



## **The Mekong Delta - Vietnam**

The Mekong Delta - Vietnam, often referred to as Vietnam's rice basket, is the biggest rice-growing region in the country, the rich alluvial soils producing three harvests a year. Despite being a predominantly rural region, the Mekong Delta is one of the most densely populated areas in Vietnam and most of the land is under cultivation. Other delta products include coconut, sugar cane, fruit and fish.

The main towns of the delta are My Tho, Vinh Long, Can Tho and Chau Doc. Driving south from Ho Chi Minh City, My Tho is the first major Mekong Delta town you come to. Its proximity to Ho Chi Minh City has made My Tho the most popular destination for day-trippers to the delta looking for a taste of authentic delta life. Here visitors can take a sampan along the waterways, visit tropical fruit orchards and try the local delicacy, Elephant's Ear Fish.

The other popular destination for day-trippers from Ho Chi Minh City is Vinh Long, another 65km deeper into the delta. It is the islands in the Mekong River rather than the town itself that is the highlight of a [Vietnam tour](#) to Vinh Long. Most of the islands are given over to fruit orchards and the narrow canals are often straddled by flimsy-looking wooden bridges made from the trunks of coconut palms or bamboo and known as monkey bridges. An early morning visit to nearby Cai Be Floating Market offers great photographic opportunities as all manner of produce is traded from boats.

To make shopping easier the boats suspend a sample of what they sell from the top of a long pole. On the way back to Vinh Long it is possible to stop off to visit small riverside workshops including blacksmiths, rice huskers, thatches and coffin makers!

Just over 30km and a ferry ride away from Vinh Long is Can Tho, the bustling commercial centre of the Mekong Delta. Can Tho is one of the more attractive delta towns but as in the rest of the Mekong Delta the best sights are on the water. The delta's biggest floating market, Cai Rang Floating Market, is 6km from Can Tho and well worth an early morning visit. For a memorable boat trip, the Victoria Can Tho Hotel operates sunrise and sunset cruises on the Lady Hau, a renovated traditional rice barge. A spectacular sight outside of town is the stork garden at That Not where hundreds of egrets, herons and cormorants gather in the treetops to roost late in the afternoon.

Chau Doc, nestling at the foot of Sam Mountain on the Cambodian border, has a real frontier town feel to it. This busy little riverside town has large Cham, Khmer and ethnic Chinese communities and the distinctive architectural styles of each community can be seen in their places of worship around the town. A boat trip on the river is the best way to see the unusual floating fish farms, houses with wooden pens suspended underneath where live fish are kept. Chau Doc's Sam Mountain is home to dozens of temples and shrines and is a popular pilgrimage site for ethnic Chinese as well as Vietnamese.

Off the eastern coast of the delta in the Gulf of Thailand, nearer Cambodia than Vietnam, is the island of Phu Quoc. A mountainous island that is still mostly forested,

Phu Quoc is blessed with some beautiful white sandy beaches and clear blue seas. The island is famous throughout Vietnam for the production of black pepper and its fish sauce, said to be the best in the country. Several small-scale beach resorts have opened over the past few years on Phu Quoc and it is connected by a daily flight to Ho Chi Minh City as well as offer [visa to Vietnam](#) service for tourists if you require.

Though not part of the Mekong Delta, Con Dao is another island off the southern coast of Vietnam. Con Dao served as a prison island for political prisoners during the French colonial era, when it was known as Poulo Condore, and in later years the Saigon regime imprisoned opponents of the regime in the infamous cells known as the 'tiger cages'. The old prison buildings are still standing and are open to the public as is a small museum tracing the island's history. Besides having an interesting history, Con Dao is also an island of immense natural beauty with forested hills, deserted sandy beaches and extensive coral reefs making for some excellent diving.

#### Mekong Delta - Vietnam Tour Highlights

- Take a boat along some of the delta's verdant narrow waterways
- Explore the bustling floating markets for a colorful early morning experience
- Visit one of the many orchards for exotic tropical fruits straight from the tree
- Watch the sun setting over Cambodia from Sam Mountain
- Phu Quoc island for relaxing beach break

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