



Central Vietnam

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Morning Glory Street Food Restaurant (p206)
- ➔ Cargo Club (p206)
- ➔ Waterfront (p190)
- ➔ Les Jardins de La Carambole (p179)

Best Places to Stay

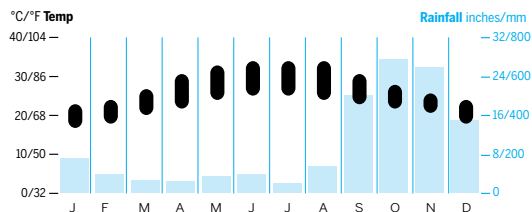
- ➔ An Bang Seaside Village (p212)
- ➔ Phong Nha Farmstay (p159)
- ➔ Hoi An Chic Hotel (p205)
- ➔ Beach Bar Hue (p183)

Why Go?

The cultural heart of the nation, central Vietnam is fully loaded with historical sights and cultural interest, and blessed with ravishing beaches and outstanding national parks. Marvel at Hue and its imperial citadel and royal tombs. Savour the unique grace of riverside jewel Hoi An. Tour the military sites of the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ). Check out Danang, fast-emerging as one of the nation's most dynamic cities. And don't neglect the extraordinary Phong Nha region, home to three gargantuan cave systems (including the world's largest cave). And when you've had enough of touring the sights, invest in some well-deserved hammock time on the golden sands of An Bang beach or learn to cook central Vietnamese cuisine, the nation's most complex. And now with improving highways, and upgraded international airports at Hue and Danang, access to this utterly compelling and diverse part of the nation has never been easier.

When to Go

Hue



Late Apr

Danang's riverfront explodes with colour for the annual fireworks competition.

May Temperatures are on the rise and central Vietnam's beaches come into their own.

Sep Sticky summer heat relents, peak crowds are a memory and sea temperatures are balmy.

NORTH-CENTRAL VIETNAM

History

This region's seen it all: kings, warriors and occupiers and a history of warfare and conflict. The ancient kingdom of Champa began here in the 2nd century and flourished for more than a thousand years. It left its mark in the myriad towers and temples dotting the landscape; the most renowned are at My Son. The Vietnamese subdued Champa in the 15th century, and in subsequent centuries European, Japanese and Chinese traders established footholds in Hoi An.

In 1802 Vietnam's last royal dynasty, the Nguyens, set up court at Hue, which became the centre of political intrigue, intellectual excellence and spiritual guidance. Later emperors were subdued by expanding French ambitions in Vietnam, and by the time of independence the locus of national power had shifted back to Hanoi.

In 1954 Vietnam was partitioned into North and South, creating a DMZ that saw some of the American War's heaviest fighting. Thousands of lives were lost in bloody battles as entire cities, including Vinh and most of Hue's imperial enclosure, were flattened. Vast tracts of countryside around Dong Hoi and Dong Ha remain littered with lethal ordnance. Hoi An was one of the few places spared, and remains a magical exception.

Today, there's a burgeoning tourism sector around Hue and Hoi An, and the city of Danang goes from strength to strength. But the northern part of the region remains poor and undeveloped.

i Getting There & Away

The main north-south railway cuts directly through the region, as does Hwy 1 and the Ho Chi Minh Highway. Airports at Vinh and Dong Hoi run flights to Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) and Hanoi.

Ninh Binh Province

A short hop south of Hanoi, Ninh Binh Province is blessed with breathtaking natural beauty, intriguing cultural sights and the wonderful Cuc Phuong National Park. That said, Ninh Binh has become a massive destination for domestic travellers, and many of its attractions are heavily commercialised. Expect plenty of hawkers and a degree of hassle at the main sights.



Central Vietnam Highlights

- 1 Travel back in time in the historic old port of **Hoi An** (p195).
- 2 **Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park** (p156) is truly something else: the world's foremost caving destination.
- 3 Tread in the footsteps of emperors from the Forbidden Purple City to the imperial tombs of **Hue** (p167).
- 4 Learn a new culinary craft in a **Vietnamese cooking class** (p203) in Hoi An.
- 5 Head out for a nature ramble at delightful **Cuc Phuong National Park** (p152).
- 6 Wonder while you wander amid the enigmatic Cham ruins at **My Son** (p214).
- 7 Test your two-wheel prowess on a **motorbike tour** (p203) around the idyllic back roads of central Vietnam.
- 8 Go underground at the **Vinh Moc Tunnels** (p162) in the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ).