

VIETNAM

Sapa



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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

Sapa - Vietnam

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

How To Use This Interactive Travel Guide

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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



SAPA - GENERAL INFORMATION

About: The popular tourist town of SAPA is located in the far Northwest corner of Vietnam has what is generally considered some of the most spectacular scenery of the country. Located in Lao Cai Province, the entire area is filled with rugged mountain ranges, impressive waterfalls, and a good number of large volume caves. The town has a well developed infrastructure catering to the needs of the many tourists visiting. It is built around a central lake and has a wide selection of accommodation, restaurants, cafes, and bars to choose from. There's also plenty of tour and travel agents around the town, offering trekking and sightseeing tours to the many attractions in the area. The most popular activities are trekking through the mountain range to the west of the city, and hiking tours through the rice terraces to the south. MOUNT FANSIPAN, the highest peak in Indochina, overlooks the city. For sightseers wanting a less arduous way to the summit, there's a cable car service providing spectacular rides to the top of this 3140-meter peak.

Getting there: The starting point for any trip to Sapa, or the North of Vietnam, will be HANOI. This is the capital of Vietnam and there's plenty of choices available for getting to Sapa. The most direct method is on a bus but there's also a train service which goes to LAO CAI CITY.

Note: Sapa is located approx. 30 km from Lao Cai. If you take the train, you'll need to make an additional bus, or taxi, ride from Lao Cai to Sapa. **Click the following link for transport options:**



Guided tours from Hanoi: These can be arranged from Hanoi if you don't want to DIY. Most of the tour companies are located around the "Old Quarter" and offer tours to most of the best sightseeing locations in the North. MR. LINH'S ADVENTURES is an excellent tour company which offers group and private tours. **Click the following link for further information:**



Sapa and Mt. Fansipan

SAPA - GENERAL INFORMATION

From Noi Bai airport to Sapa: For those who want to avoid the traffic jams of Hanoi, there's a sleeper bus service which runs from TERMINAL 2 directly to Sapa. **Click the following link for booking info:**

NOI BAI TO SAPA BUS

Sapa Accommodation: There are hundreds of accommodation options available, in and around Sapa, to suit everyone's budget range. An excellent choice is the SAPA VILLAGE HOTEL. **Click the following link for booking inquiries:**



Food and Coffee: The LE GECKO RESTAURANT and CAFE chain, serves excellent western food (French) and great coffees. Their main outlet is at the western end of the lake, but there's also another just 200 meters down the road from the Sapa Village Hotel. **Click the following link for directions:**



Getting around: If you're planning to go DIY for your sightseeing trips, then the best option is to rent a motorbike. These can be rented from most guesthouses or travel agents around Sapa. **Note:** If you're inexperienced on a motorbike, ride with due care as most of the roads are around mountainous terrain.

DIY versus Guided Tours: If you're confident riding a motorbike, DIY isn't a problem for single day tours. Trips to locations such as HEAVEN'S GATE and LOVE WATERFALL relatively easy due to the fact there's a sealed road all the way to the parking areas, and a short hike/walk to the sightseeing attraction. If you're considering doing something which involves a long trek into a more remote area (such as the MUANG HOA VALLEY) doing a guided tour is recommended. Guided tours are easily booked at most at most travel and tour agents around Sapa.

Cat Cat Village: This is the nearest Hmong Village and rice terraces area to Sapa. As such, it tends to get the highest volume of sightseers. If you're short on time then this is an option, however it's the least authentic village experience due to the numbers of tourists going there. **Click the following link for directions to Cat Cat Village:**



The best coffee in town

SAPA SIGHTSEEING - GENERAL INFORMATION

Sapa Sightseeing: The primary sightseeing activity around the Sapa area is hiking/trekking. Most of these tours are either single day or overnight trips. An overnight trip will be an extended trekking tour which can cover 15 - 20 km. The accommodation for an overnight trip is normally in local home-stays in a Hmong village environment.

Mount Fansipan Hike: The longest and most difficult overnight trip is the ascent to the peak of MOUNT FANSIPAN. If you're considering doing this, it's advisable to have a good level of fitness as most of the hike is uphill. There is a developed trail all the way to the top. At an unrushed pace, the 11.2 km distance can be covered comfortably on an overnight trek. Towards the summit, and just before the final steep section, there's a wooden shelter where hikers can get a few hours sleep before making the final ascent. Most people doing the ascent will come down on the cable car.

Note 1: The weather can be cold overnight at the top of the mountain, so having warm clothing is highly recommended for the overnight stay.

Note 2: The hike up Mount Fansipan cannot be done solo. All hikers are required to go with a local guide. These are provided by the tour companies, when you pay for the trip.



A typical Sapa tour guide

SAPA SIGHTSEEING - LOVE WATERFALL TOUR

Love Waterfall Tour: This is a nice half day tour which takes in HEAVEN'S GATE, LOVE WATERFALL, and SILVER FALLS. If you have a motor bike, you can reach all these locations without any problems. The road is sealed all the way to the parking areas, of each. The Heaven's Gate site is the farthest from Sapa (approx. 14 km) so the normal schedule is to start there first and then work back. **Click the following link for directions from Sapa to Heavens Gate:**



Love Waterfall: This is normally the second stop on the tour and the pick of the three locations. The waterfall is located approximately 1 km from the parking lot. A developed trail takes you through a picturesque landscape of forested peaks and farmland. The final section of the trail follows the stream all the way to the base of the waterfall. The waterfall isn't big, compared to Silver Falls, but it's a very scenic location and worth the effort of getting there. **Click the following link for directions from Sapa to Love Waterfall car park:**



Silver Falls: This is the final stop on the half-day tour and is just a short hike from the road. You can park your bike along the roadside and then make the ascent up the developed trail to the three levels of the waterfall. If it's the right time of the year, and there's a good flow, this waterfall is visually impressive. At the bottom of level three there's bridge across the canyon which allows a nice view up the falls. **Click the following link for directions from Sapa to Silver Waterfall:**



LOVE WATERFALL TOUR - PHOTOS



SAPA SIGHTSEEING - MUANG HOA VALLEY TOUR

The Muang Hoa Valley: This area is located approximately 7 km south of Sapa City and is a good choice for those wanting to do an easy hike through the rice terraces. Note: To see the rice terraces prior to harvest, the last week of August is the best time. If you go any later than the second week into September, all you see is stubble. The last area where the rice is harvested is normally up towards CAT CAT VILLAGE.

Trekking: For single day tours, it's easy enough to DIY if you have a motorbike. From Sapa, take route # TL 152 until you arrive at the location indicated on Google Maps. This road runs along the Eastern side of the valley and provides exceptional views as you ride south from Sapa. There are several trails which branch off route # TL 152 and drop down into the valley. Find a safe place to park your motorbike (a café or restaurant) and go for a hike through the valley. If you plan on doing an extended hike, or an overnight trip, it's best to hire a local guide who knows the area. **Click the following link for directions from Sapa to Muang Hoa Valley:**



MUANG HOA VALLEY PHOTOS



Rice Harvest

© Mark Jones



Hmong Lady

© Mark Jones

SAPA SIGHTSEEING - TA PHIN CAVE TOUR

Ta Phin Cave: This sightseeing attraction is located approximately 11 km North of Sapa Township. If you have a motorbike, getting there isn't a problem, as the roads are paved all the way to the cave entrance. As far as caves go this one is rather underwhelming, compared to a place like Phong-Nha. The tour companies offer half-day guided outings but, to be honest, the US 50-dollar fee per person isn't worth it. If you're interested in seeing this cave, just ride out there on your motorbike and hire one of the local Hmong guides who are normally gathered around the cave entrance. **Note:** If you pay for a guided tour from Sapa, you'll still have to use a local guide anyway. And they normally want a tip from the tourists. **Click the following link for directions from Sapa to Ta Phin Cave:**



The cave tour: Once you arrive at the cave entrance, a local guide will offer to guide you through. If you're going DIY, the normal fee is about 40k VND (approx. US 2) per person. If you're on a paid tour from Sapa, the guide will make the arrangements. You'll also need a flashlight to go through the cave as there's no lighting inside.



If you don't have your own headlamp, you can rent one from the Hmong guides for 20k VND. The full traverse of the cave is approximately 1.5 km and it's quite narrow in some places. In other words, you'll need to get down on your hands and knees to crawl through some tight spots. For this reason, wearing trousers is highly recommended. The Cave is relatively young as far as caves go, and there are no calcium formations anywhere to be seen. It's basically a rock tunnel. The tour will take approximately one hour to complete.



TA PHIN CAVE - PHOTOS



SAPA SIGHTSEEING - MOUNT FANSIPAN

Mount Fansipan: At 3143 mtrs at the summit, MOUNT FANSIPAN is recognised as the highest mountain in the Indochina Region. For anyone interested in getting to the summit, there are two options: 1. An overnight hike. 2. Take the cable car.

Doing the hike: If you are keen on doing the hike to the summit, there's a couple of things to consider prior to handing over your cash. The distance is from Love Waterfall car park to the summit is 11.2 km. This is an arduous hike, and a good standard of fitness is required. Additionally, it's quite cold overnight so warm clothing is highly advisable. If you don't have the energy levels required for the hike, no problems, take the cable car. **Note:** A hike to the summit must be done with a local guide.

The Cable Car: This 7 km ride to the summit of Fansipan is a fantastic experience. Although it's a mass tourism set-up, the views during the 25-minute ascent are brilliant. **Note:** For anyone interested in going there, a couple of things to keep in mind. 1. Try to do it on a weekday as it's less crowded. The locals generally go on the weekend. 2. Go early, to beat the weather and the crowds. The mornings are generally clearer than the afternoons, due to heat and humidity build-up. **Price:** The entry fee (for the ride) is 600k VND (approx. 25 USD). **Click the following link for directions from Sapa to the cable car departure terminal:**

At the summit: The summit has an amazing structural development and in good weather it's visually impressive. If it's fogged in, you don't see much. The primary features are a massive, seated Buddha statue and a large Pagoda, among other things. Additionally, the cable car terminal isn't the very top of the summit. To get to the highest point you have the option of ascending 800 steps or, if you want to make life easy for yourself, there's a train. A good option is to take the train up, then descend down the stairway. The train fare is 150k VND. At the very top there's a broad viewing platform which enables visitors to get panoramic views of the surrounding landscape.

Note: Every day at 10:15 am there's a flag raising ceremony, at the summit, to mark the highest point in Indochina. This is a bit of a sombre affair. While the national anthem plays, uniformed staff march up the steps of a podium and attach the Vietnamese flag to a flagpole. With the music still blaring away, the flag is then run up the mast. **Click the following link to see a video of the cable car ride up Mt. Fansipan, and the flag raising ceremony:**



At the summit of Mt. Fansipan

MOUNT FANSIPAN - PHOTOS



YEN BAI PROVINCE - GENERAL INFORMATION

About: YEN BAI PROVINCE is located approximately 200 km to the Northwest of Hanoi. A visitation to Yen Bai is a diversion from the main route (CT05) to Sapa. The primary attraction of Yen Bai Province are the rice terraces around the MU CANG CHAI District. **Note:** the best month for viewing the rice terraces is September. The rice harvest begins in early October.

Getting there: As mentioned, a tour through Yen Bai Province is a diversion from the main route to Sapa. From Yen Bai City you need to veer west onto route QL 32, and head Northwest towards Lai Chau Province. If you have your own transportation (DIY) this is easy enough to do. Just follow the Google Maps route. There may be public buses running doing this route but, without your own transportation, the best option for visiting this area is to get on a guided tour from Hanoi. In this regard, MR. LINH'S ADVENTURES is an excellent tour company (located in Hanoi) for getting off the beaten track. **Click the following link for directions from Hanoi to Yen Bai Province.**



The following is an account of my trip through Yen Bai Province with Mr. Linh's Adventures.



Northern Vietnam Tour: The original plan was to go directly to Sapa on day one. I was keen to get the drone into action for some aerial shots of the rice terraces in a mountainous area a few km south of Sapa. Unfortunately, my two-week delay in arriving in Vietnam, meant the rice in that area had already been harvested. My guide suggested going to an alternate location, MU CANG CHAI, where the rice terraces were still a few days away from harvesting (this was on the way to Sapa). He suggested overnighting at TU LE and doing a tour of the rice terraces the following morning. On the day one there were a couple of interesting places to visit before reaching our overnight stop in Tu Le.



Mu Cang Chai rice terraces

SIGHTSEEING - TU LE

The Marble Factory: This is a bit of a novelty place to stop along route QL 32. The area is known for its marble geology and as such a local factory has been cutting and polishing large chunks of marble for many years. The display is extensive, and impressive. Apparently, everything in the display area is for sale. Even the tables and chairs built from huge slabs of marble. The location isn't shown on Google Maps unfortunately. For anyone whose interested the factory is right next to the road, on route QL 32, near NHGIO LAO Township.

Tu Le: This was the final stop for day one of the tour, and where we'd overnight. TULE Township is in a beautifully scenic area, surrounded by mountain ranges. We booked ourselves into a local hotel and then went to a café, directly across the road, which had an outdoor balcony with a fantastic view across the valley. The valley was filled with rice fields which were yet to be harvested. After our coffee break my guide suggested a late afternoon walk down around the villages in the valley. The scenery was impressive, and it was my first opportunity to put up the new drone. A highlight was checking out some of the rice milling techniques of the local villages.



Marble furniture



Marble melons



Tu Le farm lands

TU LE - PHOTOS



Tu Le over view



Tu Le rice fields

SIGHTSEEING - MU CANG CHAI

The rice terraces of Mu Cang Chai: This is a very popular sightseeing attraction in Yen Bai Province. Unfortunately, if you don't get there before the end of September, the only things you're going to see is terraces of stubble. The site is easy to access and there's a parking area right next to the road on route QL 32. If you're on an organised tour, as I was, the guide will take care of the entry fee requirement. The distance from the parking area to the viewing area is 1.2 km, and all uphill. If you're not up to the hike, local motorbike taxi operators, offer rides to the top for around US 2.00. I did the hike option as I wanted to be able to make the most of photo opportunities on the way up. I also had the drone with me and was looking forward to getting it into the air.

The viewing area: The site is well set up for sightseeing. There's a cement pathway all the way up to the rice tray viewing area. Once up there, there's a couple of broad viewing platforms to ensure, even on a busy day, everyone's got some elbow space. There's also a restroom and a small cafeteria to keep things comfortable. In late September the panorama from the viewing area was quite spectacular. The rice trays were predominantly bright green and, in some areas, beginning to yellow. According to my guide, the harvest was only a few days away.



Rice terraces



Rice terraces



Hmong guides at the rice terraces

MU CANG CHAI - PHOTOS



Mu Cang Chai rice terraces



Mu Cang Chai rice terraces

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