

## **VIETNAM OPENS DOOR TO THE EAST**

**By Bernard Burt**

Memories of the Vietnam war may be fading, but hot new spas make a trip to this ancient country a must. From the heart of old Saigon in Ho Chi Minh City, I traveled to Imperial Hue, beach resorts on the Pacific and China Sea. Ancient architecture, state-of-the-art interiors, and air conditioning are standard. Welcomed with attentive service, I found the perfect antidote to stress in a country that has emerged with new vigor.

### **Ho Chi Minh City Day Spa La Cochinchine Has Affordable Luxury**

At the Rex Hotel, a monument to Saigon and its French connections in Ho Chi Minh City, a luxury spa complements rooftop fitness center and swimming pools. La Cochinchine Spa is inspired by the French name given to Vietnam in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Opened less than a year on two floors redolent of the old Rex, treatments feature traditional Vietnamese, French, and Chinese beauty secrets. From neighboring India come Ayurvedic therapies with herbal remedies. Priced in US dollars and thousands of VND, treatments range from \$12; full-day packages with three to five hours of therapy start at \$66, include access to Nautilus fitness center, Jacuzzi, sauna and pools.

Contact: [www.lacochinchine.net](http://www.lacochinchine.net); Email - [info@lacochinchine.net](mailto:info@lacochinchine.net)

For a Vietnam vet or newcomer, staying at the Rex is nostalgia trip. Lunch at the rooftop restaurant adds panoramic views of Ho Chi Minh City and the heart of old Saigon. Gone are the American cultural center and army briefings for foreign correspondents. A new wing elevates the status of the Rex as the first state-owned five-star hotel, built and run by the Vietnamese. Across the square, Sheraton and Park Hyatt hotels compete with the new Caravelle hotel, all offering spas. Shops offer designer couture, Thalgo spa products. Contact: [www.rexhotelvietnam.com](http://www.rexhotelvietnam.com)

### **Serenity of Nature Inspires Princess D'Annam Resort & Spa**

A sense of history lingers as we navigate streets of the Capital onto Highway #1. Traffic gridlock adds hours to a beach excursion. Before we reached the Princess d'Annam Resort, the restaurant manager thoughtfully telephoned to order my room service dinner, complemented by excellent French wine. The beachfront spa is an ideal escape from scorching sun, has separate wings for men and women; two private suites allow treatments without leaving your luxe roost. Try indigenous herbal oils for Viet massage.

Built by French investors on a pristine cove, the resort's modern villas bespeak a minimalist sensibility, post-colonial ambience. Ginger perfumes gardens, beachside

dining overlooks a century-old lighthouse and fishing village. A talented kitchen crew prepares seafood French style. The resort is named for a legendary princess who brought peace to her kingdom. Quiet, spotless, it's an antidote to city stress.

Contact: [www.princessannam.com](http://www.princessannam.com); Email: [iinfo@princessannam.com](mailto:iinfo@princessannam.com))

## **The Nam Hai Blends American Technology, Oriental Tradition**

From bustling seaport to ultramodern beach resorts and casino, Hoi An is fast developing as an international center for business and leisure. Luxurious lodging and spa therapy meet at The Nam Hai, a resort with a distinctive sense of style.

Shimmering on China Beach, the lotus lagoon at The Nam Hai harbors an intoxicating blend of East and West. Six spa villas serenely dot this floating world. Ancient healing traditions start with footwash, welcoming travelers, refreshing and healing. In the privacy of your villa, select botanical ingredients for Sundari facial, Arabian rhassoul scrub, or Ayurvedic abhyanga friction massage; calm the senses, rev circulation. Bodywork includes products by Traditions D'Orient, romantic baths for two, complete with Champagne and canapés.

(Rituals from Bali, India, Himalayas, and Vietnam  
2 hours, from US\$190; other treatments start at \$90.)

Must Try: The Nam Hai Jade Massage synchronized by two therapists working pressure points with jade-infused oil to dissolve muscle tension with a variety of soothing strokes. (\$160 – 60 mins)

Vietnam's ancient architecture inspired design of the resort's spacious 100 villas, with suites priced from US\$160 last spring. Interiors feature high-end amenities, double shower, posh lounge, and garden with open-air shower; 40 pool villas have up to five bedrooms. Three swimming pools adjoin the grill and candle-lit restaurant offering local seafood, American steak, plus a fresh take on Vietnamese cuisine. Scheduled activity includes tennis tournament, self-defense lesson, cooking class. Golf at nearby Montgomerie Links, tour Hue imperial citadel, villages that preserve traditional crafts.

Opened in 2006, managed by GHM (General Hotel Management) with the same style as The Setai on Miami's South Beach, The Nam Hai takes luxury to a new level, honoring the culture of Vietnam.

[www.ghmhotels.com](http://www.ghmhotels.com)

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## **Pilgrimage Village Links Imperial Hue to Spa Haven**

Turn back to a time when emperors of Vietnam ruled atop a moated citadel in Hue. An hour's flight from HCMC, it was another world.

A delightfully rustic resort where skilled artisans create beautiful souvenirs under leafy arcades, yoga and tai chi groups meet at an Olympic-length swimming pool, and spa treatments come with traditional Viet technique, Pilgrimage Village links past and present. A member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World since 2007, the 99-room resort is tucked into tropical gardens 4km from the center of Hue and the Perfume River.

The airy Vedanā Spa reception pavilion is surrounded by water, with treatment huts in lush foliage. My therapist spoke no English but body language was sufficient. The Vietnamese massage ends with suction cups placed on the body to draw out toxins and muscular knots. (US\$45, 50 min). Other treatments include Swedish massage, Thai body work, hot stone massage, and foot reflexology. Signature baths with fresh flowers and milk, body wrap with local honey, reflect indigenous sources, including coffee or green tea salt scrub. “Romance for Two” package adds nailcare for men and women.

Stay in a bungalow or villa close to the spa (ask for B149). Built with red brick, villas have marble bath; Honeymoon pool cottage comes with private garden, four-poster bed. Furnished simply but artfully, my bungalow had comfortable king-size bed, large bath, TV and phone. Also mosquito spray. Prices start at \$145 per day, plus taxes.

Meals are in a two-story restaurant crafted in wood. Vietnamese favorites include noodle soup for breakfast, as well as dumplings. Cooking classes can be arranged, and there’s a free shuttle bus into town. The resort’s tranquil setting, variety of dining spots and bars, and artful landscaping, provide a welcome respite.

Contact: [www.pilgrimagevillage.com](http://www.pilgrimagevillage.com) or [www.slh.com](http://www.slh.com)

Email: [info@pilgrimagevillage.com](mailto:info@pilgrimagevillage.com)

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## FIRST SIX SENSES DESTINATION SPA OPENS ON THAILAND’S PHUKET ISLE

By Bernard Burt

Escape to a private isle in the Andaman Sea, minutes from Phuket by speedboat. Secluded at Asia’s most lavish destination spa, discover a new world of wellness.

Lifestyle coaches welcome you to spa gardens devoted to traditions of Siam, China, Indonesia, and India. Thai therapists pick herbs for Pra Kob compress made of tumeric, lemongrass, and bergamot, kneading sore muscles with soothing strokes as you relax in open-air pavilion or air-conditioned sala.. Ayurveda treatments are housed in India-style cottage. Tea is served in a Chinese bamboo grove at the heart of this unique spa village.

Must Try: Pra-Trim Siam stimulates lymphatic system with body brush, wash, Jasmine balm, energizing traditional Thai massage (8,900 Thai Baht - 2hrs 20mins).

Live close to nature in a thatch-roof villa, with garden pool and bath, butler service, AC but no TV. Join group exercise and yoga at hilltop fitness center; relax at enormous swimming pool; meditate in tropical labyrinth. Dining options include organic salad at sand-floor restaurant with bio-dynamic wines, pizza oven, grilled lobster; raw food lunch on beach. Drinks include fresh fruit juice, coconut water, coffee, Evian, and Champagne. There are free bicycles, CD library and computers if you insist.

Not a typical Six Senses resort (Soneva Fushi, Zighy Bay), the destination spa program integrates wellness and lifestyle. Created by Ana Maria Taveres, veteran of Chiva Som, and an international team of wellness specialists, this is a healthy lifestyle village where you can consult Reiki master Nikorn Banjerdiert, psychotherapist Albert Schmaedick, TCM pharmacist. With an amazing 44 treatment rooms, the range of well-being therapy is exceptional.

Seasonal specials add value. Three-night package 47,000 Thai Baht single, 94,000 double occupancy, plus taxes, service charge.

[www.sixsenses.com](http://www.sixsenses.com)

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