

# HANOI & HALONG BAY

**ENCOUNTER**

**TOM DOWNS**

Hanoi & Halong Bay Encounter

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### Colour-Coding & Maps

Colour-coding is used for symbols on maps and in the text that they relate to (eg all eating venues on the maps and in the text are given a green knife-and-fork symbol). Each neighbourhood also gets its own colour, and this is used down the edge of the page and throughout that neighbourhood section.

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## TOM DOWNS

Tom began travelling to and writing about Vietnam in the mid-1990s, when he journeyed from the south to the north with his wife, Fawn, a native of Saigon. They have returned frequently since then, falling in love with Hanoi's *bun cha*, *bia hoi* stands and fine colonial buildings. Above all, Tom has grown fond of the people of Hanoi, appreciating their obvious pride as well as their wry humour. He regards Hanoi as a very livable city, but prefers the 'assault on the senses' he experiences when hitting the city's streets anew on each visit. Among other books, he is author of Lonely Planet's *New Orleans* city guide. He lives in Oakland, California, with Fawn and their kids Mai, Lana and Liam.



## TOM'S THANKS

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## THE PHOTOGRAPHER

Greg Elms has been a contributor to Lonely Planet for over 15 years. Armed with a Bachelor of Arts in Photography, Greg was a photographer's assistant for two years before embarking on a travel odyssey. He eventually settled down to a freelance career in Melbourne, and now works regularly for magazines, graphic designers, advertising agencies and, of course, book publishers such as Lonely Planet.



Getting around in style, Old Quarter



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# THIS IS HANOI

Hanoi captivates with its beauty, and truly gets under your skin with its irrepressible vitality. The city – once named Thang Long, for a mythical ‘soaring dragon’ – is indeed rising, and the local population is clearly energised. The city’s thrust forward is unavoidable and infectious.

Hanoi is rare among Asian capitals, for the city is forging ahead without obliterating all signs of its past. Central Hanoi is an architectural show stopper held together by wide, tree-lined boulevards and mazes of intriguing alleys. The French architectural legacy, which Hanoians have little reason to feel romantic about, is nevertheless valued here. After decades of neglect, the city’s treasure trove of villas and colonial government buildings is being restored and put to inviting use – most notably in the French Quarter’s accumulation of fine restaurants. The Old Quarter, an agglomeration of humble ‘tube houses’, has been declared a historic district to protect the city’s oldest and most colourful enclave.

But Hanoians rarely slow down to admire the beauty of their city. Hanoi’s appeal is greatly enhanced by the exuberance of its citizens, the vast majority of whom seem to be whirring around the city on motorbikes. Hanoians have a reputation for regarding foreigners coldly, but most respond warmly to a smile. In increasing numbers, they are growing accustomed to doing business globally. Many are growing wealthy on the local stock market. All over town are signs of Hanoians enjoying the good life, and many are eager to share their thoughts and a toast with new friends from abroad.

This is an exciting time to visit Hanoi. The city is changing fast, but it offers an enticing blend of past and present. The arts, fashion and fine-dining scenes are flourishing as local talents and entrepreneurs respond to looser government control and growing opportunities. Meanwhile, traditional charms like a walk around Hoan Kiem Lake, or a bowl of *bun cha* (rice vermicelli with barbecued pork and vegetables) at an old woman’s food stall, are to be savoured as much as ever.

**Top left** Traditional music accompanies the show at Thang Long Water Puppet Theatre (p55) **Top right** Artwork beside Hoan Kiem Lake depicts a myth associated with the lake (p58) **Bottom** Catching up over a *bia hoi* at Lan Chin (p78)