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**HOTELS & RESORTS**

# REVIEW: ZANNIER HOTELS BÃI SAN HÔ

This new luxury beach resort near Quy Nhon highlights just how much historical and natural beauty remains to be seen in coastal Vietnam.



By Katie Lockhart

<https://travelandleisureasia.com/review-zannier-hotels-bai-san-ho/>

**A** **TRULY SECLUDED EXPERIENCE AWAITS AT THE LUXURY** Zannier Hotels Bãi San Hô, a 45-minute drive from Quy Nhơn, on the central coast of Vietnam smack between Nha Trang and Danang. The resort's 71 villas are arranged in three categories, each in a different traditional Vietnamese architectural style, and spread over a sprawling 98 hectares of lush hills, rice paddies and one kilometer of beautiful beachfront.

The lobby, Nhà Ở restaurant, an infinity pool, a hidden bar and an underground spa occupy what looks like a stone fortress perched on a hill overlooking its kingdom, which also includes a gym, yoga studio, kids' club, conference room, beach bar and two more restaurants. Exploring is a must, but be warned: once you step foot in your tranquil villa, it becomes near impossible to leave.



I'm told Arnaud Zannier bought the land in 2014 to immerse guests in the feeling of wondrous remoteness you first encounter via the vistas from the lobby. If you're unfamiliar with his brand, he's likely not offended: dedicated to preservationist travel and epicureanism that stays authentic to the destination, Zannier only has five hotels (the other in Asia being Phum Baitang in Cambodia) and is all about small-batch, purposeful hospitality. The family owns vineyards in Provence and Douro, where they also grow honey and olive oil, and they have a range of artisanal organic tea from China.

My buggy zips down the paved roads as the wind cruises through the long grass on either side. Mixed with the waves crashing on the beach, it creates an otherworldly calm, a symphony of daily life in little-visited and even lesser-known Phú Yên province, the easternmost in Vietnam.



“Those are our ruins, over there,” the resort manager, Michael, points out. According to local legend, more than a century ago, the father of Jean Moreau (a fighter for the liberation of Vietnam known locally as Dương Bá Lộc), settled on a plot next to the ocean and found an ancient Cham treasure of gold and gems buried where the rice paddies sit today. “It’s not here, now, I’ve looked,” Michael jokes.

But the ruins of the house remain, an homage to the region’s layered and fascinating history, a prevalent theme throughout Zannier Hotels Bãi San Hồ. Phú Yên province was a stronghold of the ancient Cham kingdom, a seafaring Hindu culture that controlled this part of modern-day Vietnam for some 1,200 years. It has long been a center for agriculture and fishing. Quy Nhon held an important American air base during the Vietnam War, but it wasn’t until the past decade in which that nearby city, in neighboring Bình Định province, became a real tourism destination known for its stellar seafood scene. Even so, it remains below most radars: until Zannier opened in December 2020, the Avani and Anantara Quy Nhon Villas were the only name brands in the area.

BEACH RESORT, THIS AREA OFFERS GUESTS SOMETHING DIFFERENT.



Some things like the hardened-molten-lava Ganh Da Dia reef alongside clear-blue waters, red-brick Champa towers juxtaposed with one of the oldest Roman Catholic churches in Vietnam, stunning surroundings and a completely off-the-beaten-path feeling.

The buggy slows, and my thatched-roof Beach Pool villa, partially shrouded by swaying grass, comes into view. An ode to the local Cham architecture, these villas have a pitched bamboo roof with exterior walls finished in a mixture of clay, sand and straw. (The Hill Pool villas are inspired by the traditional homes of the Ede ethnic group, while the Paddy Field villas evoke the lives of local fishermen.)



I slip off my shoes and step inside the 59-square-meter space, first noticing the dark-timber beams and custom-made linen-clad canopy bed. The afternoon sun bounces off the distressed-wood floors as I run my fingers over the hand-brushed walls, the same color of the sand on the beach just outside the large ocean-facing offset swivel glass door. Aged boxes that once held rice sit in the corner, while fishing-rope-wrapped lampshades and traditional hill-tribe baskets hang on the walls. Every inch is impeccably and eclectically staged with Vietnamese antiques mixed with modern touches. It's practically begging for a photoshoot.

In front of me, past my private pool and lounge chairs, the waves crash on the beach, sending mist into the air. The Aquarius in me runs down to put my feet in the water. I notice that along the long stretch of beach is a volleyball net and a beach bar calling to me like a mirage in the desert.



I wander over and sit down on the linen couches under the canopy. I'm quickly met with a "*Xin chao!*" and a menu. The variety of fresh sugarcane juices mixed with fruit and tea from Zannier's organic tea farm in China is perfect for a warm afternoon by the water.

Vietnam's strict border closures during the pandemic meant the resort's foreign 'hospitality experts' never made it in to train the staff, but it hardly matters. Here, it's all warm smiles, a willingness to chat, genuine connections and high service standards.



bat. The menu is a combination of western food — including seafood pasta and an ultimate burger — mixed with Vietnamese comfort standards like *bánh mì* and *bánh xèo* (a popular local savory pancake dish).

I'm spoiled for choice, and my waiter can tell I'm waffling. "May I suggest today's special? A locally caught Quy Nhon lobster from the bay?" He points to the fishing boats lining the horizon, and my decision is made.

As I lazily make my way through the silica sand back to my beach villa, I notice my shoulders aren't around my neck, my jaw is unclenched, and I'm totally relaxed. A full-stomach and the sound of the waves means I'm out like a light on the plush outdoor sectional sofa.



That doesn't stop me from dreaming of the homestyle Vietnamese dishes I've been promised at Bà Hai, the resort's third restaurant, which is designed to look like an A-frame communal house in a Bahnar village. Luckily, I come to just in time for dinner: some *bún chả* and *bánh cuốn* like grandma makes.

## GETTING THERE

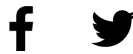
Fly into Quy Nhon from Hanoi, Saigon, Hai Phuong or Vinh, then it's a 45-minute drive from the airport to the resort. *NB: Just before COVID-19 stopped cross-*

regular, a plan we understand is likely to be back on track when travel resumes.  
-K.L.

**STAY**

Zannier Hotels Bãi San Hô

- \* Doubles from US\$240 per night inclusive of breakfast.
- \* Special APAC package: Three-night stay with return airport transfer from/to Quy Nhon Airport, a 20 percent discount in all F&B outlets, one complimentary extra bed and breakfast for one child up to 16 years old, and a complimentary upgrade from Paddy Field villa to One-bedroom Hill Pool villa *OR* from One-bedroom Hill Pool villa to One-bedroom Beach Pool villa. Valid for citizens and expats living in APAC countries (China, Hong Kong, India, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam) from US\$720 through October 29, 2021.



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