

14-Day Guided North Vietnam Motorcycle Tour from Hanoi via Ha Giang to Cat Ba Island: 'The Big Loop'

Ride dates: 4th November - 17th November 2026

Overview

Adventurous Northern Vietnam Motorcycle Tour

From Hanoi to Cat Ba Island via Ha Giang in the North Vietnam mountains our expert guides lead you through some of the most breathtaking landscapes in Vietnam, ensuring that you have a safe and unforgettable journey. Included in the tour are ten days of guided motorcycle riding, cultural events, two boat cruises, a kayaking adventure on Halong Bay and four rest days to explore local communities and sights at your own pace. Come and ride through beautiful North Vietnam with The Platypus Foundation and Asian Lotus Travel.

Cost

Options starting at USD \$2,240 (inclusive of tour costs and charitable donation to Platypus) per person.

Key Information

Included

- Hotel and homestay accommodation for the duration of the guided tour, i.e. from Wednesday 4 November – Tuesday 17 November 2026 inclusive – see itinerary for details.
- Food and drinks – 14 breakfasts (B), 1 lunch and 11 dinners (D) – see itinerary for details
- Snacks for morning and afternoon teas on ride days
- English speaking tour guide
- Motorcycle: Honda XR150 motorbike (or similar) hire with insurance and fuel
- Entrance fees for sightseeing activities, cruises and kayaking

Not included

- Your international and/or domestic air tickets.
- Your Vietnam visa. We recommend obtaining your visa through the Vietnam Immigration Department at the Ministry of Public Security.
- Your international driver's licence (required by everyone driving a motorcycle). We recommend the International Driving Permit available online from ITA. (<https://www.itaoffice.org/>)
- Your personal travel insurance. All participants are expected to arrange their own insurance. We highly recommend purchasing travel insurance from home. Policies should cover any and all potential risks involved in your holiday. We recommend insurance from Cover-More.
- The cost of most lunches – on ride days we stop at a local wayside kitchen and for a few Dong enjoy the local cuisine.

- Tips / gratuities. We recommend USD \$8 – 10 per day per person to our supported team (guide and driver).
- Your motorbiking jackets, pants, gloves, helmets and boots (compulsory) – Asian Lotus Travel can provide our standard helmets and gloves upon request. If you do not bring your standard motorbiking jacket and pants, you can buy these from a shop near your hotel in Hanoi before the trip starts. The choice of sizes is limited. Please contact Dong Minh Cuong (aka Koony) at Asian Lotus Travel if you need to check the available sizes. **(All riders must wear boots and a helmet)**
- Waterproof bags / raincoats (these items can be bought in Hanoi)
- Personal expenses
- Alcoholic drinks

Tour Highlights

- Touring distance: approximately 3250 kilometres
- Daily rides: between 90 – 240 kilometres
- Terrain: mix of tarmac, gravel, muddy, rocky, and off-road
- Stay in the Stilt house of the White Thai People and explore the scenic village of Mai Chau and its local culture.
- Discover long forgotten off-road French trails from the Indochina War
- Stay in a hot spring bungalow at Suoi Chieu Lake
- Discover Mu Cang Chai – the beautiful world of rice terraces
- Enjoy a cruise on the stunning Chat village reservoir
- Ride the spectacular O Qui Ho Pass in to Sapa
- Visit Lung Tam secondary school and meet the kids who receive support from The Platypus Foundation
- Visit the Palace of the H'Mong King
- Go kayaking around the stunning 'Wonder of the World'
- Enjoy the relaxed luxury of Cat Ba island at the end of your tour
- ... and so much more.

Skill level

Suitable for riders with intermediate and advanced skill levels

Accommodation

During this tour you will be accommodated in twin shared hotel rooms and local homestays.

Detailed costing

The following costing has been calculated for a party of at least 8 participants travelling together with twin-share hotel accommodation and 125cc motorcycles. The costs are quoted on a cash payment basis and are exclusive of any government and / or third-party taxes and service charges. If payment is made by credit card, traveller's check or bank transfer, additional charges will apply.

1. Charitable donation to Platypus for each participant: USD \$357 (equivalent to AUD \$500)
2. Tour cost per rider: 8 – 9 riders: USD \$2,123 each; 10-11 riders: USD \$1,989 each; 12 – 14 riders: USD \$1,883 each

Options

1. Tour cost per pillion passenger: same rate as the rider (Rider and pillion share a bigger more powerful motorcycle: 250cc or 400cc)
2. Tour cost per car passenger: USD \$1,148 each
3. Bigger motorcycle premium (250cc – 400cc): USD \$35 per day

Detailed Itinerary

Tuesday 3 November 2026 – Day 0 – Hanoi Arrival - Accommodation: Hotel at your cost

It is recommended that international participants fly into Hanoi's Noi Bai International Airport. Asian Lotus Travel will arrange your hotel transfer if you provide your itinerary to Dong Minh Cuong (cuongdm@asianlotustravel.com aka Koony). Rest up and enjoy a good look around Hanoi.



The Thang Long Water Puppet Theatre is the primary venue for water puppetry performances in Hanoi, located at 57B Đinh Tiên Hoàng, Hàng Bạc, Hoàn Kiếm. This traditional art form dates back to the 11th century in the Red River Delta, where skilled puppeteers manipulate intricate wooden puppets on a water stage accompanied by live traditional music and singing. Performances typically run in the afternoon and evening.

Wednesday 4 November 2026 – Day 1 – Shopping, bike testing and group dinner – Meals D –

Accommodation: Hanoi Pearl Hotel

An opportunity to explore Hanoi's shopping districts and, if required, purchase bike gear such as waterproof clothing and travel bags from a local store. Asian Lotus Travel can provide advice. All participants must attend a group briefing and bike testing at 3.00 pm and a group dinner in the evening at a local Vietnamese restaurant. The location will be advised separately.



Hanoi's shopping scene blends traditional markets in the Old Quarter with modern malls offering international brands. For traditional goods, the Old Quarter is the primary destination, featuring specialized streets like Hang Gai (Silk Street) for high-quality silk and tailoring, Hang Bac Street for silver jewellery, and Hang Dau Street for footwear. Large markets such as Dong Xuan Market (wholesale goods, fabric, and souvenirs) and Hang Da Market (clothing and accessories) are ideal for bargaining and local finds.

Modern shopping malls provide air-conditioned comfort and a wide range of international retailers. Vincom Center Ba Trieu and Trang Tien Plaza are the top choices for luxury and high-end fashion, hosting brands like Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Dior, Zara, and H&M. For entertainment and family-friendly options, Vincom Mega Mall Royal City (largest complex with an ice rink and water park), Lotte Center Hanoi (250+ brands and observation deck), and Aeon Mall Long Bien (Japanese supermarket and children's playground) are highly recommended. Indochina Plaza Hanoi and Lotte Mall West Lake also offer modern lifestyle shopping with diverse dining and entertainment zones.

Specialty and local boutiques offer unique cultural items and independent designs. For authentic souvenirs and art, visit Hanoia (lacquerware), Collective Memories (curated crafts and art), and Tired City (original artwork by local Vietnamese artists). Ly Thai To Street in the French Quarter is known for boutique fashion and artisan workshops, while Chùa Bộc Street features local clothing brands like Bò sữa by boo and Degrey. For thrifting and vintage items, stores like Hanoi Punk and second-hand shops on Hue Street or Thai Ha Street are popular among locals and expats.

Thursday 5 November 2026 – Day 2 – Hanoi to Mai Chau – Distance: 170 klms –Meals B, D –

Accommodation: Minh Tho Homestay, Mai Hich Village

Early in the morning we leave the busy life of Hanoi behind and travel on Highway 06 to the Northwest of Vietnam. The ride will take us through the Pu Luong Nature Reserve and you will quickly see why the ethnic Thai people made this enchanting valley their home long ago: endless mountains, fertile valleys and pristine jungle are just a few good reasons to visit. Pu Luong is dotted with quaint hamlets and villages throughout the park, each with its own unique history. Most of the communities in the reserve are Thai people, an ethnic group with two local branches, White Thai and Black Thai. The Thai people are highly skilled at wet rice cultivation and their homes are built in a raised stilt style. Staying at one of these homestays is a fantastic way to experience local customs and see what life is like for this Vietnamese ethnic minority. At our journey's end, we'll check into a traditional Stilt House of the White Thai people and explore the scenic village. After dinner, our hosts will entertain us with traditional music, singing and dancing.



An unbelievable experience off the beaten track, Minh Tho Homestay features an outdoor swimming pool, garden, and a shared lounge and bar. There's wonderful cuisine and an evening of traditional dancing and music.

Friday 6 November 2026 – Day 3 – Mai Chau - Mộc Châu – Sơn La - Distance: 190 klms –

Meals B, D – Accommodation: Hotel

Leaving Pu Luong in the morning after breakfast, we ride through the countryside on narrow paved roads and dirt tracks crossing shallow rivers, traversing bridges, and passing through villages and scenic bamboo forests. Along the way we will discover parts of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, (Vietnamese: Đường mòn Hồ Chí Minh) a crucial logistical network during the Vietnam War, running from North Vietnam to South Vietnam through Laos and Cambodia. It consisted of a complex system of roads and trails used by North Vietnam to transport troops and supplies to support the National Liberation Front in the South. Contrary to the perception of it being a primitive path, the trail included paved roads, command outposts, and even fuel pipelines. Today, the trail is recognized not only for its historical significance but also as a destination for travellers seeking to explore Vietnam's natural beauty. Lunch will be a simple affair in a local restaurant. Our afternoon ride is on smooth roads all the way to Con Cuong town where we spend the night in a hotel.



The rice terraces in Pu Luong are located across four main valleys (the Don, Uoi, Kho Muong, and Hieu vales) within the Pu Luong Nature Reserve. These terraces in each valley offering distinct landscapes ranging from wide panoramic views to remote limestone surroundings and waterfalls.

Saturday 7 November 2026 – Day 4 – Sơn La - Mu Chang Chai - Distance: 160 klms – Meals

B, D – Accommodation: Homestay of the Thai People

Leaving Sơn La, we ride along the edge of the Black River towards the Ngoc Chien commune in the Muong La district where we'll enjoy lunch and visit the Ngoc Chien hot springs. The area features 13 natural hot springs with temperatures ranging from 30°C to over 70°C, including unique wooden bathing facilities made from Po Mu (Pơ-mu) wood in Luot village. Afterwards we continue our ride arriving late in the day at the Thai Family Homestay in Kim Noi village, Mu Cang Chai.



Ngoc Chien hot springs are natural mineral springs located in the hidden Ngoc Chien valley in Son La province at an altitude of nearly 1,000 metres surrounded by high mountains, green forests, and terraced rice fields and where water temperatures range from 45°C to 60°C, allowing guests to bathe comfortably year-round despite cool night temperatures. The area is home to Thai, Mong, and La Ha ethnic communities.

Sunday 6 November 2026 – Day 5 – Mu Chang Chai – Than Uyen – Tea Plantation – Sapa –

Distance: 160 klms – Meals B, D – Accommodation: Sapa Charm Hotel

Today we ride up and down to Than Uyen and Tan Uyen, known for its Muong Than rice fields, hydroelectric reservoirs and more scenic views of tea plantations. After lunch, we continue on passing the developing towns of Phong Tho, Lai Chau, Tam Duon before tackling the spectacular road up O Quy Ho pass to get in to Sapa town.



O Quy Ho Pass , at nearly 50 kilometres, is recognized as the longest mountain pass in Vietnam. It stretches between the provinces of Lao Cai and Lai Chau and is situated within the Hoang Lien Son mountain range at an elevation of over 2,000 meters above sea level. It is often called the "King of the Northwest Pass" and is one of the "Four Great Mountain Passes" of Northern Vietnam. The pass is famous for its treacherous, winding roads that hug steep cliffs and deep abysses, offering dramatic views of a sea of clouds that often cover the summit year-round, earning it the nickname "Heaven's Gate." Its name originates from a local H'Mong legend of a tragic love story between a mortal woodcutter named O Quy Ho and a fairy, whose sorrowful cries are said to echo from a golden bird at sunset.

Monday 11 November 2026 – Day 6 – Relaxing in Sapa – Meals – B, D – Accommodation:

Sapa Charm Hotel

Spend the whole day exploring the sights in Sapa. The #1 attraction for many is Fansipan Mountain, but there's a lot to choose between including a walking tour to the local village of the T Black Hmong or Dzay, visiting Moana Sapa, one of the most photogenic spots in the whole of Vietnam, and so much more. (And why not ask the hotel to do your laundry while you are away enjoying the sights!)



Fansipan Mountain can be reached by Cable Car arriving near the temple complex. From there you still need to climb about 600 steps to the very top. The steps are steep and at high altitude (~3,100 - 3,143m) so they can feel tougher than the number suggests. There's also a short funicular railway from near the cable car station that reduces the climb significantly, leaving only a few dozen steps at the end. Fansipan is the highest mountain in Vietnam and the entire Indochinese Peninsula, with a confirmed elevation of 3,147.3 meters (10,326 ft) earning the nickname "Roof of Indochina." The views are simply spectacular.



Moana Sapa is approximately 3 - 4 km from Sapa town centre, about 10 - 15 minutes by taxi or 45 - 60 minutes walking (uphill in parts). Moana is intentionally modern, designed for immersive experiences and stunning photography. Think of it as a “Little Bali in Sapa”, but with the dramatic backdrop of the Hoang Lien Son mountain range. Highlights include:

- *Heaven Gate: Inspired by Bali’s iconic gates, this archway in Sapa frames the rolling Hoang Lien Son mountains and drifting clouds. Standing here feels like walking into a celestial painting, especially at sunrise when mist lingers in the valleys.*
- *The Stone Hand: A giant sculpted hand stretching out into the sky, symbolizing both strength and welcome. On foggy mornings, the hand appears to rise straight out of the clouds, making photos look surreal and otherworldly.*
- *Infinity Swing: Suspended against dramatic backdrops, the swing gives an exhilarating illusion of flying into the misty horizon, a must-try for thrill-seeking photo lovers.*
- *Moana Girl Statue: The symbolic sculpture of a serene girl gazing over the valley has become a signature image of Moana. Around it are smaller photo corners, from wooden frames to stylized viewpoints, each designed to create unique, Instagram-worthy shots; and*
- *Cafés & Rest Areas: Beyond photography, Moana offers cozy cafés and seating areas where you can sip a warm drink while watching layers of mist drift slowly across the valleys.*

Tuesday 10 November 2026 – Day 7 – Sapa to Ha Giang – Touring distance: 240 klms – Meals

B, D – Accommodation: Wing Bungalow, Phường Thiện Ward, Hà Giang city

We leave Sapa town in the morning, and go on with our ride via Lao Cai town or the Muong Hoa valley road to Ta Van with our chosen route depending on the weather. Then in the afternoon we take route 279 to Ha Giang, before overnighing at the Ha Giang Wings Bungalow. Tuyên Quang (formerly Ha Giang) is a mountainous province in the far north of Vietnam, often referred to as the 'gateway to the country' due to its location at the nation's northernmost point. Nestled in the Northeast region, it shares a border with China and is characterized by rugged highlands, deep valleys, and winding roads that traverse dramatic landscapes. The province is home to diverse ethnic minority groups, each contributing to a rich tapestry of cultural traditions and languages. Its remote terrain and unique heritage make it a place of growing interest for travellers seeking authentic mountain experiences in Vietnam.



The Hà Giang Wings Bungalow) is a highly-rated 3-star accommodation located in Tien Thang Hamlet, Phuong Thien Commune, Ha Giang City, designed to offer a unique stay surrounded by limestone mountains. It is particularly noted for its outdoor swimming pool, garden, and panoramic views of the valley. The establishment has received strong reviews, with a rating of 9.2/10 on Booking.com based on over 350 reviews, highlighting its friendly staff, comfortable beds, and peaceful atmosphere.

Wednesday 11 November 2026 – Day 8 – Ha Giang – Qun Ba – Dong Van – Meo Vac – Than

Uyên – Meals - Touring distance 170 klms - B, D – Accommodation: Hoa Cuong Hotel, Meo

Vac Town

After breakfast, we farewell the Wings Bungalow Family and continue riding the Karst Plateau, the road leading us along high rocky mountains and through spectacular valleys to the villages of the H'Mong, Lo Lo, and Ha Nhi people on the way. En-route we will visit a school where the children receive Platypus Scholarships, visit the Palace of H'Mong King and take in a great view of the Nho Que river before descending into Meo Vac town.



The Palace of the H'Mong King (also known as Vuong Chinh Sinh Palace or Dinh Vua Meo) is a national relic located in the Sa Phin Valley of Dong Van District, Ha Giang Province, Vietnam, built between 1898 and 1907 by Vuong Chinh Duc, the leader of the Hmong ethnic group.

Constructed at a staggering cost of 15,000 Indochinese piastres (equivalent to roughly \$6.36 million today), the palace covers an area of over 1,200 m² on a 3,000 m² site and features a unique blend of Chinese, French, and Hmong architectural styles. Designed as a traditional Chinese courtyard house with four wings surrounding a central atrium, the palace includes a defensive outer stone wall and interiors adorned with dragon, phoenix, and turtle carvings symbolizing prosperity. The complex consists of 10 buildings arranged in three zones with 64 rooms, built entirely by human labor using stone walls, wooden pillars, and terracotta tiles without any machinery. It served as the seat of power for the Hmong feudal regime until 1962, when the monarchy was abolished following the death of Vuong Chi Sinh.

Thursday 12 November 2026 – Day 9 – Meo Vac – Pac Bo – Touring distance 150 klms –

Meals B, D – Accommodation: Bungalow / Homestay in Pac Bo

Leaving the lowland, we head up today to the western highland region of Song Gam (Gam River), then head to Khau Coc Cha Pass with its wonderful views. We'll take lunch on the way before continuing, then continue on hilly roads to Pac Bo. In the afternoon, we'll visit the Pác Bó Cave where Ho Chi Minh spent time during the early part of the Vietnam revolution.



Khau Coc Cha Pass, also known as Me Pia Pass or the 15-tier pass, is a 2.5-kilometer-long mountain route in Xuan Truong commune, Bao Lac district, Cao Bang province, Vietnam, famous for its 14 sharp hairpin bends creating 15 distinct levels. Originally a narrow 40 cm trail from the French colonial era, it was expanded between 2009 and 2011 to a 5-meter-wide asphalt road, yet it remains one of the most dangerous and challenging passes in Northern Vietnam due to its steep slopes and blind corners.



Pác Bó Cave, located in Trường Hà commune, Hà Quảng district, Cao Bằng Province, is a 15 m² karst cave where Ho Chi Minh lived and worked for seven weeks in February and March 1941 after returning to Vietnam following 30 years of exile. The site served as the clandestine headquarters for the Viet Minh resistance movement against French and Japanese occupiers, with Ho Chi Minh drafting documents on a stone table and sleeping on a wooden plank bed. Key historical landmarks within the complex include Lenin Stream (formerly Khuoi Giang Spring), Karl Marx Mountain, and Khuoi Nam Shack, where he resided longer after leaving the cave.

Friday 13 November 2026 – Day 10 – Pac Bo – Ban Gioc Waterfall – Touring Distance 90 klms

– Meals: B, D – Accommodation: Bungalow

Today's ride is one of the shortest on the trip. Leaving Pac Bo, nestled in the rugged mountains of Cao Bang Province, in the morning we'll enjoy a lovely ride through countryside characterized by lush bamboo groves, cascading waterfalls, and primeval forests. In the afternoon, we arrive in Ban Gioc Waterfall and explore the beauty of the 4th biggest border waterfall in the world and the beautiful Nguom Ngao cave.



Ban Gioc Waterfall is one of Vietnam's most impressive natural sights, located in the northeastern province of Cao Bang. With a width of 300 meters and a height of 30 meters, the falls are a stunning sight to behold. Nestled on the Quay Son River, the waterfall is surrounded by a picturesque landscape of rice fields, bamboo groves, and limestone pinnacles. Despite its beauty, Ban Gioc remains off-the-beaten-path, offering a tranquil and unspoiled experience for visitors.



Nguom Ngao Cave, also known as the Tiger Cave, is a spectacular limestone grotto located in Gun village. Discovered in 1921 and opened to tourists in 1996, it is recognized as a national-level

scenic landscape and is a key component of the Non Nuoc Cao Bang UNESCO Global Geopark. The cave system is approximately 2,144 meters long (with a 2016 survey suggesting a total length of 2,769.6 meters) and features five entrances at altitudes between 420 and 507 meters. Currently, the management board has opened 945.8 meters of the cave for visitors, who can explore chambers filled with diverse stalactites and stalagmites resembling coral reefs, ships, waterfalls, and terraced fields. The cave's unique formations, which include seven-coloured stalactites due to calcium mixed with other minerals, were formed over 400 million years when the area was an ancient sea, leaving behind numerous coral and crinoid fossils.

Saturday 14 November 2026 – Day 11 – Ban Gioc Waterfall – Huu Lien - Touring Distance

220 klms – Meals B, D – Accommodation: Hotel / Bungalow

Leaving the friendly folk in Khuoi Ky village we ride along the Vietnamese – Chinese border and head to Lang Son province. Weather permitting we'll enjoy a short ride in the scenic Dong Lam Meadow before checking-in at our bungalow with its glorious views across the rice fields.



Dong Lam Meadow (also known as Dong Lam Steppe or Huu Lien Grassland) is a 100-hectare ecological area located in Huu Lien Commune, Huu Lung District, Lang Son Province, in northern Vietnam, approximately 25 km from Lang Son city and 150 km from Hanoi. The landscape features vast green grasslands surrounded by majestic limestone mountains, streams, and Dong Lam Lake, earning it the nickname "Ha Long Bay of the Northeast region" during the rainy season (July to October) when rising water levels transform the meadow into a clear blue lake. During the dry season (November to June), the area offers expansive green carpets ideal for camping, picnics, horseback riding, and exploring the surrounding Huu Lien National Forest Reserve, which hosts a diverse ecosystem of 776 plant species and 409 animal species.

Sunday 15 November 2026 – Day 12 Huu Lien – Ha Long City Tuan Chau Ferry to Cat Ba -

Touring Distance 160 klms – Meals B – Accommodation: Hotel ***

Today is our last on the motorbikes riding on beautiful roads from Huu Lien followed by a highway section into Halong City. When we reach Tuan Chau we catch the 1.00 pm ferry across Ha Long Bay before a 45 minute bus transfer from Ferry Pier to Cat Ba Town. After check-in at our hotel, head out for dinner at one of the island restaurants.



The view from Cannon Fort, Cat Ba Island

Monday 16 November 2026 – Day 13 Halong Bay Boat Trip (Cat Ba Island) – Meals B, L –

Accommodation: Hotel ***

After a sumptuous breakfast in our hotel, our crew will take us on a private cruise around Ha Long Bay stopping at several beautiful spots for kayaking (weather permitting), cave exploration, swimming in the clear bay waters and searching for the wild macaques of Monkey Island. Lunch will be served on board before we return late afternoon to our hotel for the second night stay. Enjoy the beer o'clock and sunset.



Cruising through Ha Long Bay

Tuesday 17 November 2026 – Day 14 Cat Ba – Hai Phong - Hanoi – Meals B, D –

Accommodation: Hotel ***

Hotel checkout today is at noon, so make the most of the morning still we gather for our bus journey back to Hanoi, hotel check-in and our evening farewell dinner.

Wednesday 18 November – Day 15 Hanoi Departure – Meals B

This is the final day of your tour. After breakfast and check-out, your airport transfer will be scheduled. Bon voyage.