

TRUTH IN TRAVEL

CONDÉ NAST

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Traveler



the
SOUTHEAST
ASIA
edition



Next-Level



Most travelers to Vietnam follow a well-blazed trail between five familiar touchstones: Hanoi, Halong Bay, Huế, Hoi An, and Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon). Even returning visitors seldom stray from the H's—which makes sense; they're all eminently worthwhile, and strung together on an easy north-south route, with quick flights or scenic train rides between them. But there's so much more—from the mist-shrouded mountains of Hà Giang to the coffee plantations of Dalat to the coconut-palm idyll of Ninh Van Bay. With fewer crowds and calmer vibes, these B sides are as compelling as the big hits, and even first-timers should consider one or more for a best-of-Vietnam trip. For further guidance, let the experts at Remote Lands—one of our go-to Vietnam specialists—tailor the perfect itinerary. **PETER JON LINDBERG**

**Who Loves It**

Couples looking for beachy downtime, Saigon expats, and the food-obsessed—Phú Quốc is renowned for its seafood, intensely flavored peppercorns, and the world's finest nuoc mam (fish sauce), a cornerstone of Vietnamese cooking.

How to Do It Right

Fly nonstop from Saigon or Hanoi, book two nights on the beach, and have Remote Lands arrange guided visits to a pepper-corn plantation and Dường Đông's vibrant riverside market, plus a rain forest drive in the national park to look for langurs, macaques, and tropical birds. (Food nerds can tour the Red Boat fish sauce factory.) Or just hit the sand and shake off the city.

Where to Stay

The JW Marriott was a game-changer for Phú Quốc; two years on, it's the island's best luxury resort, despite new competition from InterContinental. For a more intimate vibe, try the colonial-style La Veranda, on a quieter stretch of Dường Đông Beach.

PHÚ QUỐC**What & Where**

A jungle-draped island off Vietnam's southwestern coast, just a one-hour flight from Saigon.

Why Go Now

Though PQ's roughly the size of Phuket, its beaches are far less spoiled, and there's only a handful of hotels...for the moment. After decades under the radar, this once-sleepy backwater is on the road to overdevelopment. Come before it's unrecognizable.



The JW Marriott Phú Quốc.

Vietnam

HÀ GIANG

What & Where

Vietnam's northern frontier has breathtaking mountain scenery crisscrossed with steep rice terraces and hiking trails linking hill-tribe villages.

Why Go Now

While nearby Sapa is overrun, Hà Giang province is even more beautiful, and its H'mong and Tay communities show a different side of Vietnam. The road from Đông Văn to Mèo Vac across karst-studded Mã Pí Làng Pass is stunning.

How to Do It Right

Remote Lands can arrange trekking tours via helicopter from Hanoi (an eight-hour drive otherwise). Do it as a long day trip, or stay in a rustic mountain lodge like *Auberge de Mèo Vac* and wake up to H'mong-style breakfasts by the fire.

"The smell of peppercorns laid out on bamboo mats and drying in the sun by the road in Phú Quốc is so intoxicating, it's hard not to stop."

Chris Costello, chef-owner at Coscacont, San Francisco



NINH VAN BAY

What & Where

On Vietnam's southern coast, just north of Nha Trang (a 45-minute flight from Saigon), Ninh Van Bay has great snorkeling and diving, reliably good weather—and one of our favorite Asian beach resorts.

Why Go Now

The gorgeously sun-bleached, 50-villa *Six Senses Ninh Van Bay* has been quietly besting the competition for years, luring a chic yet low-key clientele that's a world apart from the boozy bacchanal of Nha Trang itself. (The city is largely filled with Chinese and Russian tourists.) Fortunately, you're far from that ruckus, on a quasi-private cove

accessed by *Six Senses'* own launch.

How to Do It Right

Book a couple of nights (hell, book a week) in a beachfront villa with a plunge pool, and spend your days paddleboarding, windsurfing, hiking to waterfalls in the forest behind the resort, indulging at the spa, and sailing to tiny uninhabited islands around the bay. Kids can explore *Six Senses'* very cool new Earth Lab, and collect their own hen eggs for breakfast at the farm.

◀

A H'mong girl in Hà Giang province.

DALAT

What & Where

With its cooler climate, this town was a retreat for the French, who built Swiss-style chalets in the pine forests around Dalat's central lake. Today the city is a kitschy favorite of Vietnamese honeymooners, while the countryside draws active travelers.

Why Go Now

Dalat itself can be overwhelmed with bus tours, and the weather is often chilly. But there's biking, rafting, and canyoneering just outside town—and Dalat's food is fantastic, with specialties like *bánh tráng nướng* (rice-paper pizza), kid-goat curry, and superb local coffee.

How to Do It Right

Fly from Saigon (45 minutes) or take the winding drive up from Nha Trang (three hours), and book one of the half-timbered 1920s chalets at *Ana Mandara Villas Resort & Spa*. Spend the morning cycling in the hills or rafting the Lang Biang River's Class II-IV rapids, and visit *5350 Coffee*, a co-op growing arabica beans (still unusual in Vietnam, where robusta is the norm). Get your curried or barbecued goat fix at *Quán Ăn Đỉnh Thành*, then hit *Tung Cafe*, a louche 1960s-era bolshé straight out of a Wong Kar-Wai film.

"Hà Giang is, in my view, the most beautiful place in all of Vietnam. Due to its remoteness, it's relatively untouched, so the old traditions are mostly intact."

Catherine Heald, cofounder of Remote Lands

CẦN THƠ

What & Where

The Mekong Delta is Vietnam's rice basket—a watery landscape of floating markets, stilt houses, Khmer-style pagodas, and rippling green paddies.

Why Go Now

The Delta is often done on a cruise (see p. 000) or in a day from Saigon, but in Cần Thơ, the regional capital, a stylish new hotel is reason to stay the night.

How to Do It Right

Reachable only by boat, on its own private islet, *Azraï Cần Thơ* is the latest opening from Adrian Zecha's new affordable-luxe brand. The 60 villas have the indoor-outdoor layouts and minimalist design you'll expect from the Amanresorts founder, with generously sized verandas overlooking the river, lake, or jasmine-filled garden; the staff can arrange boat tours of Cần Thơ and the floating markets.



The Same, Only Better

When The Datal—Malaysia's Kerry Hill—designed retreat on the tip of Langkawi Island—opened 25 years ago, it helped pioneer the brand of unfussy luxury that the region is now known for and immediately attracted travelers looking more for an adult summer camp vibe than a manicured beach resort. Thankfully, after a year-plus closure during which new villas were added and rooms were refreshed, the hotel's DNA remains as unspoiled as the 10-million-year-old rain forest and the impossibly cute dusky leaf monkeys that greet you on the footpath to the white sand beaches.

LOUNGE AROUND BACK HOME

The fly-and-stop beach vacation definitely has its place. But if you want to push yourself a bit, here are four trips that'll keep your adrenaline pumping and your heart rate high.

Remote Lands' Biking the Mountain Jungles of Northern Thailand • Bypass the beach on this rugged nine-day cycling expedition through the country's lush interior. You'll average 40 to 75 miles a day—including a ride up Doi Inthanon, Thailand's highest peak.

Wild Frontiers' Adventure Asia • Go deep with this ambitious 31-day circuit that includes biking in Thailand and kayaking in Cambodia, with plenty of spa time built in to the itinerary.

Bali Barong Tours' Bali Challenge • During this 11-day sweat-fest, you'll hike through farmland, climb volcanoes, and white-water raft on the Ayung River.

Trufflepig's Hiking in Northern Vietnam • Spend three days trekking the highlands of Mai Chau, through cassava fields and past traditional villages, stopping to recharge at rustic ecolodges.

OUR TRAVEL
TIPS, TRICKS, AND
MISCELLANY

Intel

A GUIDE
TO TRAVELING
BETTER

OUR TRAVEL SPECIALISTS ON THE ULTIMATE SOUTHEAST ASIA ITINERARIES

TACKLE THAILAND WITH KIDS

Robyn Mark of Mayamaya Travel specializes in truly engaging experiences for families—without overdoing it. She'll organize a nighttime street-food crawl through Bangkok's Chinatown, mahout training in Chiang Rai, and tuk-tuk rides through the streets of Chiang Mai. Once everyone is properly worn out, she recommends heading to Phuket for some hard-earned beach time.

WHAT "MADE IN CAMBODIA" TRULY LOOKS LIKE

A new ethical-fashion tour from Abercrombie & Kent gives travelers a peek at how textiles are made here in an effort to support fair pay and working conditions. The trip includes visiting local silk and cotton weavers in Luang Prabang, and a stop in Siem Reap at the studio of Madagascar-born Eric Raisina, who has a boutique on rue Dauphine in Paris.

GET YOUR PHO ON IN VIETNAM

Catherine Heald of Remote Lands can point you in the direction of the best bún chả and bánh mì (or snake and lotus, for extra credit). You'll need two weeks to do it all, tracing the coast from Saigon to Hanoi.



How to Really Cover Some Ground in Southeast Asia

If there's one thing we've learned while putting this issue together, it's that you don't have to do the entire region in one trip. The better move is to go deep into one country at a time, and plan to come back.

Below, you'll find the playbook for tackling the biggies one by one.

Indonesia

Because this country is made up of a whopping 17,000 islands, it's hard to know which are vacation-worthy or how to hopscotch across the country in a single trip. Diane Embree of **Bali Barong Tours** makes the archipelago doable in a three-week visit: from volcano climbing and white-water rafting in **Bali** to temple hopping in **Yogyakarta** and searching for Komodo dragons in Komodo. She'll point you to the best surf breaks in **Flores** and orangutans in **Malaysian Borneo**.

Laos

Most travelers skip Laos in favor of Cambodia and its temples or the beaches of Vietnam. Big mistake, says **Wild Frontiers'** Andrea Ross, whose 11-day north and south Mekong itinerary will have you asking, How did I not know about this? There's the Patuxai war memorial in the sleepy capital of Vientiane—think of it as the Laotian version of the Arc de Triomphe—the limestone Pak Ou caves, home to 4,000 Buddha statues; and the Kuang Si waterfall near **Luang Prabang**, the former royal capital.

Cambodia

Off the bat, let's just say there's so much more to this country than Angkor Wat. We're not suggesting you skip it; rather, we want to make sure you fit in more. Give yourself 30 days here, making time for a sail to the stilt villages on Tonlé Sap lake and for hiking the **Cardamom Mountains**. Of course, a trip to the legendary temple complex is a must, and one of the benefits of going with **AboutAsia** is taking advantage of their know-how and access, so you're there when the crowds are not, which means you'll have those temples all to yourself.

Vietnam

One day you're holding on for dear life to the edge of a cyclo as you zip through **Hanoi**, the next you're knocking on doors at traditional H'mong houses in a village in the **Vietnamese highlands**. Add kayaking in Hả Long Bay (above), a history tour of Saigon, and a cocktail or two at the war-era landmark Rex Hotel, and now you have a full itinerary. Vietnam can feel a bit like a choose-your-own-adventure, pulling you in a dozen different directions all at once. Jarrod Hobson of **ATJ** distills it into a digestible 16-day north-to-south journey.



The Best Two Weeks Ever

Hoard all your vacation days for an all-out Southeast Asia dream trip. Here, the greatest hits in three epic two-week adventures.



MALAY PENINSULA

If you're serious about food and culture, follow Trufflepig's Tyler Dillon's lead.

Singapore

Nail the high/low vibe with *char kway teow* and chili crab at a hawker center, then grab a coconut negroni at rooftop bar Potato Head.

Kuala Lumpur

Between bowls of *curry laksa* at Restoran Kam Fatt and *roti canai* at Mansion Tea Stall, hit the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia.

Georgi Town

You're here to eat. Period. See page 42 for the places you cannot miss.

Mergui Archipelago

There aren't really restaurants here, says Dillon, but the pro move is to charter a yacht and island hop. Buy some fresh fish along the way to be grilled on a secluded beach.



CAMBODIA + LAOS + VIETNAM

Sandy Ferguson of Asia Desk calls this one a "great romp through Indochina."

Siem Reap

Of course, Angkor Wat is a must—but so is pre-dawn meditation with the monks of the Phnom Krom Pagoda on a hill overlooking Tonlé Sap lake.

Luang Prabang

Extremely worth it to see the daily early-morning procession of more than 200 saffron-robed monks.

Vietnam

Best way to experience Saigon? On a Vespa, zipping through the chaotic back alleys. In Hanoi, make a pilgrimage to Bún Chả Húng Lahn and feast on the grilled pork in fish sauce while contemplating the world, just as President Obama and Anthony Bourdain did.



THE SEE-IT-ALL TRIP

For first-and-last-timers to the region, Catherine Heald at Remote Lands will make sure you don't miss a thing.

Bangkok

They'll pack your schedule with bar crawls, biking trips in the countryside, and a visit to Koh Kret, the island in the middle of the Chao Phraya.

Chiang Mai

Have a *khantoke* dinner at Wiang Kum Kam, the nearby ancient settlement.

Singapore

Explore the city, then get your nature fix with a hike in Bukit Timah Nature Reserve.

Bawah Island, Indonesia

Arrive via ferry or seaplane to the Bawah Island resort and then do absolutely nothing. Or spend the day sailing to the surrounding Anambas Islands.

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g. Copies not Distributed	12,077	13,847
h. Total	824,256	832,337
i. Payment Paid	72,288	72,748
j. Total Electronic Copies	80,523	20,504
k. Total Paid Print Copies (Line 1d) + Paid Electronic Copies	671,486	618,239
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T. I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. Signed: David Gettner, Vice President and Treasurer

"The Mekong Delta is one of the most underrated places in the region, and the folks who live there are the friendliest in Vietnam." G. W. "Sandy" Ferguson Omer, Asia Desk