



## *Hue—ward bound*

I've had the pleasure of spending the past few days in Hue, the imperial city of Viet Nam. While most of my time was spent meeting with provincial government officials, secondary and university teachers and administrators and students, I did manage a visit to the Citadel, the symbol of Hue's imperial past.

Prior to WWII, Hue had been the capital of Viet Nam. The city has a long and distinguished history with the Citadel at its heart. The Citadel was home to Viet Nam's last imperial dynasty—the Nguyen dynasty. The area within the Citadel housed imperial residences, meeting halls, libraries, ministries and parks. The Citadel is almost 10 km in circumference and its walls are 6 m high and 20 m thick. The moat which encircles the entire Citadel is 23 m wide with a depth of 4 m. There are ten entrances to the citadel, many of which are now bridges and roads into the Citadel area.

Today little is left of the Citadel. Between the French and American wars 80% of the Hue's palaces and historic sights were totally destroyed, wiping out several hundred years of Vietnamese history.

The citadel was begun in 1804 and served as Viet Nam's capitol until around 1945. Dominating the skyline is the 37 m high *Cot Co* or Flag Tower, first erected in 1809. *Cot Co* achieved international renown on the morning of 31 January 1968, when communist forces seized the Citadel and ran their yellow-starred banner up its mast.

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Above: *Cot Co*, or *Flag Tower*, first erected in 1809.

Below: *The Thai Hoa Palace* used for official receptions and other important court ceremonies.





For 25 days the Viet Cong flag fluttered defiantly as US Marines and South Vietnamese soldiers fought house-to-house to retake the city. During this struggle Hue was battered by machine guns, rockets, bombs, napalm, artillery fire and naval bombardment, causing immense destruction. Further damage ensued follow-



Detail from the Thai Hoa Palace.

ing the collapse of the south, as symbols of Vietnam's royal past were left to decay by the communists—a policy which changed in 1990, as the potential for tourism was realised.

Hue is included in the UNESCO Heritage List which has resulted in the Citadel receiving much needed assistance in repairing damage sustained during the French and American wars.

## When in Hue be sure and enjoy ***Bun Bo Hue*** Hot and Spicy Noodle Soup



*Bun Bo Hue* is a great change from the otherwise bland Pho of the north. The key is the broth. *Bun Bo Hue* has a spicy yet sweet tang to it. Ladled in among the soup are pork slivers, rare beef, chopped spring onions and fairly thick and chewy fresh bun (noodles). There's also a side dish of beansprouts, various herbs and banana flowers. Chili paste and fish sauce are available to fine-tune the broth.