

Postcard from VIETNAM



JOSEPHINE AGOSTINO ENJOYS A WONDERFUL WEEK OF SHOPPING AND PAMPERING IN PARADISE

When you're facing an eight-hour flight early on a Sunday morning, the word "gorgeous" doesn't come to mind. It's lucky, then, that my 11 new best buddies and I are about to launch into a week-long Gorgeous Safari to Vietnam – a pampering holiday for women by Gourmet Safaris. Our wonderful tour guides are hairdresser Mandy Amos and make-up artist Kenneth Higgins.

Our first port of call is the city of Hoi An, best known for being the tailoring capital of Vietnam, and for its authentic and fresh Vietnamese cuisine. Most notable is the new Morning Glory Street Food Restaurant & Cooking School. It's the home of Ms Vy, a beautiful and stylish culinary whiz who inspires women (and men) to "eat for taste, health, power and beauty".

But when there is retail therapy on offer, food can wait – there's no keeping a group of women away from bargain-priced tailored clothes. And we're in good hands – countless shopkeepers around Hoi An know our guides by name.

Two dresses, a pair of shorts, a caftan, a few shirts for the boy back home, some trinkets and gifts from the local market later, and I'm a happy camper.

I FLOAT TO THE SPA FOR A SUBLIME FOUR-HANDED MASSAGE

Back at the resort, over a scrumptious lunch, there is business to be done. Kenneth asks us when we are free to fit in a one-on-one makeover and make-up consultation. Oh, the stress of it all!

Our last evening in Hoi An is spent gliding along the river to Red Bridge Restaurant, where we dine on seafood and papaya salad, marinated chicken, and squid cooked on our very own sizzling plate.

As we check in for our flight to Quy Nhon Life Resort, our excess luggage reassures us that our work is well and truly done. The resort, an idyllic beachfront oasis on a golden stretch of sand, is managed by a friendly Australian, yet the experience is quintessentially Vietnamese.

Dressed in a sarong, I float from a lunchtime cooking demo – rice paper rolls and pork- and prawn-filled pancakes – to the spa for a sublime four-handed full-body massage.

Then, as I take a final dip in the infinity pool, I'm mesmerised by the serene soundtrack of the waves crashing up against the beach's rock formations. The state of bliss follows me back to my beachfront room and all the way home.

How gorgeous is that!

Escape to bliss

►► A trip down the river may very well lead to a heavenly gourmet experience.

ask Catriona

►► Getaway's Catriona Rowntree answers all your travel questions

UK PACKING TIPS

Q I am planning a trip to Great Britain in April/May 2008 and I was hoping you could give me some ideas as to what clothes I should take. We shall be doing a tour by bus for 21 days and then hiring a car and travelling through Scotland and England, staying in youth hostels or inns. I am a senior citizen and like to dress comfortably and casually.

Judith, via email.

A As you will be travelling around a fair bit by bus and car, the key words to remember are comfort and warmth.

The weather will still be pretty chilly in that area around that time, so take a jacket that will protect you from wind and rain and keep you warm. Make sure you pack clothes you can layer. That way, if it does warm up, you can peel off the layers.

Comfy shoes are also a must – travelling always involves loads of walking, and sore feet can really spoil the fun.

One last tip: pack clothes that are easy to hand-wash.

Remember – anything you forget can be bought over there.

3 tips for a Gorgeous Safari

►► As the guides will tell you, you get what you pay for with tailors, so check your clothes are stitched to your satisfaction and check that the lining is silk.

►► Facials and massages are included, but there's time for extras. Must-dos at Quy Nhon are the four-handed massage, foot-drainage massage and coconut body scrub followed by an aloe-vera wrap.

►► Aside from shopping, World Heritage-listed Hoi An also has a fascinating history that is best seen via an early morning walking tour, or with a cyclo driver pedalling you around.

HOW TO GET THERE

►► The next **Gorgeous Safari** to Vietnam departs in April 2008. For more information, visit www.gourmetsafaris.com.au

►► **Getaway** returns to the Nine Network on February 10, 2008.

Write to...

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