

VIETNAM · SEP 2026

Compiled Aug 9, 2026

# Vietnam Solo Trip

Northern Vietnam in the golden-terrace month. A photography-first, hostel-social, bike-riding, birthday-celebrating 11-day plan.

Sat, Sep 12 to Wed, Sep 23, 2026

**11**

DAYS ON GROUND

**₹92k**

TOTAL BUDGET

**5h**

DIRECT FLIGHT

**Sep 19**

BIRTHDAY (SAT)

Prepared for Kanak Sachin Dahake

BOM → HAN · VietJet VJ910 · 5h direct

# ☐ Table of Contents

This document is a complete field guide to a solo trip to Northern Vietnam in September 2026 — flight logistics, visa walkthrough, day-by-day plan, budget, accommodation, photography guide, safety, birthday plan and pre-departure checklist. Every section is self-contained; skip anywhere.

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## How to use this document

Read start-to-finish once, then use the table of contents for quick reference before/during the trip. The itinerary section is your daily reference — bookmark it. The flights, visa, and budget pages are pre-departure to-do lists. The photography and packing lists work best printed and folded into your camera bag.

Sep 12  
ARRIVE HANOI

Sep 19  
BIRTHDAY IN HANOI

Sep 23  
FLY HOME

₹29,654  
BEST FLIGHT PRICE

# Trip at a glance

## ☰ The one-page answer

### ✈ Flights

**Mumbai to Hanoi** on VietJet VJ910 (5h direct). Fri Sep 11 board, Sat Sep 12 07:10 land.

Return VJ907 Wed Sep 23. Best price: **₹29,654 on Goibibo** (Eco + 20kg).

### 📖 Route

Northern Vietnam only: **Hanoi · Ha Giang · Ninh Binh · Halong**. Central and South skipped in Sep — typhoon season.

Golden rice terraces peak in late Sept, perfect for the Ha Giang Loop.

### 🏠 Stays

**Hanoi Central Backpackers**, Bong Hostel (Ha Giang), Tam Coc homestay (Ninh Binh). All hostels, social by design.

USD 6-12 per night, free breakfast, nightly pub crawls, safe for solo.

### 🎂 Birthday

**Sat Sep 19** — Trang An boat morning, back to Hanoi for rooftop cocktails, dinner at Cau Go, hostel pub crawl at 22:00.

Real Saturday: ideal for a big night out.

## ☆ What this plan optimises for (in order)

1. **Safety and solo-friendliness** — every night is a big social hostel or a guided group (Easy Rider, day cruise). Never alone in a random room.
2. **Photography** — spots timed to golden hour, weather (post-monsoon clarity), and light. Fujifilm X-T30 III film simulations picked per location.
3. **Social interaction** — hostel free-beer hours, loop group of 6-10, birthday pub crawl. Solo but never alone.
4. **Bike experience via Easy Rider** — Ha Giang Loop with a local guide (you pillion, they drive). Legal, safer, and better photos.
5. **Budget under INR 1L** — total pinned at ~INR 92,000 including flights (Economy fare), with ~₹8k splurge buffer.
6. **Remote work** — 1-2 workdays baked in Mon-Tue at Toong / Ken Office coworking spaces.



### ⚠ What you skip in September

Central Vietnam (Da Nang, Hoi An, Hue) is peak typhoon month. Two days of rain can eat 40% of a 10-day itinerary. Save Hoi An for March-May any future year.

# Flights: Mumbai to Hanoi

**₹29,654**

 BEST PRICE FOUND  
(GOIBIBO)

**5h**

EACH DIRECTION

**VJ910/907**

BOTH LEGS

**20kg**

 CHECKED BAG  
INCLUDED

## ✂ The flights

| Leg      | Flight | Route                | Date · Time                    | Fare (Eco + 20kg) |
|----------|--------|----------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| Outbound | VJ910  | Mumbai T2 → Hanoi T2 | Sat 12/09/2026 · 00:40 – 07:10 | ~₹ 15,300         |
| Return   | VJ907  | Hanoi T2 → Mumbai T2 | Wed 23/09/2026 · 20:05 – 23:40 | ~₹ 14,300         |

## ☰ Eco vs Deluxe — the trade-off

### ✓ Economy (₹29,654 on Goibibo)

Includes 20kg checked bag as an add-on. No seat selection, no change flexibility. Best if you're 90%+ sure of your dates. Recommended.

### ☆ Deluxe (₹35,292 on VietJet direct)

Adds seat selection, priority baggage, and change flexibility (fare difference only). ~₹5,600 more.

### ⚠ Airport-counter baggage

Never buy checked bag at the counter — costs 2-3× the online price. Always add during booking.

## 🏠 Pune to Mumbai transfer (Fri Sep 11)

| Mode                        | Cost         | Time                   | When to leave Pune |
|-----------------------------|--------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| Cab / Uber to T2            | ₹3,500-5,000 | 3.5-4h door to door    | 16:00 Fri          |
| Volvo bus + taxi (cheapest) | ₹800 + ₹300  | 4-5h + taxi            | 15:00 Fri          |
| IndiGo PNQ-BOM              | ₹1,800-3,500 | 1h flight + 3h layover | 17:00 Fri          |

### 🕒 Timing: reach Mumbai T2 by 20:30 Fri Sep 11

Boarding for VJ910 starts around 23:00 for the 00:40 Sat departure. Dinner at T2 airside is easy; VJ910 doesn't include meals so eat before you fly.

## ⚠ Add-ons and gotchas

- **Web check-in** opens 24h before — Fri Sep 11 00:40 IST. Set a phone reminder.
- **Cabin baggage cap**: 7 kg. Your 60L rucksack goes checked (too tall for cabin). Only the laptop bag + camera goes on board.
- **No meals** on India route — eat at Mumbai T2 before boarding.
- **Name on passport must match ticket exactly**: DAHAKE / KANAK SACHIN.
- **Insurance**: buy Digit or ACKO before flying.

## 💰 Booking-platform comparison (Aug 9, 2026)

Same VJ910 + VJ907 flights, same 20 kg baggage — different platform + coupon can save up to **INR 5,600**.

| Platform                   | Fare           | Coupon                 | Card required            | Total          |
|----------------------------|----------------|------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| VietJet.com direct         | <b>Deluxe</b>  | none                   | Any                      | ₹35,291        |
| MakeMyTrip                 | Economy + 20kg | MMTGOOGLEINT -₹2,500   | Any                      | ₹32,911        |
| <b>Goibibo</b> (best case) | Economy + 20kg | GOHSBCINTEMI -₹3,172   | HSBC + EMI               | <b>₹29,654</b> |
| Goibibo (IDFC EMI)         | Economy + 20kg | GOIDFCINTNCEMI -₹3,172 | IDFC First + no-cost EMI | <b>₹29,654</b> |
| Goibibo (any card)         | Economy + 20kg | GOGOOGLEINT -₹2,538    | Any                      | ₹30,288        |

### ☰ Why the price gap

Goibibo and MMT share the same parent (MakeMyTrip Group acquired ibibo in 2017) and use the same VietJet ticket engine. They run **different daily coupon promotions** — always check both.

## ⚠ 3 caveats before clicking Pay on Goibibo

### Non-refundable outbound wording

Goibibo shows a flat penalty of INR 14,912. MMT shows a tiered structure (INR 6,491-17,516). Underlying VietJet fare rules are **identical** — different UIs. Since you won't cancel, this is theoretical.

### 24-hour ticket issue on Goibibo

MMT and VietJet.com give instant PNR. Goibibo issues within 24h. Very low risk that VJ910 sells out in that window for a Sep 12 flight priced at ₹30k+.

### HSBC EMI requirement

The INR 29,654 price needs HSBC Credit + EMI. Alternatives: **GOIDFCINTNCEMI** (IDFC First, no-cost EMI) same total. Or **GOGOOGLEINT** (any card) → INR 30,288.

## ✓ Recommended booking sequence

1. **Sign in to Goibibo first** — booking ties to your account for support and goCash.
2. Try coupons in order at payment: **GOHSBCINTEMI** → **GOIDFCINTNCEMI** → **GOONECARDEMI** → **GOGOOOGLEINT**. Use the first that works with your card.
3. Passenger name: **DAHAKE / KANAK SACHIN** (exact match to passport + e-Visa).
4. Contact: **+91 7972228429 / ksdusa4@gmail.com**.
5. **Skip every optional add-on**: Travel Insurance (buy ACKO separately), Price Drop Protection, in-app "Visa for Vietnam" (₹4,320 — DIY on [evisa.gov.vn](https://evisa.gov.vn)), tree-plantation.
6. Fallback: MakeMyTrip at ₹32,911 for instant confirmation if the 24h wait bothers you.

### ✓ Post-booking (once confirmed)

Screenshot the PNR · verify VJ910 (Sat 12/09) + VJ907 (Wed 23/09) · verify passenger name matches passport · update flight number on e-Visa if not yet submitted · set web check-in reminder for **Fri Sep 11 00:40 IST**.

# Vietnam e-Visa

## ☰ The essentials

| Item                 | Details                                                                       |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Cost                 | USD 25 single entry (~ ₹2,100)                                                |
| Validity             | Up to 90 days — you set the window                                            |
| Processing           | 3-5 working days (5-7 in peak Sep)                                            |
| Apply before travel  | At least 2 weeks recommended, minimum 10 days                                 |
| Passport requirement | Valid 6+ months beyond arrival · 2 blank pages                                |
| Only official portal | <a href="https://evisa.gov.vn">evisa.gov.vn</a> — anything else is a reseller |

## 📷 Required documents

### Passport bio page

JPEG scan, all 4 corners visible, no glare. Kanak's is

already uploaded .

### 4×6 cm portrait photo

**White background**, no glasses, no smile with teeth, formal shirt.

Kanak's photo is

uploaded and passed the 74% face-match check .

### Debit or credit card

HDFC / ICICI / Axis Forex / Niyo all accepted.

International transactions enabled.

### Tentative flight number and hotel address

Now that you've booked VJ910, use flight number

`VJ910`; residential address `Hanoi Central

Backpackers Hostel, 16 Ly Quoc Su Street, Hoan Kiem Ward, Hanoi`.

## ⚠ Common rejection reasons

1. **Grey or off-white photo background** — 40% of Indian rejections. Fix by redoing on a white wall with phone flash.
2. **Wrong port of entry** — pick *Noi Bai Int Airport (Ha Noi)*, not a land border.
3. **Passport expiring within 6 months of arrival** — Kanak's expires 19/11/2029: safe.
4. **Name spelling mismatch** — form vs passport.
5. **Photo has smile with visible teeth, glasses, headwear.**

✓ **Your form is 90% ready**

Confirmed values: single-entry, valid **10/09/2026 to 30/09/2026**, purpose Tourism, entry Sat Sep 12, stay 11 days, Ha Noi + Hoan Kiem Ward, Noi Bai airport for both entry and exit, expenses USD 1,200, insurance ACKO, expenses covered by Personal, payment Credit Card.

⚠ **Last checks before submitting**

Section 4: "Contact address" must be an address, not a phone number. Section 5: fill Position/Course of study (e.g. Software Engineer) and Company phone number (+91 20 4045 4045).

📖 **Arrival at Noi Bai (Sat Sep 12 · 07:10)**

1. Skip the "Visa on Arrival" counter — that's for unprepared travelers.
2. Go straight to general immigration. Present passport + printed e-Visa PDF.
3. Officer stamps arrival date and duration.
4. ATMs in the arrivals hall — withdraw 3-5 million VND (₹10-16k) to start. Always pick "No conversion / VND" to avoid dynamic currency conversion.
5. Skip taxi touts. Airport wifi, then Grab Car to hostel. ~30 min ride, 280-380k VND (₹950-1,300).

# September weather in Vietnam

Vietnam has three completely different September climates depending on latitude. Northern Vietnam is at its scenic peak; Central is peak typhoon; South is monsoon wet.

## ☀️ North · Sep 12-23

**Peak scenic month.** Monsoon easing, rice terraces turning gold late Sept, morning haze lifting for photography.

**Visit** Hanoi, Ha Giang, Sapa, Ninh Binh, Halong Bay

## ☁️ Central · Same window

**Typhoon window Sep-Nov.** First serious rains, high risk of trip-disruption. Beautiful when it clears but a real gamble.

**Skip** Da Nang, Hue, Hoi An

## ☁️ South · Same window

**Wettest monsoon month.** Daily downpours, mostly manageable but not photogenic.

**Wet** HCMC, Mekong, Phu Quoc

## 📷 Photography-specific weather notes

### Hanoi

Morning haze burns off by 09:30. Best light: 06:30-08:30 for dawn shoots at Hoan Kiem Lake and 16:00-18:00 golden hour in the French Quarter.

### Ha Giang

Rice terraces at Hoang Su Phi turn from green to gold in late Sept — expect terraces in various stages. Cloud inversions common at dawn — worth a 5am wake-up.

### Halong Bay

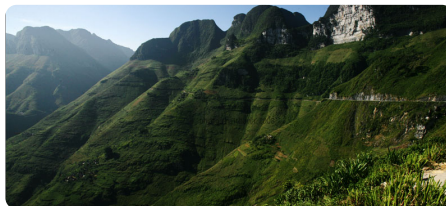
September haze lifts by end of month, decent for photography. Overcast common (dramatic clouds for photos). Rain squalls pass in 30-60 mins.

### Ninh Binh

Karst peaks work in almost any weather — mist is a bonus. Trang An caves stay dry inside so a light drizzle doesn't kill the boat ride.

## ★ Why September is actually the best month

Airfares hit their annual low (₹22-25k Mumbai-Hanoi vs ₹35-40k in December). Fewer crowds. Rice terraces at photograph-peak. Late-monsoon greenery still lush. Only downside: 2-3 grey days spread across the week, which the itinerary buffers into rest days.



# Day-by-day itinerary

Sat Sep 12 morning arrival · Wed Sep 23 evening departure. 11 days on ground, 8 leaves if you count strictly, 6 leaves if the last two workdays are officially work-from-Hanoi.

11

DAYS ON GROUND

3

HA GIANG LOOP DAYS

1

BIRTHDAY SATURDAY

1

HALONG DAY CRUISE

## Day 0 ● PNQ → BOM · Fly overnight Travel

FRI  
Sep 11

- 16:00 leave Pune; reach Mumbai T2 by 20:30
- 23:00 boarding VJ910
- 00:40 depart Mumbai · 5h A321neo flight

## Day 1 ● Arrive Hanoi · Old Quarter Hanoi

SAT  
Sep 12

- 07:10 land Noi Bai · immigration + ATM · Grab to hostel
- Bun cha lunch at the Obama-famous joint on Le Van Huu
- Slow walk Old Quarter + Hoan Kiem Lake with the Fujifilm
- 19:00 hostel free-beer hour — meet future loop-mates
- Book Ha Giang Loop through hostel reception tonight

## Day 2 ● Hanoi photography day Hanoi

SUN  
Sep 13

- 05:30 dawn shoot at Hoan Kiem — locals doing tai chi
- 09:00 Temple of Literature (before crowds)
- 11:00 Train Street — cafes with tea and the 15:30 train
- 13:00 pho + egg coffee at Giang Cafe
- 18:00 Water Puppet show — 100k VND, 50 min

## Day 3 ● Hanoi + night bus to Ha Giang Hanoi

MON  
Sep 14

- Slow start · Hoa Lo Prison Museum · French Quarter walk
- 18:00 last hostel dinner · finalize loop group
- 21:00 sleeper bus to Ha Giang (Sapa Express or QT)

## Day 4 ● Ha Giang Loop Day 1 Ha Giang

TUE  
Sep 15

- 05:30 arrive Ha Giang · loop briefing · coffee
- 08:00 Easy Rider departs · Twin Mountains · Heaven's Gate
- 180 km winding roads · Yen Minh homestay
- Family-style dinner + rice wine

**Day 5**  **Loop Day 2 · Ma Pi Leng Pass** Ha Giang

WED  
Sep 16

- The MOST scenic day of the trip
- Dong Van → Ma Pi Leng → Meo Vac loop
- Optional Nho Que River boat 100k VND
- Waterfall swim + Du Gia homestay

**Day 6**  **Loop Day 3 + night bus back** Ha Giang

THU  
Sep 17

- Du Gia → Ha Giang City with rice-terrace panoramas
- 14:00 shower + collect stored luggage
- 20:00 sleeper bus back to Hanoi

**Day 7**  **Recovery + Ninh Binh** Ninh Binh

FRI  
Sep 18

- 05:00 arrive Hanoi · long sleep
- 90-min massage · 400k VND
- 21:00 evening van to Tam Coc · sleep in Ninh Binh

**Day 8**  **BIRTHDAY: Trang An + Hanoi rooftop** Birthday

SAT  
Sep 19

- 07:00 Trang An boat · 3 caves + karst lagoons
- Back to Hanoi by 15:00
- Sunset at Skyline Hanoi rooftop
- Dinner at Cau Go · hostel pub crawl 22:00

**Day 9**  **Halong Bay day cruise** Halong

SUN  
Sep 20

- 08:00 shuttle from Hanoi
- Kayak · Titop Island · cave tour · lunch onboard
- Back by 19:00

**Day 10**  **Work day + Old Quarter** Hanoi

MON  
Sep 21

- Toong IPH or Ken Office · 200+ Mbps
- 4-5 hours focused work
- Cocktails at Nê in the evening

**Day 11**  **Half-day work + last night in Hanoi** Hanoi

TUE  
Sep 22

- Morning coworking half-day
- Afternoon souvenirs at Dong Xuan market · Craft Link
- Farewell hostel dinner + lakeside walk

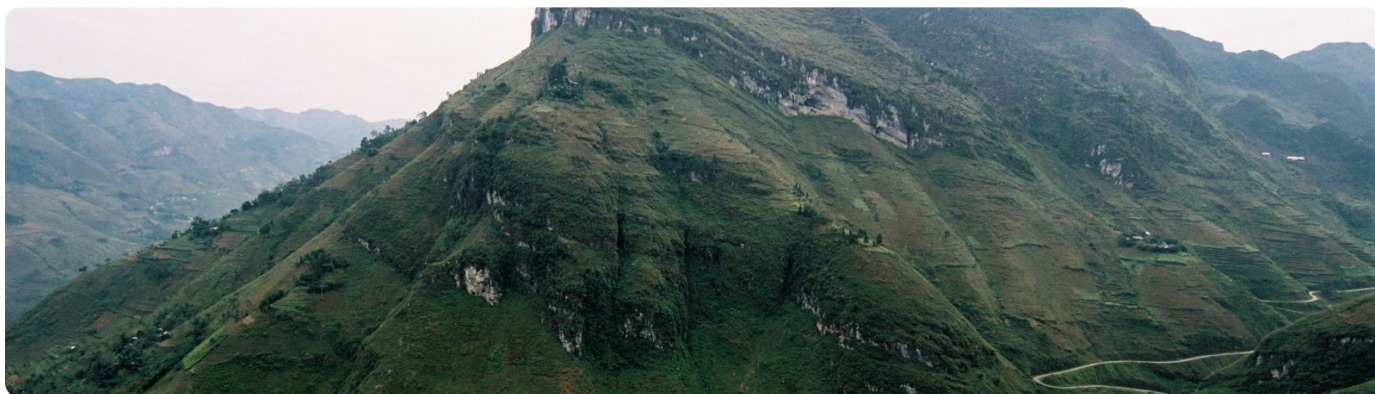
**Day 12**  **Fly home on VJ907** Travel

WED  
Sep 23

- Morning cafe brunch · pack
- 15:30 Grab to Noi Bai
- 20:05 VJ907 depart · 23:40 land Mumbai
- Cab / hotel-and-back to Pune

# The Ha Giang Loop

Three days on a motorbike in Vietnam's northernmost province. Twin Mountains, Heaven's Gate, Dong Van Karst Geopark, Ma Pi Leng Pass (one of Southeast Asia's top 4 mountain passes), and homestays with ethnic minority families. This is the emotional core of the trip.



Ma Pi Leng Pass — the highlight of Day 2

## ☰ Three ways to do the loop

| Option                                          | Cost                     | Legal for Indians                       | Verdict                                                 |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Easy Rider</b> (you pillion, guide drives)   | USD 170-220<br>(₹14-18k) | Yes • fully legal                       | <b>Recommended.</b> Safest, best photos, no IDP needed. |
| Guided self-ride (you drive with guide leading) | USD 130-180<br>(₹11-15k) | Only with 1968 IDP + Vietnamese license | India issues 1949 IDPs, not 1968. Technically illegal.  |
| DIY solo ride                                   | USD 60-90 (₹5-7.5k)      | Same legal issue + safety risk          | Not recommended for a solo first-timer.                 |

## 📖 What Easy Rider includes

### ✓ Included

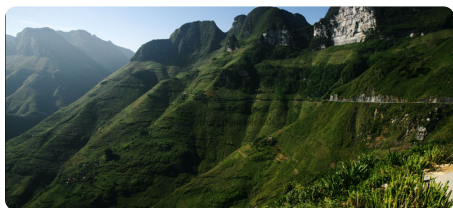
- Local guide who drives you on his bike
- All fuel, tolls, park entries
- 2 nights homestay (twin/dorm)
- All meals except drinks
- Luggage storage in Ha Giang City
- Helmet, jacket, gloves
- English-speaking guide

### ⚠️ Not included

- Alcohol (rice wine is cheap on-site)
- Nho Que River boat (100k VND)
- Personal tips (100-200k VND typical)
- Travel insurance (buy Digit / ACKO before trip)

## ☆ Recommended operators

- **Bong Hostel** — most popular, biggest social group, strongest safety record. Recommended.
- **QT Motorbikes** — smaller groups (4-6), more personal, guides speak better English.
- **Mama's Homestay** — family-run, best food, slightly older crowd.



### :≡ Loop packing (a small daypack)

2 quick-dry shirts · 1 warm layer (mountains get cold at night) · rain shell · 1 pair jeans · 1 sports shorts · 5 pairs underwear/socks · sunscreen · bug spray · Fujifilm + spare batteries · portable charger · basic first aid.

# Birthday plan: Saturday, Sep 19

Sep 19, 2026 is a real Saturday. That's the best possible day for a birthday — no work anywhere, hostels running full pub crawls, everyone in vacation mode. The Ninh Binh + Hanoi variant gets you the best photo morning AND the best social evening.



*Colourful lanterns — perfect birthday backdrop*

## 📅 The recommended plan

### Morning — Trang An (Ninh Binh)

**07:00 boat ride**, 2-3 hours. A local rower propels you through karst caves and lotus lagoons. This is the single best photo morning of the whole trip.

Cost: 250k VND (~₹850) · Camera-critical light.

Back to Hanoi by 15:00 (2h van from Tam Coc).

### Evening — Hanoi

**18:00 Skyline Hanoi rooftop** — sunset panoramic of Hoan Kiem Lake. Sunset cocktail.

**20:00 dinner at Cau Go** — upscale Vietnamese, ~500k VND for a full meal with wine.

**22:00 Hanoi Central Backpackers pub crawl** — 20+ solo travellers, 5 bars, ends at a rooftop club in West Lake.

## ☰ Alternative birthday configurations

| Option                                  | Vibe                                       | Cost             | Notes                               |
|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Hanoi rooftop + pub crawl (recommended) | High-energy, social, urban                 | ~₹2,500 all-in   | Best mix of photos + people         |
| Ninh Binh homestay birthday dinner      | Quiet, family-hosted                       | ~₹1,200          | Fits if Sep 19 lands on rest day    |
| Ha Giang Loop Day 3 homestay            | Rural, ethnic minority family + loop group | Included in loop | Requires shifting loop to Sep 17-19 |
| Overnight Halong Bay junk boat          | Isolated, romantic, sunset from a boat     | ₹4,500-6,500     | Feels lonely if solo. Skip.         |

# Ninh Binh & Halong Bay

## 📖 Ninh Binh (Sep 18-19)

Called "Halong Bay on land" — limestone karst peaks rising out of rice paddies and rivers. Do it as a Fri night arrival + Sat morning boat ride, sleeping in a Tam Coc homestay in between.

### Getting there

Limo-van from Hanoi (2h, 200k VND with hostel pickup) or train (2h 15m, 90-150k VND).

### Trang An vs Tam Coc boats

**Trang An** is longer (3h, 3 caves), better for photos. Tam Coc is shorter (1.5h), busier. Do Trang An.

### Mua Cave

500-step climb to the panoramic viewpoint. Do at sunset (17:00 arrival, 45 min up, sunset shot, 20 min down). Optional if you're tired.

### Homestay pick

Tam Coc Garden Homestay or Nguyen Shack — both under ₹800 with breakfast, family-run, super safe for solo.



*Trang An boat ride — the best photo morning of the trip*

## 📖 Halong Bay (Sep 20)

### 📷 September on Halong

Haze lifts by end of month. Some overcast days work well for moody photos. Rain squalls pass in 30-60 minutes. Bring your Fujifilm rain sleeve.

### **Day cruise from Hanoi**

08:00 shuttle from Old Quarter · 2h drive · 6h on the water · back by 19:00.

Cost: ₹1,800-2,500 with a reputable operator (Cat Ba Ventures, Vega Travel).

Included: kayaking, Titop Island climb, cave tour, lunch on the boat.

### **Overnight cruise (splurge)**

Ha Long junk boat, 1 night on board. Beautiful but you miss the Halong-crowds sunset from the boat's own deck, get better food, and it costs ₹4,500-6,500.

Solo cabins available on some operators — Bhaya, Emperor Cruises.

# Budget breakdown

₹91,954

TOTAL (ECO FLIGHT)

₹8,360

PER DAY AVERAGE

₹8,046

UNDER 1L BUFFER

USD 1,080

IN DOLLARS

## ₹ Line items in INR

| Category                                      | Amount (₹) | % of total | Notes                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------|------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Flights (VJ910 + VJ907, Economy + 20kg)       | 29,654     | 30%        | Best price via Goibibo · Deluxe on VietJet direct is ₹35,292 |
| Pune-Mumbai + Mumbai-Pune transfer            | 7,000      | 7%         | Cab both ways                                                |
| Vietnam e-Visa                                | 2,100      | 2%         | USD 25                                                       |
| Travel insurance (Digit/ACKO 14 days)         | 1,200      | 1%         | Motorbike + medical evac cover                               |
| Ha Giang Loop (Easy Rider, 3D2N)              | 16,000     | 16%        | USD 190 - includes food + stay                               |
| Hostels · 8 nights (Hanoi + Ninh Binh)        | 7,200      | 7%         | USD 10-12 per night                                          |
| Halong Bay day cruise                         | 2,200      | 2%         | Kayak + lunch included                                       |
| Trang An boat                                 | 850        | 1%         | 250k VND                                                     |
| Ninh Binh homestay (1 night)                  | 800        | 1%         | Tam Coc                                                      |
| Sleeper buses (Hanoi ↔ Ha Giang)              | 1,600      | 2%         | Round trip, 250k VND each way                                |
| Food (Vietnamese, all meals for 11 days)      | 8,500      | 9%         | Street food + 2 nice meals                                   |
| Coffee, drinks, snacks                        | 3,000      | 3%         | Egg coffee, coconut coffee, bia hoi                          |
| Coworking (Toong / Ken 2 days)                | 1,400      | 1%         | 200k VND per day                                             |
| Grab rides + local transport                  | 3,500      | 4%         | Airport transfers + city hops                                |
| Museums + activities                          | 1,800      | 2%         | Temple of Literature, Hoa Lo, Water Puppet                   |
| SIM / eSIM (Airal 30-day)                     | 550        | 1%         | Xin Chao 10GB via Viettel                                    |
| Birthday night (rooftop + Cau Go + pub crawl) | 3,500      | 4%         | Sat Sep 19 all-in                                            |

| Category                         | Amount (₹)     | % of total  | Notes                                |
|----------------------------------|----------------|-------------|--------------------------------------|
| Souvenirs + coffee beans + gifts | 2,500          | 3%          | Dong Xuan market, Craft Link         |
| Contingency + spa + tips         | 2,500          | 3%          | 90-min massage, unforeseen extras    |
| <b>Total</b>                     | <b>₹91,954</b> | <b>100%</b> | ~USD 1,080 · ₹8k under the 1L target |

## ☰ Where you can save · where you shouldn't

### ✓ Safe to trim

- Skip Pune-Mumbai cab, take Volvo bus: save ₹4,000
- Downgrade one Hanoi night to a dorm bed: save ₹300-500
- Skip Halong day cruise, do day trip to Bat Trang instead: save ₹1,500
- Cook / eat 1 street meal a day: save ₹2,000

### ⚠ Do not cut

- Travel insurance — mountain-region medical evacuation matters
- Easy Rider (vs DIY) — safety on unfamiliar mountain roads
- Airport Grab (vs tout) — first hour matters most
- Deluxe fare — you save more than the difference in add-ons

# Where to stay

Hostels are the strategy — every night is either a big social hostel or a guided-group homestay. Solo but never alone.

## 🏠 Hanoi options (5 nights total)

### Hanoi Central Backpackers

Recommended

#### 16 Ly Quoc Su, Hoan Kiem

USD 10-12/dorm · 8.7 rating · daily pub crawl · free beer 7pm · free breakfast · huge social crowd.

Books the Ha Giang Loop directly, luggage stored free during the loop.

### The One Hostel

#### Old Quarter · Yen Thai

USD 8-10/dorm · 8.9 rating · quieter · better for readers/photographers · rooftop bar with lake views.

### Quiri Hostel

#### Nam Ngu · West of Old Quarter

USD 12-14/dorm · newer property · A/C works well · quieter street · slightly further walk to nightlife.

### Female-only pod options

Not applicable to this trip but noted for reference: The One Hostel and Old Quarter View both have female-only dorms if travelling with a female friend later.

## 🏠 Ha Giang (3 nights on loop)

### Bong Hostel

Loop booking + first night before departure. USD 8 dorm. Biggest loop operator, best social scene.

### Yen Minh / Du Gia homestays

Nights 2-3 of the loop. Family-run, dorm-style, dinner included. Cold showers in some places — bring flip-flops.

## 🏠 Ninh Binh (1 night)

### Tam Coc Garden Homestay

USD 10-15 for a private room. Family-run, cycles included, best-in-class breakfast.

### Nguyen Shack Ninh Binh

USD 12-18 · in the middle of a rice paddy · sunset view from your balcony · slightly further from Trang An dock.

### ✓ Solo safety notes

All picks above have >8.5 ratings from solo travellers, 24h reception, lockers in dorms, and daylight-only check-in requirement (no random midnight arrivals). Text your family your hostel name each night — standard solo-travel best practice.

# Photography guide

You're travelling with a **Fujifilm X-T30 III**. This section is your location-by-location cheat sheet: film simulations, lenses, timing, and specific spots.

## 📷 Your kit + settings by scene

| Scene              | Best film sim              | Aperture  | ISO       | Timing                             |
|--------------------|----------------------------|-----------|-----------|------------------------------------|
| Hanoi Old Quarter  | Classic Chrome             | f/2.8-4   | 200-800   | Golden hour 16:00-18:00            |
| Train Street       | Classic Chrome / Reala Ace | f/4-5.6   | 400-1600  | Overcast or 07:00 dawn             |
| Ha Giang mountains | Velvia (saturation)        | f/8-11    | 100-400   | Golden hour + midday               |
| Ma Pi Leng Pass    | Velvia                     | f/8-16    | 100-200   | Any daylight                       |
| Rice terraces      | Velvia                     | f/8-11    | 100-200   | Late golden hour                   |
| Homestay dinners   | Classic Negative           | f/1.4-2.8 | 1600-3200 | Dusk & indoor                      |
| Halong Bay         | Classic Chrome + polariser | f/5.6-8   | 200-400   | Late morning                       |
| Trang An boat      | Provia (natural)           | f/5.6-8   | 400-800   | 07:00 first boat                   |
| Vietnamese food    | Classic Chrome             | f/2-2.8   | 400-1600  | Overhead light                     |
| Street portraits   | Reala Ace / Classic Neg    | f/1.4-2   | 400-1600  | Golden hour or under a rain awning |

## ☰ What to actually bring

### Camera body

Fujifilm X-T30 III, 2 batteries, 128GB SD (SanDisk Extreme Pro), microfiber cloth.

### Lenses (pick 2)

**Recommended combo:** 23mm f/2 (street + food + candid) + 55-200 f/3.5-4.8 (rice terraces + mountains). Skip the 18-55 kit if you can — the 23 does 90% of what it does with better bokeh.

### Accessories

Peak Design capture clip · rain sleeve (Halong) · circular polariser 43mm (Halong) · UV filter · lens cleaning pen.

### Editing on the road

Import to iPad Lightroom nightly. Push to iCloud so a phone loss doesn't = losing photos. Lightroom mobile handles Fuji RAF files fine.

## 📷 Non-obvious photo spots

- **Long Bien Bridge at sunset** — cross on foot, shoot the Red River with the Hanoi skyline behind

- **Ceramic mosaic mural** — 4km long along the Yen Phu embankment, Guinness world record. Bike it early morning.
- **Fairy Bosom (Twin Mountains) Ha Giang** — a viewpoint on Loop Day 1 with the "twin peaks" landscape.
- **Meo Vac market** — Sunday morning ethnic minority market. Only on Sundays. Coincides with Day 6 of your loop if timed.
- **Cong Caphe on West Lake** — the pastel-green Vietnamese-communist-aesthetic cafe. Coconut coffee. Instagram gold.



### ⚠ Cultural etiquette

Always ask before photographing a local (especially ethnic minority families in Ha Giang). A smile + a "chup anh?" (photo?) works. Never photograph inside temples/pagodas without checking. Don't pay children for photos — creates a bad dynamic for future travellers.

# Safety, money, SIM

## 🛡️ Rules to live by

### Grab, always

Book Grab Car or Grab Bike for every urban ride. Ignore metered taxis outside airports (the meter is fake). At Noi Bai, walk past all "Taxi?" callers.

### No motorbike self-drive

Indian licenses are not recognized. If pulled over, expect 200-1000k VND "fine". If in an accident, no insurance will cover.

### Don't hand over your passport

Some scooter rentals ask for passport as "collateral". Hard no. Offer 5M VND cash deposit instead.

### Bia hoi corner is fine

Ta Hien / "Beer Street" — safe, touristy, well-lit, plenty of foreigners. Not a scam zone.

## 💰 Money mechanics

| Item               | How                                                                                                                                            |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ATM at Noi Bai     | Withdraw 3-5M VND on arrival. Choose <b>NO</b> to dynamic currency conversion.                                                                 |
| Cards accepted     | Most hotels/restaurants take Visa/Master. Street food is cash only.                                                                            |
| Best card          | Any Forex card (Niyo/Axis Multi-Currency) or a good travel credit card (HDFC Regalia, Axis Atlas). Avoid dynamic conversion — always pick VND. |
| Exchange rate rule | 1 USD ≈ 25,500 VND · 1 INR ≈ 300 VND. Round up in your head, negotiate lightly.                                                                |
| Tipping            | Not expected in Vietnam. Round up bills, tip 50-100k VND to loop guides.                                                                       |

## 📶 SIM / eSIM

### Airalo eSIM · Xin Chao 10GB · 30 days

USD 6.50 (~₹550). Buy and activate before you fly. Rides on **Viettel** — the only carrier with reliable coverage in Ha Giang mountains.

Set up eSIM as secondary line on your iPhone; keep Indian SIM for OTPs.

### Physical SIM alternative

Viettel SIM at Noi Bai arrivals hall — 300k VND / 25GB / 30 days. Larger data allowance but requires passport copy and 15 min at the airport.

## Emergency contacts

| Number            | Who                                   |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 113               | Police                                |
| 114               | Fire                                  |
| 115               | Ambulance                             |
| +84 24 3824 5588  | Indian Embassy · Hanoi                |
| +91 11 2301 1100  | MEA India · Overseas Indians helpline |
| +91 91-89000-4900 | Digit Insurance claims (24x7)         |

# Packing list

A 60L rucksack, not fully filled, plus a laptop bag as cabin. Total weight targeted at ~10 kg. Everything fits in three sections: documents, wear, and gear.

## ☰ Documents (in a waterproof pouch)

- Passport + 2 printed e-Visa PDFs
- 3 passport photos (spare, for local SIM/permits)
- Insurance policy printout + digital copy
- Flight confirmations (VJ910, VJ907)
- Hostel confirmations (first 2 at minimum)
- Emergency contacts card in wallet
- USD 100 emergency cash separate from wallet

## 👜 Clothes (11 days)

- 5 quick-dry T-shirts (Decathlon)
- 2 travel pants (1 zip-off convertible)
- 1 pair jeans (Hanoi evenings + birthday)
- 1 warm layer (Ha Giang gets ~15°C at night)
- 1 rain shell (light, packable)
- 7 underwear + 7 socks
- 1 pair swim shorts
- 1 collared shirt for birthday dinner

## 🛡️ Footwear + rain

- 1 pair sturdy walking shoes (Merrell Moab)
- 1 pair flip-flops (Old Quarter + homestay showers)
- 1 rain poncho (loop days)
- Waterproof shoe covers (optional)

## 📷 Electronics + camera

- Fujifilm X-T30 III + 23mm f/2 + 55-200
- 2 camera batteries + charger + spare SD card
- Laptop + charger + laptop bag
- 10,000 mAh power bank
- Universal travel adapter (Type A/C/G)
- Cables in a small pouch (USB-C, Lightning)
- Wireless earbuds

## 🛡️ Health kit

- Digene / Pepto Bismol for street food adjustment
- Paracetamol · Diamox (rare mountain sickness)
- Rehydration salts (ORS)
- Band-aids · antiseptic ointment
- Personal Rx meds if any + doctor's note
- Mosquito repellent (Odomos or DEET spray)

## ☰ Toiletries

- Travel-size shampoo, soap, toothpaste
- Sunscreen SPF 50+
- Deodorant + razor + spare blades
- Nail clipper + tweezers
- Small microfiber towel
- Face wipes (long bus rides)

### **Non-obvious things worth bringing**

- **Ziplock bags** — for electronics on the loop, wet clothes on Halong, camera batteries dry
- **Small padlock** — for hostel lockers
- **Neck pillow** — sleeper bus makes or breaks the loop transition
- **Foldable daypack** — 15L for loop / Halong / Ninh Binh days
- **Two colour of pen** — for arrival/departure card filling on flights

# Links, apps, resources

## 🔗 Essential URLs

| What                                  | URL                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Vietnam e-Visa (only official)        | <a href="https://evisa.gov.vn">evisa.gov.vn</a>                           |
| VietJet Air check-in / manage booking | <a href="https://vietjetair.com">vietjetair.com</a>                       |
| Ha Giang Loop · Bong Hostel           | <a href="https://bonghostels.com">bonghostels.com</a>                     |
| QT Motorbikes Ha Giang                | <a href="https://qtmotorbikeshagiang.com">qtmotorbikeshagiang.com</a>     |
| Hanoi Central Backpackers             | <a href="https://backpackershostel.com.vn">backpackershostel.com.vn</a>   |
| Airalo eSIM                           | <a href="https://airalo.com/vietnam-esim">airalo.com/vietnam-esim</a>     |
| KAYAK price alerts                    | <a href="https://kayak.co.in">kayak.co.in</a>                             |
| Digit Insurance                       | <a href="https://godigit.com">godigit.com</a>                             |
| ACKO Travel Insurance                 | <a href="https://acko.com/travel-insurance">acko.com/travel-insurance</a> |

## 📱 Apps to install before flying

### Grab

Ride-hailing + food delivery. Sign in with Google before flying (needs SMS OTP).

### Google Translate

Download Vietnamese offline pack. Camera translate menus works well.

### Google Maps

Download offline Hanoi + Ha Giang + Ninh Binh maps.

### Airalo

Manage eSIM data + top-ups.

### WhatsApp

Universal in SE Asia. Hostels + tour operators reply here.

### Fujifilm Camera Remote

Wireless transfer camera → phone. Save Lightroom edits nightly.

## 📖 Further reading (optional)

- [Reddit: 19 days in Vietnam solo for 1 lakh INR](#)
- [Reddit: My solo trip to beautiful Vietnam](#)
- [Travelfish Vietnam](#) — best independent guide site
- Lonely Planet Vietnam · latest edition · optional if budget

## ☆ **Safe travels, Kanak**

Everything you need to make the trip smooth is in this document. Print pages 4, 5, 7 (flights, visa, itinerary) and keep the printed copies with your passport.

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