

An aerial photograph of a lush, green landscape in Vietnam, featuring terraced rice fields that cascade down a hillside. The fields are a vibrant yellow-green, and the surrounding hills are covered in dense, dark green forest. A small cluster of traditional houses with thatched roofs is nestled in the middle of the terraces. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic, capturing the essence of rural Vietnamese life.

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Welcome to Vietnam

With everything from superb cuisine to stunning landscapes, this corner of Southeast Asia dazzles the senses. Peaceful paddy fields give way to frenetic urban centers like Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, where the youthful population rushes to embrace the future. Boutiques fill the French colonial buildings in enchanting Hoi An; in the north, a world away, are Sapa's ethnic markets. Around Vietnam, lush jungles and jagged karst peaks beckon adventurers. Absorb it all but take time to relax, perhaps on the long, alluring coastline with its world-class beaches.

TOP REASONS TO GO

- ★ **History:** From Hue's Imperial City to the Cu Chi tunnels, Vietnam's past entralls.
- ★ **Cuisine:** Fresh herbs, fiery chilies, fragrant noodle dishes—pho is just the beginning.
- ★ **Postcard Views:** Misty mountains, vibrant green rice paddies, and sapphire seascapes.
- ★ **Cool Cities:** The buzzing streets of Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi reward exploration.
- ★ **Islands:** Isolated Con Dao, blissful Phu Quoc, and rugged Cat Ba are tropical escapes.
- ★ **Boating:** Cruises in Halong Bay, boat rides through the Mekong Delta—Vietnam is best by boat.

WHAT'S WHERE

1 Ho Chi Minh City.

Still called Saigon by many, Ho Chi Minh City is a rapidly expanding metropolis, one full of contrasts. The downtown core is quite walkable and most major sites—from the War Remnants Museum to the Reunification Palace—can be visited on foot.

2 The Mekong Delta.

Running through the upper delta is the Mekong River, dotted with small fertile islands where fruit grows in abundance. The rest is a patchwork of waterways, mangrove swamps, and brilliant green rice paddies that run into the emerald East Sea.

3 The South-Central Coast and Highlands.

Two of Vietnam's most popular resort towns are here—ocean-side Nha Trang and the cool mountain retreat of Dalat. On the East Sea, Nha Trang has a palm-lined boulevard running the length of its beach. If it's mountains and lakes you seek, head to temperate Dalat.

4 The Central Coast.

The towns of Hue and Hoi An provide a fascinating glimpse of Vietnam's history. UNESCO site Hoi An is



an ancient trading and fishing town where many buildings remain as they were 200 years ago. Hue's Imperial City and palatial royal tombs are impressive reminders of the country's regal past. In between Hue and Hoi An is Danang, the region's major transportation hub.

5 Halong Bay and North-Central Vietnam.

A boat on Halong Bay or Bai Tu Long Bay, and kayaking among the islands of the Cat Ba archipelago are just two of the popular outdoor activities in the picturesque North Central region.

6 Hanoi. The capital of Vietnam is also its cultural hub. Despite the chaotic motorbike traffic, this city of majestic lakes, wide tree-lined boulevards, and hauntingly familiar French colonial architecture remains quite charming.

7 The Northwest. Hanoi is the jumping-off point for the rest of northern Vietnam, which is home to more than 50 ethnic minority groups. Many ethnic minorities live in the beautiful highlands of the north, where views of the rice terraces and surrounding fields are truly stunning.

☎ 273/651-9000 🌐 www.theislandlodge.com.vn 🚗 12 rooms 🏠 All-Inclusive.

Jardin du Mekong

\$\$\$ | B&B/INN | Small and charming, this family-run guesthouse has nine cute bamboo bungalows set in a lovely garden area, well off the tourist trail, and is an ideal rural retreat for those seeking a glimpse of local life and a taste of excellent home cooking. **Pros:** truly friendly-family atmosphere; delicious home-cooked food; property has bicycles for exploring the area and hammocks for enjoying the gardens. **Cons:** about two hours from My Tho; isolated; no air-conditioning or fridge in the room. 📺 **Rooms from:** d1,000,000 📠 *Cau Song Doc, Ben Tre* ☎ 090/314-9696 cell phone 🏠 **Free Breakfast** 🚗 9 bungalows.

Mango Home Riverside

\$\$\$ | B&B/INN | A boutique homestay on the banks of the Ham Luong River, Mango Home Riverside has comfortable air-conditioned thatched bungalows set in a beautiful tropical garden. **Pros:** staffers are more than happy to suggest activities and tours; relaxing riverside retreat. **Cons:** isolated. 📺 **Rooms from:** d1,100,000 📠 *Nghia Huan, Ben Tre* ☎ 98/323-2197 cell phone, *Ho Chi Minh City office (English), 096/768-3366 cell phone, hotline* 🌐 mangohomeriverside.com 🚗 9 rooms 🏠 **Free Breakfast.**

Mekong My Tho Hotel

\$\$\$ | HOTEL | The fanciest place in town, this new four-star hotel is great value for money: the rooms—all with river views—are spacious, the swimming pool and fitness center are clean and new, and the rooftop café-bar is a great spot to watch the sunset. **Pros:** good fitness center; newly built; all rooms with river views. **Cons:** breakfast options are limited; staff can be inefficient; cleaners can be a bit lax. 📺 **Rooms from:** d1,000,000 📠 *1A Tet Mau Than, My Tho* ☎ 0273/388-7777 🚗 114 rooms 🏠 **Free Breakfast.**

Cai Be

Spilling over from the land into the river, this Mekong Delta town and its nearby villages are a hive of market activity. Slip into a sampan and languidly cruise along the water with a stop at the floating market before ogling the town's handsome cathedral and eye-popping Cao daist temple.

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

You'll need a boat to visit Cai Be's floating market, but the rest of the town can be covered on foot or by bicycle. To go to My Tho and Vinh Long, hire one of the motorcycle drivers who are all around town; it's much easier to have the driver wait for you there than it is to hire another one to go back to Cai Be.

👁 Sights

Cai Be Cathedral (Nha Tho Cai Be)

CHURCH | This 1930s Gothic-Romanesque cathedral seems an anachronism in a small Vietnamese town, but it's a reminder of Vietnam's colonial past. The bell tower stands 171 feet tall and its bells, which were cast in France, weigh in at a whopping 400–2,000 kilos (880–4,400 lbs.). 📠 *Just off the river, near Van Hoa K3, Cai Be.*

Cai Be Floating Market (Cho Noi Cai Be)

MARKET | The smallest of the Mekong Delta's floating markets, with only 10 to 12 boats, this is an easy excursion from most of the region's homestays. Be aware, however, that the floating markets around Can Tho are much bigger and livelier. The benefit of this market is that it runs all day, until about 5 pm. 📠 *Off Cai Be Wharf, Cai Be.*

Dong Hoa Hiep Commune

MUSEUM VILLAGE | The most notable of the several hundred mid- to late 19th-century houses in this commune are those belonging to Tran Tuan Kiet and Nguyen Van Duc. The latter was built in 1850 and



Cai Be's floating market is one of the most famous in Vietnam.

combines French pillars and domes with more traditional Vietnamese style elements. This was the house of a wealthy family, and the trappings of their life are on display. 📠 *Dong Hoa Hiep Commune, 22 Phu Hoa Hamlet, Cai Be.*

🍴 Restaurants

★ Le Longanier

\$\$\$\$ | VIETNAMESE | Reminiscent of an elegant colonial mansion, Le Longanier is a lunch-only restaurant set in tropical gardens that's part of the Victoria Hotels empire, and so is a regular stop on Victoria Cruises. Independent travelers can stop in (a reservation is required) to enjoy the set menu of Mekong Delta classics. **Known for:** lush gardens; beautiful colonial-style decor; set lunch. 📺 **Average main:** d600,000 📠 *49 Hamlet 5, Phu An Village, Cai Be* 🚗 *If coming by road, follow sign just after the bridge. It's about a 200-meter walk along bike-only path* ☎ 1800/599-955 🌐 www.victoriahotels.asia/en/hotels-resorts/can Tho/le-longanier-restaurant.html.

★ Mekong Lodge Restaurant

\$\$\$\$ | VIETNAMESE | FAMILY | The hotel restaurant uses only local ingredients and happily accommodates vegetarians. Specialties include crispy elephant ear fish and other local seafood. **Known for:** supporting the disadvantaged; elephant ear fish; good vegetarian options. 📺 **Average main:** d720,000 📠 *An Hoa, Dong Hoa Hiep, Cai Be* ☎ 08/9663-3269 cell phone 🌐 mekonglodge.com.

Mr Kiet's Ancient House

\$\$ | VIETNAMESE | The house of district chief Tran Tuan Kiet was built in 1838, its 108 poles made from the wood of *xylocarpus* trees, and doors carved with illustrations of flowers and trees. On display within the house is beautiful carved furniture, some with mother-of-pearl inlays, ceramic pieces, and other antiques. **Known for:** seven-course set menu; historic setting; hyperlocal cuisine. 📺 **Average main:** d250,000 📠 *22 Phu Hoa Village, Dong Hoa Hiep, Cai Be* ☎ 913/684-617 cell phone 🌐 kiethouse.com.