

Ho Chi Minh City

HCMC commonly known as **Saigon** was the former capital of the South Vietnam before 1975. It is one of Asia's most exciting cities with vibrant street life, handsome buildings and warm weather all year round.

The city began as the Khmer fishing village of Prey Nokor and remained in the hands of the Khmer (Cambodians) for many centuries.

During 17th century, floods of Vietnamese immigration arrived there. The immigrants first came in 1623 with permission from the Cambodian king, but later waves came uninvited, while Cambodia was too weakened by a war with Thailand to stop them. In 1698, Prey Nokor and the whole lower Mekong river delta, was formally annexed by Vietnam and became known as Saigon.

Sài Gòn may refer to the kapok trees planted by Khmer people (bông gòn (cotton sticks/trees)) around the city.

In 1859 Saigon fell to an invading coalition of French and Spanish forces and then became part of the colony of French Indochina. Under French rule, Saigon was filled with Western architecture, and French villas still remain in the city to this day. In 1940, when France fell to Nazi Germany, Saigon and French Indochina came under the administration of Vichy France, but after months, the Japanese had taken control.

In 1945, the Communist Viet Minh won the war with French and the country gained the independence. In 1949 South Vietnamese declared their own state with its capital in Saigon. From 1954 (after the French war finished) until 1975 (until the US war finished) Saigon remained as the capital of South Vietnam. After the country unification after 30th of April 1975, Saigon was renamed Ho Chi Minh City in 1976.

HCMC is the largest city in Vietnam, having 8.3 million inhabitants (2016). The three Eastern Religions of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism are the most popular belief systems.

The climate is classified as tropical wet and dry, meaning that it is warm all year round and divided into two distinct seasons, the wet season (May-Oct.) and the dry season (Nov.-April).

Attractions:

Ben Thanh market is one of the earliest surviving structures in Saigon from 17th century and an important symbol of HCMC.

Saigon Opera House (1897) modelled on the Petit Palais in Paris.

Saigon Central Post Office (1886-1891) designed by Alfred Foulhoux, but is often erroneously credited as being the work of Gustave Eiffel.

Saigon Notre-Dame Cathedral (1863-1880).

Independence Palace (Reunification Palace): in 1975 the tanks of the North Vietnamese Army crashed through its main gate signifying the end of the Vietnam War.

Bitexco financial Tower (262.5 m) and Sky Deck, for a good view of HCMC at the restaurant at 50th floor.

Jade Emperor Pagoda (Ngọc Hoàng Điện), a Taoist pagoda (at 73 Mai Thi Luu str.) built by the Chinese community in 1909.

Vĩnh Nghiêm Pagoda (literally Ever Solemn), the first pagoda in Vietnam to be built in Vietnamese traditional architecture style (339 Nam Kỳ Khởi Nghĩa str.).

Excursions around Saigon

- 1/ One-day excursion to Mekong river (My tho),
- 2/ Half-day excursion to Cu Chi Tunnels,
- 3/ One-day excursion to Vung Tau by speed boat,
- 4/ Full day tour to Cu Chi and Cao Dai temple.



HCMC - Mekong Delta (My Tho)

Visit the Mekong Delta and My Tho (70kms south from HCMC) and Ben Tre islands, enjoy sightseeing on your trip along the river and walk around local fruit gardens.

- 1.5 hour bus-drive to My Tho admiring green rice field on the way.

- Cruise by a motorized boat on the Tien River to the Qui (Tortoise Islet); seeing other 3 islands (4 islands named after 4 animals that appear in Buddhist writings- Dragon, Unicorn, Phoenix and Turtle).

- Walking in the village, seeing local fruit garden and tasting the tropical fruits, visiting the bee house and tasting honey from the bee-nets by your fingers.

- Lunch will be served right in the heart of the orchard garden.

- Boat cruise through Bao Dinh canal, entering Ben Tre province-the land of coconuts, visiting the coconut candy-making shop.

- Rowing boat trip on the small canal covered by the shadow of the water coconut's trees,

- Relaxing in a hammock or bike ride around the island.



Cu Chi Tunnels

The tunnels at Cu Chi are an immense network of connecting underground passageways during the American War, 50kms north-west from HCMC.

The Viet Cong soldiers used the tunnels as hiding spots during combat, as well as communication and supply routes. They were also the site of hospitals, food and weapon caches, and living quarters for numerous North Vietnamese fighters.

The underground network stretches for 250 kilometers. The visitors will visit a short portion of the tunnel network and go underground, crawling around in the safer parts of the tunnel system. After exploring the tunnels, one will have time for some shooting at the range, and then to enjoy tea and cassava, an important food for the guerrillas during the war.



Cao Dai Temple

90kms north-west from HCMC.

It is one of the most striking structures in South-East Asia, built in 1926, the temple is the "Holy See" of the Cao Dai sect, a hybrid of Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism and Christianity, set up in Tay Ninh.



Vung Tau

150kms east from HCMC, 2hrs by speed boat along Saigon river and Saigon sea, with beautiful beach, 32m-high statue of Jesus extending his 18.3m-long arms on the top of 170m-high Nho Mount, White Palace from the last King of Vietnam

