

# Perfect touch

With the ongoing development of resorts, Vietnam is fast becoming the ideal place for visitors seeking a form of retreat.

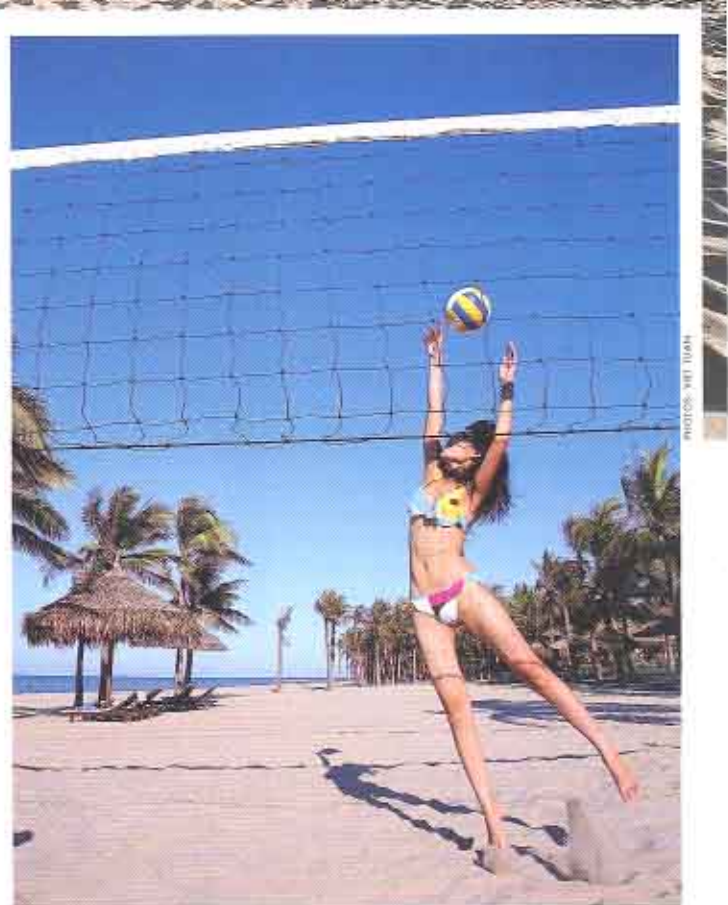
**D**emand for luxury travel, both inside and outside of Vietnam, has shown signs of slowing this year but a new group of high-end travellers is emerging who seek more to a holiday than mere indulgence. A holiday must give these travellers something besides manicures and room service. They now want something to take home that lasts longer than a tan. Meditation, exercise, healthy diets, natural settings - all these things are part and parcel of a new class of leisure travel designed to meet spiritual as well as physical needs. "Wellness", as it is termed in the hospitality industry, has become big business, and resorts in Vietnam are introducing spa services to meet the challenge.

Ms Myla Caceres, Director of Sales and Marketing at the new L'Amien Mui New Resort & Spa thinks that people travel to relax

and part of their holidays is purely relaxation. And the best way to relax is to have a nice spa. "Spa services are becoming essential for guests, not only as a means of relaxation and rejuvenation but also as a great alternative remedy for managing stress," she said. The resort's Anmien Spa is the only one in Phan Thiet offering Ayurveda Treatments from India, with other services including Thai Traditional and Balinese massages plus a range of healing therapies. The Anmien Spa experience is not just about good massage and perfect ambience; it was also given the utmost attention when the resort developed the spa.

Likewise, Mr Herbert Laubichler-Pichler, General Manager of The Nam Hai in Quang Nam province said that a well-travelled cus-

tommer would always expect to have spa services on hand when staying at a resort. "In our case, since the spa has such a good reputation we can safely say that it has become an attraction in its own right and guests come not just because of the reputation of The Nam Hai but because of the standing of the spa," he said. In March 2009, The Nam Hai struck gold - an Asia Spa & Wellness Gold Award, the region's premier exhibition for the spa and wellness industry. The resort's spa menu is based on oriental healing traditions to offer guests a cultural experience within the context of a spa. The Nam Hai has eight private spa



PHOTOS: VET TUAN



villas suspended over a tranquil lagoon of lotus flowers. Each villa features private changing facilities, a treatment room with state-of-the-art massage beds, a steam shower and a separate relaxation room with oversized daybed and bath. A nail salon offers beauty rituals with a serene view of the lagoon.

Six months after the 94-room boutique spa Life Heritage Resort Hoi An reopened with a fresh, modern tropical Asian design, the old town's premier resort opened the doors of a new facility: a fully fledged Life Spa, in March this year. "Remarkably enough, this will be the first spa of international standing in the old town," said Mr Chris Duffy, General Director of Life Resorts. "For both guests and visitors alike, there is the opportunity to walk the historic old district and top off the effort with a world-class spa treatment. It's a winning combination - heritage and wellness."

Life Resorts operates two wholly-owned resorts in Vietnam: the Hoi An property and the Life Wellness Resort Qui Nhon, and also manages the Blue Ocean Resort on the south central coast in Phan Thiet. The signature treatment is an 80-minute fusion of seven techniques, known as the "Harmony of Energy". The spa features several 30-minute express treatments and a clutch of healing treatments that include hot stone therapies, aromatic oils and foot reflexology. "In Qui Nhon, the Life Spa is a perennial favourite in international wellness competitions," Mr Duffy said. "Although our focus in Hoi An is on the area's rich heritage, we had nothing to lose by importing tried and true treatments from Vietnam's premier wellness destination."

Whereas many resorts sequester spa facilities in the bowels of the building or at the back of the property, the new spa at Princess d'Annam is out front, on the sea. "Our spa has the best seat in the house," said Mr Jean Philippe Beghin, General Manager of the recently opened Prince d'Annam Resort & Spa. "All too often people forget that the setting plays a fundamental role in an overall spa experience. Exteriors are sacrificed for interiors. But we have sacrificed nothing."

With its full-on spa menu introduced from June 1, Mr Beghin's boasts about his facility are immediately apparent. The building itself

claims beachfront real estate and opens up to panoramic views of Ke Ga Bay, with its iconic 1899-built lighthouse defining one edge of the bay and a dramatic dune of sand defining the other. Therapeutic body massages anchor the new spa menu, with nine treatments covering a range of styles, from Vietnamese and Thai massage to Swedish and Hawaiian.

Clearly, natural setting plays a very important role for a spa. Luxury spans beyond the opulence of marble bathrooms, four-poster beds and exotic plunge pools; all standard at today's five star resorts. However, the discerning traveller values the exclusivity of private beaches and quiet, secluded places that bring him or her closer to nature.

Besides location and spa menu, the most important factor in satisfaction is the caring attitude that the resorts' staff extend to guests. "You can have a good, expensive product, but without good staff the experience can never be complete," said Mr Laubichler-Pichler.

Although the total number of guests at most resorts in Vietnam have decreased slightly over the last year, according to the resort managers the average spend per guest was higher and when people decide to travel they are also ready to indulge themselves with two or three hours at the spa. At Princess D'Annam, for example, 99 per cent of

guests go to the spa, while The Nam Hai aims for 15 per cent of turnover from their hotel guests being for spa services, and the figure is achievable.

Over the last decade or so Vietnam has become a more and more attractive destination for travellers. Unlike many of its neighbour, though, the country has no real tradition as a place to come for healing, but it is still graced with unspoilt nature and a rich cultural heritage. Together with the development of luxurious resorts, Vietnam is an ideal venue for this new kind of retreat. ■