



## Da Nang

Da Nang was the landing point of both the French and the Americans during their stints in Vietnam. When the French established a garrison in Da Nang (then called Tourane), more soldiers died from disease than the associated fighting in establishing the garrison. There is now a small cemetery dedicated to them. During the Vietnam War, Da Nang was the home to one fifth of all US servicemen based in Vietnam. This made Da Nang one of the heaviest defended cities in South Vietnam, yet it eventually fell to the North Vietnamese in 1975 with hardly a bullet fired.

Da Nang marks the halfway point between Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City and was the first place to organize its own local communist party committee. The city is fairly featureless, and if you are coming from the tranquil setting of Lang Co, Hoi An, or anywhere for that matter, Da Nang is an extreme disappointment. It is a busy, dusty, colorless city, the fourth largest in Vietnam, and one of the largest business centers. Unless you are in Da Nang for business, chances are you will pass straight through. Da Nang does have a fascinating Cham Museum that contains an excellent collection of Cham art. However, the main reason for staying in [hotels in Da Nang](#) is in the surrounding region. Vietnam Beach, the Marble Mountains, Hoi An and My Son are all within striking distance of Da Nang, though it is more pleasant to stay in Hoi An and visit these sights. Travelers can also get [Vietnam visa on arrival](#) at Da Nang airport easily.

## Lang Co Beach

If you were not planning on staying in Lang Co, a drive through may change your mind. The main street is lined with palm trees enticing you to go for a swim in the crystal clear waters that lap onto fine white sandy beaches. Lang Co is on a sand spit peninsula with a sparkling lagoon on one side, and a long beach lining the South Sea on the other. This is one of the most beautiful places in Vietnam, and is yet to be developed extensively for tourists, which is probably a good thing.

## Hai Van Pass

Travelling by road between Lang Co and Da Nang, you will have to get over the Hai Van Pass. This pass is created by a spur from the Truong Son Mountain Range that extends to the coast. This extremely mountainous road, with its sensational views, is the cause of many local vehicles breaking down. So if you are on one, allow yourself plenty of time. The view from the top of the pass is extraordinarily beautiful and well worth a stop to take it all in. The train goes through tunnels at the base of the mountain and along the shoreline, so you will miss out on the spectacular views from the top. However you will see some awesome scenery nonetheless.

## Cham Museum

The Cham Museum is the main attraction of Da Nang and is worth the trip, even if it is from Hoi An. This old sandstone building houses an excellent collection of Cham art and sculpture. The museum was built between 1915 and 1916, with Da Nang being chosen due to its proximity to the themes of Cham architecture, and was enlarged in 1936 as the collection of works increased. There are now over 300

pieces of sculpture and they are all original pieces of work. The subjects of the sculpture range through a vast ten rooms of the museum bears the name of the district in which the relic were found.

### Vietnam Beach

Vietnam Beach extends north and south of the Marble Mountains and was made famous by the war and subsequent TV series. Vietnam Beach is within cycling distance of Da Nang and it was this close proximity that led to it being used as an R&R destination for American soldiers during the war. It is a long beach that stretches all the way down to Cua Dai beach at Hoi An, though you will get a larger surf at Vietnam beach. Vietnam beach actually hosted Vietnam's first International Surfing Competition in 1992. There is some controversy as to whether this was the real Vietnam Beach or if it was the beach called My Khe, further to the north.

### My Khe Beach

My Khe is the beach directly east of Da Nang on the South China Sea. By road it is about 6 km from the centre of town to the ocean, by crossing the Han River via the Nguyen Van Troi Bridge. Turn left after the river crossing onto the main road, then a right after a couple of kilometers, and follow this street until you hit the water. My Khe Beach and Vietnam Beach are only 65 km apart and they are connected by the same stretch of coastline and uninterrupted sand. This proximity to each other makes it easy to understand to confusion towards the real 'Vietnam Beach', as it is essentially the same beach.

### Marble Mountains

The Marble Mountains are made up of five limestone outcrops in isolation from the surrounding plains, each riddled with caves and grottoes, with some made into pagodas and shrines. Each mountain represents one of the five elements of the universe, being water, wood, fire, metal and earth. The main mount, representing water, has a path to the top with two entrances open to tourists. You can also enter from the second entrance at the reverse side, farther down the road, which is a much less strenuous climb. The top offers spectacular views of Da Nang and the surrounding Marble Mountains. A better vantage point is reached through a small hole at the top of one of the caves, with the views including China Beach and Cham island.

As you start climbing the stairs, you will be accosted by young children offering to guide you or sell you stone carvings. The guides can be quite good value, as for payment they often just want you to buy a small stone carving, a great pressie for the folks back home. Some of the larger caves have been transformed for religious purposes, and Buddha statues are guilt within them along with all the associated guardians. Some of these caves are quite eerie with the pungent smell in incense sitting in the air and the walls all covered in bullet marks from small arms fighting during the Vietnam War.

During the Vietnam war there was some violent fighting which went on in cave to cave battles. In Huyen Khong cave, one of the large holes in the ceiling was caused by a bomb. Within this cave there are a number of shrines, temple guards and Buddha statues, and there are still stalactites on the ceiling. Off to the side of the cave there are two small stalactites that are believed to represent breasts, one is

dripping whilst the other is dry. According to legend, when Emperor Tu Duc entered and touched one of the stalactites, it stopped dropping and never has since. At the base of Marble Mountains there are a large number of stone carving shops reminiscent of Mahallipuram, India, as all you can hear is the endless chipping away of stone. All these stores are very keen to sell you a three foot high temple dog.

### My Son Sanctuary

My Son has what is arguably the best collection of Cham art and architecture in its natural setting in Vietnam. It is somewhat of an arduous journey to get out there, but is well worth the effort. If you are not willing to risk life and limb to visit Angkor, at least My Son will give you a little taste of what it must be like. Though some of the monuments were destroyed by the war or thieves, but what remains is still considerable. Many of the structures are overgrown with dense vegetation but you can get inside some of them.

### Cua Dai beach

The beach is the closest to Hoi An, very beautiful and is well worth a visit to cool off when the heats starts to get to you. The only eyesore are the bizarre changing huts and bungalows. It is an incredibly long beach with loads of room to wander off for a bit of personal space, which is so difficult to find in Vietnam. If you spend a day at the beach and elect to take a deckchair, you will be asked to buy either a baguette, some lovely pineapple or a drink, otherwise you will have to pay for the seat. All these prices are inflated, but the pineapple in particular is delicious.

### Hoi An

Hoi An town is small and peaceful, the kind of place where you may get stuck for a few days, whether it is intentional or not. Originally known as Faifo, this antique town is bordered on its southern side by the Thu Bon River, along which there's a number of small cafes. Despite the fact that it is now a tourist haven, the artistic atmosphere and local friendly people create an inviting environment. Hoi An was an important port developed in 17<sup>th</sup> century and remained so for a long time. There used to be canals parallel to the streets, so merchandise could be loaded straight from the back of houses onto the boats. Hoi An's continuance as a port lasted right up until the early years of the 20 century, when the river became silted up forcing the cargo ships to call at Da Nang instead.

In the past Hoi An has been used by the Japanese, Portuguese, Dutch, French and the large remaining Chinese community where all sorts of produce and wares were traded. Remnants of these past traders' influences can still be seen lining the streets of Hoi An. There are nine different types of historical sites in Hoi An with an average age of 200 years. They include private houses, family chapels, community halls, communal houses, temples, pagodas, bridges, wells and tombs. Many of these buildings have been maintained close to their original form, allowing you imagination to recreate a prosperous trading town. The houses are small and colorful with wooden doors and two round "wooden house's eyes" above, window shutters and ornamental furniture. A pleasant change from the iron bars and metal grates of other towns.

Hoi An is full of shops selling artwork, from lifelike memorial family portraits, to stylized images of Hoi An houses and streets. Next door to the art shops are places selling souvenir statues, ceramic plates, and 'antique' bowls. At the market place beside the river, you can pick up almost anything you want. Tourists are often being lured into the markets to buy silk and to have quality garments tailor made. You can have anything from dresses and trousers to shirts and hats made for a cheap price. Another noticeable quality of Hoi An is its relative silence. There are few cars and people do not feel the urge to use their horns every two seconds. The streets are filled with the hum of voices, motorbikes and the shuffling of thongs along the ground. Hoi An is small enough to get around on foot, and you will need a set of wheels if you are going to Cua Dai Beach, or on a day trip to the Marble Mountains or Da Nang. A relaxing activity around sunset is to hire a boat from the waterside by the market place. Many of the locals will wait on the river and offer you this service throughout the day and night.