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A PLACE OF FINESSE





WORDS ROSSARA JAMIL PHOTOS LA SIESTA HOI AN RESORT & SPA, MANUFACTURERS

The charming La Siesta Hoi An Resort & Spa is the perfect base for exploring the cultural sights and sounds of the historic town of Hoi An

A stroll along the streets of Hoi An, Vietnam, brings to attention the remarkable architecture that has remained largely intact for centuries. So much so that Hoi An Ancient Town was inscribed a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1999. Hoi An is a well-preserved Southeast Asian trading port dating from the 15th to the 19th century. Its architecture reflects Vietnamese culture mixed with Chinese and Japanese influences, and hints of its French colonial past.

Replete with details, the town provides sensory delights to take in on the way to La Siesta Hoi An Resort & Spa. The lush boutique hotel is located within walking distance or a five-minute cab ride from the town. The resort is the first property located outside Hanoi by the Elegance Hospitality Group. Its founder, Do Van Dan, was taken by the town's atmospheric allure. And when he wanted a new wing on the property, he took it upon himself to oversee its design and construction.

“Hoi An Ancient Town was the key factor that inspired me. My vision was to bring the town to the resort rather than the other way around. For our guests to feel the atmosphere of the old town façade while luxuriating in the very best amenities and facilities,” Dan says. “The villas are inspired by the ancient town terraced houses, the yin yang

“The villas are inspired by the ancient terraced town houses, yin-yang tiles and the sunshine Hoi An yellow.”

tiles and the sunshine Hoi An yellow. The wooden balustrades and so on resemble former merchant houses that make up the ancient town. We incorporated the iconic elements on our doorstep into our design.”

The new 37-room East Wing features a spa, a saltwater pool and a fine-dining restaurant. Guests can choose from luxurious suites including duplex suites and terrace suites that come with private Jacuzzis or Swedish saunas. With its classical design elements like clawfoot bathtubs and wood furniture, the rooms evoke an old world allure that befits the historic surroundings. Guests can enjoy Vietnamese cuisine at the cosy Red Bean Restaurant or European-influenced menu within the airy Temple restaurant. The latter, with its hanging daybeds, rattan chairs and French doors, brings to life the leisurely pace synonymous with the colonial era.

Dan says, “I personally love Hoi An for its unique charm. Modern amenities combined with an ancient setting create an intriguing combination. The pace of life is relaxed but confident. The surrounding area offers everything for everyone.”

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Hoi An certainly has plenty to offer with striking architectural gems, a vast countryside, white sandy beaches and a lively riverside. Early

Japanese and Chinese settlers made their mark on its design and architecture, creating a distinct setting. Japanese merchant houses, Chinese temples and old warehouses sit side by side. Hard to miss is the 18th-century Japanese Covered Bridge, its simple lines a contrast to the elaborate Chinese and Vietnamese structures around it. Hoi An is known for its lanterns, and the myriad dotting the town often indicate the buildings’ respective cultural heritage. At night, with the lanterns all lit up, the scene breathes an ambience that brings urban-dwelling visitors back to a different time and place.

If you’ve got a few days at least, stop by one of Hoi An’s 600 tailor shops and you could get a suit done in quick time. Many extend a 24-hour turnaround. Look out also for the craftsman who carves decorative souvenirs from bamboo roots. You can even learn how to do it from the man himself. Check out the array of coffee, from kopi luwak to Blue Mountain, at Cà Phê Gia Truyền Heirloom Coffee. Aside from bars, cafes with speciality coffee that have sprouted there make great places to watch the world go by.

That’s possible in Hoi An also because, unlike the notoriously frenetic fender-to-fender traffic of Hanoi’s Old Quarters, Hoi An Ancient Town has retained its calm by banning motorcycles at certain times of the day. This makes walking and cycling comfortable for exploring the locale.



Venture further on a half-day cycling tour, and it will bring you on winding paths flanked by villages and paddy fields. A ride on the beautiful Thu Bon River in the famed Vietnamese circular bamboo basket boats is a must-do too. Seven kilometres away is the relatively unspoiled An Bang Beach, its white sandy beaches easy to get to on bicycles provided by the hotel or rented motorcycles, or via a short taxi ride.

RELAX AND UNWIND

If preferred, there's no need to wander too far either. La Siesta Hoi An Resort & Spa holds cooking classes where you can learn to prepare local favourites like the Vietnamese spring rolls, beef noodle soup and fish in banana leaf. Of course, there's nothing like a sumptuous spa experience while on holiday. Whether it's to refresh after a long cycling tour or a day of shopping in the town, a dip in the resort's saltwater pool is bound to soothe aching muscles. Or rejuvenate more quickly with the resort's spa services, which has an extensive list of services. For an experience unlike any other, opt for the signature Himalayan salt stone or herbal therapy massage, the latter consisting of Vietnamese herbs.



For an experience unlike any other, opt for the signature Himalayan salt stone or herbal therapy massage, with the latter consisting of Vietnamese herbs at the resort's spa

What's striking is its level of service, with staff members who are attentive to your needs. Inform them of your loved one's or your dietary restrictions, and they'll take care of you at every meal. And if you have a specific pillow type to make sleep happen more quickly, there's a menu of five pillow types: down, feather, latex or microfibre – thin and flat or extra thick – pillows. It is this commitment and attention to detail that makes for a comfortable stay, however long you want it. **D**

MAN WITH A VISION



Do Van Dan, founder and chairman of the Elegance Hospitality Group, began his journey in the hospitality business with a 10-room hotel in Hanoi in 2006. From four staff members, his team has grown to more than 500. Today, his company has several hotels in Hanoi. La Siesta Hoi An Resort & Spa is the company's first outside Hanoi.

Dan was born into a poor farming family. Unable to pursue a career as an architect, he worked a series of jobs and eventually entered the hospitality industry as a receptionist. Learning the ropes along the way and saving money diligently, he then managed to buy a small property.

The company grew from there, due to a strong commitment to service. He says, "We care about our customers. I'm a firm believer in the adage 'no detail too small, no request too big'. After over a decade of evolution, we have achieved some excellent results, but we must never take anything for granted. The attainment of perfection is an ongoing process."

TRAVEL TIPS

- To get there, fly to Da Nang International Airport. It takes 45 minutes to an hour to reach Hoi An by taxi or shuttle transfer.

- Don't miss the Central Market Food Hall in Hoi An, where you can find authentic local specialties such as bánh xèo, cao lau and mi quang.

- Extend your holiday with a road trip from Hoi An to Hue via the Hải Vân Pass, a breathtaking and challenging mountain pass, and stop by the rapidly developing coastal city of Da Nang.