



Central Vietnam

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Nu Eatery (p216)
- ➔ Morning Glory Restaurant (p216)
- ➔ Cargo Club (p216)
- ➔ Waterfront (p197)
- ➔ Fatfish (p197)

Best for Spectacular Scenery

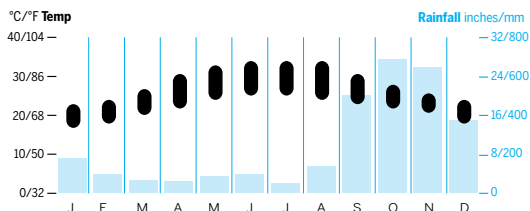
- ➔ Tam Coc (p157)
- ➔ Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park (p162)
- ➔ Bach Ma National Park (p190)
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- ➔ Cham Islands (p223)

Why Go?

The geographic heart of the nation, central Vietnam is packed with historic sights and cultural interest, and blessed with ravishing beaches and outstanding national parks. Marvel at Hue and its imperial citadel, royal tombs and excellent street food. Savour the unique heritage grace of riverside jewel Hoi An, and tour the military sites of the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ). Check out Danang, fast emerging as one of the nation's most dynamic cities. Also emerging as a must-visit destination is the extraordinary Phong Nha region, home to three gargantuan cave systems (including the world's largest cave), and a fascinating war history concealed amid stunning scenery. Enjoy well-earned downtime on the golden sands of An Bang beach or learn to cook central Vietnamese cuisine, the nation's most complex. With improving highways, and upgraded international airports at Hue and Danang, access to this compelling and diverse part of Vietnam has never been easier.

When to Go

Hue



Late Apr

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

May

Temperatures 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.

History

This region's seen them all: kings and king-makers, 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. Myriad Cham towers and temples dot the landscape; the most renowned are at My Son. The Vietnamese subdued Champa in the 15th century, while 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 fatefully partitioned into North and South, creating a Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) that saw some of the heaviest fighting of the American War. 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. Historic Hoi An was one of the few places spared.

Today, tourism drives Hue and Hoi An, and Danang is expanding with energy and investment, but the region's north remains relatively undeveloped.

NORTH-CENTRAL VIETNAM

① Getting There & Away

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

Ninh Binh Province

South of Hanoi, Ninh Binh province is blessed with natural beauty, cultural sights and the Cuc Phuong National Park. However, Ninh Binh is very popular with domestic travellers, and many attractions are heavily commercialised. Expect hawkers and a degree of hassle at the main sights.



Central Vietnam Highlights

- ① Travelling back in time in the historic old port of **Hoi An** (p203).
- ② Going underground at the astounding **Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park** (p162), the world's foremost caving destination.
- ③ Treading in the footsteps of emperors from the Forbidden Purple City to the imperial tombs of **Hue** (p174).
- ④ Taking it easy amid the relaxed beach scene at **An Bang** (p220).
- ⑤ Experiencing the urban energy and bright lights of exciting **Danang** (p193).
- ⑥ Wondering while you wander amid the enigmatic Cham ruins at **My Son** (p224).
- ⑦ Testing your two-wheel prowess on a **motorbike tour** (p212) around the idyllic back roads of central Vietnam.
- ⑧ Exploring the fascinating **Vinh Moc Tunnels** (p170) in the Demilitarised Zone.