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## LA SIESTA SPA LOUNGE: WHERE RELAXATION STARTS AND ENDS

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## HOI AN CUISINE A CULINARY MELTING POT

It is not one element, but many which make Vietnamese cuisine delicious and healthy. A defining feature, for example, is the combination and adaption of influences from France, China and various other Asian nations to create a unique food philosophy. Or let's consider the intricate integration of herbs and vegetables, and the clear, clean flavors and vibrant color palates for each set of ingredients.

A key building block is the number five. A balanced fusion of five tastes - spicy (metal), sour (wood), bitter (fire), salty (water) and sweet (earth). These correspond to the five colors of white (metal), green (wood), yellow (earth), red (fire) and black (water). Which in turn stimulates the five senses.

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## POWERFUL HOI AN ARCHITECTURE AND LUXURIOUS INTERIORS

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## THANH HA COMMUNITY COMMUNAL HOUSE A PLACE OF WORSHIP

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## MY SON VIETNAM'S 'VALLEY OF THE KINGS'

Described by French historians as 'The Valley of the Kings', My Son or holy land is the site of temple towers and a former imperial city of the Cham people. The ancient Indo-chinese kingdom of Champa arose in the 2nd century AD surviving to the 17th century. Occupying coastal areas of central Vietnam and what is now Cambodia and Laos, it was a Hindu based civilisation influenced by India. In 192 AD there was an uprising against dominating Chinese warlords leading to the creation of Champapura or 'City of the Cham people'. The political capital city of this independent state was called Simphaparu (meaning Lion Citadel), now Tra Kieu village.

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# HOI AN CUISINE

# A CULINARY MELTING POT



## Influences in Vietnamese cuisine

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Culinary diversity across the three main regions of Vietnam is also important. The north, south and center have distinct dishes particular to each area, as well as subtle and overt variations of the nation's iconic fare.

Northern cuisine tends to be less spicy/sweet and less bold than other regions. Southern areas, meanwhile, boast more vibrant and flavorsome creations, while central regions incorporate more spices and stronger elements.

## Culinary aromatic balancing

The melting pot of cultures not only makes Hoi An historically colorful but has also influenced the town's cuisine through vibrant colors and divine flavors. Originating in the 15th century as an important South East Asian commercial port, the Hoi An area became home to many Chinese traders and merchants.

Hence the strong influence of Chinese cuisine. According to Chinese tradition, all food has energy and is therefore guided by the forces of Yin and Yang. In simple terms, yin refers to passive-negative forces and yang its active-positive counterpart. A regulating balance is created, especially important when it comes to food. Over-indulging in either element affects the body's balance. Yin foods have cooling and expanding properties, while yang foods do the opposite by warming and contracting. Hoi An cuisine places great importance on this yin yang combination by balancing flavors and textures.

When considering the secrets of Hoi An flavors, look no further than the specialty of Tra Que organic vegetable village. This agricultural community supplies vegetables and herbs to most of Hoi An's food outlets and markets, and is therefore prominent in numerous Hoi An dishes. For centuries the farming families have been cultivating high quality, superbly flavored herbs and vegetables, essential ingredients in many dishes. These products have their own balancing energies and compliment staple foods such as rice, beans, meats. For example, items such as bean sprouts and tomatoes have yin qualities while spring onion and coriander are yang foods.

Following Vietnam's regional culinary diversity and uniqueness, Hoi An's cuisine features variations on national iconic dishes as well as local delicacies specific to the town and Quang Nam province.

On this whistle stop tour of Hoi An cuisine the following dishes illustrate a little about this wide gastronomic topic.

## Noodles galore

One quintessential Hoi An dish has existed since the 14th Century. Said to have emanated from Phu Chiem village in Quang Nam province, Mi Quang is a noodle dish. Originally created for workers, over time it has become a source of local pride. Memorable for a harmonious mixture of flavors and textures, it consists of thin flat rice noodles and a balance of fresh ingredients. Traditionally mixed with shrimp, pork and vegetables, topped with grilled sesame rice crackers, fried shallots, peanuts and a variety of fresh herbs, the flavors are enhanced with a little sweet-flavored broth making the noodle dish moist. The dish even has its own saying:

*"Thương nhau múc bát chè xanh,  
Làm tô mì Quảng anh xơi cho cùng"*

It relates to a girl from Quang Nam province who offers her boyfriend a cup of tea and a bowl of Mi Quang to signify how much she loves him.

One dish which locals say cannot authentically be replicated outside Hoi An is Cao Lau. Invented in Hoi An, its uniqueness comes from the town's water. Hoi An has many ancient wells dating back to the Cham period; the Ba Le Well is the most famous. It is reputed that alum-free water from this well was/is the secret of Cao Lau.

Water used for soaking the rice noodles is mixed with ash from Cham Island giving the noodles a chewy consistency and a distinct flavor overall.

Cao Lau is a special type of noodle dish. The preparation of the noodles follows a very precise and seemingly complex process. And unlike other dishes which can be regionally adapted, the Cao Lau's recipe should not be changed. In addition to noodles and the intensely flavored broth, the other compulsory

ingredients are slices of pork, crispy pigskin, raw vegetables, coriander, and soya sprouts from Tra Que village. The name of the dish also has a significance. "cao" means high and "lau" means chamber. It is said that the combined words may have referred to when the local businessmen at the time would sit in high chambers to eat while keeping watch on their shops and business.

## A cracking good time

A seemingly simple looking dish is deceptively complex behind the scenes. Banh dap means cracked or smashed rice pancake. Incorporating yin and yang principles, it combines two kinds of rice paper sheets. A thin wet sheet is sandwiched between two dry brittle sheets. To eat, one smashes the 'sandwich' creation into small pieces which are then dipped into mam cai, a special fermented salted fish paste.

## A common specialty

While the above are regionally unique dishes, Hoi An demonstrates it can take food common throughout Vietnam and create special signature dishes. One such example is humble chicken and rice (Com Ga). Hoi An combines fluffy yellow pandan leaf-flavored rice topped with particularly high quality local shredded chicken, and crushed onions and herbs from Tra Que.

Thanks to the areas natural, unique and secret qualities Hoi An has fast developed a reputation as a food paradise and a gastronomical delight.

**Sign up with Red Bean restaurant to experience a great authentic cooking class**

**Visit Tra Que organic village and Hoi An market to select superb ingredients**

**Learn how to cook a selection of Hoi An dishes**





# POWERFUL HOI AN ARCHITECTURE AND LUXURIOUS INTERIORS

The majestic, enchanting and superior color yellow is one of the most uplifting colors of the spectrum. Visitors to Hoi An won't be surprised to learn that a nickname given to the town is 'Yellow City' of Vietnam. And according to local Hoi An resident and French photographer Réhahn, Hoi An is always wrapped in sunshine.

Hoi An, translated as "peaceful meeting place" is an exceptionally well preserved community. Its ancient houses, tight yellow ochre terraces bathed in light, moss covered walls, sloping roofs, verandas, balconies and wooden balustrades speak of an impressive historical and cultural legacy.

This former wealthy trading port, dating from the 15th to 19th centuries and honored in 1999 as a UNESCO World Heritage site, is home to nearly 1,000 ancient buildings and a charming architectural glory.

Being at a cultural crossroads linking Cham, Japanese, Chinese, Indian and French influences, Hoi An embodies an exclusively unique architectural style where East meets West. A style not really seen elsewhere in Vietnam.

La Siesta Resort & Spa embodies a powerful reflection of Hoi An's unique blend of influences, style and colors. The new east wing can be imagined as an extension and combination of the

ancient town's architectural splendor and prosperous past.

Eight majestic sunshine-yellow townhouse villas, grouped into tight terraces, are bathed in light from early morning to dusk - a wash which strengthens the depth of the yellow-hued walls. First floor suites with front porches and backs opening onto gardens hint at the homes of former merchants and officers in colonial times which had front decks and inner living spaces leading to back yards.

Let your eye wander upwards to the rows of wooden balconies, passageways connected by arches and traditional Hoi An-style narrow wooden doorways – a reflection of the town's colonnaded houses with dark wooden balustrades and verandas.

The east wing façade is symmetrically bewitching in style, just as its ancient town counterpart. Quintessential deep pitched roofs with yin yang red-brown tiles epitomize the Chinese influence. Corridors, terraces and verandas give shade from the sun and create a cooling airflow effect, just as the 1920s-40s French architecture was adapted to Hoi An weather's and environment. An imposing east wing style at home with harmony and nature, cool in the summer and cozy in the cooler months.

Just as the old town has a powerfully unique style reflecting east and west

cultures, so La Siesta Resort & Spa combines Hoi An architecture with luxurious and appealing beautiful interiors. Cool rooms versus the brightness and heat of the outside. A palette of whites, pale biscuit colors contrast with dark browns, dusty grey blues and sage greens to create a timeless calming environment and a touch of class. Highly polished dark wooden floors add depth. Vintage geometric patterned floor and wall tiles, adopting the interior color palette blend perfectly in style. Light streams through the windows framed by taupe colored soft drapes. High quality period-style furniture creates a combined neo-classical and French colonial interior design

concept. Styles that, maybe, hint at Sheraton and Hepplewhite furniture contrast with Asian elements. High quality soft white linens, upmarket amenities and high end accessories add luxurious touches.

What is strikingly evident in the design is the exacting precision of every element. Each has its place. There is no clutter or over indulgence. The effect created is simple, minimal and very sophisticated. As the saying goes, 'less is more'.

The east wing is a balance of Hoi An's glorious architectural heritage and stately interior comfort affording everyone a touch of luxury.



# DISTINCT FLAVORS OF TRA QUE

In addition to naturally fertile land, humble algae and weeds living in the ponds near the De Vong River can rightly take some of the credit for Tra Que's delicious fame and distinct flavors. The village, named after a sweet-flavored herb cultivated in this area, is located north east of Hoi An old town. Centuries ago, it was an important stopping point for boats sailing down the De Vong river from/to Da Nang. Due to the natural qualities of this area its fame as a leading vegetable production center quickly grew.

The years come and go, but the residents of Tra Que Hamlet, in Cam An Village, have diligently cultivated their land for generations using effective authentic methods, plus the application of a fascinating process.

For hundreds of years farming throughout Vietnam was traditionally organic based. The Tra Que farmers keep organic farming methods alive by uniquely using the algae and weeds instead of manure or chemical fertilizer. It is these organic organisms which are the intriguing secret behind the Tra Que Village vibrant healthy greens and fresh flavors.

The village cultivates more than 20 kinds of herbs and vegetables including basil, knotweed, Vietnamese mint, coriander, perilla (a herb of the mint family), lettuces, onions and so forth. The produce of Tra

Que are important ingredients featured in traditional dishes, which uniquely define Hoi An's cuisine. Many recipes, such as banh xeo (a type of savory crisp pancake), Cau Lau (the famous regional noodle soup), Mi Quang noodles and so forth, demand vegetables and herbs. A combination of specific fresh vegetables releases the five flavors and stimulates the senses. One particular dish which importantly relies on the Tra Que ingredients is Tom Huu or Tam Huu. This literally means "prawns' friends" or "three friends". Prawns and pork are wrapped in water mint leaves grown in Tra Que and secured with thin strips of green onion. The way the ingredients are tied together, creating a "friendship of flavors", inspired the name of this variety of Vietnamese fresh roll.

To supplement their income and proudly demonstrate effective farming techniques, the villagers have firmly put Tra Que on the tourist map. Domestic and international visitors can participate in various agricultural activities, experience local farming life, witness farming procedures including raking, sowing, tilling the land, watering, picking the vegetables and herbs and so on. The farmers take time to explain the fertilizing methods and other aspects of farming. The combination of this traditionally idyllic rural setting and a chance to roll up one's sleeves and till the land makes Tra Que an attractive destination.

Being a farming community, the villagers pray for successful crops to sustain their livelihood. Playing an important role in the village for over 500 years is the Cau Bong Festival. Held on the 7th day of the 1st lunar month this colorful and lively ceremony calls for a good harvest. The villagers pray to the God of the Harvest and the founders of the village, asking for a bumper crop, good weather and prosperity during the coming year. Early morning the villagers prepare offerings of sticky pink rice (symbolizing luck and a good crop), chicken, incense, flowers and other votive offerings. The elders lead the procession in honor of the ancestors. Women in traditional ao dai carry the five fruits tray. Offerings are made at the temple, prayers are chanted and rituals followed. As well as the traditional formalities, it is also a time for fun activities and entertainment. There are food stalls, vegetable and herb displays and competitions, a boat race and the chance for festival goers and visitors to join the locals in some farming activities.

Nowadays, around 220 households still maintain and agricultural occupation. To illustrate the farming community's size and productivity – Tra Que village covers an area of 18 hectares with a capacity of 300 quintals per hectare (one quintal relates to 100 kg). In value terms, a few years ago statistics indicated a total volume of 540 tons worth 9.2bn VND.

Tra Que vegetables and herbs rightfully have a superb reputation for freshness, high quality, food safety and distinct flavors. As such, the village supplies most of Hoi An's major restaurants, and has a distribution network throughout Quang Nam province, Hue and down to Saigon.

We end with some food for thought. Maybe it would be more accurate to regard the villagers not as farmers but as artisans. Applying skillful farming techniques, handing down knowledge from generation to generation, combined with wonderful aromas and vibrant colors, Tra Que's industry is more like an art form. And a particularly delicious one at that.

**Tra Que Organic Vegetable village,  
Tra Que Hamlet, Cam An village,  
Northeast of Hoi An old town.**

**La Siesta Resort & Spa arranges tours to Tra Que village. Visit the gardens, join the farmers in preparing and fertilizing the land. Attend one of Tra Que village cooking classes or visit the village on its annual festival day.**

**For private/group tour to Tra Que village., please contact our tour consultant at:  
[info@lasiestaresorts.com](mailto:info@lasiestaresorts.com)  
or tel number +84 2353 915 915.**



# LA SIESTA SPA LOUNGE: WHERE RELAXATION STARTS AND ENDS

In the heart of La Siesta Resort & Spa between the west and east wings lies a circular glass structure, giving almost 360 degree views of the property. A little like a summer house from the outside, this sanctuary is La Siesta Spa's reception. Welcome to the Spa Lounge.

The setting and environment make an interesting combination of opposites. Bordering the property with mottled yellow ochre walls covered in moss is the old communal house which is a place of worship. And right next door the floor to ceiling glass walls of the Spa Lounge create a more modern impression, softened by strips of light-beige bamboo blinds providing shade from the sun. My eye is drawn to the circular roof layered in strands of faux coconut leaves, a similar color to the blinds. This adds a touch of the tropics, rather like one would expect to see on a deserted island, blending naturally with the exotic gardens that surround.

I step inside, arriving a little early for my spa treatment, moving from the heat and bright sunlight into the cool soft interior. Immediately I am enveloped by the wonderfully subtle and soft aroma of essential oils and soothing music. Any tension I had soon disappears. A lot of thought has clearly been put into creating this lounge - from its precise location and design to the purpose and atmosphere. Incorporated into its standalone identity are influences linking it to the resort. The relaxed and inviting interior features comfy dark brown colonial-style furniture and geometric floor tiles in dusty blue and cream – similar in style to the main east wing suites. My eye wanders to the outside, through the windows, taking in the view of the whole area and the sunlight shimmering on the east wing saltwater pool.

I am given the spa menu and a spa client information form. I note down any aches or pains, my preferred massage pressure, areas for the therapist to focus on and, a wonderful touch, I can choose the massage oil for my treatment. The receptionist explained La Siesta Spa offers a choice of four essential oils and two base oils. These are also available for purchase from the Spa Lounge. While I picked up each container to smell the receptionist elaborated on each of them. Fokenia, also known as Siam wood, has a sweet woody aroma, with calming and aromatic qualities. Citriodora is a lemon-scented eucalyptus oil which helps combat many ailments such as asthma, colds, migraines and so forth. Cajeput appears to be great for treating a huge range of conditions from toothache and relieving cramps to improving blood circulation and as a general skin tonic. It has a strong, sweetish medicinal aroma. The fourth essential oil is Holy Basil which comes from the Holy Basil leaf. Considered



sacred among Hindus, it is powerful, aromatic and widely considered as a purifier for the mind, body, and spirit.

The final two oils are base oils meaning they are carrier oils used to dilute stronger concentrated ones. At La Siesta Spa they use Tamanu and Olive oil. Tamanu is a natural nut oil with healing and anti-inflammatory qualities and a deep rich scent. While finally olive oil, commonly associated with cooking, has long been used as a skincare product and is particularly good for soothing rheumatic conditions. I chose Fokenia based on its calming aroma.

In the meantime I had been brought a cold towel and a healthy cooling tea. In the hot summer months the spa lounge serves a lemongrass tea. The citrus flavor is refreshing and cool. Lemongrass provides a number of benefits including an antioxidant, good for treating digestive conditions, combating high blood pressure and flu relief. In the cooler season (although the Hoi An temperatures don't radically drop) a different tea is served filled with all the goodness of ginger, lemon and cinnamon. Bursting with nutrients it helps to boost energy and is a perfect tonic for overall wellness.

Form filled in, tea drunk, massage oil chosen, feeling totally relaxed I am greeted by my therapist. From the menu of over 30 treatments and packages, I had opted for the 90' Cloud Nine combination of hot stones and a foot massage.

And so, I am whisked away from one relaxing haven to another. Through the gardens and across little walkways spanning channels of water I reach the spa villas ready for my pampering session.

## NIGHT MARKET HOI AN NIGHT MARKET COLORS

For those who know Hoi An well, it is no surprise that the town has recently been voted number 13 in the TripAdvisor 2017 Travelers' Choice top 25 destinations of the world, and the number 1 destination in Vietnam. And ask anyone what their lasting image of Hoi An is, most likely they will say the lanterns.

Lantern creation is Hoi An's traditional handicraft and one of the town's most famous trademarks. In olden days, people hung oil lamps in interesting shaped lantern shades in the Chinese style. In the 16th and 17th centuries Japanese merchants in the commercial areas of Hoi An (called Faifo at the time), would hang their own particular shaped lanterns in front of buildings. The local townsfolk followed this lead, stringing up lanterns on poles hoping to attract luck and prosperity.

Fast forward to the end of the 1990s when in 1998 Hoi An's authorities inspired a night of lantern festivities on the 14th day of the lunar calendar. Fast forward once again to the present time. The centuries-old tradition of decorating the town with lanterns is stronger now than ever. And there is no better way to admire the dark night sky lit up in a myriad of warm shining colors than every evening at Hoi An's night market.

When the Quang Nam province authorities decided to clear up the streets in the old quarter, they brought in pedestrian-only zones and replaced the old French-era central market with a new structure.

Street traders and food stalls were, of course, affected. Some food stall holders moved into the new market building while others had to find alternative space. They turned to Hoi An islet. In 2011 the islet, once home to a banana plantation, was transformed. The land was cleared to make space for guesthouses, hotels, riverside restaurants and cafes. And it was here, outside the guarded boundaries of the ancient town, that traders and stall holders from the old part established what is now one of Vietnam's most stunningly famous night markets.

The market runs along Nguyen Hoang Street on Hoi An's islet, linked to the mainland by 3 short bridges over the Thu Bon River. Locals and visitors alike can browse the 50 or so stalls selling a multitude of items from jewelry, arts and handicrafts to textiles, souvenirs and small household wares. Great street food is available too – enjoy Hoi An's iconic dishes such as Mi Quang, Cao Lau, chicken rice, banh my and so forth.

But undoubtedly the market's personality and character are built around the lanterns which beckons visitors over the bridges. Lanterns that light up the night bringing the market to life through the poetry of color.

**Hoi An Night Market - Nguyen Hoang Str., Open every night, from 16:00 for lantern stalls, 21:00/22:00 for other stalls**

# THANH HA COMMUNITY COMMUNAL HOUSE A PLACE OF WORSHIP



How many hotels can say they have a traditional place of worship touching their grounds? Right next door to La Siesta Resort & Spa, and with a private direct route from the hotel gardens, is what looks like an old temple. Seemingly inconspicuous, lying in wait behind a high wall, it is very easy to pass by, oblivious to its existence. Renovated in 1952, the building wears the yellow ochre colors of Hoi An, topped with old traditional roof tiles, mottled in dark green and brown moss. A humble hidden gem, undiscovered by the tourist industry.

This is the Communal House of Thanh Ha Ward.

#### Paying respects

Centuries ago rice cultivation was the main source of livelihood for the ancient Viet people. In between the harvests, farmers would make useful household items and handicrafts to support their daily lives and supplement their income. Over time, thousands of handicraft activities developed into successful and sophisticated guilds. Techniques were kept closely guarded secrets within each family; skilled artisans handed down their knowledge from generation to generation.

Over the years, handicraft industries have gone through huge periods of change. Sadly, many have declined or

died out as villagers opt for other sources of income, while the younger generations may simply lose interest in the family trade. Luckily others continue to thrive, preserving century-old skills and knowledge, solidifying that industry's importance to the village and its community.

Such communities did, and still do, worship the ancestors and masters of their handicraft. At annual festivals, the villagers pay homage to their founders and craft masters. They do so at a specific place of worship within the village.

In simple terms, there are traditionally three main types of building associated with worship in Vietnam. Even though they have similarities, both inside and out, these structures have different purposes.

A Chùa is a Pagoda where people pray to Buddha. It is regarded as the more feminine out of the three as most worshippers are women. A Dền refers to a temple where people honor a spirit or guardian, or a real person such as a local hero or master craftsman of the village. And finally a Đinh is a communal house. This is similar to a temple in terms of worship and dedication to village founders. However, the Đinh was, and is, also the center of village activity and entertainment. It is regarded as the more masculine out of the three places of worship. In the past the village

men and elders would gather to discuss village business, legal and administration matters. And even now the communal house retains its status as a meeting place, and the starting point for annual village festivals.

Rice production remained a staple industry but around the rice farming areas villages sprung up founded on a particular handicraft skill. Different regions and communities became famous for certain crafts. For example: Van Phuc silk village in Ha Tay, Hanoi; Cat Dang lacquer village in Nam Dinh; Mot Thoang weaving village just outside Saigon and so forth. And Quang Nam province has its own share of special craft villages; nowadays it is estimated 60 or so handicraft villages still remain in the province.

#### Legend of the Thanh Ha potters

One of these is the 500 year-old Thanh Ha pottery village in Thanh Ha Ward. Dating back to the 15th century, it is said residents originating from Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, Nam Dinh and Hai Duong provinces brought their pottery trade to the Thanh Ha area. Legend goes on to explain that some village folk from Nghe An and Thanh Hoa were sailing in the area when they hit a big storm. They anchored their boats at the junction of a river and a road. It seemed a favorable location to them so they decided to stay and establish their craft in this area.

With a plentiful supply of quality clay, being close to the water and having good trade links, the Thanh Ha pottery trade was born. Soon, ceramic production made the Thanh Ha ward area famous.

#### Rice and worship

In Thanh Ha pottery village itself the villagers hold a number of bright, big and colorful annual festivals. Starting out from the village communal house they worship the ancestors of their pottery profession, praying for good luck.

Meanwhile, further up the road along Hung Vuong Street heading towards Hoi An ancient town, the Thanh Ha Community Communal House also holds its own festivities. However, unlike its village neighbor 2km away, the festivals of this communal house are low key, more private and quietly modest. But equally poignant.

Thanh Ha Community Communal House celebrates two annual festivals. The first is on the 16th day of the 2nd lunar month to pray for Spring. The second is on the 16th day of the 8th lunar month to honor the Autumn. Although worshippers also pay respects to the eight founding fathers of the pottery trade, to which the communal house is dedicated, the reason for their worship differs to that of neighboring Thanh Ha pottery villagers. These festivals honor the two annual rice harvests for the region, Spring and Autumn. Thus the farming community pays respect and prays for the best possible weather conditions for their community.

It is really only the past 15 years or so that tourism has started to replace traditional agricultural life and rice farming of the Hoi An area. However, despite decades of change, structures such as Thanh Ha Community Communal House, with its crumbling peaceful courtyard, Banyan tree (a soul of the land) and other symbols of worship ensure the connection between farming and worship are kept alive.

#### Thanh Ha Community Communal House

Dedicated to the eight founding fathers of the Thanh Ha pottery trade

132 Hung Vuong Street

2km from Thanh Ha pottery village,  
1km from Hoi An ancient town center

La Siesta Resort & Spa plans a number of unique activities in association with the communal house



# MY SON VIETNAM'S 'VALLEY OF THE KINGS'

Described by French historians as 'The Valley of the Kings', My Son or holy land is the site of temple towers and a former imperial city of the Cham people. The ancient Indochinese kingdom of Champa arose in the 2nd century AD surviving to the 17th century. Occupying coastal areas of central Vietnam and what is now Cambodia and Laos, it was a Hindu based civilisation influenced by India. In 192 AD there was an uprising against dominating Chinese warlords leading to the creation of Champapura or 'City of the Cham people'. The political capital city of this independent state was called Simhaparu (meaning Lion Citadel), now Tra Kieu village. The Cham were a seafaring nation and at the civilisation's height it controlled the spice and silk trades between China, Indonesia, India and Persia.

While the Cham people's livelihood was based on rice cultivation and fishing, they were also incredible master craftsmen when it came to building temples. Of the 225 Cham vestiges in Vietnam, one of the most prominent and significant centers of major SE Asian Hindu shrines is the My Son Sanctuary.

Considered as the longest inhabited archaeological site in Indochina, the My Son sanctuary was the religious capital of the Champa Kingdom from the 4th to 13th centuries, the center of culture and belief, and burial place of kings.

Strategically located, set in a small valley in Du Phu Commune, Quang Nam province, and surrounded by two mountain ranges, this complex of temple ruins embodies a unique and great architectural achievement. The tower temples were constructed over a 10 century period. As each new monarch acceded the throne, he would come to My Son for the purification ceremony, present offerings, erect new monuments, and remodel existing ones. Hence the complex expanded, its creation providing evidence of the Cham's technological sophistication, masterful engineering skills and advanced brick construction.

After the Cham civilization declined, a Frenchman, Camille Paris, made a remarkable discovery. Born in 1856, he was an official in the French colonial administration in Vietnam. In 1889, overseeing the construction of a telegraph line in central Vietnam, Paris stumbled across the forgotten world of the My Son ruins. He died in 1908 and another Frenchman, Architect and Archaeologist Henri Parmentier undertook the first excavation and conservation work between 1903-04. He documented 71 temples classified into 14 groups, assigning letters A, A', B, C, D, E, F, G, H, K to 10 main groups. 32 stele with Cham and Sanskrit inscriptions were also catalogued. These bear inscriptions about political and religious matters

from the view point of the kings to confirm their legitimacy or to make gifts to the gods. French scholars carried out the first restoration project from 1937-1943. Today, about 20-25 lower temples remain preserved and well maintained but many others were destroyed during the Vietnam war. Many artefacts are housed in the Da Nang Museum of Cham Sculpture.

The Cham worshipped Hindu gods and many of My Son's temples were built to honour Krishna (a supreme god), Vishnu (responsible for creation) and the mighty Shiva (the destroyer). Following the same model layout, the temple 'families' covered a total area of 142 hectares. Records indicate the very first temple, dating from the 4th century, was made of wood. After it was destroyed by a major fire two centuries later, apart from one stone structure, all subsequent creations were made of red fired brick with stone pillars and sandstone bas-relief depicting Hindu mythology.

Each group consisted of a brick tower sanctuary (kalan) surrounded by towers and periphery monuments. This main pyramid tower, was dedicated to Shiva. It symbolized the sacred Meru Mountain ie. the centre of the universe, home of the Hindu gods and hence the King's divinity. The smaller temples were

devoted to spirits of the eight compass points while the gate tower faced eastwards to welcome the sun.

The structures were internally plain and dark; the towers had windows but not the temples. Alcoves inside held lamps, and the curved roofs would have been covered in gold or silver leaf. The towers were connected to one another by an elaborate series of friezes carved into the brick. Even now it is not completely understood how the Cham people were able to construct such monuments and connect the material through this incredible feat of brick construction.

In December 1992, at UNESCO's 23rd World Heritage Committee meeting in Morocco, the My Son Sanctuary was officially announced as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It has rightly been recognized as an exceptional example of cultural interchange, for the introduction of Hindu architecture into South-East Asia and of course clear evidence showing how remarkable the Champa civilization was.

**My Son Sanctuary is 50km from Hoi An and 70km from Da Nang.**

**For private/group half or full day tours to My Son Holy Land, please contact our tour consultant at [info@lasiestaresorts.com](mailto:info@lasiestaresorts.com) or tel number +84 2353 915 915.**