

Treasures in Vietnam

The southeast Asian nation has an array of exciting openings to look forward to in 2024, discovers **Cathy Toogood**



ASK THE experts



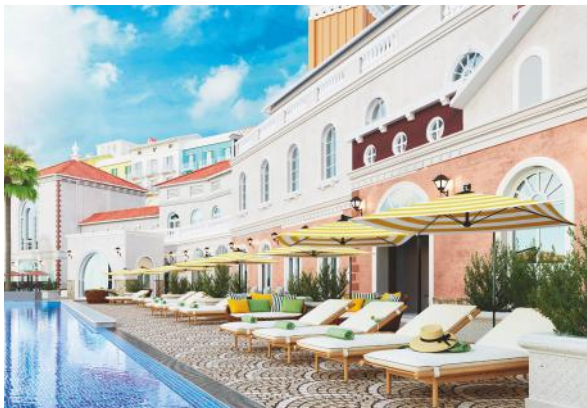
James Williams,
luxury travel designer,
Carrier

“Vietnam offers excellent value for money in all standards of travel, from backpacker to the luxury market. My favourite area is Hoi An, which is famous for the Chinese lanterns that light up the cobbled streets each evening. The city provides a more peaceful insight into Vietnam than the hustle and bustle of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.”



Sandra Foreman,
business development
manager,
Wendy Wu Tours

“Vietnam’s unilateral visa exemption offers an incredible opportunity for travel agents. With a generous allowance up to 45 days, agents can take full advantage of offering longer stays in the country. More-flexible itineraries can entice more travellers to explore the diverse landscapes and rich culture of Vietnam, without the burden of visa applications. It’s a win-win for agents and clients alike.”



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Hoi An; Ho Chi Minh City; Four Seasons Resort The Nam Hai; Festa Phu Quoc, Curio Collection by Hilton

PICTURES: Shutterstock/Mister_Knight, Sean Hsu, saravutpics

In 2019, Vietnam welcomed a record 17.3 million international tourists. Since the country reopened its borders in March 2022 following the pandemic, visitor numbers are recovering fast. According to the Vietnam Tourism Advisory Board, between 12 and 13.5 million arrivals are expected this year.

With more than 2,000 miles of coastline, scrumptious street food, blissful palm-tree-backed beaches, buzzy cities and relaxed cruises along the Mekong, Vietnam’s appeal is clear.

Now it’s even easier for clients to get there, since Vietnam Airlines increased its schedule from Heathrow to daily on October 29. The carrier operates four flights per week to capital Hanoi and three per week to the largest city, Ho Chi Minh City.

The visa exemption stay limit for UK tourists was also increased from 15 days to 45 days in August.

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To understand why Vietnam is so popular right now, *Travel Weekly* takes a look at some of the country’s most interesting new developments.

HOT HOTELS

The perfect spot for a relaxing stay – perhaps at the end of an escorted tour – the luxurious Azerai Ke Ga Bay opened in June. The property’s plush suites and poolside villas are located on a three-mile-long beach on Vietnam’s southeast coast. It’s a two-and-a-half-hour drive from

Ho Chi Minh City via a highway that opened earlier this year. Guests can enjoy yoga and meditation sessions, dips in one of four pools and personalised spa treatments.

Clients looking for a romantic island retreat will want to hear about La Festa Phu Quoc, Curio Collection by Hilton, which is set to open on December 21 on the western coast of Phu Quoc – nicknamed ‘Pearl Island’ due to its glistening sands. Hilton claims that it will offer “a taste of the Amalfi Coast in Vietnam” with an Italian-inspired design in rooms that overlook a private beach and offer astonishing sunset views.

If cultural immersion is a priority, clients will love the location of Four Seasons Resort The Nam Hai – near the riverside city of Hoi An, the ruins of the My Son temple complex and the imperial city of Hue. The hotel offers excursions to these sites, plus there’s a cooking academy and cultural ➤

DESTINATIONS

ASIA | VIETNAM



ABOVE: Vietnamese cruise line Ambassador Cruise has launched an itinerary that explores the limestone karsts of Lan Ha Bay

experiences such as lantern making on offer. New this year are a yogi wellness practitioner and Japanese-influenced restaurant and bar, which is set to open this month.

TRENDING TOURS

Intrepid Travel is focusing on further cutting the carbon footprint of its tours, so it has tweaked the 15-day Scenic Vietnam itinerary to remove an internal flight and replace it with two overnight train journeys.

As well as reducing the carbon impact, the new route adds a stop in Quy Nhon, where clients will visit a Vietnamese family that has practised martial arts for three generations. The master of the family will tell clients about the secrets of his practice and its health benefits, before giving a demonstration, and then supervising as they try their own moves.

As a result of an increase in bookings to Vietnam, Exodus Adventure Travels will launch Hidden Vietnam: Sapa & Beyond next year. This adventurous tour will take clients to a homestay in a tribal village in

“The master of the family will tell clients about the secrets of his martial arts practice, before giving a demonstration

the hill region of Sapa, where they'll be treated to a home-cooked meal, as well as visiting the secluded Lan Ha Bay and popular Cat Ba Island.

Meanwhile, G Adventures has launched the Geluxe Collection, a new style of trip that offers clients the chance to be physically active, stay in 'one-of-a-kind' accommodation, enjoy gourmet experiences and to meet communities and learn about their culture.

The new programme includes the 11-day Vietnam: Hanoi, Halong Bay & Trekking Pu Luong, which takes in the country's highlights,

including a night on a junk boat in Halong Bay, cycling to the Vietnam War-era Cu Chi tunnels and rafting in Pu Luong.

COOL CRUISES

Wendy Wu Tours has reported an increase in enquiries for river cruises in southeast Asia for 2024, so it's launched a collection of cruise and beach trips for clients looking to combine adventure with relaxation. Its Magical Mekong Cruise & Beach holiday comprises a seven-night cruise on the *Victoria Mekong* – sailing from Kampong Cham in Cambodia to southern Vietnam – followed by a four-night sand and spa holiday on idyllic Phu Quoc.

Oceania Cruises will relaunch the refurbished *Riviera* next year. Four cruises will make stops in Vietnam – three sailing from Bangkok and one from Mumbai. Shore excursions will include the palace-filled former capital Hue, Vietnam's current capital Hanoi and Nha Trang, a stunning beach resort famed for its spicy seafood.

For a shorter adventure or a handy add-on, Vietnamese line Ambassador Cruise (not to be confused with the UK-based line of the same name), has launched two or three-day itineraries that explore the limestone karsts of Lan Ha Bay. Its sumptuous ship has just 39 cabins, a sun deck, restaurant, piano lounge, bars and a spa.

With so much in store for 2024, an adventure to Vietnam could easily make it on to clients' Christmas lists this year. **TW**

BOOK IT

A 16-day trip to Vietnam ending with three nights at Azerai Ke Ga Bay costs from £5,235 per person with **Audley Travel**. The price is based on two sharing and includes flights, transfers, accommodation and excursions. audleytravel.com