



Ninh Binh

Area: 1,386 sq km

Population: 839,900

Provincial capital: Ninh Binh

Ninh Binh is 91km from Hanoi. Express train connections with Hanoi (Limited allocation of tickets) and regular bus connections with Hanoi's South Bus Station. The best time for visiting Cuc Phuong National Forest is during the dry season, from December to April, when the hard forest rain accounting for 90% of the annual rainfall is over. Cuc Phuong National Forest is located 160 km south of Hanoi in Ninh Binh province. The park is conveniently located on the route to several tourist attractions including Bich Dong Pagoda, Hoa Lu, and Sam Son Beach. It was officially opened in 1960 for foreign visitors who have [visa for Vietnam](#) as the first national park in Vietnam.

Cuc Phuong National Forest is surrounded by several limestone cliffs, the highest being May Bac, meaning "silver cloud," with a height of 656 m. There are plenty of plants and mammals living in the park. The flora supports an estimated 2,000 different species and the fauna, 450 species, accounts for 38% of the national fauna. Thanks to the limestone terrain, Cuc Phuong National Forest counts multitudes of caves including Trang Khuyet Cave, Con Moong Cave, Pho Ma Cave, and Nguoi Xua Cave. Quen Voi, also part of the park, is where Nguyen Hue's army was stationed before it made its surprise attack on Thanh Long and defeated Thanh enemies in the spring of 1789.

Global environmental programs led by the UNDP, United Nations Development Program, and FFI, Flora and Fauna International, researched the distinguished primitiveness of the tropical forest and the monsoon influence on Southeast Asia in Cuc Phuong National Forest.

Sapa - Lao Cai

The best time to witness the scenic beauty of Sapa is in April and May. Before that period, the weather might be cold and foggy; after that period is the rainy season. In April and May, Sapa is blooming with flowers and green pastures. The clouds that settle in the valley in early mornings quickly disappear into thin air.

Located at 1,500 m above sea level, Sapa lies on the side of Hoang Lien Son Mountains, 333 km northwest of Hanoi. Sapa's flora is diversified, ranging from flowers to tropical fruits; among the most popular fruits produced in Sapa are apples, pears, peaches, and plums. Sapa has many natural sites such as Thac Bac, Thuy Cung Grotto, Gio Cave, Troi Gate, and Truc Forest. Sapa is also the starting point of many climbers and scientists who want to reach the top of Fansipan Mountain, the highest mountain in Vietnam at 3,143 m. There are also many [hotels in Sapa](#) for visitors to stay before trekking. Hoang Lien Son Mountains is also called the Alps of the North Sea area, since Fansipan Mountain is not only the highest peak in Vietnam, but also in the Indochina Peninsula. The pyramid-shaped mountain is covered with clouds all year round and temperatures often drop below zero, especially at high elevations.

To reach Sapa, one can take a train to Lao Cai and take a bus to Sapa from there. On Sundays, Nung, Dao, Tay, Cao Lan, Paxi, and Xa Phong minorities in their

colorful clothes ride down the mountain to take part in the Sunday market at the foot of Fansipan Mountain.

Lao Cai is 340km from Hanoi and can be reached by bus, car, or train.

- Train: Two trains depart from Hanoi daily. One leaves at 6.05 am and arrives in Lao Cai at 3.30 pm; another train departs from Hanoi at 10 pm and arrives in Lao Cai at 7.10 am the next morning. From Lao Cai to Hanoi, the train departs at 10.20 am and arrives in Hanoi at 7.20 pm. The second train departs from Lao Cai at 6.45 pm and arrives in Hanoi at 4.00 am the next morning.
- Bus: Minibuses leave Sapa for Lao Cai (38 km, 2 hours, costs about US\$ 2 per person). Buses depart from Lao Cai for Bac Ha daily (63 km) and costs about US\$ 5. Sapa to Bac Ha (110 km) costs US\$ 12 (Sunday minibus tour includes transportation, guide and trekking to the village of the Flower H'mong). On the way back to Sapa, it is possible to stop in Lao Cai and catch the night train back to Hanoi.

Son La

Son La, 308 km west of Hanoi, is the capital city of a province with the same name. The area is populated mainly by hill-tribes, including the Black and White Thai, Muong and H'Mong (Meo) tribes. Son La was in the past, a prison town constructed by French colonialists to hold anti-colonialist revolutionaries. Son La is 121km from Moc Chau, 170km from Mai Chau, 310 km Northwest of Hanoi. Moc Chau is 199 km from Hanoi.

- Road Bus connections with Hanoi's Kim Ma station. Car rentals can be arranged in Son La for about US\$ 120 for a Son La-Hanoi round trip.
- Air Na San Airport is 20 km from Son La. Flights only run once a week. A ticket can be booked at Son La Hotel or local travel agency (Booking online - dulichso.com).