

The really beautiful Vinh Trang Pagoda is easily reached either by a pleasant bike ride or can be walked too while staying at My Tho, Vietnam. Going to look around this Buddhist Pagoda is essential - the buildings, gardens and settings are the most beautiful we have ever seen anywhere. If you are not staying at My Tho but are anywhere near the town then it really is worth stopping off there.

How to get there if staying in My Tho: From the river front turns left along Trung Trac which goes alongside the Bao Dinh Canal. Turn right across the second bridge and then continue along Nguyen Van Giac to a main road junction. Turn left into Nguyen Trung Truc and the complex is just a short way along on the right. You cannot miss the pagoda as it is fronted by gardens and a very visible and huge standing Buddha.

Vinh Trang Pagoda was built in 1849, has been restored many times and resembles an Indian Raj Palace - it's decorated with mosaics made from broken pottery. Overlooked by a tall white Buddha with another huge sitting and laughing Buddha image alongside, Vinh Trang Pagoda is set amongst lovely gardens packed with flowers and shrubs, lotus pools and tombs of the monks and has huge ornate triple arched gates.

This is an active Pagoda and there are resident monks around but you quite welcome to look around most of the buildings - the entrance is to the right-hand side of the Pagoda. The main chamber is made of dark wood pillars and has gilt woodwork - there is a tiny courtyard which is lined with the monks sleeping quarters.

Entrance to Vinh Trang Pagoda is free - there are officials on the gate and if you are cycling they will point you out where to leave your bikes (usually just inside the entrance gate) and also keep an eye on them for you. Having had a good look around it is also nice to then go for a wander or cycle ride around the many paths in the area. These often go alongside very small canals and are lined with beautiful foliage and a variety of small houses. Just be a bit aware of any local people who tend to whiz along on their motorbikes!

One of the things to do while staying at My Tho is to go on a Boat Trip out onto the beautiful Mekong River.

Boat trips at My Tho can be booked through any [hotels in My Tho](#) or Tien Giang Tourist Company which is located along the river front near the Chuong Duong Hotel. Typically, they charge USD30 to USD35 for a private tour to the islands - also having lunch on one of the islands is possible but this is extra. You should give them as much notice as possible especially if you want them to arrange an English-speaking guide to come along with you (a good idea). As the tourist office caters mostly for pre-arranged organized coach trips then setting up private tours may take a little bit of time - if needed they will find someone in the office who speaks English.

There is a large map in the office so you can choose which route you would like to take although this may be subject to tides. Note the Mekong river is extremely wide and has fast currents and can be very choppy especially on the part between Dragon Island and Ben Tre Province. If not sure about being on such a small boat in such possible conditions then ask for a life jacket - certainly make sure there are life-jackets in the boat somewhere.

Incidentally beware of people along the river front in My Tho offering boat trips at cheap prices - these boats are almost certainly not insured, may not be legal and anyway it's just not worth the risk on such a dangerous river just to save a couple dollars. If you want an alternative to Tieng Giang Tourist Company there is another which arranges boat trips called Ben Tre Tourist Company at 4/1 Le Hung Gang - this is out of town near the new bridge.

A typical boat trip takes you across the Mekong River to Ben Tre Province, then along the Tan Thach Canal to the Honey Bee Farm for some Vietnamese honey tea tasting. This is followed by a visit to the coconut candy factory which is extremely interesting. They show you how the coconuts are pressed to extract the milk - this milk is heated with lots of sugar, then when it all sets it's all cut into small pieces. Various flavors are added during the process and the end result is extremely delicious coconut candy bars. The ever-resourceful Vietnamese do not waste anything in this process with every part of the coconut used for something or other - for instance even the husks are used for making coconut matting or for fuel. The boat tour may well continue on to visit the Coconut Monk Temple on Phoenix Island - this temple features 9 blue and gold dragon-entwined pillars which are meant to represent the 9 tributaries of the River Mekong. The "coconut monk" was actually called Ong Dao Dua and he formed a new religion which was a mix of Christianity and Buddhism - known as Tinh Do Cu Si.

The final part of the trip might well include taking you to Unicorn Island for some fruit tasting and for which you have to travel a little way up a narrow canal - it's too shallow for the tourist boat so you are transferred onto a sampan. The narrow canal has a canopy of palms and on either side, there are beautiful mangrove and other foliage - it really is a lovely part of the trip. Once you get off the sampan you are given a platter of quite a few different fruits to try out plus some Vietnamese tea - all accompanied by local music and dancers.

Source: [Đặt khách sạn](#)