



Vietnam



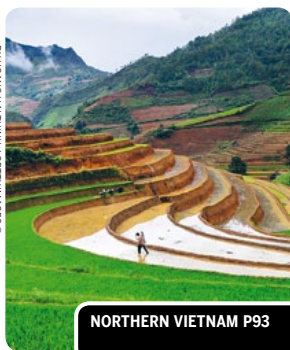
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Plan Your Trip

Itineraries



3
WEEKS

From South to North

Making the most of Vietnam's spectacular coastline, this route hugs the shore for much of the time and is bookended by the country's two greatest cities. You'll have ample opportunity to indulge in some serious beach time, and be able to hit the cultural sights and explore two national parks en route.

The adventure begins in the cauldron of commerce that is **Ho Chi Minh City**. Spend three days hitting the markets,

browsing museums and eating some of the globe's best cuisine. Take a day trip to discover wartime history at the **Cu Chi Tunnels**. Head north into the central highlands via **Cat Tien National Park**, home to gibbons, crocodiles and bountiful birdlife. Next up is the romantic hill station of **Dalat** for a tour of its quirky sights, and the opportunity to get stuck into some adventure sports such as canyoning, mountain biking or kayaking.

Then it's a stunning road trip down to the beach at **Mui Ne**, a tropical idyll with towering dunes and crazy kitesurfing. Continue up the coast to the big brash



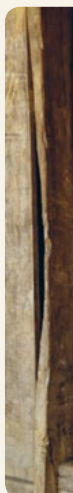
Mui Ne (p248)

resort of **Nha Trang**, where party people will love the hedonistic bar scene. On the way, be sure to explore the largely undeveloped coastline, perhaps stopping at **Doc Let Beach**, **Whale Island** and the moving war memorial at **Son My**.

Cultured charmer and culinary mecca **Hoi An** is the next essential stop. This town certainly warrants three days, such is its allure. Then it's a quick look at booming **Danang** and on to the old imperial capital of **Hue** and its citadel, tombs and pagodas. From here pause to tour the **DMZ** (Demilitarised Zone) and its famous war sites before hitting the truly remarkable **Phong**

Nha-Ke Bang National Park, the world's greatest caving region, with towering limestone mountains and cobalt jungle rivers.

Next it's a long journey by road or train towards **Halong Bay**, with more than 2000 limestone outcrops dotting the ocean. Stop for a couple of days on rugged **Cat Ba Island**, an important adventure-sports centre, before heading to the capital. Budget for at least a couple of days in **Hanoi** to sample its evocative Old Quarter and to view the city's elegant architecture and memorable museums. Make the most of your last day, perhaps munching street food and sampling *bia hoi* (fresh draught beer).



3
WEEKS

Northern Mountains

Northern Vietnam is a world unto itself: a land of brooding mountains, overwhelming beauty and a mosaic of ethnic minorities. It's ideal terrain to cover on two wheels, with light traffic and breathtaking views, though most of the region can be tackled by public transport with a patient attitude.

Visit **Hanoi** to explore its Old Quarter and visit the museums. Then head west to **Mai Chau**, home to the White Thai people, for your first two nights; it's a perfect introduction to ethnic minority life. Northwest where the road begins to climb into the Tonkin Alps, a logical over-night stop is **Son La**.

Continue on for two nights at **Dien Bien Phu**, a name that resonates with history as it was here that the French colonial story ended with defeat. Tour the military sights and then continue north through stunning scenery up the Tram Ton Pass.

Sapa is the premier destination in the northwest, thanks to the infinite views (on a clear day!), and an amazing array of minority peoples. Explore the area on two feet or two wheels for around four days before heading to **Bac Ha** for three nights to experience the best of the region's markets. Most colourful are the Flower H'mong people.

From Bac Ha move east to Ha Giang province, taking it slowly through stunning scenery and towns including Yen Minh, Dong Van and Meo Vac. Explore remote destinations like the Lung Cu flag tower and the Vuong Palace from **Dong Van**, before negotiating the vertiginous Mai Pi Leng Pass to **Meo Vac**. From Meo Vac, there's no public transport further south, so you'll need to hire a *xe om* (motorbike taxi) or car to get to the riverside junction town of Bao Lac.

Local buses run from Bao Lac to **Cao Bang** and on to **Ba Be National Park**. Spend about three nights around Ba Be, staying at local Tay ethnic minority homestays, and exploring the park by trekking or kayaking. From Ba Be travel back to Cao Bang for the trip south to Hanoi.



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Top: Rice paddies, Mai Chau (p121)
Bottom: Red Dzao woman, Ta Phin (p129)

Off the Beaten Track: Vietnam



PHU THUAN

Enjoy the magnificent oceanic coastline and lack of development at Phu Thuan, which has a great new place to stay. (p183)

BAI HUONG

Take part in a homestay in this beautifully situated fishing village in the Cham Islands, just a short boat ride from the tourist mecca of Hoi An. (p213)

GANH DA DIA

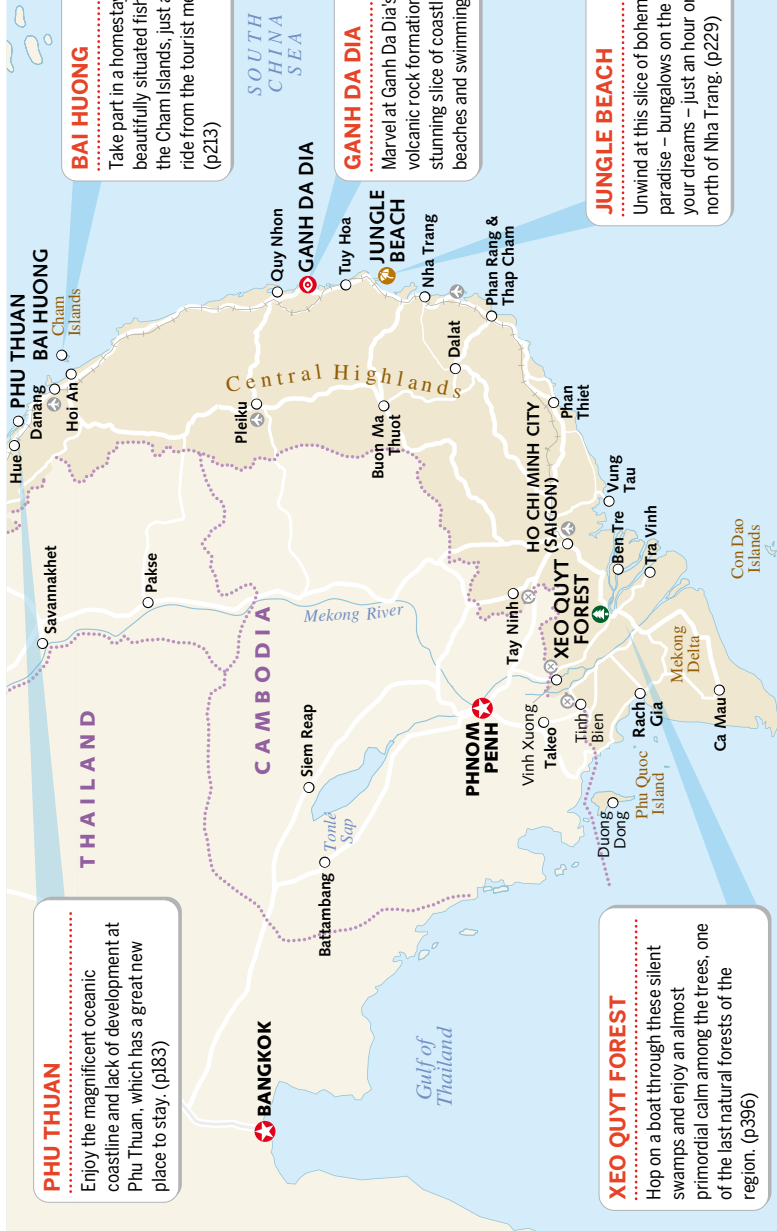
Marvel at Ganh Da Dia's fascinating volcanic rock formations, located on a stunning slice of coastline with good beaches and swimming. (p229)

XEO QUYT FOREST

Hop on a boat through these silent swamps and enjoy an almost primordial calm among the trees, one of the last natural forests of the region. (p396)

JUNGLE BEACH

Unwind at this slice of bohemian paradise – bungalows on the beach of your dreams – just an hour or so north of Nha Trang. (p229)





OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Melbourne, London and Oakland, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

OUR WRITERS



Iain Stewart

Coordinating Author, Central Vietnam, Southeast Coast, Southwest Highlands

Iain's been visiting Vietnam for over two decades, and has written numerous guides for Lonely Planet, including three editions of this title. He's been to virtually every province in the nation but has a weakness for beaches and great ocean roads. Highlights on this trip were eating the best food in the world, travelling virtually the entire coastline with mate Vinh and his family, visiting the

swim-through caves of Phong Nha, mountain biking around Dalat, hanging out in Hoi An, bar-hopping in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) and savouring the silence of Con Dao.



Brett Atkinson

Hanoi, Northern Vietnam Brett's been travelling to Vietnam from his hometown of Auckland for two decades, and continues to explore new areas of one of his favourite countries. In his second Lonely Planet *Vietnam* research trip he devoured Hanoi street food atop tiny blue plastic stools, got way off the beaten track in Ha Giang province and rested road-weary limbs in a restorative Red Zao herbal bath near Sapa. See www.brett-atkinson.net for details of his latest travels and writing.



Damian Harper

Ho Chi Minh City, Mekong Delta After graduating with a degree in Chinese in the days when it was still an exotic choice, Damian relocated to Hong Kong to see out the last year of British rule. He has also lived in Beijing and Shanghai and today calls London home. He has worked on over 30 books for Lonely Planet since 1997, including *China, Shanghai, Beijing and Malaysia, Singapore & Brunei*. Damian's Vietnam journey took him from the roaring streets of HCMC to the dirt roads and idyllic beaches of Phu Quoc, via a choice of lip-smacking Vietnamese restaurants and unforgettable views of the Mekong waters.

Read more about Damian at:
lonelyplanet.com/members/damianharper



Nick Ray

Siem Reap & the Temples of Angkor A Londoner of sorts, Nick comes from Watford, the sort of town that makes you want to travel. He lives in Phnom Penh with his wife Kulikar and his young children Julian and Belle. He has contributed to countless guidebooks on the Mekong region, including Lonely Planet's *Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam* guides. When not writing, Nick is often exploring remote parts of Indochina as a location scout and manager for the world of television and film, including everything from *Tomb Raider* to *Top Gear*.

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