

Hoi An Ancient Town

Hội An is a small city on the coast of the South China Sea in central Vietnam. It is located in the Quảng Nam province and is home to approximately 88,000 inhabitants.

The city possessed the largest harbour in Southeast Asia in the First Century and was known as Lâm Ấp Phố (Champa City).

The former harbour town of the Champa people at the estuary of the Thu Bon river was an important trading centre in the 16th and 17th centuries, where Chinese from various provinces as well as Japanese, Dutch and Indians settled down. During this period of the China trade, the town was called Hai Pho (Seaside Town), during the French occupation. Originally Hai Pho was a divided town, because across the "Japanese Bridge" used to be the Japanese settlement. The bridge (Chùa cầu) is a unique covered structure built by the Japanese, the only known covered bridge with a Buddhist pagoda attached to one side.

The town is known to the French and Spanish as Faifo, and by similar names in Portuguese and Dutch. A number of theories have been put forth as to the origin of this name. Some scholars have suggested that it comes from the word "Hái-phố" (海浦) meaning "sea town", while others have said that it seems more likely to simply be a shortening of Hội An-phố (會安浦), "the town of Hoi An", to "Hoi-pho" which became "Faifo".

In 1999, the old town was declared World Heritage by the UNESCO, as a well-preserved example of a Southeast Asian trading port of the 15th to 19th centuries, whose buildings display a unique blend of local and foreign influences.

Today, Hội An is still a small city, but it attracts a fair number of tourists, also being a well established place on the backpacker trail. Many visit for the numerous art and craft shops and tailors, who produce made-to-measure clothes for a fraction of the western price. Several Internet cafés, bars and restaurants have opened along the riverfront. Some popular evening venues, especially with Western visitors, are Tam Tam's restaurant and bar, the Before and Now bar on Le Loi, the Mango restaurant as well as the Salsa on the other side of the river.

Source: --Wikipedia [<http://www.wikipedia.org>]