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Victoria Sapa Resort.

Savoring Vietnam

Variety is the spice of Vietnamese lodgings. By ELIZABETH HANSEN

Vietnam is packed with opportunities for adventure—ranging from cycling sections of the maze-like Ho Chi Minh Trail to visiting Uncle Ho's wooden stilt house in Hanoi. Other options include hiking with hill tribes, gawking at culinary caterpillars and other delicacies in colorful public markets, and learning to make *pho* (soup) in a crash course on the local cuisine. Fortunately, the country's hotels also offer variety—no cookie-cutter designs here. Instead, each place—at various levels of luxury—showcases local crafts and customs and provides easy access to memorable experiences.

Sofitel Métropole Hôtel

HANOI When it opened in 1901, the Grand Hôtel Métropole Palace became an oasis of luxury for travelers in Southeast Asia, and it still is. Other Hanoi hotels offer similar amenities, but only the Métropole has the art, architecture, and antiques befitting a colonial landmark, as well as the cachet of a world-class hotel. Past guests include Graham Greene war-protestor Jane Fonda, and Joan Baez, who took cover in the bomb shelter beneath the swimming pool. The Opera Wing, added in 1996, offers spacious rooms with wooden floors, but guests who want the full flavor of Indochine opt for the Métropole Wing, where the décor includes ceiling fans and historic photos of Hanoi. **Insider tip:** The hotel's culinary class is the only one in Hanoi that includes a morning trip to the market to shop for ingredients. From $190; *www.sofitel.com.*

Victoria Sapa Resort

SAPA This alpine community near the Chinese border is surrounded by lush valleys and sprawling rice terraces, and it's home to many of Vietnam's ethnic minorities—Black Hmong, Flower Hmong, Red Dao, and others. Each hill tribe can be identified by its distinctive clothing. The mountains, cool temperatures, and Shangri-la-like beauty attract trekkers. Some scale 10,306-foot Mount Fan Si Pan located about six miles west of Sapa, and others hike—one popular route goes through the Hmong village of Lao Chai and ends in the town of Ta Van. The chalet-style Victoria Sapa provides the most comfortable rooms in the area. Most rooms include vibrant bedspreads woven by local tribes and views of the Tonkinese Alps. **Dinnertime:** The resort's restaurant serves freshly prepared Vietnamese meals, such as *banh xeo* (pancakes) and *canh chua ca qua* (hot and sour fish soup). From $126; *www.victoriahotels-asia.com.*

Evason Ana Mandara

NHA TRANG Ana Mandara means "beautiful home for the guest," which makes it the perfect name for this tranquil resort on Nha Trang's long stretch of white sand. At one end of the property, a large infinity pool appears to spill into the South China Sea. Nearby, spa treatments such as Vietnamese pressure-point massage are offered in outdoor pavilions, and throughout the area, tropical plants line winding paths. Guests on the beach need only raise a flag and staff members will bring icy towels or platters of exotic fruit. Suite pampering includes fragrant sachets of herbs for the bath

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and little clay pots of ginger tea. **Don't miss:** The Beach Restaurant, where guests can wriggle their toes in the sand, is a great spot for a seafood dinner. From $236; *www.sixsenses.com/evason-anamandara.*

Life Heritage Resort

HOI AN A thriving river port from the 15th to 19th century, this quaint town, with numerous historic structures, has earned a UNESCO World Heritage designation and a spot on most visitors' must-see list. However, "must-shop" is often the reaction when new arrivals see streets lined with boutiques selling bargain-priced silk clothing. Built in 2004 and the only in-town resort, Life Heritage is handy for going back and forth to fittings for custom-tailored clothes (a woman's suit, made overnight, costs about $85). The hotel offers 94 split-level rooms, a palm-rimmed pool, and complete spa. **Rooms to book:** Numbers 106, 107, and 108 offer porches with views of the adjacent Thu Bon River. From $102 with breakfast; *www.life-resorts.com.*

Park Hyatt Saigon

HO CHI MINH CITY Open since 2005, the Park Hyatt feels like a gracious French colonial home in the center of this bustling city. A baby grand piano is the focal point in the Park Lounge, where HCMC's business elite meet for high tea in the afternoon. Large, vivid lacquer paintings of graceful Vietnamese women wearing classic *ao dai* seem like family portraits in this elegant mansion. At dinner, guests can sit at the counter of Square One's open kitchen to watch chefs prepare lotus stem salad, Nha Trang oysters, and passion fruit soufflé. The 252 bedrooms include flat-screen televisions and broadband Internet access. **Most memorable:** The attentive staff looks after guests as if they were long-lost relatives: Laundry is returned in packages too pretty to open, and language lessons are freely provided. From $180; *www.hyatt.com.*

Hoi An.

Bong Sen Hotel 1

HO CHI MINH CITY The Bong Sen enjoys an enviable location on Dong Khoi Street—known during the "American War" as Tu Do (Freedom) Street. Back then, bar girls hung out in doorways, but today the avenue is home to fashionable shops and popular cafés, such as the notable Paris Deli. Located in the hotel district, the Bong Sen is a favorite of Asian businessmen and budget-conscious travelers. The hotel offers 127 modern rooms that provide a quiet retreat from the city. **Note:** Fifty-seven smaller rooms are located nearby in the Bong Sen Hotel Annex. From $59 with breakfast; in the Annex, from $35 with breakfast; *www.hotelbongsen.com.*