

Dai Nam Theme Park

Everyone loves a theme park; the gut wrenching rollercoasters, the zany rides and the musical carousels; and when it comes to them, the west certainly has it covered. Thankfully, now has Vietnam. Words by Will Peach. Photos by Khoa Tran.



OUTSIDE OF HO CHI MINH CITY, AN hour's ride west down Highway 13, lurks Vietnam's own breathtaking land of wonderment, one to rival the plans of Walt Disney himself. Well, almost.

It's not Suoi Tien, the theme park with the huge statues of Vua Hung lurking over Highway 1. And it's certainly not Dam Sen Park or the now defunct Saigon Wonderland in Phu My Hung.

This is for real, or as real as an amusement park can get.

More than three years in the making, the land in question is Lac Canh Dai Nam Van Hien, or Dai Nam for short. This recently opened theme park close to Song Be Golf Course is Vietnam's own entertainment flagship for the world stage.

◦ Size is Everything

Set in over 450 hectares of spectacularly kept landscape, visitors are transported directly back to Imperial China and the

glorious reign of the Ming Dynasty. Forget Cinderella's enchanted castle, forget the Epcot Globe, the centre point of Dai Nam is the Golden Temple, a 5,000 m² pagoda of real gold, housing the biggest shrines, gongs and altars in all of Vietnam. However, access isn't guaranteed, and the park does its best to shut any undeserving visitor out with its monolithic Great Wall that closely mirrors that of Beijing's Forbidden City itself.

Dai Nam, like its western counterparts, seeks to provide all the thrills and spills one expects. Walk past the endless supermarket and the 5,000-room hotel to be greeted by the exhilarating view of the colossal Dai Nam Square, a massive open air concert venue that foregrounds the Golden Temple and the eerie Bao Son Mountain. This 13.5 hectare space plays host to concerts, plays and other events throughout the year, holding a capacity of over 30,000 people. If walking in the midday heat to each of the complex's parks isn't top of your agenda, hitch a buggy or a

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train to avoid the unforgiving sun at no extra cost.

◦ Let the Fun Begin

The amusement park will probably be your first stop. Hop off your ride and have a quick break beneath one of the many spray fountains before being flung into the air, spun around in circles and dropped from great heights. Enter the haunted house through the golden mouth of a traditional Chinese dragon and let the footlights guide your way through a passage of flying witches, falling skeletons and more.

If, on the other hand you're there with the kids, then join them on the Dino Hop-Per, Kids Coaster or Mini Tugboat. Be sure, however, not to miss the fantastic 4D cinema which showcases the very best in entertainment technology by taking you on a haunted mine train ride where you feel rain fall from the ceiling and the spit of a deadly cobra. Friendly English speaking staff are always on hand to ensure your safety and to offer any help.

◦ Time for a Feeding

Following all the fun and frolics of the day you probably won't escape the rumblings of

a hungry stomach. All the better then for the huge variety of food and drink on offer in the many outlets scattered around the grounds. Chill out with a coffee in the cosy air conditioned interior of Nha Hang Cafe while the kids check out Quick Pizza for a speedy snack. If you need that little reminder that you are still in Vietnam, grab some pho or bun bo for around VND20,000. Ice cream is also popular at only VND12,000 a scoop and comes in a variety of flavours.

Having refuelled and reenergised you may want to take it a little easy before hitting the park's big boys; Dai Nam Rollercoaster, Sky Diver and Log Flume. Sky Diver affords awe-inspiring panoramic views of the park, if only for a second, before the 100ft plunge to the ground, while the Log Flume has you all calm and comfortable before throwing you into the 70ft wave at the end. Enjoy all the corkscrews, loops and rapid G's of the rollercoaster before a quick dash to the bumper boats afterwards.

◦ Lions and Tigers and Bears, Oh My!

After spending most of your day thrown about on rides, what better way to wind down than peruse the large open air enclosures of Dai Nam Zoo. Catch a shuttle from the amusement park and start on the zoo's winding circuit, vis-

iting the white tigers, Asian elephants, giraffes and white rhinos. Take a well-earned rest on the viewing stalls or gently meander around the reptile house and aviary watching many of our earth's different creatures enjoying faithful representations of their natural habitats. Furthermore, the zoo runs a successful breeding programme and educates guests in informative ways with its English signage.

◦ More to Come

Projected to open in mid 2009 is Dai Nam's own homage to popular water parks like Typhoon Lagoon and Wet N' Wild spanning over 25,000m².

Excitement is here, but make sure you don't eat before getting on the rollercoaster.

◦ Information

Tickets cost VND150,000 for adults and an additional VND20,000 for the zoo. Dai Nam is located in Binh Duong province, 35km from Ho Chi Minh City. Take Highway 13 (starts as Xo Viet Nghe Tinh) through Binh Thanh and Thu Duc and follow it towards Thu Dau Mot. Local bus number 18 runs daily between the Ben Thanh Market bus depot and Dai Nam. Visit www.laccanhdainamvanhien.vn for more information. 