

VIETNAM

Cao Bang Province



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**Plus
Ban
Gioc
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FOREWORD



Thanks for downloading this FREE interactive travel guide. You've made an excellent choice if you plan on **GETTING OFF THE BEATEN TRACK** in (LOCATION). Before you delve into the content of this travel guide, please take a few minutes to read this foreword. It outlines how to make the best use of the information contained within.

First-hand experience: This travel guide has been put together using first-hand experience gained from traveling to, and exploring, all the locations presented within. The information and photos featured in my travel guides, have been collated over years of putting boots on the ground. There is no second-hand information, or information which is plagiarized from other travel sources, within this guide. Every cave, waterfall, river, viewpoint, jungle trail, temple site, guesthouse and restaurant presented, or promoted, I have been to and seen and/or experienced myself.

Getting off the beaten track: The primary focus of my travel guides is **ADVENTURE TRAVEL** (and activities) to locations which are non-mainstream tourist destinations. As an example, there is no information for the mainstream tourist locations of **VIETNAM** (except as transit hub's before heading off to a more remote location) listed in this travel guide. As such, the information in this guide is directed towards travelers (not tourists) who are keen

for a bit of adventure - caving, climbing, jungle trekking, kayaking - in an off the beaten track location, of South East Asia. If these types of activities aren't to your liking, then this travel guide won't be much use to you. There's no information in here about the party towns in South East Asia.

Budget travel: Knowing the importance of making the most of your hard-earned currency, my travel links ([12GO ASIA](#)) and accommodation links ([AGODA](#)) are predominantly budget oriented. They provide a range of options for getting to a central hub, or base, from which you can make your daily explorations.

Independent sightseeing: Instead of going on group tours, I strongly promote the idea of renting your own vehicle (car or motorbike) and venturing out yourself. To help you get to the exact location, there's always a [GOOGLE MAPS](#) link to show the route from a hub (hotel or guesthouse) to the sightseeing attraction. If there's a local tour operator offering excellent adventure type tours, or activities, I'll provide links to their website. A good example of a great adventure tour operator is [GREEN DISCOVERY LAOS](#), who offer excellent caving, kayaking and trekking tours throughout Laos.

The Table of Contents: This is page four of the travel guide and has a sequential list of sections, which you can go to directly by clicking on the **GREEN** numbered tab.

YouTube Links: These take you directly to my YouTube Vlog ([Megaworld Asia](#)) where you can see short, high quality travel videos of the numerous attractions listed in my travel guides. If you enjoy the videos, please hit the like button and don't forget to subscribe to see my upcoming adventures.

Your next adventure is just one click away

Safe travels,

MEGA

Cao Bang Province

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**Your Next Adventure
Is Just One Click Away**

How To Use This Interactive Travel Guide

The Table Of Contents: To effortlessly move from the TOC to the page you want to view, simply click on the **page number**: 

YouTube Links: These will take you to a short highlights video, of the sightseeing attraction, in the section you're looking at:



Other Links: These take you to ancillary services such as recommended restaurants, or car and motorbike rental agencies, in the location you're traveling to:

ANCILLARY SERVICES

Travel Links: This takes you to **12GO ASIA**, an excellent travel group which provides a range of options for getting around the region:



The Table Of Contents: To move back to the TOC, click on the **yellow arrows**, at the bottom of each Page: 

Google Maps Links: These provide a route from a designated location (e.g., a hotel) to a particular sightseeing attraction:



Information Links: These links take you to information sites, such as Wikipedia or Wiki-voyage, to provide more in-depth info on a particular subject or location:



Accommodation Links: This takes you to the Agoda website to check accommodation availability and make bookings:



It's Time To Get Off The Beaten Track



CAO BANG PROVINCE - GENERAL INFO

About: At the Northeast extremity of the country, and pushing up hard against the border of China, sits the less traveled province of Cao Bang. Most travelers, venturing into these northern areas of Vietnam, invariably head for the more well-known Sapa area. With its direct rail link, Sapa is the more accessible option. However, for those wishing to get off the beaten track in these Northern reaches of Vietnam, Cao Bang is worth sparing a couple of days for. **For more detailed information please refer to:**

WIKIPEDIA

Ban Gioc: The main attraction in Cao Bang province is the visually impressive BAN GIOC FALLS. Ban Gioc Falls, and its associated river, form part of the border with China with the delineation running straight down the middle of the falls' terraced levels. Ban Gioc also happens to be the world's fourth largest cross border falls and in the full flow of the rainy season is well worth the effort of getting there. Other worthwhile sites are NGUOM NGAO CAVE and Ho Chi Minh's base at PAC BO. There may be other places of interest in the area but the above mentioned three sites appear to be the best outings.

Getting there: As with all visits into the Northern Provinces the starting point is Hanoi. Cao bang Township is approximately 290 Km north of Hanoi and transportation options, compared with those available for a journey to Sapa, are somewhat limited. If you're traveling by motorbike, be prepared for long stretches of twisting mountainous road. The only public transport option appears to be an overnight bus - at approx. USD 20 - departing every evening at 8.30 PM from MY DINH BUS STATION. Travel time from Hanoi to Cao Bang, allowing for a lunch stop in Lang Son, is approximately 6 - 7 hours. **Click the following link for travel options from Hanoi to Cao Bang:**



Getting to Ban Gioc: The distance from Cao Bang to Ban Gioc is just 100 km. If you take the bus to Cao Bang, the best option is to stay overnight there, then arrange for transportation (minivan or motorbike) out to the waterfall. In either case, it can be a bit of a hassle as Cao Bang isn't a place which sees a lot of foreign tourists.



CAO BANG PROVINCE - GENERAL INFO

Guided tour: A more convenient option, in terms of having arranged transportation and accommodation, is to book a 3 - 4 day excursion with a tour company from Hanoi. In this regard LINH'S ADVENTURES is an excellent choice for doing tours through the Northern areas of Vietnam. They offer group and private tours to all the best sightseeing locations in the north, including CAO BANG PROVINCE: **Click the following link for inquiries:**



Accommodation: For accommodation in Cao Bang, the DUC TRUNG HOTEL is a good choice. **Click the following link for booking inquiries:**

DUC TRUNG HOTEL

Accommodation at Ban Gioc: If you're doing a guided tour from Hanoi, most of the tour companies will take you directly to one of the homestays/guesthouses near the waterfall.



This is the best option, in terms of giving yourself the maximum amount of time on a single day at the sightseeing attractions at Ban Gioc. An excellent accommodation choice is the Yen Nhi Homestay (aka the stone village). The Yen Nhi Homestay is located near to Nguom Ngao Cave in amongst a dramatic karst landscape. **Click the following link for booking inquiries:**



CAO BANG PROVINCE - SIGHTSEEING

Cao Bang Sightseeing: As mentioned above the main attractions in the area are as follows:

- Ban Gioc Falls
- Nguom Ngao Cave
- Pac Bo Cave and historical site

The road to Ban Gioc: The drive from Cao Bang also happens to be visually impressive with imposing jungle clad limestone peaks providing magnificent scenery during the two hour trip to the falls. As the road twists and winds its way through the spectacular terrain there are plenty of opportunities for landscape shots from some of the roadside viewpoints. In September the green and yellow carpets of the rice terraces create a nice contrast against the darker green of the surrounding jungle clad escarpments. **Click the following link for directions from Cao Bang to Ban Gioc:**



Phat Tich Pagoda: This pagoda is located on a hill approx. 2 km from the fall's car park. Stop here, before going to the falls, for an excellent panoramic view of the waterfall and the surrounding terrain. Note: there's a steep road up to the pagoda. If you don't have the energy for the hike



from the main road, make use of the motorbike taxi service at the bottom of the hill. Click the following link for the location: Google Maps.

Entry fees: The view, when one does eventually arrive at the waterfall site, is something to marvel at. The road terminates at a large parking area surrounded by restaurants and in the distance, across the green expanse of the rice fields, the falls stand out majestically in the river valley below. There is a small fee of 30,000 VND, payable at a checkpoint at the head of the pathway down to the falls area.



CAO BANG PROVINCE - BAN GIOC FALLS

The Vietnamese side: There is two sets of falls. The falls to the left are smaller than the main falls and are completely within the Vietnamese side of the border. The main falls, and its associated river, mark the border of Vietnam and China with the delineation apparently right down the center line of the main falls. The walk from the car park is approximately 400 meters and takes you along a paved footpath before arriving at the first, smaller set of falls on the Vietnamese side of the border.

The main falls: Continue past this smaller set of falls to a bridge which crosses a stream, where the flow from smaller falls joins the river, and you eventually end up on a narrow strip of land between the two sets of falls. The far side of river is China where Chinese sightseers can be seen boarding rafts for a cruise around the face of the main falls.

Raft cruises: These are also available on the Vietnam side and a thirty minute drift across the width of the main falls can be done for 50K VND (USD 2). This is the best option for getting a closer look at the falls as the walking trail finishes roughly 100 meters back from the face of the falls. It's an exhilarating trip and as the rafts man maneuvers his craft across the face of the falls the spray coming off the powerful curtains of water provide some cooling relief from the heat.



Note: For those keen on photography, it's worth noting the fine mist in the air fogs camera lenses very quickly so camera settings should be done before turning the lens towards the falls. It's also worth noting, much to the disappointment of many visitors, that swimming is not allowed. Two hours is probably enough time to take it all in and get plenty of good shots before heading back up to the car park. For those who've worked up an appetite during their excursion around the falls there's a couple of restaurants situated right next to the car park providing simple but hearty Vietnamese food.



CAO BANG PROVINCE - PHOTOS & VIDEO



Ban Gioc Falls

Click the link to the right to see video highlights of Cao Bang Province:



Ban Gioc Falls

CAO BANG PROVINCE - NGUOM NGAO CAVE

Nguom Ngao Cave: This site is just five kilometers back along the road and a visitation works out to be very convenient in the context of planning your days outing. After viewing the falls first, you can visit the cave site on your return to Cao Bang. The cave site is easy to access with a sealed road leading straight to a large parking area in front of the cave entrance. There's an entry fee of 30,000 VND and this also includes a local guide. **Note:** the guides only speak Vietnamese and at the end of the tour they will probably expect a tip.

Doing the cave tour: The words "Nguom Ngao Cave" can be clearly seen above a small opening in the limestone wall. After a short climb of a few meters, sightseers enter the cooling inner world of Nguom Ngao Cave. The cave is well set up for an enjoyable and safe walk with a concrete pathway and plenty of artificial lighting along the 2.5 kilometers of tunnels and chambers. Compared to caves in Phong Nga, this one is smaller but it's still visually impressive with lots of beautiful formations along the course of the traverse.

Two sections: The first section is the older developed area which leads to a large room at a central point. This central area is 800 meters from the initial entry point and path splits in two directions. Turn left and you're heading to the exit.

keep going straight and you're heading towards the upstream entrance - the newly developed area of the cave.

The newly developed zone: More care is needed in this section as the concrete path terminates, and one is required to follow an undeveloped trail through large rock piles. After clearing the rock piles, the trail follows the stream bed, and several water crossings are required to reach the upstream entrance. **Note:** use solid footwear, or footwear which you don't mind getting soaked.

Giant white flowstone: The back section (newly developed area) is the best area of the cave. It's where the relatively narrow passageway of the initial section gives way to some large chambers filled with impressive formations. One, the white flowstone formation, is quite beautiful.

Conclusion: Two hours is probably sufficient time for a thorough inspection of all the formations and passageways in Nguom Ngao Cave. The trip to Ban Gioc Falls and Nguom Ngao Cave is a full day's outing. My total time from departure from Cao Bang until my return was approximately nine hours including traveling time of roughly 4 - 5 hours. All in all, this is a great day out and well worth the effort of coming up from Hanoi.



The large central room

NGUOM NGAO CAVE - PHOTOS & VIDEO



**Nguom Ngao Cave
upstream entrance**

Click the link to the right to see video
highlights of NGUOM NGAO CAVE:



The giant white flowstone

CAO BANG PROVINCE - PAC BO HISTORICAL SITE

About: Also known as PAC BO CAVE this historical site is one of significance in Vietnam's recent history; it was Ho Chi Minh's Jungle Base for twenty years after his return from China in 1941. Although pushing right up on the border of China this site, in distance and traveling time, is a lot closer to Cao Bang than Ban Gioc Falls. At a touch over 60 KM from Cao Bang a visit to Pac Bo will comfortably fill in half your day when considering traveling time and a leisurely exploration of the site. **Click the following link for directions:**



Getting there: If you have your own transport (a motorbike) just follow the above Google Maps route. If you're on an organized tour, the driver will know the way to go. If you don't have your own transport and you're not on a tour, the best option is to ask at the hotel or guesthouse you're staying at. There may also be local tours from Cao Bang City. **Click the following link for transportation options from Cao Bang to Pac Bo Historical Site:**



Picturesque terrain

On site: The Pac Bo site is approx. one hour north of Cao Bang city. The site car park is positioned along the edge of a pristine river where large schools of freshwater fish can be seen swimming in the clear waters. As with all other sites I've visited in Vietnam there is a small entry fee - 30K VND (USD 1) - payable at a booth at the far side of the car park before entering. From the entry point a solid cement pathway follows the edge of the river, leading off into the green peaks in the distance. At the foot of the limestone peaks a river exits from an underground spring to begin its flow in the open. The pathway then ascends up a stairway to two sites of significance.



The interior of Pac Bo Cave

CAO BANG PROVINCE - PAC BO HISTORICAL SITE

Two sites: The first one, and closer to the river, is PAC BO CAVE its self. A bit further up - perhaps another 50 vertical meters - is the site where Ho Chi Minh apparently first crossed back into Vietnam, from China, in 1941. The stone and cement stairway ends at a brush covered, level piece of ground. Apparently Ho Chi Minh lived in a small dwelling at the site before moving further down the hill to the cave. Beyond a small, dirt track leads off into the thick jungle of the border belt between Vietnam and China. A placard, in Vietnamese language, nearby proclaimed the historical significance of the site for Vietnam.

Pac Bo Cave: The local authorities have set up lighting within the cave so the entirety of it is well illuminated. As far as caves go Pac Bo is very small compared with other cave systems I've seen in Vietnam. Along the back wall, supported by rocks within the cave, is a large flat board; approximately the size of an average house door. Nearby sits a blackened kettle on a rock fire. According to a placard on the cave wall this was Ho Chi Minh's living quarters for quite some time. It is totally Spartan; the flat board was his bed. To live in a situation like this for as long as he did speaks of total dedication to a cause and a life of continued hardship.



The stone table: From the cave a stairway leads back down to the river to continue the circuit around the Pac Bo Site. The trail comes down one side of the river and returns along the other side. At the point where the trail begins its return leg, sits another point of historical significance; the "stone table and chair." There is a larger and smaller rock formation, side by side, which look remarkably like a table and chair. Both are flat topped and could indeed be used as a table and chair. According to my guide the nearby placard states this was a favoured spot for Ho Chi Minh each morning as he wrote and planned his long march in ridding his country of foreign invaders.



Ho Chi Minh's Bed

MEGAWORLD ASIA

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