Hanoi Travel Guide

Discover Hanoi: Vietnam's Captivating Capital

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Things to do in Hanoi

Landmarks & Monuments

Hanoi's iconic landmarks tell the story of Vietnam's resilient history, from ancient citadels to revolutionary memorials. These monuments stand as testaments to the city's enduring spirit and cultural significance.



Must See

Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum

2-3 hours for full complex No Booking Needed

Map

The final resting place of Vietnam's revolutionary leader, this imposing granite structure draws thousands of visitors daily. **Witness the preserved body** of 'Uncle Ho' in a climate-controlled chamber. The mausoleum complex includes the Presidential Palace, Ho Chi Minh's Stilt House where he lived modestly, and the One Pillar Pagoda. Strict dress codes apply no shorts, sleeveless shirts, or hats. Photography is prohibited inside. Lines can be extremely long, especially on weekends and holidays.



Must See

Imperial Citadel of Thăng Long

2-3 hours No Booking Needed

Map

A **UNESCO World Heritage Site** dating back over 1,000 years, this ancient citadel served as the political center of Vietnam for 13 consecutive centuries. Archaeological excavations have revealed artifacts from the Đại La Citadel period (7th century) through the Nguyễn Dynasty. Explore the Flag Tower, Dragon Steps, and underground military bunkers used during the American War. The site beautifully illustrates the evolution of Vietnamese architecture and military strategy across different dynasties and periods of occupation.



Top Pick

Hỏa Lò Prison (Hanoi Hilton)

1-1.5 hours No Booking Needed

Map

Originally built by French colonists in 1896, this notorious prison held Vietnamese revolutionaries and later American POWs during the Vietnam War. The museum offers a **sobering glimpse into colonial brutality** and wartime conditions. Original guillotines, shackles, and prisoner quarters remain preserved. The exhibits provide powerful insights into Vietnam's struggle for independence, though some displays reflect Vietnamese governmental perspectives on the American War period.



Notable

Long Biên Bridge

30-45 minutes No Booking Needed

Map

Built by the French and Opened in 1902, this historic cantilever bridge spans the Red River. Originally named Paul Doumer Bridge, it served as a **vital supply route** during the wars and bears scars from American bombing campaigns. Despite damage, portions remain operational for trains and motorbikes. The bridge offers stunning sunrise and sunset views and has become a popular photography spot capturing Hanoi's industrial heritage against modern development.

Tips for Landmarks & Monuments

- **Mausoleum Timing:** Opening starts at 07:30 during April–October and 08:00 during November–March, outside maintenance closures.; Closed Mondays and Fridays; the 2026 maintenance closure is 4 September–2 November, reopening 3 November.
- **Dress Respectfully:** Cover shoulders and knees at all historical sites
- **Beat the Crowds:** Arrive before 8:30 AM for shorter mausoleum queues
- **Citadel Tours:** Consider hiring a guide to understand the complex historical layers

Museums & Galleries

Hanoi's museums offer fascinating insights into Vietnamese art, culture, and history. From ancient artifacts to contemporary art, these institutions preserve and celebrate the nation's rich heritage and creative spirit.



Must See

Vietnam Museum of Ethnology

2-3 hours No Booking Needed

Map

Widely considered **Vietnam's best museum**, this institution showcases the country's 54 ethnic groups through authentic artifacts, traditional costumes, and life-size dwellings. The indoor galleries feature excellent displays on textiles, musical instruments, and daily life. The outdoor area contains actual houses from different regions including Bahnar, Ede, and Tay homes transported and reconstructed on site. Regular water puppet shows and traditional craft demonstrations enhance the experience. English descriptions are comprehensive, making it accessible for international visitors.



Top Pick

Vietnam National Museum of History

1.5-2 hours No Booking Needed

Map

Housed in a beautiful **French colonial building** from 1926, this museum traces Vietnamese history from prehistoric times through the August Revolution of 1945. Collections include Dong Son bronze drums, Cham sculptures, imperial artifacts, and archaeological treasures. The Nguyen Dynasty exhibits feature ornate royal garments and ceremonial objects. While some displays feel dated, the breadth of coverage makes it essential for understanding Vietnam's historical timeline. Located near Hoan Kiem Lake, making it easy to combine with Old Quarter exploration.



Top Pick

Vietnam Women's Museum

1.5-2 hours No Booking Needed

Map

This **award-winning museum** celebrates Vietnamese women's contributions to society, from family life to warfare. Three floors explore women in family, history, and fashion through multimedia exhibits, personal stories, and artifacts. Particularly moving are the sections on women soldiers, market vendors, and ethnic minority traditions. The museum excels at storytelling, making historical events personal and relatable. Rotating exhibits feature contemporary women artists and social issues. Audio guides available in multiple languages enhance understanding of women's evolving roles in Vietnamese society.



Notable

Vietnam Fine Arts Museum

1.5-2 hours No Booking Needed

Map

Set in a former French colonial building and Catholic girls' school, this museum houses Vietnam's largest fine arts collection spanning prehistoric to contemporary periods. Three floors showcase ancient pottery, Cham and Buddhist sculptures, lacquer paintings, silk art, propaganda posters, and modern Vietnamese art. The **traditional lacquerware and folk art sections** are particularly impressive. Contemporary galleries feature works by Vietnam's most celebrated artists. The building itself, with elegant courtyards and colonial architecture, adds to the artistic atmosphere.



Notable

Vietnamese Air Force Museum

1-1.5 hours No Booking Needed

Map

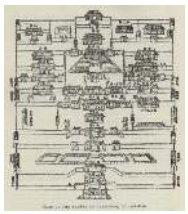
Aviation enthusiasts will appreciate this extensive collection of military aircraft, including **Soviet-era MiGs, American planes** captured during the war, and helicopters. Outdoor displays feature full-size aircraft you can walk around, while indoor exhibits showcase weapons, uniforms, medals, and photographs documenting Vietnam's aerial warfare history. Highlights include a MiG-21 that shot down American aircraft and wreckage from downed B-52 bombers. Descriptions focus on Vietnamese Air Force victories from their perspective of the conflict.

Tips for Museums & Galleries

- **Museum Mondays:** Most museums close on Mondays plan accordingly
- **Ethnology Museum Location:** Located 7km from center; take taxi or Grab (20-30 minutes)
- **Photography:** Check policies; many museums charge for camera use
- **Guided Tours:** Museums offer knowledgeable English-speaking guides for deeper insights
- **Combination Tickets:** Some museums offer discounted entry when visiting multiple sites

Religious Sites

Hanoi's temples, pagodas, and churches reflect the city's spiritual diversity. These sacred spaces offer peaceful retreats from urban chaos and showcase exquisite architecture blending Vietnamese, Chinese, and French influences.



Must See

Temple of Literature (Văn Miếu)

1-1.5 hours No Booking Needed

Map

The temple was founded in 1070; Quốc Tử Giám, Vietnam’s first national university, followed in 1076, honors Confucius and celebrates scholarly achievement. This **beautifully preserved complex** features five courtyards, ornate gates, pavilions, and the famous stone steles mounted on tortoise backs listing names of doctorate graduates from 1442-1779. The architecture exemplifies traditional Vietnamese design with curved roofs, red-lacquered pillars, and tranquil gardens. Often called Hanoi's most peaceful attraction, it offers respite from city chaos. Regular traditional music performances enhance the scholarly atmosphere.



Must See

Ngọc Sơn Temple

30-45 minutes No Booking Needed

Map

Perched on Jade Island in Hoan Kiem Lake, this **scarlet-painted temple** is accessed via the iconic red Huc Bridge (The Morning Sunlight Bridge). Construction of Ngọc Sơn Temple began in autumn 1841, it honors scholar Van Xuong, military leader Tran Hung Dao, and Lã Tổ, or Lã Động Tân, is a Taoist immortal associated with medicine. The temple complex includes ornate pavilions, altar rooms, and a preserved giant turtle specimen. Early morning visits capture locals practicing tai chi nearby. The combination of lakeside location, colorful architecture, and cultural significance makes this one of Hanoi's most photographed sites.



Top Pick

Trấn Quốc Pagoda

30-45 minutes No Booking Needed

Map

Hanoi's oldest Buddhist temple, dating to the 6th century, sits picturesquely on a small island in West Lake. The **11-tier stupa**, built in 1998, dominates the skyline and contains Buddha relics. Ancient trees, including a sacred Bodhi tree gifted from India, shade the courtyards. The pagoda remains an active place of worship where monks chant sutras daily. Sunset visits offer spectacular views across West Lake with the red-and-gold temple reflecting in the water a photographer's dream. The peaceful atmosphere provides spiritual solace amid Hanoi's urban energy.



Top Pick

St. Joseph's Cathedral

30 minutes No Booking Needed

Map

Hanoi's neo-Gothic Catholic cathedral, built in 1886, resembles **a miniature Notre-Dame de Paris** with its twin bell towers and stained glass windows. The weathered grey facade adds historical character. The interior features soaring vaulted ceilings, ornate altars, and religious artwork blending European and Vietnamese styles. Daily masses are conducted in Vietnamese and Latin. The square in front has become a popular gathering spot for young Hanoi residents. Evening visits showcase beautiful illumination, while Sunday masses offer insight into Vietnam's Catholic community, established during French colonial rule.



Notable

Quan Thanh Temple

30-45 minutes No Booking Needed

Map

Located at West Lake's southeastern shore, this 11th-century Taoist temple honors Tran Vo, guardian of the north. The main attraction is a magnificent **four-ton bronze statue** of the deity, cast in 1677. The temple complex features traditional Vietnamese architecture with dragon-adorned roofs, stone courtyards, and ancient bonsai trees. Intricate woodcarvings and lacquered panels decorate interior halls. Less crowded than other religious sites, Quan Thanh offers an authentic glimpse into Taoist worship practices still observed by local devotees who come to pray and burn incense.

Tips for Religious Sites

- **Dress Modestly:** Cover shoulders and knees; remove shoes when entering temple buildings
- **Respect Worshippers:** Keep voices low and avoid interrupting prayers or ceremonies
- **Incense Etiquette:** Purchasing and offering incense is optional but appreciated
- **Photography:** Ask permission before photographing monks or worshippers; avoid flash on altars
- **Best Times:** Early morning (6-8 AM) offers peaceful atmosphere and local spiritual practices

Ancient & Historical Sites

Beyond Hanoi's major monuments lie hidden historical gems that reveal layers of the city's thousand-year story. Ancient ruins, colonial architecture, and preserved neighborhoods transport visitors through different eras.



Top Pick Book Ahead

Hanoi Opera House

2-3 hours for performance Book Ahead

Map

Built in 1911 during French colonial rule, this **architectural masterpiece** replicates the Palais Garnier in Paris with neoclassical facades, grand staircases, and ornate interiors. The auditorium has 598 seats. Exterior features include Ionic columns, Gothic domes, and decorative sculptures. While interior tours are limited, attending an evening performance allows appreciation of the gilded balconies, crystal chandeliers, and French-inspired frescoes. The building symbolizes colonial influence while now celebrating Vietnamese performing arts excellence.



Notable

Ancient Houses of Ma May Street

30-45 minutes No Booking Needed

Map

This **restored 19th-century merchant house** at 87 Ma May Street provides rare insight into Old Quarter traditional architecture. The narrow, deep structure (tube house design) showcases original wooden construction, antique furniture, ancestor altars, and period décor. The heritage house at 87 Mã Mây is 28 metres long. English-speaking docents explain daily life in colonial-era Hanoi. The preservation project maintains authentic architectural details while educating visitors about merchant class lifestyle during French occupation.



Notable

B-52 Victory Museum

30 minutes No Booking Needed

Map

Located at the former crash site of an American B-52 bomber shot down during the 1972 Christmas bombings, this small museum preserves **The museum is at 157 Đội Cấn; the wreckage in Hữu Tiệp Lake is a separate nearby historical site.**. The twisted metal remains visible from the street, creating a stark war memorial. Photos and artifacts document the Linebacker II campaign from Vietnamese perspectives. The neighborhood setting residential streets surrounding military debris powerfully illustrates how war affected civilian areas. Less touristed than other war sites, it offers authentic local interaction and unvarnished historical presentation.

Tips for Ancient & Historical Sites

- **Combined Walking:** Ancient houses integrate well with Old Quarter walking tours
- **Opera Tickets:** Book performances online in advance; check monthly schedules
- **Historical Context:** Read about Vietnamese-American war before visiting B-52 site
- **Local Guides:** Consider hiring guides for deeper historical narratives

Squares & Streets

Hanoi's streets and squares pulse with energy, blending chaos and charm. These public spaces showcase daily life, from bustling markets to serene promenades, revealing the city's authentic character.



Must See

Hoan Kiem Lake & Walking Streets

1-2 hours No Booking Needed

Map

The **symbolic heart of Hanoi**, The lake’s last known giant turtle died on 19 January 2016. The 1.8km perimeter pathway offers pleasant walking amid French colonial buildings, shaded trees, and lakeside benches. Weekend nights (Friday-Sunday 7 PM-midnight) transform surrounding streets into pedestrian zones filled with street performers, food vendors, families, and young people socializing. The scene captures modern Hanoi's vibrant energy. Early morning visits reveal locals practicing tai chi, badminton, and traditional exercises a window into daily Vietnamese life.



Must See

Old Quarter (36 Streets)

3-4 hours minimum No Booking Needed

Map

Hanoi's ancient commercial district, dating to the 13th century, features **narrow streets named after traditional trades** Hang Bac (Silver), Hang Ma (Paper), Hang Gai (Silk). The chaotic maze of tube houses, temples, markets, and workshops creates sensory overload: motorbikes weaving through crowds, street food aromas, vendors hawking goods. Architecture ranges from crumbling French colonial to modern shophouses. Each street retains specialized character despite modernization. Getting intentionally lost reveals hidden cafes, street food stalls, and local life. Evening brings heightened energy with beer corners and food vendors setting up sidewalk operations.



Top Pick

Dong Xuan Market

1-2 hours No Booking Needed

Map

Hanoi's largest **covered market** Đồng Xuân Market has three trading floors. The 1889 structure houses thousands of vendors selling everything imaginable: fabrics, clothing, electronics, housewares, fresh produce, and souvenirs. The ground floor focuses on food and flowers, upper levels on goods. Prices require bargaining. The surrounding streets extend the market outdoors with even more vendors. Authentic local shopping experience far removed from tourist-oriented shops. Early morning visits capture market energy as vendors set up. The adjacent night market (Friday-Sunday) offers street food and entertainment.



Notable

Train Street (Đường Tàu)

45 minutes No Booking Needed

Map

This **Instagram-famous alley** sees trains passing within inches of homes, cafes, and hanging laundry. Residents have lived alongside the tracks for decades, creating a unique urban landscape. The cafes along the tracks have been closed by the authorities more than once, so check current access rules. The combination of domestic life children playing, vendors selling and rumbling locomotives creates surreal contrast. Authorities periodically close the street to tourists due to safety concerns, so access varies. When open, maintaining respectful distance from homes and following safety guidelines is essential.

Tips for Squares & Streets

- **Traffic Awareness:** Old Quarter motorbike traffic is intense; cross streets slowly and steadily
- **Bargaining:** Expect to negotiate 30-50% off initial prices at markets
- **Train Times:** Check current Train Street schedules and access restrictions before visiting
- **Weekend Walking Streets:** Don't miss the pedestrian zone energy Friday-Sunday evenings
- **Pickpocket Prevention:** Keep valuables secure in crowded market areas

Neighborhoods & Districts

Each Hanoi neighborhood possesses distinct character, from the French Quarter's tree-lined boulevards to West Lake's expat communities. Exploring different districts reveals the city's multifaceted personality.



Top Pick

French Quarter (Ba Đình District)

2-3 hours No Booking Needed

Map

This elegant district showcases **colonial-era grandeur** with wide, tree-shaded boulevards, yellow-painted villas, government buildings, and embassy compounds. Unlike the Old Quarter's chaos, the French Quarter offers spacious streets perfect for leisurely walks. Notable architecture includes the Presidential Palace, Opera House, and numerous ministries housed in restored colonial structures. Upscale boutiques, international restaurants, and art galleries attract affluent locals and expats. The area exemplifies French urban planning imposed on Vietnamese capital, creating a distinctly different atmosphere from traditional Hanoi neighborhoods.



Top Pick

West Lake Area (Tây Hồ)

half day No Booking Needed

Map

Surrounding Hanoi’s largest natural lake, covering approximately 500 hectares, this upscale neighborhood attracts **expats, affluent Vietnamese, and young professionals**. The lakeside promenade offers jogging paths, parks, and seafood restaurants serving fresh catches. Side streets contain trendy cafes, international dining, boutique hotels, and serviced apartments. Historic pagodas like Tran Quoc anchor the area spiritually. Weekend markets and festivals animate public spaces. The atmosphere feels less frenetic than central Hanoi more residential and relaxed. Sunset views across the 500-hectare lake provide scenic respite from urban intensity.



Notable

Hồ Tây (West Lake) Cycling Route

2-3 hours No Booking Needed

Map

The 17km loop around West Lake provides **excellent cycling** through diverse neighborhoods, past temples, villas, and local markets. Bike rentals available at multiple locations. The flat route suits all fitness levels, offering lake breezes and shade from trees lining the path. Stop at Trấn Quốc Pagoda, seafood restaurants, or lakeside cafes. Morning rides avoid heat and traffic. The circuit showcases both upscale development and traditional villages, illustrating Hanoi's economic contrasts. Sunset rides are particularly scenic as golden light reflects off the water and fishermen cast nets from small boats.

Tips for Neighborhoods & Districts

- **Neighborhood Combos:** Visit French Quarter in morning, West Lake for afternoon/evening
- **Bike Safety:** Wear helmets; stay alert for motorbikes entering bike lanes
- **Lakeside Dining:** Try West Lake's specialty snail dishes (ốc) at local restaurants
- **Architecture Walks:** French Quarter rewards photography and slow exploration

Parks & Gardens

Despite urban density, Hanoi preserves green spaces where residents exercise, socialize, and escape city chaos. These parks blend natural beauty with cultural significance, offering windows into local daily life.



Notable

Lenin Park (Thống Nhất Park)

1-2 hours No Booking Needed

Map

Hanoi's largest inner-city park offers **50 hectares of greenery**, lakes, walking paths, and recreational facilities. Early mornings see thousands of locals practicing tai chi, aerobics, badminton, and traditional exercises. The park contains Thuy Ta restaurant on an island, a small amusement park, swan boats, and shaded picnic areas. Vendors sell drinks and snacks throughout. Unlike manicured tourist parks, Lenin Park feels authentically local families gather, elderly play chess, and young couples stroll hand-in-hand. The atmosphere captures everyday Hanoi life, making it ideal for people-watching and cultural immersion. Weekend afternoons bring heightened activity and festive energy.



Notable

Botanical Gardens (Vườn Bách Thảo)

1-1.5 hours No Booking Needed

Map

Established by the French in 1890, these **The gardens originally exceeded 33 hectares; their remaining area is approximately 10 hectares.** The colonial-era layout features manicured lawns, greenhouses, lotus ponds, and shaded pathways. Less crowded than other parks, the gardens offer peaceful retreat for nature lovers. The bonsai collection and tropical plant houses fascinate botany enthusiasts. Local families picnic on weekends while couples seek romantic hideaways. The gardens are in Ngọc Hà, beside the Ba Đình historical area, rather than adjoining the Temple of Literature, allowing easy combination visits. Morning visits provide cooler temperatures and bird-watching opportunities.



Optional

Bay Mau Lake (Reunification Park)

30-45 minutes No Booking Needed

Map

This small lake and surrounding park near the Old Quarter provides **quiet respite** from urban chaos. The tree-lined pathway circling the lake attracts joggers and walkers. Locals fish from banks, practice calligraphy on pavement with water brushes, and gather for conversations. Small cafes overlook the water, offering Vietnamese coffee and people-watching. The unpretentious atmosphere feels neighborhood-focused rather than tourist-oriented. Early morning captures the most authentic local activities tai chi, exercise groups, and elderly residents socializing. The park's central location makes it convenient for quick breaks during Old Quarter exploration.

Tips for Parks & Gardens

- **Morning Magic:** Visit parks 6-8 AM to observe local exercise rituals and tai chi
- **Bring Snacks:** Pack water and light refreshments for longer park visits
- **Cultural Etiquette:** Observe and photograph respectfully; ask before taking close-ups of people
- **Seasonal Beauty:** Spring (March-April) brings blooming flowers; autumn offers pleasant weather

Fountains & Public Art

While Hanoi's public art scene is less developed than Western cities, distinctive sculptures, monuments, and installations punctuate the urban landscape, often carrying political or historical significance.



Notable

Ceramic Mosaic Mural

1-2 hours partial viewing No Booking Needed

Map

Recognized by Guinness World Records as the **world's largest ceramic mosaic**, this 4km mural along the Red River dyke celebrates Hanoi's 1000th anniversary. Created by Vietnamese and international artists, the vibrant artwork depicts historical events, cultural symbols, daily life scenes, and abstract designs. Thousands of ceramic pieces form dragons, lotus flowers, traditional costumes, and modern imagery. The mural stretches from the Long Bien Bridge area through several neighborhoods. Best viewed while cycling or taking a leisurely walk the sheer scale prevents single-viewpoint appreciation. Sections vary in artistic quality but collectively showcase community art ambition.



Optional

Revolutionary Statues & Monuments

viewed while exploring No Booking Needed

Map

Throughout Hanoi, **socialist-realist sculptures** commemorate revolutionary heroes, workers, soldiers, and political figures. These bronze and stone monuments reflect communist ideology and Vietnam's liberation narrative. Notable examples include the Ly Thai To statue near Hoan Kiem Lake, various Lenin statues, and worker/soldier monuments in public squares. While primarily serving political purposes, they offer insights into Vietnamese governmental values and historical interpretation. The artistic style echoes Soviet influences. Photography allowed, though these monuments generate less tourist interest than cultural or historical sites.

Tips for Fountains & Public Art

- **Mural Access:** Some sections easier to reach than others; research before visiting
- **Photography:** Best light for ceramic mural photos in late afternoon
- **Bike Rental:** Cycling provides ideal pace for viewing long mural sections

Transportation

Navigating Hanoi requires understanding various transportation options. From motorbike taxis to new metro lines, the city offers diverse ways to explore, each providing different perspectives on urban life.



Essential

Grab / Ride-Hailing Apps

varies by distance No Booking Needed

Grab (Southeast Asia's Uber) dominates Hanoi's ride-hailing market, offering **transparent pricing and cashless payments**. Options include GrabBike (motorbike), GrabCar (sedan), and GrabCar 7-seater. Download the app, add payment method, and request rides easily. Motorbike rides cost 15,000-40,000 VND for short trips; cars start around 40,000 VND. Drivers speak limited English but GPS handles navigation. The app shows estimated fares before booking, eliminating negotiation stress. Essential for visitors uncomfortable bargaining with traditional taxi drivers. Helmets provided for motorbike rides Vietnam's most efficient traffic navigation method.



Useful

Cyclo Tours

1-2 hours No Booking Needed

Map

Traditional three-wheeled bicycle taxis offer **nostalgic, slow-paced exploration** of the Old Quarter and French Quarter. Passengers sit in front while drivers pedal from behind, providing unobstructed views for photography. Cyclos navigate narrow streets cars cannot access, revealing hidden corners. Tours typically last 1-2 hours and require price negotiation beforehand (expect 100,000-200,000 VND per hour). While touristy, cyclos capture old Hanoi atmosphere and support elderly drivers preserving this traditional occupation. Best for short, scenic routes rather than efficient transport embrace the leisurely pace as part of the experience.



Optional

Hanoi Metro (Line 2A)

30 minutes-1 hour No Booking Needed

Map

Vietnam's first urban metro line, opened in 2021, connects **Cat Linh to Yen Nghia** (12 stations, 13km). The elevated Chinese-built system offers air-conditioned comfort and city views during the 24-minute journey. Stations feature modern design with ticket machines, security screening, and English signage. Line 2A single journeys cost 9,000–19,000 VND in cash, or 8,595–18,625 VND electronically, under fares introduced August 2025. While not covering major tourist areas yet, the metro provides insight into Hanoi's infrastructure development and local commuting patterns. Additional lines under construction will eventually create comprehensive network. The experience contrasts sharply with street-level traffic chaos.

Tips for Transportation

- **Traffic Safety:** Always wear helmets on motorbikes; hold bags securely
- **Cash Backup:** Carry small bills for situations where apps don't work
- **Cyclo Negotiation:** Agree on price and route before departing; write it down if needed
- **Rush Hours:** Avoid travel 7-9 AM and 5-7 PM when traffic peaks
- **Airport Transfer:** Grab or pre-booked transfers more reliable than airport taxis

Tours & Activities

Hanoi offers immersive experiences beyond sightseeing cooking classes, water puppet shows, and street food tours provide hands-on cultural engagement and create lasting memories of Vietnamese traditions.



Must See Book Ahead

Water Puppet Theatre

1 hour including show Book Ahead

This **uniquely Vietnamese art form**, dating back 1000 years, features wooden puppets performing on water stages. Puppeteers stand waist-deep behind screens, manipulating figures with long poles to enact folk tales, agricultural scenes, and legends. Traditional live music accompanies performances using drums, wooden bells, horns, and bamboo flutes. The Thang Long Water Puppet Theatre near Hoan Kiem Lake offers multiple daily shows (50 minutes). Stories include the Legend of the Restored Sword and rural village life. While touristy, water puppetry represents authentic Vietnamese cultural heritage worth experiencing. Book tickets in advance for preferred times.



Must See Book Ahead

Street Food Walking Tours

3-4 hours Book Ahead

Guided tours navigate Hanoi's **overwhelming street food scene**, introducing visitors to authentic dishes at local vendors. Experienced guides lead small groups through Old Quarter alleys, explaining ingredients, cooking methods, and cultural context. Typical foods include pho, bun cha, banh mi, egg coffee, and various snacks. Tours accommodate dietary restrictions and spice preferences. Beyond eating, guides share insights into Vietnamese dining customs, market culture, and neighborhood history. Evening tours capture the energetic street food atmosphere with vendors setting up sidewalk operations. Book reputable companies with good reviews quality varies significantly among tour operators.



Top Pick Book Ahead

Vietnamese Cooking Classes

4-5 hours Book Ahead

Learn to prepare **authentic Vietnamese dishes** in hands-on classes led by local chefs. Most classes begin with market tours, teaching ingredient selection and Vietnamese produce. Participants then cook 3-5 dishes such as pho, spring rolls, or regional specialties. Classes accommodate all skill levels with step-by-step instruction. Small group settings encourage interaction and questions. Many schools provide recipe booklets for recreating dishes at home. Half-day and full-day options available. Vegetarian and special dietary versions offered. Beyond cooking techniques, classes offer cultural insights into Vietnamese food philosophy, regional variations, and family dining traditions.



Top Pick Book Ahead

Motorbike Tours

4-8 hours depending on route Book Ahead

Experience Hanoi's traffic from the back of a motorbike with **female rider collectives** like Vietnam Backroads. Professional drivers navigate chaotic streets while passengers enjoy 360-degree views. Tours range from city highlights to countryside excursions. The intimate format allows personalized routes and spontaneous stops. Riders share local knowledge, recommend restaurants, and provide cultural context. Morning tours showcase markets and daily routines; evening tours highlight illuminated landmarks and street food. Safety gear provided. While initially intimidating, motorbike tours offer exhilarating immersion into Vietnamese life and create unforgettable photo opportunities.



Top Pick Book Ahead

Perfume Pagoda Day Trip

full day (8-10 hours) Book Ahead

This **important Buddhist pilgrimage site** lies 60km southwest of Hanoi in limestone mountains. The journey involves scenic boat rides along waterways flanked by karst peaks, followed by cable car or hiking to pagoda caves. The Huong Tich Cave contains the main shrine carved into the mountainside. Pilgrims and tourists visit year-round, though the festival (February-March lunar calendar) brings massive crowds. Full-day tours include boat transfers, temple visits, lunch, and guide services. The combination of river scenery, mountain hiking, and religious significance makes this Hanoi's most popular day trip despite the 2-3 hour travel time each way.

Tips for Tours & Activities

- **Book Ahead:** Popular tours and water puppet shows sell out, especially weekends
- **Tour Research:** Read recent reviews; quality varies dramatically among operators
- **Dietary Needs:** Communicate restrictions clearly when booking food tours or cooking classes
- **Weather Consideration:** Perfume Pagoda best visited during dry season (October-April)
- **Motorbike Comfort:** Wear long pants and closed shoes; bring sunscreen and sunglasses

Day Trips & Excursions

Beyond Hanoi's city limits lie UNESCO sites, traditional villages, and natural wonders. These excursions provide context for Vietnamese history, rural life, and stunning landscapes within a few hours' drive.



Must See Book Ahead

Ha Long Bay

2 days/1 night recommended Book Ahead

Map

This **UNESCO World Heritage Site** features 1,600 limestone karst islands rising from emerald waters, creating one of the world's most spectacular seascapes. Most visitors take overnight cruises with kayaking, cave exploration, swimming, and seafood meals. Day trips possible but rushed. Highlights include Sung Sot Cave, Ti Top Island, and floating villages. While touristy and somewhat commercialized, Ha Long Bay's natural beauty remains breathtaking. Choose cruise companies carefully quality varies significantly. Expressway transfers from central Hanoi typically take approximately 2.5 hours, with extra time for traffic and pickups. Alternatively, fly to nearby Cat Bi Airport. Peak season (October-April) offers best weather but higher prices and crowds.



Must See Book Ahead

Ninh Binh (Tam Coc - Bich Dong)

full day (10-12 hours) Book Ahead

Map

Called **'Ha Long Bay on land,'** Ninh Binh province offers limestone karsts, rice paddies, and river caves 100km south of Hanoi. Tam Coc boat tours glide through three caves on the Ngo Dong River, surrounded by dramatic cliffs and seasonal rice fields. Mua Cave viewpoint requires 500-step climb but rewards with panoramic vistas. Bich Dong Pagoda perches on mountainside with ancient temples. Additional sites include Trang An grottoes (UNESCO site), Bai Dinh Pagoda (Vietnam's largest), and Hoa Lu ancient capital ruins. Less crowded than Ha Long Bay with easier accessibility. Full-day tours from Hanoi include transportation, boat rides, and lunch.



Notable

Bat Trang Ceramic Village

half day (4-5 hours) No Booking Needed

Map

This **700-year-old pottery village** 15km southeast of Hanoi maintains traditional ceramic production. Narrow streets lined with workshops, showrooms, and kilns produce everything from delicate porcelain to decorative tiles. Visitors watch artisans throwing pots, painting designs, and firing pieces. Many shops offer hands-on workshops where tourists create and paint their own ceramics. Prices significantly lower than Hanoi city shops excellent for souvenirs. The village combines shopping with cultural experience. Half-day trips easily arranged via taxi or tour. Weekdays show more active production than weekends. Bat Trang represents traditional Vietnamese craftsmanship surviving modernization.



Notable

Duong Lam Ancient Village

full day (8-10 hours) No Booking Needed

Map

Vietnam's first **National Historic Cultural Relic** preserves traditional rural architecture 50km west of Hanoi. Ancient laterite brick houses with curved tile roofs line narrow lanes. Several structures date back 300-400 years, showcasing northern Vietnamese village design. The village produced two Vietnamese kings and maintains temples honoring them. Residents continue traditional lifestyles rice farming, tofu making, and craftwork. Cycling tours explore countryside between historic homes, banyan trees, and communal houses. The authentic atmosphere contrasts sharply with urbanized Hanoi. Day trips include village exploration, traditional lunch, and cultural demonstrations. Less touristy than other attractions, offering genuine rural Vietnamese experience.

Tips for Day Trips & Excursions

- **Ha Long Bay:** Book cruises through reputable agencies; read recent reviews carefully

- **Ninh Binh Season:** Visit May-June or September-October for green or golden rice paddies
- **Early Starts:** Most day trips require 7-8 AM departures for full experiences
- **Tour vs Independent:** Tours offer convenience; independent travel allows flexibility and cost savings
- **Weather Preparation:** Bring sun protection, comfortable shoes, and rain gear depending on season

Food & Dining

Real, highly-rated Restaurants in Hanoi, sourced from Google Places (rating above 4★).

L'essence De Cuisine★★★★★ 5 (3,801)

1-2 hours

Map

L'essence De Cuisine is a highly-rated restaurant in Hanoi, rated 5★ from 3801 reviews. Located at 99B P. Hàng Gai, Hoàn Kiếm, Hà Nội 11015, Vietnam.

Opening Hours

- Monday: 10:30 AM – 10:00 PM
- Tuesday: 10:30 AM – 10:00 PM
- Wednesday: 10:30 AM – 10:00 PM
- Thursday: 10:30 AM – 10:00 PM
- Friday: 10:30 AM – 10:00 PM
- Saturday: 10:30 AM – 10:00 PM
- Sunday: 10:30 AM – 10:00 PM

Hong Hoai's Restaurant★★★★★ 4.9 (23,291)

1-2 hours

Map

Hong Hoai's Restaurant is a highly-rated restaurant in Hanoi, rated 4.9★ from 23291 reviews. Located at P. Bát Đàn/20 P. Hàng Bồ, Phường, Hoàn Kiếm, Hà Nội 100000, Vietnam.

Opening Hours

- Monday: 10:00 AM – 11:00 PM
- Tuesday: 10:00 AM – 11:00 PM
- Wednesday: 10:00 AM – 11:00 PM
- Thursday: 10:00 AM – 11:00 PM
- Friday: 10:00 AM – 11:00 PM
- Saturday: 10:00 AM – 11:00 PM
- Sunday: 10:00 AM – 11:00 PM

Hoang's Restaurant - Vietnamese Restaurant & Vegan Food★★★★★ 4.9 (30,998)

1-2 hours

Map

Hoang's Restaurant - Vietnamese Restaurant & Vegan Food is a highly-rated restaurant in Hanoi, rated 4.9★ from 30998 reviews. Located at 54 P. Hàng Buồm, Phố cổ Hà Nội, Hoàn Kiếm, Hà Nội 100000, Vietnam.

Opening Hours

- Monday: 10:00 AM – 11:00 PM
- Tuesday: 10:00 AM – 11:00 PM
- Wednesday: 10:00 AM – 11:00 PM
- Thursday: 10:00 AM – 11:00 PM
- Friday: 10:00 AM – 11:00 PM
- Saturday: 10:00 AM – 11:00 PM
- Sunday: 10:00 AM – 11:00 PM

Hanoi Corner Restaurant★★★★★ 4.9 (10,453)

1-2 hours

Map

Hanoi Corner Restaurant is a highly-rated restaurant in Hanoi, rated 4.9★ from 10453 reviews. Located at 45 P. Hàng Bạc, Phố cổ Hà Nội, Hoàn Kiếm, Hà Nội 100000, Vietnam.

Opening Hours

- Monday: 10:00 AM – 11:00 PM
- Tuesday: 10:00 AM – 11:00 PM
- Wednesday: 10:00 AM – 11:00 PM
- Thursday: 10:00 AM – 11:00 PM
- Friday: 10:00 AM – 11:00 PM
- Saturday: 10:00 AM – 11:00 PM
- Sunday: 10:00 AM – 11:00 PM

MẸT Vietnamese Restaurant & Vegetarian Met 2★★★★★ 4.9 (28,580)

1-2 hours

Map

MẸT Vietnamese Restaurant & Vegetarian Met 2 is a highly-rated restaurant in Hanoi, rated 4.9★ from 28580 reviews. Located at 42 P. Lương Văn Can, Phố cổ Hà Nội, Hoàn Kiếm, Hà Nội 11015, Vietnam.

Opening Hours

- Monday: 10:00 AM – 10:30 PM
- Tuesday: 10:00 AM – 10:30 PM
- Wednesday: 10:00 AM – 10:30 PM
- Thursday: 10:00 AM – 10:30 PM
- Friday: 10:00 AM – 10:30 PM
- Saturday: 10:00 AM – 10:30 PM
- Sunday: 10:00 AM – 10:30 PM

Tung's Kitchen★★★★★ 4.9 (18,299)

1-2 hours

Map

Tung's Kitchen is a highly-rated restaurant in Hanoi, rated 4.9★ from 18299 reviews. Located at 2 P. Hàng Bông, Phố cổ Hà Nội, Hoàn Kiếm, Hà Nội 100000, Vietnam.

Opening Hours

- Monday: 10:00 AM – 10:30 PM
- Tuesday: 10:00 AM – 10:30 PM
- Wednesday: 10:00 AM – 10:30 PM
- Thursday: 10:00 AM – 10:30 PM
- Friday: 10:00 AM – 10:30 PM
- Saturday: 10:00 AM – 10:30 PM
- Sunday: 10:00 AM – 10:30 PM

MẸT Vietnamese restaurant & Vegetarian Food 1★★★★★ 4.9 (30,471)

1-2 hours

Map

MẸT Vietnamese restaurant & Vegetarian Food 1 is a highly-rated restaurant in Hanoi, rated 4.9★ from 30471 reviews. Located at 29 P. Hàng Trống, Hoàn Kiếm, Hà Nội 11000, Vietnam.

Opening Hours

- Monday: 10:00 AM – 10:30 PM
- Tuesday: 10:00 AM – 10:30 PM
- Wednesday: 10:00 AM – 10:30 PM
- Thursday: 10:00 AM – 10:30 PM
- Friday: 10:00 AM – 10:30 PM
- Saturday: 10:00 AM – 10:30 PM
- Sunday: 10:00 AM – 10:30 PM

May Tre Dan Restaurant - Authentic Vietnamese Cuisine★★★★★ 4.9 (1,700)

1-2 hours

Map

May Tre Dan Restaurant - Authentic Vietnamese Cuisine is a highly-rated restaurant in Hanoi, rated 4.9★ from 1700 reviews. Located at 151-153 Hang Bong Hoan Kiem Ward, 151-153 P. Hàng Bông, Hoàn Kiếm, Hà Nội 100000, Vietnam.

Opening Hours

- Monday: 11:00 AM – 10:00 PM
- Tuesday: 11:00 AM – 10:00 PM
- Wednesday: 11:00 AM – 10:00 PM
- Thursday: 11:00 AM – 10:00 PM
- Friday: 11:00 AM – 10:00 PM
- Saturday: 11:00 AM – 10:00 PM
- Sunday: 11:00 AM – 10:00 PM

Comida Hanoi Restaurant & Cooking Class★★★★★ 4.9 (1,870)

1-2 hours

Map

Comida Hanoi Restaurant & Cooking Class is a highly-rated restaurant in Hanoi, rated 4.9★ from 1870 reviews. Located at 52b P. Lương Ngọc Quyến, Phố cổ Hà Nội, Hoàn Kiếm, Hà Nội 100000, Vietnam.

Opening Hours

- Monday: 10:00 AM – 10:00 PM
- Tuesday: 10:00 AM – 10:00 PM
- Wednesday: 10:00 AM – 10:00 PM
- Thursday: 10:00 AM – 10:00 PM
- Friday: 10:00 AM – 10:00 PM
- Saturday: 10:00 AM – 10:00 PM
- Sunday: 10:00 AM – 10:00 PM

VIET Restaurant Hang Bong & Sky Bar★★★★★ 4.9 (2,663)

1-2 hours

Map

VIET Restaurant Hang Bong & Sky Bar is a highly-rated restaurant in Hanoi, rated 4.9★ from 2663 reviews. Located at Tầng 11 & 12, 41 P. Hàng Bông, Hoàn Kiếm, Hà Nội 11000, Vietnam.

Opening Hours

- Monday: 11:00 AM – 10:30 PM
- Tuesday: 11:00 AM – 10:30 PM
- Wednesday: 11:00 AM – 10:30 PM
- Thursday: 11:00 AM – 10:30 PM
- Friday: 11:00 AM – 10:30 PM
- Saturday: 11:00 AM – 10:30 PM
- Sunday: 11:00 AM – 10:30 PM

Hanoi Food Culture Restaurant & Cooking Class★★★★★ 4.9 (4,789)

1-2 hours

Map

Hanoi Food Culture Restaurant & Cooking Class is a highly-rated restaurant in Hanoi, rated 4.9★ from 4789 reviews. Located at 60 Ng. Phất Lộc, Phố cổ Hà Nội, Hoàn Kiếm, Hà Nội 100000, Vietnam.

Opening Hours

- Monday: 10:00 AM – 10:00 PM
- Tuesday: 10:00 AM – 10:00 PM
- Wednesday: 10:00 AM – 10:00 PM
- Thursday: 10:00 AM – 10:00 PM
- Friday: 10:00 AM – 10:00 PM
- Saturday: 10:00 AM – 10:00 PM
- Sunday: 10:00 AM – 10:00 PM

Lan Ong Restaurant – Authentic Vietnamese Cuisine in Hanoi Old Quarter★★★★★ 4.9 (1,611)

1-2 hours

Map

Lan Ong Restaurant – Authentic Vietnamese Cuisine in Hanoi Old Quarter is a highly-rated restaurant in Hanoi, rated 4.9★ from 1611 reviews. Located at 26 P. Lãn Ông, Phố cổ Hà Nội, Hoàn Kiếm, Hà Nội, Vietnam.

Opening Hours

- Monday: 10:30 AM – 10:00 PM
- Tuesday: 10:30 AM – 10:00 PM
- Wednesday: 10:30 AM – 10:00 PM
- Thursday: 10:30 AM – 10:00 PM
- Friday: 10:30 AM – 10:00 PM
- Saturday: 10:30 AM – 10:00 PM
- Sunday: 10:30 AM – 10:00 PM

Gánh Hà Nội★★★★★ 4.9 (10,478)

1-2 hours

Map

Gánh Hà Nội is a highly-rated restaurant in Hanoi, rated 4.9★ from 10478 reviews. Located at 115 P. Hàng Buồm, Phố cổ Hà Nội, Hoàn Kiếm, Hà Nội, Vietnam.

Opening Hours

- Monday: 10:00 AM – 11:00 PM
- Tuesday: 10:00 AM – 11:00 PM
- Wednesday: 10:00 AM – 11:00 PM
- Thursday: 10:00 AM – 11:00 PM
- Friday: 10:00 AM – 11:00 PM
- Saturday: 10:00 AM – 11:00 PM
- Sunday: 10:00 AM – 11:00 PM

MẸT Vietnamese restaurant & Vegetarian Food 3★★★★★ 4.9 (26,473)

1-2 hours

Map

MẸT Vietnamese restaurant & Vegetarian Food 3 is a highly-rated restaurant in Hanoi, rated 4.9★ from 26473 reviews. Located at 110 P. Hàng Bạc, Phố cổ Hà Nội, Hoàn Kiếm, Hà Nội, Vietnam.

Opening Hours

- Monday: 10:00 AM – 10:30 PM
- Tuesday: 10:00 AM – 10:30 PM
- Wednesday: 10:00 AM – 10:30 PM
- Thursday: 10:00 AM – 10:30 PM
- Friday: 10:00 AM – 10:30 PM
- Saturday: 10:00 AM – 10:30 PM
- Sunday: 10:00 AM – 10:30 PM

VIET Restaurant Hang Da & Rooftop Bar★★★★★ 4.9 (3,064)

1-2 hours

Map

VIET Restaurant Hang Da & Rooftop Bar is a highly-rated restaurant in Hanoi, rated 4.9★ from 3064 reviews. Located at Tầng 8, JM Marvel Hotel, 16 P. Hàng Da, Phố cổ Hà Nội, Hoàn Kiếm, Hà Nội 100000, Vietnam.

Opening Hours

- Monday: 2:30 – 10:00 PM
- Tuesday: 2:30 – 10:00 PM
- Wednesday: 2:30 – 10:00 PM
- Thursday: 2:30 – 10:00 PM
- Friday: 2:30 – 10:00 PM
- Saturday: 2:30 – 10:00 PM
- Sunday: 2:30 – 10:00 PM

Practical Information

Optimal Travel Seasons

Best Overall: October to December - Pleasant temperatures (20-28°C/68-82°F), minimal rainfall, clear skies, and comfortable humidity make autumn ideal for exploration. This is peak tourist season with higher prices and crowded attractions.

Spring (March-April): Warm weather with occasional drizzle. Beautiful blooming flowers and festivals like Perfume Pagoda pilgrimage. Temperatures rise toward summer heat.

Summer (May-September): Hot and humid (30-38°C/86-100°F) with frequent afternoon thunderstorms and typhoon risk. Lower hotel rates and fewer tourists compensate for challenging weather. Morning activities recommended before heat peaks.

Winter (January-February): Cool and misty (12-20°C/54-68°F) with persistent drizzle. Pack warm layers as buildings lack heating. Lunar New Year (Tet) brings closures but festive atmosphere book accommodations well in advance.

Month	Avg Temp	Rainfall	Crowd Level
Jan-Feb	16-20°C	Medium	Low
Mar-Apr	22-28°C	Low-Med	Medium
May-Sep	28-33°C	High	Low
Oct-Dec	20-28°C	Low	High

Getting Around Hanoi

□□ Motorbike Taxis (Xe Ôm)

The fastest way to navigate traffic. **Grab app recommended** for transparent pricing (15,000-50,000 VND for short trips). Traditional xe ôm drivers cluster near tourist areas negotiate prices beforehand. Always wear provided helmets and hold bags securely.

□□ Ride-Hailing & Taxis

Grab: Download app for cars (from 40,000 VND) and bikes. Cashless payments via card or GrabPay. English interface eliminates language barriers.

Traditional Taxis: Reputable companies include Mai Linh (green), Taxi Group (red-yellow). Insist on meter usage. Airport to Old Quarter: 250,000-350,000 VND (30-40 min). Avoid unmarked cabs and negotiate flat rates.

□□ Hanoi Metro

Line 2A operational (Cat Linh-Yen Nghia). Modern, air-conditioned, affordable (8,000-15,000 VND). Limited tourist coverage currently. Line 3 (Nhổn - Hanoi Station) is opening in stages and more lines are planned.

□□ Bicycles & Cyclos

Bicycles: Rent from hotels (50,000-100,000 VND/day) for Old Quarter exploration and West Lake loops. Traffic intimidating for inexperienced cyclists.

Cyclos: Three-wheeled pedal taxis for leisurely sightseeing (100,000-200,000 VND/hour). Agree on route and price first. Nostalgic but slow.

✈ Airport Transfer

Distance: 28km north of city center

Options:

- **Airport Bus #86:** Bus 86 costs 50,000 VND per trip; the airport lists departures every 25–30 minutes, terminating at Hanoi Railway Station.
- **Grab/Taxi:** 250,000-400,000 VND (30-50 min depending on traffic)
- **Private Transfer:** Pre-book for convenience (300,000-500,000 VND)
- **Airport Taxi Scams:** Avoid drivers soliciting inside terminal; use official taxi stands or Grab pickup zone

□□ Intercity Transport

Trains: For Sapa, take the train to Lào Cai, then transfer by road; trains do not reach Sapa itself. Book online at dsvn.vn or via hotels.

Buses: My Dinh and Giap Bat stations for northern destinations. Ninh Binh, Ha Long Bay accessible via bus (80,000-200,000 VND).

Pro Tip: Download offline Google Maps. Traffic peaks 7-9 AM and 5-7 PM allow extra travel time.

Shopping in Hanoi

□□ What to Buy

Handicrafts & Art: Lacquerware boxes, paintings on silk, water puppets, ceramic pieces from Bat Trang, embroidered textiles, bamboo products, hand-woven baskets

Fashion: Custom-tailored clothing (24-48 hour turnaround), silk scarves and garments, traditional ao dai dresses, linen clothing, ethnic minority textiles, conical hats (non la)

Food & Beverages: Vietnamese coffee (robusta and arabica beans), tea varieties (lotus, artichoke, green), dried fruits, rice wine, fish sauce, spices, instant pho packets

Jewelry & Accessories: Silver jewelry (ethnic designs), pearl items, leather goods, bags, wallets

□□ Best Shopping Areas

Hang Gai Street (Silk Street): High-quality silk clothing, embroidered items, tailors, galleries. Fixed prices generally higher but better quality than markets.

Dong Xuan Market: Hanoi's largest market with wholesale prices. Four floors of clothing, fabrics, electronics, housewares, souvenirs. Heavy bargaining expected (start at 40-50% of asking price).

Weekend Night Market (Friday-Sunday): Hang Dao Street closes for pedestrian market 6 PM-midnight. Clothing, accessories, street food, souvenirs at negotiable prices.

Hang Ma Street: Traditional decorative paper items, lanterns, festival decorations, votive offerings. Especially vibrant before Tet (Lunar New Year).

Old Quarter Specialty Streets: Each street historically sold specific goods Hang Bac (silver), Hang Thiec (tin), Hang Tre (bamboo). Many maintain traditional focuses.

Trang Tien Plaza & Vincom Centers: Modern malls with fixed-price international and Vietnamese brands, air conditioning, food courts. No bargaining.

□□ Bargaining Tips

- **Start Low:** Offer 40-50% of initial price; meet somewhere in middle
- **Walk Away Tactic:** Politely leave if price too high vendors often call you back with better offers
- **Buy Multiple:** Purchasing several items increases bargaining leverage
- **Cash is King:** Paying cash (VND) gives negotiating advantage over cards
- **Stay Friendly:** Smile, joke, maintain good humor throughout negotiations
- **Know Fair Prices:** Check multiple vendors before committing; ask hotel staff for guidance
- **Fixed Price Indicators:** Upscale shops and malls don't negotiate; look for price tags

Scam Alert: Be cautious of gem/jade dealers approaching tourists. Quality varies dramatically; only buy from reputable stores.

□□ Shipping & Customs

Most shops arrange international shipping for larger items (ceramics, furniture). Request proper invoicing for customs. Vietnam allows duty-free export of handicrafts; restrictions on antiques over 30 years old.

Annual Events & Festivals

□□ Tet Nguyen Dan (Lunar New Year)

When: Late January to February (dates vary annually based on lunar calendar)

Vietnam's most important holiday businesses close 3-7 days, many residents return to home villages. Expect: temple visits, family gatherings, fireworks at midnight, traditional foods (banh chung sticky rice cakes), red decorations symbolizing luck, dragon dances, ancestor worship. Tourist attractions may close; book accommodations months ahead. Experience authentic cultural traditions but anticipate service disruptions.

□□ Perfume Pagoda Festival

When: The festival spans the first through third lunar months; in 2026 it ran 18 February–11 May, with the opening ceremony on 22 February.

Major Buddhist pilgrimage to Perfume Pagoda draws massive crowds seeking blessings for prosperity, health, children. Boat rides, mountain hikes, temple offerings, traditional performances. Expect 3-4 hour waits if visiting during peak weeks.

□□ Hung Kings Temple Festival

When: 10th day of 3rd lunar month (April)

National holiday honoring legendary founders of Vietnamese nation. Main ceremonies at Hung Kings Temple in Phu Tho Province (100km northwest). Hanoi hosts parades, traditional performances, cultural activities. Patriotic celebration of Vietnamese identity.

□□ Hanoi International Film Festival

When: Biennial, currently in even years; the eighth edition’s opening ceremony is scheduled for 28 November 2026.

Southeast Asia's emerging film festival showcasing Vietnamese and international cinema. Screenings at National Cinema Center and venues citywide. Cultural exchange, director panels, awards.

□□ Hanoi Rock City & Music Festivals

When: Various dates, primarily April-November

Growing live music scene hosts rock, electronic, indie concerts. Hanoi Rock City venue features local and international acts. Check local listings for festival dates (Monsoon Music Festival, Soundfest).

□□ Hanoi Marathon

When: October-November

Annual marathon with full, half, 10km, 5km routes through city streets. International participation growing. Register months in advance at hanoimarathon.com.

□□ National Holidays (Closures Expected)

- **Tet Holiday:** Week surrounding Lunar New Year
- **Hung Kings Festival:** 10th day, 3rd lunar month
- **Reunification Day:** April 30
- **International Labor Day:** May 1
- **National Day:** September 2

Festival Travel Tips: Book accommodations early, expect higher prices and crowds, confirm attraction hours, participate respectfully in religious ceremonies, try festival-specific foods.

5 Detailed Day Itineraries

Day 1: Old Quarter & Hoan Kiem Lake Immersion

Morning (7:00-12:00):

- **7:00 AM:** Witness locals doing tai chi and exercise around Hoan Kiem Lake. Walk the perimeter (30 min)
- **8:00 AM:** Visit Ngoc Son Temple via red Huc Bridge. Entry fee applies (check the current price) (45 min)
- **9:00 AM:** Breakfast at local cafe pho or banh cuon with Vietnamese coffee (60,000 VND)
- **10:00 AM:** Explore Old Quarter's 36 streets on foot. Visit Ancient House at 87 Ma May Street. Entry fee applies (check the current price) (2 hours)

Afternoon (12:00-17:00):

- **12:30 PM:** Lunch at Bun Cha Huong Lien (Obama's restaurant) or local spot (80,000-120,000 VND)
- **14:00 PM:** Visit Hoa Lo Prison Museum. Entry fee applies (check the current price) (1.5 hours)
- **16:00 PM:** Coffee break at egg coffee shop (Cafe Giang or Cafe Pho Co with rooftop views) 35,000-45,000 VND

Evening (17:00-22:00):

- **17:30 PM:** Watch sunset from Long Bien Bridge or lakeside
- **18:30 PM:** Attend water puppet show at Thang Long Theatre. Book advance, 100,000-200,000 VND (1 hour)
- **20:00 PM:** Dinner and bia hoi (fresh beer) at corner pub in Old Quarter (100,000 VND)
- **21:00 PM:** Explore weekend night market if Friday-Sunday, or stroll illuminated streets

Day 2: History, Culture & Museums

Morning (7:30-12:00):

- **7:30 AM:** Early arrival at Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum complex (beat crowds). *Note: Closed Mon/Fri and Oct-Nov*
- **8:00-10:30 AM:** Tour mausoleum, Presidential Palace grounds, Ho Chi Minh Stilt House, One Pillar Pagoda. Free entry

- **11:00 AM:** Visit nearby Temple of Literature. Entry fee applies (check the current price) (1.5 hours)

Afternoon (13:00-17:00):

- **13:00 PM:** Lunch in French Quarter at local restaurant (100,000-150,000 VND)
- **14:30 PM:** Vietnam Museum of Ethnology (taxi/Grab required, 7km from center). Entry fee applies (check the current price) (2.5 hours)

Evening (18:00-22:00):

- **18:00 PM:** Return to center; walk French Quarter's tree-lined boulevards
- **19:00 PM:** Dinner at upscale Vietnamese restaurant (Cau Go, Home, or KOTO) 200,000-400,000 VND
- **21:00 PM:** Drinks at rooftop bar overlooking Hoan Kiem Lake

Day 3: Street Food & Local Life Experience

Morning (6:00-12:00):

- **6:00 AM:** Join street food walking tour (book ahead) or independently explore Dong Xuan Market area
- **6:30 AM:** Breakfast: pho at street stall (40,000 VND), watch market activity
- **8:00 AM:** Coffee at traditional cafe, observe local routines
- **9:00 AM:** Explore Dong Xuan Market's four floors practice bargaining (2 hours)
- **11:00 AM:** Snack on banh mi from street vendor (20,000-30,000 VND)

Afternoon (13:00-17:00):

- **13:00 PM:** Vietnamese cooking class with market tour (book advance, 600,000-1,200,000 VND including lunch). Alternatively, visit Adult admission: 40,000 VND.
- **16:00 PM:** Relax at Lenin Park or West Lake rent bicycle for lakeside ride

Evening (18:00-23:00):

- **18:00 PM:** Sunset at West Lake with Tran Quoc Pagoda visit
- **19:30 PM:** Seafood dinner at West Lake restaurant try snail dishes (ốc)
- **21:00 PM:** Return to Old Quarter for evening street food crawl sample banh xeo, bun cha, che (dessert)

Day 4: Art, Crafts & Alternative Hanoi

Morning (8:00-12:00):

- **8:00 AM:** Breakfast at local spot
- **9:00 AM:** Visit Vietnam Fine Arts Museum. Entry fee applies (check the current price) (2 hours)
- **11:00 AM:** Explore Hang Gai Street galleries and silk shops browse without obligation

Afternoon (13:00-17:30):

- **13:00 PM:** Lunch in Old Quarter
- **14:30 PM:** Half-day excursion to Bat Trang Ceramic Village by taxi/Grab (30 min). Tour workshops, try pottery-making, shop for souvenirs (3 hours)

Evening (18:30-22:00):

- **18:30 PM:** Return to city; visit Train Street if accessible (check current status)
- **19:30 PM:** Dinner at modern Vietnamese fusion restaurant
- **21:00 PM:** Live music at Hanoi Rock City or jazz club

Day 5: Day Trip to Ninh Binh

Full Day Excursion (7:00-20:00):

- **7:00 AM:** Depart Hanoi by tour bus or private car (2 hour drive, 100km south)

- **9:00 AM:** Arrive Tam Coc. The 2026 adult sightseeing ticket is 250,000 VND without the electric shuttle, or 350,000 VND with it.
- **11:30 AM:** Lunch at local restaurant goat meat specialty (100,000 VND)
- **13:00 PM:** Visit Bich Dong Pagoda climb to mountain temples (1 hour)
- **14:30 PM:** Mua Cave viewpoint climb 500 steps for panoramic views (1.5 hours, 100,000 VND)
- **16:30 PM:** Optional: Trang An boat tour OR visit Hoa Lu ancient capital ruins
- **18:00 PM:** Depart for Hanoi
- **20:00 PM:** Arrive Hanoi; late dinner in Old Quarter

Alternative Day 5: Ha Long Bay can be visited on a day trip; overnight cruises are optional. Perfume Pagoda also full-day option. Duong Lam Ancient Village for cultural immersion.

□□ Best Instagram & Photography Locations

□□ Sunrise & Golden Hour Spots

Long Bien Bridge (5:30-7:00 AM): Capture sunrise over Red River with iconic bridge structure. Motorbikes and trains crossing create dynamic shots. Access from either end; northern side offers river views.

West Lake - Tran Quoc Pagoda (5:30-7:00 AM): Golden light illuminates the pagoda's reflection in lake waters. An 11-storey stupa approximately 15 metres high. Lakeside pathway provides multiple angles.

Hoan Kiem Lake (6:00-7:30 AM): Morning mist, tai chi practitioners, Turtle Tower emerging from fog. Ngoc Son Temple's red bridge particularly photogenic. Fewer tourists allow clean shots.

□□ Architectural Photography

St. Joseph's Cathedral (Any time; sunset lighting best): Neo-Gothic facade, weathered grey stone, contrast with motorbike traffic. Square in front offers composition space. Evening illumination adds drama.

Hanoi Opera House (Late afternoon): French colonial grandeur, neoclassical columns, ornate details. Shoot from fountain plaza for symmetrical compositions. Evening lighting enhances golden facades.

Imperial Citadel Flag Tower (Morning): 40-meter octagonal tower against blue skies. Climb for aerial city views. Ancient walls provide historical context shots.

Old Quarter Tube Houses (Any time): Narrow, deep buildings with colorful facades. Hang Ma Street's lanterns create vibrant scenes. Morning light illuminates street details; evening captures neon signs.

□□ Urban & Street Life

Train Street (Check schedule; morning/evening trains): Trains passing inches from cafes and homes dramatic urban shots. *Respect closures; don't trespass.* Capture locals' daily routines amid tracks.

Dong Xuan Market (Early morning 6:00-8:00 AM): Vendors arranging produce, flower sellers, bustling market energy. Colorful fruits, traditional baskets, authentic commerce. Second floor offers overhead perspectives.

Old Quarter Streets at Night (7:00-10:00 PM): Neon signs, street food vendors, motorbike light trails, busy intersections. Long exposure captures motion blur. Ta Hien Street (beer corner) shows social scenes.

Motorbike Traffic (Any major intersection, rush hour): Hundreds of motorbikes create organized chaos. Elevated positions (bridges, buildings) provide bird's-eye views. Long Bien Bridge approach shows traffic streams.

□□ Cultural & Colorful Scenes

Hang Ma Street (Pre-Tet or weekends): Red lanterns, gold decorations, festival items create explosion of color. Paper decorations, silk flowers, traditional crafts. Narrow street intensifies visual impact.

Water Puppet Theatre (During performance): Dynamic puppet movements, splashing water, traditional costumes. *Check photography policies; some theaters prohibit flash.* Capture cultural heritage.

Temple Incense (Ngoc Son, Quan Thanh, Tran Quoc): Coiled incense spirals, smoke patterns, devotees praying, red-gold altars. Early morning or late afternoon light filters through smoke beautifully.

Ceramic Mosaic Mural (Any time; afternoon light best): Colorful tiles depicting Vietnamese culture, 4km of artistic opportunity. Bicycle or walk for varied sections. Details and wide shots both effective.

□□ Nature & Peaceful Moments

West Lake Sunset (5:00-6:30 PM): Golden hour reflections, fishermen casting nets, couples on benches. Thanh Nien Road causeway offers lake views both sides. Autumn provides clearest skies.

Hoan Kiem Lake Turtle Tower (Anytime): Iconic pagoda on small island, symbol of Hanoi. Dawn mist creates mystical atmosphere; dusk illumination adds romance. Include red Huc Bridge in wide shots.

Temple of Literature Gardens (Morning 8:00-10:00 AM): Serene courtyards, traditional architecture, stone stelae on tortoises, manicured trees. Fewer crowds enable contemplative compositions. Red-lacquered buildings contrast with greenery.

□□ Instagram Story & Reels Ideas

- **Street Food Preparation:** Pho being assembled, banh mi construction, egg coffee creation capture process videos
- **Traffic Crossing:** POV navigating Old Quarter intersections thrilling urban experience
- **Cyclo Ride:** Forward-facing video through narrow streets, authentic transport
- **Market Haggling:** Friendly bargaining interactions (ask permission)
- **Rooftop Views:** 360-degree pans from Cafe Pho Co or hotel rooftops
- **Tai Chi Morning:** Lake exercisers, slow-motion movements, peaceful routines

Photography Tips: Best light 6:00-8:00 AM and 4:30-6:00 PM. Respect locals ask permission for portraits. Use smartphones for inconspicuous street photography. Dry season (Oct-Apr) provides clearest skies. Bring lens cloth for humidity. Watch belongings in crowds.

⚡ Electricity & Power Adapters

Voltage: 220V AC, 50Hz (same as Europe, different from US 110V)

Plug Types: Vietnam primarily uses **Type A, C, and G** outlets:

- **Type A:** Two flat parallel pins (American-style, ungrounded)
- **Type C:** Two round pins (European-style)
- **Type G:** Three rectangular pins (British-style, less common)

Many modern hotels feature universal outlets accepting multiple plug types. Older buildings may have only Type A or C.

□□ Do You Need an Adapter?

- **From USA/Canada:** Type A plugs fit directly BUT voltage difference (220V vs 110V) requires voltage converter for devices not dual-voltage. Check device specifications most modern electronics (laptops, phone chargers, cameras) are dual-voltage (110-240V) and only need plug adapter.
- **From Europe:** Type C plugs work directly; no adapter needed for most outlets
- **From UK/Ireland:** Need Type G to C/A adapter
- **From Australia:** Need Type I to C/A adapter

□□ What to Bring

Universal Travel Adapter: Recommended for flexibility across Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries. Look for adapters with USB ports for charging multiple devices.

Voltage Converter: Only necessary for devices NOT dual-voltage (hair dryers, straighteners, some older electronics). Most accommodations provide hair dryers.

Power Bank: Essential for day trips and long exploration days. Hanoi has reliable electricity but charging points aren't always convenient.

Surge Protector: Optional but useful for protecting electronics from power fluctuations, which occasionally occur.

□□ Hotel & Accommodation Considerations

Most hotels (3-star and above) provide:

- Universal outlets or adapters upon request
- Hair dryers (no need to bring high-wattage devices)
- Reliable electricity with minimal outages
- Some properties have USB charging ports built into rooms

Buying Locally: If you forget adapters, electronics shops in Old Quarter sell them cheap (50,000-150,000 VND). Convenience stores and hotels may loan/rent adapters.

Power Outages: Rare in Hanoi's tourist areas but can occur during storms. Hotels typically have backup generators. Keep devices charged and carry flashlight/phone backup.

□□ Must-Try Dishes & Dining Guide

Iconic Hanoi Dishes

Phở (Noodle Soup): Vietnam's most famous dish rice noodles in clear beef (bò) or chicken (gà) broth, herbs, lime. **Where:** Pho Gia Truyen (49 Bat Dan), Pho Thin (13 Lo Duc). **Price:** 40,000-70,000 VND. **Tip:** Add herbs, lime, chili to taste; slurp loudly is acceptable.

Bún Chả: Hanoi's signature lunch grilled pork patties and slices with rice noodles, herbs, dipping sauce. **Where:** Bun Cha Huong Lien (Obama's spot, 24 Le Van Huu), Bun Cha Dac Kim (1 Hang Manh). **Price:** 40,000-80,000 VND. **When:** Traditionally lunch dish.

Bánh Mì (Vietnamese Sandwich): Crispy baguette with pate, cold cuts, pickled vegetables, cilantro, chili. French-Vietnamese fusion. **Where:** Banh Mi 25 (25 Hang Ca), street vendors. **Price:** 20,000-35,000 VND.

Egg Coffee (Cà Phê Trứng): Thick egg cream atop strong Vietnamese coffee dessert-like richness. **Where:** Cafe Giang (39 Nguyen Huu Huan), Cafe Pho Co (11 Hang Gai, rooftop views). **Price:** 35,000-45,000 VND.

Bún Riêu: Tomato-based crab noodle soup with tofu, tomatoes, herbs. **Where:** Bun Rieu Cua Hang Bac (48 Hang Bac). **Price:** 40,000-60,000 VND.

Chả Cá (Turmeric Fish with Dill): Hanoi specialty grilled fish with turmeric, dill, peanuts, rice noodles. **Where:** Cha Ca Thang Long (21-31 Duong Thanh). **Price:** 120,000-200,000 VND. Cook at your table.

Nem (Spring Rolls): Fresh (gỏi cuốn) or fried (nem rán) rice paper with vegetables, pork/shrimp, herbs. **Where:** Everywhere. **Price:** 30,000-60,000 VND per serving.

Bia Hơi (Fresh Beer): Light, cheap draft beer brewed daily. **Where:** Ta Hien Street (beer corner), corner pubs throughout Old Quarter. **Price:** 5,000-10,000 VND per glass. **Culture:** Sit on tiny plastic stools, socialize with locals and travelers.

Bánh Cuốn: Steamed rice rolls filled with minced pork and mushrooms, topped with fried shallots and herbs. **Where:** Banh Cuon Gia Truyen (12 Hang Ga). **Price:** 30,000-50,000 VND. **Best:** Breakfast or early lunch.

Xôi (Sticky Rice): Savory sticky rice with various toppings chicken, pork, egg, peanuts. **Where:** Xoi Yen (35B Nguyen Huu Huan). **Price:** 20,000-40,000 VND. Popular breakfast.

Ốc (Snails): West Lake specialty various snail preparations steamed, grilled, or in soups. **Where:** Restaurants around West Lake. **Price:** 50,000-150,000 VND per dish. Order multiple varieties.

Chè (Sweet Soup/Dessert): Sweet soups with beans, fruits, jellies, coconut milk served hot or cold. **Where:** Che Ba Thin (2 Ngo Thi Nham). **Price:** 15,000-30,000 VND.

□□ Dining Etiquette & Tips

- **Street Food Safety:** Choose busy stalls with high turnover. Observe cooking grilled/fried items safest. Avoid raw vegetables initially if sensitive stomach.
- **Seating:** Sidewalk dining on plastic stools is authentic experience. Don't be shy join communal tables.
- **Ordering:** Point at dishes if language barrier. Learn basics: "một" (one), "hai" (two), "không cay" (not spicy).
- **Chopstick Skills:** Attempt but forks usually available. Don't stick chopsticks vertically in rice (funeral symbolism).
- **Tipping:** Not traditional but increasingly expected at tourist restaurants (5-10%). Street stalls don't expect tips.
- **Pace:** Vietnamese eat quickly. Meals are social but efficient.
- **Tea:** Free tea provided at most restaurants cleanse palate, aid digestion.

□□ Restaurant Categories

Street Stalls (Quán Vỉa Hè): Most authentic, cheapest (20,000-70,000 VND meals). Limited English, cash only. Peak times: 7-9 AM breakfast, 11:30 AM-1 PM lunch, 6-8 PM dinner.

Local Restaurants (Nhà Hàng): Indoor seating, menus, slightly higher prices (50,000-150,000 VND). Some English. Better restrooms.

Tourist-Friendly Restaurants: English menus, Western amenities, AC, higher prices (100,000-300,000 VND). Quality varies check reviews.

Upscale/Fine Dining: Modern Vietnamese fusion, international cuisine, ambiance. **Notable:** Home Hanoi, KOTO (social enterprise training disadvantaged youth), Cau Go, Madame Hien. **Price:** 300,000-800,000 VND per person.

□□ Dietary Considerations

Vegetarian/Vegan: Buddhist vegetarian restaurants (Cơm Chay) common search "chay" on maps. Many dishes naturally plant-based. Communicate clearly: "Tôi ăn chay" (I'm vegetarian), "Không thịt" (no meat).

Allergies: Peanuts common in Vietnamese cuisine. Fish sauce (nước mắm) in most savory dishes. Communicate allergies clearly, consider translation card.

Spice Levels: Northern Vietnamese food less spicy than southern. Add chili to taste. "Không cay" means not spicy.

Gluten-Free: Rice-based cuisine naturally accommodating. Avoid soy sauce, check noodle types (rice vs wheat).

☕ Coffee Culture

Vietnamese coffee culture thriving strong robusta beans with condensed milk.

- **Cà Phê Sữa Đá:** Iced coffee with condensed milk (cold, sweet, strong)

- **Cà Phê Đen:** Black coffee (hot or iced)
- **Cà Phê Trứng:** Egg coffee (signature Hanoi drink)
- **Cà Phê Dừa:** Coconut coffee (creamy, tropical)

Where: Every corner has cafes. Try: Cafe Pho Co (views), Cafe Giang (original egg coffee), Loading T (hip), Tranquil Books & Coffee (cozy).

Food Tour Recommendation: Consider guided street food tour first night learn etiquette, discover best stalls, understand dishes. Then explore independently with confidence.

Water Safety: Drink bottled water only. Avoid ice at street stalls unless confident in source. Restaurants catering to tourists typically use filtered ice.