

VIETNAM

PHONG-NHA NATIONAL PARK



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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

PHONG-NHA NATIONAL PARK

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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



PHONG-NHA NATIONAL PARK - GENERAL INFO

About: Located approximately 525 km south of Hanoi, this is an off the beaten track destination which most travelers to Vietnam tend to miss. Possibly due to the nearest airport being 36 km away and the fact the primary reason for going is the caving and trekking activities. Phong-Nha National Park has something in the vicinity of 300 - 400 caves throughout it's vast spread of jungle covered, karst terrain. Of this approximately 40 have been developed for tourism.

Adventure Activities: There are several well established companies in Phong-Nha offering a range of caving and trekking activities. All tours are guided and there's no option of DIY tours, aside from show cave sightseeing. **Click the following link for the location Phong Nha:**



Getting there: The fastest way is to take a domestic flight (Vietnam Airlines or Vietjet) from either Ho Chi Minh City or Hanoi, to the nearby airport at Dong Hoi. The distance from Dong Hoi Airport to Phong Nha Township is 36 km. There are plenty of local taxi's on standby at the arrivals exit area. For those who are on a budget, there are plenty of overnight buses running from most provincial cities to Phong-Nha.

Click the following link for transportation options from Hanoi:



Click the following link for transportation options from Ho Chi Minh City:



Click the following link for transportation options from Da Nang:



PHONG-NHA NATIONAL PARK - GENERAL INFO

Accommodation: There's plenty of guesthouse and homestay options available along the riverfront of Phong-Nha. Most are in the 2 - 3 star level and prices are very reasonable. A search on a Agoda will give you plenty of options. A good choice, if you want resort standard accommodation with a pool, is the DOAN GIA RESORT. **Note:** This is also the base for the local adventure company, DOAN GIA EXPEDITIONS. **Click the following link for booking inquiries:**



Where to eat and drink: There are plenty of restaurants and cafe's to choose from in Phong-Nha. However, there are a few which tend to be more popular, simply because the food and service is better.

- **Bamboo Chopsticks:** Best for dinner and has Huda beer on tap.
- **Green Point Cafe & Restaurant:** Best for breakfast. Excellent omelette's and avocado shakes.

Budget Accommodation: A excellent option for inexpensive accommodation is the NAM ANH HOTEL/HOSTEL. The property has dorms and private rooms available at very reasonable rates. An additional advantage of staying here is they have an excellent tour desk staffed by a lady named LINDA, who speaks good English. She can arrange adventure tours, book onward bus tickets, and arrange motorbike rentals for you. **Click the following link for inquiries:**



- **Tree House Cafe & Restaurant:** A good alternative for dinner if Bamboo Chopsticks is full.
- **Everest Food & Beverage:** Outdoor setting with great coffee. Good, first thing in the morning before it gets too hot.
- **Phong-Nha Coffee Station:** Great for a mid-afternoon coffee and a snack.
- **Riverside Cafe:** Near the Phong-Nha Cave boat station. Great coffee and river views.



PHONG-NHA NATIONAL PARK - GENERAL INFO

Getting around: The only real option for DIY transportation is to rent a motorbike. Most rentals are the scooter type in the 100 - 125 CC range. To avoid any problems with communication and pricing, I recommend renting a motorbike at the NAM ANH HOTEL/HOSTEL. Linda, the owner/manager, speaks good English. **Click the following link for the location of the Nam Anh Hotel:**



Caving and trekking Tours: There are basically two options available for these activities. The first, and easiest, is the mainstream tours to the show cave sites. Tours to these show cave sites don't involve any lengthy jungle treks. These types of tours are set up for mass tourism and normally allow large groups to visit caves which have developed pathways and internal lighting. Trips to these sites can include boat travel and activities such as zip-lining and swimming.

Adventure Tours: The second option is the adventure caving tours. These tours normally involve a substantial amount of jungle trekking to dark caves. There are several adventure companies in Phong-Nha offering single and multi-day tours. All tours are guided and the multi-day tours include food and camping equipment.



Click on the following links for further information about ADVENTURE TOURS in Phong-Nha:

DOAN GIA EXPEDITIONS

GREENLAND ADVENTURES

JUNGLE BOSS

OXALIS



THE SHOW CAVES - GENERAL INFO

The Show Caves: The primary two show cave sites are PARADISE CAVE and PHONG-NHA CAVE. These are fully set-up for mainstream tourism, with internal walkways and illumination throughout. Getting to these sites doesn't involve any lengthy treks through the jungle. Getting to Phong-Nha Cave involves a 5 km ride up the Con River. Tickets for this cave tour can be bought at the kiosk at boat departure area. Note: You can also pay a bit extra and visit TIEN SON CAVE, which is to the right of the entrance to Phong-Nha Cave. A tour to this cave site normally takes about 2 - 3 hours. **Click on the following link for the location of the ticket kiosk:**



Doing the Double: The two most popular cave tours, departing from the NATIONAL PARK HQ (aka the Cultural & Ecological Tourist Center) are the trips to PHONG-NHA and TIEN SON Caves. Both cave sites are well set up for sightseeing with cement walkways, providing safe access, and illumination of the beautiful formations within. Travel to both sites is by way of a tour boat along the Con River. The boats will safely accommodate 8 - 10 passengers.



Cave tour boat

Prices: As of April 2025, the boat hire is 500,000 VND and 150,000 VND (USD 6 approx.) for entry into Phong-Nha cave. **Note:** To visit Tien Son Cave, you'll need to pay an additional 80,000 VND.

Recommendation: Tien Son cave and Phong Nha Cave are situated next to each other so if you are hiring a boat to see one, I would recommend paying the extra entry fee and do both caves. The journey to both is exactly the same and although Tien Son Cave is roughly two hundred meters up a cliff face, the staging point for access to both caves is at the end of the same river.



Phong-Nha Cave Entrance

SHOW CAVES - PHONG-NHA CAVE

Phong-Nha Cave: The boat ride along the Con River is a leisurely, relaxed cruise and it takes roughly thirty minutes to get from the park headquarters to the cave entrance. Once the boat arrives at the cave entrance the crew switch off the engine and paddle the vessel one kilometer into Phong Nha Cave. The impressive formations within, illuminated up by the well placed lighting, provide ample photo opportunities.

The return: After reaching the furthest extent of the penetration the vessel is turned about. Approximately halfway back to the exit, sightseers are dropped off at a landing. Visitors are then able to walk back to the exit point, along a boarded pathway, and view more of the impressive cave formations.

Phong-Nha Cave Kayak Tour: This adventure tour is a combination of kayaking and caving, into areas of Phong-Nha Cave well beyond where the mainstream tourists will go. It is a one day tour which allows keen adventurers to paddle their kayaks 2.5 km into Phong-Nha Cave and then hike for a further 1.5 km into the dark zone.

Off the beaten track: This is a true adventure tour for those wanting to get off the beaten track of mainstream tourism and experience the amazing dark zone of Phong-Nha Cave.



Entering the cave

Underground Pool: The tour includes experienced guides and lunch. The highlight is going for a swim in the big underground pool, at the farthest point of the traverse. **Note:** This tour cannot be done as part of the mainstream tour to Phong-Nha Cave. **Click the following link to see a highlights video:**



Kayaking Tour Contact: Phong Nha Caves Tour Center. **Email:** toursphongnha@gmail.com
Tel: +84 938901988



Phong-Nha Cave Formations

SHOW CAVES - TIEN SON CAVE

Tien Son Cave: After exiting Phong-Nha Cave the stairway up to Tien Son Cave is on the right. The round trip to Tien Son Cave, allowing for rest stops and photography, should take about one hour. There is a developed stairway up to the cave entrance. The two hundred meter ascent can be challenging in the midday heat. Make sure to buy drinking water from the vendors before you begin the ascent, as there is none available up at the top. In the cooler part of the year (Dec - Feb) the climb up is quite invigorating in the freshness of the morning. When it gets hotter, later in the year, it's guaranteed you will sweat by the time you reach the cave entrance.

At The Top: Be assured though the hike up is well worth it as the formations inside the cave are beautifully lit up. Depending on the time of year there may, or may not be, guides available for visitors. If there isn't it's not really an issue as the trail through the cave is easy enough to follow with a solid, cement walkway, with safety rails, providing access five hundred meters into the cave. For those wanting get in plenty of photo opportunities there are a number of large viewing platforms, along the walkway, at regular intervals to be able rest, admire the formations, and work your cameras.



The view on the trail



Cave entrance area



Inside Tien Son Cave

THE PHONG-NHA LOOP - ROUTE QL 15

The Phong-Nha Loop: This is a short road trip, which starts and ends in Phong-Nha, which takes in several sightseeing attractions within the National Park. The total distance is 50 km and the best way of doing it is on a rented motorbike. **Click on the following link for directions:**



Loop Direction: The best way to do this loop is to go in a counterclockwise direction. This way you can make the Botanical Gardens the last stop before heading back to Phong-Nha Township. Take Route QL 16 north from Phong-Nha then use a short cut to cross onto QL 15. This route will take you directly to PARADISE CAVE. On the way there's a couple of other attractions which you can visit independently.

Dark Cave: This is an adventure activity center which offers zip-lining, swimming, kayaking, and a trip into a DARK CAVE. The highlight feature of the Dark Cave is a mud bath. **Note:** The maximum weight allowable on the zip-line is 90 kg. There's also a minimum requirement of two paying customers for a visit to the Dark Cave. **Click the following link for the location of Dark Cave:**



Muoc Springs: This location is a couple of km further along from the Dark Cave. This is normally a place where large groups of locals go to enjoy swimming and kayaking activities. There is a nature trail through the surrounding rain forest which also includes waterfall viewing locations. **Note:** Muoc Springs isn't really considered to be an adventure activities site. It's more of a mainstream tourism site for large groups of locals.

Chay Bridge: This is a nice spot, on the way to Paradise Cave, to take a break from the ride and enjoy the surrounding landscape. **Note:** For the best view, pull over at a small parking area on the northern side of the bridge (before you cross it).



THE PHONG-NHA LOOP - PARADISE CAVE

About: This excellent show cave site is approximately 22 km from Phong-Nha Township and can be easily reached by car or motorbike. Most sight-seers will make their own way there but if you're not keen on a motorbike ride through mountainous terrain, you can book an organised tour at the NAM ANH HOTEL travel desk. A guided tour to Paradise Cave is normally a half day outing. **Click the following link for the location of Paradise Cave:**



Getting there: If you travel there independently from Phong-Nha, go by routes QL 16 & QL 15 on the northern side of the river. The ride is shorter, and less mountainous than the southern route. There's a turn off to the cave site, which is well indicated, on the right. **Note:** Organised tours can be booked through the NAM ANH HOTEL.

On-site: Once you arrive on-site, there's a secure parking area where you must pay 20,000 VND to park your motorbike. After that you'll need to go to the ticket office to pay for entry. As of April 2025, the entry price is 265,000 VND (\$12). **Note:** This includes the charge for the buggy ride (and return) to the base of the cliff.



The Elephant Formation



Inside Paradise Cave

SHOW CAVES - PARADISE CAVE

Getting to the cave entrance: From the entry check point there's a paved one kilometer track to the base of the cliff. For those who don't feel like walking, golf buggies will transport you to the bottom of the stairway.

Ascent options: At the base of the cliff there's a sign post giving you two options of ascending to the cave entrance above. For those feeling energetic there's the shorter 524 steps option. For those wanting to make a longer, more gradual climb there's the 570 meters of pathway option.

Doing the cave tour: At the top of the stairway (or pathway), and right in front of the cave entrance, there's a covered rest stop/cafe with seating. Take a few minutes to get your breath back before entering the cave, as there's 275 steps down to the cave floor once you enter.

A spectacular cave site: The small entrance gives no indication of the sheer volume of the chambers inside. It is simply quite stunning and one of the most spectacular cave sites in the area. The locals have done a fantastic job of setting things up for sightseeing, without being overly intrusive on the delicate cave environment. The 275 steps inside descend down a series of landings to the cave floor where a boarded walkway, with safety rails, penetrates one kilometer into the cave system.



At the entrance

The Paradise Cave 7 km Adventure: For anyone wanting something a bit more challenging than the developed 1 km section of Paradise Cave, there's the 7 km adventure into the dark zone. This exciting tour is a full day's outing (8 hours) which includes experienced caving guides, helmets and lights, and lunch. This tour can be booked through the NAM ANH HOTEL in Phong-Nha Township. **Click the following link to see a highlights video:**



The walkway through the cave

THE PHONG-NHA LOOP - ROUTE QL 15

Historical Bridge: From Paradise Cave, continue south on route QL 15 until you reach the crossroads of Route QL 15 and DT 20. There is a bridge here which marks an important point on the old Ho Chi Minh Trail, which starts at KHE GAT. This is a great place to stop for a short break if you're riding back to Phong-Nha, on Route DT 20. This location is also just a short distance from the Eight Ladies Cave. **Note:** Route QL 15 is a popular ride for motorbike enthusiasts doing the HO CHI MINH TRAIL. They start their ride in KHE SANH and continue north on route QL 15. **Click the following link for the location:**



Eight Ladies Cave: This memorial site is on Route DT562 and just 2.5 km from the crossroads bridge. It is a Pagoda and a commemoration site for eight local ladies who died in the cave, during the second Indo-China war. The site is quiet and serene and is worth a few minutes of contemplation of the tragic events which occurred here some sixty years previously. According to on-line information sources, eight local ladies were trapped in the cave after a US Forces bombing raid. A bomb blast pushed a large rock over the cave entrance, and the eight ladies weren't able to free themselves.



Eight Ladies Cave

Despite the best efforts of a rescue party, the ladies eventually died from a lack of food and water. **Click the following link for the location:**



Heading Back: Return to the crossroads and then go straight onto route DT20. From the crossroads it's just a few km to the final stop, the BOTANICAL GARDENS. **Click the following link:**



The Cross Roads Bridge

THE PHONG-NHA LOOP - THE BOTANICAL GARDENS

About: This place is promoted as a Botanical Garden, but it isn't. What's here is a tropical forest covering a karst landscape, with hiking trails and some nice sightseeing attractions. The entry fee is 45,000 VND. This allows you to do the YELLOW TRAIL.

On-site: There's a map in the entrance area, which provides detail of the route. Most visitors just go to GIO WATERFALL, which is only 400 meters from the ticket office. Note: The longer BLACK TRAIL, indicated on the area map, is a guided tour only. The black trail is much longer, is more difficult, and also includes a cave site. The price of the black trail is 1.4 million VND per person. Bookings for this tour must be made in advance.

The Yellow Trail: I highly recommend going in the opposite direction (counterclockwise) to the information map. The reason being is that you will end the hike at the SWIMMING HOLE and be able to go for cooling swim. If you go in the direction (clockwise) shown on the map you'll walk past the swimming hole at the beginning of the hike. **Note:** the best time of the year to visit is April - June, when there's still water flowing.

Doing the hike: The majority of people visiting the Botanical Gardens, tend to just visit the waterfall. This is understandable as it's only 400 meters from the ticket office.



As mentioned, if you plan on doing the full yellow trail, go to the waterfall first. From the waterfall, you'll then make the ascent up the most difficult part of the trail, to the viewpoint. After this it's mostly downhill until you arrive at the swimming hole.



ADVENTURE CAVING - DOAN GIA EXPEDITIONS

Oro Cave Challenge: This is an excellent two day/one night caving expedition which is run by the DOAN GIA EXPEDITIONS, from the Doan Gia Resort. For anyone who's up for a challenge, this tour certainly has it.

Day One: There's a few km of easy jungle trekking on the first day before arriving at the highlight of the adventure, a tough 3 km wade/swim through a river tunnel. If you're claustrophobic, it might be better to give this one a miss as this cave has several tight spots where you'll need to squeeze through. Being a river tunnel, eighty per cent of the traverse is spent wading and swimming. The traverse takes approximately three hours and is one of the most challenging cave tours in Phong-Nha.

Campsite: At the completion of the ORO CAVE traverse, one night is spent at a dedicated camp site near the exit point. Doan Gia provide tents, sleeping bags, and mats, with the camping done on raised bamboo platforms to avoid the insects, leeches, and wildlife in the area.

Day Two: On the morning of day two, a short trek is made back to the road where a waiting vehicle will transfer the team to the starting point for the second cave tour. There's then another short hike through the jungle, of approximate-



Hoan My Cave

ly thirty minutes, to the entrance of HOAN MY CAVE (according to the guides, this translates to FLAWLESS CAVE). This cave is a stark contrast to Oro Cave. It's a large volume dry cave with lots of impressive formations. The tour through Hoan My Cave will take approximately one hour. In conclusion, this is an excellent overnight tour which offers two excellent caves to explore. **Click the following link for a highlights video:**



Deep inside Oro Cave

ADVENTURE CAVING - GREENLAND ADVENTURES

Ruc Mon Cave Expedition: This is an exciting and challenging caving tour, offered by GREENLAND ADVENTURES. It's a trekking and caving tour which is located deep in the jungles of Phong-Nha National Park. The tour is available as a one day expedition, or an overnight tour which has an extra trekking component on day two. The tour can be booked directly through the Greenland office, in Phong-Nha Township, or through any of the hotel travel desks which promote the tour.

Trekking: This tour starts with an easy walk through plantations to a village, where locally grown tea is available for a short refreshment break. Following the tea break, the team heads to a nearby river and follows it to Ruc Mon Cave entrance. Approximately 100 meters from the entrance, a campsite is set up where the team will take their lunch. The Greenland Guides prepare a nourishing lunch while the team has a one break prior to beginning the cave tour.

The Cave Tour: From the lunch site the team then makes its way to the cave entrance. There's a short section of cave, approximately 100 meters, to wade through (calf deep water) to the camping base. This is a large wooden platform, set approximately twenty meters above the cave river, where those doing the two day tour will camp for the night.



The dry passage

The swim: The team will then change into swimming attire, and don life jackets, for the 600 meter swim/wade through the cave.

The Dry Passage: Once the swimming section is completed, the team heads up to a dry passage which leads back to the camping base. There are several sections in this dry passage where ropes and ladders are in place to enable the team to safely climb up and down. **Click the following link to see a highlights video:**



The start of the swim section

ADVENTURE CAVING - JUNGLE BOSS ADVENTURES

The Tiger Cave Trail: This is an exciting and challenging 3 day/2 night cave tour offered by JUNGLE BOSS ADVENTURES. The tour takes you through three consecutive caves - **Tiger Cave**, **Hangover Cave**, **Pygmy Cave** - for distance of approximately seven km. There's also a substantial amount of jungle trekking - approximately 16 km - which includes a tough hike out on day three. A reasonable level of fitness is recommended to undertake this caving/trekking tour. The tour price includes experienced guides, all meals, camping equipment, caving helmets and lights, and hiking boots (if required). Booking inquiries can be made through JUNGLE BOSS ADVENTURE TOURS.

Day one: This is predominantly jungle trekking for approximately 6 km to the entrance of Tiger Cave. There's a 1.6 km swim/hike through Tiger Cave to reach the entrance of Hangover Cave. The first night's campsite is just inside the entrance of Hangover Cave.

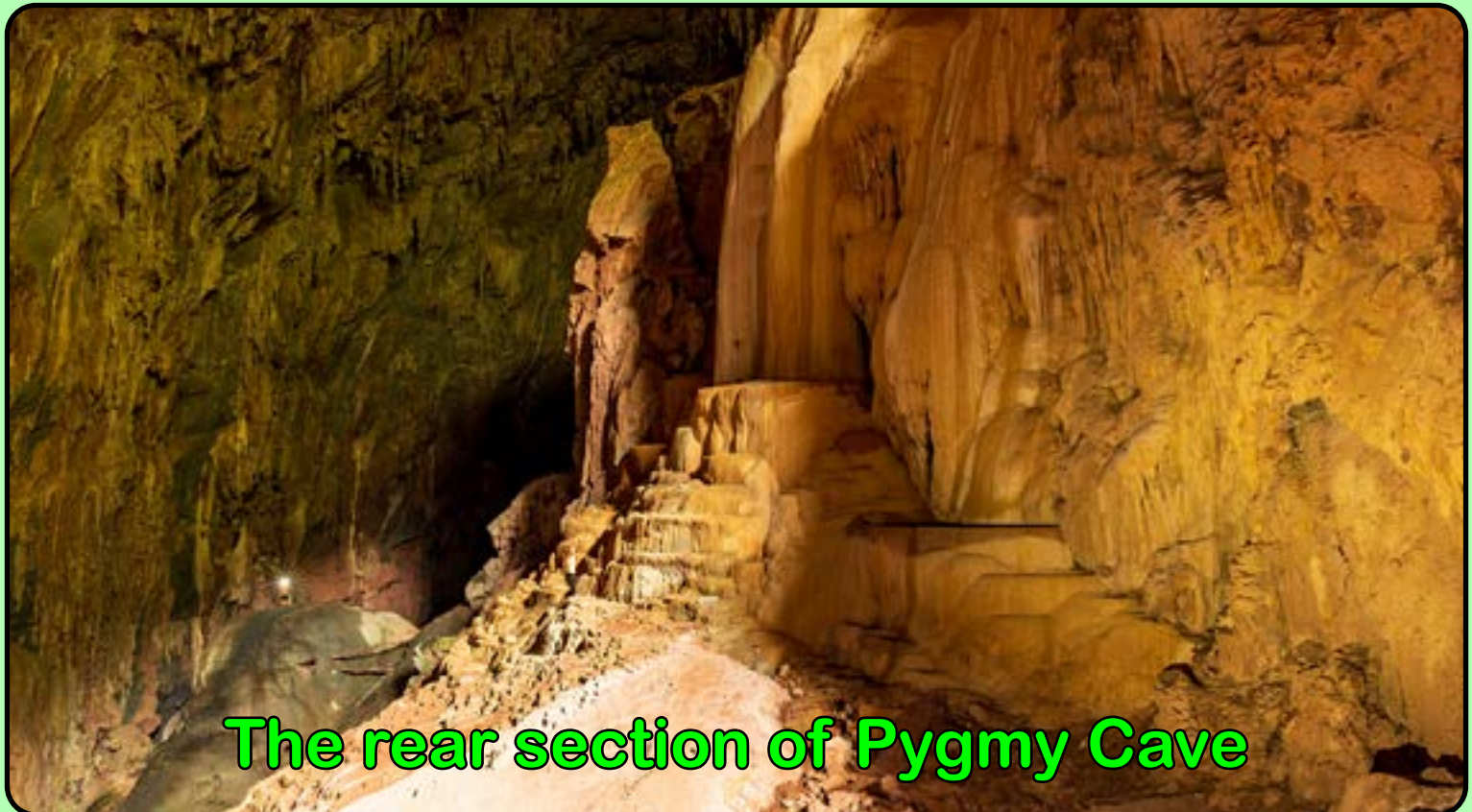
Day two: Following breakfast the tour goes directly through 4 km of Hangover Cave. The traverse takes approximately 2 - 3 hours. You'll exit from the upstream entrance of Hangover Cave and go straight into the rear entrance of Pygmy Cave, currently listed as the world's 4th largest cave.

Abseil: After a 500 meter hike through this back section of Pygmy Cave, you'll then **abseil/**



repel approximately 5 meters down to the front section. **Note:** The only way of getting down at this point is by abseiling/repelling. Following the repel, you'll hike a short distance to the second night's campsite.

Day three: This final day is the most physically challenging, with a tough uphill hike from the campsite to the top of a 300 meter high peak. The track zig-zags up a steep cliff face, before starting an 8 km jungle trek back to the end point. **Click the following link for a highlights video:**



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