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Travel

Friday Times

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A member of the Red Dao tribe plants rice in the mountains of the Sapa region, North Vietnam.

Roam among outcrops and drift through the delta of Vietnam

With three micro-climates, and rain hitting different regions in different months, it's always a great time to visit somewhere in Vietnam - but damp in other spots. March, though, is fine pretty much across the board: It's a rare season when you can capture photos of the junks and karst outcrops of Halong Bay and Bai Tu Long against an azure sky rather than haze; when trekking up the country's highest peak, Fansipan (3143m), and among the hilltribes around Sapa is comfortably cool and dry; when wandering Hanoi's charming Old Quarter is a delight; and when the central coast and southern beaches such as Mui Ne or Phu Quoc are pleasantly warm and rain-free.

Trip plan: How long have you got? A fortnight allows time for a tour of the north, looping from Hanoi to Sapa and Halong Bay, possibly even down to Hue and Hoi An. Add more time and you can stretch your route south to Nha Trang, Dalat, Saigon, the Mekong Delta and those beaches. And maybe get off the beaten track, too.

Need to know: Visa regulations change often - check the latest requirements with a Vietnamese consulate before heading off.

Other months: South - dry Dec-Apr, rains May-Nov; central coast around Hue - dry Mar-Aug, rains Sep-Feb; north - cold Dec-Mar, wet Apr-Sep, dry and cool Oct-Nov.

Enjoy fine cycling along some of Australia's tastiest trails

The heights around Bright in the northeastern corner of Victoria make a credible claim to being Australia's cycle epicentre, and March is an ideal time to saddle up - sunny, not too hot, just at the tipping point between summer and autumn. The region is laced with over 150 miles (241 km) of safe off-road routes including the 72-mile (116km) Murray to Mountains Rail Trail, plus adrenaline-piquing mountain-biking, testing road rides and plenty of family-friendly routes.

Pedal between historic gold-mining towns such as Yackandandah and Beechworth, stopping in at the bountiful cafes and cellar doors of notable wineries including Brown Brothers and John Gehrig. The region's riddled with foodie treats, too, from artisan food producers (try the wares of Milawa Cheese Company) to gourmet restaurants.

Trip planner: Bright, usually considered the gateway to the High Country, is a three-hour drive north of Melbourne. There are plenty of accommodation options, many of them charming historic B&Bs.

Need to know: If you don't bring your own bike, hire is available at most towns across the region; check details at victoriashighcountry.com.au.

Other months: Dec-Mar - summer; Apr-May - fine autumn foliage, harvest festivals; Jun-Sep - ski season; Oct-Nov - spring.

— (www.lonelyplanet.com)