



## Visit Soc Trang Vietnam

Soc Trang province is located in the Mekong River Delta region near the mouth of the Bassac River (Song Hau Giang). It is the center of an intensive rice-growing area and a crossroad for road and canal traffic. It's a poor area (as demonstrated by the scruffy condition of the provincial capital, Soc Trang town) with an estimated population of 59,000 just over 200km from Ho Chi Minh City. The road journey involves two ferry crossings. The main ethnic communities living in Soc Trang province are the Kin, Khmer (28%), and Hoya (8%). There are several attractions in and around the town, including some excellent pagodas.

### Chua Doi ('Maha Tup' in Kh'mer, but better known as the 'Bat' Pagoda)

The original pagoda was built during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but has been renovated several times since. It's notable for its architecture, an ancient Buddha statue and a number of Buddhist books written on sugar palm leaves, but its main claim to fame is the presence of large numbers of fruit bats. They have wingspans of more than a meter and roost in the trees behind the pagoda, resembling large ripe pears as they hang upside down from the upper branches. The presence of the bats has not affected the plants growing in and around the pagoda (although their droppings can have a marked effect on tourists' clothes), and they seem oblivious to the people wandering around below them. The best time to see them is in the late afternoon when they fly away to look for food.

### The Kh'leng Pagoda

This is a fine example of a typical Kh'mer pagoda. Set on a two-level terrace, the doors and windows are ornamented with Kh'mer motifs and in bright colors. The interior is dominated by a large gilded Buddha and there are several interesting artifacts in dusty display cases. A donation of the box will be appreciated. The guide books often say the building is usually locked, which is true. However, those in the know or travelling with [Vietnam visa](#) service of TUN Travel, will knock on the door, whereupon one of the resident monks will appear, open up, and be delighted to show you round and chat about the temple, Buddhism and anything else of interest. Just across the road is a small Kh'mer museum with some good exhibits relating to the local culture.

### A Hidden Gem

Soc Trang also has a truly unique pagoda. Chua Buu Son Tu (Precious Mountain Temple) was founded more than 200 years ago, but is now known as Chua Dat Set (the Clay Pagoda). At the age of twenty, a devout Buddhist monk called Ngo Kim Tong devoted the rest of his life and considerable talent to decorating the temple with clay effigies and objects ranging from the exquisite to the bizarre. The fruits of his labor over 42 years are a delight. He is commemorated by a pair of massive candles lit upon his death in 1970. They will finally burn down during 2005, to be replaced by another pair. As there are another four pairs in stock, his memorial will last beyond 2100! Please be generous with your donations. The Clay Pagoda is a family temple and thus relies entirely upon the generosity of well-wishers to cover the considerable costs of maintaining the building and its remarkable contents.

### Im Son Rang

Not far from the town, the Im Son Rang is a recently-built Kh'mer pagoda in pleasant gardens among the orchards on My Phuoc Island. The many monks enjoy having visitors. It's about a half-hour boat ride.

### The Oc-Om-Boc Festival

Soc Trang is a sleepy place apart from December. On the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> day of the tenth lunar month, the local Kh'mers stage a series of longboat races that attract visitors and competitors from all over Cambodia and Vietnam. Each boat is carved from a single tree-trunk, diamond-shaped with curved ends. There's a substantial cash prize at stake, so it's a lively event.

Source: [Vietnam Visa on Arrival](#)