

Generally, about the Imperial City of Hue in Vietnam - a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Hue is situated close to the South China Sea and is about halfway down the Vietnamese Coast. The peaceful former Imperial City of Hue has plenty to offer visitors and tourist - and seems particularly quiet after the noise and bustle of Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City. It is a delight to walk around the city with its canals and park areas. There are plenty of really good restaurants in Hue offering a variety of cuisine including Indian and Italian as well as local dishes - plus a variety of bars. The city has also many accommodations and [hotels in Hue](#) available in with prices suiting all pockets - from top class hotels to mid-range and back packing options.

As well as the actual sites one of Hue's main attractions has got to be its dragon boats which operate along the Perfumed River - you cannot possibly visit Hue without taking at least one trip on these colorful craft. There are various options and prices start from about USD2 for a one-hour trip. Other places which have to be visited at Hue include The Citadel and Thien Mu Pagoda - which can be easily walked too or visited as part of a bike ride.

Hue City as it is today owing its importance to Emperor Gia Long - founder of the Nguyen Dynasty who put Hue on the map in 1802 when he moved the capital from Thang Long (Hanoi). Gia Long gained the throne with the help of the French military. The Imperial City is very much a mixture of French style massive ramparts, bastions and moats together with the Chinese style of three enclosures (The Civic, Imperial and Forbidden Cities) which together make an unusual but elegant complex. Apart from simply enjoying wandering around the city Hue's main sites of interest are The Citadel, Thien Mu Pagoda and The Royal Tombs. Hoi lost its status as Capital of Vietnam in 1945 when Emperor Bas Dai abdicated and the capital was moved back to Hanoi.

Two years later most of the Hue's wooden temples and palaces were destroyed by fire - The Citadel particularly was left in a poor state becoming overgrown and neglected. Hue was even more poorly treated during the Tet Offensive 1968 - 1975 (of the original 148 buildings just 20 remain). In 1993 the City was listed as a world heritage site and a program of renovation began hence today's Citadel has been partially re-constructed and this work is still continuing.

Ways of Travelling to Hue City in Vietnam - Flights to Hue.

Hue airport is called Phu Bai International Airport and is located just outside the City. Pacific Airlines operate a minimal service so the main carrier in reality is Vietnam Airlines. The latter do at least operate flights in the morning, mid afternoon and evening connecting Hue directly with Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Flights to and from Hanoi take just over an hour and Hue to Saigon around one hour 20 minutes. Note that all of the flights tend to get booked up so it's necessary to book early - just turning up on the hope of getting a seat is quite iffy.

Hue by Vietnam Railways - Vietnam's Reunification Express.

Hue City is included on the train's route (Hanoi <> Saigon) and is therefore an alternative way to travel to Hue other than by flying. This is a popular although slow way to travel and again requires pre-booking to avoid disappointment particularly of course during the peak holiday season in Vietnam.

The Citadel and Imperial City at Hue is open daily from 07:00 to 17:00 - the Citadel's entrance is at Ngo Mon Gate and the entrance fee is around 55000VND. Guided tours often only allow around an hour to visit the Citadel but it's easy enough to wander around the Imperial City on your own as there is plenty to see much of which "time-orientated" organized tours don't allow time for. Remember though that the Vietnam weather can be extremely hot - there is a cafe available or perhaps take sandwiches with you and some drinks and go to the far end of the site where you can sit under a pavilion for a while.

Hue Citadel's 10km perimeter wall has survived almost intact - its most prominent feature is the Cot Co (Flag Tower) which has three squat brick terraces topped with a flag pole. Originally there were ten gates into the Citadel and entry today is across the moat and through Ngan Gate. On either side of Cot Co are nine huge cannon which are made of bronze and represent the four seasons of the year and the five elements - the cannons were cast in 1803.

Cross a second moat to the entrance at Ngo Mon Gate which was constructed with massive stone slabs and on which rests an elaborate watch-tower (the Five Phoenix Watch-tower). The design of the Gate follows the principles of Feng Shue and has five entrance portals.

The central portal was for the Emperor, either side of this were for the mandarins of the Royal Court and the two side gates were used for elephant access. Just in front of the Ngo Mon Gate are two square lakes - go between these on a path to reach the Thai Hoa Palace the interior of which is brightly colored in red and gold lacquers. Hugely popular with tourists this is one of the main locations visited by tour groups of [Đặt khách sạn](#) and is really inundated with people to the extent is difficult to see very much. This was the Throne Palace where all major ceremonies were held - such as coronations, royal birthdays and where important foreign dignitaries were received. Turning left from Ngo Mon Gate take a pleasant walk between walls and gardens to reach the Gateway to Hien Lam Coc (pavilion) which was built by Emperor Minh Mang in 1824.

The pavilion is a three-stored galleried building which has wooden facade. In front of the building sit nine bronze dynastic urns cast during the reign of Minh Mang (1791 - 1841) who ruled for two decades. The urns are all decorated with mountains, rivers, clouds, wildlife and other important images with each urn is dedicated to a specific emperor with Gia Long's in the middle.

Located on the opposite side of the courtyard is To Mieu Temple which was erected in 1822 once again by Minh Mang to worship his father - since then further altars have been added to honor the memories of other Nguyen Emperors. From here the path leads to the Hung Mieu - the temple is dedicated to Gia Long's parents and is known for its glazed carvings on the tiled roof - especially the large gargoyle-like stone dragon. As you wander around between the temples and buildings there are beautifully decorated gates and well-kept gardens.

Walking on through one of these gates you arrive at an area where there are quite a few ruined buildings some of which are now being restored. This is a very interesting area and certainly not many tourists get this far which is a shame. At the far end

there are various moats and lakes and even more fantastic gates - also remnants of the Forbidden City can be seen including a restored pavilion and the Thai Binh which was the Royal Library (a heavily decorated two storey building set amongst bonsai gardens). Other buildings in this area of The Citadel include the Royal Mint and the Theatre.

Hue Imperial City and Citadel is surrounded by an excellent moat and it's well worth spending an hour or so wandering round it - the area is paved and grassed and you get really good views of the walls, parapets and gateways. The water supply for the moat at Hue is provided from The Huong River (also known as The Perfume River).

Thien Mu Pagoda at Hue in Vietnam.

Originally built during the Nguyen Dynasty around 1601, Thien Mu Pagoda (Heavenly Lady Pagoda) is located on the northern bank of the Perfume River on Ha Khe Hill and at seven stories high it's the tallest pagoda in Vietnam. The story goes that Nguyen Hoang (Governor of Thua) was told of a legend that an old lady (Thien Mu) - who was wearing blue trousers and a red shirt - sat on Ha Khe Hill and prophesized that a nobleman would build a pagoda on the hill to pray for the country's prosperity - Thien Mu was not seen again. Nguyen Hoang decided to have a temple built at the site and named after the old lady - hence Thien Mu Pagoda.

Tu Hieu Pagoda in Hue City, Vietnam.

Set amongst trees and down a dirt road 3kms southwest of Hue this quiet pagoda is not usually visited by organized tours and is ideal for cycling too - note though you do have to go up a steep hill to get to it. The pagoda is open daily and free to enter but the girls by the entrance gate do pester you to give them something for parking/looking after the bikes. The pagoda was founded in 1843 and still has resident monks. The main entrance is through a triple arched gate which takes you to a small lake and well-kept grounds. There are many shrines (they really are all over the place) - the main shrine is dedicated to Sakyamuni Buddha also known as Thich Ca Buddha. The pagoda has an imperial link as the royal eunuchs retired here and were worshiped after their deaths.

Enjoying a nice bike ride out to Thuan An Beach at Hue and cycling around some Vietnamese rice fields.

Another nice ride is to cycle out to the South China Sea at Thuan An Beach which is around 14kms from the center of Hue. Although you have to cycle along a fairly main road it's not too busy and the trip is generally quite flat and so ok. The beaches are desolate scruffy affairs and one could hardly imagine anyone wanting to actually stay on them. There are a few so called cafes and things right along the beach which are just about falling down - we did not even feel comfortable about leaving our bikes out of sight. We cycled several kilometers along the peninsula with no improvement to the beaches particularly obvious before turning back - there may well be beaches in better condition right at the end.

That said although these Hue beaches were disappointing the actual countryside around Hue is excellent and on our return we did divert down several side tracks and cycled round several small villages. One of the enjoyments of cycling in and around Hue was being out amongst the rice fields where, apart from watching the people

planting and working on them, you could keep stopping to look at the frequent small cemeteries which often have beautiful shrines.