



# Vietnam



THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

Iain Stewart,

Brett Atkinson, Anna Kaminski, Jessica Lee,

Nick Ray, Benedict Walker

## PLAN YOUR TRIP

Welcome to Vietnam	4
Vietnam Map	6
Vietnam's Top 20	8
Need to Know	18
First Time Vietnam	20
What's New	22
If You Like	23
Month by Month	25
Itineraries	28
Vietnam Outdoors	36
Eat & Drink	
Like a Local	43
Regions at a Glance	50



HA GIANG PROVINCE P148



FLOWER HMONG PEOPLE,  
BAC HA P145

## ON THE ROAD

### HANOI ..... 54

### NORTHERN VIETNAM ..... 99

#### Northeast Vietnam ..... 102

Ba Be National Park	102
Con Son & Den Kiep Bac	103
Haiphong	104
Halong Bay	107
Bai Tu Long Bay	120

Mong Cai & the Chinese Border	122
----------------------------------	-----

#### Northwest Vietnam ... 127

Hoa Binh	127
Mai Chau	129
Son La	131
Dien Bien Phu	131
Muong Lay	134
Lai Chau	135
Sapa	136
Lao Cai	143
Bac Ha	145
Ha Giang Province	148

### CENTRAL VIETNAM ..... 152

#### North-Central Vietnam ..... 153

Ninh Binh Province	153
Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park	162
Dong Hoi & Around	167

#### South-Central Vietnam ..... 169

Demilitarised Zone (DMZ)	169
Dong Ha	172
Quang Tri	174
Hue	174
Around Hue	187
Bach Ma National Park	190

Lang Co Beach	192
Hai Van Pass & Tunnel	193
Ba Na Hill Resort	193
Danang	193
Around Danang	199
Hoi An	203
Around Hoi An	220
My Son	224
Tra Kieu (Simhapura)	226
Chien Dan	226

### SOUTHEAST COAST ..... 233

Quang Ngai	235
Around Quang Ngai	236
Quy Nhon	238
Cha Ban Cham Area	243
Tuy Hoa	244
Tuy Hoa to Nha Trang	245
Nha Trang	247
Around Nha Trang	263
Phan Rang & Thap Cham	263
Ninh Chu Beach	265
Ca Na	265
Mui Ne	265
Phan Thiet	272
Ta Cu Mountain	273
Phan Thiet to Long Hai	273
Long Hai	274
Vung Tau	275
Con Dao Islands	279

### SOUTHWEST HIGHLANDS ..... 287

Dalat & Around	289
Ngoan Muc Pass	298
Cat Tien National Park	298
Lak Lake	300

# Contents

## UNDERSTAND

Buon Ma Thuot.....	301
Around Buon Ma Thuot.....	303
Pleiku.....	305
Kon Tum.....	307

### HO CHI MINH CITY.....311

<b>Around Ho Chi Minh City.....</b>	<b>359</b>
Cu Chi.....	359
Tay Ninh.....	362
One Pillar Pagoda.....	364
Can Gio.....	365

### MEKONG DELTA... 366

My Tho.....	368
Ben Tre.....	372
Tra Vinh.....	373
Vinh Long.....	376

Can Tho.....	379
Soc Trang.....	384
Ca Mau.....	385
U-Minh Forest.....	387
Rach Gia.....	387
Phu Quoc Island.....	389
Ha Tien.....	399
Chau Doc.....	405
Sam Mountain.....	409
Long Xuyen.....	411
Cao Lanh.....	412
Sa Dec.....	415

### SIEM REAP & THE TEMPLES OF ANGKOR.....417

Siem Reap.....	418
Temples of Angkor....	426
Angkor Wat.....	426
Angkor Thom.....	427

Vietnam Today.....	434
History.....	436
People & Culture.....	454
Arts & Architecture....	460
Food & Drink.....	464
Environment.....	470

## SURVIVAL GUIDE

Directory A–Z.....	478
Transport.....	488
Health.....	498
Language.....	503
Index.....	512
Map Legend.....	518



HOI AN P203

## SPECIAL FEATURES

Vietnam Outdoors.....	36
Eat & Drink Like a Local..	43
Hue in 3D.....	180
Scenes of Vietnam.....	227
Angkor Wat in 3D.....	428

## Plan Your Trip

# Itineraries



2  
WEEKS

### From South to North

Making the most of Vietnam's spectacular coastline, this route hugs the shore 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. Consider taking an internal flight or two to save time.

The adventure begins in the cauldron of commerce that is **Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC)**. Spend two days hitting the markets, browsing museums and eating some of the globe's best cuisine. Take a daytrip

to discover wartime history at the **Cu Chi Tunnels**.

Then it's a plane, train or bus trip up the coast to the big brash resort of **Nha Trang** for a couple of days by the sea. Party people will love the city's hedonistic bar scene, while spa lovers can indulge in a gooey, blissful session in one of the area's three mud bath resorts. Nha Trang's beach is a fine one, but for a less-developed base head up to the largely undeveloped coastline to the north, where you'll find **Doc Let Beach**, or south to the near-infinite sands of Bai Dai beach.





Halong Bay (p107)

Cultured charmer and culinary mecca **Hoi An** is the next essential stop. This town certainly warrants three days, such is its allure. Spend a couple of days enjoying Hoi An's unique ambience, touring the town's temples, pagodas and museums, and feasting on delectable Central Vietnamese cuisine. Consider a motorbike trip around the town's rural hinterland, or an excursion to the terrific Cham ruins of **My Son**. Then it's on to the old imperial capital of **Hue** for a night to explore its citadel, tombs and pagodas. From here head up to 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. 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* (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, with a patient attitude, most of the region can be tackled by public transport.

Leaving **Hanoi**, 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 overnight 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 in defeat. Tour the military sights and impressive new museum 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 Hmong 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**. Onwards towards the vertiginous Mai Pi Leng Pass and **Meo Vac**, there's no public transport (so you'll need to hire a *xe om* (motorbike taxi) or car). The route then loops down 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 back south to Hanoi.



WALTER BIRKOW/GETTY IMAGES ©



LYNN GALL/GETTY IMAGES ©

Top: Dien Bien Phu (p131)

Bottom: Flower Hmong women at Bac Ha Market (p145)



## Deep South

This itinerary takes in a lovely offshore island, the nation's main watersport centre and a waterworld of floating villages. If tropical sunsets and white-sand beaches are high on your agenda it's probably best not to plan this trip during the southern rainy season. There's frequent public transport to virtually all the main centres.

After a couple of days enjoying the urban delights and compelling energy of **HCMC**, head into the Mekong Delta, stopping at **Ben Tre** to explore canal-side lanes by bike and islands by boat. Then hop on board a cargo ship for a slow, scenic journey to **Tra Vinh** and take in the town's colourful pagodas. Next it's a short trip to **Can Tho** where it's worth lingering a couple of days to visit the bustling floating markets, the city museum and a temple or two. Further north, by the Cambodian border, **Chau Doc** is surrounded by beautiful countryside, begging for two-wheeled trips. Head to **Phu Quoc Island** for three days of well-earned beachtime on some of Vietnam's best sandy shores.

From Phu Quoc, fly (or bus it) back to HCMC, then head north into the Southcentral Highlands via a night in **Cat Tien National Park**, home to gibbons, crocodiles and bountiful bird-life. Next up it's the romantic hill station of **Dalat** for a tour of its quirky sights, and the opportunity to get stuck into some adventure sports like canyoning, mountain biking or kayaking.

The road trip from Dalat down to **Mui Ne** is one of the nation's finest, negotiating highland ridges and plunging through valleys and pine forests; it's ideally done on the back of a motorbike (consider hiring an Easy Rider). You can then rest up by the beach in Mui Ne for two or three days, a tropical idyll with towering sand dunes and a laid-back vibe – or for those with the stamina, get stuck into some crazy kitesurfing or a sailing course.

Round the trip off in style with a night in HCMC, perhaps with an ale or two at the Paster Street Brewing Company and dining out somewhere really special like the Racha Room.

HAMNINH/PHOTO/GETTY IMAGES ©



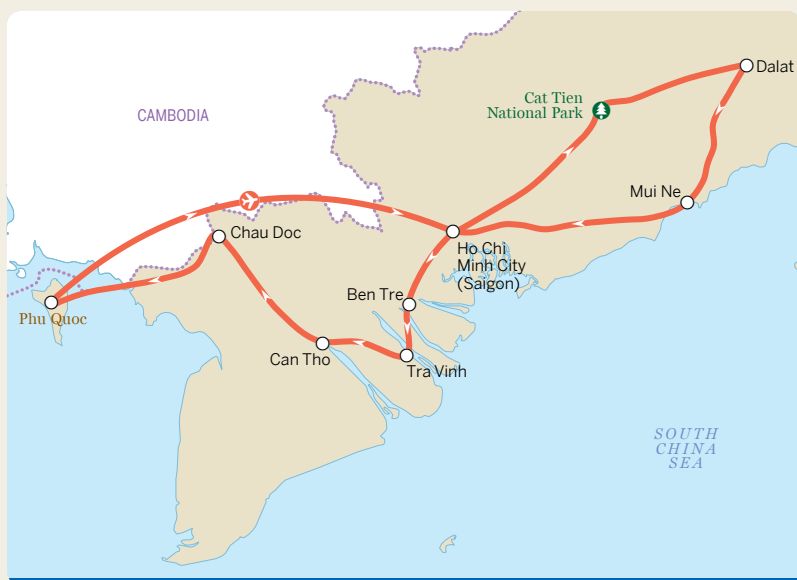
PHANSON/PHOTO/GETTY IMAGES ©



Top: Dinh Cau Beach, Phu Quoc Island (p389)

Bottom: Temple in Tra Vinh (p373)





## Off the Beaten Track: Vietnam





# Map Legend

## Sights

- Beach
- Bird Sanctuary
- Buddhist
- Castle/Palace
- Christian
- Confucian
- Hindu
- Islamic
- Jain
- Jewish
- Monument
- Museum/Gallery/Historic Building
- Ruin
- Shinto
- Sikh
- Taoist
- Winery/Vineyard
- Zoo/Wildlife Sanctuary
- Other Sight

## Activities, Courses & Tours

- Body surfing
- Diving
- Canoeing/Kayaking
- Course/Tour
- Sento Hot Baths/Onsen
- Skiing
- Snorkelling
- Surfing
- Swimming/Pool
- Walking
- Windsurfing
- Other Activity

## Sleeping

- Sleeping
- Camping

## Eating

- Eating

## Drinking & Nightlife

- Drinking & Nightlife
- Cafe

## Entertainment

- Entertainment

## Shopping

- Shopping

## Information

- Bank
- Embassy/Consulate
- Hospital/Medical
- Internet
- Police
- Post Office
- Telephone
- Toilet
- Tourist Information
- Other Information

## Geographic

- Beach
- Gate
- Hut/Shelter
- Lighthouse
- Lookout
- Mountain/Volcano
- Oasis
- Park
- Pass
- Picnic Area
- Waterfall

## Population

- Capital (National)
- Capital (State/Province)
- City/Large Town
- Town/Village

## Transport

- Airport
- Border crossing
- Bus
- Cable car/Funicular
- Cycling
- Ferry
- Metro/MRT/MTR station
- Monorail
- Parking
- Petrol station
- Skytrain/Subway station
- Taxi
- Train station/Railway
- Tram
- Underground station
- Other Transport

## Routes

- Tollway
- Freeway
- Primary
- Secondary
- Tertiary
- Lane
- Unsealed road
- Road under construction
- Plaza/Mall
- Steps
- Tunnel
- Pedestrian overpass
- Walking Tour
- Walking Tour detour
- Path/Walking Trail

## Boundaries

- International
- State/Province
- Disputed
- Regional/Suburb
- Marine Park
- Cliff
- Wall

## Hydrography

- River, Creek
- Intermittent River
- Canal
- Water
- Dry/Salt/Intermittent Lake
- Reef

## Areas

- Airport/Runway
- Beach/Desert
- Cemetery (Christian)
- Cemetery (Other)
- Glacier
- Mudflat
- Park/Forest
- Sight (Building)
- Sportsground
- Swamp/Mangrove

*Note: Not all symbols displayed above appear on the maps in this book*





### **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 children, Julian and Belle. He has written for countless guidebooks on the Mekong region, including Lonely Planet's *Cambodia*, *Laos*, *Myanmar* and *Vietnam* books, as well as *Southeast Asia on a Shoestring*. When not writing, he is often out exploring the remote parts of Cambodia as a location scout and manager for the world of television and film, including everything from *Tomb Raider* to *Top Gear*. Motorbikes are a part-time passion and he has travelled through most of Indochina on two wheels.

Read more about Nick at:

<http://auth.lonelyplanet.com/profiles/nickjray>



### **Benedict Walker**

#### **[Hanoi](#)**

Currently hanging by the beach near his Mum, in hometown Newcastle (Australia), Ben is living his dreams, travelling the world for LP. So far, Ben has contributed to Lonely Planet's *Japan*, *Canada*, *Florida*, *Australia* and *Germany* guidebooks. This is his first time writing for the Vietnam team. Otherwise, he's written and directed a play, toured Australia managing travel for rock stars and is an avid photographer toying with his original craft of filmmaking. He's an advocate of following your dreams – they can come true. For updates, see [www.wordsandjourneys.com](http://www.wordsandjourneys.com).

## **Contributing Authors**

**[Andrea Nyugen](#)** wrote the Regional Specialities content in the Eat & Drink Like a Local chapter.

Andrea is the acclaimed author of *Into the Vietnamese Kitchen* and *Asian Tofu*. She also publishes [Vietworldkitchen.com](http://Vietworldkitchen.com).



## 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 Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Beijing and Delhi, 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 Writer, Southeast Coast** Iain Stewart has been visiting Vietnam since 1991 and has explored virtually every province in the country over the years. This is the fourth edition of *Lonely Planet Vietnam* he's contributed to and the third as co-ordinating writer. Travelling the highway between Vung Tau and Tam Hai was some road (and rail) trip, taking in the full spectrum of Vietnam's stunning coastal scenery and numerous memorable meals. Iain also wrote the Plan and Understand chapters, Survival Guide and the Scenes of Vietnam colour section.

Read more about Stewart at:

<http://auth.lonelyplanet.com/profiles/stewpot>



### Brett Atkinson

**Central Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh City** For more than 20 years, Brett has been exploring one of his favourite countries, and his latest Vietnam sojourn spanned street food and history in Hue and Hoi An, the thrilling cave systems of Phong Nha, and the irresistible urban buzz of Ho Chi Minh City. Brett is based in Auckland, New Zealand and has covered more than 50 countries as a guidebook author and travel and food writer. See [www.brett-atkinson.net](http://www.brett-atkinson.net) for his most recent work and upcoming travels. Brett also wrote the Eat & Drink Like a Local and the Food & Drink chapters.

Read more about Brett at:

<http://auth.lonelyplanet.com/profiles/brettatkinson>



### Anna Kaminski

**Southwest Highlands, Mekong Delta** A big fan of two-wheeled travel, Anna fell hard for the picturesque lanes of the Mekong Delta and the hills of the Southwest Highlands in years past and remains smitten. Given the food, the friendly locals, and ample indigenous culture, there's little surprise that southern Vietnam remains one of her favourite destinations. Having previously lived in and backpacked all over Southeast Asia, on this occasion Anna explored the Delta's forgotten corners and motorbiked part of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Anna tweets at @ACKaminski.

Read more about Jessica at:

<http://auth.lonelyplanet.com/profiles/jessicalee1>



### Jessica Lee

**Northern Vietnam** Jessica first came to Vietnam in the late 90's and has visited several times since then. This trip saw her road-tripping the winding highways of the northwest, up into the mountains of Ha Giang province, and then down to the bustle of Halong Bay – along the way, drinking more *caphe sua da* than is probably recommended. When she's not travelling, Jess lives in the Middle East, and has also contributed to Lonely Planet's guidebooks to Turkey, Egypt and Cambodia.

OVER MORE  
PAGE WRITERS

Published by Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd

ABN 36 005 607 983

13th edition – August 2016

ISBN 978 1 74321 872 3

© Lonely Planet 2016 Photographs © as indicated 2016

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in China

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be copied, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, except brief extracts for the purpose of review, and no part of this publication may be sold or hired, without the written permission of the publisher. Lonely Planet and the Lonely Planet logo are trademarks of Lonely Planet and are registered in the US Patent and Trademark Office and in other countries. Lonely Planet does not allow its name or logo to be appropriated by commercial establishments, such as retailers, restaurants or hotels. Please let us know of any misuses: [lonelyplanet.com/ip](http://lonelyplanet.com/ip).

Although the authors and Lonely Planet have taken all reasonable care in preparing this book, we make no warranty about the accuracy or completeness of its content and, to the maximum extent permitted, disclaim all liability arising from its use.

© Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'