

Unit 5: Ha Long Bay

Narrator: As the sun rises on Vietnam's Ha Long Bay, boats big and small leave the shore, sailing over emerald waters through the maze-like channels that link the bay's sixteen hundred islands. For centuries, this unique seascape has inspired wonder. This region of northeastern Vietnam has been home to humans for thousands of years. However, most of the islands remain uninhabited and largely unaffected by human hands, even though the bay is very popular with tourists.

The name Ha Long is Vietnamese for descending dragon. According to one legend, when the Viet people were attacked, a dragon flew down from heaven to protect them. The creature sprayed not only fire but also emeralds and jade stones that formed Ha Long's jewel-like islands. Scientifically, these islands are rock towers called karsts. They were formed over millions of years, as seashells and sand fell to the sea floor and eventually became solid limestone. Rain and rivers flowed over the stone, carving deep channels between each tower. The karst towers at Ha Long Bay are unique because they are half covered by sea water which has cut even further into the stone, forming caves and tunnels that visitors today can explore.

Adding to the wonder of this landscape, are two national parks on On Cat Ba island and Bai Tu Long bay. Together, these natural sanctuaries make up the On Cat Ba archipelago which has been a protected site since 1994 and is enjoyed by visitors from all over the world.