

- AIRLINES
- ARTS & CULTURE
- CELEBRITY TRAVELLER
- CHIC CITIES
- CRUISE
- DESTINATIONS

- Natural wonders of the north
- Return of the native
- Instant antiquity
- Into the blue
- Recipe for relaxation
- Santorini. Too naughty to be heaven
- Map your own Greek odyssey
- Japan Lets Loose
- Five Reasons to Visit Taiwan
- New York Neighbourhoods
- Six Reasons to Visit the Big Apple
- Malaysia's Hidden Gems
- Luxury on the Côte
- Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon
- Where the wild things are
- Luxe for Less Vietnam
- Bewitched by Burma
- Bowled over by Barbados
- Shrines in the snow
- Calm Waters
- Chile from top to bottom
- Miami on \$22,000 a day
- APhilippine Paradise
- Fiji's Fantasy Islands
- Celebrity hideaway
- Peru scales new heights
- China's Deep South

HOME > HOLIDAY POSSIBILITIES > DESTINATIONS > NATURAL WONDERS OF THE NORTH >

## NATURAL WONDERS OF THE NORTH



By Gary Allen, Issue 53 Summer 2013 (Ha Long Bay, Vietnam)

STUNNING NATURAL SCENERY AND A RICH CULTURAL MIX IN NORTHERN VIETNAM MAKE IT AN IDEAL DESTINATION FOR EXPLORING EITHER BY BOAT OR ON FOOT WRITES Gary Allen.

Ha Long Bay is possibly the most beautiful destination in Vietnam and no trip to Vietnam is complete without a visit to this amazing World Heritage site. Its name means "Bay of the Descending Dragon" after legendary dragons that are said to have descended from heaven to help the locals by spitting jewels and jade to the sea to form a natural fortress against invaders.

The jade and jewels formed islands that aren't your typical islands... Which may explain why they were the subject of such mythic tales. They're more like limestone stalactites that just rise out of the tranquil emerald coloured water. 1,600 in total, they are large and small. Some have beaches and some are hollow with enormous caves and grottoes that can be explored.

The best way to see this beautiful place is by boat, and I can tell you now that one day is not enough. We chose to voyage with a Ha Long Bay based company called Au Co Cruises which offers a two-night cruise that allows for a much deeper exploration of the three bays including Ha Long Bay, and Cat Ba Island and its National Park.

The Au Co is a luxury ship that sets itself apart from all the other Ha Long Bay cruises in a number of ways. Onboard, each state room has a balcony for just sitting in privacy and quietly enjoying the islands passing by. The rooms are large enough for relaxing in and the bathrooms are small, but the good shower makes up for that. Even though the staterooms are great, really you want to be out and enjoying all the decks, and of course the activities that the ship offers but if you are unfortunate and encounter bad weather, then you know you have a comfortable room to go back to.

I suggest you take part in all the activities that are available if you possibly can. They are all well organised and fun from the kayaking tour to seeing caves and floating villages, biking on an island to a village, a cooking class on the boat and just jumping off and swimming in the bay. The staff on board my cruise were fantastic; always accommodating and helpful with whatever passengers required or desired. The food is absolutely a highlight of the cruise.

Captain Jody, our Australian Captain, made us feel that we were in good hands as he had over a decade of experience in Ha Long Bay, which is nice to know what with the history of terrible storms that can rise up very quickly. Here's a sample itinerary:

### DAY 1

#### Ha Long Bay – Lan Ha Bay

The first day of the cruise is an introduction to the amazing scenery of Ha Long Bay and its southern sister, Lan Ha Bay. The ship passes famous spots such as the Thien Cung and Me Cung caves as well as Soi Sim and Titov islands. Lan Ha Bay, Ba Trai Dao and the Ho Ba Hamlets offer opportunities to explore as part of a guided kayaking tour. Or you can take a swim in the Bay's emerald waters.

### DAY 2

#### Cat Ba Island – Bai Tu Long Bay

This island is famous for its National Park and is far and away the largest in the Gulf of Tonkin. It is covered by a dense rainforest which is home to indigenous species of flora and fauna. The secluded village of Viet Hai is easily accessible in a short walk or cycling trip. Bai Tu Long Bay, a little

SMSF Trustee Empowerment Day

Melbourne | Brisbane | Sydney

Run your own SMSF or interested in doing so?



MORE INFO

Shaken but not stirring

One Perfect Day Monaco

Bali's New High

Boracay Revisited

Hot Spring Ryokan

Gem of the Orient Earth

Treasure Island

Hello Hawaii

The Last Shangri-la

Above And Beyond In Bali

Experience Australian luxury for less

Aesthetic Adventures In Modern Mitteleuropa

Sun & Sand Seychelles

Alaskan Summer Cool

Bali High Life

Suite Life Arizona

A Step Back in Time

Driving Highway 1

Boracay - Playground Of The Rich & Famous

New Luxury on Sabah's Island Paradises

Tango Town

Daydream Islands

Time to Fly: Families, Couples and Friends

ECO

EVENTS

FAMILY

FOOD & WINE

GOLF

HOTELS & RESORTS

LUXURY LIFESTYLE

OUTDOOR & ADVENTURE

RAIL

SAFARI

SHOPPING

SKI

SPA

further east of **Ha Long Bay**, is the most remote area of the voyage. There's an opportunity for a relaxing row boat tour through the floating village of Vung Vieng or a cruise into the area's geological park.

### DAY 3

#### Ha Long Bay

On this day the cruise goes to the heart of Ha Long Bay where there is the highest concentration of limestone rocks in the area and caves and grottoes abound. One of the most beautiful is the Sung Sot (Surprise) Cave, exceptional because of its size and the shapes that have been created by millions of years of erosion.



Fine Vietnamese cuisine and fresh seafood are part of the experience.

### TREKKING IN SAPA

A lush, mountainous region in the far northwest of **Vietnam**, almost on the Chinese border, Sapa has a rich history, vibrant cultural mix and the highest peak in the country. Sapa town was established as a French military outpost in the early 1900s, though many of the original colonial buildings were destroyed during conflicts in the 1940s and 50s. The surrounding mountains are home to colourful hilltribe villages, green rice paddies and local markets, as well as some of the country's most stunning scenery.

Day trips or multi-day treks through the region allow visitors to walk through forests, swim in rivers and dine or spend the night with local Black Hmong and Red Dzao (pictured left) tribespeople. Sapa Sisters Trekking Adventures is run by young Hmong women from a local village who have a great knowledge of local trails and all speak English.

Visit [sapasisters.webs.com](http://sapasisters.webs.com)

### WHERE TO STAY

#### Victoria Sapa Resort & Spa

The best accommodation in the area, the Victoria is a four-star hotel styled as a traditional mountain chalet. There are 77 rooms, each with private terraces, as well as a swimming pool, spa and tennis courts.

Rates: Rooms from VND3,180,000 (about A\$147) per night and suites from VND4,770,000 (about A\$220) per night.

[victoriahotels.asia](http://victoriahotels.asia)



Hotel Sofitel Legend Metropole

### CRUISE & SNOOZE

The Au Co and the Hotel Sofitel Legend Metropole (above) in Hanoi offer a joint package to make the trip to Ha Long Bay easier. Starting from US\$828 (about A\$791), the package includes a limousine transfer to the hotel, two-night stay at the Sofitel Legend Metropole, a half-day Hanoi city tour, a round trip transfer to Ha Long Bay on the Au Co shuttle bus, onshore excursions, kayaking and snorkelling, as well as everything usually included on an Au Co cruise.

### WHERE TO STAY

#### Hotel Sofitel Legend Metropole

The Sofitel Legend Metropole has a rich history, having been a rendezvous point for colonial society. It has accommodated famous guests including Charlie Chaplin, Jane Fonda, Somerset Maugham and Graham Greene as well as a long list of foreign politicians and dignitaries. Opened as The Grand Hotel Metropole Palace in 1901, the 2005 facelift blends the old wing with the new wing.

Rates: Rooms start from A\$238 per night and suites from A\$625 per night.

[sofitel-legend.com](http://sofitel-legend.com)

### InterContinental Westlake

TOURS

WALKING

WITHIN 3 HOURS

InterContinental Westlake is in a beautiful location away from the frantic chaos of the centre of Hanoi on the waters of West Lake, but still only a few minutes taxi ride to the city centre. It has 359 guest rooms and suites, many of which are in island pavilions on the lake.

Rates: Rooms start from US\$112 (about A\$108) per night and suites from US\$196 (about A\$189) per night.  
ichotelsgroup.com

#### GETTING THERE

Vietnam Airlines flies from Sydney and Melbourne to Hanoi via Ho Chi Minh City. Return economy fares start from A\$1,030 and business class fares from A\$3,400. Total flight time is around 12 hours including stopover.  
vietnamairlines.com.au

Share this page: [f](#) [t](#) [+1](#) [✉](#)



Whether it's your Wedding, Anniversary,  
your loved ones Birthday,  
or company Dinner and Dance. . .

COPYRIGHT 2010 GADFLY MEDIA

[CONTACT US](#)

[ADVERTISE WITH LUXURY TRAVEL & STYLE MAGAZINE](#)

[TERMS & CONDITIONS](#)

[PRIVACY POLICY](#)

[SITEMAP](#)

Web design by Komosion | CMS KomodoCMS