



Ninh Binh

Ninh Binh has involved into a major travel center in recent years. Its sudden transformation from sleepy hamlet to tourist magnet has little to do with Ninh Binh itself, but rather with its proximity to nearby Tam Coc (9 km) and Hoa Lu (12 km) and Cuc Phuong National Park (45 km). Although it is certainly possible to visit these sights as a day trip from Hanoi, many travelers chose to overnight in Ninh Binh or the national park to appreciate the scenery at a more leisurely pace.

Tam Coc

Known to travelers as Vietnam's 'Halong Bay without water', Tam Coc boasts breathtaking scenery. While Halong Bay has huge rock formations jutting out of the sea, Tam Coc has them jutting out of the rice field paddies. There is a striking resemblance here to Guilin and Yangshuo, both major attractions in China. Tam Coc means 'there caves'. Hang Ca, the first cave, is 127m long; Hang Giua, the second is 70m long; the third is Hang Cuoi, the smallest with only 40m. The best way to see Tam Coc is by row-boat on the Ngo Dong River. The boats actually row into the caves, and this is a very peaceful and scenic trip. The boat trip to all their caves takes about three hours, including the stops.

Hoa Lu

The scenery here resembles nearby Tam Coc, though Hoa Lu has an interesting historical twist. Hoa Lu was the capital of Vietnam during the Dinh Dynasty (968-80) and Early Le Dynasty (980-1009). This site was a suitable choice for a capital city due to its proximity to China and the natural protection afforded by the region's bizarre landscape.

Kenh Ga floating market

In Kenh Ga (Chicken Canal), chickens may not be a prominent part of the villagers' lives, but the canal certainly is. Everyone in Kenh Ga lives on boats floating on the Hoang Long River. About the only other place in Vietnam where you can see anything like this is in the Mekong Delta. On the other hand, nowhere in the Mekong Delta will you find a stunning a mountain backdrop as you find at Kenh Ga. Another difference - people in Kenh Ga row boats with their feet.

Phat Diem

Phat Diem is the site of cathedral remarkable for its vast dimensions and unique Sino-Vietnamese architecture. During the French era, the cathedral was an important center of Catholicism in the north and there was a seminary here. Phat Diem has a high density of Catholics amounted to 120,000 live in this area.

Thai Binh

Few travelers visit Thai Binh because it's not on National Highway 1. You are only likely to come here if you're following the route that connects Ninh Binh to Hai Phong.

Keo Pagoda

Keo Pagoda (Chua Keo) was founded in the 12th century to honor Buddha and the monk Khong Minh Khong, who miraculously cured Emperor Ly Thanh Ton (ruled 1128-38) for leprosy. The finely carved wooden bell tower is considered a master piece of traditional Vietnamese architecture. The nearby dike is a good place to get a general view of the pagoda complex.

Cat Ba Island

Cat Ba is the largest island in Halong Bay vicinity. Lan Ha Bay, off the east side of the island, is especially scenic and offers numerous beaches to explore. While the vast majority of Halong Bay's islands are uninhabited vertical rocks, Cat Ba has a few tiny fishing villages and a fast-growing town. The terrain is too rocky for agriculture: Most residents earn their living from the sea while others cater to the tourist trade. Life has always been hard here and not surprisingly; many Cat Ba residents joined the exodus of Vietnamese 'boat people' in the 1970s and 1980s. There is very little motorized traffic and, indeed, very few roads. Compared with the tourist carnival at Bai Chay, Cat Ba is still relatively laid-back. There are numerous lakes, waterfalls and grottoes in the spectacular limestone hills, the highest of which rises 331m above sea level. The growth of the vegetation is stunted near the summits because of high winds. The largest permanent body of water on the island is Ech Lake, which covers an area of three hectares. Almost all of the surface streams are seasonal; most of the island's rainwater flows into caves and follows underground streams to the sea, creating a shortage of fresh water during the dry season.

Phong Nha

Formed approximately 250 million years ago, Phong Nha Cave is the largest and most beautiful known cave in Vietnam. Located in the village of Son Trach, (55km north-west of Dong Hoi) it was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2000. It's remarkable for its thousands of meters of underground passageway and river caves filled with abundant stalactites and stalagmites.

Phong Nha means Cave of Teeth and Wind, but, unfortunately, the 'teeth' (or stalagmites) that were by the entrance are no longer there. Once you get further into the cave, it's mostly unspoiled. There is also a newly discovered dry cave just above the mountain containing Phong Nha Cave.

Hue

Traditionally, Hue has been one of Vietnam's main cultural, religious and educational centers. Today, its main attraction are the splendid tombs of the Nguyen emperors, several notable pagodas and the remains of the Citadel. Also, the local will no doubt tell you repeatedly, the women of Hue are renowned for their beauty. Tourism just may have saved Hue's cultural sites from oblivion. Between 1975 and 1990, all the old buildings were regarded as politically incorrect, sign of the 'feudal decay'. It was only in 1990 that the local government recognized the tourist potential of the place and declared these sites 'national treasures'. In 1993, the complex of monuments in Hue was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and restoration and preservation work continue.

Danang

Danang, known under French as Tourane, succeeded Hoian as the most important port in central Vietnam during the 19th century. Danang is join the western bank of

the Han River. The eastern bank is accessible via new Song Han Bridge further south. It is a long, thin peninsula, the northern tip of which is Nui Son Tra, named as 'Monkey Mountain' by the Americans. Though it has long been a closed military area, local authorities are considering opening the area to tourism. China Beach and Marble Mountains lie south of the city and Hai Van Pass overlooks it from the north. There is also an international airport in Da Nang where foreign tourists can [obtain Vietnam visa on arrival](#).

Hoian

Hoi An is a picturesque riverside town 30 km from south of Danang. Most visitors agree it is the most enchanting place on the coast and is one city worth lingering in. Known as Faifo to early Western traders, it was one of South-East Asia's major international port during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. In its heyday, Hoi An, a contemporary of Macau and Melaka, was an important port of call for Dutch, Portuguese, Chinese, Japanese and other trading vessels. Vietnamese ships and sailors based in Hoi An sailed to all sections of Vietnam, as well as Thailand and Indonesia. Perhaps, more than any other place in Vietnam, Hoi An retains a sense of history that grows on you the more you explore it.

Though Hoi An has yet to become a UNESCO World Heritage Site, preservation efforts are well up to par. Several historical structures are open for public viewing, a number of streets in the center of town are off-limits to motor traffic, and building alteration and height restrictions are well enforced. If only Hanoi would follow suit in the historic Old Quarter. Despite the numbers of tourists who come and stay at [hotels in Hoi An](#), it is still a very conservative town, and visitors should dress modestly when touring the sites. 'Hoi An legendary Night' takes place on the 14th day of every lunar month (full moon) from 5:30 to 10 pm. This colorful monthly event features traditional food, song and dance, and games along the lantern-lit streets in the town center.

My Son

One of the most stunning sights in the Hoi An area is My Son, Vietnam's most important Cham site, and as of 2000 a UNESCO World Heritage Site. During the centuries when Tra Kieu (the known as Simhapura) served as the political capital of Champa, My Son was the site of the most important Cham intellectual and religious center, and also may have served as burial place for Cham monarchs. My Son is considered to be Champa's counterpart to the grand city of South-East Asia's other Indian-influence civilization: Angkor (Cambodia), Bagan (Myanmar), Ayutthaya (Thailand) and Borobudur (Java).

The monuments are set in a verdant valley surrounded by hills and overlooked by massive Cat's Tooth Mountain (Hon Quap). Clear streams (perfect for a dip) run between the structures and past nearby coffee plantations.

My Son became a religious center under King Bhadravarman in the late 4th century and was occupied until the 13th century- the longest period of development of any monuments in South-East Asia (by comparison, Angkor's period of development lasted only three centuries, as did that of Bagan). Most of the temples were dedicated to Cham Kings associated with divinities, especially Shiva, who was regarded as the founder and protector of Champa's dynasties.

's contact with Java was extensive. Cham's scholars were sent to Java to study and there was a great deal of commerce between the two empires - Cham pottery has

been found on Java and, in the 12th century, the Cham king wed a Javanese woman.

Because some of these ornamentation work at My Son was never finished, archaeologists know that the Chams first built their structures and only then carved decorations into the brick work. Researchers have yet to figure out for certain how the Chams managed to get the baked bricks to stick together. According to one theory, they used a paste prepared with a botanical oil indigenous to central Vietnam. During one period in their history, the summits of some of the towers were covered with a layer of gold.

During the American War, the My Son region was completely devastated and depopulated in extended bitter fighting. Finding it to be a convenient staging ground, VC guerrillas used My Son as a base; in response the Americans bombed the monuments. Traces of 68 structures have been found, of which 25 survived repeatedly pillaging in previous centuries by the Chinese, Khmer and Vietnamese. The American bombings spared about 20 of these, some of which sustained extensive damage. Today, Vietnamese authorities are attempting to restore the remaining sites.

Source: [Đặt khách sạn](#)