

## The essence of Vietnam

*The central coast region has huge potential for tourism with miles of glorious white beaches, a vast expanse of national parks and refined cuisine.*



Tourism in Central Vietnam has long focused on the imperial city of Hue, the Cham ruins of My Son and the old trading port town of Hoi An. Undoubtedly, these UNESCO-accredited world heritage sites should remain must-see sites for visitors to the region.

However, delving a little deeper, visitors will find the provinces of Thua Thien Hue, Danang and Quang Nam have so much more to offer-unique centuries-old cultural sights and experiences, jaw-dropping natural attractions, stunning coastlines and delectable local food-all of which form ‘the essence of Vietnam.’

Though Thua Thien Hue, Danang and Quang Nam each stand out with their own special character, they come together to represent the priceless centrepiece of Vietnam-a destination that lives up to its ancient traditions and heritage.

The three central coast provinces are currently focusing development towards the trend of eco-sea tourism, leisure tourism, and sea sport tourism, with scuba diving, parasailing and kayaking centres frequently popping up along the coastline.

The paradise beaches, famous peninsulas, archipelagos and islands as well as beautiful bays including Son Tra peninsula in Danang, Cham island in Quang Nam and Lang Co bay in Thua Thien Hue provide the perfect setting for these activities.

Inland, the region is rich in natural resources, with pristine forests, imposing mountain ranges and natural hot springs, as well as a plethora of cultural and historical relics which have the potential to be explored and promoted as highlighted products for cultural, historical and religious tourism.

With these advantages, the province is drawing the attention of both local and international investors. More and more prestigious local and international hospitality groups are operating or in the process of constructing new luxury hotels and beautiful beach resorts in the region.

The scale and structure of investment in the region is rapidly moving towards the luxury trend, creating more lavish accommodation and leisure products for high-end tourists.

Along with providing upscale services for tourists, many hotel brands have won prestigious international hospitality awards from world tourism organizers, magazines and travel websites, helping to boost Vietnam and its central coast onto the world luxury tourism map. Through their worldwide marketing networks, these international brands are promoting the image of Vietnam's high-end sea tourism across the world.

For the luxury market, the central coast also offers world class golf courses. Vietnam's burgeoning golf coast brings together some of the finest golfing experiences available in Asia, offering some rare gems to the discerning golfer.

The Colin Montgomerie-designed Montgomerie Links in Quang Nam, Greg Norman's Danang Golf Club, Bana Hills Golf Club in Danang and Nick Faldo's Laguna Lang Co Golf Club in Thua Thien Hue have earned the region its reputation as Asia's new golf tourism hotspot and one not to be missed by golf enthusiasts.

The central provinces of Thua Thien Hue, Danang and Quang Nam are reemerging as alternative destinations for high-end travellers seeking stunning beaches, first rate resorts, and UNESCO world cultural heritage sites.

### Quang Nam heritage

Quang Nam is blessed with 125 kilometres of wild and beautiful coast line, it is home to two world cultural heritages-Hoi An ancient town and My Son sanctuary, as well as Cu Lao Cham biosphere reserve. These heritages are unique to Quang Nam province and cannot be found elsewhere in Vietnam.

The province also has a long cultural history and cultural diversity due to exchanges among Quang Nam and Champa, India, Japan, China, and some western countries.

This diversity is demonstrated through the cultural identities of the various ethnic groups. With such treasures, Quang Nam is a hotspot for luxury tourism, offering all this as well as jaw dropping scenery, excellent food and warm hospitality.

To discover the beauty of Quang Nam to its fullest, visitors should explore Hoi An ancient town by day and night, take a boat trip to Cu Lao Cham island, and head to ancient My Son sanctuary.

The highly exotic Cu Lao Cham-a group of islands not far from Cua Dai beach, has been recognized as a World Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO. Blessed with a cool climate, beautiful clean white sandy beaches, crystal clear water and protected marine habitats, the island is also known as 'Mother of Cham'.

A 518m mountain graces the island, topped by the three peaks of Ngoc Long, Tien But and Bat Lao. Long ago the king of Champa lived here. Though few Cham relic remain, the island is perfect for diving and exploring nature.

A trip to the region shouldn't go by without a visit to My Son, the most sacred place of the Champa kingdom. It lies in the present day Quang Nam province, about 30km west of the site of Simhapura, the capital of Champa until 1000 CE. Protected by a circle of mountains stand more than 70 structures constructed from brick and stone, most of which were dedicated to Siva.

The buildings at the World Heritage Site of My Son Sanctuary were masterpieces of their time but are sadly now in ruins.

The large complex was heavily damaged by US bombing during the Vietnam War. The site has been restored through donations from a number of countries and NGO's.

The Cham people derived their cultural and spiritual influences almost exclusively from Hindu India. My Son was the place where kings were cremated and towers built to commemorate their great deeds.

The majority of the temples were dedicated to the Cham kings who, upon their death, were associated with divinities of the Hindu pantheon, especially Shiva, who was considered the founder of the Champa civilisation.

Despite the rich treasures the province has to offer, various steps need to be taken for the tourism industry to achieve its potential.

As Tom Corrie, deputy head of Cooperation and Development, EU Delegation to Vietnam, pointed out ‘Vietnam competes with attractive tourism destinations in neighbouring countries.

To survive in this competitive environment that is heavily influenced by globalisation trends, Vietnam and Quang Nam province in particular must present unique, innovative and diversified products, which lead to a quality-oriented positioning.

These products need intelligent marketing structures, both national and regional, to communicate the competitive advantages of the destination.’

*Time Out*