

Viet Cong Tunnels Welcome Tourists

Vietnam is one of Asian most rapidly developing countries. Its economy has been growing in the recent years, the level of services has improved and the potential of local tourist industry has massively increased. Even though the Vietnam War (1959-75) left the country and its people in a terrible state, it appears that the painful memories are gradually settling down and the Vietnamese are ready to tell their stories to the world. Many tourists who come to Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) are attracted by the nearby **Cu Chi Tunnels**.



This intricate underground system of passages was used by the Viet Cong guerilla fighters as a refuge and center of operations during the Vietnam War. The tunnels are located about 70 km of the city of Saigon and all together feature a surprising maze of 250 km of underground corridors and rooms. The entire system dating back to the 1940s enabled the Viet Cong to control the whole surrounding rural area.

What is fascinating here is the diversity of the tunnels - people in fact lived here, spent years and years underground without seeing daylight for weeks at a time. There are kitchens, living areas, improvised hospitals, weapon factories and operation rooms, simply an entire city below the surface. In places, it was several stories deep and housed up to 10,000 people who were getting married, giving birth, going to school. They only came out at night to furtively tend their crops.

The ground here is hard clay, which made the whole system possible. But even so, the planning and construction was incredible. People dug the corridors with hand tools, filling reed baskets and dumping the dirt into bomb craters. They installed large vents so they could hear approaching helicopters, smaller vents for air and baffled vents to dissipate cooking smoke. There were also

hidden trap doors and gruesomely effective bamboo-stake booby traps.

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The strategic value of the tunnels was immense; they offered convenient access to U.S. military bases and enabled communication between the guerillas. Simply enough, the tunnels were a major and constant worry for the U.S. soldiers.

Nowadays, tourists are welcome here. They may learn about the life in the tunnels, about the tactics of guerilla fighters as well as what life in the war felt like for common people. It is a very beneficial and deep experience for anyone. Being in Saigon and missing out on this impressive tour is from a tourist's point of view simply unacceptable.

History

In the beginning, there was never a direct order to build the tunnels; instead, they developed in response to a number of different circumstances, most importantly the military tactics of the French and U.S. The tunnels began in 1948 so that the Viet Minh could hide from French air and ground sweeps. Each hamlet built their own underground communications route through the hard clay, and over the years, the separate tunnels were slowly and meticulously connected and fortified. By 1965, there were over 200 kilometers of connected tunnel. Most of the supplies used to build and maintain the tunnels were stolen or scavenged from U.S. bases or troops.

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