Halong Bay: No room in the Inn

Well my trip to Halong Bay, Vietnam's premier tourist destination, started out a little rocky but everything turned out great in the end. My plan had been to go to Hai Phong, a city near the bay, stay a night, and then head to Cat Ba Island, the largest and most developed island in the bay. I arrived in the mid afternoon to Hai Phong. The city has limited budget accommodation and I tried to get a room in the one sub-ten dollar place. After first telling me they had one room left I was then in informed they were all full. This should have been a hint of things to come, but I chalked it up to the limited accommodation in the city. I had two options now: try to get to Cat Ba that day, or head to Halong City where there was more accommodation. Paying $25 for a more expensive hotel room was not an option on my budget. I was about to head to Halong City after the boat company was trying to overcharge me for the last boat to Cat Ba, but as I was walking away they caved to my price. This turned out to be an unfortunate bit of successful bargaining. I turned up in Cat Ba town at about 6:30 in the evening. The restaurants beneath the hotels that lined the seaside were overflowing with Vietnamese tourists. I looked at my watch and realized I had made critical timing mistake it was a Saturday night in the summer the busiest time I could have arrived. I walked from hotel to hotel getting the same all full response. In the few cases that rooms were available the hotels were trying to charge ridiculously high rates for bad rooms. With my cheapest offer to sleep in a lobby for $10, I decided it was time for a new plan. In the guidebook it said there was a restaurant on a beach about a mile outside of town, accessible only by foot, which rents out tents. I setout with the intention of either getting a tent, or sleeping on the beach as a last resort. After the twenty minute walk I arrived at the beach soaked with sweat. The restaurant promptly told me they were not allowed to rent out tents anymore. To which I said then I'll sleep on the beach. They said no. To which I said I'm not walking back to Cat Ba so they could either carry me back or let me sleep here. I sat down on the beach. About 15 minutes into my "sit in," they said could rent me a tent

Cat Ba Island, Halong Bay.

Rice fields, Cat Ba Island, Halong Bay. The locals got a laugh when I helped out a farmer and put a sack of rice on the back of my motorbike and helped him bring it in to town.

for one night only.   It turned out great, sleeping with the soothing sound of crashing waves, in a beautiful little cove.

    The next morning I headed back in to Cat Ba, where the weekenders were leaving and I was able to get a room with AC, satellite TV, and a view of the harbor for $10. What a difference a day makes. I took a motorbike around the island the first day I was there, but I knew to see the bay properly I would need to get out on a boat. I joined a two German guys and a Finish couple for a 2 day boat trip. Of course, having locked myself into a boat, the morning we were leaving it was steadily raining. However, the weather let up in the afternoon, and it was it was beautiful even in the rain. Fortunately the weather on the second day was good. My last day on Cat Ba I decided a little exercise wouldn't hurt and I rented a kayak in the afternoon. I spent a couple hours making my way around the peaks and islands of the shore of Cat Ba. I had some tea with some locals on a floating fish farm which gave me a chance to rest my arms. All and all it ended up a great visit to the bay despite the non optimal planning.

Mouth of a cave and our boat, Halong Bay.

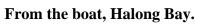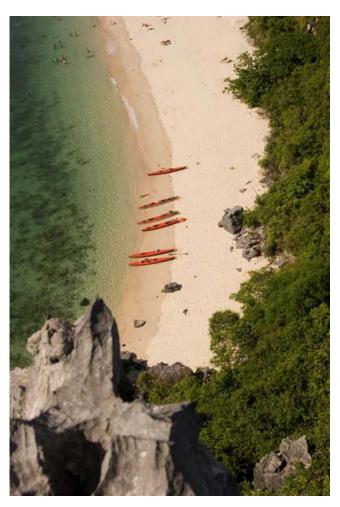**Fishing boat going out to fish for the night, Halong Bay.**

Jumping of the boat for a swim, Halong Bay.

Fishing boat going out to fish for the night, Halong Bay.

From the boat, Halong Bay.

Kayaks on a beach, Halong Bay.

It was a tough climb to the top but the view was well worth the effort, Halong Bay.

Not a bad view, Halong Bay.