



Best of Northern Vietnam Birding

11 Days: Cuc Phuong National Park ♦ Van Long Nature Reserve ♦ Ba Vi National Park ♦ Sapa ♦ Tam Dao



Fujian Niltava

Day 1: Arrive Hanoi. Hanoi to Cuc Phuong National Park

Arrive at Hanoi's Noi Bai International Airport and transfer directly to Cuc Phuong National Park, a three-hour drive south of Hanoi. The first national park to be established in Vietnam, Cuc Phuong is an area of limestone hills covered in primary rainforest. The best birding is in the centre of the park where there are several excellent trails including the Loop Trail and the Valley Trail. The main road through the park can also be very productive especially for over-wintering thrushes early in the morning. Overnight at Cuc Phuong National Park.

Days 2 & 3: Cuc Phuong National Park

Two full days of birding at Cuc Phuong where specialities include Silver Pheasant, Pied Falconet, Bar-bellied, Blue-rumped and Eared Pittas, Silver-breasted Broadbill, White-winged Magpie, White-tailed Flycatcher, Fujian Niltava and Limestone Wren-babbler. Overnight at Cuc Phuong National Park.

Day 4: Cuc Phuong National Park to Ba Vi National Park

Leave Cuc Phuong after breakfast for the journey north to Ba Vi National Park stopping off at Van Long Nature Reserve en route. Take a sampan through flooded rice fields to the dramatic limestone cliffs that are home to the largest population of one of Vietnam's critically endangered primates, Delacour's Langur. During the winter months large numbers of waterfowl can be seen here as well as a raptor or two. From here continue to Ba Vi National Park, three hours' drive to the north for an overnight stay. In the late afternoon bird the road to the summit of Mount Ba Vi looking for newly-arrived wintering thrushes that could include Black-breasted, Japanese, Siberian, Dusky, White's and Grey-backed. Overnight at Ba Vi National Park.

Day 5: Ba Vi National Park to Hanoi

A full morning to explore Ba Vi National Park further where in addition to wintering thrushes there is chance of seeing the scarce Rufous-cheeked Laughingthrush, Indochinese Green Magpie and the lovely Red-billed Blue Magpie. Leave for Hanoi in the afternoon and transfer to Hanoi Railway Station to catch the overnight train to Lao Cai. Overnight on train.

Day 6: Lao Cai to Sapa

Arrive at Lao Cai station in the early morning and transfer by road through the spectacular scenery of green rice terraces and misty mountain peaks to Sapa for breakfast. After breakfast explore the Ham Rong Gardens, a popular tourist attraction overlooking the town centre. Despite the crowds there are some quieter parts of the gardens where some of the local bird specialities such as White-browed Laughingthrush, Red-billed Leiothrix, Spectacled Barwing and Vinous-throated Parrotbill may be found. In the afternoon drive to the village of O Quy Ho around 10 km from Sapa for an afternoon of walking and birding along a trail through an area of mixed primary and secondary forest and scrub. Birds that can turn up here include such sought after species as Spot-breasted Parrotbill and Sickle-billed Scimitar-babbler. Overnight at Sapa.

Day 7: Sapa

After an early breakfast it is a short drive to the entrance of Hoang Lien National Park in the shadow of Vietnam's highest mountain, Mount Fan Si Pan. Stop at Thac Bac Waterfall en route to look for Little Forktail, White-capped and Plumbeous Water Redstart. At Hoang Lien National Park, the first section of the trail leading to Fan Si Pan and the valley below make for a nice walk with some good birding opportunities. Specialities here include White-tailed Nuthatch, the Vietnamese endemic Pale-throated Wren Babbler, Golden-breasted Fulvetta, Golden Parrotbill and Green-tailed Sunbird. Overnight at Sapa.



Rattapon Kaichid/ritchaya Jarthorn

Little Forktail

Day 8: Sapa to Hanoi

In the morning return to Hoang Lien National for more birding or hike to the Hmong village of Cat Cat in a valley 3 km below Sapa. Continue birding in the afternoon or shop for hilltribe handicrafts and textiles in Sapa's bustling market. Transfer to Lao Cai in the early evening to board the overnight train back to Hanoi. Overnight on train.

Day 9: Hanoi to Tam Dao

Arrive back in Hanoi early in the morning and transfer to Tam Dao, a hill resort 60 km by road from the capital. Tam Dao's specialities include several species that are more usually associated with China and cannot be seen elsewhere in South-East Asia such as the attractive Chestnut Bulbul and Grey Laughingthrush. Overnight at Tam Dao.

Day 10: Tam Dao

A full day to explore the montane evergreen, bamboo and pine forests around Tam Dao town. Resident species to look out for here include Red-billed Blue Magpie, Grey Treepie, Coral-billed and Streak-breasted Scimitar-babblers, Rufous-headed and Short-tailed Parrotbills and Collared Babbler. Winter visitors that may turn up between November and March include White's, Grey-backed, Japanese, Eyebrowed and Black-breasted Thrushes, as well as Fujian Niltava. Overnight at Tam Dao.



Dan Brown

Red-flanked Bluetail

Day 11: Tam Dao to Hanoi

Continue birding at Tam Dao before transferring back to Hanoi's Noi Bai International Airport for departure flight.