



FIRST REVIEW

Anantara QUY NHON VILLAS

RHEA SARAN escapes to a pretty Vietnamese coastal retreat and finds a hidden gem

Everyone loves a getaway. But there's getting away – and then there's really getting away. Anantara Quy Nhon Villas is firmly in the latter category. Just 26 stand-alone villas fronted by a private beach along a quiet, under-the-radar stretch of Vietnamese coastline.

That I was going somewhere off the beaten tourist path was clear even as I boarded my Vietnam Airlines flight from Hanoi (where you fly in direct from Dubai) to coastal Quy Nhon – I was one of only two non-locals on board. From Quy Nhon airport, the resort lies a further one-hour car ride away. So it's a journey, but all this travel serves the purpose of transporting you to a part of Vietnam that has yet to be inundated with visitors. No one ever said getting away – *truly* getting away – was easy.

But, boy, is it worth it. Waking up each morning of my stay at Anantara Quy Nhon, I'd sit out on my private pool deck with a cup of tea and nothing but uninterrupted views of the South China Sea, dotted with islands, and the occasional distant fisherman passing in his round basket boat for company.

Just over half the villas are set on the private beach, with direct access on to the soft sand; I loved falling asleep to the sound of waves crashing just beyond the glass patio doors. Ocean-view villas are perched slightly up the hillside, with a higher vantage point on that postcard-perfect view. All accommodation comes with private plunge pools, spacious decks, airy contemporary interiors in muted shades with a profusion of wood, and mod-cons like a flat-screen TV and JBL speakers for your music. I liked my plunge pool, but I loved my giant stand-alone bathtub a little bit more. Poised in front of a picture window in the large, light-filled bathroom, it looked like it could accommodate a family of four. The tub isn't the only oversized thing on hand: the minibar is of more maxi proportions, with a separate grape chiller and additional amenities like cheese and charcuterie in the main fridge.

While the villas are comfortably roomy, the resort itself is charmingly diminutive in size. Guests are welcomed into an open-air reception – with cool local design features inspired by traditional Vietnamese fishing boats



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and weaving patterns – before being whisked on a very short golf-buggy ride to their villa for check-in (honestly, you could walk around the grounds in 10 minutes). There's the Sea Fire Salt restaurant, open for breakfast, lunch and dinner, as well as a bar down by the main infinity pool, which also serves light bites (think chicken satay, salads, pizza and crab nachos). A little glass box of a gym has all the necessary equipment and is open 24 hours... and that sums up the entirety of the resort. It feels less like a hotel than a small, exclusive residential enclave – with five-star service (villa hosts attend to all needs).

Despite there being only one restaurant, I found a refreshing variety of dining on offer during the several days of my stay, which included the room service menu (don't be afraid to go off-menu, I did one night to great effect). Breakfast runs the gamut from traditional *pho* or stir-fried noodles to homemade granola and yogurt as well as eggs and pastries of all kinds. One afternoon I lunched on a spicy tuna poke bowl, another saw me dining on red snapper and Vietnamese sticky rice. Vietnam is famous for its flavoured salts (the resort has a variety to sprinkle on to dishes), and one night I ate fresh seafood served on a salt brick. Villa deck barbecues can be arranged, as can Anantara's Spice Spoons cooking classes. I learnt to make a carrot, raw mango and papaya salad, surprisingly light deep-fried spring rolls and *bún bò hu*, which is my favourite of the various Vietnamese noodle soups (the broth is deeper, spicier and heavier on the lemongrass – real soul food).

The resort's mission is to deepen its wellness bent. There's yoga in the morning, tai chi in the afternoon, and they soon expect to introduce meditation sessions with a local monk. The Anantara Spa here feels like a bit of a haven (note: it is shared with Minor Hotels' AVANI resort next door). Perched amid lush greenery,



many treatment rooms feel like you've entered a treehouse for a bit of a jungle-spa vibe. My Vietnamese wellness journey began with a foot ritual and ended with a coconut-milk bath, a typical ingredient of the region. The massage in between was done Vietnamese-style, which has similarities to Balinese massage, with long strokes and bending to release tension.

While the resort feels like a little oasis, one of the reasons to come all this way is also to discover this part of central Vietnam. With the Quy Nhon Explorer, Anantara offers guided tours of some noteworthy sights in the area. On my half-day tour,

I discovered just how culturally diverse Vietnam is, even just in terms of religion. We first drove out to a peaceful riverside church and seminary, followed by a climb up to the Banh It Towers, relics of the old Cham dynasty (housed inside one of the ruins was a Hindu god), and finally on to the largest Buddhist pagoda in the region. What stood out most was that I was literally the only tourist at each site. The Banh It Towers have a feel of Angkor Wat-esque history and majesty (though of course significantly smaller), yet I didn't have to rock up at 5am to get any chance of seeing it without the hordes; at 10am, I was still the only person up there.

Quy Nhon is a getaway, even when you're not trying. And that's worth the journey alone. Villas from AED 1,947; 0084-2-56-384 0077, anantara.com

From top left: Visit the Banh It Towers near Quy Nhon; local dishes like *pho* are on the menu; the private beach; an ocean-view villa; the treehouse-like spa; a treatment room overlooking the sea