



Hanoi

04 / POP 6.5 MILLION

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Why Go?

Showcasing sweeping boulevards, tree-fringed lakes and ancient pagodas, Hanoi is perhaps Asia's most graceful, atmospheric and exotic capital city. It's an energetic city on the move, and it often seems Hanoi's ambitious citizens are determined to make up for lost time.

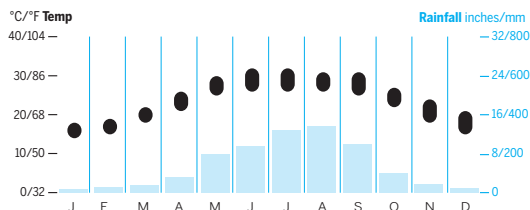
As motorbikes and pedestrians ebb and flow through the Old Quarter's centuries-old commercial chaos, hawkers in conical hats ply their wares while other locals sip drip-coffee and *bia hoi* (beer). At dawn on the shores of Hoan Kiem Lake, synchronised tai chi sessions take place beside goateed grandfathers contemplating their next chess moves.

In Lenin Park, Communist Party youth practise military drills, while nearby, Hanoi's bright young things celebrate contrasting values in cosmopolitan restaurants and bars.

Real estate development and traffic chaos increasingly threaten to subsume Hanoi's compelling blend of Parisian grace and Asian pace, but a beguiling coexistence of the medieval and the modern still enthralls.

When to Go

Hanoi



Jan–Apr Expect cooler days and the energy and colour of the annual Tet and Dong Da Hill festivals.

May Grab a glimpse of the city's alternative arts and music scenes at the CAMA festival.

Oct–Dec Clear, sunny days and low humidity make this the best time to visit Hanoi.

History

The site where Hanoi stands today has been inhabited since the neolithic period. Emperor Ly Thai To moved his capital here in AD 1010, naming it Thang Long (City of the Soaring Dragon). Spectacular celebrations were held in honour of the city's 1000th birthday in 2010.

The decision by Emperor Gia Long, founder of the Nguyen dynasty in 1802, to rule from Hue relegated Hanoi to the status of a regional capital for a century. The city was named Hanoi (The City in a Bend of the River) by Emperor Tu Duc in 1831. From 1902 to 1953, Hanoi served as the capital of French Indochina.

Hanoi was proclaimed the capital of Vietnam after the August Revolution of 1945, but it was not until the Geneva Accords of 1954 that the Viet Minh, driven from the city by the French in 1946, were able to return.

During the American War, US bombing destroyed parts of Hanoi and killed hundreds of civilians. One of the prime targets was the 1682m-long Long Bien Bridge. US aircraft repeatedly bombed this strategic point, yet after each attack the Vietnamese managed to improvise replacement spans and return road and rail services. It is said

that the US military ended the attacks when US POWs were put to work repairing the structure. Today the bridge is renowned as a symbol of the tenacity and strength of the people of Hanoi. An essential Hanoi experience is to ride by *xe om* (motorcycle taxi) across this iconic structure.

As recently as the early 1990s, motorised transport was rare; most people got around on bicycles and the only modern structures were designed by Soviet architects. Today Hanoi's conservationists fight to save historic structures, and the city struggles to cope with a booming population, soaring pollution levels and an inefficient public transport system.

Sightings

Note that some museums are closed on Mondays and take a two-hour lunch break on other days of the week. Check the following opening hours carefully before setting off.

OLD QUARTER

This is the Asia dreamed of from afar. Steeped in history, pulsating with life, bubbling with commerce, buzzing with motorbikes and rich in exotic scents, the Old Quarter is Hanoi's historic heart. The streets

HANOI IN...

One Day

Rise early for a morning walk around misty **Hoan Kiem Lake** before a classic Hanoi breakfast of *pho bo* (beef noodle soup) at **Pho Gia Truyen**. Pay your respects at the **Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum**, before checking out the surreal **museum** and **stilt house**. Wander down P Dien Bien Phu to the interesting **Vietnam Military History Museum**. Have lunch at the nearby **Matchbox Winebar & Restaurant** before taking in the cultural treasures at the adjacent **Fine Arts Museum**. After lunch, walk five minutes to the peaceful **Temple of Literature**, before catching a cab back to jettison your new-found serenity amid the irresistible chaos of the **Old Quarter**. Browse the ancient neighbourhood's buildings, shops and galleries, stopping for a well-earned and refreshing glass of *bia hoi* (draught beer). Catch a performance of the **water puppets** before heading to the sprawling **Quan An Ngon** for dinner. Good luck in choosing from the diverse menu, which spans all of Vietnam's regional cuisines.

Two Days

Hanoi has some terrific sights away from the central zone, so head into the suburbs to the excellent **Vietnam Museum of Ethnology** to discover the ethnic mosaic that makes up Vietnam today. Have a local lunch in **Nha Hang Lan Chin**, tucked away next to the **Museum of Vietnamese Revolution** and hop across the road to the **National Museum of Vietnamese History**. The building is stunning and the contents a fine introduction to 2000 years of highs and lows. After this focus on what's gone before, detour north by taxi to the emerging restaurant and bar scene on trendy **P Xuan Dieu** near Tay Ho (West Lake). Dinner and cocktails at the **House of Son Tinh** is recommended as a glimpse into the Hanoi of tomorrow.