



Ha Long Bay

Photo: Nguyen Quang Ngoc Tonkin / Shutterstock.com



Gary Cacciatore/unsplash

Discover the wonders of Ha Long Bay, one of the most attractive and awe-inspiring destinations in Southeast Asia. Delve into the ethereal waters that bathe the monumental limestone karsts rising dramatically over the bay. Try out your kayaking skills, go hiking and explore the area at will while staying at Vietnam's top World Heritage Site destination. Whether you are travelling solo or with a group, this part of the world should be top of your list.

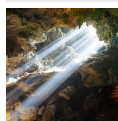


Andre Ouellet/unsplash



Marina Lobato/unsplash

Featured



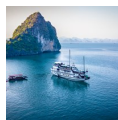
Dong Thien Cung

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Cannon Fort

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THE AREA



Danny Iacob / Shutterstock.com

Ha Long Bay is an astoundingly beautiful geographical feature and a UNESCO World Heritage Site in northeastern Vietnam. This heavenly Southeast Asian destination is a classic spot on the map for travellers who want to revel in the marvels of nature. An outstanding cluster of some 1,600 islands and islets lie waiting to be discovered where the green and mountainous land of the Quảng Ninh province meets the tranquil and turquoise South China Sea. Many of these islands have acquired interesting names due to their peculiar shapes that resemble certain animals, such as elephants or monkeys. Another peculiarity of these chunky landmasses that rise up from the ocean floor is their interior. Inside some of the towering green islands are great lakes, sometimes complete with stalactites and stalagmites. Dau Be, for instance, has an impressive six lakes within its rocky structure. As for the locals, there are four villages in the area, inhabited by people who live on floating houses.

On the mainland, what is sometimes referred to as Ha Long City is in fact a conurbation of two separate cities joined together by a bridge: Bãi Cháy and Hong Gai. The main areas of interest outside of the city are Ha Long Bay itself and Cát Bà island.

TOP 5



Kévin Langlais / Unsplash

Sung Sot Cave



As one of the most beautiful and appealing caves in Ha Long Bay, Sung Sot is a dazzling work of nature, astonishingly vast in size,

despite its inconspicuous appearance from the outside. The rocky entrance down into the cave, coated in dense vegetation, leads to two large limestone-laden chambers, each meticulously decorated with a millennia-old ceiling of delicately formed stalactites. The impressive rock formations are colourfully lit up and can be admired from the comfort of a smooth walking path that traverses the cave. Located on the island of Bò Hon, this cave can be visited when using any of the major tour operators in Ha Long Bay, such as Aphrodite Cruise or HaLong Phoenix Cruises.

Photo: Sytilin Pavel / Shutterstock.com

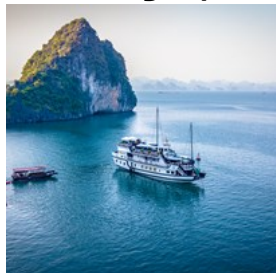
Address: Bò Hòn Island, Ha Long Bay, Halong City, Quảng Ninh

Opening hours: Daily 8.00 - 18.00

Tickets: Entrance fee usually included in tour price

Internet: www.aphroditecruises.com/en-gb

Bai Tu Long Bay



Just east of Ha Long Bay is Bai Tu Long Bay. Both of these places share many of the same geological characteristics, the exception being that Bai Tu Long is a bit of a hidden gem and has a lot fewer tourists. This is what makes Bai Tu Long such an interesting alternative to northeastern Vietnam's most popular destination. With limestone karst islands just as impressive as those in Ha Long Bay, Bai Tu Long doesn't have as many grottos, but is equally beautiful. One of the easiest ways to visit Bai Tu Long Bay is by cruise ship. Try Bhaya or Indochina Junk if you're looking for tour companies that operate cruise ships with stops in the area.

Photo: aksenovden / Shutterstock.com

Tickets: Prices vary depending on the cruise

Internet: www.bhayacruises.com

Seaplane from Hanoi to Ha Long Bay



Some of the most scenic vistas in Vietnam can be admired from a bird's-eye view aboard a plane that takes off from the capital city of Hanoi. Flying over the green landscape of northeastern Vietnam, this aeroplane tour is possibly the best way of seeing the limestone karst formations of Ha Long Bay. Hai Au Aviation offers this service, and although somewhat pricey, the sights you can see from the plane are absolutely astonishing. This is most likely one of the best ways there is to see the natural wonders of the bay.

Photo: The South Wind / Shutterstock.com

Address: Noi Bai International Airport (HAN), Sóc Sơn,

Hanoi, Vietnam

Internet: www.seaplanes.vn/en

Lan Ha Bay



Lan Ha Bay is located just off of Cát Bà island. With a whole archipelago of its own, it receives far fewer visitors than Ha Long Bay and is a particularly pretty little spot in this unique limestone karst island landscape. Around 300 green islands lined with sandy white beaches stand tall in the bay. Discover the area in all its natural splendour by booking a cruise to Cát Bà that includes Lan Ha Bay. You can explore the ins and outs of this itinerary with Cát Bà Island Cruises. They also offer activities that involve trekking in Cát Bà and kayaking in the bay.

Photo: Nguyen Quang Ngoc Tonkin / Shutterstock.com

Address: Lan Ha Bay, Vietnam

Internet: www.catbaislandcruises.com

Cannon Fort



Enjoy some absolutely staggering vistas from the viewpoints of Cannon Fort, a military construction built by the Japanese during WWII in amongst the thick tropical vegetation of the green hills of Cát Bà island. Explore the tunnels and the historic gun emplacement used by Japanese, French and Vietnamese soldiers throughout the past century. There is even a small museum, a café and mannequin gunmen loading and firing the weaponry.

Photo: Martin Lakostik / Shutterstock.com

Address: Cannon Fort, Cat Ba, Cát Hải, Hai Phong, Vietnam

Opening hours: Daily 7.00 - 18.30

Tickets: Entry is 40,000 dong ~ 1.55 euros

HA LONG



pongwan sukpoka / Shutterstock.com

Ha Long Bay is the main site in the area that attracts travellers from far and wide. Here is where you will find remarkable wonders of nature, such as hidden caves with majestic stalactites and luscious green islands. Ha Long Bay truly delivers when it comes to awe-inspiring scenery. However, if it's a meal at a nice restaurant you're looking for then you may like to head back to the mainland and try the food in Ha Long City, where some of the region's best restaurants can be found. If you feel like spending an evening at a bar by the sea consider taking a cruise ship to Cát Bà island, as nightlife in Ha Long Bay itself is somewhat limited.

Sung Sot Cave



In amongst the most beautiful and appealing of the Ha Long Bay caves and grottos, Sung Sot is a dazzling work of nature, astonishingly vast in size, despite its inconspicuous appearance from the outside. The rocky entrance down into the cave, coated in dense vegetation, leads to two large limestone-laden chambers, each meticulously decorated with a millennia-old ceiling of delicately formed stalactites. The impressive rock formations are colourfully lit up. All of this can be viewed from the comfort of a smooth

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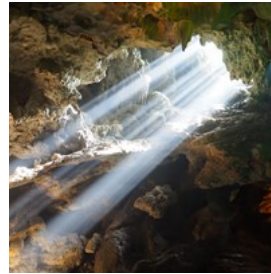
Photo: Sytilin Pavel / Shutterstock.com

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Dong Thien Cung

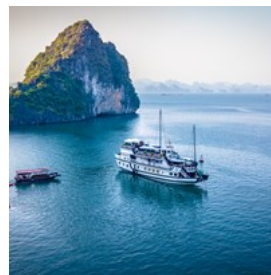


Thien Cung Cave, or Dong Thien Cung, is a grotto located on the island of Dau Go, in the southwest of Ha Long Bay. Complete with a colourful decoration in the form of lighting on its walls, the cave boasts an enviable display of ancient stalactites and stalagmites. Along with Sung Sot Cave, this has proved to be one of the most popular and visited grottos in the archipelago, and its stunningly beautiful interior is the reason.

Photo: CrowBoxz / Shutterstock.com

Address: Cát Hải, Quảng Ninh

Bai Tu Long Bay



Just east of Ha Long Bay is the less visited Bai Tu Long Bay. The two share many of the same geological characteristics, with the exception that Bai Tu Long has a lot fewer tourists and is not as well-known. This is what makes it such an interesting alternative to Vietnam's most popular destination for many visitors. With limestone karst islands just as

impressive as those in Ha Long Bay, Bai Tu Long doesn't have that many grottos. However, what it does have is lovely beaches to relax on, such as Ban Chan. One of the easiest ways to visit Bai Tu Long Bay is on a cruise. Try Bhaya or Indochina Junk if you're looking for tour companies that operate cruise ship itineraries within the area.

Photo: akseovden / Shutterstock.com

Tickets: Prices vary depending on the cruise - Check the website

Internet: www.bhayacruises.com

Seaplane from Hanoi to Ha Long Bay



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Photo: The South Wind / Shutterstock.com

Address: Noi Bai International Airport (HAN), Sóc Sơn, Hanoi, Vietnam

Internet: www.seaplanes.vn/en

CÁT BÀ ISLAND



Lena Serditova / Shutterstock.com

Though strictly not in Ha Long Bay, Cát Bà archipelago is only some 15 miles (25 km) away from the city of Ha Long and is well worth a visit. A conglomeration of about 366 small islands that surround the main island of Cát Bà, this archipelago is a natural park and habitat of the endangered langur monkey. Some of the best activities Cát Bà has to offer are hiking, rock climbing, snorkelling or simply relaxing on the beaches south of the main island.

Two to three days are recommended if you want to get a feel for the island and truly appreciate its beauty. You can also take a tour of the surrounding Lan Ha Bay, either by joining a guided tour or by renting a cruise boat of your own. Information about guided boat tours can be found on the website below.

Cát Bà National Park



Cát Bà's national park covers most of the island's interior, where travellers can embark on a number of hiking trails immersed in the natural surroundings. At the entrance to the park you can choose which route you'd like to take depending on the amount of time you would like to spend there. Those who are physically

prepared, and up for a challenge, might consider heading all the way up to the summit that crowns the island. A word of warning should be given to travellers, as the hot weather and humid conditions may make the climb feel pretty exhausting.

Another option is to join a guided tour of the park on foot or to choose a pre-planned walk that combines trekking with cycling or kayaking. Cat Ba Ventures organise activities such as these, but you can also arrange a guided tour with the park rangers on site.

Photo: Pavel Szabov / Shutterstock.com

Address: Cat Ba National Park, Đường xuyên đảo Cát Bà, Trân Châu, Cát Hải, Hai Phong, Vietnam

Opening hours: Daily 8.00 - 17.00

Hospital Cave



For a cave that's a tad different take a trip to Hospital Cave. Its name is fairly self-explanatory, as this large man-made underground cavity was once used as a secret building to attend to the wounded during the American War. Later on it was also used as a safe space for the Viet Cong, and wasn't abandoned until 1975. The huge cave covers three storeys and it includes an operating theatre, a natural cavern used as a cinema and even a swimming pool. Guided tours are available on site.

Photo: Sitoo / Flickr(image cropped)

Address: Trân Châu, Cát Hải, Hai Phong, Vietnam

Opening hours: Daily 8.00 - 17.00

Phone: +84 96 531 79 92

Lan Ha Bay



Lan Ha Bay is located just off of Cát Bà island. With a whole archipelago of its own, it receives a lot fewer visitors than Ha Long Bay and is a particularly beautiful little corner of this unique limestone karst island landscape. About 300 green islands lined with sandy white beaches stand tall in the bay. Discover the area in all its natural splendour by booking a cruise to Cát Bà that includes Lan Ha Bay. You can explore the ins and outs of this itinerary with Cát Bà Island Cruises. They also offer activities that involve trekking on the island and kayaking in the bay.

Photo: Nguyen Quang Ngoc Tonkin / Shutterstock.com

Address: Lan Ha Bay, Vietnam

Internet: www.catbaislandcruises.com

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Photo: Martin Lakostik / Shutterstock.com

Address: Cannon Fort, Cat Ba, Cát Hải, Hai Phong, Vietnam

Opening hours: Daily 7.00 - 18.30

Tickets: Entry is 40,000 dong ~ 1.55 euros

DINING



slava296 / Shutterstock.com

Although the main attraction of Ha Long is undoubtedly its spectacular islands, there are a number of interesting eateries to try out on the mainland, offering some of the best gastronomy in the region. From internationally-oriented food joints that offer all manners of Western and Vietnamese-inspired meals to a more traditional choice of local seafood and noodles, you are sure to find something that agrees with your tastebuds.

Linh Dan Restaurant (Ha Long City)



Linh Dan is probably one of the best restaurants you'll find in Bãi Cháy. Sit down at a table in the building's large foodhall and choose from an extensive menu of varied seafood delicacies including crab, lobster and prawns. They also do spring rolls, salads, noodles and rice-based dishes. Have a taste of the delicious cuisine that is native to this part of the world for a reasonably moderate price in the surroundings of Bãi Cháy Beach.

Photo: K Suwattarakul / Shutterstock.com

Address: 104 Bãi Cháy, Thành phố Hạ Long, Quảng Ninh, Vietnam

Opening hours: Daily 9.00 - 21.00

Phone: +84 91 463 45 98

Cua Vang Restaurant (Ha Long City)



Head to Cua Vang, also known as the Golden Crab, to find a comprehensive selection of appetising seafood dishes. At the entrance to the restaurant customers are met with a fish tank full of sea creatures, some of which you will also notice making appearances on the menu. Here you'll find some very tasty local Vietnamese cuisine. Try the shrimps and the squid, or go all out and order the speciality crab hotpot.

Photo: annaj77 / Shutterstock.com

Address: 20 Bồ Nâu, Bãi Cháy, Thành phố Hạ Long, Quảng Ninh, Vietnam

Opening hours: Daily 8.00 - 23.30

Phone: +84 168 884 8686

Green Mango (Cát Bà Island)



On the seafront of Cát Bà Island is Green Mango, one of the most popular eateries in the area for travellers. From seafood and steaks all the way to pizza, pasta and burgers, the Green Mango also serves some signature dishes of Southeast Asian cuisine such as Green Curry or Pad Thai. This restaurant is also the perfect place to kick back and enjoy a cocktail or a sip of wine during your stay on the island.

Photo: THE CUT / Shutterstock.com

Address: 236 Một Tháng Tư, TT. Cát Bà, Cát Hải, Hải Phòng, Vietnam

Opening hours: Daily 7.00 - 23.00

Yummy Restaurant (Cát Bà Island)



Located on the island of Cát Bà, this Western restaurant certainly lives up to its name. On the menu, hungry travellers can choose from a range

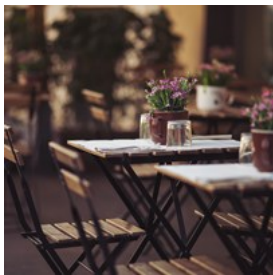
of pan-Asian meals, from Indian to Thai and Vietnamese food. Aside from a broad choice of beef, chicken, squid and shrimp, vegetarian options are also available.

Photo: bonchan / Shutterstock.com

Address: 180 Nui Ngoc Street, Cat Ba 180000, Vietnam

Opening hours: Daily 8.00 - 22.00

Papa's BBQ (Ha Long City)



Claimed to be one of the best restaurants in the area, Papa's BBQ is the home of

German-Vietnamese cuisine in Ha Long. Come

in and fill yourself up with their steak, sausage and shrimp-based menu. Accommodating a largely international clientele, their kitchen caters to guests who are accustomed to European standards.

Photo: Greerascris / Shutterstock.com

Internet: www.papasbbq.net

BARS & NIGHTLIFE



DisobeyArt / Shutterstock.com

Ha Long Bay may not be top of the list if you are in the mood to party, but if you stay over at Cát Bà island, there are a few small bars by the seafront worth a try. Take a saunter down the harbour promenade, and you are likely to stumble upon a bar or two where settling in for an evening of beers and cocktails is the way to go.

The Good Bar (Cát Bà Island)



Overlooking the harbour from an upper floor, this bar is the perfect excuse for you to meet up with other travellers on a night out before setting off

again on your cruise trip. Out of the few nightlife options on the island, this may just be the most popular. In any case, you'll find a row of backpacker bars on the promenade by the harbour, so if you miss the Good Bar, it is likely that you will find a similar place to sit down at for a beer or a cocktail.

Photo: nuu_jeed / Shutterstock.com

Address: Street 1 Thang 4, Cat Ba 180000, Vietnam

Opening hours: Daily 6am-3am

Oasis Bar (Cát Bà Island)



In a privileged location overlooking the bay, Oasis Bar is a homely place with a very laid back atmosphere. Grab a beer and have a game on the pool table. After you've finished honing your skills on the cue, sit out on the terrace and watch the evening go by with a pint in your hand. Oasis Bar also does meals and burgers.

Photo: Pavel L Photo and Video / Shutterstock.com

Address: 254 Đường 1/4, TT. Cát Bà, Cát Hải, Hải Phòng, Vietnam

Phone: +84 96 377 11 55

Bai Hoi Stalls (Cát Bà Island)



Bai Hoi is a popular draught beer produced in the city of Hanoi that is sold at stalls on the harbour front of Cát Bà island. Try some of this classic locally brewed alcoholic beverage for an affordable price while you sit back, relax and take in the wonderful views of the sun setting over bay.

Photo: Kittibowornphatnon / Shutterstock.com

TOURIST INFORMATION



Dmytro Gilitukha / Shutterstock.com

Passport / Visa



Short stays that do not require a visa (some as short as 15 days) are possible for citizens of Cambodia, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, The Philippines, Brunei, Myanmar, Belarus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Norway, Russia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Citizens of Chile can enter the country for 90 days, visa-free.

Citizens of a further 46 world countries are eligible for an E-visa as of February 2017. These are granted for a period of 30 days. To confirm whether or not you will need a visa to enter Vietnam, please contact your local consulate.

Different rules may apply to cruise ship passengers on shore excursions. In late 2019, temporary visa slips could be obtained directly on board for a very small fee (under the condition that Vietnam is only visited as part of a cruise itinerary with a final destination elsewhere).

Photo: TukTuk Design

Best Time to Visit



Planning your trip to Ha Long Bay between October and December means that you will have the chance to experience the bay with relatively

temperate and pleasant weather. However, these months are the high season and the area will certainly be more crowded. An alternative to this would be visiting Ha Long Bay from June to September. Please keep in mind that these are the summer months, when the chances of stormy weather and typhoons increase substantially.

Photo: VectorA_ / Shutterstock.com

Ha Long Cruise Ports



Although Ha Long Bay is the most well-known of the natural treasures in the region, there are in fact three other places of interest in the area: Cát

Bà Island, Bai Tu Long and La Han Bay. When booking a trip you can usually expect the cruise ship to cover one or two of these places in the same itinerary.

In terms of the duration of the cruise, tour operators regularly provide a variety of options to choose from. The choice tends to range from single day trips to two day-one night cruises (2D1N), three day-two night cruises (3D2N) and four day-three night cruises (4D3N).

When booking a cruise you will find that the price includes other commodities such as food and certain activities on the islands the ship

stops at. These activities tend to involve visiting caves, relaxing at beaches, exploring floating villages, and sometimes plans that are more physically demanding such as biking or climbing.

Double-checking the specific services and amenities that are included in the cruise price is always a good idea. For instance, transport to and from Hanoi is often not included if you're visiting from the capital.

Some recommendable cruise ship operators that organize trips in the area are Bhaya, Pelican and Peon Tours. Whether you're looking for a luxury trip or you're travelling on a budget, the Ha Long Bay Tours website below lets you compare the different options, so you can choose according to your preferences.

Photo: iconStocker

Internet: www.halongbaytours.com

Noi Bai International Airport (Hanoi)



Noi Bai is the international airport of the Vietnamese capital, Hanoi. If you are flying in from outside of the country it is likely that

your airport of arrival will be Noi Bai. This is the main airport near Ha Long Bay with most international connections.

To get from Noi Bai airport to Ha Long Bay there are a few different options. Depending on whether you are travelling on a budget or you don't mind splashing out a little extra in exchange for a bit of comfort, you might like to choose one of the options over the other. If you have booked a cruise trip in Ha Long Bay it is a good idea to check if the cruise operator offers

an airport shuttle bus to the point of departure of the cruise trip.

These shuttle buses are often cheaper when booked alongside the cruise itself. In the case that this option is not available, there are also other means of transport. On the cheap and cheerful side there are local coaches. The stops each bus provider uses may be located in very different parts of town, so please make sure you check with your cruise company before selecting a bus provider. On the more expensive side, there are also private cars and even seaplanes.

Find more information about bus providers and other means of transport available from Noi Bai to Ha Long in the link below.

Photo: Juan Garces
Address: Noi Bai International Airport (HAN), Sóc Sơn, Hanoi, Vietnam
Internet:
www.bhayacruises.com/blog/get-from-hanoi-to-halong-bay/

Van Don International Airport (VDO)



Van Don is a recently built airport in northeastern Vietnam. Having started its activity as a fully functioning airport towards the end

of 2018, Van Don offers flights to an extensive list of, mainly Asian, airports including Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam), Seoul-Incheon (South Korea) and Shenzhen (Hong Kong). So unless you are arriving in Van Don from a city within Eastern Asia, you will most likely be flying to a different airport.

If your plane is, however, landing at Van Don, there is a public shuttle bus service available from the airport to Ha Long and back. You can

find more information about the itinerary and stops of the shuttle buses on the website below.

Photo: Juan Garces
Address: Van Don International Airport, Đoàn Kết, Vân Đồn District, Quảng Ninh, Vietnam
Public Transport: Buses 14A and 14B travel to Van Don airport and back
Internet: vandonairport.vn

Post



There are two main post offices in Ha Long. One is in the Bai Chay area and the other is on the other side of the bridge, in Hòn Gai. Postal services such

as mailing, postcards and money exchange are offered in both branches.

Photo: Andy Fuchs
Address: Quang Ninh Post Office, Lê Thánh Tông, Thành phố Hạ Long, Quảng Ninh, Vietnam
Phone: +84 825 925

Pharmacy



Pharmacies are called 'nha thuc' in Vietnamese. Follow the link below to access a list of pharmacies in the area as well as some other

relevant information on local medical services.

Photo: Gemma Garner
Address: 68 Hàng Nồi, Tp. Hạ Long, Quảng Ninh, Vietnam
Internet: www.halongcruises.net/practical-information/Hospitals-and-Pharmacies-in-Halong-City.html

Telephone

Country code: +84



Photo: Jardson Almeida

Electricity



220V is standard in Vietnam. In Hanoi, many outlets fit round pins. Use a surge protector when using computers. If you stay at 3 star hotels and

up, the hotel receptionist should be able to provide you with an adapter.

Photo: Stirling Tschan

Taxi



Some of the most well-known and recommended taxi companies that operate within Ha Long City are Mai Linh Taxi, Ha Long

Taxi and Mong Cai Taxi. Taking a cab from one of these firms is useful if you need to travel relatively long distances, such as from the city to the airport.

Photo: Taxi

Population

Approximately 1,600

Currency

Vietnamese dong (VND)

Opening hours

Shops are generally open from around 8.00 to 21.00 or 22.00, with a one or two-hour lunch break. Banks are open from Monday to Friday from around 8.00 to 11.30 and from

13.00 to 16.30. Government offices are open on weekdays from 8.00 to 16.30 with an hour off for lunch.

Internet

www.visithalongbay.com

Newspapers

VnExpress (English) — vnexpress.net

Tuoi Tre News (English) — tuoitrenews.vn

Viet Nam News (English) — vietnamnews.vn

Emergency numbers

Search & Rescue: 112

Police: 113

Fire: 114

Ambulance/First Aid: 115

Tourist information

www.vietnam.travel/places-to-go/northern-vietnam/ha-long
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*This guide was researched and written by Matthew Jones Ruiz