

SAND & the CITY

Y&YW's Rachel Avery embraces urban culture and beach serenity in Vietnam



A Panorama Suite at The Reverie Saigon



The vibrant country of Vietnam has been popular with backpackers for the past few decades, but thanks to its ever-growing luxe hotel scene, it's now a hub for honeymooners too. We flew direct with Vietnam Airlines to get straight in on the action. A short car transfer took us to The Reverie Saigon, the most talked-about hotel in the capital, Ho Chi Minh City.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

The hotel is located right in the centre of the city (sometimes known by its former name of Saigon) and situated within a 39-floor building that stands overlooking the busy streets below. As soon as we pulled up to the huge marble lobby (with a fleet of luxury cars, including a Bentley and Rolls-Royce outside), we knew we'd arrived somewhere pretty special. The epitome of opulence is the best way to describe the entire hotel – everything in the building sparkles (literally), from the polished marble floors to the decadent chandeliers.

In our Panorama Suite, the grandeur continued with a vast sitting

room, gigantic bed, walk-in wardrobe and exquisitely decorated bathroom. We were also very impressed with the extensive pillow menu and complimentary minibar that was restocked daily. And it's not called the Panorama Suite for nothing – the views from the floor-to-ceiling windows were absolutely breathtaking, even from the

“Everything in the hotel sparkles, from the polished floors to the chandeliers”

bathroom. I made sure I took time to enjoy the surroundings, and soaked in the bath while admiring the mesmerising skyline.

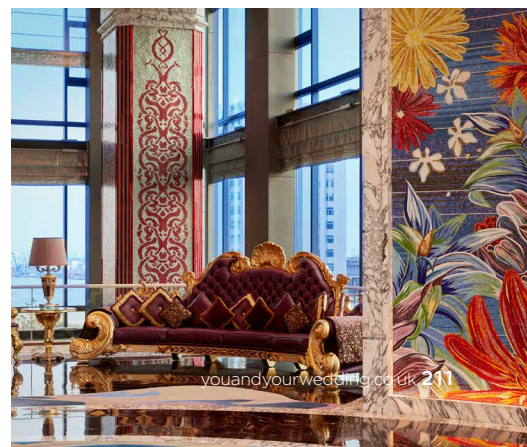
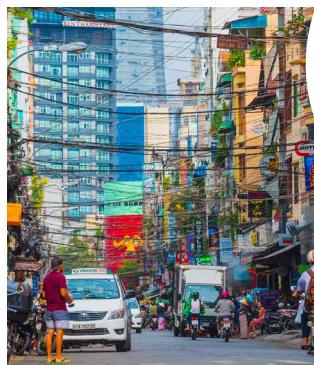
The indulgence continued as I headed to the hotel's spa for an even bigger dose of pampering. My 'Five Elements by Ila' treatment involved massage, hot stones and acupressure, and was the perfect remedy for those long-haul aches. There's also an outdoor pool on the sixth floor if you'd prefer to relax there while catching some rays.

If you book a suite at The Reverie Saigon, you get access to the top-floor lounge. The exclusive area is where we headed for breakfast, afternoon tea and

evening drinks. With a fabulous cocktail menu and a rotation of glorious foods, there's no reason to leave this private hangout at all – but, of course, we wanted to explore as much of the city as we could while we were there.

Sights dating from Vietnam's colonial era, such as the Saigon Central Post Office and the Notre-Dame Cathedral Basilica, are very close to the hotel. Be sure to head out in the morning before the sun gets too strong and explore the streets on foot. While out and about, you can also pop in to Ben Thanh Market, one of the liveliest parts of the city, to pick up a few gorgeous keepsakes (don't forget to haggle).

While at The Reverie Saigon, we enjoyed The Royal Pavilion, the hotel's Chinese restaurant that's a destination in itself – the superb dim sum dishes are highly recommended. A few doors down, another of Ho Chi Minh City's must-visit eateries is the Vietnam House Restaurant, serving a fabulously modern take on Vietnamese food overseen by well-known chef Luke Nguyen.





A Terrace Sea View Room at The Anam

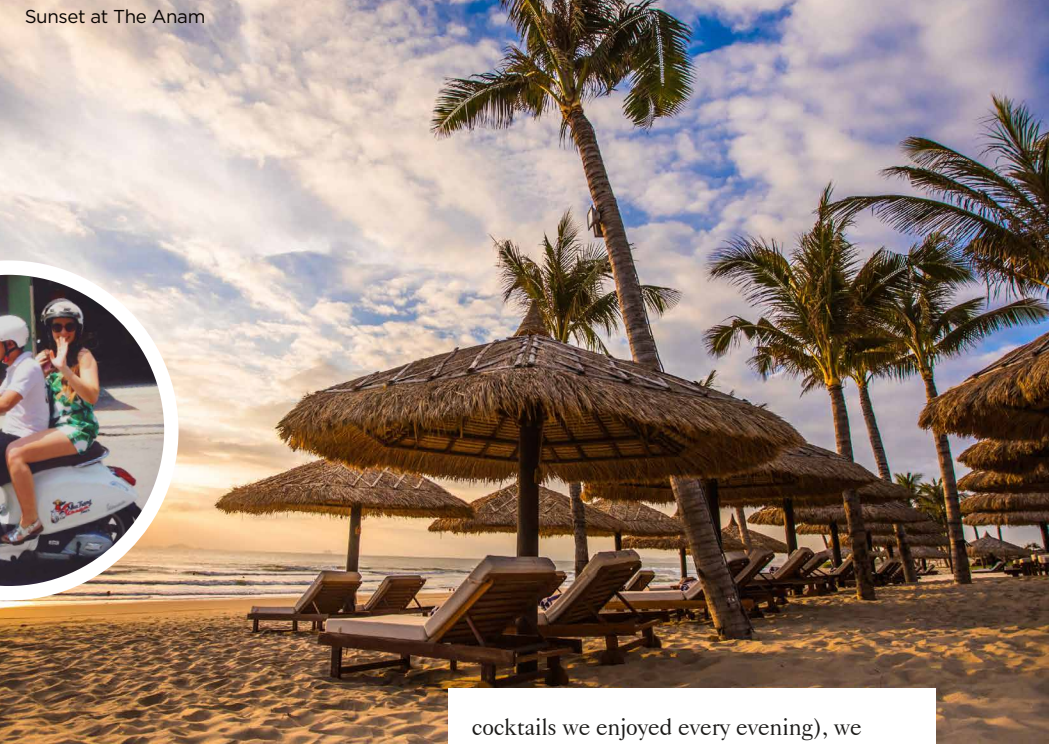


BEACH-BOUND

After a few days in the city, we were craving a little R&R – so it was a good job that the next stop was the beach. After a short 40-minute flight to Cam Ranh and a 15-minute drive to Nha Trang, we arrived at what can only be described as sheer paradise. Our hotel, The Anam, is a tropical haven filled with 3,000 palm trees. Dotted around are three pools, three restaurants and two bars, all set on a beautiful stretch of beach. We checked in to our suite, which had an amazing balcony overlooking the luscious gardens, and a huge, comfy bed. As soon as I'd unpacked my bags, I strolled over to the Sri Mara Spa for a 90-minute ultra-relaxing massage. What a wonderful start to our stay!

We woke each day eager to throw open the curtains to reveal the bright blue skies (this region of Asia gets 300 days of sunshine a year). For the best temperatures, travel between February and September, when it's warm without being unbearably humid. Hitting the beach and taking a dip in the refreshing sea quickly became our favourite way to start the day, and there was always someone around if you wanted to order a fresh coconut to drink.

The head chef at The Anam is big on Asian fusion dishes, and over the course of our stay we enjoyed many tasty treats, such as pulled pork bao, spicy chicken dishes, and fresh fish salads. It's almost unforgivable not to try a truly authentic taste of the Vietnamese favourite of *pho* (pronounced



Sunset at The Anam

like 'fuh') while you're here. It's a delicious hearty broth with noodles, and it can be topped with meat, fish or vegetables.

The Anam has a range of dining options, with Lang Viet Restaurant serving superbly traditional Vietnamese dishes, The Colonial providing fine-dining European meals, and the partially open-air Indochine, where we headed for buffet breakfast each day.

The best way to explore the nearby city

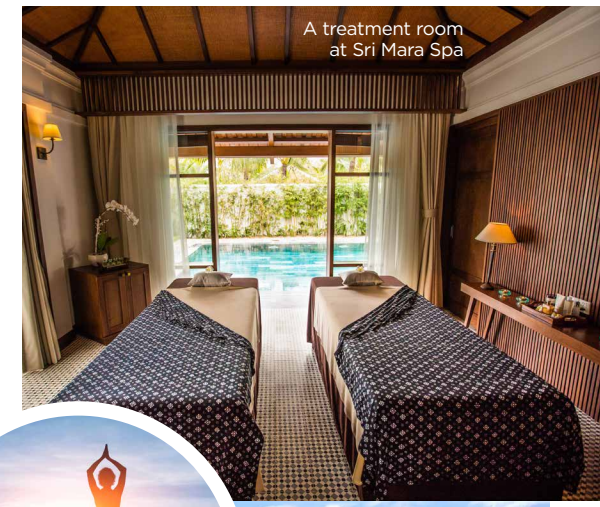
"Stretching and relaxing to the sound of the sea at sunset yoga was such a calming experience"

of Nha Trang is by moped, much like the locals. One morning, we embarked on The Anam Art Trail, which starts at Cong Ca Phe, an edgy, stylish coffee house. We hopped on the back of Vespas to see the town from a unique vantage point. The thrill ride was punctuated with stops at art galleries and artists' homes and workshops, where there were some incredible paintings and photos to admire.

Back at the hotel, the activities continued. Complimentary sunrise and sunset yoga sessions take place almost every day. Thanks to the divine beds (and perhaps the tasty

cocktails we enjoyed every evening), we never did make it to the sunrise sessions. We did manage to join in at sunset, though – and stretching and relaxing to the sound of the sea was such a peaceful way to end a day.

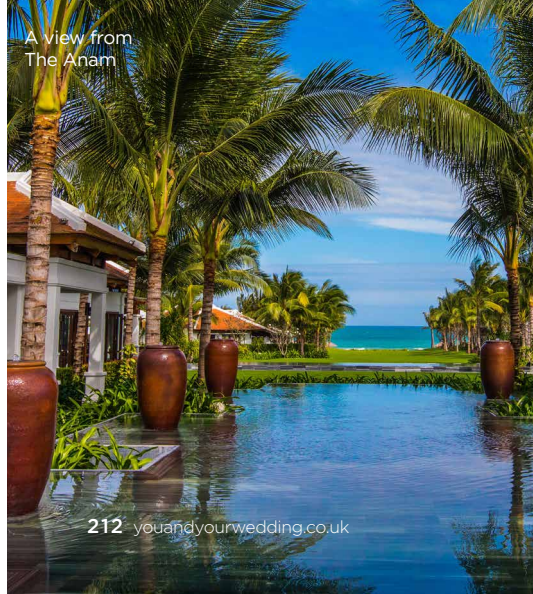
Whether it's finding your inner zen by the beach, soaking up the culture in the hustle and bustle of the city, or doing a bit of both, Vietnam certainly has something for everyone. It's a country of two worlds, and I've fallen in love with both.



A treatment room at Sri Mara Spa



Nha Trang



A view from The Anam



Exploring Vietnam

GO THERE

Nightly rates at The Reverie Saigon from US\$350 (approx. £252) for a Deluxe Room (including breakfast, wifi and a minibar per room, per night). Suites start from US\$800 (approx. £577) per night (including one or two-way airport transfers, dependent on room category), thereveriesaigon.com. Nightly rates at The Anam from US\$200 (approx. £144) for a Balcony Garden View Room, theanam.com. Vietnam Airlines operates the only non-stop scheduled services from the UK to Vietnam, with daily Dreamliner flights from London Heathrow to Ho Chi Minh City or Hanoi, offering Skytrax four-star rated service across three cabin classes. Return Economy fares start from £464 per person, vietnamairlines.com. The Anam Art Trail, nhatrangvespatour.com

A Pool View Villa at The Anam