



Destinations to watch in 2012

VIETNAM The 'new' Thailand?

The beaches are perfect, the food is delicious, the accommodation stylish and affordable, and the people charming - the South-East Asia is hard to beat for a holiday, from high-end honeymoons to budget backpacking. Thailand is the obvious choice, and an eternally popular destination, but, as a result, it's getting harder (and more expensive) to find its secret, unspoilt places.

Vietnam, meanwhile, has such places in abundance, still relatively unexplored by tourists as it is rather more off the beaten track. But this looks set to change soon, as Vietnam Airlines has just launched direct flights from the UK to both chaotic **Ho Chi Minh City** (formerly Saigon) and **Hanoi** and there have been a number of high-end luxury resorts opening up recently.

Halong Bay, with its turquoise waters and distinctive rock formations looming up out of the sea, has become one of the country's most well-known destinations since it was used as a location in the Bond film *Tomorrow Never Dies*. But some of our favourite locations include the less-explored islands of **Phu Quoc** - most of which is a national park, covered in tropical jungle, with coral reefs offshore that make for some of the best diving in the world - and the beautiful **Con Dao** archipelago, as well as the Hindu temples of **My Son**, and the cities of **Hue**, **Hanoi** or **Ho Chi Minh City**, where there is fun to be had of the more chaotic kind.

STAY

Among the lovely new additions to Vietnam's hotel scene is the boutique **Chen Sea Resort & Spa** on the island of Phu Quoc, and **Six Senses Con Dao**.

And slick new hotel group EpiKurean has recently opened three very stylish, very boutique properties: the seven-villa **Bai Tram Hideout** on a white-sand beach in Binh Din province; **An Lan Ninh Van Bay Villas**, on a blissfully isolated bay not far from the tourist-town of Nha Trang; and its latest, **An Lam Saigon River**, which has just seven riverside villas in Ho Chi Minh City.

Or combine beach and city on a tour of the country. Wexas Travel's 15-day 'Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh' itinerary costs from £3,939 pp, and takes in Halong Bay, the islands off Nha Trang, the French hill station of Dalat, the Mui Ne Peninsula in the south, and finally onto Ho Chi Minh City, staying at An Lam Saigon River.

Price includes flights, all accommodation and travel. Contact Wexas Travel (020 7838 5892; www.wexas.com)