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A Journey through Vietnam: Phu Quoc Island

A hidden paradise of lush jungles, turquoise water, white beaches and true hospitality...
Stacie Flinner explores Phu Quoc Island on her Journey through Vietnam.

6 JUNE 2017

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Our visit to Phu Quoc Island,

Vietnam

Thirty miles off the southwest coast of the mainland sits Phu Quoc Island, the pearl of Vietnam. A hidden paradise of lush jungles and turquoise waters, colonial architecture and exciting new developments, friendly fishermen and pepper farmers, the sound of waves lapping the shore and the buzz of motorbikes taking locals to the morning market to choose fresh fish for that night's dinner. Up until recently the island was considered backcountry, with a history of controversial provenance due to its strategic placement between Indochina and the rest of Southeast Asia. Phu Quoc was briefly host to Vietnam's largest prison where American forces held North Vietnamese soldiers, but after forty years of peace, locals have resumed farming and fishing and Phu Quoc is officially welcoming tourists with the completion of a shiny new international terminal in the last five years.

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My husband, David, and I arrived in Phu Quoc on a mostly empty flight after spending a week in Hanoi. Our fellow travelers were a mix of locals and tourists looking forward to solitary walks along untouched beaches after a whirlwind tour of Vietnam. We had heard of Phu Quoc's pristine natural environment (roughly 70 percent of the island is national park) and stretches of white sand with barely another human in sight and were eager to shake off the chaos of Hanoi's Old Quarter and discover Phu Quoc's virtues for ourselves.

La Veranda Resort

Ever the fans of colonial-inspired architecture, we made [La Veranda Resort Phu Quoc's](#) elegant property our home for three days. Though La Veranda is nestled into the most densely populated strip along Long Beach, the resort's design creates a feeling of utter seclusion, thanks to the lush tropical garden that envelops the 70 rooms and villas. The property's owner, Madame Catherine, originally intended to retire on the land, but instead decided to share her slice of paradise with the world as a hotel. Every aspect of the rooms and decor have been hand selected by Madame Catherine and are inspired by her childhood spent on the island.

In addition to her design sense, the resort reflects the relaxed and hospitable character of the local people and proved the perfect base for exploring the beauty of the island at our own pace – or maybe a bit slower. Our days alternated between early starts to see the fisherman haul in their catch and bring it to the morning wet market, and lazy afternoons spent lingering over tea and a game of chess on the veranda as countless butterflies danced around us and out into the garden. We rented a motorcycle and started out on a (slightly jarring) ride around the island's many unpaved roads, making it far enough to enjoy a simple and tasty lunch of fresh crab and coconuts before making our way back to the hotel to completely relax during a couples' massage. We spent one morning at Sao Beach, a long strip of perfect white sand whose beauty is well known to travellers, but the road to which is riddled with potholes and still relatively inaccessible: a charming dichotomy, symbolic of the still-relatively-undiscovered-yet-fast-developing island as a whole. (But know the bumpy ride is worth it.)



While we'd venture out during our sun-filled days, the most cherished moments of our stay came while back on our villa's veranda overlooking the Gulf of Thailand as the sky splashed out incredible sunset hues, in the colours of guava, papaya and mangosteen. Then in the

moment between twilight and complete darkness, bright green and white lights would begin to appear on the distant horizon, as night fishermen let out their nets and illuminated the surrounding waters. The twinkling pearls of light formed a necklace across the ocean, between the silhouette of swaying palms indicating we'd have roughly one hour before the evening's lightening storm would begin. Anticipating a downpour we opted to stay close to home each night, dressing for dinner and taking a short walk up to the Peppertree Restaurant to take our seat on the second level veranda overlooking the ocean. We'd order our dinner and wait for the show to begin. The nightly rains seemed to respect that we had come seeking a sunny, tropical paradise, and waited until we were safely inside to open their floodgates. Demonstrating their full force, and winding down to a drizzle just as we took our last bites of dessert. A courteous extension of the local's hospitality indeed.



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