



Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos & Northern Thailand



Phillip Tang

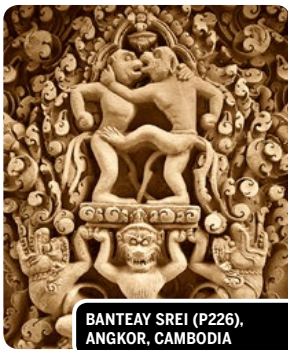
Tim Bewer, Greg Bloom, Austin Bush, Nick Ray, Richard Waters,
China Williams

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RICE FIELDS,
NORTHERN VIETNAM P71



BANTEAY SREI (P226),
ANGKOR, CAMBODIA

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Halong Bay (p71), Vietnam



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WEEKS

Highland Adventure

This itinerary takes you from northern Thailand to Halong Bay, Vietnam, via the rugged and thrilling northern route. Traversing the Mekong's highest mountains, you'll get up close and personal with colourful hill tribes and have a range of outdoor adventures at your disposal.

Start in **Chiang Mai**, where every activity known to athletes – mountain biking, kayaking, abseiling, trekking, ziplining – has a following. Take the winding road to **Pai**, a mountain retreat that proves the hippie trail is alive and well. Then head on to **Tha Ton**, the entry point for boat trips down to **Chiang Rai**, itself a good base for responsible trekking. Cross into Laos and check out the **Gibbon Experience** at Bokeo Nature Reserve before continuing east to **Luang Namtha** for trekking, cycling, or rafting in and around the Nam Ha National Protected Area (NPA).

Head south to beautiful **Luang Prabang** on the banks of the Mekong to soak up the culture, before boomeranging north once more to explore the karst-laden wonderland of the Nam Ou (Ou River) on a boat ride or kayak trip out of **Nong Khiaw**. From here an adventurous overland trail runs east to Vietnam via **Vieng Xai** and the Pathet Lao caves, a sort of Cu Chi Tunnels cast in stone. Once over the border in **Mai Chau**, try the northwest loop through **Dien Bien Phu** to experience incredible scenery and some of the country's most dramatic mountain passes.

Sapa, an old French hill station, is the gateway to the minority communities of this region. Consider a side trip to **Bac Ha**, home to the colourful Flower Hmong folk and great walking country. Head south to **Hanoi**, where you'll appreciate that you bought your ethnic souvenirs directly from the minority people and not in the designer boutiques of the Old Quarter.

Still haven't had your fill of adventure? Set off for **Halong Bay**. Take to the waters of Lan Ha Bay by local boat to see the 'new' Halong Bay without the tourists. Boating, kayaking and Robinson Crusoe-style camping are possible here, and there are some beautiful hidden coves. Then leave the water behind and head to the spectacular limestone outcrops of **Cat Ba Island**. Experienced craggers will find challenging routes here, and there's instruction available for novice climbers as well.



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Top: Rafting, Chiang Mai (p465), Thailand
Bottom: Hmong woman and child, Bac Ha (p80), Vietnam

6
WEEKS

Mekong River Meander

This trip follows the famous river downstream from northern Laos all the way to its terminus in Vietnam's Mekong Delta. En route you'll encounter a wide range of landscapes, cultures and adventures as you slice through all four countries of the Mekong region.

Leave behind the bustle of **Bangkok** and make a beeline for **Chiang Rai** near the Golden Triangle, where the borders of Laos, Myanmar (Burma) and Thailand converge. Crossing the Mekong into Laos at **Huay Xai** is like stepping back in time. Take a slowboat down the Mekong to **Luang Prabang**, stopping overnight in **Pak Beng**. Soak up the magic before leaving the river for some relaxation in **Vang Vieng**.

Continue to **Vientiane** and reunite with the mighty waterway. The Lao capital is a sleepy place with some great cafes, restaurants and bars – which you won't be encountering for a while after here. Board a bus and follow the river southeast, stopping off in **Tha Khaek** and **Savannakhet** before arriving in **Pakse**. Visit the imposing Khmer sanctuary of **Wat Phu Champasak**, in the shadow of Lingaparvata Mountain; explore the waterfalls and villages of the **Bolaven Plateau**; or enjoy the laid-back islands of **Si Phan Don**.

Cross into Cambodia. If you missed the Irrawaddy dolphins near Don Khon in Si Phan Don, you can see them near the border at **Preah Rumkel**, or a few hours further south in the laid-back Mekong riverside town of **Kratie**. From Kratie, consider peeling off to visit the mountains of **Mondulkiri Province**, home to elephants, hill tribes and pristine nature.

Weeks in rural provinces will have you happy to see **Phnom Penh**, where the Mekong merges with another vital regional waterway, the Tonlé Sap. Take a sunset boat cruise or participate in an aerobics session on the riverfront promenade. When you're recharged, board a fast boat downstream to **Chau Doc**, Vietnam, gateway to the Mekong Delta. Check out **Can Tho**, the delta's commercial heart. Hotfoot it to **Ho Chi Minh City** for some fun; delve deeper into the delta with a homestay around **Vinh Long**, or make for the tropical retreat of **Phu Quoc Island**, a well-earned reward for following the mother river.

INTERREGIS / SHUTTERSTOCK ©



GALINA ANDRUSHKO / SHUTTERSTOCK ©

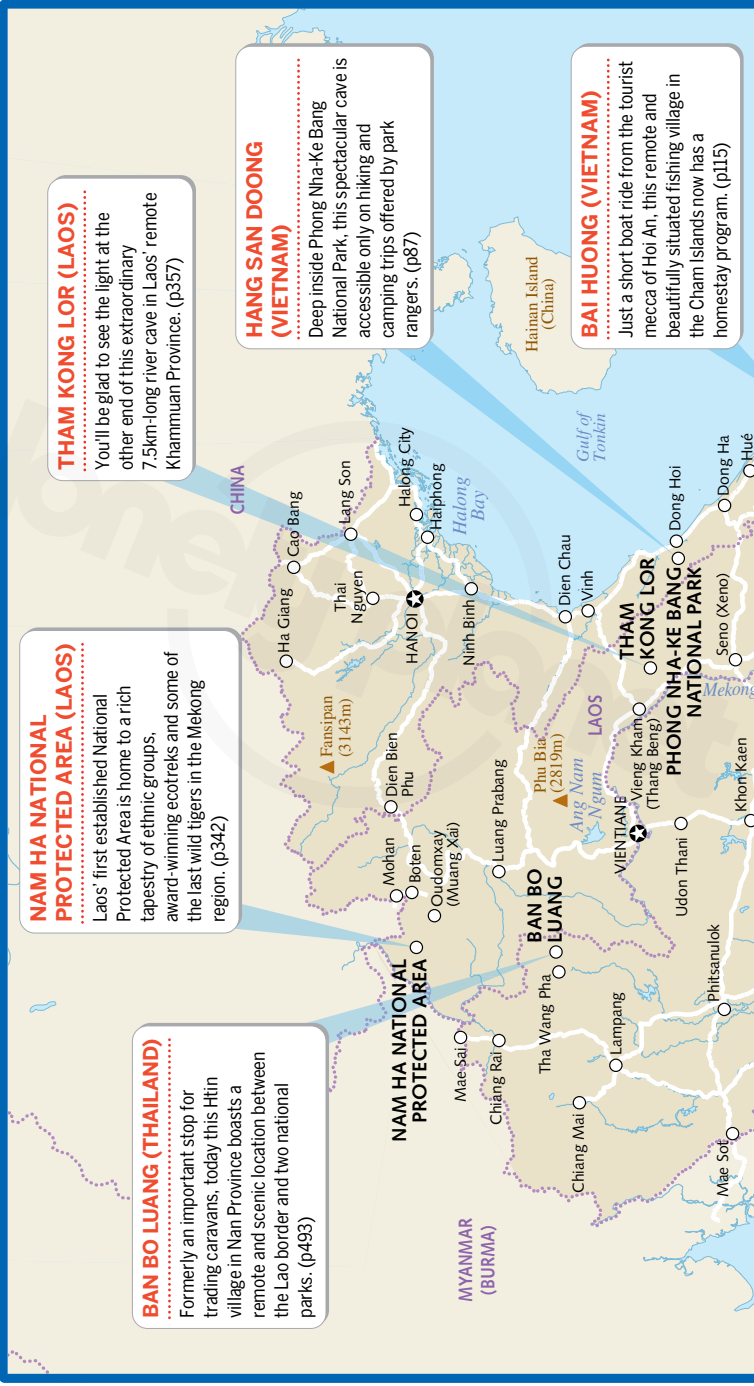


Top: Si Phan Don (p380), Laos
Bottom: Floating market, Can Tho (p154), Vietnam



Off the Beaten Track: Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos & Northern Thailand

200 km
120 miles



NAM HA NATIONAL PROTECTED AREA (LAOS)

Laos' first established National Protected Area is home to a rich tapestry of ethnic groups, award-winning ecotrails and some of the last wild tigers in the Mekong region. (p.342)

BAN BO LUANG (THAILAND)

Formerly an important stop for trading caravans, today this Htin village in Nan Province boasts a remote and scenic location between the Lao border and two national parks. (p.493)

THAM KONG LOR (LAOS)

You'll be glad to see the light at the other end of this extraordinary 7.5km-long river cave in Laos' remote Khammuan Province. (p.357)

HANG SAN DOONG (VIETNAM)

Deep inside Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park, this spectacular cave is accessible only on hiking and camping trips offered by park rangers. (p.87)

BAI HUONG (VIETNAM)

Just a short boat ride from the tourist mecca of Hoi An, this remote and beautifully situated fishing village in the Cham Islands now has a homestay program. (p.115)

NAM HA NATIONAL PROTECTED AREA

Mohán

Boten

Oudomxay (Muang Xai)

Luang Prabang

Phu Bia (3143m)

Fansipan (3143m)

HA NOI

Thái Nguyên

Cao Bang

Lang Son

Halong City

Haiphong

Ninh Binh

Vinh

Dien Chau

VIETNAME

Vientiane

Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park

Veng Kham (Thang Beng)

Kong Lor

Dong Hoi

Seno (Xeno)

Dong Ha

Hue

Khon Kaen

Phitsanulok

Mae Sot

Chiang Mai

Tha Wang Pha

Lampang

Mae Sai

Chiang Rai

MYANMAR (BURMA)

Gulf of Tonkin

Halong Bay

China

Hainan Island (China)

Mekong



PHA TAEM NATIONAL PARK (THAILAND)

A cliff provides fantastic views of the normally vast Mekong River as it narrows to a wild, rocky channel. Trails into the park interior pass prehistoric wall paintings. (p464)

CHI PHAT (CAMBODIA)

This award-winning ecotourism project offers trekking, mountain-biking, kayaking and birdwatching in the lush Cardamom Mountains of the wild Koh Kong Province. (p254)

PRASAT PREAH VIHEAR (CAMBODIA)

Make the overland pilgrimage to this majestic mountaintop temple on the Thai border. Improving roads are making it more accessible than ever, so go now to beat the masses. (p236)

BOLAVEN PLATEAU (LAOS)

Mount a steel horse and ride past thundering waterfalls, remote minority villages and lush rainforests, then chill out in delightful backpacker retreat Tat Lo. (p385)

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

- Bodysurfing
- 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

OUR WRITERS



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Vietnam Phillip grew up on typically Australian pho and fish'n'chips. A degree in Chinese- and Latin-American cultures launched him into travel and writing about it for Lonely Planet's *Canada, China, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Peru* and *Vietnam* guides. Follow Phillip Tang on Instagram: @mrtangtang and Twitter: @philliptang



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Laos After briefly holding fort behind a desk as a legislative assistant, Tim decided he didn't have the ego to succeed in the political world (or the stomach to work around those who did). He quit his job at the capitol to backpack around West Africa, during which time he pondered what to do next. His answer was to write a travel guide to parks, forests, and wildlife areas of the gorgeous state of Wisconsin. He's been a freelance travel writer and photographer ever since.



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Thailand Austin originally went to Thailand in 1999 as part of a language study program hosted by Chiang Mai University. The lure of city life, employment and spicy food eventually led him to Bangkok. City life, employment and spicy food have managed to keep him there since, working as a writer and photographer. He's contributed text and photos to more than 20 Lonely Planet titles including *Bangkok, Food Lover's Guide to the World* and the *World's Best Street Food*.



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Cambodia, Laos A Londoner of sorts, Nick harks from Watford, the sort of town that makes you want to travel. He studied history and politics at Warwick University before hitting the road for a life in travel and has worked on about 50 titles for Lonely Planet since his first foray in 1998. Based in Cambodia's Phnom Penh with his wife Kuliakar and two children, Julian and Belle, he covers countries in Southeast Asia, including Myanmar and Vietnam, with the occasional diversion to Africa.



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Laos Richard is an award-winning journalist and works for the *Independent, Sunday Times* and *Telegraph*. Laos is one of his favourite countries, his journeys there started in '99 as a traveller, then as a journalist taking him into the still forbidden Xaisomboun Zone investigating the Hmong guerrilla survivors of the Secret War. This will be his 12th Lonely Planet book on Laos. To read more of his travel journalism visit: www.richardwaters.co.uk.



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