



Northern Vietnam

Includes ➔

Ba Be National Park . . .	102
Haiphong	104
Halong Bay	107
Bai Tu Long Bay	120
Mong Cai & the Chinese Border	122
Hoa Binh	127
Mai Chau	129
Dien Bien Phu	131
Muong Lay	134
Lai Chau	135
Sapa	136
Lao Cai	143
Bac Ha	145
Ha Giang Province	148

Why Go?

Vistas. This is Vietnam's big-sky country; a place of rippling mountains, cascading rice terraces and the winnowed-out karst topography for which the region is famed.

Halong Bay's seascape of limestone towers is the view everyone's here to see, but the karst connection continues inland, to Ba Be's sprawling lakes and the knobbly topped peaks of Ha Giang, until it segues into the evergreen hills of the northwest highlands.

Not to be outdone by the scenery, northern Vietnam's cultural kaleidoscope is just as diverse. In this heartland of hill-tribe culture, villages snuggle between paddy-field patchworks outside of Sapa and the scarlet headdresses of the Dzao and the Black Hmong's indigo fabrics add dizzying colour to chaotic highland markets.

The twisting ribbon-roads winding north from Hanoi reveal a rural world far removed from Vietnam's horns-a-honking big-city streets. If you're up for some road-tripping, this is the place to do it.

Best Places to Eat

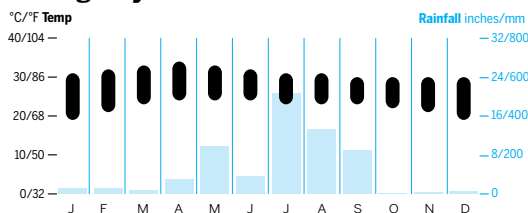
- ➔ Hill Station Signature Restaurant (p141)
- ➔ Nam Giao (p106)
- ➔ Thanh Lan Com Binh Dan (p124)

Best Local Markets

- ➔ Dong Van Market (p150)
- ➔ Bac Ha Market (p145)
- ➔ Na Giang Market (p126)
- ➔ Sin Cheng Market (p146)
- ➔ Sinho Market (p135)

When to Go

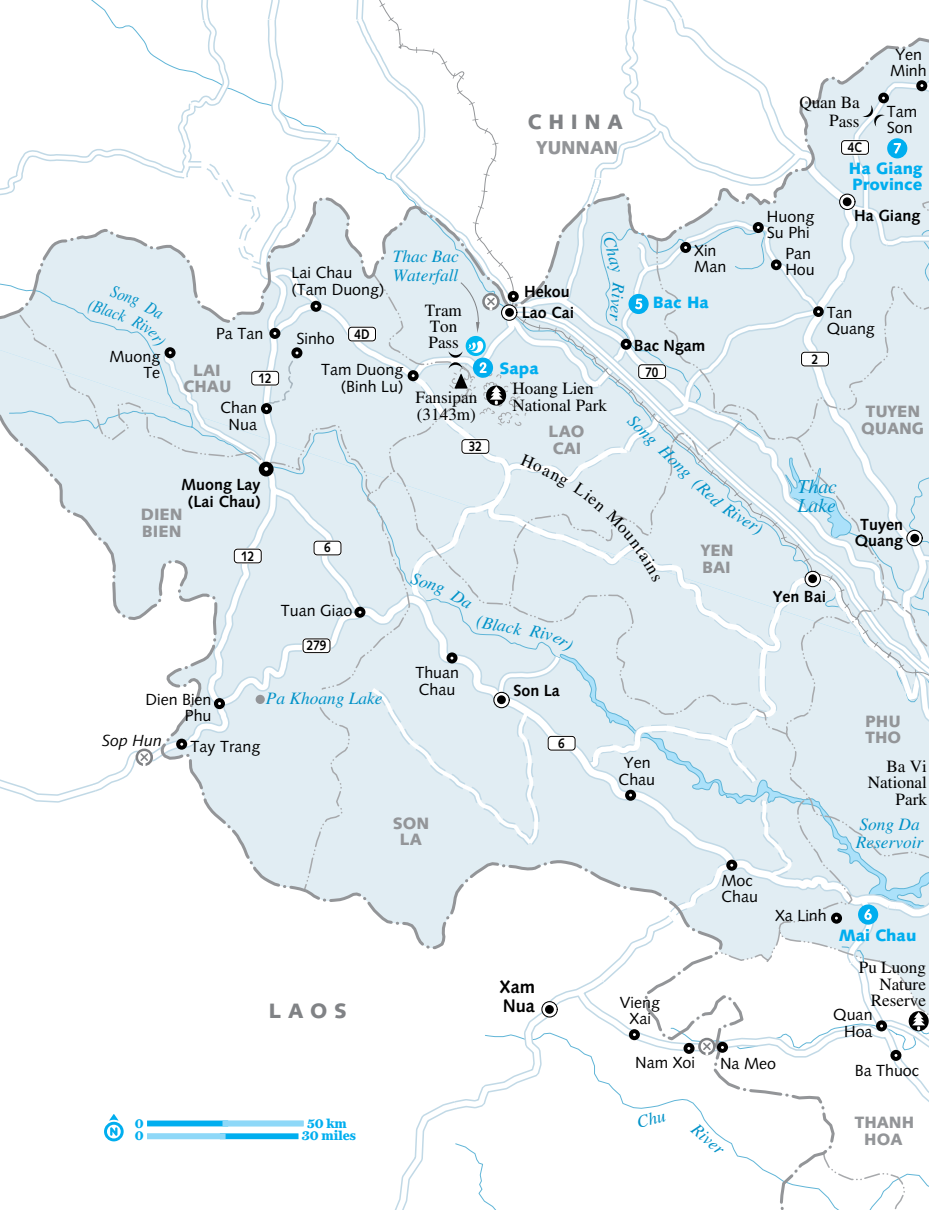
Halong City



May The month before high season begins to hit has sunny days aplenty yet few crowds.

Late Aug–Sep Hike Sapa and Bac Ha during harvest season.

Nov Blue skies, calm seas; the perfect time for Halong Bay.



Northern Vietnam Highlights

1 Kayaking within the karsts, into lagoons and grottoes in **Halong Bay** (p107).

2 Trekking mountain trails to the hill-tribe villages around **Sapa** (p136).

3 Gliding across the tranquil lakes of **Ba Be National Park** (p102), soaking up the serene scenery of shoreline village huddles and soaring mountain peaks.

4 Diving into northern Vietnam's action-adventure centre, hiking, biking and climbing your way around **Cat Ba Island** (p112).