

► DISPATCHES FROM VIRTUOSO INSIDERS

Just Back from Vietnam

Melbourne-based Virtuoso travel advisor **Cate Cave** recently travelled to Vietnam with ten other travel industry professionals from around the globe as part of a 14-day educational tour. Here, she shares her highlights.

WHY GO: Vietnam has unforgettable culture, **diverse food** options, adventure, and exciting experiences, from the coasts to the cities to the mountains and everything in between.

SAIL AWAY: **Exo Travel** arranged our junk boat ride through Ha Long Bay, which included sailing by **limestone cliffs** and climbing to the top of Titov Island. Looking down at all the islands and boats dotting the emerald waters was breathtaking.



Cave with a street vendor in Hanoi and (above) Ha Long Bay from Titov Island.

BEST BITES: We tried the famous Vietnamese coffee and pho – a **traditional Vietnamese noodle soup** – and visited one of Hanoi's markets, where vendors sell everything from fresh tropical fruits and fragrant herbs to fresh meats, flowers, and live fish and frogs.

HOI AN: This UNESCO World Heritage site's architecture and relaxed lifestyle have changed little over the years, making it a perennial favourite. The town's tiny shops

are home to some of **Asia's best tailors**, who can create outfits overnight.

SOUVENIR: One find in Hoi An was a trio of **small charcoal drawings** of local people on rice paper. The vendor was the artist's mother. She was so proud of her daughter and talked to us for ages.

A SUITE VISIT: We visited the sophisticated **Six Senses Ninh Van Bay** after a private speedboat trip. I loved the impressive villas perched on huge boulders with stunning views overlooking the sea.

HO CHI MINH CITY: We explored the city at night on a Vespa tour and ended up at one of the many **bars and clubs** where locals like to unwind.



Virtuoso's Cristina Magni (bottom row, left) with Virtuoso advisors and Banyan Tours & Travels executives.

► VIRTUOSO NEWS

The India Jet Set

Virtuoso's Cristina Magni recently accompanied seven Australian Virtuoso travel advisors and agency executives on a ten-day trip through India with **Banyan Tours & Travels** and **Taj Hotels Palaces Resorts Safaris**. The travellers stayed at the island-bound Taj Lake Palace, Udaipur; shopped for colourful adornments at a **bangle bazaar** (Maniyaro Ka Rasta); toured UNESCO World Heritage site **Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus** (formerly known as Victoria Terminus Station) during a stay at The Taj Mahal Palace, Mumbai; and more. "My clients place a lot of trust in me when I personally recommend destinations, hotels, and tour companies," says Brisbane-based Virtuoso travel advisor Sue Basedow. "Having experienced a destination first-hand is priceless, and I won't ever forget the consistently high standard of accommodation and service. One highlight for me was being met by decorated elephants and beautiful **restored vintage cars** whilst entering the Rambagh Palace, Jaipur."

ASK THE ADVISORS

What is your go-to weekend getaway?

"My favourite is Byron Bay. You can drive down from Gold Coast after work, relax on the beach, and go diving. Julian Rocks is an amazing dive site with plenty of marine life (and sharks). In the evening you can eat at one of the nearby restaurants and get away from city life."

– Richard Muff, Gold Coast

"Fiji is so easy to get to – it's only a three-hour flight from New Zealand – and it has some wonderful accommodation spots. One of my favourites is Vomo Island Fiji, just fifteen minutes from Nadi via helicopter."

– Kelly Showler, Auckland

"Noosa Heads on the Sunshine Coast. The fashionable yet relaxed main street, Hastings Street, has a fabulous array of cafés, restaurants, and boutiques. The Noosa National Park Coastal Walk is stunning, with fabulous scenery and small beach coves to stop at for a swim. Look out across the bay for whales and dolphins."

– Deborah Barley, Gold Coast