

# A JOURNEY TO PHU YEN

Central Vietnam's hidden coastal gem

Xuan Dai Bay, by Phan Phu Yen



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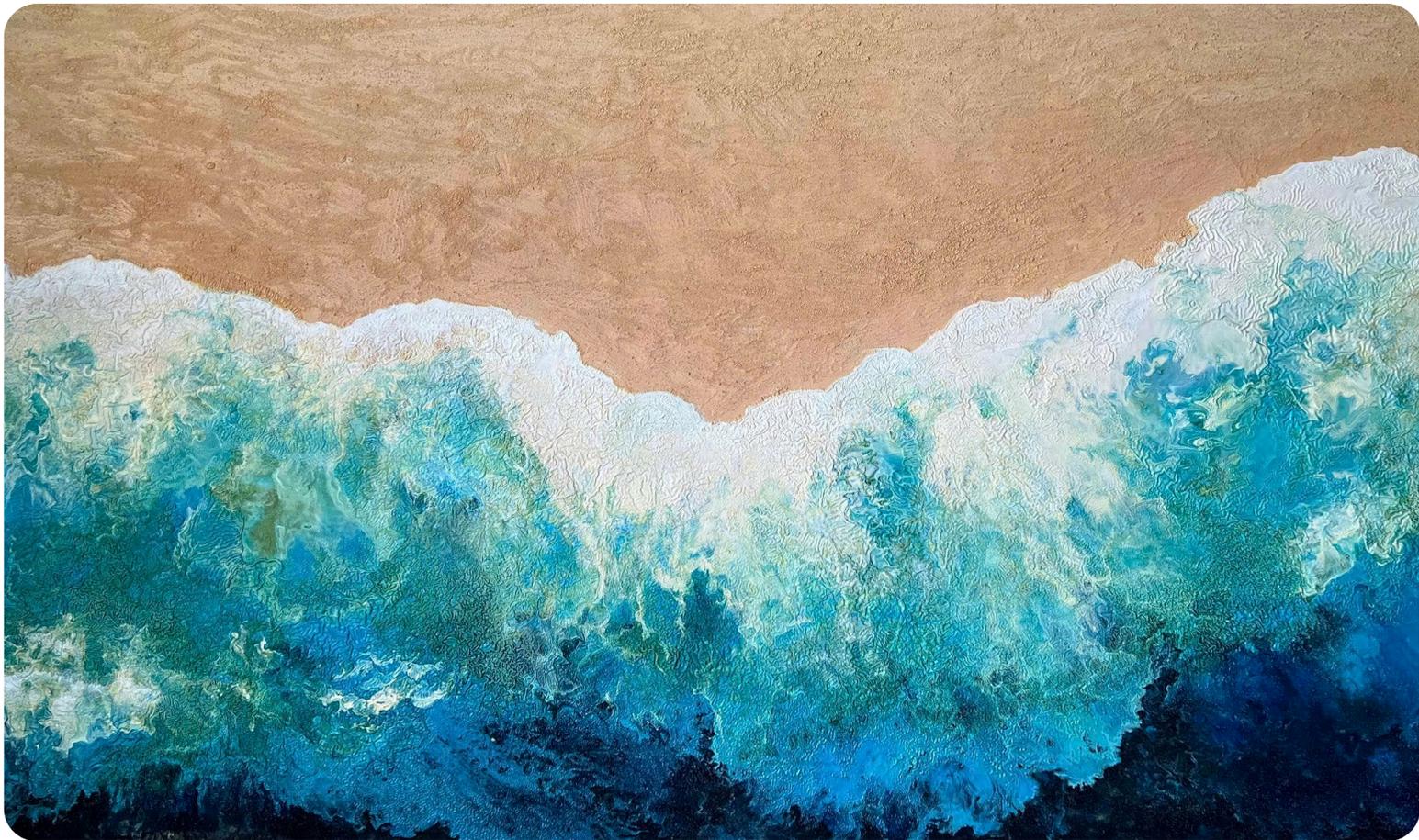
Agave, by Karen Myers Oil

Embark on a journey with us along the pristine coastline of Phu Yen, a Vietnamese province made for discovery and exploration.

This guide sets the stage for your voyage by introducing you to the area's rich history and rare natural beauty. We then take you on a tour of its iconic sites, with details on how to best explore each one. To complete your experience, we offer a curated selection of exclusive accommodations and activities, along with ideas for extending your adventure to other exceptional destinations.



Bryde Whales



Golden sands, blue sea, by Phan Phu Yen



# I AN UNHURRIED JOURNEY TO THE AUTHENTIC, UNSPOILED COAST OF CENTRAL VIETNAM



"Between land and water, the heart always hesitates, yet it turns toward the ocean."

Joseph Kessel



Also known as the Palm Coast, Phu Yen is one of the most picturesque hidden gems in south-central Vietnam, with a wealth of natural beauty, history, and wildlife. It features narrow peneplains with rustling rice fields, golden sand dunes, meandering rivers, and groves of pandanus, dragon trees, and agave. The rugged coastline has breathtaking bays, lagoons, oceanic headlands, and rocky islands, with various species of endemic birds and Bryde's whales.

In addition to its stunning nature, Phu Yen has a vibrant historical legacy, with ancient villages dotting the land that centuries ago formed the central and southern parts of the Cham kingdom of Vijaya. Today, Phu Yen is part of the larger Dac Lac Province following an administrative reorganization in 2025.

Phu Yen's coastline remains largely unspoiled, protected by its isolation from major tourism and industry. This seclusion lends the area a timeless quality, offering travelers an authentic, slow-paced seaside experience rooted in local traditions, with coastal hikes through dunes and islands along ancient stone paths and encounters with local fishermen.

Recent infrastructure improvements have increased access to Phu Yen, making it easier to explore. The new N1 highway and additional sub-roads facilitate travel to various exceptional sites, such as the Zannier Bai San Ho resort - a luxurious jewel overlooking the scenic turquoise waters of Vung Mu Bay.



Thanks to these new transportation links, travelers can easily extend their journeys from central Vietnam. Head south to discover the natural wonders of Nha Trang, Nui Chua National Park, and the ocean dunes of Lam Dong Province. For those seeking a vibrant urban experience, a trip north leads to the cities of Hoi An and Danang. Or head east through An Khe or Ayun Pa to soak up the rich history of the Central Highlands.



Pandanus, by Rachel Newling

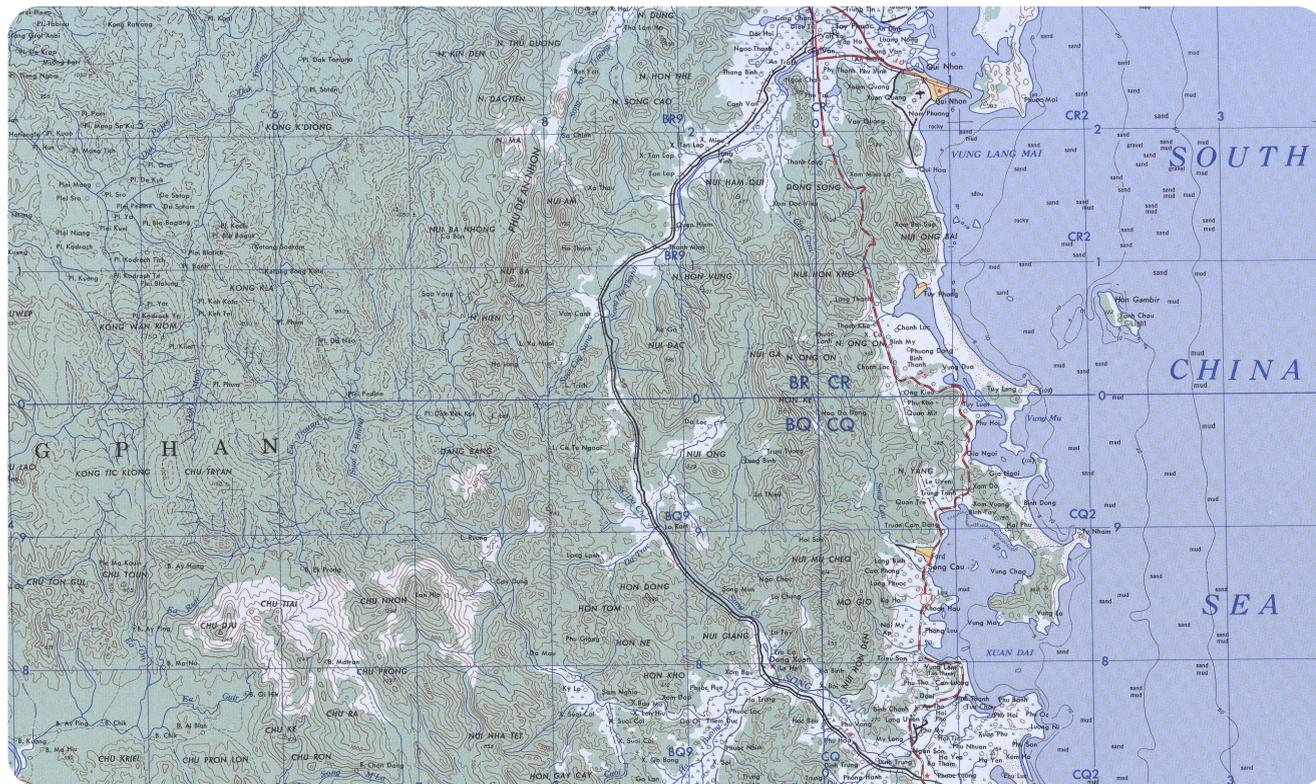


© Zannier Bai San Ho, Hill Pool Villa

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# II

## A REGION WHERE STUNNING NATURAL BEAUTY MEETS AN ANCIENT PAST



“The true voyage is not the one that leads to a place, but the one that transforms the traveler.”  
Joseph Conrad,  
*Heart of Darkness*

Palm Coast, between Quy Nhon and Tuy Hoa

## 01 DISCOVERING NORTHERN PHU YEN

*From southern Quang Ngai to Song Cau*

In the northern part of Phu Yen, shimmering pearlescent beaches stretch for nearly 50 kilometers from the last foothills of Quang Ngai to the plains of Binh Dinh. The ocean waters intermingle with the river deltas of the Song Tra Khuc and Song Ve, tracing changing estuaries in the sand.

At Phu Khuong (Thuy Thach), the coastal strip narrows and the foothills of the South Annamite Range draw closer, giving the coastline a more dramatic appearance. A series of jagged bays and small sandy peninsulas form here that extend all the way to the Song Lai Giang delta at Hoi An (Bong Son).

South of Bong Son lies Dam Tra O Bay, with Turtle Island rising majestically offshore. The terrain then shifts abruptly, ascending into the Nui Mieu and Nui Trop Tre mountains, whose foothills border the nearby Nuoc Ngot Bay.

The northern part of the bay is sheltered by a sandy, windy peninsula. At its end lies Vinh Loi, a fishing village characterized by coconut groves and sparkling salt pans. Opposite the village is Buffalo Island (Hon Con Trau), a rocky atoll that has withstood typhoons for centuries. Not far from the bay, the historical site of Co Luy features ancient Cham ramparts that still stand guard today.

The Quy Nhon Valley emerges next, extending along the Song Con River for approximately 50 kilometers in length and 10 kilometers in width. To the east, the valley is enclosed by Quy Nhon Harbor, Lang Mai Bay, and the Nui Da Den (Phuong Mai) promontory, which encir-



Cham Tower, by Ha Thanh

cle the city of Quy Nhon and protect it from typhoons.

Quy Nhon has been known by several names throughout history: Thi Nai (the salt market), the port of Vijaya, the port of Sin Tchéou, and Cri Vini during the Champa period. The heart of the ancient Vijaya kingdom once stretched across the plain formed by the lower reaches of the Song Con River. Today, the only remnants of this magnificent realm are the Silver, Copper, Ivory, and Gold Towers, mysterious monuments that evoke a bygone era.

## 02 EXPLORING SOUTHERN PHU YEN

*From Song Cau to Cape Mui Dien*

From Song Cau, Southern Phu Yen unfolds, revealing a landscape of narrow peneplains, bays, lagoons, capes, promontories, and islands that developed over time. Although primarily used for flooding rice fields, the plains also contain coconut groves, salt marshes, villages, hamlets, and, in years past, even a few Peking silk factories. These plains are separated from the ocean by either dune fields or a succession of promontories and bays, such as Vung Chao and Xuan Dai.

The Song Cau area is defined by the sandy and rocky Vung Mu peninsula. To its west, the peninsula provides shelter to Cu Mong Bay, which is connected to the sea by a narrow passage that opens up to stunning views of Cua Lao Xanh Island (Hon Gambir) on the horizon. To the south rises the Xuan Dai promontory, a mighty granite structure still partially covered by dense maritime forest.

Dam O Loan Bay stretches from the foothills of Xuan Dai into the Phu Yen central coastal area, a 12-kilometer zone with a diverse mosaic of landscapes and natural environments. The coast is dominated by Cape Da Dia, where the Ganh Den lighthouse keeps watch over the bay and distinctive honeycomb formations of basalt columns jut dramatically into the sea below.



Ganh Den lighthouse, Cape Da Dia, by Phan Phu Yen

Further along, the small bay of Vung Chao opens up like a hidden cove. The bay's southern shore is dominated by the Phu Luong promontory, its slopes painted with narrow fields separated by stone walls or hedges and spectacular basalt columns adorning its base.

Beyond this unique agricultural and mineral landscape, the vast Dam O Loan lagoon glitters, its shifting blend of sand and water overlooked by the Sleeping Volcano promontory (Nui Cao Bien). Offshore sits the island of Cu Lao Mai Nha, also known as Robinson Island.

At the heart of this coastal area lies Tuy Hoa, the former capital of Phu Yen. Here, the ruins of a red brick Cham tower stand some 15 meters high. An inscription from the 4th century is visible on its escarpment – an invocation to Shiva under the name of Bhadrecvara, engraved by order of Bhadravarman I.

Tuy Hoa is built on the estuary of the Song Ba River. The Song Ba valley, or Ayun Gap, served as the primary natural route used by the Cham to penetrate the central plateau.

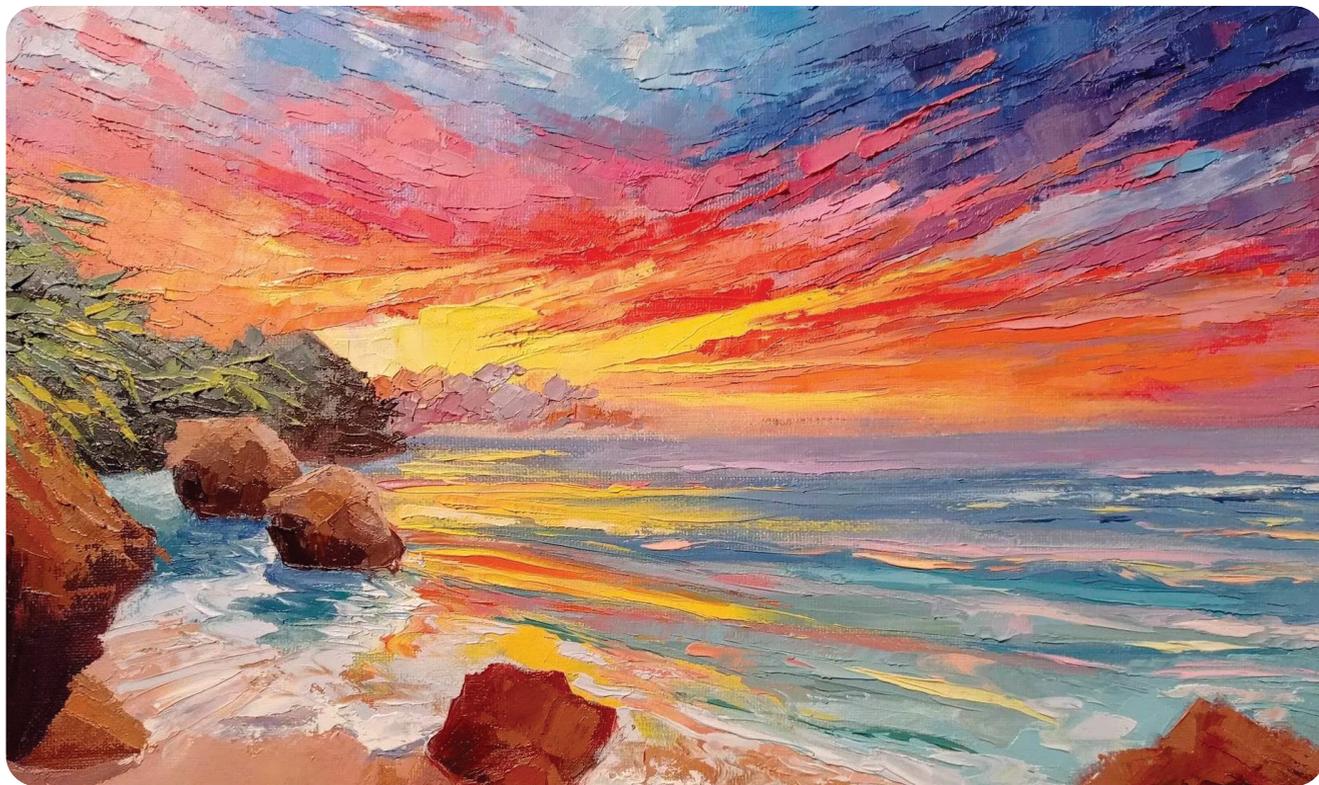
The valley forms a northwest corridor providing access to the Pleiku plateau via the Ayun Pa district.

The southern part of the region is bordered by Cape Mui Dien (Cape Varella), where the mountains draw closer together, creating a grandiose and wild landscape. To the west stands the remarkable silhouette of the Mother and Child Mountain.

Cape Mui Dien, with the Mother and Child monolith in the background



# III EXCEPTIONAL SITES



“By the ocean, meditation becomes a dialogue with eternity.”  
Herman Melville,  
*Moby Dick*

# 01 NORTHERN PHU YEN

## QUY NHON VALLEY

Quy Nhon Valley lies in the Song Con Delta, a fertile river valley that was once home to the flourishing Indianized kingdom of Vijaya. Today, the weathered remains of that kingdom can still be seen nestling within the lush landscape of rice fields, tree clusters, and coconut groves.

### *Experiences*

Follow in the footsteps of ancient builders and explore the remnants of the Vijaya Kingdom, including the Silver, Copper, Ivory, and Gold Towers. Built between the 11th and 13th centuries, these red-brick monuments are adorned with granite ornaments and bas-reliefs that combine carvings of apsaras, lions, monsters, Nagas, elephants, and other mythological animals.

Visit the Lang Son Minor Seminary, a unique religious establishment known for its Gothic architecture and rich history. Originally built between 1841 and 1850, the seminary features a central chapel surrounded by work and study areas, all set within a graceful garden. In 2012, the Servants of Jesus of Mercy, a Catholic diocesan congregation, took up residence. The community currently includes around 140 sisters and postulants. The seminary previously housed one of Vietnam's first Catholic printing presses, which produced works in Quoc Ngu, the Romanized Vietnamese language.



Cham tower, by An Ngon



Main pool at The © Zannier Bai San Ho

## THE ZANNIER BAI SAN HO

This five-star luxury resort is nestled in a coastal cirque near the unspoiled beaches of Vung Mu Bay, surrounded by hills and cliffs covered with lush maritime vegetation. Its 73 free-standing villas feature traditional Vietnamese architecture inspired by the Jarai people (Proto-Indochinese from the central plateau).

### *Experiences*

Immerse yourself in the daily life of the communities around Cu Mong Lagoon with this a half-day module that highlights local culture and industry. Explore the bustling Xuan Hai fish market, learn the secrets of making banh trang (a local specialty), and discover traditional salt production methods and regional techniques for fishing, mussel farming, and shrimp farming. Finish your adventure with a lunch of freshly harvested seafood.

## XUAN DAI DUNE

The Xuan Dai promontory offers sweeping views of the surrounding area, including the bays of Vung Chao, Xuan Dai, Vung Mo, and Vung Quan, as well as the historic Song Cau harbor, an entire complex dominated by Mount Nui Tac. The center of the promontory is distinguished by a vast dune dotted with eroded granite rocks in shades of brown, with thickets and groves of pandanus trees growing among the rocks.

### *Experiences*

Embark on a coastal hike across a ridge of pristine white sand dunes dotted with rocks and diverse vegetation, such as thorny bushes, acacia and eucalyptus trees, pandanus trees bent by years of storms, and maritime pines. From the top, take in a magnificent 360° panorama. To the west, gaze on the waters of Xuan Dai Bay and the distant foothills of the Annamite Mountain range. To the north and south, admire the promontories rising in the distance, including the notable Ong Dien Point. To the east, enjoy a view of the wild beach of Vung Quan Bay stretching out to meet the vast, undulating ocean.



## 02 SOUTHERN PHU YEN

### THE ANCIENT HILL

Located just north of Phu Hanh village, Co Thach Hill – also known as the Ancient Hill – is a small, peaceful plateau with gentle slopes rising to a height of 104 meters. It is distinguished by a unique pattern of interlacing stone paths, low walls, land plots, tombs, and stone wells that serve as silent witnesses to ancient occupations. It is also notable for its significant water table and the presence of the majestic *Streblus Asper* tree.

### Experiences

Set off on a two-hour hike through a scenic, bucolic landscape and enjoy natural beauty and historic sites on the way. Observe centenarian *Streblus Asper* trees with dark foliage, prickly pears, agaves, and fragrant clumps of Mexican mint. Pass by old stone houses that have been converted into stables or barns, hollow tombs, and quietly impactful ancient wells. End your hike with sumptuous views of Xuan Xai Bay and Cape Da Dia.



*Streblus Asper* leaf powder

## ROBINSON ISLAND

“On my island, I felt alone, yet the ocean around me reminded me of infinity and freedom.” Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*

Cu Lao Mai Nha Island, often called Robinson Island, rises dramatically from the ocean like a granite pyramid, its base hidden beneath the depths and its summit extending to the sky. Located just 15 minutes from the mainland, this secluded island stands alone, battered by the winds and blue waves of the Pacific. For centuries, Vietnamese fishing families have found refuge on the island; even during the Champa kingdom, the island’s western side provided a natural sanctuary from typhoons and the wrath of the ocean. The “king of the island” watches over this lone rock in the sea, just as his ancestors have done for centuries.



Phu Yen fishermen



Crystal Waters, by Lucy Young

### *Experiences*

After exploring the bustling Phuoc Dong fish market, sail west to meet the king of the island and his family. From there, walk through a coastal forest with diverse vegetation, including vines, *Ficus* trees, maritime pines, bushes, and thorny species, while admiring panoramic views of distant peninsulas and the ocean. The trail leads to Robinson Crusoe Beach, a private cove nestled between small cliffs and a cape studded with sculptural, eroded monoliths and dotted with prickly cactus and pandanus groves.

In a completely private setting on a serene, protected beach, indulge in a delicious, elegant seafood lunch. The turquoise waters invite travelers to swim and contemplate the peaceful surroundings. There is also an option for a two-hour Level 1 or 2 walk.



The Mother and Child Mountain

## THE MOTHER AND CHILD MOUNTAIN

The Mother and Child Mountain, also known as Chu H'Mu, reaches 2,021 meters into the sky overlooking southern Phu Yen and Cape Varella. It derives its name from a monolith at its summit that resembles a woman carrying a child. Wild forests blanket the mountain's slopes, while its upper regions feature rolling meadows and scattered boulders. The foothills are primarily inhabited by the Rhadé (Edé) people, who consider the mountain a sacred site and source of various legends.

### *Experiences*

Hikers can reach the summit of the Mother and Child Mountain via an uphill trek starting from M'Drak. There are two itinerary options with Level III treks:

- A two-day trek: One night in camp, 24 kilometers round trip, with an elevation gain of 1,200 meters and loss of 1,200 meters; and
- A three-day trek: Two nights in camp, which adds an extra day to explore the legendary mountain.

## THE SLEEPING VOLCANO PROMONTORY

From its position south of the village of Phuoc Dong, the promontory of Nui Cao Bien, known locally as "the Sleeping Volcano," overlooks the ocean for nearly two kilometers. This volcanic headland extends the small plateau that encircles O Loam Bay. The area is home to several dormant volcanoes, including the 108-meter-high Dong Tranh and the 126-meter-high Nui Cam. Two volcanic lakes, Xom Bau and Dong No, nestle between the peaks, serving as silent witnesses to the region's geological past.

### *Experiences*

Embark on a Level 1 module that combines walking and cycling. The journey begins in the fishing village of Phuoc Dong, known for its bustling local life and houses decorated with hanging nets. A short walk from the village takes you to the Sleeping Volcano, where you discover rolling meadows of straw grass and a solitary, evocative tomb. At the base of the cliffs, marvel at basalt columns, then take in scenic views of the golden sands of Xom Cat beach, Cu Lao Mai Nha, Swallow Island (Hon Yen), and further south, the Song Ba estuary and Cape Varella monolith (Mui Dien).



Robinson Island dragon tree

# IV ACCOMMODATIONS



“Facing the ocean,  
happiness is not a  
vague idea.”  
Albert Camus

## THE ZANNIER BAI SAN HO

Surrounded by enchanting natural beauty, Bai San Ho (“coral bay” in Vietnamese), is a luxury resort with 71 villas spread across 98 hectares. Self-contained and secluded, the villas reflect the Zannier philosophy of “simplicity is the ultimate sophistication” through architecture and décor inspired by local traditions, enriched by Vietnamese art objects, paintings, and silkscreen prints. Each private pool and terrace opens onto rejuvenating views of dancing rice fields, panoramic hills, and a pearlescent sandy beach. The resort provides culinary experiences with regional cuisine, beachfront seafood, and international menus. There is also a wellness area, water sports center, and kids’ club.

Waters, by Rebecca Jagers



Nature surrounding The © Zannier Bai San Ho

## DA DIA BEACH HOUSE

Located on the edge of Bai Bang fishing village, this contemporary villa opens directly onto a delightful beach with azure water and gently lapping waves. Tucked away in a lush pocket of bougainvillea and Chinese pittosporum greenery, this intimate retreat provides the most modern amenities and an infinity pool, inviting travelers to enjoy peace and quiet with family and friends. The villa also offers a contemplative interlude that allows visitors to relax and unwind, lulled by the soothing sound of the surf.

## INTERCONTINENTAL DANANG SUN PENINSULA RESORT

Designed by renowned architect Bill Bensley, this luxurious world-class resort is an oasis nestled among lush palm trees. It boasts 189 elegantly appointed rooms, suites, penthouses, and villas with breathtaking views of the sea. The accommodations are all decorated in a Vietnamese vernacular style, featuring a thematic color palette that ranges from the black of lacquered wood to the white of iconic temple tiles, interspersed with thoughtfully placed colors and unique works of art. The Danang Intercontinental Sun Peninsula truly sets the standard for luxury, design, and unparalleled service.

Emperor of Vietnamese dynasties



Son Tra Peninsula, by © Eric Losh

## ANCIENT HUE GARDEN HOUSES

This hotel complex is located in the village of Kim Long, near the imperial citadel of Hue. It features five imperial-style garden houses and four colonial-style villas that combine charm with world-class, attentive service. The hotel seeks to immerse visitors in the traditional atmosphere of an ancient mandarin residential district of Hue, with its poetry and rich traditions.

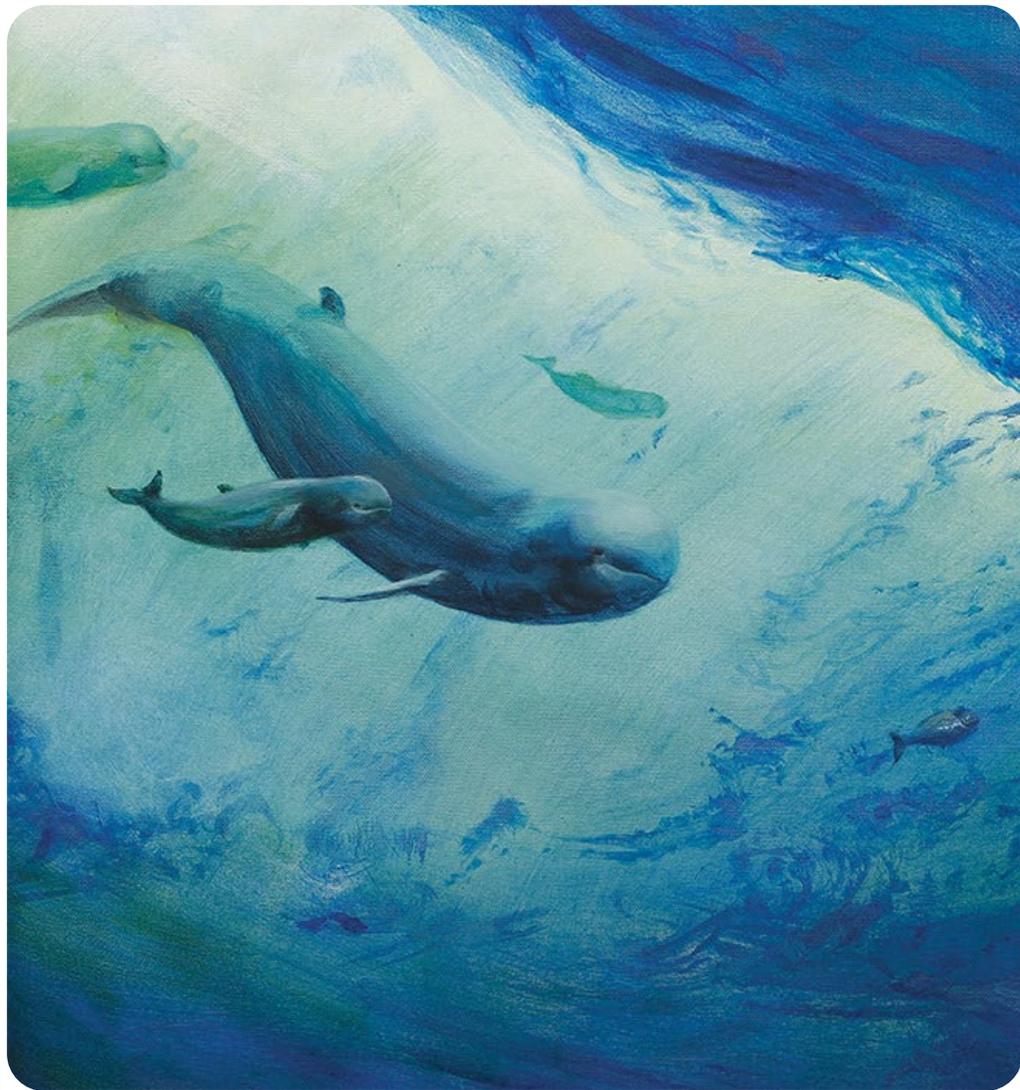
# V EXTENSIONS

The ocean of wisdom  
knows no shore.  
Vietnamese proverb

Destinations to  
complement  
south-central Vietnam  
exploration



Mother dolphin and her calves



## *The Center of Annam*

This region features three contrasting jewels:

- ▶ **Hue:** Steeped in legends and poetry, Hue is the guardian of Vietnam's cultural heritage. It was the seat of Vietnam's last imperial dynasty, the Nguyen, from 1802 to 1945 and capital of the Protectorate of Annam during the French Indochina era. The city perches gracefully among rolling green hills along the banks of the languid Perfume River, and its ancient Imperial City is a listed UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- ▶ **Danang Bay:** Once the French port of Tourane, Danang Bay lies at the feet of the magnificent Son Tra Peninsula, a tropical maritime forest that is home to a large population of the rare, elusive douc langur. The bay's origins trace back to the ancient Cham city of Singhapura (the "City of the Lion").
- ▶ **Hoi An:** The magical "city of lanterns" is a UNESCO World Heritage site known for its pedestrian-only city center that is recognized as a living open-air museum.



Empress Nam Phuong at her wedding in 1934, by a court photographer

## *An Khe*

The RN 19 highway connects Quy Nhon to Pleiku via a 164-kilometer route that is home to several historical sites. Along the journey, travelers can visit former American military installations from the Vietnam War, including the An Khe military airfield and Camp Radcliff – a former air cavalry (Air Cav) base established in August 1965 by the 70th Engineer Battalion as the base camp for the 1st Cavalry Division.



The Cham complex of My Son



The U.S. Air Cav insignia

## *Quang Ngai*

Stretching from Cape Batangan in the north to Chuong Hoa Pass in the south, this historical area was once the scene of numerous conflicts. It is scattered with the remnants of former American bases from the Vietnam War, including the Special Forces camps of Ha Thanh, Gia Vuc, Tra Bong, Minh Long, and Ba To. The area is also where the tragic My Lai (or Son My) massacre took place.

Today, travelers can discover the remains of the Quang Ngai Long Wall, a 127-kilometer rampart built in 1819 by the Nguyen dynasty as a demarcation line against the Da Vach people. Visitors can explore this site alongside a renowned Italian archaeologist specializing in ancient Southeast Asian civilizations.



Proto-Indochinese woman, by Nguyen The Vinh

## *Ayun Pa*

Northeast of Tuy Hoa lie the Song Ba Valley and the town of Ayun Pa (Cheo Reo), the ancient lands of the legendary Jarai kings of fire, wind, and water. The valley drains the eastern Pleiku plateau upstream from where the Song Ba and Ayun Pa rivers meet. It is a vast depression covered in old and new alluvial deposits, with a semi-arid climate. Along the lower Song Ba River south of Phu Tuc, travelers can visit two nature reserves: the Krong Trai and the Ea So, known for its Siamese crocodiles. The entire area is accessible via National Highway 25, which runs 225 kilometers from Tuy Hoa to Pleiku.

## *The Great White Dune*

South-central Vietnam is notable for its coastal dune fields, which form striking oceanic ergs. The largest and wildest of these is the Great Dune in Lam Dong Province, located between Phan Ri and Phan Thiet. This semi-desert expanse is a unique sight in Vietnam and Southeast Asia due to its sheer size and Saharan appearance. Travelers can choose from three different hiking modules there, ranging from Level 1 to 3.



The Great White Dune

## *Nui Chua National Park*

Extending across the southern part of Khanh Hoa Province, the Nui Chua National Park is one of Southeast Asia's best-preserved natural sites, offering diverse terrestrial and marine wildlife. The park is home to several endangered species, most notably the black-shanked douc langur (*Pygathrix nigripes*). Its coast provides a refuge and nesting ground for three species of sea turtles, including

the green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) and the olive ridley turtle (*Lepidochelys olivacea*). Every year at the beginning of summer, the park's coastline becomes a migration route for the rare Bryde's whales, considered protectors of fishermen by the Vietnamese and the reincarnation of the divine spirit Cha Aih Va by the Cham. Various discovery and trekking modules are available in the park, ranging from Level 1 to 3.

The coastline of Nui Chua





Phu Yen sea turtle



Cape Mui Dai Lanh Lighthouse, by Phan Phu Yen



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