nha Cave** (p152)