

Majestic and mysterious, inspiring and imperious: words alone cannot do justice to the natural wonder that is Ha Long Bay. Imagine 2000 or more incredible islands rising from the emerald waters of the Gulf of Tonkin and you have a vision of breathtaking beauty. The area was designated a World Heritage site in 1994. Many visitors can't help but compare the magical, mystical landscape of limestone islets to Guilin in China and Krabi in southern Thailand, but in reality Halong Bay is more spectacular. These tiny islands are dotted with grottoes created by wind and waves, and have sparsely forested slopes ringing with birdsong.

Beyond the breathtaking vistas on a boat cruise through the bay, visitors to Ha Long come to explore the caves- some of which are illuminated for the benefit of tourists – and to hike in Cat Ba National Park. There are few real beaches in Halong Bay, but Lan Ha Bay has dozens of which lie within a short hop of Cat Ba Town.

Sprawling Halong City is the main gateway to Halong Bay but not the ideal introduction to this incredible site. Most visitors sensibly opt for tours that include sleeping on a boat in the bay, while some travelers with [Vietnam visa](#) are now dodging Halong City completely and heading straight for Cat Ba Town, from where trips to less- visited (but arguably more alluring) Lan Ha Bay are easily set up. For more on tours around Halong bay, see that boxed text. As the number- one tourist attraction in the northeast, Halong Bay draws a steady stream of visitors' year – round. From February to April the weather in this region is often cool and drizzly. The ensuing fog can make visibility low, but this adds an ethereal air to the place and the temperature rarely falls below 10C. During the summer months tropical storms are frequent, and tourist boats may have to alter their itineraries, depending on the weather.

Halong Bay is the stuff of myths and naturally the Vietnamese have concocted one. Halong translates as “where the dragon descends into the sea”. Legend has it that the islands of Halong Bay were created by a great dragon that lived in the mountains. As it charged towards the coast, its flailing tail gouged out valleys and crevasses. When it finally plunged into the sea, the area filled with water, leaving only the pinnacles visible.

What to Do?

Besides the breathtaking vistas, visitors come to Halong Bay for the perfect time spent on the boat to visit floating villages and explore the caves. There also have interesting relaxing activities such as swimming, fishing and kayaking. Also, this trip can be combined with a trip to the largest island of Cat Ba, which offers beaches, hiking in the national park and travelers can book online at

[hotels in Ha Long Bay](#) website. Nearby Ha Long City, Tuan Chau Island is a promising spot for relaxation. This island is being developed into a recreation complex with aquarium, circus, golf and resorts, and is becoming increasingly popular for Vietnamese tourists.

When to go?

It is possible for visits to Ha Long Bay year-round. And winter months (from October to April) are said to be the best time although in months of December, January and February, the weather is often cool, drizzly and overcast with low visibility. During summer months (May to September), tropical storms are frequent and tourist boats may have to alter the itineraries depending on weather condition.

Travel Tips

There is different scale of prices for overnight tours to Ha Long Bay but beware that we just get what you pay for. Price differences are based on the quality of the boat, food, accommodation, transportation, crew as well as other invisible elements. Frequent questions to ask before making a booking are the group size on boat and on car, cabin type (with or without A/C), included and excluded services in the package so that you know what to expect in advance.