

Cao Bằng

Vietnam

TRAVEL GUIDE

Tripomatic



Overview

Cao Bằng is a remote border province in the far north-east of Vietnam. Its main draw is Bản Giốc Waterfall, one of the largest waterfalls in Southeast Asia, which marks the border with China. The province is also a UNESCO Global Geopark, with limestone karst, caves, lakes and quiet villages of the Tay, Nung and Dao peoples.

Most visitors stay two to three nights. Cao Bằng city is the base. Days are for the waterfall, Nguom Ngao Cave, Thang Hen lakes and Pác Bó.

When to visit

September to November is the best time. The waterfall is full after the summer rains, the air is clear and the chestnut harvest is on in Trùng Khánh. Rice fields turn golden in September and October. Bản Giốc is at its fullest from July to September.

The winter from December to February is cold and foggy, and snow is rare but possible on high ground. The summer from June to August is wet, and landslides can close roads.

MONTH	CONDITIONS	DAY °C avg / max	NIGHT °C avg / min	
January	Great Great for sightseeing	20° / 26°	9° / 3°	Dry air
February	Great Great for sightseeing	23° / 30°	11° / 4°	Dry air
March	Great Great for sightseeing	27° / 33°	15° / 9°	
April	Fair Fair for sightseeing	30° / 37°	19° / 13°	12 rainy days · Muggy, humid air
May	Poor Poor for sightseeing	32° / 36°	22° / 18°	19 rainy days · Oppressive humidity
June	Poor Poor for sightseeing	31° / 34° Feels like 35°	24° / 21°	24 rainy days · Oppressive humidity · Calm winds · UV 8 (Very high)
July	Poor Poor for sightseeing	31° / 34° Feels like 36°	25° / 23°	24 rainy days · Oppressive humidity · Calm winds · UV 9 (Very high)
August	Poor Poor for sightseeing	31° / 33° Feels like 35°	24° / 22°	23 rainy days · Oppressive humidity · Calm winds · UV 9 (Very high)
September	Fair Fair for sightseeing	30° / 33° Feels like 33°	22° / 18°	16 rainy days · Oppressive humidity · Calm winds
October	Good Good for sightseeing	27° / 31°	19° / 14°	Muggy, humid air
November	Great Great for sightseeing	24° / 30°	14° / 9°	
December	Great Great for sightseeing	20° / 27°	10° / 4°	Dry air

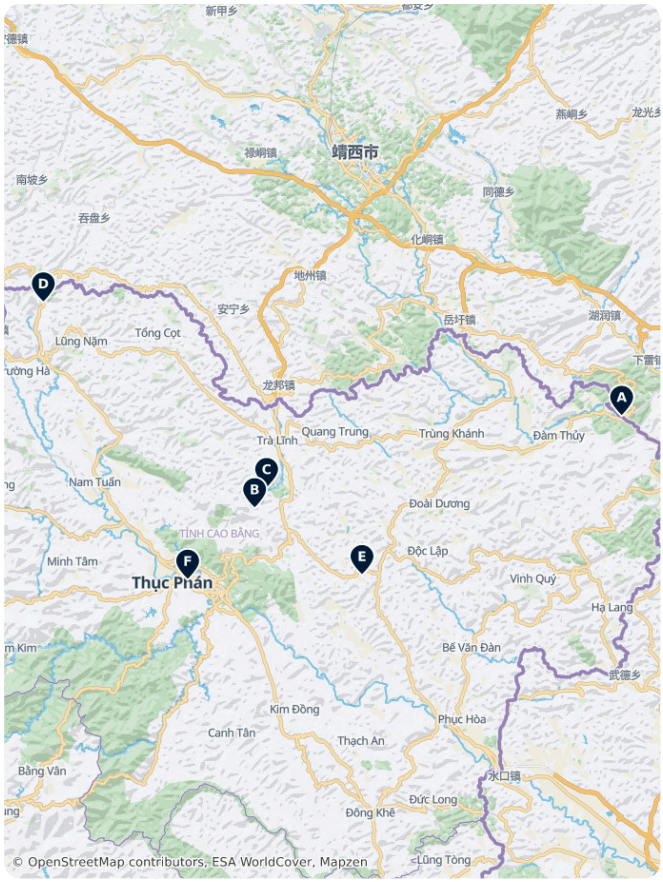
Best months: January, February, November, December

Climate data: NASA POWER (MERRA-2) · 1996–2025

Top sights

- A Ban Gioc (Detian) waterfall is a wide, stepped waterfall on the Quây Sơn River, on the border with China.
- B Hồ Thang Hen is a pair of mountain lakes about 25 km from Cao Bằng, with a quiet shore and boat rides.
- C Núi Thủng is a limestone arch in a hill, with views over the valley.
- D Ho Chi Minh 0km monument is a monument at Pác Bó, the border village where Hồ Chí Minh returned to Vietnam in 1941.
- E Ironsmith Village is a village known for iron tools and blacksmiths.
- F Bảo tàng tỉnh Cao Bằng is the provincial museum in Cao Bằng city.

Nguom Ngao Cave, near Bản Giốc, is a large cave with stalactites and a guided path.



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What to experience

- **Stand below Bản Giốc**: A bamboo raft goes to the base of the falls on the river.
- **Explore Nguom Ngao Cave**: A lit path leads through large halls.
- **Boat on the Thang Hen lakes**: A quiet mountain lake trip.
- **Taste chestnuts in autumn**: Trùng Khánh is famous for its chestnuts.
- **Stay in a homestay**: Tay and Nung villages host guests in stilt houses.

Day trips

- **Nguom Ngao Cave**: a long cave near the waterfall, usually visited together with Bản Giốc.
- **Pác Bó**: a historic site and cave about 50 km north of Cao Bằng city.
- A Ha Giang: the neighbouring province, often combined in a northern loop.
- B Hanoi: about 6 to 8 hours by road, so most visitors stay overnight.



Where to explore

- **West**: Ha Giang has the Đồng Văn plateau and the Hà Giang Loop.
- **South**: Hanoi is the main gateway.
- **Karst country**: Ninh Binh is another limestone region in the north.

Getting there

- **By bus**: Sleeper buses and minivans run from Hanoi to Cao Bằng city in about 6 to 8 hours.
- **By car**: A private car or driver from Hanoi is a comfortable option. Many tours run a loop through Bắc Kạn and Ba Bể Lake.
- **By air or train**: Cao Bằng has no commercial airport or passenger railway. Hanoi is the nearest hub. Vietnam Railways
- **To the waterfall**: Bản Giốc is about 85 km from Cao Bằng city. The drive takes about 2 hours.

Getting around

- **Car with driver**: The easiest way to reach the waterfall, caves and Pác Bó in one trip.
- **Motorbike**: Popular with experienced riders. Roads are quiet but winding.
- **Taxi**: Available in Cao Bằng city. Book a driver for day trips.
- **Walking**: Cao Bằng city is small and walkable.

Getting around on foot & by bike

WALKABILITY

Low

Cao Bằng city is walkable, but sights lie far apart on mountain roads.

CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE

Low

Distances and steep roads make cycling hard for most visitors.

Driving

- **Is a car worth it?** A car with a driver is the best way to see the waterfall, the caves and the lakes in two days.
- **Roads**: Mountain roads are winding and can be foggy. Drive slowly.
- **Fuel**: Fill up in Cao Bằng city or Trùng Khánh.

Food & drink

Cao Bằng food is hearty and simple. Try roasted duck with a sour sauce, bánh cuốn Trùng Khánh, a thin steamed rice roll, and smoked pork. Local chestnuts are sold in autumn. Rice wine and sweet potato sweets are common gifts.

Look for family restaurants in Cao Bằng city and small eateries near the waterfall.

What to eat & drink

BREAKFAST

Pho · Phở
Beef or chicken noodle soup with a fragrant broth, fresh herbs, and rice noodles; commonly eaten for breakfast.

LUNCH

Bun Cha · Bún chả
Grilled pork patties and slices served with rice vermicelli, herbs, and a sweet-sour dipping sauce; a Hanoi specialty.

Bun Bo Hue · Bún bò Huế
A spicy, lemongrass-scented beef noodle soup from the city of Hue.

Cao Lau · Cao lầu
A noodle dish unique to Hoi An, with thick chewy noodles, pork, and greens, traditionally made with local well water.

SNACKS & STREET FOOD

Banh Mi · Bánh mì
A French-influenced baguette sandwich filled with pork, pate, pickled vegetables, and herbs.

Banh Xeo · Bánh xèo
A crispy turmeric rice-flour crepe filled with pork, shrimp, and bean sprouts, wrapped in lettuce and herbs.

Goi Cuon · Gỏi cuốn
Fresh (uncooked) spring rolls filled with shrimp, pork, herbs, and vermicelli, wrapped in rice paper.

SWEETS & DESSERTS

Che · Chè
A category of sweet dessert soups or puddings made with beans, fruit, jelly, and coconut milk, served hot or over ice.

DRINKS

Ca Phe Sua Da · Cà phê sữa đá
Strong drip coffee served over ice with sweetened condensed milk; Vietnam's signature drink.

Bia Hoi · Bia hơi
Cheap, light draft beer brewed fresh daily and sold at street-side stalls, especially in Hanoi.

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Safety & health

Cao Bằng is a quiet and safe province, but some points need care.

- Mountain roads can be slippery and foggy. Landslides are possible in summer.
- Stay on marked paths near the border. Some areas have unexploded ordnance from past conflict.
- Wear a helmet if you ride a motorbike.
- Carry cash. ATMs are limited outside the city.
- Bring warm clothes in winter.

History

Cao Bằng sits on a trade route between Vietnam and China. The province was an old base of the Mạc dynasty in the 16th century.

In 1941 Hồ Chí Minh returned to Vietnam through Pác Bó and set up a base in a cave there. The area was also the site of fighting in the 1950s and in the 1979 border war. In 2018 UNESCO named the area the Non Nước Cao Bằng Global Geopark.

Country facts

Quick practical facts for Vietnam at a glance:

CURRENCY

VND ₫

ELECTRICITY



Type A / Type C / Type F
220 V · 50 Hz

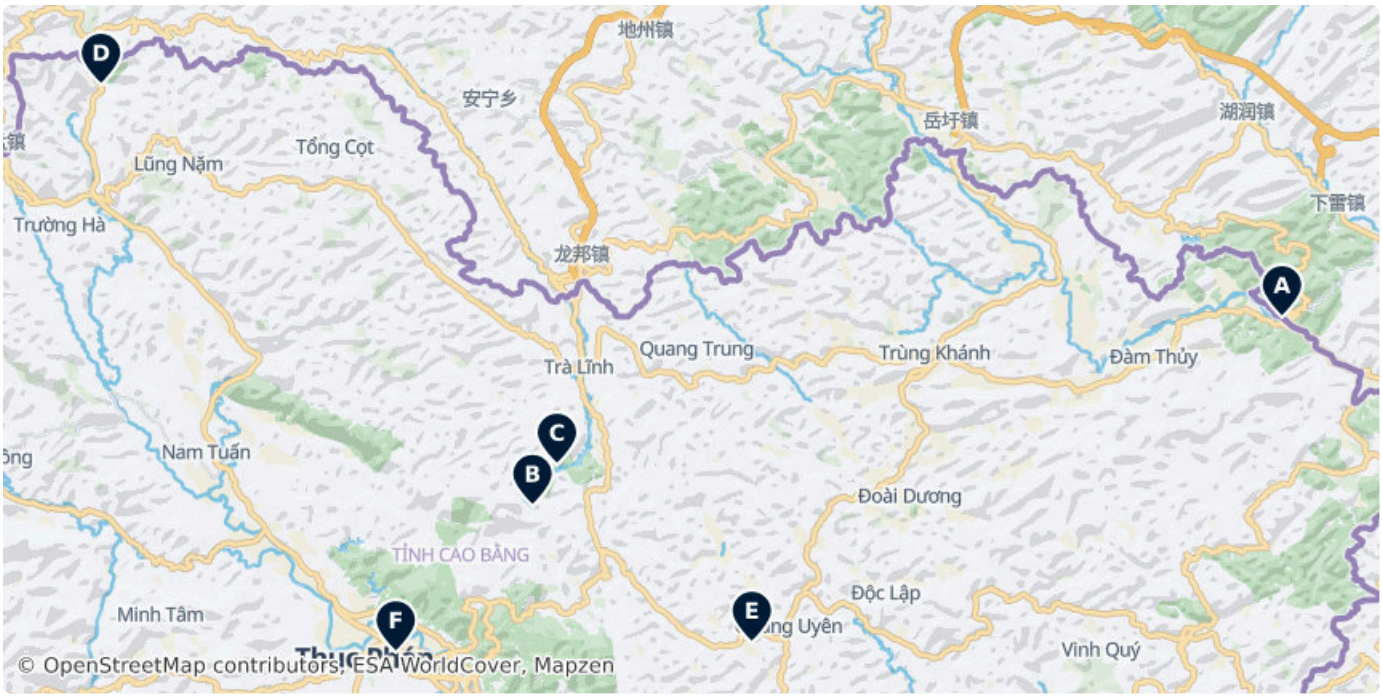
LANGUAGES

Vietnamese

TAP WATER

Not safe to drink

Top sights



A Ban Gioc (Detian) waterfall

Xã Đàm Thủy, Cao Bằng Province, Vietnam
(22.85560, 106.72377)

B Thang Hen lake

(22.75665, 106.29735)

C Núi Thủng

(22.77821, 106.31129)

D Ho Chi Minh 0km monument

(22.97722, 106.05185)

E Ironsmith Village

(22.68485, 106.42211)

F Bảo tàng tỉnh Cao Bằng

(22.67984, 106.21957)

DATA SOURCES

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