

Royal Brunei Airlines to begin Vietnam flights from May

ROYAL Brunei Airlines (BI) will begin a three-times weekly service between Brunei and Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) in Vietnam from May.

Connections are available for all Australian ports (BNE/SYD/PER/DRW) dependant on day of the week and great fare deals will soon be released. The flights will leave Brunei at 14.40 and arrive in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) just one hour later at 15.40. The new service will have good connections from Sydney and Brisbane via Brunei, providing business travellers with a new air link to the city known as 'The Paris of the East' for its wide tree-lined boulevards and magnificent French colonial villas.

Ho Chi Minh City — formerly known as Saigon — is located in the south-eastern region of Vietnam, 1760km south of Hanoi. The city covers an area of 2095sq km.

The population of Ho Chi Minh City is around 6.3 million, and a varying degree of English is spoken, especially in the



tourism and commerce sectors.

Ho Chi Minh City is the most important economic centre in Vietnam. In 2005, the city's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was estimated at US\$11.6 billion - accounting for 20 per cent of Vietnam's GDP. The city boasts many big enterprises in industry especially high-tech, electronic, building material, agropduct — processing and light industries — and it has a thriving construction sector as well as finance and banking.

The best way to see the city is on foot. Most major tourist attractions are in District 1, which is fairly compact and easy to get around, but the weather may determine how much walking you do. The city has a tropical climate (hot and humid), with average humidity of 75 per cent and it has two distinct seasons. The

rainy season, with average rainfall about 1800 mm annually, usually begins in May and ends in late November, while the dry season lasts from December to April. The average temperature is 28°C (Celsius).

Getting around by taxi is a good, cheap option. But, while most of the city's taxis are metered and usually in good condition, not many drivers can speak English.

Attractions include the History Museum near the entrance to the zoo. It boasts an excellent collection of artifacts from Vietnam's 2000 plus years of recorded history. Unification Palace, the former Presidential Palace occupied by Van Thieu is worth a visit as is the Ben Thanh Market, with its tempting food court. If you have a little more time, the Cu Chi Tunnels, an extensive network of underground passages that played a strategic role in the war with the US, is worth seeing. The Tunnels house hospitals, kitchens, weapons factories and even classrooms.

Shopping is excellent. Beautiful handicrafts abound, but you will need your bargaining skills. Worth a visit is the Dong Khai and Le Thanh Ton centres, where jewellery and antiques, furniture and clothes are plentiful.

Tan Son Nhat International Airport is a joint civilian and military operation located around seven kilometres north of the Ho Chi Minh City. Taxi and bus services are available to and from the airport and within the city. Because of rapidly growing air services and the airport's close proximity to the city centre, the Vietnamese government plans to build a new international airport near Long Thanh Township, Dong Nai Province about 50 km in the north-east.

RBA adds two more Perth flights

FROM March 26, Royal Brunei Airlines (RBA) will increase its services to Perth to five a week.

The two additional flights - using Airbus A320 aircraft - will operate early morning departures on Mondays and Fridays to provide direct connections to the airline's extensive network. The Airbus flights, offering 12 business seats and 132 economy, will arrive in Perth at 02.20 and depart at 03.10, arriving in Brunei at 08.30. The airline will continue to operate B767 services on the three other days Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

WA manager for RBA, Paul Lim, said the additional flights were most welcome and would improve connections for travellers, with the airline's first-ever early morning departures from Perth.

"Customers, particularly business travellers, have been requesting an early morning departure to enable them to better use our strong network in Asia," said Lim. "The new flights will arrive in Brunei early in the morning enabling direct connections to most key cities."

Lim also welcomed the new flights from Brunei through to Vietnam.

"Vietnam is an increasingly popular destination both for leisure and business," he said.

RBA is expected to release special promotional fares to support the new Perth flights. Check with your local travel planner.