

## **Vietnam and the charming atmosphere of its towns**

Hanoi unites an ancient and warm atmosphere with the typical Vietnamese way of life. The old city is formed by small and low houses decorated after the Vietnamese customs and traditions. The small streets, crossing the old town are so alike that it is not easy to tell them apart.

The corner of Tạ Hiện, accessible from different streets, represents one of the characteristic sites of this old part. It is enough to visit this small place and some of the streets around for having an idea of the old city.

While visiting the temple of Literature, one may admire the fine architecture and decorations of the Vietnamese style. Colours and paintings are amazing and contribute to make this place something magic.

The Vietnamese population is very kind. During all my journey along Vietnam, I met people who always made a good impression to me. Vietnamese citizens are very proud of their culture, traditions and like to tell you about their history and customs.

I moved early in the morning from Hanoi towards Ha Long Bay. During the two day cruise, I experienced the beauties of this magic and enchanting place. Cruising in the middle of natural small islands gives one amazing sensations. Vessels quietly navigate around the bay, stopping at the most important sights. Sometimes one may see small traditional Vietnamese boats, with men and women bearing their typical hat, gently navigate through these quiet waters.

After having tasted delicious food on the boat, I enjoyed a beautiful evening in the middle of the bay under a sky full of stars, thankful that no clouds were covering the show. This bay is as beautiful as It is misty or cloudy. Accordingly, one is very lucky if one may admire It with very good weather conditions.

During the trip in Ha Long Bay, It is worth to make a tour, with a kayak, around some of the small islands. I had beautiful memories of my kayak tour in this water. One may admire different hidden parts, while crossing caves and navigating inside the smallest islands.

During the cruise, I also tasted one of the most delicious foods ever tried in Asia.

While travelling along Vietnam, one realises how famous Vietnamese people are for their culinary skills. In every town, one may taste delicious traditional food.

The flight to Huế landed on time. Huế, the ancient capital of Vietnam where one is fully immersed in the traditional Vietnamese customs and culture and may experience all the immensity and enchantment of the former empire. There is less traffic than in Ho Chi Minh or Hanoi. Instead, the atmosphere is quite relaxing.

The imperial city includes numerous evidences of the ancient Vietnamese architecture and design, although most of the parts have been destroyed throughout the XX<sup>o</sup> century.

One remains charmed by the decorations carved and painted on the gates as well as on the other doors or walls around.

It is important and worth to hire a guide who explains you the history of the citadel, the forbidden purple city, the overall imperial city as well as how Huế developed over the centuries.

Huế deserves to be visited carefully and not in a hurry. One needs to stay there at least two full days.

The Royal tomb of Khai Định King is an original monument in its architecture and design. After having climbed the stairs at the entrance, there is a courtyard where stand at both side small statues of mandarins court aligned in a row.

In the room at the top of the monument, enclosing the grave, one may admire different decorations carved in each wall and on the ceiling. The colours match well, forming a pleasant harmony.

In this room one may realize and have an idea of the over-refinement and beauty of the ancient Vietnamese decoration. One may say that this place is unique in all of Vietnam if one considers the architecture, designs and decorations.

It is also worth to visit the tomb of Tu Đức, formed by a succession of gardens and ancient buildings.

I crossed the coast from Huế to Hôi An by bus, stopping at the most interesting places. From the Hải Vân Pass it is possible to admire a beautiful view over the Vietnamese coast. Before reaching Hôi An, I had a look at the marble mountains. A place formed of caves, tunnels and temples. While climbing the Mount Thuy, one admires different holy figures built with white marble.

Finally, I reached Hôi An, one of the most beautiful small towns in the world. Notwithstanding the fact that it is tiny, one should spend 2 days there, so as to be fully immersed in the spirit and atmosphere of the place. Even though lots of tourists, coming from everywhere in the world, crowd around the small streets, the town maintains its charming and enchanting atmosphere.

The houses on both sides of the main streets and alongside the river represent the different cultures as well as customs, architectures and traditions of populations who influenced this area during the ancient period. Chinese, Japanese, French architecture stand harmoniously side by side.

The Japanese bridge represents one of the wonders of the town. The decorations of the different houses are mostly well preserved.

Ho Chi Minh had a modern and state-of-the-art development, maintaining Vietnamese tradition and customs as well as witnesses of the ancient French colonial period. This makes the metropolis a pleasant place. One may easily walk around the city, admiring new buildings, boulevards, ancient corners as well as taste delicious meals in different places. Certainly, Saigon is polluted and congested as other big cities in the world.

From the Bitexco Financial Tower, one may have a magnificent view over the city, although it is not possible to go outside, but you are forced to admire the sight through glass walls.

Ho Chi Minh is also full of nice and charming haunts where to spend the evening, dancing, listening to music or just talking.

After having experienced the life in the metropolis, I took a bus to Cần Thơ, a city on the Mekong River. This town represents an extraordinary example of how people live in the south of Vietnam. Floating markets is the daily traditional occupation of most of the local people living there. Every early morning the Mekong river before Cần Thơ becomes a carpet of boats, selling different kinds of vegetables and fruits. In other aspect, the city along the Mekong is small and quiet. It is enough to spend there one day for experiencing the floating markets as well as some parts of the delta, by navigating on the river with a small boat.

The last place I saw in Vietnam is Châu Đốc, a city with an extraordinary landscape over the Mekong river. The town is particularly known, as it is the starting point for reaching Cambodia, by navigating on the Mekong river.

It is advisable to reach Phnom Penh by boat through the Mekong river. You can admire all the beauty and enchantment of the Mekong. In this part the river is very large and the boats gently navigate over the water. The nature surrounding offers extraordinary landscapes.

Vietnam is a relaxing country for travelling. There are several amazing and unique places around the state which deserve to be visited without hurry. People are very welcoming, especially in small towns where one may experience all the kindness of this population, by spending the night in some of the guesthouses, run by local families. In every city/small town from the north to the south, one may taste different traditional meals.