

Vietnam Sightseeing & Attractions



HANOI

The capital of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, is located in the Red River Delta, in the center of North Vietnam. It is the political, economic, cultural, commercial, and tourist center of the country. It was founded in 1010AD during the reign of King Ly Cong Uan. Many ancient architectural features are still preserved in Hanoi, particularly in the fascinating warren of streets known as the Old Quarter. There are over 600 pagodas, and there is water everywhere, with dozens of hectares of lakes lying tranquilly among the tree-lined streets. The most notable are fabled Hoan Kiem Lake in the heart of the city, and the vast expanse of West Lake. Many traditional handicrafts are also practised in Hanoi including bronze casting, silver carving, lacquer work and embroidery.



HALONG BAY

Located in the north of Vietnam's Eastern Sea, 165 km east of Hanoi. Halong Bay, one of the country's most famous tourist attractions, has been declared a World Cultural Heritage area of outstanding natural beauty by UNESCO. Halong Bay covers an area of 1,500 square kilometres. Among many pleasant beaches along its winding coastline is Bai Chay in Halong City and the peaceful coves of Cat Ba Island. The marine reserve in the bay is flourishing and offers great potential for snorkeling. The bay is filled with thousands of islets of all shape and sizes; many are named for their unusual shapes - Voi islet (elephant), Ga Choi (fighting cock) and Mai Nha (roof). A wide variety of birds and animals including bantams, monkeys and iguanas live on the islands. Pearl and coral is also exploited in some areas. With its spectacular beauty, Halong Bay is a wonderful destination. Tourists who visit Halong Bay at any time of the year are always enthralled.

LAO CAI

The town of Lao Cai borders northern Vietnam and southern China. It is a one hour drive from Sapa and is just off the main road from Sapa to Hanoi. The Lao Cai border area has been used as a trading transit point for well over 1000 years and has changed hands many times between Chinese, Vietnamese and ethnic minorities. A recent example was the Chinese invasion of Northern Vietnam in 1979 in response to Vietnam's move into Cambodia. The Chinese held Lao Cai for a few weeks before the Vietnamese drove them back across the border. Lao Cai is now a growing trading town and legal and illegal trade has contributed to the modernization of this border post.

SAPA

Located 1,500 m above sea level, Sapa lies high up in the Hoang Lien Son Mountains, 333 km northwest of Hanoi. Sapa has an amazing diversity of flora, ranging from flowers to tropical and temperate fruit; among the area's most popular products are apples, pears, peaches and plums. Sapa has many outstanding natural wonders such as Thac Bac, Thuy Cung Grotto, Gio Cave, Troi Gate and Truc Forest. It is also the starting point for climbers and scientists who want to climb Mount Fansipan, the highest mountain in Indochina at 3,143 m. The Hoang Lien Son mountain range is known as the alps of the north. The pyramid-shaped Mount Fansipan is covered with clouds all year round and temperatures often drop below zero, especially at high elevations.

MAI CHAU

Located in Hoa Binh province, approximately 135 km from Hanoi and 60 km from Hoa Binh. From the top of Cun Mountain there is a superb panorama of the stilt houses of Mai Chau sitting in a fertile green valley. The area is home to several ethnic minorities, particularly the White Thai ethnic group. Their traditional stilt houses are large structures with palm leaf roofs and polished bamboo floors. The kitchen is located in the center of the house; the cooking as well as the weaving of the colourful tho cam, the material used to make their clothes, takes place there. The Sunday market brings a lot of people into town. People from different minorities living in the mountains nearby come to sell such products as honey, bananas, corn and tho cam weaving. The Sunday market also features traditional White Thai food, music and dancing.

HOA BINH

Hoa Binh lies on the banks of the Black River, 75 km outside Hanoi. The area is home to the Muong and Dao minority tribes. These villages are located between 10 and 25 km outside Hoa Binh. The Muong houses are identified by their tortoise shell thatched roofs. The Dao tribes live 25 km upriver and can be reached by boat. It is possible to arrange overnight accommodation in the village longhouses. The villagers are only too happy to give you a taste of their local wine which can be sucked through long straws.

DIEN BIEN PHU

The Battle of Dien Bien Phu was a world-famous historical event that symbolises the glorious victory of the Vietnamese people and army. It took place in the west of Dien Bien district, in Lai Chau province, 500 km northwest of Hanoi. Dien Bien Phu is surrounded by mountains and lies in the Muong Thanh valley, a 20 km long, 6 km wide heart-shaped basin. The Nam Rom River which runs through the valley is responsible for the area's rich fertility. French military forces occupied the valley in 1953, establishing a ring of fortified positions equipped with state-of-the-art weapons. News of the Vietnamese victory at Dien Bien Phu resounded around the world. The heroic struggle of the Vietnamese people's army against the French expeditionary corps in 1954 lasted 56 days. General de Castries and his entire command were taken prisoner, along with 16,000 troops. Historical remains from the Battle of Dien Bien Phu include Doc Lap Hill, the airport and the French command bunker.

LAI CHAU

The road from Dien Bien Phu to Lai Chau is rather uncomfortable and scenery relatively mundane. However once again there are a variety of interesting hilltribe villages along the way and visitors can be certain that these have not seen very many tourists. Hilltribes in this region include the Thai, Hmong, Xa, Ha Nhi and Kho Mu. From the town of Lai Chau a number of day excursions to

various villages is possible, including the Phi Hay White Hmong Village, the Black Poon T'ang Village and the Sin Ho Hmong and Dao Minority Village.

QUANG BINH

Quang Binh Province, 166 km from Hue, has beautiful sand dunes and beaches. Dong Hoi, the provincial capital, suffered extensive damage from US bombing during the Viet Nam War. The old French bunkers and US bomb craters can easily be seen when traveling on National Highway 1. In addition, Phong Nha cave, 45km northwest of Dong Hoi, is remarkable for its thousands of meters of passageways lined with a great variety of limestone formations. The Cham utilized the grottoes as Buddhist sanctuaries in the 9th and 10th centuries. Phong Nha is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

QUANG TRI

Wedged between Laos and the Eastern Sea, Quang Tri, 594km from Ha Noi, is well-known for the Ben Hai River which was the frontier between North and South Viet Nam separated by the DMZ. Venturing into the narrow tunnel of Vinh Moc and viewing some scenes of tragedy or relaxing and swimming at the splendid palm - fringed beach will be an indispensable part of your trip.



HUE

Founded as a royal city in 1687, the original citadel city of Phu Xuan was built on the site of present day Hue, the gateway to the treasures of Vietnam's royal past. The city served as Vietnam's political capital from 1802 to 1945 under the 13 emperors of the Nguyen dynasty and was a major center of Vietnamese culture, religion and education. Today, Hue is one of Vietnam's major tourist attractions. This small, quiet city is justly famed for the magnificent architecture of its citadels, palaces, royal tombs, pagodas and temples built under the Nguyen dynasty in an elegant verdant setting on the banks of the Perfume River. UNESCO has labelled Hue "a beautiful architectural poem".



DANANG

Known under the French as Tourane, it succeeded Hoi An (Faifo) as the most important port in central Vietnam during the 19th century. This coastal city lies on a river and is surrounded by mountains, with a busy port and splendid beaches - Non Nuoc (China beach), My Khe and Tien Sa.



HOI AN

The ancient town of Hoi An, 32 km south of Danang, lies on the banks of the Thu Bon River. Known to early Western traders, Hoi An was one of the major trading centers of Southeast Asia in the 16th century. Hoi An has a distinctive Chinese atmosphere with low, tiled-roof houses and narrow streets; the original structure of some of these streets is still virtually intact. All the houses were constructed of rare timbers and decorated with lacquer panels engraved with Chinese characters and pillars carved with ornamental designs. Tourists can visit the ruins of the Sa Huynh and Champa cultures. They can also enjoy the beautiful scenery of the romantic Thu Bon River, Cua Dai Beach, and Cham

MY SON

The imperial city of the Champa empire of the 4th to 12th centuries, My Son Sanctuary is a large complex of religious ruins comprising more than 70 architectural remains.

They include temples and towers with distinctive and complicated red brick designs. The most important feature of Cham architectural design are the towers built to reflect the divinity of their kings. The Cham architecture in My Son is one of the main attractions of Danang.

NHA TRANG

The 7km-long white sand beach of Nha Trang is known as Vietnam's Mediterranean coast. It is sunny all year round, with an average temperature of 23°C due to the prevailing northern winds. Nha Trang has lower rainfall than anywhere else in the country and it is protected from storms by the Truong Son Mountains and Ca Pass. From Ca Pass, one can see Ro Paddle, Ke Ga Cape, Hon Do, and Tran Nam Paddle. The magnificent coral seabed in Nha Trang makes it ideal for scuba diving and snorkeling.

PHAN THIET

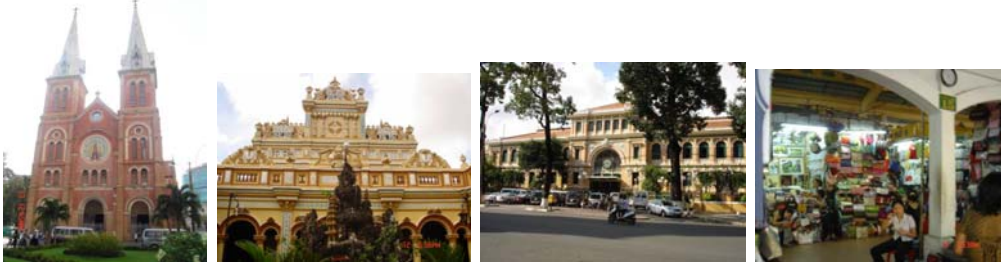
Phan Thiet is built along both banks of the Phan Thiet River, which is also known as the Ca Ti River and the Muong Man River. Mui Ne beach, famous for its sand dunes, is 22 km east of Phan Thiet near a fishing village at the tip of Mui Ne Peninsula.

DALAT

200 km northeast of Ho Chi Minh City and 1,500 m high, Dalat has the appearance of an old French city. It was founded in 1897 when Doctor Alexandre Yersin recommended that the area be developed as a resort. Dalat has many natural and artificial lakes such as Ho Xuan Huong, Than Tho, Da Thien and Tuyen Lam, which are all bordered by rows of pine trees, one of Dalat's best-known features. A trip to Dalat is not complete without a visit to the Flower Gardens. The temperate climate is suitable for many varieties of flowers, including orchids, roses, lilies, and camellias. Nowadays, tourists often go on from Dalat to the nearby Langbian Highlands, home to

many ethnic minorities. Langbian Mountain's highest peak (2,165 m) is very tempting for climbers. From Lom Bieng Klo peak, one can see endless green mountains reflecting the golden rays of the sun. There are many organized tours in the area, including parachuting and climbing.

HO CHI MINH CITY



Formerly known as Saigon, lies between the Mekong Delta and South Vietnam. It is 1,730 km from Hanoi and 50 km from the Eastern Sea. It is crisscrossed by hundreds of rivers and canals, the largest being the Saigon River. The Port of Saigon, established in 1862, is accessible to ships of up to 30,000 tones, a rare advantage for an inland river port. Over the past few centuries, Saigon, once lauded as the "Pearl of the Far East," has been known as an important trading center for the Chinese, Japanese and Western merchants who traveled up the Saigon River to Pho Island.



THE TUNNELS OF CU CHI

75 km northwest of Ho Chi Minh City in Cu Chi district, this district is now famous around the world as the base for the Vietnamese operation known as the Tet Offensive in 1968. There are more than 200 km of underground tunnels, comprising a main axis system with many branches connecting to underground hideouts, shelters and other tunnels. The tunnels are between 0.5 to 1 m wide, with just enough space for a person to walk along by bending or crawling. However, parts of the tunnels have been modified to accommodate visitors.

The top soil layer is between 3 to 4 m thick and can support the weight of a 50-ton tank and withstand the impact of light shells and bombs. The underground network provided sleeping quarters, meeting rooms, hospitals and social centers. Visiting the Cu Chi Tunnels provides a fascinating glimpse into the prolonged resistance war that the Vietnamese people endured, and also highlights the national characteristics of perseverance and ingenuity. Cu Chi Tunnels have been visited by thousands of tourists from all over the world during the past few years.



THE MEKONG DELTA

The Delta region is formed by the various tributaries of the mighty Mekong River which begins its journey to the sea in Tibet and winds its way for 4,500 km through China, Burma, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and southern Vietnam. The Vietnamese name for the Mekong is Cuu Long which means "Nine Dragons" and this is represented by the nine exit points of the Mekong River as it flows into the sea. The Delta covers an area of 60,000 km, the majority of which is now cultivated. Over the centuries the local villagers have created a system of canals through what was once marshland and forest. A visit to the rich flood plain area of the Mekong Delta is one of the best ways to experience Vietnamese rural life, which typifies the living standards of over 80% of the country's population. As well as producing over half of the nation's rice, the Delta area abounds with fruit orchards and traditional fish farms. From a cultural point of view, the region is particularly interesting because of its diverse mix of ethnic Khmer, Chinese and Vietnamese. A variety of day tours are available and these can also be extended to overnight tours. The three most popular areas to visit are detailed below:

(a) My Tho : This city of 100,000 inhabitants sits on the northern reaches of the Mekong Delta. Originally founded by Chinese fleeing Taiwan for political reasons in the late 17th century, it was subsequently taken under Vietnamese control as the Kinh extended their influence further south. Today My Tho is the capital of Tien Giang Province and is a meeting point for the sale and purchase of agricultural and seafood products.

(b) Vinh Long : Further south is the riverside town of Vinh Long. The surrounding canals and villages are perhaps more representative of the Delta lifestyle than those found in the city of My Tho. The drive to Vinh Long can take over 3 hours as cars must use ferry boats in places. Due to time constraints we recommend to stop at Cai Be which is the location of the first ferry crossing. From here sampans are available and there is sufficient time to enjoy a three hour tour of the surrounding waterways, stopping at various points of interest including boat building villages, family businesses making rice paper and the Cai Be floating market. Lunch can be taken at a good Vietnamese restaurant on one of the islands.

(c) Can Tho : Located in the center of the 11 provinces of the Mekong Delta, 170 km from Ho Chi Minh City, south of Hau River. The Hau River is considered the main benefactor of the region, since its annual floods deposit a large quantity of alluvial nutrients on the paddy fields. Taking a boat along the river can be a wonderful trip on a fine day. On the east bank of the Hau River is Ninh Kieu Wharf, wellknown as a local beauty spot. Not far away is a floating restaurant connected to the riverbank by a bridge. Visitors travel along the waterway to the floating restaurant to sample eel dishes, a specialty of the region.

LONG HAI

Only 2-hour drive from Ho Chi Minh City, located at the East Sea. An excellent place to spend relaxing days at the beach.