

Da Lat

At one time Da Lat was an ideal holiday retreat, set amongst the low hills of the Central Highlands. It was originally founded in 1897 by Alexander Yersin and Da Lat city was established in 1912. The city served as a hill station for the French trying to escape the heat of the plains and delta. Da Lat has a charming French district behind the Rap 3-4 cinema, which is well worth exploring. This is also where a number of the [hotels in Da Lat](#) are situated including the Sofitel. Da Lat is also the center of kitsch in Vietnam. Keep an eye out for the Da Lat Cowboys, who ride around the town on horseback. You can also take a ride on a swan boat in the lake or buy one of the dozens of tacky trinkets on sale in the market.

Da Lat Flower Garden: This flower is situated at the north end of Xuan Huong Lake beside the golf course. Da Lat is famous for its flowers and many are exported overseas. This garden has a great selection of these flowers along with the animal hedges, silly rides and even sillier staged photos.

Ho Chi Minh (Saigon)

For many of the inhabitants of Ho Chi Minh City, nothing has changed. The rich Vietnamese are still getting richer and the poor still sleep in their cyclos. The streets swarm with life, people buy and sell things, bargain, cook, wash, urinate, sleep, eat, drink, and live on the streets of Saigon. Many of the street stall holders live beside or under their stalls on mattresses they drag out for a night under the stars. As wealth begins to rise, so do the more undesirable facets of life in Saigon. The student and young side of Saigon offer an optimistic edge to the city with pumping clubs and great restaurants. Whilst Hanoi enjoys the spoils of its neighbor the Government, Saigon still feels it's being punished for being on the losing side.

Tay Ninh

Tay Ninh is situated 95 km north-west of Ho Chi Minh city and is the original home of the Cao Dai religious sect. It is from here that Cao Daism has spread its influence. The Cao Dais denied support to the Viet Cong, and after reunification, they were punished for this intransigence by the confiscation of their lands and temples which were not returned to them until 1985. The central Cao Dai Temple is 4 km from Tay Ninh in the village of Long Hoa. Surrounded by a series of schools and administrative buildings, the temple contains an awesome array of colors and symbolism unlike anything else you will see in Vietnam. The three colors you will see are those of red, yellow and blue which represent Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism respectively.

Cu Chi tunnels These tunnels are a symbol of Vietnam's continual fight against foreign oppression and imperialism. The tunnel system covers close to 200km including under what was once a US air base. The tunnels once spanned an area stretching from close to the Cambodian border to the city limits of Ho Chi Minh City. They were originally constructed to fight against the French in the 1940s, to give a peasant army a means of communication between villages whilst remaining undetected. In 1960 the Viet Cong repaired and added to the tunnels to fight against the South Vietnamese and American forces. The Commander of the American forces in the region held the opinion that the Viet Cong who were responsible for digging them were like human moles.

The tributaries of the hectic Mekong River highway provide a comprehensive network of canals and channels. The rivers are the best methods to explore the region at a leisurely pace and offer the opportunity to experience the truly unique Mekong River lifestyle.

My Tho is a delightful town, situated about two hours by bus south west of Ho Chi Minh city. Sitting on the bank of The Mekong River, My Tho is divided into two by a tributary of the river. From here you can do a number of short boat trips to various islands and floating markets within the surrounding area. It is also a good place to catch the overnight long boats to a variety of locations including Chau Doc and Long Xuyen.

Con Phung island: this island is also known as the Island of the Coconut Monk named after a monk, Ong Dao Dua, who meditated on the island for three years during which he ate nothing but coconuts.

Snake farm: the Snake Farm is home to two yellow turtles, the only two living of their species known to the human race. They live to 1,000 years old so these ones have another 800 years to look forward to. The Thai government offered US\$ 250,000 for the turtles, but the Vietnamese authorities declined the 'generous' offer, so that they could keep these very special creatures.

Can Tho is a thriving metropolis with huge streets, little action and loads of mosquitoes. Although Can Tho has its own market by the riverside, where you can get excellent ice-cream, the principal attraction would have to be the nearby floating markets.

Cai Rang Market is situated about 8 km from Can Tho by road or a 20 km loop by boat. This market is quite nice and sells a variety of fruit and vegetables and operates from 5 am to 11 am, though the markets are better the earlier you can get there.

Soc Trang is situated on Highway 1 and makes for a perfect place to break the journey from My Tho to Ca Mau. With a 500 kg Vampire pig and a psychedelic pagoda to see, Soc Trang is well worth a visit to experience a bit of the bizarre side of life in Vietnam. Soc Trang is the home to two fascinating pagodas. The first one is the Khmer Bat Pagoda. The grounds are spacious and serene and the pagoda is lovely. About 20,000 fruit bats with dog-like faces live on the grounds of the pagoda, and an individual bat can weigh up to half a kilo.

Ca Mau is situated in one of the largest swamplands in the world, surpassed only by the Amazon basin. This provides Ca Mau with its unique attraction of the U-Minh mangrove forest.

U-Minh Forest is the largest mangrove swamp that can be found excepting the Amazon. Once in U-Minh forest you can take an interesting walk around the rice fields and mangrove forests. It is very quiet and spacious, making a worthwhile day trip from Ca Mau.

Bird Parks: there are two bird parks that you can visit from Ca Mau. The first, Bac Lieu bird garden can be found about 3 km out of Bac Lieu. The second bird garden is in Minh Hai in Vuon Chim in the Bam Doi District.

Phu Quoc island

Situated in the Gulf of Thailand, close to both Ha Tien, Rack Gia and the Cambodian coast, Phu Quoc Island possesses excellent white sand beaches and great snorkeling opportunities. There is a ferry travelling to Phu Quoc daily and a few flights a week from Saigon. Tourists do not need to [get Vietnam visa](#) to fly to Phu Quoc island.

Chau Doc sits on a tributary of the Basic River and is an incredibly friendly bustling little city. The people here are known for being very warm and approachable. Chau Doc's also right on the Cambodian Border and if you were able to enter Cambodia by boat, you'd pass through here.

Sam Mountain: The main attraction of Chau Doc is Sam Mountain. Situated 7 km from town along Bao Ho Thoai Street, the mountain has a number of pagodas at its base, and some kind of army listening post on the top. The main pagoda gets full marks for kitsch. Although the pagodas at the base of the mountain are nothing to write home about, the view from the top of the mountain is well worth the climb.

Chau Doc has a large covered street market on Le Cong Thanh Street. Here you can get everything from something tasty to eat to a new Hi Fi. There is also a great food market by the river, past the post office.

Ba Chuc situated between Chau Doc and Long Xuyen where there is a temple and ossuary dedicated to over 3,000 Vietnamese that the Khmer Rouge massacred in September 1978. It is very moving and well worth visiting.