

Taking a Cruise on the mysterious Ha Long Bay and going around the beautiful Hang Thien Cung (caves) in Vietnam.

There are various possibilities and options if you are staying in Hanoi and want to go on a [Ha Long Bay cruise](#) - ranging from just going for the day and taking a 4- or 5-hour cruise to going on an extended Ha Long Bay cruise and spending 2 or 3 days or more on board. Prices for these trips therefore obviously vary according to which itinerary is chosen but importantly there are further options to consider - the quality of the boat, number of passengers on board, how good is the food and so on. You do need to carefully read the descriptions for various options - some boat trips on offer may seem pretty cheap but this probably means they are really crammed. Hanoi hotels are good at organizing these Halong Bay trips for you and most don't particularly mark up the prices for some commission. Additionally, you can usually leave your luggage at your hotel if going off on a trip for several days and just pick it up on return even if you are no longer intending to stay at that hotel.

It's worth remembering that Halong Bay can be shrouded in mist - even fog - or drizzle and this obviously affects what you can see - you have to take pot luck. Our Halong cruise was organized by our hotel - there were various options and they recommended the 35USD each trip as this was a better boat, less people on board and offered a good lunch. The trip included transport by mini-bus, a guide, boat trip, entrance fee to the cave and an excellent sea-food lunch - drinks were extra however but were not over-priced. The mini-bus trip takes quite a long time as Hanoi to Ha Long is 165km - the usual drinks, toilet and craft shop factory stop is made route. The return trip skips the factory but does have a brief toilet and drinks stop.

One thing to bear in mind is that the drive back in the dark from Halong Bay to Hanoi can be quite hair raising - especially the overtaking where the drivers are content to nearly collide head-on at high speed. Certainly, on these mini-buses it's best not to sit right up the front by the driver. Ha Long Bay is a UNESCO World Heritage Site - covers 580 square miles and has over 2000 pinnacle shaped outcrops. Legend states that giant dragon plunged into the Gulf of Tonkin and created a myriad of tiny islands - Ha Long means "descending dragon". The whole area is a seascape of bizarrely shaped outcrops, caves and sandy coves. The boat trip takes you through often mist-shrouded limestone and dolomite outcrops and around several of the brightly painted floating villages of Ha Long Bay.

The day of our trip was quite dull and the whole area seemed really weird and drier with the pinnacles rising ghost like out of the gloom. Part of the tour included a visit to

Hang Thien Cung (grotto of the heavenly palace) - i.e. a series of underground caves. There is a steep climb to the entrance of the cave then a descent into the rectangular cavern - the cavern is 250 meters long and 20 meters high.

The numerous stalactites and stalagmites are lit up often with brightly colored lights and the whole thing is quite spectacular. It probably takes around 35 to 40 minutes to walk round the caves. Obviously, there can be several groups in the caves at the same time but the guides seemed capable for organizing their respective groups and there was no congestion. When you climb back up to the exit from the caves (which is not the same as the entrance point) the views are again very impressive. After returning to the boat it was then possible to go kayaking or you could just sit and

relax on board. The entire "boat" part of the Halong Bay tour takes about five hours and is definitely a worthwhile experience and good value for money.

Source: [Đặt khách sạn](#)