

A spectacular sight from the new Sandy Beach coastal road, Marble Mountains consist of five craggy marble outcrops topped with delicate pagodas. Ironically, the sculptors based around the mountains now use marble shipped in from China, as locals began to realize that at the rate they were using it, there wouldn't be any marble, or any mountains, left to international visitors who have applied [Vietnam visa on arrival](#) online. Each mountain is said to represent a natural element and is named accordingly: Thuy Son (Water), Moc Son (Wood), Hoa Son (Fire), Kirn Son (Metal or Gold) and Tho Son (Earth). The largest and most famous, Thuy Son, has a number of natural caves in which first Hindu, and later Buddhist, sanctuaries have been built over the centuries. Of the two paths leading up Thuy Son, the one closer to the beach (at the end of the village) makes for a better circuit. At the top of the staircase is a gate, Ong Chon, which is pock marked with bullet holes. Behind Ong Chon is Linh Ong Pagoda. Entering the sanctuary, look to the left to see a fantastic figure with a huge tongue. To the right of Linh Ong are monks' quarters and a small orchid garden. Behind Linh Ong, a path leads left through two short tunnels to several caverns known as Tang Chon Dong. There are several concrete buddhas and blocks of carved stone of Cham origin in these caves.

Near one of the altars is a flight of steps leading up to another cave, partially open to the sky, with two seated Buddhas in it. Immediately to the left as you enter Ong Chon Gate is the main path to the rest of Thuy Son. Stairs off the main pathway lead to Vong Hal Da, a viewpoint for a brilliant panorama of Sandy Beach. The stone-paved path continues to the right and into a canyon. On the left is Van Thong Cave. Opposite the entrance is a cement Buddha, and behind that there is a narrow passage that leads up to a natural chimney open to the sky. Exit the canyon and pass through a battle-scarred masonry gate. There's a rocky path to the right, which goes to Linh Nham, a tall chimney-shaped cave with a small altar inside. Nearby, another path leads to Hoa Nghiem, a shallow cave with a Buddha inside. If you go down the passageway to the left of the Buddha, you come to cathedral-like Huyen Khong Cave, lit by an opening to the sky.

The entrance to this spectacular chamber is guarded by two administrative mandarins (to the left of the doorway) and two military mandarins (to the right). Scattered about the cave are Buddhist and Confucian shrines; note the inscriptions carved into the stone walls. On the right a door leads to two stalactites, dripping water that comes from heaven, according to local legend. Actually, only one stalactite drips; the other one supposedly ran dry when Emperor Tu Duc touched it. During the American War this chamber was used by the VC as a field hospital. Inside is a plaque dedicated to the Women's Artillery Group, which destroyed 19 US aircraft from a base below the mountains in 1972. Just to the left of the masonry gate is Tam Thai Tu, a pagoda restored by Emperor Minh Mang in 1826. A path heading obliquely to the right goes to the monks' residence, beyond which are two shrines. From there a red dirt path leads to five small pagodas.

Before you arrive at the monks' residence, stairs on the left-hand side of the path lead to Vong Giang Dai, which offers a fantastic 180-degree view of the other Marble Mountains and the surrounding countryside. To get to the stairway follow the path straight on from the gate. A torch (flashlight) is handy for exploring the caves.

Source: getvietnamvisa.com