

VIETNAM

Ha Long Bay



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**Bonus
Location
Cat Ba
Island**



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Ha Long Bay



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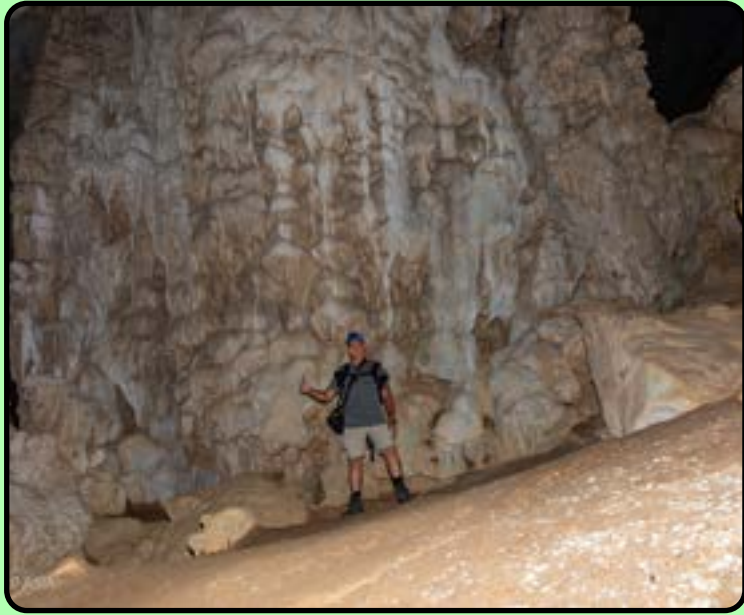
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12GO ASIA

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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

Ha Long Bay

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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**: **1**

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



HALONG BAY - GENERAL INFO

About: This is a mainstream tourist destination, in the north of Vietnam, which is normally on most people's bucket list of must see attractions. The area is famous for its spectacular seascape of sedimentary Karst islands, many of which have large caves to explore. According to local information sources, there are 1869 islands and islets in the greater Halong Bay area. **Note:** Halong Bay is an extremely popular sightseeing destination for the locals. The place tends to get packed out on weekends and the school holidays.

Getting there: For those wanting to do an independent tour of Halong Bay, there are buses which run there from Hanoi. However, to avoid the hassles involved with arranging transportation, booking hotels, and organizing a boat tour out to the islands, the easiest way to get there is to book a tour through an agent in Hanoi. They then provide transportation from Hanoi to the port where the tour boats depart from. **Click the following link to check your best transportation option from Hanoi to Halong Bay.**

Departure Point: TUAN CHAU PORT is the departure point for all boat tours out to the islands. It's located approximately 150 km east of Hanoi. If you're staying at a Hotel in Halong City, it's a 15 minute run (in a taxi) back along the coastline (towards Hanoi). If you're doing an organised tour, the travel company will provide transport from your hotel in Halong City (and return) each day. **Note:** If you're planning to tour Halong Bay independently, the best/cheapest way of traveling from Hanoi to Tuan Chau Port is with a Grab car. **Click the link below for the location of Tuan Chau Port:**



Staying in Halong City: For those who don't want to be stuck on a boat for the entirety of the tour, there's also the option of staying at a Hotel in Halong City and doing boat tours on a daily basis. The **Grand Fleuve Boutique Hotel** is an excellent accommodation choice in Halong City.



Take a boat tour around Halong Bay

TOURING HA LONG BAY - NEARBY LOCATIONS

Halong Bay Tours: The options for touring Halong bay are single day or over night tours. A single day tour normally begins and ends in Hanoi. Overnight, or extended, tours are normally done on a live-aboard vessel. The best way of doing either option is to book a tour through an agent in Hanoi. **VIT Travel** is an excellent choice for tours.

VIT TRAVEL

Dau Go Island Group: This is a picturesque Island group, just a few kilometers east of Tuan Chau Port. The primary attractions are two impressive cave sites, located on Dau Go Island. Cruising time to get there is approximately forty minutes. However, the standard tour seems to be a circuit through some spectacular karst peaks, and a bypass of the national symbol for Ha Long Bay - THE FIGHTING CHICKEN ROCKS - before arriving at Dau Go Harbor. **Note:** If you're short on time, you can request to go directly to Dau Go Harbor. This will save about forty minutes.

Dau Go Harbor: Dau Go Island has a picturesque harbor where sightseers can disembark at the jetty. From there a concrete pathway takes you along the edge of the bay before making an ascent up a flight of stairs to the entrance of the first cave.



Fighting Chicken Rocks



Dau Go Harbor



Dau Go Island Group

TOURING HA LONG BAY - DAU GO ISLAND

Dau Go Island: As mentioned, this is the closest sightseeing attraction to Tuan Chau harbor. The primary attractions here are two show cave sites. **Note:** A show cave is one which has been developed for a safe sightseeing experience. It has internal lighting and a constructed pathway through the length of the cave excursion.

Two Caves: There are two cave sites here, side by side. The first and most impressive is THIEN CUNG CAVE. The second, and less visited, is DAU GO CAVE.

Thien Cung Cave: After a two hundred meter walk from the boat landing, and a hike up a flight of stairs, sightseers will arrive at the entrance of Thien Cung Cave. The entrance way is narrow but soon opens up into a large internal space. The cave has been set up for safe sightseeing and has a solid cement pathway and internal lighting through the length of the excursion. A nice feature of the cave, in the first section, is a hole in the ceiling which allows shafts of sunlight to stream through in the afternoon. Moving further into the cave you'll eventually arrive at the large central room where lighting illuminates a myriad of nice formations. From the central room it's approximately 150 meters to the exit point. The walk through this cave takes about 30 minutes to complete.



Walkway to Thien Cung Cave



Shafts of sunlight



The illuminated central room

TOURING HA LONG BAY - DAU GO ISLAND

Dau Go Cave: After exiting Thien Cung Cave, a pathway takes sightseers around the cliff to the entrance of DAU GO CAVE. This cave tends to get less visitors. Possibly because of the distance from the jetty, and the fact many of the tour boats are on a tight schedule which only allows time to visit Thien Cung cave. Dau Go cave is bigger than Thien Cung and has route which goes deeper into the island. There's also developed pathway to follow, but no internal lighting.

Local artwork: The main feature is the large entrance room where some local artists have placed artwork around a boarded walking platform. When first entering this cave there's a series of stairways down to the cave floor. A pathway then does a loop to the back of the cave and returns to the boarded platform. On the loop route there's plenty of large formations to be seen. Having a flashlight is absolutely essential for this cave tour, as there's plenty of ambient light coming through from holes in the cave ceiling. A tour through this Dau Go Cave will take approximately 45 minutes.

Return to the boat: From the exit point from Dau Go Cave, a stairway will take you back to the coastal pathway. On the way down there's a platform which provides nice views of the harbor and across to Halong City. Where the stairway rejoins the coastal pathway, you can return to the boat landing and enjoy the scenic walk around the bay.



TOURING HA LONG BAY - SUNG SOT ISLAND

Sung Sot Island: A tour to SUNG SOT ISLAND is normally a full day's excursion as it includes a visit to SUNG SOT CAVE and TI TOP ISLAND. The travel time from Tuan Chau port is approximately 1.5 hours and, on the way, the route goes through some magnificent karst scenery.

Sung Sot Cave: This impressive cave is located in a beautiful horseshoe bay and is recognized as being the largest cave in the Halong Bay area. Access to the cave entrance is by way of a properly constructed stairway, with a couple of viewing platforms on the ascent. These platforms provide fantastic views out over the surrounding bay and also provide a respite for anyone wanting to take a breather on the ascent to the cave.

The Cave Tour: As with the other cave sites in the area, this one has a properly constructed trail, with steps and handrails, for a safe sight-seeing experience. The main feature of the cave is a massive main chamber which, from the back end, provides views back to the light streaming in from the entrance. The trail does a loop to the back end of the cave and returns to the main entrance. This is an excellent sightseeing experience, and well worth the effort of getting there. A tour through Sung Sot Cave will take approximately one hour.



TOURING HA LONG BAY - TI TOP ISLAND

Ti Top Island: This is normally the second stop on the Sung Sot Island tour. After visiting Sung Sot Cave, you'll have lunch on the tour boat before being dropped at Ti Top Island for an hour or so. The main sightseeing attraction here is the view-point on the peak of the island. Visitors will disembark at the boat landing and then make their way around the beach to the starting point for the hike up to the viewing platform on the peak. For anyone who's interested, it's 425 steps up to the lookout. It's a bit of a slog in the afternoon sun but well worth the effort. The views from the top are fantastic.

General Ti Top: After completing the hike to the peak, you can check out the large statue, along the beach front, from which the island gets its name. According to local information sources, the island was named after a Russian general, who visited the island with Ho Chi Minh, back in the 1960's. The statue definitely has the appearance of a Russian Military personnel.

Ti Top Beach: After completing the hike to the peak, a good way to cool off is to have a swim at the beach. There is a safe area for swimming. A tour to Sung Sot Cave and Ti Top island will normally take around 6 - 8 hours, and is a great day out in Halong Bay.



General Ti Top



Ti Top Beach



Ti Top Island

HA LONG BAY - PHOTOS & VIDEO



Click the link to the right to see video highlights of HA LONG BAY:



CAT BA ISLAND - GENERAL INFORMATION

About: CAT BA ISLAND isn't actually part of Halong Bay. It is situated south of Halong and has its own island archipelago called LAN HA BAY. The island's topography is predominantly a jungle covered karst terrain. It's a rugged, mountainous landscape which provides the opportunity for hikes to various peaks and, and several interesting caves to explore. If you decide to stay for an extended period, there's a township (at the southern end of the island with plenty of hotels, guesthouses, and restaurants to choose from. **Click the following link for accommodation options on Cat Ba Island:**



Getting there: If you opt for a one day tour from Halong City, as I did, the best way of getting there is to take a speed boat, from Tuan Chau Port, across to the northern tip of Cat Ba Island - BEN PHA GIA LUAN. **Click the following link for directions from Tuan Chau Port to Cat Ba Island:**



Cat Ba Sightseeing: In hindsight, you need to spend a few days on Cat Ba for a full sightseeing experience (which would also include touring Lan Ha Bay). A one day tour, although very interesting, doesn't do it justice. If you're doing a guided tour a local guide will be there to accompany you, on arrival at Cat Ba, for the day's excursion.

Extended tours: Tour companies in Hanoi, such as VIT Travel, also offer overnight treks around the island which include visits to local minority tribes, hikes to viewpoints, and local home-stays. **Click the following link for guided tour options to Cat Ba Island:**



Main attractions: The primary sightseeing attractions on Cat Ba are: DIN NGU LAM PEAK, TRUNG TRANG CAVE, and HOSPITAL CAVE.

Note: If you're a one day tour from Halong City, these three locations are (realistically) all you'll have time for. Additionally, an organised one day tour also includes transportation to all the sightseeing locations and lunch. **Click the following link to see a short highlights video of the three above-mentioned locations:**



Cat Ba Island terrain

CAT BA ISLAND - DIN NGU LAM PEAK

Dinh Ngu Lam: This is a bucket list stop for most visitors to the island and takes approximately one hour to ascend to the lookout on the peak. The peak is within the area designated of CAT BA NATIONAL PARK, which also includes TRUNG TRANG CAVE. The entry point is the small road marked as Cat Ba National Park, on Google Maps. If you're on a motorbike, you can park near the office and walk the short distance to the head of the trail. This is where you pay the entry fee of 80k VND (this also includes admittance into Trung Trang Cave). **Click the following link for the location of CAT BA National Park:**



The trail to the top: Being a popular attraction, the trail to the lookout on Dinh Ngu Lam has been properly developed for safe hiking experience. There are stairways and handrails in place on the steeper sections. The trail runs through some heavy jungle and as such, there's plenty of shade for the hike. There's also a couple of locations where the trail deviates off to sightseeing attractions en-route. **Note:** if it's been raining, or it's damp, the trail, although developed, is slippery under foot. Wearing solid footwear, and not flip flops, is well advised.



Trail to the top

At the top: Once you arrive at the main peak, there's a cement lookout tower, with a roof, to rest and recover after the near vertical ascent up the final twenty meters. For most people, this is as far as they go and, as such, the place tends to get a bit crowded.

A better view: For anyone wanting a better view, there's a second lookout, approximately fifty meters above this first one. The trail continues on, from the rear of the lookout platform and takes an additional fifteen minutes to complete. Understandably, there are significantly fewer people at this top most lookout. The views from here are even better.



Dinh Ngu Lam Peak lookout

CAT BA ISLAND - TRUNG TRANG CAVE

Trung Trang cave: This is another bucket list stop on a tour of Cat Ba Island and, to be honest, after visiting the caves in Halong Bay, it wasn't too remarkable. The cave entrance is located approximately one km south of the Cat Ba National Park entrance. **Note:** The entry fee for the hike to Din Ngu Lam Peak also includes admittance to Trung Trang Cave. **Click the following link for the location of Trung Trang Cave:**



On-site: Just beyond the entry gate, and before you start the ascent to the cave entrance, there's a restaurant and restroom area. If you want to have some lunch, or enjoy a cold drink, this is a good place to do it before starting the cave tour.

Ascent: Like all the other cave sites, this one has also been developed for a safe sightseeing experience. There's a solid stairway, with handrails, up to the cave entrance. The distance from the restaurant area to the cave entrance is approximately two hundred meters.

Doing the cave tour: It takes approximately twenty to thirty minutes to go through the cave. There's a cement trail, and internal lighting, in place for a safe sightseeing experience.



A narrow tunnel

This cave has very few formations and is more like a narrow tunnel. There is quite a few low hanging sections where sightseers will need to crouch down to pass through. For anyone who enjoys cave tours, there's also a couple of locations where bats can be seen hanging from the ceiling.

War history: According to local information sources, this cave was used as a shelter, from bombing raids, for local military personnel during the war years. **Note:** If you use a guide for a tour through this cave, they will point out the locations of previous human occupation.



A water supply used for human habitation

CAT BA ISLAND - HOSPITAL CAVE

About: Hospital Cave is a relic of Cat Ba's war time history. Known locally as HANG QUAN Y, it is located approximately 3.3 km south of Trung Trang Cave. The parking area and ticket office for the site is right next to the road. For anyone touring independently, the entrance fee is 50k VND. From the parking area, there's a short stairway up to the cave entrance. **Click the following link for the location of Hospital Cave:**



On-site: More a bunker than a cave, the internal areas are completely concreted indicating the site was used as a safe haven for wounded military personnel, during the war years. Its construction is definitely a bomb proof bunker. There's a triple door entrance, with heavy steel doors, to access the internal room areas.

Doing the tour: From the entrance, there's a main corridor with rooms branching off it. Within these rooms, mannequins are in place to give a feel for the historical aspect. There's also an upper level where the cave ceiling can be seen. An emergency exit (escape point) leads from this upper area but is closed to tourists. A tour through the hospital cave will take approximately 30 - 40 minutes.



The main corridor



Main entrance



One of the hospital rooms

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