

HISTORICAL WALKING TOURS – HO CHI MINH CITY

Caravelle Hotel



Stands at 19 Lam Son Square, across from the Municipal Theatre, in the legendary heart of the city. The hotel opened in 1959, boasting a suite of amenities never before seen in Saigon, including bulletproof glass, a Berliet generator and Trane air conditioners (a first for any hotel in the city). In 1998, after more than two decades of operation on a shoestring budget, the aging landmark was resuscitated with a complete renovation and a complimentary, 24-storey tower.

Saigon Saigon Bar of the Caravelle, the famous “roof top garden bar”, was an unofficial headquarters for correspondents and generals during the 1960s and early 70s. Nowadays, the original bar still stands, antique fans still whirl languidly from the raked ceiling, cocktails are still carefree on the garden terrace, dating back to 1956; and the verandah remains a “lookout tower” across Ho Chi Minh City, with its romantic purple glow at sunset.



Opera House



This restored three-story theatre has an auditorium with 1800 seats and with modern light and sound equipment. Originally, it was built by the French and intended as an opera house. In 1955 it became South Vietnam's National Assembly building. Today the building has been renovated as a theater for a variety of traditional and classical performances—plays, concerts, ballet, opera and Vietnamese traditional dance.

City Hall



End of Nguyen Hue Street. Originally called the Hôtel de Ville and now formally rebranded the People's Committee Hall, is a striking cream and yellow French colonial building beautifully floodlit at night. No entry, but the statue of Uncle Ho in front is a very popular place for photos.

Notre Dame Cathedral



The twin towers of Notre Dame Cathedral have been a familiar landmark in Ho Chi Minh City since the 1880s. In front of the cathedral in a small garden is a delicate statue of the Virgin Mary. The interior of the cathedral is rather plain, unlike most French cathedrals, with no stained glass, but it is a cool escape from the heat outside.

Central Post Office



Across from the Notre Dame Cathedral, the vast Post Office was also built in the late 19th century in European style. The interior has hardly been touched since it was built and is dominated by a huge portrait of Ho Chi Minh. The building always seems busy but most people are just visitors rather than customers.

Reunification Palace



The Reunification Palace is beautiful in its ugliness, a 1960s monstrosity designed with the help of Soviet architects. Most people will remember the image of a North Vietnamese tank crashing through the gates on 30 April 1975 signifying the fall of Saigon. The tank still graces the front lawn. Rooms open to the public remain exactly as they were in 1975, showing where important meetings were held during the war, as well as some of the private quarters of the president and his family. Most fascinating are a series of underground tunnels housing a telecommunications center.

Ho Chi Minh City Museum



Housed in the former building of the Government of Cochinchina, the Ho Chi Minh City Museum (formerly the Revolutionary Museum) contains artifacts, such as weapons, uniforms, medals and old photos, from the period of Communist struggle against the French and the Americans. Unfortunately, the exhibits are only labelled in Vietnamese but some are self-explanatory. Outside the museum is a collection of military hardware including a tank and a helicopter.

Historical Museum



Located just inside the entrance to the Botanical Gardens and Zoo, the Historical Museum houses a collection of artifacts covering the last 2,000 years of Vietnamese history including items belonging to ancient cultures such as Dong Son, Oc Eo and Cham. The museum was built in 1929 and the collection assembled by the Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient.

War Remnants Museum



Formerly known as the Museum of American War Crimes, the name has been toned down so as not to offend its US visitors and is now the War Remnants Museum. This is not a museum for the sensitive as it houses instruments of torture and hundreds of photographs of atrocities committed during the 20th century and, in particular, the Vietnam War. Visitors cannot fail to be moved as the exhibits provide a context for a period of history many only know from old newsreels and Hollywood movies. At the front of the museum is a small collection of military hardware and, most interestingly, the mobile guillotine used by the French colonists to dispense justice throughout the country before World War II.

Ben Thanh Market



Ben Thanh Market has long been one of Saigon's most famous landmark. The market has been in existence since the French occupation. The original market was located on the shores of Ben Nghe river by old fort Gia Dinh. Its proximity to the fort and the river where merchants and soldiers would land was reason for its name (Ben meaning pier or port and Thanh meaning fort). In 1859, when the French invaded Saigon and overtook fort Gia Dinh, Ben Thanh Market was destroyed. It was rebuilt shortly thereafter and remained standing until it was moved to its present location in 1899.

Historical Walking Tours

Caravelle Hotel - The Perfect Location

