



photo by Paradise Resort

Paradise in Vietnam

Whether you want to be part of a tour group or travel independently, you can just hit up your favourite budget travel site like Expedia or Kayak, search and book. However, I have recently rediscovered the convenience and satisfaction that a personalized, neighbourhood travel service provides.

Time is in short supply for everyone. Whether you want a full meal deal (package) or just basic flights, a competent travel agent can save you hours and hours of searching online. Flight Centre has branches all over Vancouver, several of which I have used over the years. They have a good track record, which is probably why the branch at 1232 Davie Street is one of the most popular travel agencies in Davie Village.

One of the best trips I've ever had was a road trip in Vietnam. I flew into Ho Chi Minh and took a northbound bus for about 11 hours. The best part of that trip was my final destination, a family-run remote place called Paradise Resort, which I had booked online.

If you're planning an Asian adventure you could always mix it up. Book your flights through Flight Centre, but book the accommodation yourself. It's easy to do, it's risk-free, and you might even feel a sense of accomplishment like I did. I also booked my own bus trip once I was there. You can too - it's not only easy but will save you money.

Arrival in Vietnam

The excitement started minutes after leaving the Ho Chi Minh International Airport. With my Vietnamese welcoming party-of-three, I walked to a parking lot expecting a car. No car was in sight - I saw only oodles of scooters as far as my eyes could see. Gaggles of scooters - one of the quirky, endearing characteristics of Vietnam. I was told to wait at the curb. Moments later up zips my host Win on a scooter, her mom and aunt doubled up on one behind her.



Venturing Out

After a day to chill and get acquainted with District 3, the neighborhood my hotel was nestled in, I was glad to have made online reservations with a local tour company, *Sinhcafe*, to explore a bit of Vietnam. *Sinhcafe* rocks with its efficient, economical, and reliable service. It is the go-to tour company for Vietnamese travellers and international budget travellers.

The journey to the coastal city of *Nha Trang* - 350 Km. north of *Ho Chi Minh* and 1000 Km. south of the capital *Hanoi* - takes 10-11 hours. This city is known by many Vietnamese as the best seaside resort in the country. I had other beach plans though. *Nha Trang* served as a perfect base for my journey to the remote Paradise Resort.

Along the way you can see vast fields of lush green trees and plants, refreshing to view until your eyes get tangled in the patches of land here and there plagued by the chemicals of warfare. At that moment, you realize you are looking at wasteland where no living organism can ever exist again - evidence of the devastation of Agent Orange during the Vietnam War. But that's another story.

The moment the bus reached the *Nha Trang* bus station, I grabbed my bag from the compartment under the bus and stepped onto the street. I was immediately swarmed by motor bike riders trying to persuade me to ride to a hotel of their choice. Fortunately I had reserved a room in advance. I just grabbed a driver and off we went.

When my driver turned onto the beach-front road *Tran Phu*, I recalled the website photo of the waterfront view from my pre-booked room and smiled. We had driven into the picture.

Get Me To The Beach

I awoke early to the sun's warmth as it poured in through the floor - to - ceiling windows of my hotel room. Well rested and happy, I leaped out of bed and into the shower. Out on the street, I found no shortage of eateries for breakfast. I went to a favourite among travelers - *Good Morning Vietnam* - on *Biet Thu* Street.

Next I hit the street to find transportation to my final destination of *Paradise Resort* at *Doc Let Beach*. The trip would be 45 kilometers north of *Nha Trang*. My anxiety was short lived. A motor bike driver had convincingly promised to take me to my destination comfortably, safely, and less expensive than a regular taxi could.

You won't have this anxiety, though, because *Paradise Resort* now offers private transportation between *Nha Trang* and *Paradise* for \$20-\$30 each way, depending on the size of car you request. Arrange this ride in advance on their website when you book your accommodation.

Paradise Resort at Doc Let Beach

This ultimate bargain starts at \$US30 (single) or \$US50 (double) a day with 3 delicious, healthy meals and a clean, well designed and constructed beach hut. Owner-operator Vladimir from Croatia does his best to maintain a laid-back, hassle-free atmosphere. His 'Paradise' has 170 meters of beach front, and is located in rural *Ninh Hoa*, in *Khanh* Province.



If you seek peace and quiet with ample time and space to sit and look out at the wondrous aquamarine sea, read, write, meditate, get a massage, play solitaire, this will be your slice of Heaven for as long as you wish to indulge yourself. You can also find your groove by kayaking, fishing, snorkelling, or swimming.

I found most of the 9 or so other people from various countries staying at *Paradise Resort* authentically friendly. During the first 2 nights of my 6-night stay I became friends with a couple from France.

We were the only night owls, it appeared. Only the three of us, night after night, would hang out for hours in the open-air cafe. It was also where guests ate 3 times a day. Sophie,

Anne, and I fell into a groove of playing cards and drinking wine until the wee hours every night. I saw other friendships strike up, too, every day of my week at Paradise.

If you'd like to get away from the beach and explore a bit of the region, there is a salt quarry you can reach by foot, and a little fishing village to explore afterwards.

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What Others Have Said

I always check to see what Lonely Planet's take is on a place I consider traveling to for the first time. In this case, they gave Paradise Resort a thumbs up. You can [read the review here](#).

A couple of reviewers had this to say last year:

"[We had an amazing stay here!](#) We stayed for 3 days. The owner was fantastic - a lot of fun! We had an issue with our train tickets and he sorted everything out for us. We stayed in a bungalow that was overlooking the sea, the beach was flawless. There wasn't an awful lot to do other than relax but we weren't complaining! When we visited there were a couple of kayaks on the beach that we used to paddle over to his boat where we spent a while sunbathing on. I would definitely recommend this place as a must visit when travelling Vietnam, it was one of my favourite places. The food is fantastic and it was really nice to sit with other travellers at meal times, great for meeting other people. It's a must visit!" (Love2Travel244, February 2014)

Getting There

After you have booked your flights with a local travel agency like [Flight Centre](#), contact Vladimir [on his website](#). Don't forget that for a modest fee you can arrange a lift to his paradise. Otherwise, when securing your transportation to Paradise Resort, unless you are at the wheel yourself it is advisable to make sure your driver speaks English. You might have to request a helmet!

The route from *Nha Trang* to *Doc Let Beach* area is an inspiring drive on windy, coastal roads with a few very steep grades. I loved the ride there on the back of a motor bike - the open air allowed every cell of my 5 senses to be stimulated. It was a dynamic start to a memorable stay at Paradise.

