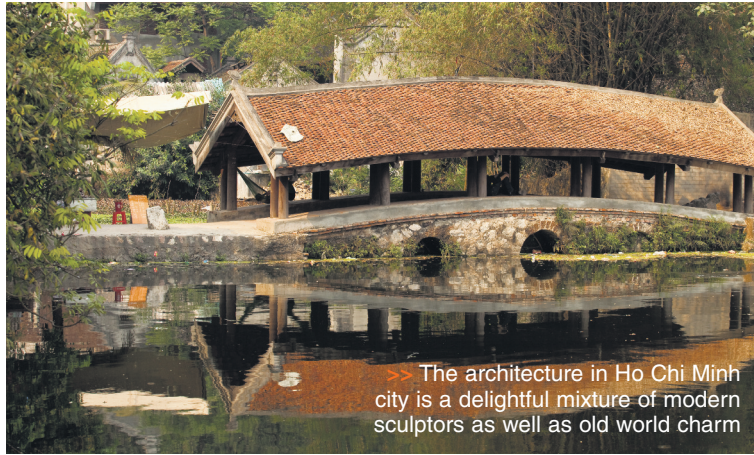


**WHERE TO STAY:**

You can opt for budget friendly hotels such as Blue River Hotel (approximately ₹1,500 – ₹3,500) which has affordable rooms and a staff that speaks a little bit of English. If you want to indulge in a little bit of luxury though, Rex Hotel (approximately ₹6,000 – ₹9,000 per night) is a good option. It's rich in history and very tourist friendly, without cutting you off from the local flavour of the city.



>> The architecture in Ho Chi Minh city is a delightful mixture of modern sculptors as well as old world charm

If you're making your way down to Vietnam, the one city you're most likely to visit (and with good reason) is Ho Chi Minh City. The city was formerly known as Saigon and is still called that by several locals stuck in its old world charm. From the spindling archaic Reunification Palace to swanky office buildings, the city is a good mix of old and new. We stayed at the classic Rex Hotel, which is rich in history and very tourist friendly.

You can tell why there's a lack of cars as you travel through, Ho Chi Minh City is a foot friendly place.

Ben Thanh market is a must visit as it has everything you can imagine



# Asian experiment

Ho Chi Minh City is abuzz with motorcycles, cheap shopping and an array of food, says **Rhea Dhanbhoora**. We tell you why the vibrant city in Vietnam is a good travel destination despite the language barrier...

under a single roof. It's so large that you can get lost inside, but never bored. From linen and clothes, to jewellery and an experimental array of food, there's nothing you won't find here — and for the best prices. You have to haggle, which can get a bit tedious because of the language barrier, but if you're lucky you may find a kind hearted soul who speaks English to translate for you. Communicating may seem hard but the people are so friendly that you're going to forget you are both speaking different languages. Shopkeepers are helpful and will give your children a complimentary gift if they're lucky.

Visit the War Remnants Museum and stand outside the People's Committee Hall to soak in some brilliant French colonial architecture. With several museums, religious sites and shows to visit, you'll never have a dull moment.

Eating in Ho Chi Minh City is not for the faint hearted, as they will offer you (with enthusiasm) snakes marinating in bottles of wine. Be careful to double check what meat you're eating, because they serve up "specials" such as dog meat. While we stayed away from the snake and dog meat dishes, we did try the frog's legs and snails, which are quite delicious, the rubbery texture reminding us of mussels. Although restaurants such as Hoi An and Temple Club are great options for some delectable Vietnamese fare, our best food experiences were little stalls and women selling bowls of soupy pork

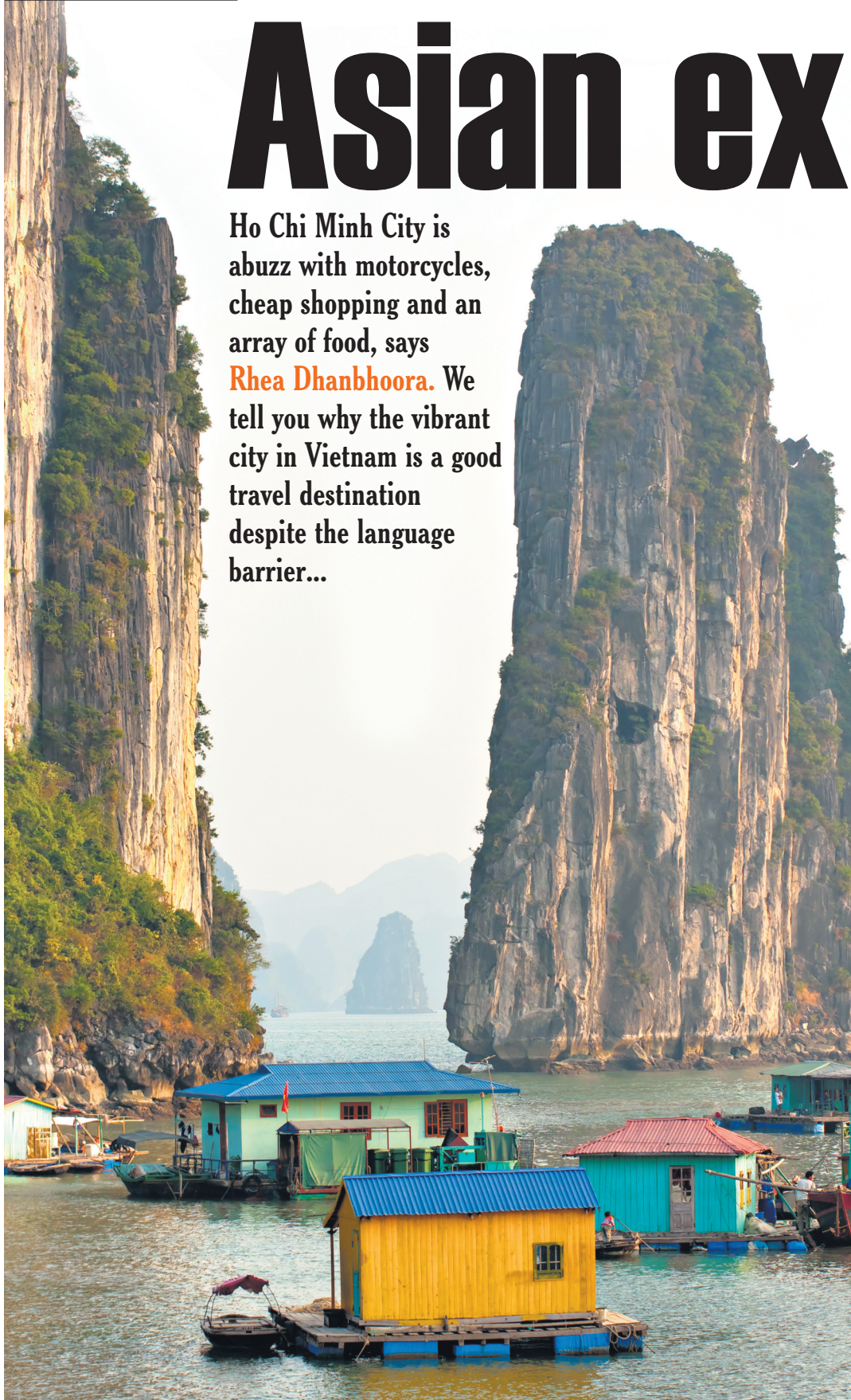


and rice in the middle of the road, on upturned stools. Don't miss a chance to mingle with the locals and taste their food instead of visiting tourist heavy restaurants, where fare is tailored to suit international palettes.

Dishes such as Banh Hoi (thin noodles topped with vegetables and meat), Bun Mang Vit (bamboo shoot and duck noodle soup) and Bo 7 Mon (seven courses of beef) are good options for those who want a taste of Vietnam but don't want to be too adventurous. The food is flavourful and filling and the traditional green tea doled out to you at the end of the meal is often accompanied by small yellow bananas to aid digestion. Also don't miss out on the popular Asian dried fish snacks.

Ho Chi Minh City is one of the safest, friendliest destinations in the world where there's always someone waiting to help you find your way, get the best price on crystals or smile and nod at you as you walk past. Sadly, another thing that is synonymous with the city are bike thieves, so hold your bags and purses close to you unless you want them snatched up, like ours almost were.

Ho Chi Minh City is all about experimentation. Whether it's trying to decipher what you're eating, making your way through a crowded market without the slightest clue as to what people are offering to you or even simply watching locals buzz around in a hurry — the vibrant city is a great place to be. Don't call your travels complete until you've checked this one off your list.



>> To get the best experience in Vietnam, mingle with locals, eat local fare and visit little towns and villages instead of sticking to tourist hotspots