

Welcome to Vietnam

Astonishingly exotic and utterly compelling, Vietnam is a country of breathtaking natural beauty with a unique heritage, where travel quickly becomes addictive.

Sensory Overload

Unforgettable experiences are everywhere in Vietnam. There's the sublime: gazing over a surreal seascape of limestone islands from the deck of a traditional junk in Ha-long Bay. The ridiculous: taking 10 minutes just to cross the street through a tsunami of motorbikes in Hanoi. The inspirational: exploring the world's most spectacular cave systems in Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park. The comical: watching a moped loaded with honking pigs weave a wobbly route along a country lane. And the contemplative: witnessing a solitary grave in a cemetery of thousands of war victims.

War, Peace & Progress

Forty years after the carnage and destruction of an epoch-defining conflict, Vietnam is resolutely a nation, not a war, in the eyes of the world. Self-confident and fast-developing, its progress is all-evident in the country's booming metropolises. Vietnam's allure is easy to appreciate (and something of a history lesson) as ancient, labyrinthine trading quarters of still-thriving craft industries are juxtaposed with grand colonial mansions from the French era, all overseen from the skybars of 21st-century glass-and-steel highrises.

A Culinary Superpower

The Thais may grumble, but in Southeast Asia nothing really comes close: Vietnamese food is *that* good. Incredibly subtle in its flavours and outstanding in its diversity, Vietnamese cooking is a fascinating draw for travellers – myriad street-food tours and cooking schools are testament to this. Geography plays a crucial role, with Chinese flavours influencing the soups of the north, spices sparking up southern cuisine, and herbs and complex techniques typifying the central coastline, rightly renowned as Vietnam's epicurean epicentre. And up and down the country you can mingle with villagers, sample local dishes and sip rice wine in Vietnam's many regional markets.

Thrills & Chills

If you've got the bills, Vietnam's got the thrills and chills. Some require a little physical effort, such as motorbiking switchback after switchback up the jaw-dropping Hai Van Pass in central Vietnam. Others require even more sweat: kitesurfing the tropical oceanic waters off Mui Ne or hiking the evergreen hills around Bac Ha or Sapa. And when you're done with all that adrenaline stuff, there's plenty of horizontal 'me' time to relish. Vietnam has outstanding spas – from marble temples of treatments, to simple family-run massage salons with backpacker-friendly rates.



Why I Love Vietnam

By Iain Stewart, Writer

I find myself returning to Vietnam for the same reasons: to feast on the best seafood in the world, ride a lonely mountain pass I've not yet experienced, and search for that perfect cove beach I've not yet found. The country has changed immeasurably since I first arrived in 1991 (when the nation was still shell-shocked from the war with the USA and Hanoi was a city of bicycles) but I continue to be astounded by the spirit, determination and sheer lust for life of the Vietnamese people.

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