



Northern Vietnam

Includes ➔

Ba Be National Park	96
Haiphong.	98
Halong Bay.	101
Bai Tu Long Bay.	113
Mong Cai & the Chinese Border.	115
Hoa Binh.	120
Mai Chau.	121
Dien Bien Phu.	123
Muong Lay.	126
Sapa.	128
Lao Cai.	136
Bac Ha.	137
Ha Giang Province.	140

Best Places to Eat

- ➔ The Hill Station Signature Restaurant (p134)
- ➔ Thanh Lan Com Binh Dan (p117)
- ➔ Sapa Market (p133)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Ancient House Homestay (p110)
- ➔ Mai Chau Nature Lodge (p122)
- ➔ Hmong Mountain Retreat (p132)

Why Go?

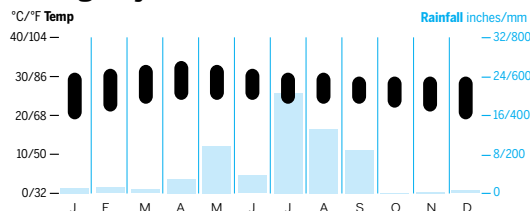
Northern Vietnam's top ticket is the wildly popular Halong Bay, and nearby Cat Ba Island offers excellent hiking, biking and rock climbing. The karst connection continues into Cao Bang province – an essential detour are the sublime lakes of Ba Be National Park – and then west into Ha Giang, Vietnam's emerging destination for travellers, which hugs the Chinese border.

Further west the landscape segues into towering evergreen peaks and fertile river valleys. This is the heartland of hill-tribe culture with markets enlivened by the scarlet headaddresses of the Dzao, the indigo fabrics of the Black H'mong and the brocaded aprons of the Flower H'mong.

Sapa is a great base for hiking and stunning vistas of Fansipan, Vietnam's highest peak. From this former French hill station, the fabled northwest loop road crosses high mountain passes to historic Dien Bien Phu, before crossing lush lowland valleys south to sleepy Mai Chau.

When to Go

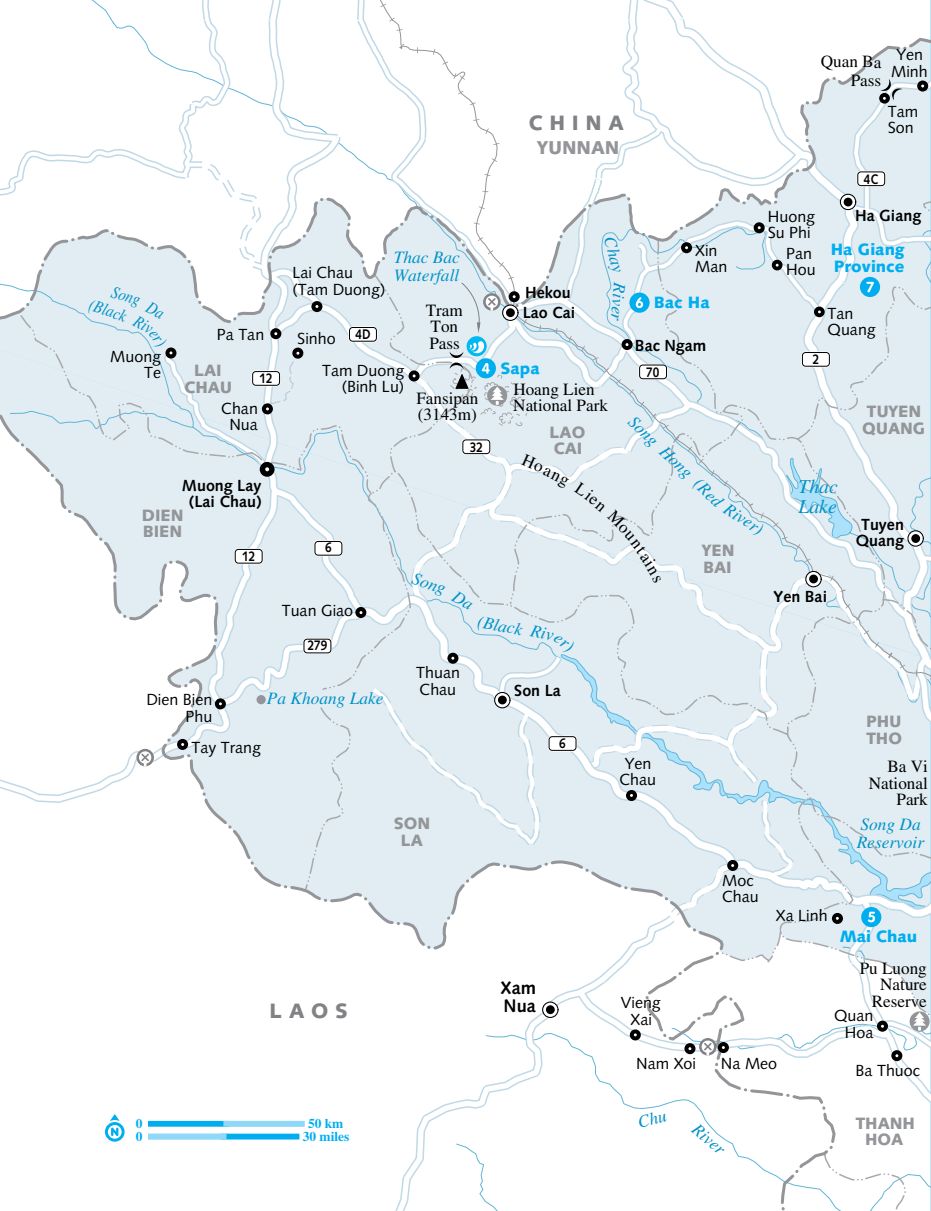
Halong City



Jan–Mar Cool and drizzly; fog in Halong Bay and very cold overnight lows in Sapa

May–Aug Tropical storms in the northeast, which may disrupt Halong Bay tours.

Oct–Dec The best time to be around Sapa and Halong Bay.



Northern Vietnam Highlights

1 Escape **Halong Bay's** tourist buzz by gently kayaking into hidden lagoons and grottoes (p103).
2 Hike, bike and climb your way around the great outdoors

in Cat Ba Island's fascinating **national park** (p106).

3 Board a boat to glide through lakes and rivers, and spend the night with a local

Tay family in **Ba Be National Park** (p96).

4 Walk misty mountain trails through sublime scenery and hill-tribe villages around **Sapa** (p128).