

# Hoa Lu *in Ninh Binh*

EXPLORE THE ROYAL CAPITAL  
OF VIETNAM



# Explore the Royal Capital of Vietnam: Hoa Lu in Ninh Binh

Hoa Lu was the capital of Vietnam between the 10th and 11th centuries, and today, Hoa Lu is a top location for tourists in Vietnam. Tourists enjoy the ancient city's beautiful temples and natural beauty. Hoa Lu is just 90 kilometers south of [Hanoi](#), so tourists can easily add Hoa Lu to their itinerary for northern Vietnam. Know that to travel to Vietnam, most tourists will need a Vietnam visa, and you can learn [how to apply for a Vietnam visa here](#).

In this article, we share key travel destinations for a visit to Hoa Lu. We also share tips on how to get there, what to pack, and the best times to visit. Additionally, we share recommendations for different types of travelers, including travelers who are [backpacking in Vietnam](#) and families.

## Places to See

Tourists will find that there is plenty to see and plenty to do in Hoa Lu. On the top of the list are Hoa Lu's temples. The city's impressive caves are certainly worth a visit, too. Check out some of the top places to see in Hoa Lu, Vietnam, in the following pages.



## Dinh Tien Hoang Temple

Dinh Tien Hoang was the first emperor of Vietnam, and the [Dinh Tien Hoang Temple](#) pays homage to his reign. Historians credit Emperor Dinh Tien Hoang with uniting territories in 986 AD to form the [Dai Co Viet Kingdom](#). While the temple was in disrepair for centuries, locals restored the temple in the 17th century. Within the main house of the temple, there are three distinct areas: the worship area, the incense room, and a separate section with a statue of [Dinh Tien Hoang](#) and his three sons. Tourists can also see a stone pedestal of his throne and a collection of bronze bells. Visitors who are OK with a bit of a climb can ascend a 300-foot staircase up the Ma Yen mountain behind the temple. At the top, people who make the trek can enjoy beautiful views over Hoa Lu.



## Le Dai Hanh Temple

Just 300 meters away from the Dinh Tien Hoang Temple is the [Le Dai Hanh Temple](#). Tourists can visit both temples over a few hours. Emperor Le Dai Hanh is famous for defeating Chinese invaders in the 10th century. Le Dai Hanh Temple features several ornate wood carvings, an art form that is much less pronounced in the Dinh Tien Hoang Temple. In the central section of the temple, visitors will find a statue of Emperor Le Dai Hanh on a throne.



## Nhat Tru Pagoda

The [Nhat Tru Pagoda](#) is one of Vietnam's national historical monuments. The pagoda is in the Dinh architectural style, and visitors will notice three distinct sections in the area surrounding the pagoda. There is the main lobby, a Buddha worship house, and a house for worshiping ancestors. Inside the Nhat Tru Pagoda, visitors will find a rare decorated Buddhist pillar with a carved lotus. The pillar is an impressive 4.16 meters tall. Over 1,000 years ago, royalty and monks would meet at the Nhat True Pagoda and discuss policy issues and regional affairs.



## Trang An Landscape Complex

When visiting Hoa Lu, tourists can take a small boat through the [Trang An Landscape Complex](#). The location boasts a tranquil river that runs between rice fields and impressive limestone karst structures, and the area is an official [UNESCO World Heritage Site](#). Tourists can experience Trang An by going on a boat tour and exploring Trang An's Sao Khe river and the area's lush natural beauty. Also, Trang An was a film location in the 2017 movie [King Kong - Skull Island](#). Movie buffs can visit the exact film locations and feel as if they are in the movie themselves!

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## Tam Coc Cave System

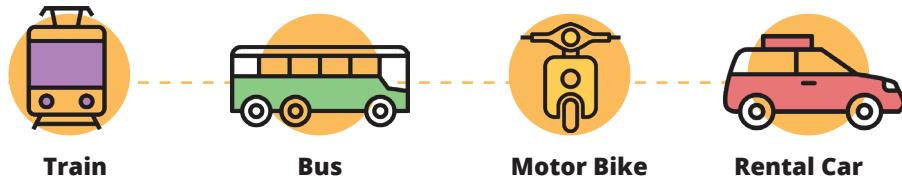
The [Tam Coc cave system](#) is technically part of the Trang An Landscape Complex, yet many guidebooks treat the Tam Coc cave system as a separate area. Some tourists refer to the Tam Coc cave system as "[Halong Bay on land](#)," as the locations are similar with their jutting limestone towers. Key caves include the Hang Ca, Hang Hai, and Hang Ba caves, and tourists can explore each of these caves while visiting the Trang An Landscape Complex. However, tourists should expect an extra cost for a boat ticket when visiting the Tam Coc caves. Tourists and their boat guide will need to lay down on their backs as the guide paddles into the caves. It's a tight fit!



## How to get to Hoa Lu

Hoa Lu is a popular destination for tourists in part because it is very accessible. Tourists can visit Hoa Lu on a day trip from Hanoi, and if they have the time, they can also spend a night or two in Hoa Lu and the surrounding [Ninh Binh](#) area.

**Depending on budget and time limitations, tourists can get to Hoa Lu by:**



## Vietnam Visa

Before your trip to Vietnam and Hoa Lu, tourists must acquire a Vietnam visa. Tourists [can apply for a visa to Vietnam online](#), and applying online can help travelers avoid long lines and hassles at the airport.



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## What to Pack When Visiting Hoa Lu

When visiting Hoa Lu, expect that almost all of your trip will be outdoors. Of course, the Trang An Landscape Complex and Tam Coc caves are outdoors, and the temples are also outdoors. The temples do not have air-conditioned rooms or an indoor museum portion. Accordingly, pack for a day in the sun. Be sure to bring a hat, and wear sunscreen or protective clothing. Even when you are under clouds, the sun's rays can have a harmful effect.

There are restaurants in and around Hoa Lu, but travelers should not expect a place to eat on every corner, as they may find back in Hanoi. Be sure to bring plenty of water, and bring some of your favorite snacks. Most tours split up the day with lunch at a local restaurant.

However, some snacks may help you get through the day's longer treks.

Be sure to pack comfortable shoes. You will do plenty of walking in Hoa Lu, and some tourists chose to climb the 300-foot limestone rock face behind the Dinh Tien Hoang Temple. Also, bring waterproof shoes if you have them. Your feet may get a bit wet when you visit the Tam Coc caves by boat or walk alongside the river's shore. Also, bring small bills for tipping. It is appropriate to tip boat drivers for their service.

To learn more about what to pack, check out our guide on [how to pack for your trip to Vietnam](#).



## When to Visit Hoa Lu

The ideal time to visit Hoa Lu is between April and May. During those months, visitors can enjoy stunning landscapes as the rice paddies will be a bright yellow among the area's rich green foliage. Visitors are also more likely to experience those landscapes under blue skies, as April and May are just at the start of the rainy season between April to October.

If you are lucky, your trip will coincide with the Hoa Lu Festival, which typically occurs in early April. The festival features processions, singing, dancing, and great food. During one of the festival's main events, locals will carry a boy dressed as Dinh Tien Hoang across the Hoang Long River. The procession then stops in a nearby village where the games and music continue. The festival's dates change with the lunar calendar, so be sure to check the festival's dates during the year your plan to visit Hoa Lu.

Know that some people recommend visiting Hoa Lu in September. While visitors in September are more likely to experience rain, the more mature rice fields will be a beautiful deep green. While some months are better than others, tourists can enjoy Hoa Lu any month of the year. If you find yourself in Hanoi, you should make the trip to Hoa Lu regardless of the current month. To learn more about when to visit popular locations in Vietnam, check out our article on the [best time to visit Vietnam by region](#).

## TIPS FOR TRAVELING TO HOA LU

### For Backpackers

Traveling in Vietnam can fit almost any budget, including the budget of backpackers looking to travel inexpensively. Backpackers who wish to visit the ancient capital of Hoa Lu can find a variety of budget tour options. Travelers will find numerous local travel groups in Hanoi, and we recommend that they inquire about each group's budget tour options.

It may take a bit of hunting, but backpackers can find day trips to Hoa Lu for as low as \$30. This tour price typically includes roundtrip transport by bus. The trip is a two-hour journey each way. Backpackers will also get to enjoy a one-hour boat ride through the Tam Coc cave systems during most tours. Some tours even offer a bike trip through the rice fields of the Trang An Landscape Complex.

**Taking a day-trip tour is probably the best option for backpackers.** They will be able to see Hoa Lu's main attractions, and they can be back at their hostel in Hanoi the same day. However, if backpackers wish to stay in Hoa Lu and take their time, we recommend staying at the [Hoa Lu Backpacker Homestay](#). Backpackers can reserve a bunk bed in a shared room for as low as \$6 per night - with breakfast included!

If you would like more tips on budgeting for a Vietnam vacation, check out our guide to [Vietnam vacation costs](#).



## TIPS FOR TRAVELING TO HOA LU

### For Families

Families with children can also enjoy Hoa Lu's magnificent landscapes and ancient temples. If you are traveling as a family, we recommend that you try to arrange a private tour. Like backpackers, you can also inquire about your options at Hanoi's local travel agencies. A family will likely be able to get a private tour for around \$100 - \$200. This price includes a private driver for roundtrip transportation, a guide, and boat tour fees.

Whatever you end up choosing, just be sure that you have everything in writing regarding what to expect. A private tour helps families who are traveling with children, as the family can travel at its own pace. However, with a private tour, the family needs to be more involved in creating their private tour experience and making sure that there are no surprises.

Families that wish to spend a night at Hoa Lu can reserve a room at the Hang Mua Eco Lodge. The hotel is safe, and the hotel offers a beautiful pool that parents can enjoy with their children. Rooms at the [Han Mua Eco Lodge](#) are as low as \$34 per night.



## More on Getting a Vietnam Visa

We hope that the above information has been helpful and informative for planning a trip to Hoa Lu. When planning your trip to Hoa Lu or anywhere in Vietnam, it is important to sort out visa issues well in advance of your departure. Almost all tourists to Vietnam need a Vietnam visa to enter the country.

Fortunately, it is easy to get a Vietnam visa if one applies online. Vietnam has a visa-on-arrival program, and before a trip, visitors should apply online for a visa approval letter. The visa approval letter will certify that the traveler will not run into any issues in getting a visa stamp at the airport. Additionally, getting the approval letter before one's trip allows the traveler to avoid long lines at the airport.



## It's Easy to Get Started!

1.



Get started with our [online Vietnam visa application](#). After receiving your visa application, we will process your information and let you know if there are any issues or additional paperwork for you to complete.

2.



Once everything goes through, we will issue you your Vietnam visa approval letter. **We typically issue visa approval letters two days after we receive your online Vietnam visa application.**

3.



Next, **take your Vietnam visa approval letter with you on your trip.** Upon arriving in Vietnam, you will present the approval letter to immigration. The immigration officer will review your letter and then provide you with a visa stamp.

4.



After that, you are ready to start your trip in Vietnam! **Know that you must enter Vietnam through one of the country's participating international airports. Vietnam visa approval letters do not work at land border crossings.**



For more information on popular tourist destinations in Vietnam, check out our [Vietnam travel guides page](#). You can find recommendations for locations such as [Ho Chi Minh City](#), [Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park](#), [Phan Thiet](#), and [Nha Trang](#). Also, check out our [Vietnam travel tips](#) page to learn more about [Vietnamese cuisine](#) and [etiquette in Vietnam](#).