

Photo-essay

Enchanting Vietnam

In this photo-essay, we go to Vietnam, Lan Le-Ngoc's country till he left it in 1978. He graciously shared his life story with us for [The Long Read \[pg 12 & 13\]](#) for this issue.



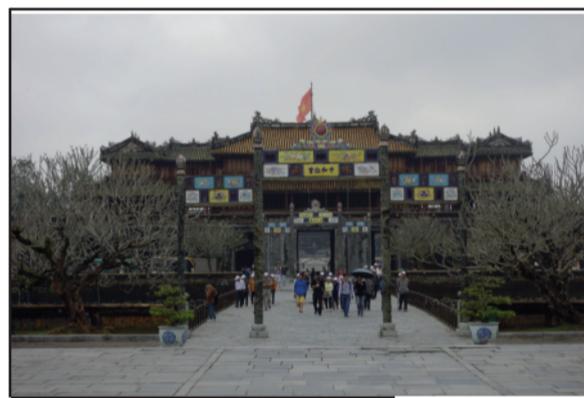
The scenic trains journeys are a great way to see the country.



Vietnam is a truly beautiful country with breathtaking natural beauty, vibrant culture, warm and welcoming people, and a rich history. Every town and city has a character of it's own. Vietnam never fails to charm.



Dating back to 4th century AD, the ruins of the once glorious temples of My Son are a sight to behold. They consists of several temple clusters, only some of which still stand strong. Majority of the temples were bombed out of existance by the American forces during the Vietnam war.



Hue was the imperial capital of the Nguyen dynasty. The imperial city, surrounded by a wall of 2 Km by 2 Km, is a fortress, consisting of the palace, temples, gardens and tombs.



The tombs of Nguyen dynasty are top tourist attractions in Hue. Emperor Tu Duc's tomb is one of the most beautiful tombs. It has a vast sprawling complex with a calm and serene ambience, built around a beautiful lake and full of pine trees. It consists of several tombs and temples dedicated to wives, some courtesans, and other relatives.



Bombs used by the American forces to destroy the temples.



Hoi An, another UNESCO world heritage site was the site of the first chinese settlement in Vietnam. It used to be a major South-East Asian trading centre from the 15th to 19th century. Today, Hoi An is a delightful little town. Taking a walk down the alleys of the old town, with well preserved buildings from the past, which have now been converted to temples, emporiums, and museums, it is not very hard to imagine how life would have been back then. The colourful markets light up at night where you can buy anything and everything. Tailor made shoes and clothes are a speciality of Hoi An. You'll see numerous shops lined up where they can make lovely shoes and dresses for you, in just one day!



The marble mountains, near the city of Da Nang, is a group of five hills that contain a number of natural caves and tunnels. Some of the caves are quite big and take the visitor by surprise. There are several buddhist and hindu temples in this complex. It is a popular tourist destination. The area is famous for marble sculpture making and stone-cutting crafts. Just outside the complex there are numerous shops selling scuptures of all types. Some of the showrooms are huge and have endless collections on display. The quality of the craft is stellar.

Ho Chi Minh's mausoleum in Ho Chi Minh city is where the embalmed body of Ho Chi Minh is kept, protected by four armed guards at four corners. There's a very strict code of conduct that everyone must follow. People wait in long queues everyday to pay their respects to the father of nation.



Cu chi tunnels, where the horrors of the American-Vietnam war come alive, are part of a much larger network of several stories deep underground tunnels, which served as a hiding place for the Vietnamese. The tunnels contain complete living quarters with homes, kitchens, and hospitals. Some of the tunnels have been opened for visitors, and it is only after visting this place does one realise what life meant for these people brave and fearless people, and just how hard it was to live this way.



Ha Long Bay, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is absolutely breathtaking with thousands of monolithic limestone islands rising from it's emerald waters.

A night's stay on a boat is a must in Ha Long Bay.



Standing true to it's name, the Surprise cave is the most magnificent cave in Halong bay and leaves it's visitors awestruck. When you begin following the tiny path that leads up to this cave, it is hard to imagine just how huge and spectacular this cave could be.



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Vietnamese surely know how to honour their martyrs. There are separate graveyards for soldiers and common people in all villages, and they have detailed listings of everyone who rests there. Some of the graves were quite fancy. They likely belonged to officers of higher cadre.



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