Cac Dao Vinh Ha Long Cultural and Historical Site

Alternative site name(s)
Ha Long bay
Province(s)
Quang Ninh
Status
Decreed
Management board established
Unknown
Latitude
$20^0$47' - $21^0$00'N
Longitude
$107^0$01' - $107^0$19'E
Bio-unit
06a - Tropical South China

Conservation status

Cac Dao Vinh Ha Long [islands in Ha Long bay] was designated as a cultural and historical relic and national scenic spot on 28 April 1962, by Decision No. 313/VH-VP of the Ministry of Culture and Information (ADB 1999). Subsequently, on 9 August 1986, the site was included on Decision No. 194/CT of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers as a 1,000 ha cultural and historical site (MARD 1997). To date, an investment plan for the cultural and historical site has not been prepared and the exact boundary has not been defined.

In 1993, the government of Vietnam proposed that Ha Long bay should be designated as a World Heritage Site, and in 1994, the site was inscribed as a Natural World Heritage Site by the UNESCO World Heritage Commission. The World Heritage Site covers an area of 43,400 ha, including around 700 islands (ADB 1999).

In 1995, Ha Long bay, together with Cat Ba island, was included on a proposed list of marine protected areas prepared by Hai Phong Institute of Oceanography (Nguyen Huy Yet and Vo Si Tuan 1995).

In 1999, the Asian Development Bank (ADB 1999) proposed establishing a 155,300 ha protected area called Ha Long Bay Natural Landscape. It is not clear how this proposed protected area relates to the Vietnamese protected areas system.

According to ADB (1999), the site is managed by Quang Ninh Provincial People's Committee through the Ha Long bay management board. It is not clear, however, whether this management board is responsible for the Special-use Forest or the World Heritage Site. Cac Dao Vinh Ha Long is not included on the 2010 list (FPD 1998).

Topography and hydrology

A total of 1,969 islands and islets lie in Ha Long bay (ADB 1999). The geology of these islands is characterised by limestone karst, of which there are two major landforms: fengcong and fenglin karst (Waltham 1998). Several of the larger islands reach elevations of over 200 m. The waters of the bay itself, however, are shallow, and reach depths of only 6 to 10 m. None of the islands appear to have permanent surface water features.

Biodiversity value

Only a limited amount of biological research has been conducted in Ha Long bay to date, and information on its biodiversity value is limited. The islands in the bay support limestone forest, although the vegetation cover is often sparse and low, as a result

of human disturbance and the precipitous nature of the topography. The islands support a diverse flora, which includes a number of endemic species. For instance, during a recent botanical survey by the Institute of Ecology and Biological Resources (IEBR) and IUCN, seven plant species new to science were discovered: *Livistona halongensis*, *Impatiens halongensis*, *Chirita halongensis*, *C. hiepii*, *C. modesta*, *Paraboea halongensis* and *Alpinia calcicola* (Vietnam News 2000a).

The islands in Ha Long bay support a high diversity of snail species, including 60 that are endemic to the site. Of particular note is the high diversity of true cave-dwelling snail species that occur at the site (Vermeulen and Whitten 1998).

Conservation issues

Ha Long, Hai Phong and Hanoi cities are the major centres of economic growth in northern Vietnam. Economic development in these cities, together with the growing affluence of areas of southern China, including Hong Kong, is leading to increased human pressure on the Ha Long bay area. The coastal zone of Quang Ninh province and Hai Phong city is currently experiencing rapid growth in infrastructure development, particularly in the transport, shipping, coal mining and tourism sectors.

ADB (1999) consider the development of a new port in Ha Long bay, which could lead to an increase in shipping traffic through the site, and development of tourism infrastructure, to be major threats to the site. Industrial waste and fisheries management have also been cited as threats. Waltham (1998) notes that there is a continuing need for careful control of development within Ha Long bay by a management structure that gives due respect to the important environmental values of the site.

Other documented values

Ha Long bay is one of the most visited sites by both domestic and foreign tourists in Vietnam. In 1998, 186,328 domestic tourists and 113,869 foreign tourists visited Ha Long bay (ADB 1999). The main attraction is the unparalleled landscape of limestone karst islands. The name Ha Long means dragon descending, and refers to a local legend that the islands were formed by a celestial dragon and her children, who spat out great quantities of pearls to place a chain of razor-sharp mountains across the path of an invading enemy fleet (Dodd and Lewis 1997). The fact that Ha Long bay has been designated as a World Heritage Site enhances its appeal to tourists.

Related projects

The government of Vietnam and the Japanese International Co-operation Agency (JICA) commissioned a comprehensive environmental study of pollution in the World Heritage Site and the coastal area adjacent to Ha Long city. This study, which investigated a range of pollution sources and indicators, was to be concluded in October 1999.

In 2000, with funding from the Royal Netherlands Embassy, an illustrated guide to selected plant species of the islands in Ha Long bay was compiled and published by IUCN in collaboration with the Ha Long bay management board. The aim of the project was to raise awareness among domestic and foreign tourists of the interesting and unique plants found in the area (Vietnam News 2000a).

As part of the European-Union-funded project *Capacity Building for Environmental Management in Vietnam*, the Free University of Brussels, Belgium, and the Institute of Geography and the University of Natural Sciences, Vietnam, have developed a Geographical Information System (GIS) database for Quang Ninh province, which includes Ha Long bay.

A World Bank project for the comprehensive development of Quang Ninh and Hai Phong was still in the design phase in 1999 (ADB 1999).

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