

# good morning, vietnam

Jessica Tibbits DISCOVERS exotic luxury way out EAST

I've always been in love with the idea of Vietnam. But there's only one thing that's made me hesitate in sampling its rich culture, dramatic landscapes and delicious cuisine: I just don't *do* camping or backpacking, or anything else that involves sleeping bags and living off dry shampoo. And while Vietnam may have almost overtaken Thailand in recent years as the ultimate experience for the more discerning backpacker, it's not a destination you automatically think of for a week of stress-free pampering. Until now. When I heard the five-star Banyan Tree hotel was opening in Lang Co, central Vietnam – the perfect location for exploring some of 'Nam's most famous sights – I decided to hop on a plane to check out south-east Asia's most fascinating country.

## ho chi minh

Thirteen hours, several romcoms and two sleeping pills later, I stepped off the plane into a wall of tropical heat – this was Vietnam's largest city, Ho Chi Minh. There for a six-hour stopover

between flights, I decided to explore my surroundings and staggered to the taxi rank still half asleep. Five minutes later I was wide awake, jaw hanging open – driving through the heaving streets of Ho Chi Minh is an assault on the senses. Chinese-style pagodas fight with French colonial architecture and the noise of honking scooters is relentless (as the cheapest way to get around, scooters are by far the most popular mode of transport here). Plus, the smell of fresh food cooking at every street corner is mouthwatering. I jumped out at Cho Ben Thanh market, a sprawling mass of traders selling clothes, crafts, food and drink. The smell of squid next to freshly ground coffee was a tad overwhelming in my jet-lagged state, so I made my way to the crafts section and spent a few hours hunting through the piles of silks and trinkets before heading back to the airport for the second leg of my trip.



ABOVE, HO CHI MINH FLOWER SELLERS; BELOW, A TRADITIONAL PAVILION IN HUÉ

