

KERALA SRI LANKA CHONGQING LUANG PRABANG BANGKOK

ultratravel

YOUR GUIDE TO HEAVEN ON EARTH

An aerial photograph of a vast tea plantation in a hilly region. The hills are covered in neat, terraced rows of vibrant green tea bushes. A narrow, reddish-brown dirt path or streambed winds through the terraces, creating a zig-zag pattern across the landscape. The background shows more rolling hills under a soft, hazy sky.

The ASIA Issue

EXOTIC INDULGENCE

A photograph of a luxury villa with a thatched roof and a circular infinity pool overlooking the ocean. The villa features large glass windows and a wooden deck. The pool is built on a raised platform with a stone border. The background shows lush greenery and a clear blue sky.

Hotels, spa resorts and private islands usher in a new era of luxury in Southeast Asia.

BY ZOE SETTLE



Experience a variety of
leisure activities with Banyan
Tree's Laguna Lăng Cô
property in Vietnam.



Vietnam is keen on sharing its prime coastal location, dotted with a new flock of private oases that offer plenty of pampering.

The countries of Southeast Asia are offering luxury travel with their own blend of exotic locations, local flavors and special amenities. Over the past few decades, Vietnam has been embracing tourism, revealing its occupied colonial past and its crowded streets and villages to Westerners. Lately, the country has been keen on sharing its prime coastal location, dotted with a new flock of oases that offer plenty of pampering.

In the middle of the coast of Vietnam is the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Hoi An. Long adored by visitors for its tailors and skilled craftsmen, the riverside city is now home to the Anantara Hoi An Resort (formerly the Life Resort), which debuted in June from the same group behind the year-old Anantara Mui Ne Resort & Spa property 500 miles to the south. Its central location in town makes it ideal for exploring the historic sites, although it offers plenty of activities for those who prefer to remain on property, such as cooking lessons, golf nearby at Ocean Dunes and exploring surrounding villages by bike. For the sartorially-minded traveler eager to build a bespoke wardrobe, try Hoi An's skilled tailors and make sure you spend at least 48 hours in the city to allow for enough time for fittings. Regulars recommend AoBaBa on Tran Phu street.

Spa-focused resorts are booming in the area, prized for their beachfront setting, with new resorts eager to satisfy weary travelers or those simply coming for a relaxing holiday. In Da Nang, a short drive up the coast from Hoi An, the three-year-old Fusion Maia Resort prides itself on being the first all-inclusive spa resort in all of Asia. Two spa treatments daily are included in the room rate, and each "room" is actually a villa

with a private swimming pool and courtyard. Fusion Maia's developer, Serenity Holding, is also opening a resort next year on the southern island of Phu Quoc, where 10 bungalows will be optimally sited on the ocean.

Singapore-based Banyan Tree Hotels & Resorts, known for its award-winning spa services, opened its first Vietnam property, Laguna Lăng Cô, last winter. Located in the Chan May region on a mile-and-a-half of beachfront property about 90 minutes from both Hue and Hoi An, the 700-acre property is idyllically situated between tropical jungles and mountains. The province has historically been a favorite holiday retreat for Vietnamese royalty, and now Lăng Cô attracts another category of guests with an 18-hole championship golf course designed by Sir Nick Faldo.

A visit to Vietnam usually includes arrival in or departure from Ho Chi Minh City, formerly Saigon. Include a day there and stay at the Park Hyatt Saigon, which has debuted a Masters of Food and Wine program. This September, you can visit the Grand-Place Cacao Garm on the Mekong Delta and discover the life cycle of chocolate, as well as indulge in a pastry-making class using Phan Thiet vanilla, estate coffee and the local chocolate. Or, for another foodie sensation, try Lucca Trattoria, the new restaurant from U.S.-transplant Brian McNally, part of the brother team behind New York's adored Indochine, Balhazar and Odeon. Cap off the night with the "AO Show," a five-person orchestra performing folk songs depicting the daily lifestyles of farming communities in Southern Vietnam.

To explore Vietnam, contact your travel agent today.



Ruins near Banyan Tree's Laguna Ling Co resort in the Crun May district



Cambodia Three Ways

Three very different tours will satisfy travelers eager to explore Cambodia, too. The country nestled in between Thailand, Laos and Vietnam has been experiencing double-digit growth in tourism since 2010. Nearly \$400 million is being invested in airport improvements in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, with an anticipated capacity of five million annual passengers.

Vermont-based **Country Walkers**, a 34-year-old luxury tour operator, has expanded one of its best-selling itineraries, "Trails of Indochina," to include three days in Cambodia. The next 11-day trip leaves November 4 from Laos, with visits along the southward journey to Hanoi, the iconic Ha Long Bay (and its lushly forested limestone islands) and Hoi An. It concludes in Cambodia, where guests stay at the Victoria Angkor Resort & Spa and enjoy an evening at the Apsara Theatre at Angkor Village, as well as dinner in Siem Reap with a traditional dance and cultural performance.

Aqua Expeditions will launch its *MV Aqua Mekong*, a 20-suite luxury vessel setting off into Indochina in early 2014. Designed by Saigon-based Noor Architects with interiors by David Hodgkinson and Luc Lejeune, the boat will offer itineraries in two directions, from Siem Reap down to My Tho near Ho Chi Minh City, with a stop in Phnom Penh. The floating "resort" will offer three-, four- and seven-night journeys, complete with a spa, screening room and fitness center.

Red Savannah, a two-year-old bespoke travel outfitter founded by George Morgan-Grenville, formerly of Abercrombie & Kent, offers a 12-day Cambodia holiday, which this year will include a stay at the new Park Hyatt Siem Reap, opening its doors in August. The 108-room property was formerly the Hôtel de la Paix, ideally situated near the 12th-century ruins of Angkor Wat (and an easy transfer to the airport). It's now being redesigned by Bill Bensley. Each room and suite will offer either a private pool or garden. Also, for travelers interested in Cambodia's relatively undiscovered Koh Rong archipelago, Red Savannah suggests Song Saa, which opened its 27 villas last winter on a private island.



All treas doing at the Park Hyatt Saigon



Aqua Expeditions' *MV Aqua Mekong* will launch its first cruise next year in Cambodia



Anantara Mui Ne Resort & Spa on Mui Ne beach, near Phan Thiet



Ruins of Banyan Tree's Laguna Ling Co mean 11-day summer tours to suit their interests and experience with Chen May's traditions.