

# South-Central Coast



Undeniably, the beach is the big attraction in this part of Vietnam. Nha Trang and Mui Ne have become the favoured destinations for those whose idea of paradise is reclining by the water, cocktail in hand, contemplating whether to have a massage or a pedicure before hitting the bars later. These sedentary delights are juxtaposed with an excellent array of outdoor activities – swimming, scuba diving, snorkelling, surfing, windsurfing and kite-surfing – making this simultaneously the action capital of the country.

With most visitors not venturing outside of the two tourist enclaves, the rest of the beautiful coast is wonderfully overlooked – leaving empty beaches to be explored by the more independently minded. The fine art of hassling travellers has not yet spread to the more remote parts, quickly dispelling any negative impressions engendered in the tourist traps.

If you've got the dosh, another way of beating the crowds is to head to one of the exclusive resorts popping up along the coast. Wealthy Western ex-pats from around Asia seem to be doing just that, particularly business-people based in nearby Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC). Those with an eye towards cultural edification will find a wealth of Cham towers and what remains of the Cham population in this region. While not as archeologically important as the My Son site further north, they're much more accessible and, in many ways, more impressive to the untrained eye.

This region is also home to the most poignant reminder of the American War – the Son My Memorial, commemorating the villagers who perished in what the West remembers as the My Lai Massacre.

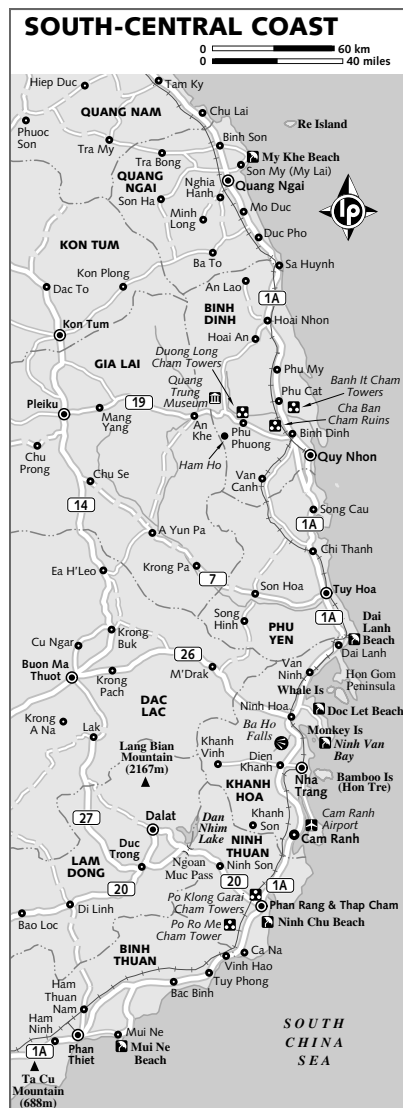
## HIGHLIGHTS

- Explore the tourist-free Cham sites and beautiful beaches around **Quy Nhon** (p277)
- After a hard day lying around the beach, party your way around **Nha Trang's bars** (p292)
- Dodge the bats in the darkness of the sanctuary at remote **Po Ro Me Cham Tower** (p297)
- Catch a wave, touch the wind, or do both at the same time – surfing, windsurfing or kite-surfing at **Mui Ne** (p301)
- Pay your respects at the **Son My Memorial** (p269)



■ ELEVATION: 1-1793M

■ BEST TIME TO VISIT: FEB-OCT



## Getting There & Away

Quy Nhon, Tuy Hoa and Cam Ranh, near Nha Trang, have airports. The north-south rail route cuts through the region, as does Hwy 1A. Hwy 19 links the coast to Pleiku, just north of Quy Nhon, while Hwy 26 joins Ninh Hoa (north of Nha Trang) to Buon Ma Thuot, and Hwy 20 connects Phan Rang and Dalat.

## QUANG NGAI

☎ 055 / pop 134,000

The capital of the province of the same name, Quang Ngai (aka Quang Nhia or Quangai) was only officially awarded city status in 2005, so the impression of a big country town is justified. The city itself offers no obvious attractions and those few travellers that venture here generally come to pay their respects to the victims of the most famous atrocity of the American War (see p271). Perhaps it's the sombre mood induced by the Memorial that has caused tourists to overlook one of Vietnam's best and least developed beaches, less than 2 kilometres away.

Even before WWII, Quang Ngai was an important centre of resistance to the French. During the Franco-Viet Minh War, the area was a Viet Minh stronghold. In 1962 the South Vietnamese government introduced its ill-fated Strategic Hamlets Program. Villagers were forcibly removed from their homes and resettled in fortified hamlets, infuriating and alienating the local population and increasing popular support for the Viet Cong. Some of the bitterest fighting of the American War took place here.

## Orientation

Built on the southern bank of the Tra Khuc River, the city is 15km from the coast. Hwy 1A doubles as the main street Đ Quang Trung as it passes through town. The train station is 1.5km west of the town centre on Đ Hung Vuong.

## Information

**Deluxe Taxis** (☎ 83 83 83)

**Main post office** (☎ 822 935; 80 Đ Phan Dinh Phung)

**Quy Nhon Internet** (☎ 828 851; 65 Đ Tran Hung Dao; per hr 4000d)

**Vietcombank** (45 Đ Hung Vuong) Branch in the lobby of Hung Vuong Hotel with an ATM outside.

## Sleeping

**Hung Vuong Hotel** (☎ 818 828; 33 Đ Hung Vuong; r 120,000-200,000d; 📺) The friendliness of this family-run minihotel more than makes up for a lack of English. The most expensive rooms can sleep five at a push.

**Hung Vuong Hotel** (☎ 710 477; www.hungvuong-hotel.com.vn; 45 Đ Hung Vuong; s/d/tr/ste US\$25/30/35/45; 📺 📺) Even by Vietnamese standards this is confusing – two hotels with the same name on the same street. This one's a large multistorey

block with spacious rooms, although it's not about to win any prizes for interior design.

**Petro Song Tra Hotel** (☎ 822 665; pvstc@dng.vn.vn; 2 Đ Quang Trung; s US\$25-30, d US\$30-35, ste US\$55; 📺 📺 📺) This Soviet-looking place has just been given a make-over. It's still not flash, but it's good value for the price, with ADSL in the rooms, a gym, a beautiful pool, tennis courts and a great location, right by the river and park.

**Central Hotel** (☎ 829 999; www.vidc.com.vn/central-hotel; 784 Đ Quang Trung; r US\$35-95, ste US\$149; 📺 📺 📺) It's now looking a little past its prime, but the Central Hotel is still the nicest place in town and probably the cleanest. The cheaper rooms have basic showers, while the suites sport over-sized baths and huge TVs. Extra luxuries include free wi-fi, a tennis court and a pool big enough to swim laps in.

There are several other minihotels on the east side of Đ Quang Trung between Đ Nguyen Nghiem and Đ Tran Hung Dao.

## Eating

Quang Ngai province is famous for *com ga*, although it actually originates further north at Tam Ky. It consists of boiled chicken over yellow rice (the colour comes from being steamed with chicken broth) with mint, egg soup and pickled vegies. You'll find *com ga* restaurants all over town. Locals tend to eat it with a spoon, so don't bother struggling with the chopsticks.

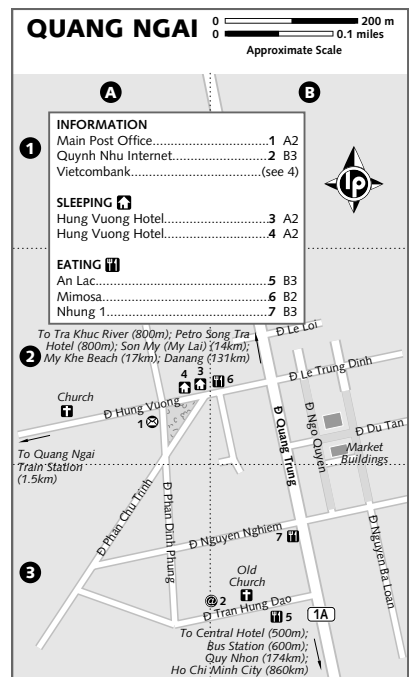
**An Lac** (☎ 822 566; 54 Đ Tran Hung Dao; meals 7000d) For good, cheap vegetarian grub, try this shopfront across from the pink church.

**Nhung 1** (☎ 821 797; 474 Đ Quang Trung; meals 10,000d) This friendly eatery is a great place to try *com ga*.

**Mimosas** (☎ 822 438; 21 Đ Hung Vuong; mains 15,000d) With menus in English and some Western breakfast options, this family-run restaurant bustles with affable service.

## Getting There & Away

**Bus**  
The **Quang Ngai bus station** (Ben Xe Khach Quang Ngai; Đ Le Thanh Ton) is situated to the south of the centre, 50m east of Đ Quang Trung. Regular buses head to all the major stops on Hwy 1A, including Sa Huynh (20,000d, 1½ hours) and Quy Nhon (60,000d, 3½ hours). If you're on an open-tour you should be able to leave the bus as it passes through town, but a pick up from here is difficult to arrange.



## CAR & MOTORBIKE

From Quang Ngai road distances are: 889km to Hanoi, 100km to Hoi An, 174km to Quy Nhon, 412km to Nha Trang and 860km to HCMC.

## TRAIN

**Reunification Express** trains stop at **Quang Ngai Train Station** (Ga Quang Nghia; ☎ 820 280; 204 Đ Nguyen Chi Thanh), 1.5km west of the town centre. Destinations include Hanoi (350,000d, 19½ to 23½ hours, four daily), Danang (47,000d, 2½ to four hours, six daily), Quy Nhon (40,000d, 5½ hours, one local train daily), Nha Trang (146,000d, six to 8½ hours, six daily) and HCMC (300,000d, 13½ to 20 hours, six daily).

## AROUND QUANG NGAI

**Son My (My Lai)**  
It's unfathomable that this pleasant rural spot could have been the setting of horrific crimes during the American War. On the morning of 16 March 1968, US troops swept through four hamlets in the Son My subdistrict, systematically killing 504 villagers, many of them

elderly and children. The largest mass killing took place in Xom Lang (Thuan Yen) sub-hamlet, where the **Son My Memorial** (admission 10,000d; ☎ 8-11.30am & 1-4.30pm Mon-Fri) now stands. However, it is one of the other hamlets that lent the name the world remembers – the My Lai Massacre.

The memorial is centred around a dramatic stone sculpture of an elderly woman holding up her fist in defiance, a dead child in her arms, as the rest of her family die at her feet. Many visitors bring incense to burn here. The US military ploughed the ground to destroy the evidence of their crimes, but the scene has been recreated to reflect the aftermath of that fateful day. Burnt-out shells of homes stand in their original locations, each marked with a plaque listing the names and ages of the family that once resided there. The concrete connecting the ruins is coloured to represent a dirt path, and indented with the heavy bootprints of American soldiers and the bare footprints of fleeing villagers.

The fact that the event was painstakingly documented by a US military photographer is quite bizarre in its own right. These graphic images are now the showcase of a small **museum** on the site. While a distressing experience, the display ends on a hopeful note – chronicling the efforts of the local people to rebuild their lives after liberation. A prominent section honours the GIs who tried to stop the carnage, shielding a group of villagers from certain death, and those responsible for blowing the whistle.

The road to Son My passes through particularly beautiful countryside: rice paddies, cassava patches and vegetable gardens shaded by casuarinas and eucalyptus trees. However, if you look closely you can still make out the odd bomb crater, and the bare tops of hills are testimony to the continuing environmental devastation caused by Agent Orange.

#### GETTING THERE & AWAY

The best way to get to Son My is by motorbike or regular taxi. The return bike trip, including waiting time, shouldn't cost more than 50,000d. From Quang Ngai head north on Đ Quang Trung (Hwy 1A) and cross the long bridge over the Tra Khuc River. Take the first right (eastward, parallel to the river) where a triangular concrete stele indicates the way and follow the road for 12km. The memorial is just past a small hospital.

#### My Khe Beach

Only a couple of kilometres from the Son My Memorial, My Khe (not to be confused with the other My Khe Beach near Danang) is a superb beach, with fine white sand and clear water. It stretches for kilometres along a long, thin, casuarina-lined spit of sand, separated from the mainland by Song Kinh Giang, a body of water about 150m inland from the beach. The beach's charm is greatly enhanced by its lack of development, although this means limited accommodation options. Still, if you want an idyllic beach largely to yourself, this is the place to come...for the time being. If tourist numbers increase, the shell of an additional building is already in place to double the size of the resort.

You'll reach the beach after crossing a bridge, 2 kilometres further along the road heading past the Son My memorial.

#### SLEEPING & EATING

**My Khe Restaurant** (☎ 843 316; Tinh Khe commune; r 100,000d) Hidden from sight behind a large yellow wall to the north of the road is the local commune, with a row of restaurants along the beach. This one, near where the paving broadens out, also has basic stilt houses to rent, each with its own bathroom, fan and TV.

**My Khe Resort** (☎ 686 111; ks\_mytra@dng.vnn.vn; Tinh Khe; r/stc US\$20/30; 📶) Although not really a resort, this small new hotel is great value with smart, clean rooms looking over the beach. Breakfast is included at the beachfront restaurant across the road. You'll find this attractive green and yellow building 100m to the left once you reach the beach.

#### SA HUYNH

☎ 055

Unfortunately a surfeit of litter means that this beautiful semicircular beach with coarse golden sand is best enjoyed from a distance. The little town is also known for its salt marshes and salt-evaporation ponds. Archaeologists have unearthed remains from the Dong Son civilisation dating from the 1st century AD in the vicinity of Sa Huynh.

#### Sleeping & Eating

**Vinh Hotel** (☎ 860 385; Hwy 1A; r 120,000d) About 1km to the south of the town, this is a basic collection of rooms behind a popular restaurant with a little bridge linking it to a quiet section of beach. Rooms come with a fan, TV

#### MY LAI MASSACRE

At about 7.30am on 16 March 1968 – after the area had been bombarded with artillery, and the landing zone raked with rocket and machine-gun fire from helicopter gunships – the US army's Charlie Company (commanded by Captain Ernest Medina) landed by helicopter in the west of Son My, regarded as a Viet Cong stronghold. They encountered no resistance during the 'combat-assault', nor did they come under fire at any time during the entire operation; but as soon as their sweep eastward began, so did the atrocities.

As Lieutenant William Calley's 1st Platoon moved through Xom Lang, they shot and bayoneted fleeing villagers, threw hand grenades into houses and bomb shelters, slaughtered livestock and burned dwellings. Somewhere between 75 and 150 unarmed villagers were rounded up and herded to a ditch, where they were mowed down by machine-gun fire.

In the next few hours, as command helicopters circled overhead and American navy boats patrolled offshore, the 2nd Platoon (under Lieutenant Stephen Brooks), the 3rd Platoon (under Lieutenant Jeffrey La Cross) and the company headquarters group also committed unspeakable crimes. At least half a dozen groups of civilians, including women and children, were assembled and executed. Villagers fleeing towards Quang Ngai were machine-gunned, and wounded civilians (including young children) were summarily shot. As these massacres were taking place, at least four girls and women were raped or gang-raped by groups of soldiers.

By the end of the murderous rampage, 504 people had died including 182 women (17 of them pregnant), 173 children and 37 men over the age of sixty. One soldier is reported to have shot himself in the foot to extricate himself from the slaughter; he was the only American casualty in the entire operation.

Troops who participated were ordered to keep their mouths shut, but several disobeyed orders and went public with the story after returning to the USA. When it broke in the newspapers it had a devastating effect on the military's morale and fuelled further public protests against the war. It did little to persuade the world that the US Army was fighting on behalf of the Vietnamese people. Unlike WWII veterans, who returned home to parades and glory, soldiers coming home from Vietnam often found themselves ostracised and branded as 'baby killers'.

A cover-up of the atrocities was undertaken at all levels of the US army command, eventually leading to several investigations. Lieutenant Calley was made chief ogre and was court-martialled and found guilty of the murders of 22 unarmed civilians. He was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1971 and spent three years under house arrest at Fort Benning, Georgia, while appealing his conviction. Calley was paroled in 1974 after the US Supreme Court refused to hear his case. Calley's case still causes controversy – many claim that he was made a scapegoat because of his low rank, and that officers much higher up ordered the massacres. What is certain is that he didn't act alone.

For the full story of this horrendous event and its aftermath, pick up a copy of *Four Hours in My Lai* by Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim, a stunning piece of journalism.

and private toilet. The seafood restaurant is undoubtedly popular and the food's good, if you can make like a local and ignore the rats.

#### Getting There & Away

Sa Huynh is on Hwy 1A, about 60km south of Quang Ngai (1½ hours by bus) and 114km north of Quy Nhon (two hours by bus). There is no bus station, but it should be easy enough to pick up a passing bus on the highway in either direction. Make sure to agree on a price before you get on. A ticket bought from the bus station at Quang Ngai to Sa Huynh only

costs 20,000d. With this as a guide it should only cost 40,000d to Quy Nhon, although we've heard of people being charged four times as much.

#### QUY NHON

☎ 056 / pop 260,000

Surrounded by great beaches, ancient Cham temples and other interesting sights, it's inexplicable that Quy Nhon (Qui Nhon, pronounced Wee Ngon) is not firmly on the tourist trail. Yet this is what adds to its appeal. With few foreigners in sight, the peripheral market in hassling tourists is yet to establish

itself. You'll find precious few touts, hawkers, beggars, pimps or dealers and it's quite possible to walk down the street without anyone yelling after you 'Hello! Yo! You!'

The capital of Binh Dinh province and one of Vietnam's more active second-string seaports, this is a great spot to sample some fresh local seafood. It's perfectly located to break

the long journey from Hoi An to Nha Trang, with plenty to keep you occupied for a week, if lazing around on the beaches isn't enough.

During the American War there was considerable South Vietnamese, US, VC and South Korean military activity in the area. The mayor of Quy Nhon, hoping to cash in on the presence of US troops, turned his official resi-

dence into a large massage parlour. The large slums of tin-and-thatch shacks that sprang up around the city, built by refugees dislocated by fighting, have now largely gone.

There's a historical connection between Quy Nhon and New Zealand dating back to the early 1960s, when funds and staff from New Zealand were provided to the provincial hospital and later to aid refugees. The strong links continue today, with New Zealand's Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA) involved in projects in health, fisheries management, agriculture and rural development, and the New Zealand Vietnam Health Trust providing training and specialists for the local hospital. At any one time around half of the small expat community in Quy Nhon are Kiwis.

### Orientation

Quy Nhon is on the coast, 10km east of Hwy 1A's Phu Tai junction. The main part of town is on an east-west orientated peninsula, shaped like an anteater's nose. The tip of the nose (the port area) is closed to the public. The municipal beach is on the peninsula's south coast, curving around to face east.

### Information

**Binh Dinh Tourist** (☎ 892 524; fax 891 162; 10 Đ Nguyen Hue) For local tours.

**Dich Vu Internet** (☎ 811 262; 57 Đ Nguyen Hue; per hr 2000d)

**Main post office** (☎ 812 700; 197 Đ Phan Boi Chau; ☎ 6.30am-10pm)

**Kiwi Connection/Kiwi Café** (☎ 892 921; nzbarb@yahoo.com; 18 Đ Nguyen Hue) Free tourist information, bike and motorbike hire, local maps and connections with English-speaking drivers.

**Vietcombank** (☎ 822 266; 148 Đ Le Loi) On the corner of Đ Tran Hung Dao; has a 24-hour ATM. Further ATMs can be found outside the Hai Au Hotel (489 Đ An Duong Vuong) & the main post office (197 Đ Phan Boi Chau).

### Sights

#### MUNICIPAL BEACH

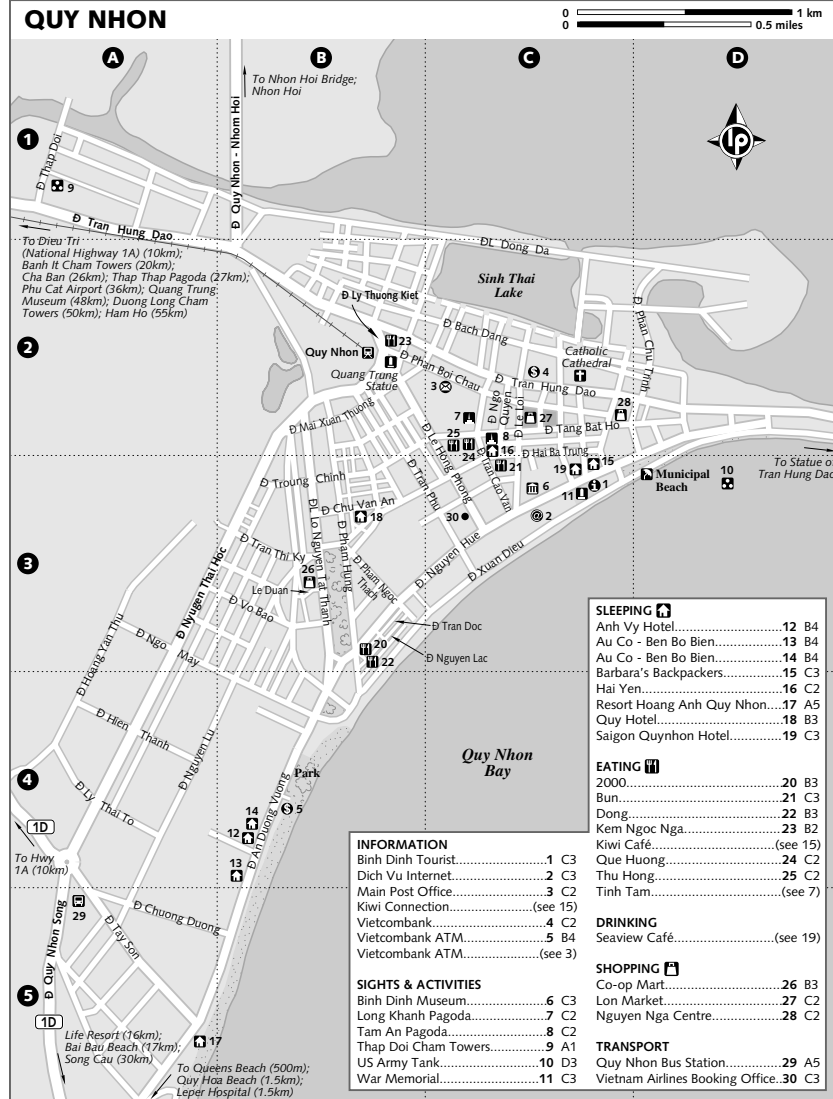
The long sweep of Quy Nhon's beachfront extends from the port in the northeast to the hills in the south. Beautiful to look at, it's not the cleanest place to swim. In 2006 a fishing village was cleared from the centre of the beach, cleaning up one of the least hygienic areas – a lack of basic sanitation meant you had to watch your step.

At the top end, the nicest section is near Barbara's Backpackers, where a grove of coconuts lines the road. At dawn and in the evenings this area is packed with locals practising Tai Chi. Further up the beach, at low tide one of Quy Nhon's more peculiar sights reveals itself – a **US Army tank**, half submerged in the sand where it was abandoned by its departing owners. In the distance you can see a giant **statue of Tran Hung Dao** giving the Chinese the finger on the far headland (see p138). Heading south, a striking socialist-realist **War Memorial** dominates a small square.

From here, buildings encroach on the waterfront for a kilometre before opening out to a parklike promenade, punctuated by large hotels, stretching to the south end of the bay. At night the bright lights of the squid boats give the illusion of a floating town far out to sea.

#### BINH DINH MUSEUM

This small **museum** (☎ 822 452; 28 Đ Nguyen Hue; admission free; ☎ 7-11am & 2-5pm summer, 7.30-11am &



1.30-4.30pm winter) features exhibits on regional history. The entry hall focuses on local Communism, including an interesting silk print (Zuy Nhat, 1959) showing a fat French colonist sitting aloft mandarins, in turn supported by bureaucrats, and cruel bosses, with the struggling masses supporting the whole lot. The room to the left has a small Natural History section and some Cham statues, while the rear room has the bulk of the excellent Cham collection. The room to the right of the entrance is devoted to the American War, with local relics such as the 'Spittoon of Heroic Vietnamese Mother Huynh Thi Bon'. A disturbing section captioned in English details various US and South Korean atrocities committed in the area.

### THAP DOI CHAM TOWERS

This remarkable pair of **Cham towers** (admission 20000; ☎ 8-11am & 1-6pm) sits within the city confines in a little park. Steep steps lead in to the former temples, which are open to the sky. Atypically for Cham architecture, they have curved pyramidal roofs rather than the usual terracing. The larger tower (20m tall) retains some of its ornate brickwork and remnants of the granite stuary that once graced its summit. The dismembered torsos of *garuda* (griffin-like beings) can be seen at the corners of the roofs.

To get here, take Đ Tran Hung Dao away from the centre and turn right into the lane after number 900 (Đ Thap Doi). The towers are down the first lane on the right, about 100m from the main road.

### LONG KHANH PAGODA

It's hard to miss the 17m-high Buddha (built in 1972), heralding Quy Nhon's main pagoda – set back from the road next to 143 Đ Tran Cao Van. Founded in 1715 by a Chinese merchant, the monks who reside here preside over the religious affairs of the city's relatively active Buddhist community.

The pagoda was repaired in 1957 after being damaged during the Franco-Viet Minh War. Mosaic dragons with manes of broken glass lead up to the main building, flanked by towers sheltering a giant drum (on the left) and an enormous bell (right). Inside, in front of the large copper Thich Ca Buddha (with its multicoloured neon halo) is a drawing of multi-armed and multi-eyed Chuan De (the Goddess of Mercy); the numerous arms and eyes symbolise her ability to touch and see all.

### TAM AN PAGODA

Quy Nhon's second most active pagoda, **Tam An** (58B Ngo Quyen), is a charming little place that attracts mostly female worshippers, although it's open to all.

### Sleeping BUDGET

**Barbara's Backpackers** (☎ 892 921; nzbarb@yahoo.com; 18 Đ Nguyen Hue; dm 40,000đ, r US\$6-10; ☎) An old-school backpackers with considerable charm but less in the way of facilities, Barbara's friendly establishment is Budget Heaven. Directly across from the beach, this slightly rundown but deliciously '70s building has crazy tiles, wood panels and a dramatic curved staircase. The great-value four-person dorm sits atop a large balcony-like rooftop with sea views. It has its own cold-water shower and separate toilet, but no air-con. A private room with a fan and shared bathroom costs US\$6, while the US\$10 room includes a basic en suite and air-con, but no fridge or TV.

**Anh Vy Hotel** (☎ 847 763; 8 Đ An Duong Vuong; r 120,000-200,000đ; ☎) This new, family-run mini-hotel has clean rooms with tiny en suites and some great sea views.

**Quy Hotel** (☎ 813 567; fax 812 188; 9 Đ Chu Van An; r 120,000-250,000đ; ☎) The décor is wild in this older establishment, where the bathrooms are like little houses inside the rooms and a rickety bamboo bridge leads to a lovely rooftop terrace.

**Hai Yen** (☎ 822 480; 104 Đ Hai Ba Trung; r 150,000-200,000; ☎) The nicest of the budget accommodation. What the family that runs this place lack in English they more than make up for in friendliness and service. All the rooms are different, so look at a few before deciding. Some are nearly suites, with a sitting area and private balcony.

**Au Co – Ben Bo Bien** (☎ 747 699; hotel\_auco@yahoo.com; 8 & 24 Đ An Duong Vuong; r 160,000-300,000đ; ☎) The same family runs these two hotels with the same name a block apart, made even more confusing by one of them sharing the same street address as the Anh Vy Hotel. Number 8 is the slightly nicer of the two, looking like a Vietnamese take on San Francisco's iconic houses. Narrow stairs with carved wooden dragons on the balustrades lead to clean rooms with tiny bathrooms but great sea-views and balconies. Number 24 has the same facilities and prices but is even more kitsch, with fake trees dominating the lobby.

### MIDRANGE & TOP END

**Saigon QuyNhon Hotel** (☎ 820 100; www.saigonquynhonhotel.com.vn; 24 Đ Nguyen Hue; s US\$35-50, d US\$45-60, ste US\$100-400; ☎ ☎ ☎) This flash new hotel, well positioned on the waterfront, has surprisingly reasonable rates. The rooms have all the bells and whistles, including safety boxes, plush carpets, fluffy bathrobes, free wireless internet and sea views.

**Resort Hoang Anh Quy Nhon** (☎ 747 100; www.hoanganhhotelgroup.com; 1 Đ Han Mac Tu; s US\$80-110, d US\$95-140, ste US\$200; ☎ ☎ ☎) Occupying a beautiful stretch of golden sand at the southernmost end of the bay, it's cruel that the water's not clean enough for swimming – although the enticing large swimming pool is just compensation. This stylish resort has a grand reception opening on to the water, a fitness centre, a tennis court and well-appointed rooms with nice linen and seaward balconies.

**Life Resort** (☎ 840 132; www.life-resorts.com; Ghenh Rang, Bai Dai Beach; r US\$152-175, ste US\$198; ☎ ☎ ☎) This Dutch-owned resort, set on a beautiful beach 18km south of the town, seems to have got every detail right. A subtle Cham influence carries through the architecture and interior design. The spacious, bright rooms are unfussily elegant, with stunning open-plan bathrooms. You can indulge in a spa treatment, Tai Chi on the beach, snorkelling or take a boat to the resort's little offshore island. The wonderful staff offer friendly service and speak excellent English – one can only hope they're paid commensurately to the prices. The restaurant's food and wine selection is exceptional.

### Eating & Drinking

**Kiwi Café** (☎ 892 921; nzbarb@yahoo.com; 18 Đ Nguyen Hue; mains 15,000-30,000đ; ☎) breakfast, lunch & dinner) The choice of ex-pats and tourists alike, this place has a welcoming vibe and serves delicious Western-style food. The smoothies are excellent, and breakfast includes Kiwi favourites such as French toast with bacon, bananas and maple syrup. It's also the best place for a drink in town, with the bar open later than most and interesting conversation easy to come by.

**Que Huong** (☎ 812 123; 125 Đ Tang Bat Ho; dishes 30,000-40,000đ) This friendly eatery spread over two floors has a good down-home vibe, serving everything from seafood and meat to snake and frogs.

**Thu Hong** (☎ 821 176; 189 Đ Tang Bat Ho; dishes 30,000-40,000đ) A small family place, serving a good fish soup.

**2000** (☎ 812 787; 1 Đ Tran Doc; dishes 40,000-90,000đ; ☎) lunch & dinner) There's no denying the freshness of the seafood, as you walk past the large tubs of live crabs and fish downstairs. A table on an upstairs balcony provides a little distance from the rowdy main dining room of this popular boozy joint. Try a seafood hotpot or some of the massive steamed prawns.

**Dong** (☎ 824 877; 26 Đ Nguyen Lac; dishes US\$3-10; ☎) lunch & dinner) Another of a cluster of popular seafood restaurants along the tiny lanes of Tran Doc and Nguyen Lac towards the centre of the bay. Keep heading upstairs for a slightly quieter meal.

**Tinh Tam** (141 Đ Tran Cao Van; mains 5000-10,000đ), Right next to Long Khanh Pagoda, this place serves extremely good vegetarian meals in basic surrounds.

**Bun** (79 Đ Hai Ba Trung; meals 7000đ) A humble place which does great *pho*, served with lots of fresh herbs and a pastry stick.

**Seaview Café** (☎ 820 100; 24 Đ Nguyen Hue) On the 8th-floor rooftop of the Saigon QuyNhon Hotel, this is a great place to grab a coffee or a sundowner and enjoy the amazing views. There's also free wi-fi.

Quy Nhon has lots of delicious street food all around the town centre. If you've got a sweet tooth, check out the tasty bakery items and ice cream at **Kem Ngoc Nga** (☎ 821 562; 326 Đ Phan Boi Chau).

### Shopping

**Lon Market** (Cho Lon, Đ Tang Bat Ho) In the dead centre of town, you'll find everything you'd expect from a Vietnamese market – from fruit and meat, to clothes and hardware.

**Co-op Mart** (☎ 821 321; 7 Đ Le Duan) This huge new development is supposedly a supermarket but, like a traditional market, sells a little bit of everything. The only difference between this and Lon Market is that prices are marked and there are check-outs.

**Nguyen Nga Centre** (☎ 891 296; nngacenter@dng.vn.vn; 2 Đ Tang Bat Ho) The shop attached to this centre for disabled children (see p276) sells lovely homemade weavings, handicrafts and clothing, with the money going towards running the centre and giving the students an income. Shedding US\$50 here will provide you with a huge bagful of interesting gifts to take home. Don't be put off if the gate's closed – it's kept shut to ensure none of the kids wander off.

### THE AMAZING MS NGA

How does a young woman end up responsible for a school for 250 disabled students, 100 of which live on site?

For Ms Nguyen Thi Thanh Nga it all started in 1990 when her younger sister severely injured her leg in an accident. While caring for her sister, the awful plight of disabled people in her poverty-stricken homeland really hit home. In 1993, having just left high school herself, Nga leapt into action – starting vocational handicrafts training (knitting and embroidery) for 10 young people with disabilities. Thirteen years later her school has stretched to two buildings and has programmes in literacy, sign language, Braille, computer skills, dress-making, handicrafts, art and music – for children with impaired hearing, impaired sight, intellectual or physical disabilities. An early intervention programme means that there is residential care for infants ranging from one to six.

Apart from the buildings, the centre gets no financial support from the government. It is completely dependent on donations and the money made by the sale of handicrafts. A contract with Intrepid Travel producing satchels embroidered with the slogan 'Say no to plastic bags' is one way the older kids can earn some money, with a percentage going to the running of the centre.

If you're not financially able to make a donation or buy stacks of goodies in the shop, there are still a number of ways you can contribute. Consider bringing a bagful of old clothes or toys with you. Perhaps someone in the family has a stash of old baby clothes in the attic. How about that old laptop gathering dust since your last upgrade? Look at it this way – you can use the bag you've emptied out to fill up again with new gear in the tailor shops in Hoi An! If you've got experience in working with disabled children, or you're happy to muck in practically, volunteering might be an option. Make sure you email or phone first to see whether you can be of use.

Walking around the centre with Nga, it's obvious how much the kids love her. This beautiful, passionate young woman works here seven days a week. This is her life.

### Getting There & Away

#### AIR

Vietnam Airlines flights link Quy Nhon with HCMC daily (515,000d) and with Danang three times per week (365,000d).

There's a **Vietnam Airlines booking office** (☎ 825 313; 55 Đ Le Hong Phong) offering a minibus transfer (25,000d) for airline passengers between the office and Phu Cat airport, 36km north of the city.

#### BUS

**Quy Nhon bus station** (Ben Xe Khach Quy Nhon; ☎ 846 246; Đ Tay Son) is on the south side of town. The next major stop north is Quang Ngai (60,000d, 3½ hours), with 11 daily buses heading on to Danang (65,000d) and one to Huế (110,000d). Heading south there are regular services to Tuy Hoa (50,000d, two hours) and on to Nha Trang (65,000d), with four heading all the way to HCMC (155,000d).

Quy Nhon is a great access point for the central highlands. There are plenty of buses to Pleiku (45,000d, four hours, 18 daily), of which five head on to Kon Tum (50,000d, five hours) and at least one to Buon Ma Thuot (85,000d) and Dalat (110,000d).

It is now possible to get a bus all the way to Pakse in Laos, crossing the new border north of Kon Tum (250,000d, 12 hours, four per week). Lao visas are not available at this border.

#### CAR & MOTORBIKE

Road distances from Quy Nhon are: 677km to HCMC, 238km to Nha Trang, 186km to Pleiku, 198km to Kon Tum, 174km to Quang Ngai and 303km to Danang.

#### TRAIN

The nearest *Reunification Express* trains get to Quy Nhon is Dieu Tri, 10km from the city. **Quy Nhon train station** (Ga Quy Nhon; Đ Le Hong Phong; ☎ 822036) is at the end of a 10km spur off the main north–south track. Only very slow local trains stop here and they are not worth bothering with. It's better to get to/from Dieu Tri by taxi or *xe om* (motorcycle taxi) for around 50,000d.

Tickets for trains departing from Dieu Tri can be purchased at the Quy Nhon train station, though if you arrive in Dieu Tri by train, your best bet is to purchase an onward ticket before leaving the station. Ticket prices

to destinations include: Danang (133,000d, 5½ to 7½ hours, seven daily), Quang Ngai (72,000d, 2½ to four hours, seven daily), Tuy Hoa (44,000d, 1½ to two hours, seven daily), Nha Trang (93,000d, four hours, eight daily) and HCMC (248,000d, 10 to 14 hours, seven daily).

### AROUND QUY NHON Beaches

The water quality of the beaches improves considerably once you round the Ganh Rang hill to the south of the town. Several beaches are easily accessible by bicycle.

#### QUEEN'S BEACH

Popular with locals, this stony little beach at the foot of Ganh Rang was once a favourite holiday spot of Queen Nam Phuong. There's a café and great views back over Quy Nhon. To get here, take Đ An Duong Vuong to the far south end of Quy Nhon's beachfront and continue as the road starts to climb. After it crosses a small bridge, turn sharply to the left and head through the gates where you will need to pay the entrance fee (5000d). Follow the path up the hill, keeping to the left where it forks. Queen's Beach is signposted to the left.

#### QUY HOA BEACH & LEPPER HOSPITAL

Leprosy may not conjure up images of fun in the sun, but this really is a lovely spot. As leper hospitals go, this one is highly unusual. Rather than being a depressing place, it's a sort of model village near the seafront, where treated patients live together with their families in small, well-kept houses. Depending on their abilities, the patients work in the rice fields, in fishery, and in repair-oriented businesses or small craft shops (one supported by Handicap International produces prosthetic limbs).

The **grounds of the hospital** (☎ 646 343; admission 3000d; ☎ 8-11.30am & 1.30-4pm) are so well maintained that it looks a bit like a resort, complete with a guitar-shaped pavilion and numerous busts of distinguished and historically important doctors (both Vietnamese and foreign). Fronting the village is **Quy Hoa Beach**, one of the nicer stretches of sand around Quy Nhon and a popular weekend hang-out for the city's expat community. Just up from the beach, there's a dirt path to the hillside **Tomb of Han Mac Tu**, a mystical poet who died in 1940.

If travelling by foot or bicycle, continue along the road past Queen's Beach until it descends to the hospital's entrance gates, about 1.5km south of Quy Nhon. It's also accessible from the road to Song Cau by taking a left turn once the water comes back into view after crossing the hills south of town.

#### BAI BAU BEACH

While the Life Resort charges nonguests an extortionate US\$10 to lounge on their beach (whether they've spent a fortune at the restaurant or not), those in the know will head a kilometre to the north for an even better beach at less than a 10th of the price. **Bai Bau** (admission 5000d, deck chair 5000d) is a beautiful white-sand crescent no more than 150m wide, sheltered by rocky headlands, with mountains for a backdrop. It can get busy on the weekend and during Vietnamese holidays, but midweek you'll likely have the place to yourself.

Bai Bau is well signed, just off the road to Song Cau, 19km south of Quy Nhon.

#### Cham Sites

The former Cham capital of Cha Ban (also known as Vijay and Quy Nhon) was located 26km north of Quy Nhon and 5km from Binh Dinh. While an archaeologically important site, there's not a lot to see. However, there are several interesting Cham structures dotted around the area.

#### BANH IT CHAM TOWERS

The most interesting and accessible of the area's Cham sites, this group of four towers is clearly visible from Hwy 1A, sitting atop a hill 20km to the north of Quy Nhon. The architecture of each tower is distinctly different, although all were built around the end of the 11th century and the beginning of the 12th. The smaller, barrel-roofed tower has the most intricate carvings, although there's still a wonderfully toothy face looking down on it from the wall of the largest tower. A large Buddhist pagoda sits on the side of the hill under the lowest of the towers. There are great views of the surrounding countryside from the top of the hill.

The **Banh It Cham Towers** (Phuoc Hiep, Tuy Phuoc district; admission free; ☎ 7-11am & 1.30-4.30pm) are easily reached by taking Đ Tran Hung Dao out of town for about 30 minutes, when you'll see the towers in the distance to the right of the road. After the traffic lights joining the main

highway, cross the bridge and turn right. Take the left turn heading up the hill to reach the entrance.

### DUONG LONG CHAM TOWERS

The **Duong Long Cham towers** (Binh Hoa, Tay Son district; admission free; ☎ 7-11am & 1.30-4.30pm) are harder to find, sitting in the countryside about 50km northwest of Quy Nhon. Dating from the late 12th century, the largest of the three brick towers (24m high) is embellished with granite ornamentation representing *naga* (a mythical serpent being with divine powers) and elephants (Duong Long means Towers of Ivory). Over the doors are bas-reliefs of women, dancers, monsters and various animals. The corners of the structure are formed by enormous dragon heads. At the time of research a major dig was taking place, revealing well-preserved carvings about 1m below the present ground level at the base of the towers. A major restoration job was also in progress.

You're best to visit the towers with a driver or a tour, as the site is reached by a succession of pretty country lanes through rice paddies and over rickety bridges.

### OTHER TOWERS

Several single towers sprout out of farmland around the area. These are not as well restored

as the big sites, and they generally have no gates or admission charges. You'll need an experienced guide (enquire at Barbara's Kiwi Café or Binh Dinh Tourist, see p273) and a couple of days to spare if you want to track them all down.

**Thu Thien** (Binh Nghi, Tay Son district) is not far off Hwy 19, 35km northwest from Quy Nhon, and can easily be combined with a visit to Duong Long and the Quang Trung Museum. **Phu Loc** (Nhon Thanh village, An Nhon district) translates as the Gold Tower and has beautiful views, while **Canh Tien** (Nhon Hau, An Nhon district), built in the 16th century, is named after upturned leaf shapes at the top which are said to resemble fairy wings. **Binh Lam** (Phuoc Hoa village, Tuy Phuoc district) sits high on a hill, 22km from Quy Nhon.

### Quang Trung Museum

Nguyen Hue, the second-oldest of the three brothers who led the Tay Son Rebellion, crowned himself Emperor Quang Trung in 1788. In 1789 Quang Trung led the campaign that overwhelmingly defeated a Chinese invasion of 200,000 troops near Hanoi. This epic battle is still celebrated as one of the greatest triumphs in Vietnamese history.

During his reign, Quang Trung was something of a social reformer. He encouraged land reform, revised the system of taxation, im-

proved the army and emphasised education, opening many schools and encouraging the development of Vietnamese poetry and literature. He died in 1792 at the age of 40. Communist literature portrays him as the leader of a peasant revolution whose progressive policies were crushed by the reactionary Nguyen dynasty, which came to power in 1802 and was overthrown by Ho Chi Minh in 1945.

The **Quang Trung Museum** (Phu Phong; admission 10,000d; ☎ 8-11.30am & 1-4.30pm Mon-Fri) is built on the site of the brothers' house and encloses the original well and a 200-year-old tamarind tree said to be planted by them. Displays include various statues, costumes, documents and artefacts from the 18th century, most of them labelled in English. Especially notable are the elephant-skin battle drums and gongs from the Bahnar tribe. The museum is also known for its demonstrations of *vo binh dinh*, a traditional martial art that is performed with a bamboo stick.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

The museum is about 50km from Quy Nhon. Take Hwy 19 west for 40km towards Pleiku. The museum is about 5km north of the highway (the turn-off is sign-posted) in Phu Phong, Tay Son district.

### Ham Ho

A beautiful nature reserve 55km from Quy Nhon, **Ham Ho** (☎ 880 860; Tay Phu; admission 5,000d; ☎ 7-11.30am & 1-4.30pm) can easily be combined with a trip to the Quang Trung Museum. Taking up a jungle-lined 3km stretch of clean, fish-filled river, the park is best enjoyed by boat (50,000d). The further up-river you travel, the better the swimming spots are.

The road to Ham Ho is signposted to the south of Hwy 19 at Tay Son.

### Thap Thap Pagoda

This peaceful pagoda in the heart of the countryside was built in the 17th century partly from material stripped from neighbouring Cham towers. It's a lovely piece of Buddhist architecture with a deep veranda surrounded by attractive gardens. Take time to wander through the serene cemetery behind.

To find it, take Hwy 1A for 27km northwest of Quy Nhon. Just past Dong Da village turn left before a small bridge labelled Can Van Thuan 2 onto a tiny country lane leading to Nhon Hau village.

## SONG CAU

☎ 057

The village of Song Cau is an obscure place that you could easily drive past without ever noticing, but nearby is an immense beautiful bay. It makes a good rest stop for tourists doing the Nha Trang-Hoi An run. Song Cau is along a notorious stretch of Hwy 1A dubbed the 'Happy 16 Kilometres' by long-distance truck drivers, named for the 'taxi girls' who ply their trade by the roadside along this stretch.

### Getting There & Away

Song Cau is 170km north of Nha Trang and 30km south of Quy Nhon. Highway buses can drop off and pick up here (with luck). If travelling with your own wheels, consider taking the newly completed coastal road between Song Cau and Quy Nhon; the scenery is stunning, and there are several good beaches en route.

### TUY HOA

☎ 057 / pop 165,000

Pronounced Twee Hwa, the capital of Phu Yen province is a friendly little place with a nice wide beach with coarse golden sand – a great overnight stop to break up a longer journey.

The few sights the town has are all on hill-tops visible from Hwy 1A. There's a huge **Seated Buddha** which greets you if you're approaching from the north. To the south of town the **Nhan Cham Tower** is an impressive sight, particularly when it's illuminated at night. The climb to the tower takes you through a small **Botanic Garden** and is rewarded by great views. On a side of the same hill a massive white **Monument** was under construction at the time of research, with sails a little like the Sydney Opera House.

### Orientation & Information

Hwy 1A forms the western edge of town with the Da Rang River to the south. The main street, Tran Hung Dao, runs several kilometres from the highway to the beach in the east.

**Incombank ATM** (239 Đ Tran Hung Dao) Opposite the market.

**Main post office** (cnr Đ Tran Hung Dao & Nguyen Thai)  
**Phong Thuc Hanh Internet** (☎ 836 228; 2 Đ Nguyen Hue)

### Sleeping & Eating

**Ai Cuc** (☎ 819 224; 6 Đ Le Quy Don; r 120,000-300,000d; ☎) This very pink place has a waterfall in the reception and big, bright, clean rooms with

### THE LOST CITY OF CHAMPA

Cha Ban, which served as the capital of Champa from the year 1000 (after the loss of Indrapura/Dong Duong) until 1471, was attacked and plundered repeatedly by the Vietnamese, Khmers and Chinese.

In 1044 the Vietnamese Prince Phat Ma occupied the city and carried off a great deal of booty along with the Cham king's wives, harem, female dancers, musicians and singers. Cha Ban was under the control of a Khmer overseer from 1190 to 1220. In 1377 the Vietnamese were defeated and their king was killed in an attempt to capture Cha Ban. The Vietnamese emperor Le Thanh Ton breached the eastern gate of the city in 1471 and captured the Cham king and 50 members of the royal family. During this, the last great battle fought by the Cham, 60,000 Cham were killed and 30,000 more were taken prisoner by the Vietnamese.

During the Tay Son Rebellion, Cha Ban served as the capital of central Vietnam, and was ruled by the eldest of the three Tay Son brothers. It was attacked in 1793 by the forces of Nguyen Anh (later Emperor Gia Long), but the assault failed. In 1799 they laid siege to the city again, under the command of General Vu Tinh, this time capturing it.

The Tay Son soon reoccupied the port of Thi Nai (modern-day Quy Nhon) and then laid siege to Cha Ban themselves. The siege continued for over a year, and by June 1801, Vu Tinh's provisions were gone. Food was in short supply; all the horses and elephants had long since been eaten. Refusing to consider the ignominy of surrender, Vu Tinh had an octagonal wooden tower constructed. He filled it with gunpowder and, arrayed in his ceremonial robes, went inside and blew himself up. Upon hearing the news of the death of his dedicated general, Nguyen Anh wept.

balconies. The staff are very welcoming without speaking much English. There are great views from the popular seafood restaurant upstairs (dishes 40,000d to 90,000d). You'll find it on a quiet side street heading north off Tran Hung Dao, a few blocks past the market.

**Cong Doan Hotel** (☎ 823 187; 53 Đ Doc Lap; r US\$15; ☹) Right by the beach, this large blue and peach establishment (they sure love their pastels) has tidy rooms and some amazing sea views.

You'll find more hotels and plenty of humble restaurants and street vendors along the highway and Đ Tran Hung Dao, as well as a stretch of seafood restaurants and *bia hoi* (draught beer) joints along the beach.

### Getting there & away

Tuy Hoa has no bus station, but buses tend to stop for fares at the petrol station on Hwy 1A, not far from the Cham Tower. There are regular buses to Quy Nhon (50,000d, two hours, 110km) and Nha Trang (50,000d, 3½ hours, 123km).

A stop on the *Reunification Express*, **Tuy Hoa Train Station** (Ga Tuy Hoa; ☎ 823 672; 149 Le Trung Kien) is on the road parallel to the highway, north of the main street. Destinations include Danang (153,000d, seven to 10 hours, five daily), Quang Ngai (97,000d, five to six hours, four daily) and Nha Trang (44,000d, 2½ hours, five daily).

Vietnam Airlines operates three flights weekly between Tuy Hoa and HCMC (530,000d). There's a **Vietnam Airlines Booking Office** (☎ 826 508; 353 Tran Hung Dao) in the centre of town and the airport is 8km to the south.

## BEACHES NORTH OF NHA TRANG

☎ 058

The coastal drive between Tuy Hoa and Nha Trang on Hwy 1A provides tantalising glimpses of a number of beautiful remote spots, while others hide in the jungle along promontories and on islands. Decent accommodation options are limited, but as a day trip there's plenty to discover if you've got your own wheels. Throw away the guidebook for a day and go exploring.

### Dai Lanh Beach

While half of semicircular Dai Lanh Beach is eaten up by an unattractive fishing village, the south end is still shaded by casuarina trees, along with the hulk of an abandoned hotel

project. About 1km south is a vast sand-dune causeway worth exploring; it connects the mainland to Hon Gom, a mountainous peninsula almost 30km in length. Boats for Whale Island leave from Hom Gom's main village **Dam Mon**, set on a sheltered bay.

It's possible to stay overnight under the trees right on Dai Lanh Beach if you're not fussy about comfort. **Thuy Ta Restaurant** (☎ 842 117; tents 15,000d, r 70,000-120,000d) has tents, as well as some ultra-simple straw-roof beach bungalows, with brick floors and fans. Toilets are shared, and for nonguests there's a charge of 3000d for the use of cold showers. Fresh seafood features prominently on the menu; expect mains to cost about 30,000d. Keep a close eye on your gear; we've had a few reports of theft.

Dai Lanh is situated 40km south of Tuy Hoa and 83km north of Nha Trang on Hwy 1A. Any highway buses can drop you here and there's a local train station.

### Whale Island

A 15-minute boat ride from Dam Mon (see above, Whale Island is a tiny speck on the map – home to the lovely and secluded French-run **Whale Island Resort** (☎ 840 501; www.whaleislandresort.com; s/d/tr/q US\$110/140/155/180). While single night-rates are expensive for the simple bamboo beachfront bungalows, it discounts substantially depending on length of stay; for example, a five-night stay averages US\$52 per night for a single – less than half the rate for one night. Prices include the two-hour car journey from Cam Ranh airport, boat transfers and three meals per day.

Rainbow Divers (see p288) have a permanent base on the island, and the Nha Trang office can take resort bookings and help with transfers. Scuba-diving season ends in mid-October, starting up again in mid-February. Despite the damaging effects of dynamite fishing, environmental protection efforts (including the transplanting of sea coral) around the resort bay have brought about a marked increase in the number of marine species – from 40 to over 170.

### Doc Let Beach

This lovely stretch of beachfront is long and wide, with chalk-white sand and shallow water. Doc Let (pronounced 'yop lek') is easily accessible from Nha Trang, and worth considering as a day trip (beach entrance fee

10,000d) or overnight stop. Although there's a small town nearby, the resorts on the beach are fairly isolated. If you're staying here, be prepared to do nothing but lay around.

### SLEEPING

**Paradise Resort** (☎ 670 480; www.vngold.com/doclet/paradise; bungalows s US\$14-16, d US\$20-22) Quite separate from the busy part of the beach in the tiny village of Dom Hai, this simple place is run by a Frenchman and his young Vietnamese family. Accommodation is basic, but the flimsy new bamboo huts are atmospheric at least, fitted with mosquito nets and tiny fans. The price would seem hefty if it didn't include three meals, as well as free bottled water, tea, coffee and fruit. Being in the village you can explore the little food market, street stalls and colourful Buddhist pagoda, under the ominous presence of an abandoned American guardtower. Follow the blue signs past the turn-off for Doc Let Resort for 2km, turning right at a petrol station and then right again halfway through the village.

**Doc Let Beach Resort** (☎ 849 152; docletresort@dng.vnn.vn; bungalows fan/air-con 150,000/250,000d; ☹ ☹) Catering mainly to domestic tourists, this large complex with 28 concrete bungalows is nestled in a casuarina grove, right on the beach. Excellent for the price and setting, the rooms are clean, and facilities include a swimming pool, tennis courts, two restaurants, a bar and, of course, karaoke and massage facilities.

**White Sand Doclet Resort & Spa** (☎ 670 670; www.whitesandresort.com.vn; r US\$51, bungalows US\$60-88; ☹ ☹ ☹) Designed with a view to Western tastes, this brand new resort provides an up-market option, with nice linen, bathrobes, slippers and safes in all the rooms. All the bungalows face the beach, while the more expensive have king-size beds, a large bath, a huge TV and a DVD player. A nicely low-rise hotel looks over the pool, with very similar room facilities to the bungalows, all with a private balcony or terrace.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Head 35km north of Nha Trang on Hwy 1A, turning right (east) about 4km past Ninh Hoa. Continue for 10km past photogenic salt fields, looking out for the signs to the resorts. Make a left turn to take you through Doc Let village and then a right to the beach. There is no public transport, but tour operators in Nha Trang

offer day trips often coupled with Monkey Island. If you're planning on staying here, enquire at your resort regarding transfers.

### Ninh Van Bay

This place doesn't really exist – except in an alternate reality populated by European royalty, filmstars and the otherwise rich and secretive. Occupying a secluded beach at the end of a dense jungle-covered peninsula north of Nha Trang, there are no roads to the secure home of **Evason Hideaway & Six Senses Spa at Ana Mandara** (☎ 728 222; www.sixsenses.com/hideaway-anamandara; villas US\$633-2070; ☹ ☹ ☹). Access is strictly restricted to guests only, via a half-hour ride on the resort's speedboat from a landing point 14km north of Nha Trang. The resort even has its own time zone – setting the clocks an hour ahead in an effort to encourage guests to enjoy the sunrise. The traditionally inspired architecture and the dirt tracks between buildings give the illusion of a jungle village – albeit one where every dwelling is an elegant two-storey villa, each with its own swimming pool and round-the-clock butler service. As you would hope for the price, the facilities and attention to detail are superb, the staff are friendly and helpful, and the setting is simply magical.

## NHA TRANG

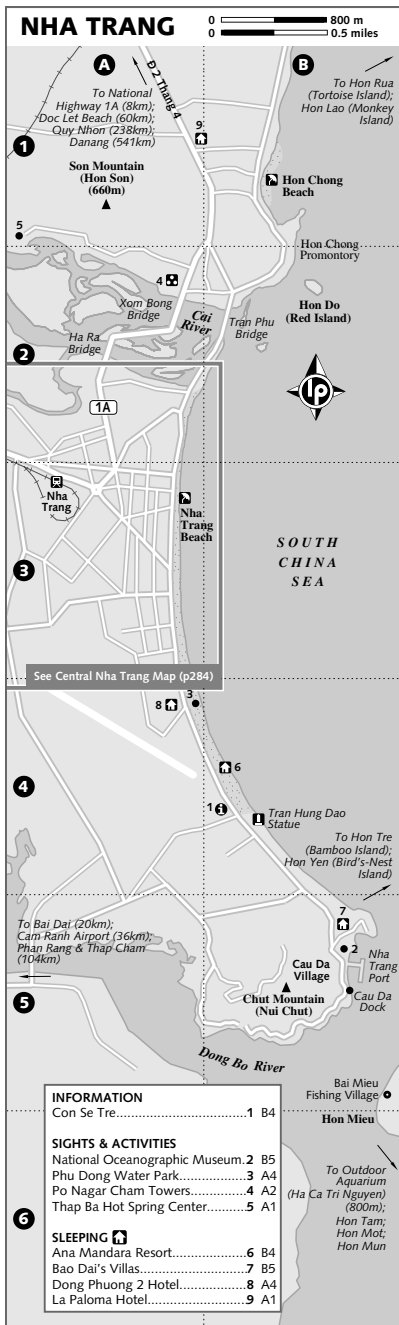
☎ 058 / pop 315,200

Nha Trang has a split personality. One takes the form of a smaller Danang – a bustling Vietnamese city humming with commerce but blessed with access to a beautiful beach. The other is a Western resort town encompassing several blocks of hotels, tourist shops, bars and international restaurants. Entering this sheltered enclave you could be anywhere in the world, if it weren't for the constant hassling from *xé om* drivers, many of whom seem to moonlight as pimps and dealers.

The city is indisputably beautiful, bordered by mountains, with the beach tracing an impressive long swoop along a bay dotted with islands. Topiary and modern sculpture dot the immaculately manicured foreshore. The only blight on the horizon is the Hollywood-style sign for the Vinpearl complex – an ugly scar dominating nearby Hon Tre Island.

Nha Trang offers plenty to keep tourists occupied – from island-hopping boat trips and scuba diving, to mudbaths and historic sites. But the main attraction for most visitors is





lounging around on deckchairs at a beachfront bar and drinking cocktails in comfort.

**Information**

**BOOKSHOPS**

**Shorty's Café Bar** (Map p284; ☎ 524 057; 1E Đ Biet Thu) Carries secondhand books, mostly in English.

**INTERNET ACCESS**

Nha Trang has dozens of designated internet cafés all over town, and you can also get online in many hotels and travellers' cafés.

**MEDICAL SERVICES**

**Pasteur Institute** (Map p284; ☎ 822 355; 10 Đ Tran Phu) Offers medical consultations and vaccinations. See p286.

**MONEY**

**Vietcombank** (Map p284; ☎ 822 720; 17 Đ Quang Trung; ☹ Mon-Fri) changes travellers cheques and gives cash advances. There's another **Vietcombank branch** (Map p284; ☎ 524 500; 5 Đ Hung Vuong) which has an ATM, and also exchanges cash and travellers cheques. There is a handy **Vietcombank ATM** (Map p284; 4 Đ Le Loi) outside the main post office and another **Vietcombank ATM** (Map p284; 60 Đ Tran Phu) outside the Que Huong Hotel.

**POST**

**Main post office** (Map p284; ☎ 823 866; 4 Đ Le Loi; ☹ 6.30am-10pm)  
**Post office branches** 50 Đ Le Thanh Ton (Map p284; ☎ 652 070; ☹ 7am-11pm); 1/29 Đ Tran Quang Khai (Map p284; ☎ 522 099)

**TRAVEL AGENCIES**

**Khanh Hoa Tours** (Map p284; ☎ 526 753; khtourism@dng.vnn.vn; 1 Đ Tran Hung Dao) Offers various tour programmes, including boat trips.

**Mama Linh's Boat Tours** (Map p284; ☎ 522 844; fax 522 845; 23C Đ Biet Thu) Known for its boat tours, Mama Linh's can also arrange trips around the province and into the highlands.

**Sinh Café** (Map p284; ☎ 524 329; sinhcafet@dng.vnn.vn; 10 Đ Biet Thu) Offers bargain basement local tours as well as open-tour buses.

**Dangers & Annoyances**

In Nha Trang there are many ways for you and your money to part company. We've heard reports of thefts on the beach (pickpockets, and jewellery disappearing during an embrace), during massages (a third person sneaks into the room and removes money from clothes) and from hotel rooms (none of the ones listed

in this book, but you should still be cautious). Don't carry too much on you, and consider leaving surplus cash at the hotel reception. That way the hotel is responsible if it goes missing, although even this may not protect you from unscrupulous operators.

At tourist sites unobservant foreigners may be overcharged – check the price on pre-printed tickets, check your change and don't pay more than a 2000 dong for bicycle parking.

A persistent scam exists at the Long Son Pagoda, where you will be approached by children with pre-printed name badges (and occasionally older people) claiming to work for the monks. After showing you around the pagoda, whether invited to or not, they will then demand money 'for the monks' or, if that fails, insist that you buy postcards for 100,000d. The best course of action is to firmly let them know you don't require their services when they first appear. If they persist, tell them that you know they don't work for the monks and you're not about to give them any money – this should ensure a quick disappearance. If you want to give money towards the monks and upkeep of the complex, leave it in the donation boxes as you would in any other pagoda.

**Sights**

**NHA TRANG BEACH**

The clear turquoise waters of Nha Trang's 6km beach are best enjoyed during the dry season – from June to early October. During heavy rains, run off from the rivers at each end of the beach flows into the bay, gradually turning it a murky brown. Most of the year, however, the water is as it appears in the tourist brochures. Even in the wettest months, rain usually falls only at night or in the morning. The best beach weather is generally before 1pm; the afternoon sea breezes can make things unpleasant until the wind dies back down around 8pm.

Beach chairs are available for rent where you can sit and enjoy the drinks, light food or massages that the beach vendors have on offer. About the only time you'll need to move is to use the toilet or when the tide comes up. The two most popular lounging spots are the Sailing Club and Louisiane Brewhouse (see p292).

**PO NAGAR CHAM TOWERS**

The Cham towers of **Po Nagar** (Thap Ba, the Lady of the City; Map p282; admission 4500d; ☹ 6am-6pm) were built between the 7th and 12th centuries, although the site was used for worship as early as

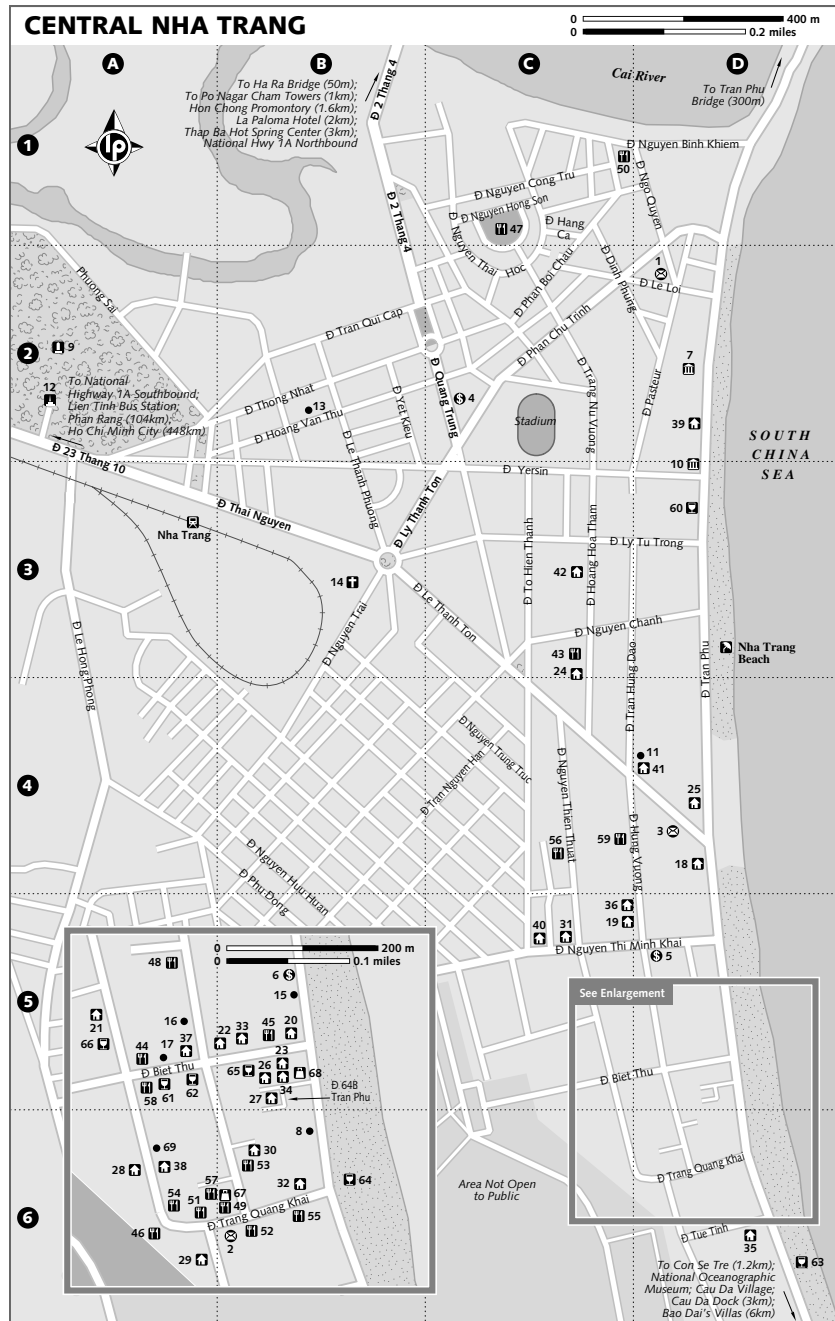
the 2nd century AD. To this day Cham, ethnic Chinese and Vietnamese Buddhists come to Po Nagar to pray and make offerings, according to their respective traditions. This site has a continuing religious significance, so be sure to remove your shoes before entering.

The towers serve as the Holy See, honouring Yang Ino Po Nagar, the goddess of the Dua (Liu) clan, which ruled over the southern part of the Cham kingdom covering Kauthara and Pan Duranga (present day Khanh Hoa and Thuan Hai provinces). The original wooden structure was razed to the ground by attacking Javanese in AD 774 but was replaced by a stone-and-brick temple (the first of its kind) in 784. There are inscribed stone slabs scattered throughout the complex, most of which relate to history or religion, and provide insight into the spiritual life and social structure of the Cham.

Originally the complex covered an area of 500 sq metres and there were seven or eight towers, four of which remain. All of the temples face east, as did the original entrance to the complex, which is to the right as you ascend the hillock. In centuries past, a person coming to pray passed through the pillared meditation hall, 10 pillars of which can still be seen, before proceeding up the steep staircase to the towers.

The 28m-high **North Tower** (Thap Chinh), with its terraced pyramidal roof, vaulted interior masonry and vestibule, is a superb example of Cham architecture. One of the tallest Cham towers, it was built in AD 817 after the original temples here were sacked and burned. The raiders also carried off a *linga* (see p265) made of precious metal. In AD 918 King Indravarman III placed a gold *mukha-linga* (a carved phallus with a human face painted on it) in the North Tower, but it too was taken, this time by the Khmers. This pattern of statues being destroyed or stolen and then replaced continued until 965, when King Jaya Indravarman I replaced the gold *mukha-linga* with the stone figure, Uma (*shakti*, or a feminine manifestation of Shiva), which remains to this day.

Above the entrance to the North Tower, two musicians flank a dancing four-armed Shiva, one of whose feet is on the head of the bull Nandin. The sandstone doorposts are covered with inscriptions, as are parts of the walls of the vestibule. A gong and a drum stand under the pyramid-shaped ceiling of



the antechamber. In the 28m-high pyramidal main chamber, there is a black stone statue of the goddess Uma with 10 arms, two of which are hidden under her vest; she is seated and leaning back against some sort of monstrous animal.

The **Central Tower** (Thap Nam) was built partly of recycled bricks in the 12th century on the site of a structure dating from the 7th century. It is less finely constructed than the other towers and has little ornamentation; the pyramidal roof lacks terracing or pilasters, although the interior altars were once covered with silver. There is a *linga* inside the main chamber. Note the inscription on the left-hand wall of the vestibule.

The **South Tower** (Mieu Dong Nam), at one time dedicated to Sandhaka (Shiva), still shelters a *linga*, while the richly ornamented **Northwest Tower** (Thap Tay Bac) was originally dedicated to Ganesha. To the rear of the complex is a small **museum** with a few mediocre examples of Cham stonework; the explanatory signs are in Vietnamese only.

The towers of Po Nagar stand on a granite knoll, 2km north of central Nha Trang on the banks of the Cai River. To get here from central Nha Trang, take D Quang Trung (which

becomes D 2 Thang 4) north across the Ha Ra and Xom Bong Bridges. Po Nagar can also be reached via the new Tran Phu Bridge along the beachfront road.

### LONG SON PAGODA

This striking **pagoda** (Map p284; ☎ 7.30-11.30am & 1.30-8pm) was founded in the late 19th century and has been rebuilt several times over the years. The entrance and roofs are decorated with mosaic dragons constructed of glass and bits of ceramic tile. The main sanctuary is a hall adorned with modern interpretations of traditional motifs. Note the ferocious nose hairs on the colourful dragons wrapped around the pillars on either side of the main altar.

At the top of the hill, behind the pagoda, is a huge white **Buddha** (Kim Than Phat To) seated on a lotus blossom and visible from all over the city. Around the statue's base are fire-ringed relief busts of Thich Quang Duc and six other Buddhist monks who died in self-immolations in 1963 (see p221). The platform around the 14m-high figure has great views of Nha Trang and nearby rural areas. As you approach the pagoda from the street, the 152 stone steps up the hill to the Buddha begin to the right of the

### INFORMATION

Main Post Office.....	1 D2
Pasteur Institute.....	(see 7)
Post Office.....	2 B6
Post Office.....	3 D4
Vietcombank.....	4 C2
Vietcombank.....	5 D5
Vietcombank ATM.....	6 B5
Vietcombank ATM.....	(see 1)

### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Alexandre Yersin Museum.....	7 D2
Blue Diving Club.....	8 B6
Buddha.....	9 A2
Khanh Hoa Museum.....	10 D3
Khanh Hoa Tours.....	11 D4
Long Son Pagoda.....	12 A2
Long Thanh Gallery.....	13 B2
Mama Linh's Boat Tours.....	(see 58)
Mana Mana Beach Club.....	(see 63)
Nha Trang Cathedral.....	14 B3
Octopus Diving.....	15 B5
Rainbow Divers.....	16 A5
Sailing Club Divers.....	(see 64)
Sinh Café.....	17 A5

### SLEEPING

44 Tran Phu.....	18 D4
56 Hung Vuong Hotel.....	19 C5
62 Tran Phu Hotel.....	20 B5
AP Hotel.....	21 A5

Asia Paradise Hotel.....	22 B5
Blue Star Hotel.....	23 B5
Dong Phuong 1 Hotel.....	(see 38)
Ha Minh Hotel.....	24 C3
Hai Yen Hotel.....	25 D4
Hotel An Hoa.....	26 B5
Hotel Nhi Hang.....	27 B5
Hotel Phuong Ngoc.....	28 A6
La Suisse Hotel.....	29 A6
Mai Huy.....	30 B6
My Long Hotel.....	31 C5
Nha Trang Beach Hotel.....	32 B6
Perfume Grass Inn.....	33 B5
Pho Bien.....	34 B5
Phu Quy 2 Hotel.....	35 D6
Phu Quy Hotel.....	36 C5
Rainbow Hotel.....	37 A5
Sao Mai Hotel.....	38 A6
Sunrise Beach Resort.....	39 D2
Thien Long.....	40 C5
Vien Dong Hotel.....	41 D4
Yen My Hotel.....	42 C3

Khanh Kat.....	49 B6
Lac Canh Restaurant.....	50 C1
Le Petit Bistro.....	51 A6
Louisiane Brewhouse.....	(see 63)
Mai Anh.....	52 B6
Pho Cali.....	53 B6
Sailing Club.....	(see 64)
Same Same But Different Café.....	54 A6
Selene.....	55 B6
Thanh Thanh Café.....	56 C4
Tin Duc.....	57 A6
Truc Linh 2.....	58 A5
Turkish Cuisine Kebab Restaurant.....	59 C4

### DRINKING

City View Café.....	60 D3
Crazy Kim Bar.....	61 A5
Guava.....	62 A5
Louisiane Brewhouse.....	63 D6
Sailing Club.....	64 B6
Shorty's Café Bar.....	65 B5
Zippo.....	66 A5

### SHOPPING

A Mart.....	(see 62)
My Village.....	67 B6
XQ.....	68 B5

### TRANSPORT

Vietnam Airlines.....	69 A6
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structure. You should take some time to explore off to the left, where there's an entrance to another hall of the pagoda.

Genuinely desperate-seeming beggars congregate within the complex, as do a number of scam-artists (see p282). The pagoda is located about 400m west of the train station, just off Đ 23 Thang 10.

#### NHA TRANG CATHEDRAL

Built between 1928 and 1933 in the French Gothic style, complete with stained glass windows, **Nha Trang Cathedral** (Map p284; cnr Đ Nguyen Trai & Đ Thai Nguyen) stands on a small hill overlooking the train station. It's a surprisingly elegant building, given that it was constructed of simple cement blocks. A particularly colourful Vietnamese touch is the red neon outlining the crucifix, the pink back-lighting on the tabernacle and the blue neon arch and white neon halo over the statue of St Mary. In 1988 a Catholic cemetery not far from the church was disinterred to make room for a new railway building. The remains were brought to the cathedral and reburied in the cavities behind the wall of plaques that line the ramp up the hill.

#### LONG THANH GALLERY

Located in the bustling heart of the city, **Long Thanh Gallery** (Map p284; ☎ 824 875; www.elephantguide.com/photographer/longthanh.htm; 126 Đ Hoang Van Thu; ☎ 8.30-11.30am & 1-6pm Mon-Sat) showcases the work of Vietnam's most prominent photographer. Long Thanh developed his first photo in 1964 and continues to shoot extraordinary black-and-white images of everyday Vietnamese moments.

The powerful images capture the heart and soul of Vietnam. Among his most compelling works, *Under the Rain* is a perfectly timed shot of two young girls caught in a sudden downpour, with a mysterious beam of sunlight streaming down on them. *Afternoon Countryside* is another rare scene – a boy dashing across the backs of a herd of water buffalos submerged in a lake outside Nha Trang.

From the images captured to their processing, there's an honesty to his work. The tactile process of mixing his own chemicals and developing the photos in a makeshift darkroom in his simple kitchen is an integral part of it. 'Colour' and 'digital' are dirty words in his book – let alone 'Photoshop'. His work has been honoured at photographic competitions around the world, showing internationally in

nearly 60 group exhibitions, as well as solo exhibitions in Germany, Japan, Australia and the USA.

#### NATIONAL OCEANOGRAPHIC MUSEUM

Housed in a grand French-colonial building in the port district of Cau Da at the far south end of Nha Trang is the **National Oceanographic Museum** (Map p282; ☎ 590 037; haiduong@dnv.vnn.vn; 1 Cau Da; adult/child 15,000/7000d; ☎ 6am-6pm). Attached to the Oceanographic Institute founded in 1923, signs direct you around the tanks of colourful live marine life and the 60,000 jars of pickled specimens that make up the collection. There are also stuffed birds and sea mammals and displays of local boats and fishing artefacts. Most of the signs have English translations, so a guide is unnecessary.

#### ALEXANDRE YERSIN MUSEUM

Dr Alexandre Yersin (1863–1943) founded Nha Trang's **Pasteur Institute** in 1895. He was probably the Frenchman most loved by the Vietnamese. Born in Switzerland, he came to Vietnam in 1889 after working under Louis Pasteur in Paris. He learned to speak Vietnamese fluently, and spent the next few years travelling throughout the central highlands and recording his observations. During this period he came upon the site of what is now Dalat and recommended to the government that a hill station be established there. Yersin also introduced rubber and quinine-producing trees to Vietnam. In 1894, while in Hong Kong, he discovered the rat-borne microbe that causes bubonic plague. At his request, Dr Yersin was buried near Nha Trang.

Today, the Pasteur Institute in Nha Trang coordinates vaccination and hygiene programmes for the country's southern coastal region. The institute produces vaccines and carries out medical research and testing to European standards. Physicians at the clinic here offer medical advice to around 70 patients a day. Vietnam's two other Pasteur Institutes are in HCMC and Dalat.

Yersin's library and office are now an interesting **museum** (Map p284; ☎ 822 355; 10 Đ Tran Phu; admission 26,000d; ☎ 8-11am & 2-4.30pm Mon-Fri, 8-11am Sat). Items on display include laboratory equipment (such as his astronomical instruments), books from his library, a fascinating 3-D photo viewer and some of the thousand or so letters written to his mother! The model boat was given to him by local fishermen with

whom he spent a great deal of his time. Tours of the museum are guided in French, English and Vietnamese, and a short film on Yersin's life is also shown.

#### KHANH HOA MUSEUM

This sleepy local **museum** (Map p284; ☎ 822 227; 16 Đ Tran Phu; admission free; ☎ 8-11am & 2-5pm Mon, Wed, Fri & Sun) features displays of Cham statues and artefacts of the ethnic minorities in the province. The Uncle Ho room features several of Ho Chi Minh's personal effects, such as clothing and the microphone with which he made his famous independence speech in Hanoi on 2 September 1945.

#### HON CHONG PROMONTORY

The narrow granite promontory of Hon Chong (Map p282) offers views of the mountainous coastline north of Nha Trang and the nearby islands. The beach here has a more local flavour than Nha Trang Beach, but the accompanying refuse makes it a less attractive option for swimming or sunbathing.

There's a gargantuan handprint on the massive boulder balanced at the tip of the promontory. According to legend, a drunken giant male fairy made it when he fell while spying a female fairy bathing nude at Bai Tien (Fairy Beach), the point of land closest to Hon Rua. They fell in love but the gods intervened, sending the male fairy away. The lovesick female fairy waited patiently for him to return, but after a very long time she lay down in sorrow and turned into **Nui Co Tien** (Fairy Mountain). Looking to the northeast from Hon Chong Promontory, the peak on the right is supposed to be her face, gazing up towards the sky; the middle peak is her breasts; and the summit on the left (the highest) forms her crossed legs.

About 300m south of Hon Chong (towards Nha Trang) and a few dozen metres from the beach is tiny **Hon Do** (Red Island), which has a Buddhist temple on top. To the northeast is **Hon Rua** (Tortoise Island), which really does resemble a tortoise. The two islands of **Hon Yen** are off in the distance to the east.

#### Activities

##### BOAT TOURS

Khanh Hoa province's 71 offshore islands are renowned for the remarkably clear water surrounding them. A trip to these islands is one of the best reasons for visiting Nha Trang, so try to schedule at least one day for a boat jour-

ney. Virtually every hotel and travel company in town books island-hopping boat tours. You can pay more for a less-crowded and more luxurious boat that takes you to more islands. Indeed, you'll have to do this if you want to get in much snorkelling.

Shallow water prevents boats from reaching shore at some of the fishing villages. In this case, you must walk sometimes several hundred metres across floats. The floats were designed for Vietnamese people, and weightier Westerners might get wet – balance carefully and take care with your camera. Nevertheless, it's all good fun and a visit to these villages is highly recommended.

**Mama Linh's Boat Tours** (Map p284; ☎ 522 844; fax 522 845; 23C Đ Biet Hu) are the hottest ticket for island hopping, guzzling fruit wine at the impromptu 'floating bar', and deck-side dancing. Daily trips last from 8.45am until 4.30pm, and typically include stops on Hon Mun, Hon Mot, Hon Tam and Hon Mieu – see p294. Tickets (US\$6) are sold at the office, but you can easily book at your hotel for a dollar or two more.

Of course all of this fun in the sun might not be the best environment for families with children (or for recovering alcoholics). If the cultural fanfare of the Mama Linh experience does not sound up your alley, there are other more orthodox boat tours around.

**Con Se Tre** (Map p282; ☎ /fax 527 522; 100/16 Đ Tran Phu; ☎ 8am-6pm) offers tours to Hon Tre which include a visit to Vinpearl, a look around the village and lunch (US\$15), and snorkelling trips to Hon Mun (one person US\$41, two people US\$44, group (per person US\$12). They also charter speed boats (US\$35 to US\$50) and wooden boats (US\$30 to US\$45), including snorkels and a guide.

If you're brave and a good haggler (use the rates above as a benchmark) you can charter a boat directly from Cau Da dock at the south end of Nha Trang. You'll need to get there early – by 10am all the boats are gone. Another attractive alternative is joining up with one of the local dive boats, most of which will take nondivers along for a discounted rate.

The cheapest way to get out on the water is to take the regular local ferry to Vinpearl on Hon Tre (adult/child 40,000/15,000d each way), leaving from Phu Quy harbour just past Cau Da dock. At the time of research, Vinpearl was building a massive cable car to span the 3 kilometres to the island.

In the interests of environmental preservation, when booking a boat tour you might consider asking if the captain anchors his boat to a buoy, as opposed to dropping anchor directly on the coral. Of course, it's hard to know if you'll get a truthful or informed answer to this question.

## DIVING

Nha Trang is Vietnam's premier scuba-diving locale. Visibility averages 15m but can be as much as 30m, depending on the season (late October to early January is the worst time of year).

There are around 25 dive sites in the area, both shallow and deep. There are no wrecks to visit, but some sites have good drop-offs and there are a few small underwater caves to explore. The waters support a good variety of soft and hard corals, and a reasonable number of small reef fish.

A full-day outing including boat transport, two dives and lunch typically costs between US\$40 and US\$70. Most dive operators also offer a range of dive courses, including a 'discover diving' programme for uncertified, first-time divers to experience the thrill under the supervision of a qualified dive master.

There are dozens of dive operators hustling for business on the streets of Nha Trang. The three we've listed below are all long-running operators with environmentally responsible diving practices. There are other reputable operators, but also plenty of cowboys. Remember, the cheapest may not be the safest.

**Blue Diving Club** (Map p284; ☎ 527 034; www.vietnam-diving.com; 66 Đ Tran Phu)

**Rainbow Divers** (Map p284; ☎ 524 351; www.divevietnam.com; 90A Hung Vuong) Run by Briton Jeremy Stein, Rainbow Divers is the standard setter for diving in Vietnam, operating out of five centres nationwide. This, its head office, also includes a restaurant and bar.

**Sailing Club Diving** (Map p284; ☎ 522 788; www.sailingclubvietnam.com; 72-74 Đ Tran Phu) & **Octopus Diving** (Map p284; ☎ 521 629; 62 Đ Tran Phu) These are two names for the same operation operating out of two different locations on the same street.

## MORE WATERY FUN

Right on the beach front, **Phu Dong Water Park** (Map p282; Đ Tran Phu; admission 20,000d, lockers 5,000d; ☎ 9am-5pm Sat & Sun) has hydroslides, shallow pools and fountains if salt water is not your thing.

If salt water is your thing, check out **Mana Mana Beach Club** (Map p284; ☎ 524 362; www.mana

mana.com; Louisiane Brewhouse, 29 Đ Tran Phu). Offering windsurfing, sea kayaking, wakeboarding and sailing lessons, Mana Mana uses state-of-the-art equipment and has access to some great surfing spots in Cam Ranh Bay.

Do you think hot muddy water might be your thing? **Thap Ba Hot Spring Center** (☎ 834 939; 25 Ngoc Son; ☎ 8am-8pm) is one of the most fun experiences on offer here. For 180,000d you can sit in a wooden bathtub full of hot thermal mud, or for 60,000d per person you can slop around with a group of friends in a larger pool. The centre also has private mineral baths (50,000d) and a large outdoor heated swimming pool complete with thermal waterfalls (free with a mud or mineral bath, 30,000d otherwise). To get here, follow the signpost on the second road to the left past the Po Nagar Cham Towers and take the twisting, bumpy road for 2.5km.

## Sleeping

Nha Trang has over 100 hotels to choose from, from basic to sumptuous, and new ones are sprouting up all the time. Unsurprisingly, the most expensive are on Tran Phu, the waterfront boulevard. Yet a cluster of a dozen brand new minihotels has recently spawned in a laneway at 64 Đ Tran Phu, all offering similar air-conditioned rooms for around US\$8 (fan-only, US\$5). Most budget rooms offer hot water, private bathrooms, fridges and TVs, although air-con may be extra. In comparison, good-value midrange options are harder to find.

## BUDGET

**Mai Huy** (Map p284; ☎ 527 553; 7H Đ Hung Vuong; r US\$5-7; ☎) Pronounced 'may we' (or 'mais oui!' if you're French), it's worth searching out this new family-run minihotel, hidden down a small laneway. At US\$5 for a simple clean room with a fan, fridge, satellite TV and private bathroom with hot water, it's unbelievable value for money.

**Sao Mai Hotel** (Map p284; ☎ 526 412; saomaiht@dng.vnn.vn; 99 Đ Nguyen Thien Thuat; r US\$5-8; ☎) With its pretty rooftop terrace adorned with potted plants, this friendly older place is a solid budget option.

**56 Hung Vuong Hotel** (Map p284; ☎ 524 584; 56hungvuonghotel@dng.vnn.vn; 56 Đ Hung Vuong; r US\$6-11; ☎) Although not quite as nice as the Phu Quy next door, this welcoming guesthouse is still a good choice. US\$10 will secure you a large room with a balcony and sea view (albeit up several flights of stairs).

**Hotel An Hoa** (Map p284; ☎ 524 029; anhoahotel@yahoo.com; 64B/6 Đ Tran Phu; r US\$6-11; ☎) One of the better options in the new, fabulously located, budget alley, rooms range from cheapies without windows or air-con, to larger pads with bathtubs and decks.

**Hotel Nhi Hang** (Map p284; ☎ 525 837; www.vngold.com/nt/nhihang; 64B/7 Đ Tran Phu; r US\$6-15; ☎) Another great budget alley option, with an almost identical set-up to An Hoa.

**Pho Bien** (Map p284; ☎ 524 858; phobienhotelint@yahoo.com; 64/1 Đ Tran Phu; r US\$8-12; ☎) The best of the budget alley minihotels, some of the cheapest rooms have views and large balconies, if you can handle a few flights of stairs.

**Blue Star Hotel** (Map p284; ☎ 525 447; quangc@dng.vnn.vn; 1B Đ Biet Thu; r US\$8-15; ☎) This humble hotel offers all the usual facilities and has nice sea views from the upper floors. Corner rooms have great big balconies.

**Thien Long** (Map p284; ☎ 524 107; toan034vn@yahoo.com; 50 Đ Nguyen Thi Minh Khai; US\$10; ☎) At the nicer end of budget, this new minihotel has comfortable rooms with balconies and good facilities.

**Phu Quy Hotel** (Map p284; ☎ 521 609; phuquyhotel@dng.vnn.vn; 54 Đ Hung Vuong; r US\$6-20; ☎) Pronounced Foo-Wee, the highlight of this minihotel is its rooftop terrace – it has awesome views and is great for dining, sunning or hanging around in a hammock. All the rooms are quite comfortable, and for US\$10 expect a balcony, bathtub and sea view.

Other reliable budget options:

**Ha Minh Hotel** (Map p284; ☎ 521 048; 30 Đ Hoang Hoa Tham; r US\$5-7; ☎) A basic family-run place with small rooms and clean sheets.

**Yen My Hotel** (Map p284; ☎ 525 064; yenmyhotel@hotmail.com; 22 Đ Hoang Hoa Tham; r US\$5-8; ☎) The rooms are small and basic, but guests enjoy free internet and satellite TV.

**Hotel Phuong Ngoc** (Map p284; ☎ 526 145; phuonngocsd@dng.vnn.vn; 56B Đ Nguyen Thien Thuat; r US\$5-20; ☎) The more expensive rooms are overpriced, but at \$5 for a fan room, the cheaper ones are better value.

**62 Tran Phu Hotel** (Map p284; ☎ 525 095; fax 525 292; 62 Đ Tran Phu; r US\$8-20; ☎) This older, state-owned, motel-like facility is set around a large courtyard/car park, right across from the beach. The newer wing

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR RESPONSIBLE DIVING

The popularity of diving is placing immense pressure on many sites. Please consider the following tips when diving and help preserve the ecology and beauty of Vietnam's reefs.

- Do not anchor on the reef, and take care not to ground boats on coral. Encourage dive operators and regulatory bodies to establish permanent moorings at popular dive sites.
- Avoid touching living marine organisms with your body or dragging equipment across the reef. Polyps can be damaged by even the gentlest contact. Never stand on corals, even if they look solid and robust. If you must hold on to the reef, touch only exposed rock or dead coral.
- Be conscious of your fins. Even without contact, the surge from heavy fin strokes near the reef can damage delicate organisms. When treading water in shallow reef areas, take care not to kick up clouds of sand. Settling sand can easily smother the delicate organisms of the reef.
- Practise and maintain proper buoyancy control. Major damage can be done by divers descending too fast and colliding with the reef. Make sure you are correctly weighted and that your weight belt is positioned so that you stay horizontal. If you have not dived for a while, have a practice dive in a pool before taking to the reef. Be aware that buoyancy can change over the period of an extended trip: initially you may breathe harder and need more weight; a few days later you may breathe more easily and need less weight.
- Resist the temptation to collect or buy coral or shells. Aside from the ecological damage, taking home marine souvenirs depletes the beauty of a site and spoils the enjoyment of others. The same goes for marine archaeological sites (mainly shipwrecks). Respect their integrity; some sites are protected from looting by law.
- Ensure that you take home all your rubbish and any litter you may find as well. Plastics in particular are a serious threat to marine life. Turtles can mistake plastic for jellyfish and eat it.
- Resist the temptation to feed fish. You may disturb their normal eating habits, encourage aggressive behaviour or feed them food that is detrimental to their health.
- Minimise your disturbance of marine animals.

at the rear has clean, basic rooms, with sheets liberally decorated with cigarette holes.

**My Long Hotel** (Map p284; ☎ 521 451; mylonghotel@yahoo.com; 26A Đ Nguyen Thien Thuat; r 150,000d; 🏠) The rooms have all the usual facilities and are reasonably clean, but it is the lovely staff that are the drawcard here.

#### MIDRANGE

**Our pick! Perfume Grass Inn** (Map p284; ☎ 524 286; www.perfume-grass.com; 4A Đ Biet Thu; r US\$10-25; 🏠 📺) The best rooms at this inviting inn have wooden floors, wood-panelled walls, and bathtubs. Even the bright, comfortable US\$10 fan rooms have great sea views. The nice folks running the place offer free internet access and breakfast.

**AP Hotel** (Map p284; ☎ 527 544; fax 527 268; 34 Đ Nguyen Thien Thuat; r 200,000-400,000d; 🏠 📺) This wonderful new minihotel has had an expensive fit-out not in keeping with the cheap rates. The electrical appliances are impressive, especially the computers provided for the free internet service. Cheaper rooms are windowless, but the pricier options have king-size beds, huge bathtubs and balconies with sea glimpses.

**Nha Trang Beach Hotel** (Map p284; ☎ 524 469; www.nhatrangbeachhotel.com.vn; 4 Đ Tran Quang Khai; r US\$13-23; 🏠 📺) The multistorey Nha Trang Beach Hotel has a cool granite lobby and friendly, efficient staff. Despite its central location, it's refreshingly quiet in the upper floors, where most of the rooms have great views and internet access.

**Rainbow Hotel** (Map p284; ☎ 525 480; rainbowhotel@dng.vnn.vn; 10A Đ Biet Thu; r US\$15-30; 🏠 📺) The Rainbow's been newly renovated, although they've still kept the daggy old linen. It's good value for the price, with some seaweaves.

**La Paloma Hotel** (Map p282; ☎ 831 216; datle@dng.vnn.vn; 1 Đ Hon Chong; r US\$15-35; 🏠 📺) This is a commendable little family-run oasis, well out of the tourist ghetto, on the northern outskirts of town. Fronting the hotel is a pleasant outdoor dining area in a palm garden, where meals (included in the price) are served family-style. The friendly owner offers guests free jeep rides into town.

**Vien Dong Hotel** (Map p284; ☎ 821 606; www.nhatrangtourist.com.vn/viendong/viendong\_e.htm; 1 Đ Tran Hung Dao; s 275,000-400,000d, d 330,000-440,000d, ste 550,000-650,000d; 🏠 📺 📺) Long a travellers' favourite, the biggest drawcard of this large old place is its swimming pool complex, with a pool big enough for laps and a smaller one

for splashing about. The rooms aren't flash but they're clean enough.

**La Suisse Hotel** (Map p284; ☎ 524 353; lasuissehotel@vnn.vn; 3/4 Đ Tran Quang Khai; r US\$18-30, ste \$40; 🏠 📺) Down a quiet yet central street, this hotel is friendly and spotless. Room numbers ending in 01 boast gorgeous wrought-iron balconies, but all are pleasingly comfortable.

**Bao Dai's Villas** (Map p282; ☎ 590 148; www.vngold.com/nt/baodai; Cau Da village; r US\$25-80; 🏠 📺) There can't be too many places where the former lodgings of an Emperor fall into the midrange category. Built in the 1920s, Emperor Bao Dai's Villas are set on a hillside close to the south edge of town. The only possible reason to stay here is historical interest, or the peace and quiet afforded by the park-like setting. The prices are quite out of touch with the facilities provided. More austere than opulent, any trace of Imperial grandeur has long disappeared from the massive, high-studded rooms. There's a private beach below and two good restaurants, one with fine bay views.

**Phu Quy 2 Hotel** (Map p284; ☎ 525 050; www.phuquyhotel.com.vn; 1 Đ Tue Tinh; r US\$28-70; 🏠 📺) This flash, multistoreyed hotel is the new sister to its popular budget namesake in the centre of town. The attractive, modern design carries into the rooms, with wooden floors, good quality linen and some amazing views. Also worth checking out:

**44 Tran Phu** (Map p284; ☎ 523 445; fax 526 395; 44 Đ Tran Phu; r 70,000-800,000d; 🏠) In a prime beachfront position and housed in a stately French colonial building, this should be one of the best hotels in town. However, on our visit we encountered surly staff, and the décor is frugal. The upper-end rooms are cavernous but fail to meet their glamorous potential.

**Dong Phuong 1 Hotel** (Map p284; ☎ 526 986; dongphuongnt@dng.vnn.vn; 101-103 Đ Nguyen Thien Thuat; r in old wing US\$6-10, in new wing US\$10-30; 🏠 📺) There's a shabby charm to some of the rooms here – like the one with the image of a naked woman in the tiles above the bathtub, or the penthouse pad opening on to a massive terrace with sea views.

**Dong Phuong 2 Hotel** (Map p282; ☎ 522 580; dongphuong2@dng.vnn.vn; 96A Đ Tran Phu; r US\$12-20; 🏠) Big, blue Dong Phuong 2 has great views, but it's starting to show its age.

**Hai Yen Hotel** (Map p284; ☎ 822 828; haiyehotel@dng.vnn.vn; 40 Đ Tran Phu; r 338,000-455,000d, ste 520,000d; 🏠 📺) It's getting a bit old, dirty and smelly, but Hai Yen is still notable for its swimming pool (shared with the Vien Dong Hotel), prime location and balcony sea views.

#### TOP END

**Asia Paradise Hotel** (Map p284; ☎ 524 686; www.asiaparadisehotel.com; 6 Đ Biet Thu; r US\$46-78, ste US\$99-124; 🏠 📺 📺) This new business-style hotel has elegant décor, comfortable beds and friendly switched-on staff and is scrupulously clean. Extras include a small rooftop pool, gym and spa centre.

**Sunrise Beach Resort** (Map p284; ☎ 820 999; www.sunrisenhatrang.com.vn; 12-14 Đ Tran Phu; s US\$140-200, d US\$155-225, ste US\$230-550; 🏠 📺 📺) The colonnaded balconies make it look like a giant wedding cake, belying the simple elegance of its interiors. The rooms are suitably luxurious, with all the frills – robes, slippers, safes, hair-dryers, wi-fi access etc. If you're in a suite you can indulge in a Jacuzzi on a balcony overlooking the beach. Other facilities include a baby-sitting service, spa and fitness centre and three excellent restaurants (specialising in Japanese, Vietnamese and international cuisine).

**Ana Mandara Resort** (Map p282; ☎ 522 522; www.evasonresorts.com; Đ Tran Phu; villa US\$236-438, ste US\$450-513; 🏠 📺 📺) A gorgeous complex of open timber-roofed beach villas, this exquisite resort is hands-down Nha Trang's classiest accommodation offering. The décor is simple and elegant, and luxuries include two excellent restaurants, two swimming pools and a serene spa area. Although shut off behind high hedges, special nights bring the food of the street into the resort, with local women invited in as guest cooks. A free weekly cocktail evening on the beach allows guests and hosts to mingle.

#### Eating

Nha Trang has the widest range of international restaurants of any Vietnamese city outside of the big two. In particular, there are a number of eateries on Đ Tran Quang Khai catering to the significant French expat community. Excellent Vietnamese restaurants dot the tourist area, but for a more authentic experience, head to the local restaurants outside of the ghetto. The street stalls cook a vast array of seafood – don't be surprised to walk past tanks of live lobster and crabs.

#### VIETNAMESE

**Café des Amis** (Map p284; ☎ 521 009; 2Đ Đ Biet Thu; dishes 7,000-40,000d) A popular cheapie focussing on seafood and vegetarian fare, the walls are covered with interesting works by Vietnamese painters.

**Lac Canh Restaurant** (Map p284; ☎ 821 391; 44 Đ Nguyen Binh Khiem; dishes 10,000-85,000d; 🏠 📺 lunch & dinner) A Nha Trang institution, Lac Canh is one of the busiest local eateries in town. Here beef, squid, giant prawns, lobsters and the like are grilled at your table.

**Cyclo Café** (Map p284; ☎ 524 208; khuongthuy@hotmail.com; 5A Đ Tran Quang Khai; mains 12,000-52,000d) Run by a local couple, the Cyclo Café has an intimate atmosphere, great service and excellent Vietnamese and Italian dishes.

**Our pick! Pho Cali** (Map p284; ☎ 525 885; 7G Đ Hung Vuong; dishes 15,000-25,000d) You can watch the food being cooked at this clean, modern eatery. The meals are absolutely delicious, and the set menu – comprising soup, rice and a hotpot – is outrageously good value at 20,000d.

**Truc Linh 2** (Map p284; ☎ 521 089; 21 Đ Biet Thu; dishes 15,000-83,000d; 🏠 📺 lunch & dinner) With three restaurants dotted around the neighbourhood, popular Truc Linh offers a festive garden setting for diners. In the evening you can choose fresh seafood from a table in front of the restaurant and enjoy a beer while you wait.

**Khanh Kat** (Map p284; ☎ 826 657; 22 Đ Tran Quang Khai; dishes 15,000-89,000d) The hotpots are excellent at this pleasant little indoor-outdoor restaurant with linen tablecloths. While the cuisine is mainly traditional Vietnamese, you'll find some Chinese and Italian dishes.

**Tin Duc** (Map p284; 1/30 Đ Tran Quang Khai; dishes 20,000-50,000d) A friendly, family-run place next to a small pagoda, Tin Duc serves a vegetarian-friendly selection of local favourites, as well as pizza and pasta.

Then there's **Dam Market** (Map p284; Đ Tran Nu Vuong), which has a colourful collection of stalls, including vegetarian (*com chay*) in the covered semicircular food pavilion.

#### VIETNAMESE VEGETARIAN

Two places serving excellent vegetarian food of the I-can't-believe-it's-not-meat variety are **Au Lac** (Map p284; ☎ 813 946; 28C Đ Hoang Hoa Tham; meals 10,000d) and **Bo De** (Map p284; ☎ 810 116; 28A Đ Hoang Hoa Tham; meals 10,000d), neighbouring restaurants near the corner of Đ Nguyen Chanh.

#### FRENCH

**Mai Anh** (Map p284; ☎ 815 920; 1/21 Đ Tran Quang Khai; mains 20,000-70,000d; 🏠 📺 lunch & dinner) Describing its menu as 'French grand cuisine' Mai Anh is the place to go for fillet steak served in a rich cognac or cream-based sauce. For 200,000d

you can indulge in a nine-course set menu 'to be shared with darling from a single plate', including a bottle of red wine.

**Selene** (Map p284; ☎ 526 813; 1/4 Đ Tran Quang Khai; mains 35,000-60,000d; ☺) breakfast, lunch & dinner) Run by a French-Canadian, this cute little eatery is adorned with colourful local art and serves a mixture of French and Italian cuisine. The pasta is particularly good.

**our pick** **Le Petit Bistro** (Map p284; ☎ 527 201; 26Đ Tran Quang Khai; mains 45,000-180,000d; ☺) The best of the French restaurants, Le Petit Bistro has a fantastic wine selection, as well as sourcing quality cheese and *charcuterie*. A testimony to the great food and wine is the number of French ex-pats who gravitate around this atmospheric little place.

## INTERNATIONAL

**Same Same But Different Café** (Map p284; ☎ 524 079; 11Đ Nguyen Thien Thuat; mains 12,000-50,000d; ☺) breakfast, lunch & dinner) A good travellers' café, this place serves Vietnamese and Western food (including veggie dishes and tasty muesli for breakfast) at reasonable prices.

**Thanh Thanh Cafe** (Map p284; ☎ 824 413; 10Đ Nguyen Thien Thuat; meals 15,000-75,000d) Another travellers' café, serving wood-fired pizza, Vietnamese dishes and other standard backpacker fare, Thanh Thanh has a pretty terracotta patio surrounded by plants. It also does deliveries.

**Bombay** (Map p284; ☎ 524 399; 12 Đ Biet Thu; dishes 22,000-50,000d) This humble Indian restaurant with plastic chairs has plenty of tasty vegetarian and tandoori options.

**Turkish Cuisine Kebab Restaurant** (Map p284; ☎ 525 328; 24Đ Hung Vuong; mains 40,000-100,000d; ☺) breakfast, lunch & dinner) If you're craving a kebab, this is quite possibly the only Turkish restaurant in Vietnam. It also serves pizza and pasta. Hookah pipes add to the atmosphere.

**El Coyote** (Map p284; ☎ 526 320; 76 Đ Hung Vuong; mains 40,000-103,000d; ☺) breakfast, lunch & dinner) This Coyote does authentic Tex-Mex food including delicious fajitas served on a sizzling plate. The owner has perhaps the most curious ethnic roots in town: he's a mixture of French, Vietnamese, Lao and Cheyenne Indian.

**Louisiane Brewhouse** (Map p284; ☎ 521 948; 29 Đ Tran Phu; mains 50,000-130,000d; ☺) breakfast, lunch & dinner; ☎) Best known for its microbrewery and decadent beachside pool, Louisiane also serves wonderful food and an oddball selection of Moldovan wine. The menu features a mixture of Thai and European favourites, as

well as excellent Vietnamese dishes – try the traditional fish salad served with rice paper and herbs. The cakes and pastries (10,000d) are superb.

**Sailing Club** (Map p284; 72-74 Đ Tran Phu; mains 50,000-185,000d; ☺) breakfast, lunch & dinner) One of the most popular hangouts in Nha Trang, the Sailing Club has three distinct restaurants. The wide terrace on the beach serves excellent Vietnamese cuisine. It's also good for people-watching during the day and ocean breezes at night. On the street side, the Indian and Italian restaurants have a garden setting, the latter serving divine desserts.

**Good Morning Vietnam** (Map p284; ☎ 522 071; 19Đ Biet Thu; mains 54,000-105,000d) The Nha Trang branch of this Italian-run chain does good pizza, pasta and salads. It also screens DVDs upstairs at 5pm and 8pm daily.

## Drinking & Entertainment

**Sailing Club** (Map p284; ☎ 826 528; 72-74 Đ Tran Phu) The hippest place in town, this popular, Aussie-run, open-air beach bar is where most of the party crowd ends up at some point in the evening. It's best known for thumping music, wild dancing, flowing shots, pool and general mayhem. You can escape the madness (well, sort of) outside on the large beachside terrace.

**Louisiane Brewhouse** (Map p284; ☎ 521 948; 29 Đ Tran Phu; ☎) True to its name, the shiny copper vats herald good news for beer drinkers at this upmarket restaurant cum microbrewery. However, it's the deckchair-ringed swimming pool and beautiful beachfront that make this one of the best places to laze away the Nha Trang days.

**Crazy Kim Bar** (Map p284; ☎ 523 072; crazykimbar.com; 19 Đ Biet Thu) Run by the ebullient Kimmy Le, this great party spot is also home base for her commendable 'Hands off the Kids!' campaign, which works to prevent paedophilia. She's now set up a permanent classroom for vulnerable street kids in an upstairs corner of the bar. Part of the proceeds from the food, booze and T-shirt sales go towards the cause. Sign up at the bar if you're interested in volunteering to teach English. Crazy Kim's has regular themed party nights, great music, good pizza and wicked cocktail buckets. Kim's life is about to get crazier – by the time this book hits the streets her new Crazy Kim Spa & Gym should have opened down the road at 1Đ Đ Biet Thu.

**City View Café** (Map p284; ☎ 820 090; 18 Đ Tran Phu)

A great place to start the evening with a sun-downer, the garden bar on the rooftop of the Yasaka Saigon Nhatrang hotel has the best views in town.

**Guava** (Map p284; ☎ 524 140; www.clubnhatrang.com; 17 Đ Biet Thu) Cool, clean-lined and atmospheric, this lounge bar is super-stylish but never seems particularly busy. Outside is a patio shaded with trees; inside, pillow-laden sofas and a pool table. The substantial 'hangover breakfasts' are conveniently served all day.

**Zippo** (Map p284; ☎ 521 117; 34Đ Nguyen Thien Thu) This friendly little bar has a free pool table and happy hours that stretch from 8pm to 11pm.

**Shorty's Cafe Bar** (Map p284; ☎ 810 985; 1E Đ Biet Thu) If you're looking for an earlier start to the happy hour, Shorty's extends from 6pm to 10pm. There's a free pool table here as well – along with a book exchange if you're after a new read.

## Shopping

Nha Trang has emerged as a reasonable place to look for art and local craft. A number of tourist-friendly shops can be found in the blocks surrounding the corner of Đ Tran Quang Khai and Đ Hung Vuong.

**XQ** (Map p284; ☎ 526 579; www.xqhandembroidery.com; 64 Đ Tran Phu; ☺) 8am-8pm) You're presented with a glass of green tea as you wander around this peaceful little craft village, where you can watch the artisans at work in the embroidery workshop and gallery. The embroidery 'paintings' may not suit everybody's taste, but the painstaking detail is fascinating.

**My Village** (Map p284; ☎ 524 825; 4L Đ Hung Vuong) There's some nice lacquer-work, furniture and other souvenir-friendly art and handicraft in this little shop in the heart of the tourist precinct.

**AMart** (Map p284; ☎ 523 035; 17A Đ Biet Thu) Everyday supplies available at this handy minimart.

Also worth checking out are the hand-painted T-shirts done by a friendly local painter named **Kim Quang** (☎ 0983-884 5397), who you can find between 2pm and 9pm working from his wheelchair at the Sailing Club (opposite).

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

**Vietnam Airlines** (Map p284; ☎ 526 768; 91 Đ Nguyen Thien Thuat) connects Nha Trang with HCMC three times a day, and Hanoi and Danang daily.

## BUS

**Lien Tinh bus station** (Ben Xe Lien Tinh; ☎ 822 192; Đ 23 Thang 10) is Nha Trang's main intercity bus terminal, 500m west of the train station. Seven daily buses head north to Quy Nhon (65,000d, 5½ hours), with at least two continuing to Danang (120,000d). Regular buses head south to Phan Rang (24,000d, 2½ hours), with a dozen continuing on to HCMC (110,000d, 11 hours) and a similar amount heading into the highlands to Dalat (60,000d, seven hours).

Nha Trang is a major stopping point on all of the tourist open-bus tours. These are the best option for accessing Mui Ne, which is not served by local buses. Sinh Café (see p282) runs a comfortable coach at 7.30am, reaching Ca Na before 11am and Mui Ne just after midday. It stops here for lunch before continuing on to HCMC (arriving 5.30pm). It also runs services to Dalat (six hours) and Hoi An (11 hours).

## CAR & MOTORBIKE

Road distances from Nha Trang are: 235km to Quy Nhon, 523km to Danang, 104km to Phan Rang, 250km to Mui Ne, 448km to HCMC, 205km to Dalat and 205km to Buon Ma Thuot.

## TRAIN

**The Nha Trang train station** (Map p284; ☎ 822 113; Đ Thai Nguyen; ☺) ticket office 7-11.30am, 1.30-5pm & 6-10pm) is down the hill west of the cathedral. Destinations include Danang (203,000d, 8½ to 12½ hours, seven daily), Tuy Hoa (44,000d, 2½ hours, five daily), Thap Cham (35,000d, 1½ to 2½ hours, eight daily) and HCMC (160,000d, seven to 12½ hours, nine daily).

## Getting Around

### TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

In the last few years Nha Trang's airport has moved from the centre of town to Cam Ranh Bay, 36km to the south. A shuttle bus runs the route (return/one way 45,000/25,000d), leaving from the site of the old airport (near 86 Đ Tran Phu) two hours before scheduled departure times. The journey takes 40 minutes. If you can't be bothered with waiting around that long, taxi are a speedier option (30 to 40 minutes), but be sure to agree a price in advance. It should cost in the vicinity of 150,000d or US\$10, although we've heard of people being scammed for double this.

**BICYCLE**

It's easy to get around all of the sights, including Thap Ba, by bicycle. Most major hotels have rentals for around 20,000d per day. Watch out for the one-way system around the train station, and the chaotic roundabouts.

**TAXI, CYCLO & XE OM**

Nha Trang has an excessive amount of all three. The *xe om* drivers are the most consistently annoying, although like taxis all over the world they seem to disappear when you actually want one. A motorcycle ride anywhere in the centre shouldn't cost more than 10,000d. Be careful at night, when some less reputable drivers moonlight as pimps and drug dealers.

**AROUND NHA TRANG Islands**

Island tours are a big part of the Nha Trang experience. For details on boat tours and charters see p287.

**HON TRE (BAMBOO ISLAND)**

The beauty of Nha Trang's largest and closest offshore island is now marred on the city side by a huge Hollywood-style sign advertising Vinpearl Complex International – a new compound of restaurants, nightclubs, shops, kids' rides, hotels and an amphitheatre. The wealthy Ukrainian-Vietnamese owners have now started work on a cable car stretching 3 kilometres from Vinpearl to the mainland.

**HON MIEU**

All the tourist literature touts Hon Mieu (also called Tri Nguyen Island) as the site of an outdoor aquarium (Ho Ca Tri Nguyen). In fact, the aquarium is an important fish-breeding farm, where over 40 species of fish, crustacean and other marine creatures are raised in three separate compartments. There is also a café built on stilts over the water. Ask around for canoe rentals.

The main village on Hon Mieu is Tri Nguyen. Bai Soai is a gravel beach on the far side of Hon Mieu from Cau Da. There are a few rustic **bungalows** (US\$6) on the island.

Most people will take some sort of boat tour booked through a hotel, café or Khanh Hoa Tourist (see p282). Impoverished and less-hurried travellers might catch one of the regular ferries that go to Tri Nguyen village from Cau Da dock.

**HON MUN (EBONY ISLAND)**

Hon Mun is situated just southeast of Bamboo Island and is well known for its snorkelling.

**HON MOT**

Sandwiched neatly between Ebony Island and Hon Tam is tiny Hon Mot; it's another great place for snorkelling.

**HON YEN (BIRD'S-NEST ISLAND)**

Also known as Salangane Island, this is the name applied to two lump-shaped islands visible from Nha Trang Beach. These and other islands off Khanh Hoa province are the source of Vietnam's finest swiftlet (*salangane*) nests (see opposite). There is a small, secluded beach here. The 17km trip out to the islands takes three to four hours by small boat from Nha Trang.

**HON LAO (MONKEY ISLAND)**

The island is named after its large contingent of resident monkeys and has become a big hit with tourists. Most of the monkeys have grown quite accustomed to receiving food handouts, providing ample photo opportunities. However, these are wild animals and should be treated as such. Bear in mind that monkey bites are a fairly reliable source of rabies.

Aside from being unwilling to participate in a cuddle, the monkeys are materialistic. They'll grab the sunglasses off your face or snatch a pen from your shirt pocket and run off. So far, we haven't heard of monkeys slitting open travellers' handbags with a razor blade, but keep a close eye (and hand) on your possessions.

A word of warning: though the island itself can make for a fun visit, there's also a bear-and-monkey show that you may want to avoid. Travellers have reported seeing the animals beaten by their trainers during performances.

If you're not part of a tour, head 15km north of Nha Trang on Hwy 1A to **Long Phu Tourist** (☎ 839 436; Vinh Luong), easily spotted by the huge colourful dragons forming the entrance, not far from a pagoda. Boats will ferry you to the island for 50,000d (15 minutes). Other destinations reached from here include Hoa Lan Springs on Hon Heo (40,000d, 45 minutes) and Hon Thi (20,000d, 20 minutes).

**Thanh Citadel**

This citadel dates from the 17th-century Trinh dynasty. It was rebuilt by Prince Nguyen Anh (later Emperor Gia Long) in 1793 during his successful offensive against the Tay Son Rebels. Only a few sections of the walls and gates are extant. Thanh Citadel is 11km west of Nha Trang near Dien Khanh town.

**Ba Ho Falls**

The three waterfalls and pools at Ba Ho Falls (Suoi Ba Ho) are in a forested area about 20km north of Nha Trang and about 2km west of Phu Huu village. Turn off Hwy 1A just north of Quyen restaurant.

**Suoi Tien (Fairy Spring)**

The enchanting little spring seems to pop out of nowhere. Like a small oasis, the Fairy Spring is decorated with its own natural garden of tropical vegetation and smooth boulders.

You'll need to rent a motorbike or car to reach the spring. Drive south on Hwy 1A for 27km to Suoi Cat, turning right (west) at the blue and white 'Huong Lo 39' sign. After 5km you'll see a sign directing you to the spring.

**Cam Ranh Harbour**

The gorgeous natural harbour of **Cam Ranh Bay** is 35km south of Nha Trang and 56km north of Phan Rang. With the opening of the excellent new airport road, beautiful **Bai Dai** (Long Beach), forming the northern head of the harbour, has become much more accessible. Largely unspoilt, the government has been encouraging development – although at the time of research the one major completed resort had long been languishing unopened in search of a buyer.

Driving the beach road, reminders of the American War come in the form of abandoned tanks peering out of the sand. The military still controls access to much of this area but are starting to work with tourist operators. Nha Trang's Mana Mana Beach Club (see p288) has negotiated access to some of the best surf breaks in Vietnam.

To get here you can take the airport shuttle bus (see p293), although you'll need to time your visit around flight times. A one-way journey in a taxi will cost about 150,000d, but you'll be able to negotiate something considerably cheaper, including waiting time, with a motorcycle driver.

**PHAN RANG & THAP CHAM**

☎ 068 / pop 161,000

If you're travelling Vietnam from north to south you'll notice a big change in the vegetation as you approach the twin cities of Phan Rang and Thap Cham, joint capitals of Ninh Thuan province. The familiar lush green rice paddies are replaced with sandy soil supporting only scrubby plants. Local flora includes poinciana trees and prickly-pear cacti with vicious thorns. Famous for its production of table grapes, many of the houses on the outskirts of town are decorated with vines on trellises.

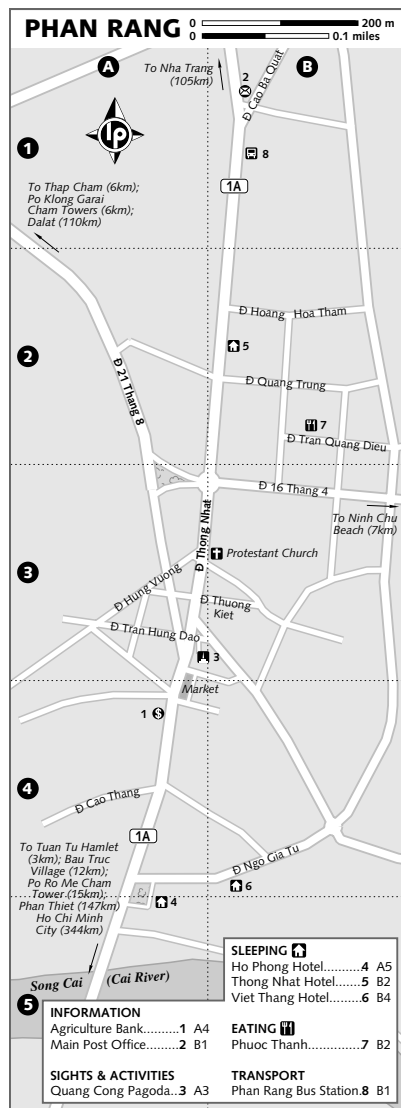
The area's best-known sight (and a common stop on the Dalat–Nha Trang route) is the group of Cham towers known as Po Klong Garai (p296), from which Thap Cham (Cham Tower) derives its name. There are other towers dotted about the countryside. This province is home to tens of thousands of Cham people, particularly in the vicinity of the twin cities. The Cham, like other ethnic minorities in Vietnam, suffer from discrimination and are usually poorer than their ethnic-Vietnamese neighbours. There are also several thousand Chinese in the area, many of whom come to worship at the 135-year old **Quang Cong Pagoda** (Đ Thong What), a colourful Chinese temple in the town centre.

With both Hwy 1A and Hwy 20 (heading to the central highlands) passing through the towns, this is a good pit stop for either a coastal trip or the journey to Dalat. Nearby Ninh Chu Beach (p299) is another, quieter alternative.

**BIRD SPIT SOUP**

The nests of the swiftlet (*salangane*) are used in bird's-nest soup as well as in traditional medicine, and are considered an aphrodisiac. It is said that the extraordinary virility of Emperor Minh Mang, who ruled Vietnam from 1820 to 1840, was derived from the consumption of swiftlet nests.

The nests, which are built out of silk-like salivary secretions, are 5cm to 8cm in diameter. They are usually harvested twice a year. Red nests are the most highly prized. Annual production in Khanh Hoa and Phu Yen provinces is about 1000kg. At present, swiftlet spit fetches US\$2000 per kilogram in the international marketplace.



## Orientation

Hwy 1A is Phan Rang's main commercial street, and becomes D Thong Nhat in town. The main part of town is bordered to the south by the Cai River. Thap Cham, 7km from Phan Rang, is strung out along Hwy 20, which heads northwest from Phan Rang towards Dalat.

## Information

**Agriculture Bank** (☎ 822 714; 540-544 Đ Thong Nhat; ☹ Mon-Fri) Exchanges currency.

**Main post office** (☎ 824 943; 217A Đ Thong Nhat) Also offers internet access.

## Sights

### PO KLONG GARAI CHAM TOWERS

The four brick towers of **Po Klong Garai** (Thap Cham; admission 5000d; ☹ 7.30am-6pm), were constructed at the end of the 13th and beginning of the 14th century. Built as Hindu temples, they stand on a brick platform at the top of Cho'k Hala, a crumbly granite hill covered with some of the most ornery cacti this side of the Rio Grande.

A large modern building in a vaguely Cham style sitting at the base of the hill is dedicated to Cham culture, with separate galleries of photographs, paintings and traditional pottery. It's a good reminder that while the Cham kingdom is long gone, the Cham people are alive and kicking (see p264).

Over the entrance to the largest tower (the **kalan**, or sanctuary) is a beautiful carving of a dancing Shiva with six arms. Note the inscriptions in the ancient Cham language on the doorposts. These tell of past restoration efforts and offerings of sacrifices and slaves. If you want to look inside, you'll need to remove your shoes as this is still an active place of worship. Inside the vestibule is a statue of the bull Nandin, symbol of the agricultural productivity of the countryside. To ensure a good crop, farmers would place an offering of fresh greens, herbs and areca nuts in front of Nandin's muzzle. Under the main tower is a **mukha-linga**, a carved phallus with a human face painted on it, sitting under a wooden pyramid.

Inside the **smaller tower** opposite the entrance to the sanctuary, you can get a good look at some of the Cham's sophisticated building technology; the wooden columns that support the lightweight roof are visible. The structure attached to it was originally the **main entrance** to the complex.

On the hill directly south of Cho'k Hala is a concrete water tank built by the Americans in 1965. It is encircled by French pillboxes built during the Franco-Viet Minh War to protect the nearby rail yards. To the north of Cho'k Hala, you can see the concrete revetments of Thanh Son Airbase, used since 1975 by the Vietnamese Air Force.

Po Klong Garai is just north of Hwy 20, at a point 6km west of Phan Rang towards Dalat. The towers are on the opposite side of the tracks to Thap Cham train station. If you're travelling between Dalat and the coast, you will pass the site. Most of the open-tour buses running the route make a requisite pit stop here.

### PO RO ME CHAM TOWER

**Po Ro Me** (Thap Po Ro Me; admission free) is one of the most atmospheric of Vietnam's Cham towers – partly due to its isolated setting on top of a craggy hill with sweeping views over the cactus-strewn landscape. The temple honours the last ruler of an independent Champa, King Po Ro Me (r 1629–51), who died as a prisoner of the Vietnamese. His image and those of his family are to be found on the external decorations. Note the flame motif repeated around the arches.

The temple is still in active use, with ceremonies taking place twice a year. The rest of the time it's locked up, but the caretakers, who are based at the foot of the hill, will open the sanctuary for you. Consider leaving a small donation with them and don't forget to remove your shoes.

The occupants of the temple aren't used to having their rest disturbed, and it can be a little creepy when the bats start chattering and swooping overhead in the confined dark space. Through the gloom you'll be able to make out a blood red and black centrepiece – a bas-relief representing the deified king in the form of Shiva. Behind the main deity and to the left is one of his queens, Thanh Chanh. Look out for the inscriptions on the doorposts and a stone statue of the bull Nandin.

Cham temple architecture has changed considerably if the small concrete hut dated 1962 at

the back of the tower is anything to go by. Inside is a statue of the king's first wife – a Muslim woman called Thanh Cat – with an inscription painted on her chest. A statue of the third wife has been removed to a museum, along with other relics from the site. A **linga** (see p265) remains at the front right of the tower. The rubble at the front left is all that remains of a preparation room bombed during the war – revealing how close Po Ro Me came to destruction.

The best way to reach the site is with your own motorbike or a *xe om*. The trip is worthwhile, as long as getting lost is a part of your agenda. Take Hwy 1A south from Phan Rang for 9km. Turn right at the turnoff to Ho Tan Giang, a narrow sealed road just after the petrol station, and continue for a further 6km. Turn left in the middle of a dusty village at a paddock which doubles as a football field and follow the road as it meanders to the right until the tower comes into sight. A sign points the way cross-country for the last 500m. This may be negotiable on a motorbike, but it is deeply rutted, and studded with rocks and cacti. You might like to park and walk the remainder.

### BAU TRUC VILLAGE

This Cham village is known for its pottery and you'll see several family shops in front of the mud and bamboo houses. On the way to Po Ro Me turn right off Hwy 1A near the war memorial, into the commune with the banner 'Lang Nghe Gom Bau Truc'. Inside the village take the first left for some of the better pottery stores.

### TUAN TU HAMLET

While Cham history is predominately Hindu, significant parts of the remaining population are Islamic. There is a minaret-less mosque

## GOODBYE SAILOR

Can Ranh Harbour has long been considered one of Asia's prime deep-water anchorages. The Russian fleet of Admiral Rodjestvenski used it in 1905 at the end of the Russo-Japanese War, as did the Japanese during WWII. At this time the surrounding area was still considered an excellent place for tiger hunting. In the mid-1960s the Americans constructed a vast base here, including an extensive port, ship-repair facilities and an airstrip.

After reunification the Russians and their fleet came back, enjoying far better facilities than they had left seven decades before. For a while this became the largest Soviet naval installation outside the USSR. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the end of the Cold War, economic problems forced the Russians to cut back vastly on their overseas military facilities. Although the initial contract on Cam Ranh Bay was due to expire in 2004, the Russians vacated their position by the end of 2002, the last hurrah for the Russian navy in Asia.



in the Cham hamlet of Tuan Tu (population 1000). This community is governed by elected religious leaders (Thay Mun), who can easily be identified by their traditional costume, which includes a white robe and an elaborate white turban with red tassels. In keeping with Islamic precepts governing modesty, the women here often wear head coverings and long dresses.

To get to Tuan Tu Hamlet, head south from Phan Rang along Hwy 1A. Go 250m south of the large bridge to a small bridge. Cross it and turn left (to the southeast) onto Đ Tran Nhat Duat. The road bends right at a Buddhist pagoda. Turn right at the T-junction after a school and follow the road through the village and over a bridge for about 2km until you reach the hamlet to the right of the road. The mosque is at the centre of the village near the large well. If you continue along the road for a further 2km you'll reach a beach with red sand dunes.

## Sleeping

**Viet Thang Hotel** (☎ 835 899; 430 Đ Ngo Gia Tu; r 120,000-180,000; 🏠) Looking a little like a Mondrian painting from the outside, this place will suit backpackers who don't mind the odd cigarette hole or stain on the sheets.

**Ho Phong Hotel** (☎ 920 333; hophong@yahoo.com; 363 Đ Ngo Gia Tu; r 170,000-250,000d; 🏠 📺) This one's a cross between a castle and a Christmas tree, set behind a little park near the bridge at the bottom of town. It's new, clean and great value – with high ceilings, impressive showers in most rooms (glass walls and two shower heads) and toilets lined with gold trim.

**Thong Nhat Hotel** (☎ 827 201; thongnhatotel\_pr@hcm.vn.vn; 343 Đ Thong Nhat; r US\$15-25; 🏠 📺) This place is starting to show its age, but it's kept clean and breakfast is included in the rates.

## CHAMPY NEW YEAR

The Cham New Year (*kate*) is celebrated at Po Klong Garai in the seventh month of the Cham calendar (around October). The festival commemorates ancestors, Cham national heroes and deities such as the farmers' goddess Po Ino Nagar.

On the eve of the festival, a procession guarded by the mountain people of Tay Nguyen carries King Po Klong Garai's clothing, to the accompaniment of traditional music. The procession lasts until midnight. The following morning the garments are carried to the tower, once again accompanied by music, along with banners, flags, singing and dancing. Notables, dignitaries and village elders follow behind. This colourful ceremony continues into the afternoon.

The celebrations then carry on for the rest of the month, as the Cham attend parties and visit friends and relatives. They also use this time to pray for good fortune.

## Eating

One of the local delicacies here is roasted or baked gecko (*ky nhong*), served with fresh green mango (see p300). If you prefer self-catering and have quick reflexes, most hotel rooms in Vietnam have a ready supply.

More palatable to tourist tastes is another local speciality, *com ga* – chicken with rice. The local chickens seem to have more meat on them than Vietnam's usual spindly specimens, and people make a point of buying chickens (or at least stopping for a feed) as they pass through. There are a few *com ga* restaurants on Đ Tran Quang Dieu, the best of which is **Phuoc Thanh** (☎ 824 712; 3 Đ Tran Quang Dieu; mains 20,000d).

Phan Rang is the table grape capital of Vietnam. Stalls in the market sell fresh grapes, grape juice and dried grapes (too juicy to be called raisins). Also worth sampling is the green dragon fruit (*thanh long*). Its mild, kiwifruit-like taste is especially refreshing when chilled. You'll find it in the market, or in grocery shops along Đ Thong Nhat.

## Getting There & Away

### BUS

**Phan Rang bus station** (Ben Xe Phan Rang; opposite 64 Đ Thong Nhat) is on the northern outskirts of town. Regular buses head north to Nha Trang (24,000d, 2½ hours), northwest to Dalat (40,000d, 4½ hours), and south to Ca Na (10,000d, one hour) and beyond.

### CAR & MOTORBIKE

Phan Rang is 344km from HCMC, 147km from Phan Thiet, 32km from Ca Na, 104km from Nha Trang and 108km from Dalat.

### TRAIN

The **Thap Cham Train Station** (Ga Thap Cham; ☎ 888 029; 7 Đ Phan Dinh Phung) is about 6km west of Hwy

1A, within sight of Po Klong Garai Cham towers. Destinations include Nha Trang (35,000d, 1½ to 2½ hours, eight daily) and HCMC (120,000d, six to 10 hours, eight daily).

## NINH CHU BEACH

### 📞 068

Southeast of Phan Rang, Ninh Chu Beach is increasingly popular with local tourists. Apart from a bit of litter, the 10km-long beach is quite nice. It makes a quieter alternative to Phan Rang as a base for visiting the Cham ruins.

A bizarre local attraction is the **Hoan Cau Resort** (☎ 890 077; waterpark admission adult/child 10,000/5000d), where Disneyland meets Vietnamese folklore. Hilarious plaster statues adorn the grounds and rooms are shaped like tree stumps. A brief visit is more enjoyable than actually staying here.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Den Gioi Resort** (☎ 874 223; www.dengionninhchu.com; r 150,000-500,000d, camping per person 70,000d; 🏠 📺) A giant Cham-looking brick building looks set to replace the ugly hospital-like reception that was in use at the time of research. The crimson-brick beach bungalows are surprisingly nice, with crisp new linen, glassed-in showers and wooden ceiling fans. Facilities include an open-air restaurant (mains 30,000d) and tennis courts. Dome-tent camping is possible near the beach.

**Saigon Ninhchu Hotel** (☎ 876 006; www.saigon-ninhchuhotel.com.vn; r US\$40-55, ste US\$80; 🏠 📺 📺) Good value for the price, this is easily the best accommodation in the area. Each of the tasteful rooms has a sea view – as well as nice carpets, comfortable beds, quality linen, robes and a safety box. Although the beach is on the doorstep, the swimming pool is hard to resist. Rounding out the picture are a small fitness centre, two restaurants, a bar, a business centre and 24-hour room service.

## Getting There & Away

Turn left (southeast) into Đ Ngo Gia Tu, the street immediately before the Cai River bridge in Phan Rang, and continue on, following the signs for 7km. Unless you're driving yourself, it's easiest to take a *xe om* (30,000d).

## CA NA

### 📞 068

During the 16th century, princes of the Cham royal family would fish and hunt ti-

gers, elephants and rhinoceroses here. Today Ca Na (pronounced *kah nah* – not like the site of the biblical booze-up) is better known for its white-sand beaches which are dotted with huge granite boulders. The best of the beach and accommodation is available right on Hwy 1A, a kilometre north of the fishing village. It's a beautiful spot, but it's tough to ignore the constant honking and rumble of trucks. The payoff, however, is an almost complete lack of hassle from the friendly locals.

The terrain is studded with magnificent prickly-pear cacti. Bright yellow **Lac Son**, a small pagoda on the hillside, makes for an interesting but steep climb. Further afield, **Tra Cang Temple** is about midway between Ca Na and Phan Rang. Unfortunately, you have to sidetrack over an abysmal dirt road in order to reach it. Many ethnic Chinese from Cholon visit the temple.

If you stay here, be aware that there are no banks or ATMs and absolutely no-one accepts credit cards or travellers' cheques.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Ca Na Hotel** (☎ /fax 761 320; r 170,000-200,000d; 🏠) This place rents crusty rooms in an ancient ferroconcrete hotel near the highway; the quieter beach bungalows are a slightly better choice. Its restaurant is a popular lunch spot for buses on the HCMC–Nha Trang route (dishes 10,000d to 40,000d).

**Hon Co Ca Na Motel** (☎ 760 998; www.ninhthuantourist.com.vn; r 250,000-300,000d; 🏠) Offering attractive bungalows with flowers on trellises and nice, new furniture, it's a shame this place is not better maintained. Giant ants and cobwebs have free reign in the less-than-clean rooms, which can be quite noisy. There's a lovely little beach, tennis courts, a large seafood restaurant (dishes 60,000d) and the ominous combination of karaoke and massage.

## Getting There & Away

Ca Na is 114km north of Phan Thiet and 32km south of Phan Rang. Many long-haul buses cruising Hwy 1A can drop you here, including the open-tour buses on the Nha Trang–Mui Ne leg. You can phone to arrange a pick-up from the Sinh Café office in either city. Local buses from Phan Rang (10,000d, one hour) head into Ca Na fishing village – ask to be let out on the highway and catch a *xe om* for the last kilometre.

**LIZARD FISHING**

When most people think of fishing in the mountains they conjure up images of hooking river trout or lake bass. But in the arid foothills of the south-central coast (notably around places like Ca Na, Phan Rang, Phan Thiet and Mui Ne) there is a whole other kind of angling, and a walk in these hills can yield one of the strangest sights in Vietnam – lizard fishing.

These lizards, called *than lan nui*, are members of the gecko family and good for eating – some say they taste like chicken. The traditional way of catching the lizards is by setting a hook on a long bamboo fishing pole and dangling bait from the top of a boulder until the spunky little reptiles strike.

Lizards are served grilled, roasted or fried, and are often made up into a paté (complete with their finely chopped bones) and used as a dip for rice-paper crackers. Yum.

**VINH HAO**

☎ 062

Known for its mineral water, which is bottled and sold all over Vietnam, Vinh Hao is an obscure town just off Hwy 1A between Phan Thiet and Phan Rang.

It's also the home of **Vietnam Scuba** (☎ 853919; www.vietnamscuba.com), an attractive and well-appointed Korean-run dive centre on a private beach about 3.5km south of Ca Na, easy to spot from the highway. This is very much a by-Koreans for-Koreans resort, but serious scuba divers (and *kimchi* [pickled cabbage] lovers) will appreciate the setup and some of the best diving in Vietnam. Marine life includes big fish, manta rays, barracuda and sharks.

Daily dive packages (US\$130) include accommodation in nice beachfront villas, boat trips and guides, and three meals a day. A BC and regulator can be rented for an extra US\$50 a day. All dive sites are offshore, anywhere from 30 to 90 minutes from the resort's private jetty.

**MUI NE BEACH**

☎ 062

Mui Ne has quickly been transformed from an isolated stretch of beautiful white sand to one long row of resorts. While there's still a **fishing village** at the east end of the beach, it's tourists that make up most of the population. The boom in top-end resorts hasn't killed the chilled surfer vibe, although it has brought an increasing number of up-market restaurants and souvenir shops. It's an unusual set up, as everything is spread along one 10km stretch of road – the accommodation is on the beach side, and the restaurants and bars mainly on the other.

Mui Ne sees only about half the rainfall of nearby Phan Thiet. The sand dunes help pro-

tect its unique microclimate, and even during the wet season (from June to September) rains tend to be fairly light and sporadic.

Mui Ne's developing a reputation as the action capital of the coast. There's no scuba diving or snorkelling to speak of, but when Nha Trang and Hoi An get the rains, Mui Ne gets the waves. Surf's up from August to December. For windsurfers, the gales howl as well, especially from late October to late April, when swells stir over from the Philippine typhoons. Kite-surfing is very popular. If this all sounds too much like hard work you can simply splash about in the clean, clear water.

One major problem the area faces is the steady creep of coastal erosion. Many resorts have almost completely lost their beaches and rely on sandbagging to keep the little they have left.

**Orientation**

The road follows the curve of the beach, running roughly east to west. Until the explosion of resorts it went by the name of Route 706 with addresses designated by their distance in kilometres from Hwy 1A in Phan Thiet (to the west). Half the properties now follow a new numbering system, with Route 706 given proper street numbers and renamed Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu on the west half of the beach and Đ Huynh Thuc Khang on the east half. Adding to the confusion, some refer to themselves by the old kilometre marking combined with the new street name.

**Information**

A great resource for information on Mui Ne is www.muinebeach.net. The main **post office** (☎ 849 799; 348 Huynh Thuc Khang) is in Mui Ne village, but there's a more convenient branch at **Swiss Village** (☎ 847 480; 44 Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu).

**Fami Tour Office** (☎ 741 030; 121 Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu) Local tours, internet access and cheap international internet calls.

**Hanh Café/Ha Phuong Tourist** (☎ 847 597; 125A Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu) Local day tours, open tour bookings, fast food and internet access.

**Sinh Café** (☎ 847 542; 144 Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu) Operates out of its Mui Ne Resort, booking open-tour buses and offering credit card cash advances.

**Tam Nam** (☎ 742 457; 49 Nguyen Dinh Chieu) Friendly and cheap laundry service operating out of a small grocery store.

**Sights**

Mui Ne is famous for its enormous **red and white sand dunes**. These have been a favourite subject matter for many a Vietnamese photographer, including some who sit like camels on the blazing hot sand for hours, waiting for the winds to sculpt the dunes into that perfect Kodak moment. If you visit, be sure to try the sand-sledding.

You'll need a jeep to explore these properly, but be careful to agree on an itinerary for the tour, preferably in writing. We've heard complaints, particularly about 'sunset tours' that

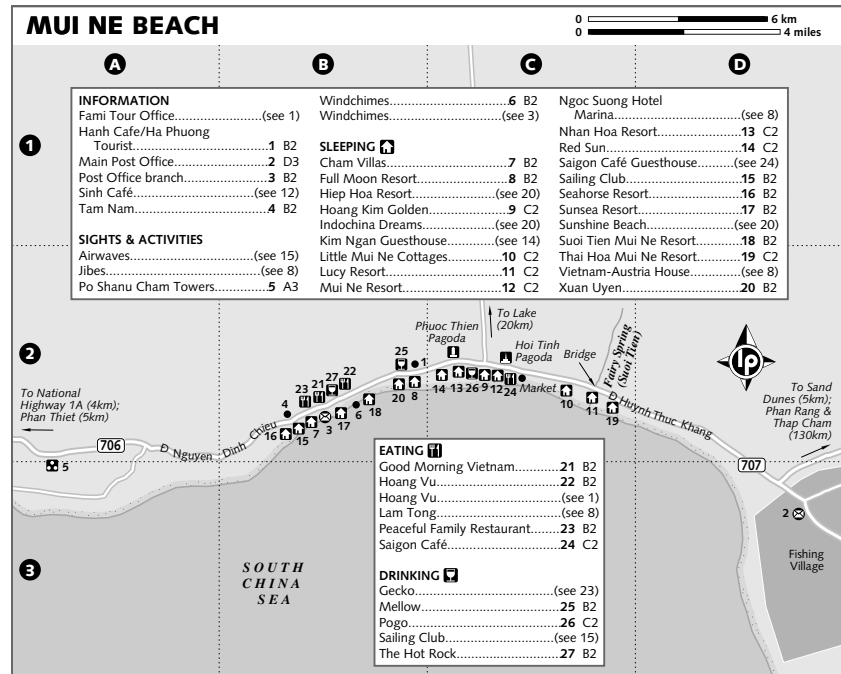
cut short with the sun high in the sky and the drivers getting aggressive when challenged.

Also of interest is the **Fairy Spring** (Suoi Tien), which is really a stream that flows through a patch of dunes with interesting sand and rock formations. It's a beautiful trek wading up the stream from the sea to its source, though it might be wise to hire a local guide. You can do the trek barefoot, but if you're heading out into the big sand dunes, you'll need leather soles on your feet; sandals are even questionable during the midday sun.

Heading west, **Po Shanu Cham Towers** (Km5; admission 2000đ; ☎ 7.30-11.30am & 1.30-4.30pm) occupy a hill near Phan Thiet, with sweeping views of the town and a cemetery filled with candy like tombstones. Dating from the 9th century, this complex consists of the ruins of three towers, none of which are in very good shape. There's a small pagoda on the site, as well as a gallery and shop.

**Activities**

**Jibes** (☎ 847 405; www.windsurf-vietnam.com; 90 Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu; ☎ 7.30am-6pm) is a surfer's heaven, offering lessons and renting state-of-the-art gear



like windsurfers (one hour/half-day/full-day US\$12/30/45), surfboards (one hour/half-day/full-day US\$10/25/30), kitesurfers (one hour/half-day/full-day US\$30/75/95) and kayaks (one hour/half-day/full-day US\$5/13/25). Insurance is extra.

**Airwaves** (☎ 847 440; www.airwaveskitesurfing.com; 24 Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu), based at the Sailing Club (see opposite), is another outfit offering kite-surfing, windsurfing and sailing lessons and equipment rentals.

**Windchimes** (☎ 0909-720 017; www.windsurfing-vietnam.com) is a third option, operating out of Saigon Mui Ne Resort (56 Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu) and Swiss Village (44 Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu).

## Sleeping

Mui Ne has become the escape of choice for ex-pats working in HCMC, meaning that the nicer accommodation can book out during weekends and holiday times. This seems to have encouraged a number of properties with midrange standards to demand top-end prices. At the budget end, prices have also begun to creep up – a rude shock compared with the luxurious facilities you'll find for the same rates in Hoi An. The good news is that the sheer volume of options on offer means that there is still value for money to be found in every category – although this is one of the few places on the coast where it pays to book ahead.

## BUDGET

**Xuan Uyen** (☎ 847 476; 78 Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu; r US\$6-12; 📍) Big on atmosphere, these cute bamboo bungalow rooms are simple and clean.

**Hoang Kim Golden** (☎ 847 689; www.hoangkim-golden.com; 140 Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu; r US\$6-25; 📍) The cheapie rooms here are very basic – shared bathrooms and no air-con. The rest cover a range of prices from good, clean budget options to newer rooms with bathtubs and minibars. There's a lot of bamboo decoration, plants in the courtyard, and two restaurants, one of which is on the beach.

**Thai Hoa Mui Ne Resort** (☎ 847 320; www.thaihoa-resort.com; 56 Đ Huynh Thuc Khang; r US\$8-25; 📍) A cheap and tidy place, with two rows of bungalow-style rooms separated by an attractive central garden. Cheaper rooms have no air-con or hot water.

**Kim Ngan Guesthouse** (☎ 847 046; kimnganvilla@yahoo.com; km13; r US\$10-15; 📍) With bungalows

whose tiled balconies jut over the water, this friendly family-run place is a good choice. All the rooms are similar, with a US\$5 saving if you forgo air-con.

**Hiep Hoa Resort** (☎ 847 262; hiephoatourism@yahoo.net; 80 Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu; r US\$12-16; 📍) This is a great spot with a lovely garden and clean, attractive rooms – albeit without frills such as TVs, fridges and phones, or air-con in the US\$12 rooms.

**Nhan Hoa Resort** (☎ /fax 847 371; 128 Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu; r US\$12-26; 📍) The old wing is basic but the newer wing is comfortable enough, and the poolside garden area reaches to the sea.

Back-up budget options:

**Saigon Café Guesthouse** (☎ 847 091; 168-170 Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu; r US\$5; 📍) These bamboo and thatched-roof bungalows are as cheap and humble as it comes.

**Mellow** (☎ 743 086; 117C Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu; r US\$6-12) on the wrong (nonbeach) side of the road, the cheaper rooms share bathrooms and toilets. The only treats are hot water and free-standing fans, and a good social vibe in the bar-restaurant.

**Vietnam-Austria House** (☎ 847 047; ngothikimhong@hotmail.com; km13.5; r US\$8-25; 📍) This established place has wooden bungalows and a block of simple rooms (the cheapest without hot water or air-con); there's also a tiny swimming pool.

## MIDRANGE

**Sunshine Beach** (☎ 847 788; www.sunshine-beach.com; 82 Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu; r US\$15-30; 📍) Friendly and welcoming, this hotel has a large open lawn area, perfect for kids to run around. The rooms are immaculately clean and comfortable. Little extras include free wi-fi, DVDs and bottled water.

**Lucy Resort** (☎ 847 017; www.lucyresort.net; km18; r US\$18-45; 📍) This collection of thatched-roof bungalows open on to a peaceful coconut grove or, in the case of the most expensive rooms, a small pool. Don't expect air-con for less than US\$25, but breakfast is included in the price.

**Indochina Dreams** (☎ 847 271; fax 08-8322 174; 74 Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu; r US\$20-25; 📍) This dreamy place is on a small scale, but the big stone bungalows are very comfortable. Rooms are cool and well-appointed, and there's a good restaurant in front, serving the complimentary breakfast.

**Mui Ne Resort** (☎ 847 542; www.sinhcafevn.com; 144 Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu; r US\$25-30; 📍) Owned by the open-tour originators Sinh Café, this

is an incredibly easy option (the buses arrive and depart from here) and an attractive one at that. The rooms are clean, comfortable and reasonably priced, if a little on the small side, and the staff are friendly. The restaurant is huge, to accommodate the bus patrons who swarm into the place several times a day on their compulsory pit stop. Expect a US\$5 surcharge on the weekends.

**Full Moon Resort** (Trang Tron; ☎ 847 008; www.windsurf-vietnam.com; 84 Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu; r US\$35-80; 📍) Most of the bungalows are set around the garden, but the beachfront bungalows have a beautifully traditional feel – with silk hangings, low square tables, wooden ceiling fans, slatted sliding doors and large corner bathtubs. Rooms in the colonial-yellow house have huge bathtubs and sofa beds to accommodate extra guests.

**Sunsea Resort** (☎ 847 700; www.sunsearesort-muine.com; 50 Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu; r US\$50-70; 📍) The traditionally inspired round bungalows with pointed thatched roofs are dotted around a beautifully maintained large garden under the shade of coconut palms. The oval pool is particularly enticing.

**Little Mui Ne Cottages** (☎ 847 550; www.littlemuine.com; 10B Huynh Thuc Khang; r US\$50-85; 📍) Lots of perks warrant the higher prices: comfortable cottages have lots of space around them, and the pool is big enough for swimming laps. Other special touches are a welcome drink upon arrival and complimentary bottled water, breakfast, internet and bicycles.

Other midrange options:

**Red Sun** (☎ 847 387; cafeloumi@hcm.vnn.vn; km13; r US\$15; 📍) Red Sun has six simple clean rooms right by the water and a shady brick courtyard and terrace. The beach disappears at high tide.

**Suoi Tien Mui Ne Resort** (☎ 847 146; suoitienmuine-resort@vnn.vn; 60 Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu; r US\$15-45; 📍) The friendly owners give this place a family feel, although US\$15 is a little pricey for a room without air-con or hot water.

**Ngoc Suong Hotel Marina** (☎ 847 515; ngocsuong@hcm.fpt.vn; 94 Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu; r US\$33-65; 📍) The paintwork could do with some maintenance, but this little place is clean and comfortable.

## TOP END

**Sailing Club** (☎ 847 440; www.sailingclubvietnam.com; 24 Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu; r US\$55, bungalows US\$70-100; 📍) Popular for its wide open bar and restaurant overlooking the sea, the Sailing Club has spacious rooms in a lush garden setting. The resort is a stylish blend of Asian and

European architecture, and the comfortable, clean rooms are designed with bamboo and dark, matte wood.

**Cham Villas** (☎ 741 234; www.chamvillas.com; 32 Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu; r US\$95-120; 📍) Set in a beautiful tropical garden with an exquisite swimming pool, this luxury boutique resort only has 14 villas, so it books up quickly. Breakfast and wi-fi internet is included in the price.

**Seahorse Resort** (☎ 847 507; www.seahorseserest.vn.com; km11; r US\$110-120, bungalows US\$132-190, ste US\$253; 📍) Gorgeously designed, the flagstone pathways and narrow pond in the coconut-shaded garden follow the natural contours of the land. Each bungalow has four separate rooms surrounding an interior garden. The rooms themselves are elegantly decorated with Vietnamese art and furnishings, and have exquisite open-air bathrooms.

## Eating

**Saigon Cafe** (☎ 847 091; 168-170 Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu; dishes 12,000-45,000đ) Great Vietnamese BBQ food in a basic setting, with profundities written on the walls in beautiful calligraphy – although we suspect 'It is still very good if you can learn by your mistake to like butter' may have lost something in the translation.

**Lam Tong** (☎ 847 598; 92 Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu; dishes 12,000-50,000đ) You can watch the food being prepared from your plastic seat in the fairy-light-strewn open-air dining area at the rear of this family house. The tanks of live seafood attest to the freshness of the reasonably priced meals.

**Hoang Vu** (Double Wheels Restaurant; ☎ 847 525; km12.2 & 121 Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu; dishes 25,000-52,000đ; 📍 lunch & dinner) Like most successful businesses in Vietnam this one's cloned itself into two restaurants. The atmosphere's romantically Asian in both and the staff provide casually attentive service and delicious, beautifully presented Vietnamese, Thai and Chinese food with some French influences.

**Peaceful Family Restaurant** (Yen Gia Quan; ☎ 741 019; 53 Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu; dishes 30,000-70,000đ; 📍 lunch & dinner) This friendly family eatery serves wonderful Vietnamese cuisine in a lovely open setting.

**Good Morning Vietnam** (☎ 847 585; www.goodmorningviet.com; km11.8; mains 60,000-105,000đ; 📍 lunch & dinner) This is another in the popular chain of Italian eateries. These guys have had the excellent idea of offering free hotel pick-ups to bridge the distance of the strip.

## Drinking

No surfer town would be complete without a smattering of beachside bars and Mui Ne doesn't disappoint on this front.

**Pogo** (☎ 0909-479 346; 138 Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu) A fun, open-air bar decorated with colourful infantile paintings – it has a pool table, big sound system and bean bags.

**Mellow** (☎ 743 086; 117C Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu) Run by an English-Vietnamese couple, this place is popular with the backpacking/kitesurfing fraternity. It also has a pool table, with a cool bicycle/lighting feature.

**Jibes** (☎ 847 405; 90 Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu) Decorated with surf boards, this one's an old favourite. There's a pool table here as well.

**Hot Rock** (☎ 847 608; 12.5km) Another popular place with a pool table, the Hot Rock also serves good food and plays some excellent music.

**Gecko** (☎ 741 033; 51 Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu) An up-market option with lots of fancy cocktails and, yep, there's a pool table

**Sailing Club** (☎ 847 440; 24 Đ Nguyen Dinh Chieu) Not as raucous as its sister in Nha Trang, the Mui Ne incarnation is a stylish place to hang out.

## Getting There & Away

It used to be that Mui Ne was quite isolated and could only be approached by an 11km diversion from Hwy 1A through Phan Thiet. Recently a new road has opened, heading northeast from the eastern end of the beach, connecting back to Hwy 1A halfway to Ca Na. This scenic stretch, past deserted beaches and a beautiful lake ringed with water lilies, greatly reduces the northward journey and allows the open-tour buses to pass through Mui Ne without backtracking.

These buses are the best option for Mui Ne, and Sinh Café and Hanh Café both have daily services to/from HCMC (US\$6, four hours), Nha Trang (US\$6, five hours) via Ca Na (60,000d, 1½ hours) and Dalat (US\$7, 5½ hours). A local bus makes trips between Phan Thiet bus station and Mui Ne, but it is irregular and slow. The best way to reach the beach from the highway in Phan Thiet is by *xe om* (50,000d).

## Getting Around

Mui Ne is so spread out that it's difficult to get around on foot. There are plenty of *xe om* drivers to take you up and down the strip; no trip should cost more than 10,000d. Given

that the area isn't highly populated and it's not on the main highway, this is not a bad place to hire a bicycle or motorbike (enquire at your hotel or at the travel agencies). However, a German tourist on a motorbike was killed by a bus on this stretch in 2006, so don't be complacent.

## PHAN THIEP

☎ 062 / pop 168,400

Phan Thiet is traditionally known for its *nuoc mam* (fish sauce), producing 16 to 17 million litres of the stinky stuff per annum. The population includes descendants of the Cham, who controlled this area until 1692. During the colonial period the Europeans lived in their own segregated ghetto stretching along the northern bank of the Phan Thiet River, while the Vietnamese, Cham, Southern Chinese, Malays and Indonesians lived along the southern bank.

The river flowing through the centre of town creates a small **fishing harbour**, which is always chock-a-block with boats, making for interesting photos. To get to Phan Thiet's **beachfront**, turn off Đ Tran Hung Dao (Hwy 1A) into Đ Nguyen Tat Thanh – the road opposite the **Victory Monument**, an arrow-shaped concrete tower with victorious cement people at the base.

The main attraction of Phan Thiet is the **Ocean Dunes Golf Club** (☎ 823 366; odgc@hcm.vnn.vn; 1 Đ Ton Duc Thang, per round US\$65), a top-notch 18-hole, par 72 course designed by Nick Faldo, near the beachfront at the Novotel. Very reasonably priced golf package tours are available if you book from HCMC – contact the resort's HCMC **marketing office** (☎ 08-824 3460; www.vietnamgolfresorts.com; New World Hotel, 76 Đ Le Lai).

## Orientation & Information

Phan Thiet is built along both banks of the Phan Thiet River (also known as the Ca Ty and the Muong Man River). Hwy 1A becomes Đ Tran Hung Dao as it runs through town. **Binh Thuan Tourist** (☎ 816 821; www.binhthuan.tourist.com; 82 Đ Trung Trac; ☎ 7-11am & 1.30-5pm Mon-Fri, 8-10.30am Sat & Sun) Tourist maps and information.

## Sleeping & Eating

Unless you're here for the golf, you're much better off staying in nearby Mui Ne (see p302).

**Binh Minh Hotel** (☎ 823 344; fax 823 354; Đ Le Loi; r 240,000-300,000d; ☎) It's ugly and the karaoke

can be noisy, but this state-owned dinosaur is right by the beach.

**Novotel Ocean Dunes & Golf Resort** (☎ 822 393; novpht@hcm.vnn.vn; 1 Đ Ton Duc Thang; r US\$66-124, ste US\$161; ☎) In a beautiful spot between the golf course and a private stretch of beach, the main Novotel building is looking a little tired – although at the time of research new villas had been built near the golf club. The hotel's Seahorse Restaurant is the flashiest eatery in town, serving up local seafood (dishes US\$5 to US\$15).

## Getting There & Around

**Phan Thiet bus station** (Ben Xe Binh Thuan; ☎ 821 361; Đ Tu Van Tu; ☎ 5.30am-3.30pm) is on the northern outskirts of town. Phan Thiet is on Hwy 1A, 198km east of HCMC, 250km from Nha Trang and 247km from Dalat. The nearest

train station to Phan Thiet is 12km west of town in dusty little Muong Man.

## TA CU MOUNTAIN

The highlight here is the **white reclining Buddha** (Tuong Phat Nam). At 49m, it's the largest in Vietnam. The pagoda was constructed in 1861 during the Nguyen dynasty, but the Buddha was only added in 1972. It has become an important pilgrimage centre for Buddhists, who stay overnight in the pagoda's dormitory. Foreigners can't do this without police permission, but there's now a **guesthouse** (☎ 867 484; r 200,000d; ☎) on the mountain.

The mountain is just off Hwy 1A, 28km south from Phan Thiet, from which the Buddha is a beautiful two-hour trek, or a two-minute cable-car ride (55,000d return) and a short, but steep, hike.

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