



Hanoi

POP 6.8 MILLION

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Best Places to Stay

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Why Go?

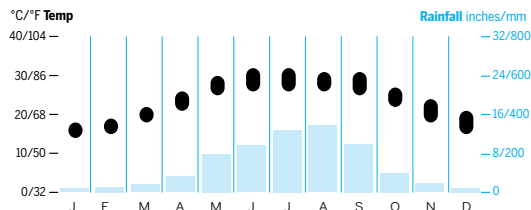
Showcasing sweeping boulevards, tree-fringed lakes and ancient pagodas, Hanoi is Asia's most atmospheric capital. It's an energetic city on the move, and Hanoi's ambitious citizens are determined to make up for lost time.

As motorbikes and pedestrians ebb and flow through the Old Quarter's centuries-old commercial chaos, hawkers in conical hats still ply their wares while other locals breakfast on noodles or sip drip-coffee. At dawn on the shores of Hoan Kiem Lake, synchronised t'ai chi sessions take place beside goateed grandfathers contemplating their next chess moves. In Lenin Park, choreographed military drills have been replaced by chaotic skateboarders, while Hanoi's bright young things celebrate in cosmopolitan restaurants and bars.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 enthral.

When to Go

Hanoi



Jan–Apr Expect cooler days and the energy and colour of the annual Tet New Year Festival.

May Experience the region's alternative arts and music scenes at the CAMA Asean music 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.

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, but the city struggles to cope with a booming population, soaring pollution levels and an inefficient public transport system.

Sights

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

Old Quarter

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 are narrow and congested, and crossing the road is an art form, but remember to look up as well as down, as there is some elegant old architecture amidst the chaos. Hawkers pound the streets with sizzling and smoking baskets hiding cheap meals, and *pho* stalls and *bia hoi* dens resonate with the sound of gossip and laughter. Modern yet medieval, there is no better way to spend time in Hanoi than walking the streets, soaking up the sights, sounds and smells.

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 Thin**. Pay your respects at the **Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum**, before checking out the **museum** and **stilt house**. Wander back down P Dien Bien Phu to the **Vietnam Military History Museum**. Have a coffee at funky **Cong Caphe** before visiting the cultural treasures of the **Fine Arts Museum**. Grab a cab to lunch at **La Badiane** before continuing to the peaceful **Temple of Literature**. Catch another cab to the chaotic **Old Quarter**, browsing the ancient neighbourhood's buildings, shops and galleries. Make time to stop for a well-earned and refreshing glass of *bia hoi* (draught beer). Catch a performance of the **water puppets** before heading south of the lake to the atmospheric **Nha Hang Ngon** for dinner.

Two Days

Head into the suburbs to the excellent **Vietnam Museum of Ethnology** to discover the ethnic mosaic that makes up modern Vietnam. Back in the city have lunch at **Chim Sao** before exploring the **Museum of the Vietnamese Revolution** and the adjacent **National Museum of Vietnamese History**. The architecture at the latter is stunning, and the contents a fine introduction to 2000 years of highs and lows. After dinner at Highway 4, head for drinks at **Manzi Art Space** or **Bar Betta**.