



nileGUIDE

ALL YOU NEED TO PLAN YOUR PERFECT TRIP



upyernoz

Perfect Hanoi Day

Hanoi, 1 Day

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Guide Description

AUTHOR NOTE: Hanoi is not for tourists. If you spend your day in the Old Quarter, you will get ripped off and frustrated. But if you explore the hidden gems, like Cafe Kinh Do 252, take a cooking class, visit 54 traditions, and some other cool stores and markets, you will feel like you have had a peak inside a rich city. End your day with dinner at Chim Sao where you can sit on the floor and a performance at the Hanoi Opera House, where you can sit in tiny chairs.

contact:
tel: +84 4 825 0216

location:
252 Pho Hang Bong
Hanoi

1 Café 252

DESCRIPTION: "The yogurt and pastry place" is how most people refer to this popular eatery. Well frequented by expatriates, it serves a fine assortment of Western fare, as well as its renowned croissants, cookies, and custard cakes. Busy most of the day, its long and spacious interior is forever buzzing with speedy waitress service and giggles from the open kitchen at the back. Fresh yogurt is made on the premises and can be taken away or you can eat in the Cafe. Call for timings before you plan your breakfast or brunch in the cafe. © wcities.com

MY NOTE: This is a great place for breakfast. The yogurt is homemade and the best you will find anywhere in the city. The coffee comes from the south and is super rich. The owner was correspondents with Ho Chi Minh and Catherine Deneuve hung out here while filming Indochine



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contact:
<http://www.partner.viator.com/en/6793/tours/Hanoi/Vietnamese-Cooking-Class-at-Hanoi-s-Cooking-Centre/d351-2514>
HANCOOK

location:
Hanoi Hanoi

2 Vietnamese Cooking Class at Hanoi's Cooking Centre

DESCRIPTION: Learn the secrets to preparing a great Vietnamese dish on this half-day cooking tour in Hanoi. Your Hanoi cooking tour will begin with a quick walk to the famous Chau Long market, where you will learn more about the various ingredients that go into a Vietnamese dish. It's then onto the Hanoi Cooking Centre for your hands on cooking lesson followed by a chance to try your new creation. Vietnamese food is healthy, simple to cook and downright delicious. This half day cooking tour in Hanoi will provide you with a hands-on lesson on how to shop for, and to cook, authentic Vietnamese food.

Your Hanoi cooking class will be held at the Hanoi Cooking Centre, a new complex nestled on the edge of Hanoi's famous old quarter and close proximity to the picturesque Truc Bach and West Lake.

Your half-day tour begins with a walk around the famous Chau Long market, nearby Truc Bac Lake. Here you will learn more about the various local ingredients including vegetables, fruits and Vietnamese herbs and spices.

Two-minutes away from the Chau Long Market is the Hanoi Cooking Centre. The Vietnamese cooking class is held in small groups (2 to 16 people) to enhance interactivity with the head chef. You will have one cooking station between 2 persons for your hands-on lesson. At midday sit down and enjoy your own Vietnamese creations accompanied by local beer or wine plus receive detailed recipes cards to take home. Happy eating! © Viator

MY NOTE: Go here for a lunchtime class. The market tour is really special. These markets are disappearing so go while you can!



viator

contact:

tel: +84 4 928 8733
http://www.valeriegregorimckenzie.com

location:

27 Nha Tho St
Hanoi

hours:

Daily 8am-8pm

3 Song

DESCRIPTION: This boutique (whose name means "life" in Vietnamese) carries original designs offering a modern twist on classic Vietnamese styles. They are a bit on the pricey side, but the clothing is thoughtful and well-cut. Everything is a creation of established designer Valerie Gregori McKenzie, who first began designing in France and continued her trade in California. Her clothing and home collections are a mix of Vietnamese classical styles and a tropical bohemian chic look. © Frommer's

MY NOTE: Comfortable, good quality clothes. Stop by here while walking around the Old Quarter. Your travel wardrobe will thank you.



wcities

contact:

tel: +84 4 942 1061

location:

Pho Le Thai To
Hanoi

hours:

Temples daily 8am-5pm

4 Hoan Kiem Lake

DESCRIPTION: Hoan Kiem Lake is the center of the city both literally and figuratively. The lake is the city's most popular strolling ground and a lovers' lane at night with couples locked in embrace on benches or parked motorbikes looking out over the placid waters, the shadows of overhanging willows cast by moonlight. In the morning the lake area is crowded with folks out for their morning exercise -- running or walking in a circle around the lake or joining in with the many tai chi, martial arts, calisthenics, aerobics, and even ballroom dancing groups that meet in the open areas at water's edge. Hoan Kiem Lake is also the city's own creation myth: the Legend of the Lake of the Recovered Sword. In the mid-15th century the gods gave emperor Le Thai To a magical sword to defeat Chinese invaders. While the emperor was boating on the lake one day, a giant tortoise reared up and snatched the sword, returning it to its rightful owners and ushering peace into the kingdom. Stroll around the lake in the early morning or evening to savor local life among the willow trees and see elders playing chess or practicing tai chi. In the center of the lake is the Tortoise Pagoda; on the northern part is **Ngoc Son** pagoda, reachable only by the stunning **Bridge of the Rising Sun**, a long, red arch typical of Chinese temple compounds. Ngoc Son is a working temple, meaning that you might walk into a local ceremony of chanting monks and kneeling supplicants. The temple grounds offer great views of the surrounding lake, and the little lakeside park on the island is a popular place for elderly men to enjoy a game of Chinese chess. Don't miss the friendly calligrapher just inside the temple (on the left as you enter). For a nominal fee, have your and your friends' names done in Chinese characters, complete with the meanings of each symbol in English on the back (I'm "Wheat Love Machine") or have a scroll done of significant Chinese characters such as "Heart," "Love," or "Determination" (whatever you think you might need). Hoan Kiem is a useful locator for navigating the city; for addresses downtown, people generally give directions in relation to it. It's good to know how to get from the lake to your hotel. The



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lake is also the jumping-off point for exploring the Old Quarter, Hanoi's labyrinth of traditional craft streets in a sprawling maze on the north end of the lake. Lakeside is also a good place to find a bench and rest your toes after trundling around town, and you can find some good little cafes, particularly on the north end. Grab an ice cream and take time to stroll or stop and watch the moon reflect off the surface of this magical lake. You might even spot one of the giant turtles who took back the sword of Le Thai To to herald peace in Vietnam; sightings of this rare breed of turtles are quite common. Willows hang over the lake and reflect in the rippling light of dusk. **Thap Rua** is the small stupa that was built in 1886 by an obscure Mandarin official. The temple was at first despised and involved in a scandal in which the official tried to have his father's bones laid to rest at the pagoda base. But over time, tiny Thap Rua, which sits on a small island at the very center of the pond, has become something of the city's Leaning Tower of Pisa, Statue of Liberty, and Eiffel Tower all rolled into one. Just two tiers of window galleries crowned by a short tapered roof, the temple commands great respect despite its recent construction, and it's a popular focal point for swooning lovers at lakeside in Hanoi's "Central Park" -- the lungs of the city. The turtles that can be seen basking at the temple's base are said to be up to 500 years old and the very species that stole the sword and founded the fair city. Hanoians love their stupa of peace; in fact, recent initiatives to have the aging pagoda painted and restored -- the small stupa is covered in moss and is overgrown with weeds -- were met with staunch disapproval from Hanoi citizens. And so it is as it always was. © Frommer's

MY NOTE: Take a morning jog around the lake or participate in one of the classes. This is the center of fun in Hanoi.

contact:
tel: +84 4 826 4089

location:
Dong Xuan and Hang Chieu
Streets
Hanoi

5 Dong Xuan Market

DESCRIPTION: This large three-story market to the north of Hanoi's Old Quarter offers a varied cornucopia of goods of all sorts. Hundreds of stalls, with thousands of workers, trade extremely fresh produce, dried foods, household goods, appliances and more. The market has an interesting history. It saw fierce fighting between Vietnamese resistance units and the French. Later, in 1994, the market was destroyed in a fire that resulted in the death of five people and the loss of an estimated USD4.5 million in stock. © wcities.com

MY NOTE: This place is big and hectic but so much fun. Shop for knick knacks or get a manicure from one of the ladies sitting around the market.



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contact:
tel: 04/715-0194
www.54traditions.com

location:
30 Hang Bun St

6 54 Traditions Gallery

DESCRIPTION: This gallery is more like an ethnographic museum, library, and gallery all rolled into one. The space is divided into five theme rooms (e.g. "Functional Objects", and "Shamanism") and co-owner Mark S. Rapport is more than happy to play guide for a day. Rapport is a self-

Hanoi

hours:

8am-6pm

described collector, baseball cards when he was a kid, African art while living in New York, and then Vietnamese minority art when he moved to Hanoi. Rapport has a natural gift for bringing the artifacts to life and, given the range of affordable pieces (small mounted prints made from antique stamps or seals got for less than \$10/£5.55) and exquisite antique artifacts, few people walk away empty-handed. © Frommer's

MY NOTE: Stop by here after the cooking class, it is right around the corner. This is more interesting and centrally located than the Museum of Ethnology. Try to get a tour with the owner Mark Rappaport, a former pediatrician from NYC.

contact:

tel: +84 4 933 0131

fax: +84 4 933 0116

location:

Trang Tien Street
Hanoi



Hanoi Opera House

DESCRIPTION: There is nothing more striking in Hanoi than looking down Trang Tien Street and seeing the Hanoi Opera House standing strong at the end. Built by the French in 1911, and renovated in the late 1990s, this is an incredible building. The facade is colonial French with pillars and balconies overlooking the city center. The 900-seat opera house plays host to visiting foreign performances as well as Vietnamese symphonies. © wcities.com

MY NOTE: End your day with a performance here. The Opera House is in the French Quarter. Head for a drink at the Metropole hotel after the performance to unwind and relax.



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Hanoi Snapshot

Local Info

Vietnam's capital, Hanoi, is a fusion of eastern and western influences, with quite a bit of French culture lingering from its days as a colony. There are French landmarks, French architecture and a French influence in the cuisine. That adds an interesting flavor to the city. But if you wanted French you'd go to France. What makes Hanoi such a fascinating metropolis is not only its past but its present and future. This is one of the most vibrant cities in the now-vibrant nation of Vietnam, which has bounced back from the devastation of the war and is rushing forward.

Sights

That said, any visit to Hanoi should include a visit to some of the wartime sites like Hoa Lo Prison. It's now a museum with exhibits that look back at the French colonial regime and at the jail's days as the "Hanoi Hilton," when it housed American prisoners. Hanoi also has its own Army Museum and Vietnamese People's Air Force Museum, where tanks, planes and canons used during the war are showcased. For a different kind of museum attraction, visit the Museum of Ethnology (Bao Tang Dan Toc Hoc), where you can occasionally see locals showing off ethnic costumes. But don't dwell on the war. Hanoi residents don't. Make sure to visit some of the many other attractions in the city. There are many temples with beautiful architecture, including the charming Ngoc Son Temple, which stands on the shores of scenic Hoan Kiem Lake and is perfect for picture taking. It has displays of mummified giant turtles, which younger tourists will find interesting. A good way to get a feel for the city overall and find places to spend more time later is to book one of the many city tours. The torrent of traffic is a sight worth seeing in itself.

Dining and Nightlife

Vietnamese Cuisine is a hodgepodge of many different influences, all of which come together in a delicious combination. Eating

by the sidewalk in Hanoi's downtown area is particularly popular and this is where you'll find the most authentic, simple yet mouthwatering choices. Park yourself at a plastic table and enjoy a bowl of spicy pho, a savory sandwich or barbecued chicken on lively "chicken street." If you want to splurge, Hanoi also has many upscale restaurants, trendy bars and entertainment venues, particularly in the Hoan Kiem District. If you're adventurous, slide over to La Mat, just across the river from downtown, and try a plate of cobra. If you want to learn yourself how to cook Vietnamese, attend a half-day class at one of the city's many culinary schools, like the Hanoi Cooking Centre or Hoa Sua Cooking School.

Shopping

Most visitors to Hanoi pick up at least one piece of beautiful Vietnamese fabric as a souvenir. One of the best places to find fabric is at Cho Hom in Pho Hue. Or for deals on a wide variety of merchandise, try the vibrant Dong Xuan market. Bargaining is considered something of a sport here, so don't be shy.

© NileGuide

History

Hanoi's personality combines the charming candor of a schoolgirl, the hardworking grit of a mechanic and the wisdom of a great aunt. It is a city in transition. Squashed between karaoke bars and travelers' cafes, elements of its French colonial past inject the city with the character of a provincial town. Over the course of the country's soap opera-like history, Hanoi has for the most part functioned as the nation's capital. Though smaller and less modern than Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi bursts with a determined energy that speaks of its historical and political significance.

Inhabited since the Neolithic period, Hanoi, enjoyed power and prestige at an early stage in Vietnam's entangled past. In A.D. 1010 King Ly Thai To, known as Hanoi's founding father, established the site as the capital of the first Vietnamese dynasty

independent from the Chinese. According to folklore, when the king stepped onto the riverbank a golden dragon flew toward the heavens, hence the original name Thang Long, City of the Soaring Dragon. Hanoi became home to the pulse of administrative activities and to the nation's first university, the Temple of Literature, a graceful complex of courtyards and small buildings. It remains a well-preserved example of the serenity and architecture of a bygone life.

Other remnants of dynastic life are sprinkled throughout the city. Guided by the principles of geometry, Ly Thai To and his successors chose auspicious locations to construct temples and palaces. Emperor Ly Thai Tong built the One Pillar Pagoda in 1049 (subsequently destroyed by the French in 1954, just before they were forced out of the city, and then rebuilt by the new government) as a gesture of gratitude to Quan The Am Bo Tat, the Goddess of Mercy, for granting him a son. The 13th century spawned Hanoi's Old Quarter, a conundrum of winding alley-sized streets, each known for specific merchandise.

Freedom from China did not equate with tranquility. Centuries of civil strife, dynastic turnovers and border struggles with China ensued. Hanoi lost its status as capital in 1802 when Emperor Gia Long, founder of the Nguyen Dynasty, captured the city and united the northern territory with the centrally located Hue, which became the new national capital. During the 1830s, the city, under its present name Ha Noi, which means city within the river's bend, was relegated to a provincial capital.

In the mid-19th century, the French eyed Indochina as a land ripe for commercial, patriotic, strategic and religious expansion and beginning in 1848 launched a series of haphazard attacks on Vietnam. In 1872 Jean Dupuis, a French merchant, captured the Hanoi Citadel, which now functions as a military base. After a decade of instability, the French troops seized Hanoi. One year later France forced the North to accept the status of a French protectorate.

Hanoi Snapshot continued

In 1887 Hanoi functioned as the center of government for the French Indochinese Union, which effectively snatched Vietnamese independence. Today, yellow facades, tree-lined boulevards and grand administrative offices provide visible reminders of the French influence. The colonial villas of the old French Quarter are now home to embassies, upscale hotels and restaurants. The Hanoi Opera House offers a vision from this past.

Vietnamese resistance to the French rule spurred uprisings, poisoning attempts and patriotic publications. The Communists, with their empathy for the peasants' frustrations with unequal land distribution, emerged as the most successful of anti-colonialists. After the Japanese defeat in 1945, Ho Chi Minh's Communist forces proclaimed the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in Hanoi's Ba Dinh Square, which still serves as an arena for national events and hosts visitors to the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum and the President Palace Memorial Site. Ho's declaration sparked violent confrontations with the French. Eight years of guerilla warfare culminated in the eventual victory over the French at Dien Bien Phu in 1954.

The next day, the Geneva Agreement provided for the temporary partition of the Communist North and the anti-Communist, US-supported South, to be reunified in 1956 following general elections. Hanoi, under the strict rule of Ho Chi Minh, reassumed its status as capital of the territory north of the 17th parallel.

The elections were not held and hostilities ignited a full-scale war, known as the American War, in which US troops backed the anti-communists. The Maison Centrale, the infamous "Hanoi Hilton," served as a vast prison complex during the war. Built by the French in 1896, the sprawling complex now houses a museum, which provocatively displays the history of the American War.

During the US bombardments of North Vietnam from March 1965 to October 1968, the authorities evacuated 75 percent of Hanoi's population and much of the city's

buildings suffered damage. In 1973, the United States withdrew. Three years later the victorious communist forces established the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, reuniting the North and South with Hanoi as the national capital. Tributes, both audio and visual, to Ho Chi Minh saturate the city. In the mornings, loud speakers blast songs singing praise to the former leader, and busts, posters and banners scattered throughout the city pay tribute. The massive Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum and the Museum of Vietnamese Revolution offer glimpses of Uncle Ho's resounding influence even decades later.

Almost all the damage incurred during the American War has been repaired. During the decades following the war, Hanoi and much of the north have been ruled under a very stringent police state. Vietnam began opening its economy in the mid-1980s, a period marked by the liberalization of foreign investment laws and the promotion of tourism. A recent trade deal with the U.S. is expected to open the way for normal trade relations between the former enemies for the first time since the Vietnam War.

Evidence of the increasing foreign influence marks the city. Supermarkets stock Pringles potato chips, the youth pack Internet cafes and the tunes of ringing mobile phones are beginning to drown out the cackle of the city's loud speakers broadcasting government messages about social evils. Hanoi tentatively jerks toward the modern world.

©

Hotel Insights

Just as the magical sword of Hoan Kiem Lake mythology eventually found its rightful place in the depths of the water, you will have little trouble finding the accommodations that are right for you.

Hanoi is a small city with many lodging options. The high-budget tourist or business traveler will find luxury in hotels with beautiful suites, fantastic restaurants, pools, fitness centers and first-rate service. The backpacker will find comfort in guest houses that may charge less than USD5

for a night's stay. Visitors with some money to spend, but who do not want to spend it all at the hotel, will also be pleased with the large quantity of midrange accommodations Hanoi offers. This city has beds for everyone.

Your preferred means of travel should play a part in your choice of location. There are many ways to maneuver around town. Taxis are not hard to spot outside most nice hotels and nightclubs. Hop on an *axe om* (a hitched ride on the back of a motorcycle) for a fast trip if you are traveling alone without any baggage. *Cyclos* (pedicabs) offer slow effortless travel. With a rented bicycle most of the city seems easily accessible and, for the most part, it is.

Once you have tried to brave the Hanoi's chaotic traffic, though, you may decide pedestrian travel proves the best choice. The blaring horns of weaving motorcycles and unyielding automobiles make road travel daunting. If this is the case, you should select lodging within walking distance of the majority of places you plan on spending time. If you are willing to brave the Hanoi streets, taxis, *xe om* and *cyclos* will be happy to have your regular business. Outlying hotels will welcome you with open arms.

Old Quarter

The exciting Old Quarter is generally a place that many people want to visit, but only the backpackers want to stay. The hustle and bustle of this 700-year-old commercial area weave through streets full of budget accommodations. Those of limited means can find singles or doubles for less than USD10. Amenities such as air conditioning may cost extra. Some of the better inexpensive options include Hotel Espéren 11 by St. Joseph's Cathedral, the Old Darling Hotel, hidden on a quiet alley off Ta Hien, and the Nam Phuong Hotel, enjoying the activity of Gia Long Market Street.

If the enthusiasm of the Old Quarter attracts you but "cheap" does not, there are a number of pleasant choices. The competition for the backpacker business proves so great that for a few dollars

Hanoi Snapshot continued

more a night than the budget hotels you can stay in a small degree of luxury. The Salute Hotel, The Classic Street and The Quoc Hoa can all balance your needs for Old Quarter location and boutique hotel comfort.

Hoan Kiem

Staying in Hoan Kiem District keeps you close to tourist attractions, museums, shopping and good restaurants. While the crazy Old Quarter sits to the north of the Hoan Kiem Lake, accommodations within a few blocks east, west and south of the water provides a wide range of comforts without the bedlam.

To the east sit two of Hanoi's premier hotels. You cannot find more opulence in more convenient locations than in the Hotel Sofitel Metropole Hanoi and the Hilton Hanoi Opera. These hotels spare no effort to please. To the south, the Thuy Nga Guesthouse affords views of the lake, and the Hoa Binh Hotel features 70 years of affordable splendor. Continuing west on Ly Thuong Kiet, the shiny towers of the Melia Hotel may beckon you or the boutique luxury of the Guoman Hotel.

Beyond Central Hanoi

For those not afraid to venture a little farther from the heart of the city, the range of possibilities grows. If not for the Asian financial crisis, the West Lake area would probably be the home of many fine places to stay. Some hotels remain unopened; some blueprints sit in wastebaskets. Two hotels have survived the storm: the moderate Thang Loi Hotel and, offering perhaps the best sunset view in Hanoi, the Meritus Westlake.

Ba Dinh District, west of the city's center, plays host to a number of embassies and government buildings. It is also the home of some of Hanoi's nicest lodgings. The glorious Daewoo Hotel is the choice of presidents and others of international nobility. A little closer in sits the comfortable and classy Lakeside Hotel (on Giang Vo Lake) and the five-star Hanoi Horison (technically in Dong Da District).

The hotels of Hai Ba Trung District, though not far from the tourism and business of central Hanoi, offer a very different experience from their slightly northern counterparts. The very adequate accommodations in this area provide easy access to the "Vietnamese" shopping of Hom Market along with the morning exercise and evening romance of Lenin Park. The very reasonable Green Park Hotel, the sophisticated Hotel Nikko and the luxurious Sunway Hotel Hanoi are a few of the more notable options.

Whether you want to stay in the center of the city or the outskirts, in extravagance or thrift, Hanoi's accommodation choices are sure to satisfy.

©

Restaurants Insights

To eat and drink in Hanoi is to taste the city's culture. The table, be it the plastic variety found in pho (noodle soup) sidewalk stalls or the taller and more substantial seen in restaurants, is a magnet for social interaction. Beyond your immediate party, the scenes that unfold in food stalls, cafés and restaurants offer a candid view of the local mode of life.

Food Stalls

As Hanoi wakes and sleeps early, finding food before dawn is easy, but satisfying the late-night munchies is a bit more challenging. Breakfast Vietnamese-style can be found on most city blocks—join a group of Vietnamese curled over low stools, slurping the white noodles served submerged in a meaty broth by vendors of pho stands. Chau, like hot oatmeal except made from rice and mixed with fish or meat, fried scallions and herbs, make another typical morning meal. Both hearty dishes will fill your stomach for less than a dollar. Food stalls line Mai Hoc De and early morning pho stands ladle out noodles on Dinh Liet.

Fine Dining

Several pricier chair-and-table establishments appeal to those craving the familiar tastes of a Western-style breakfast.

The eggs Benedict drenched in a rich hollandaise sauce at Moca Café will quiet growling tummies, and the buffet at La Brasserie in the Nikko Hotel offers limitless pastries, fruits and coffee. Serving breakfast foods all day, Café 129 and Kinh Do 252 Café combine both local and foreign tastes in food and décor.

At noon the streets buzz with motorbikes as most Vietnamese rush home for a two-hour lunch and nap. The noon meal lingers. The tree-filled garden and lengthy list of salads and buttery pastries at Hoa Sua offer an ideal place for a ladies lunch. The restored French-villa setting of the Verandah Restaurant and Bar is another place suitable for pre- or post-shopping lunch. Au Lac, the Kangaroo Café and KOTO Restaurant also provide casual spots for a leisurely lunch.

Pho To Hien Thanh

Long tables of Vietnamese crack into crabs, prawns and clams at any one the casual seafood eateries on Pho To Hien Thanh. Other places serving food from the waters include San Ho Seafood Restaurant, which offers a set seafood lunch starting at USD5. Cha Ca La Vong serves grilled fish cakes, a specialty of Hanoi.

Several of the fancier private clubs and hotels offer lunch and dinner specials, which draw a more professional crowd. All-you-can-eat buffets featuring international cuisine change every season. Check the local paper for current promotions at the Press Club, Café Promenade at the Daewoo Hotel, Turtle's Poem at the Hilton Hanoi Opera and Le Beaulieu at the Hotel Sofitel Metropole Hanoi.

For group lunches or solo dining, The Deli prepares (and also delivers) sandwiches as does the more posh Hanoi Gourmet. Bui Thi Xuan is home to a concentration of com bias, rice stands where patrons select from a display of prepared foods including grilled meats, fried fish, shrimp, various pickled and blanched greens, and sautéed tofu, and mix them with rice.

Mid-afternoon grazers flock to the Ciao Café for pastries and light bites, sit at the lakeside balcony at Co Ngu Bar for sinh

Hanoi Snapshot continued

tos(fruit juices), and sip coffee topped with frothy egg whites at the tucked-away Café Pho Co. Tea drinkers should sample some of the 73 varieties brewed at the See Wan Ton Teahouse.

Bars& Casual Dining

The bars at Emperor Restaurant(enchanting scenery), La Salsa Tapas Bar and Restaurant(great olives) and La Brique(fine wines) are stylish, upscale places to enjoy a pre-dinner drink. Each presents a refined menu that might entice you to stay for dinner.

Casual eating en masse proves popular as locals and foreigners stretch the early evening hours. The easily adjoining tables, large menus and low prices of bia hois(beer halls) make these Hanoi institutions popular places for large groups. A few places currently en vogue include Quan Bia Minh, Bia Hoi Dai Nam, Cua Hang Bac Nam Bia Hoi and 60 Ly Thuong Kiet Street.

For a truly Vietnamese gastronomical experience, assemble a group for a "dogs dinner" at Anh Tu Thit Cho Restaurant. As dog is the only option there, vegetarians might want to try Com Chay Nang Tam Vegetarian Restaurant and meet up with their carnivorous friends later.

Romance

Couples seeking romantic settings, travelers on business accounts and those impressing out-of-town guests frequent Indochine and Nam Phuong-two classy Vietnamese restaurants housed in French villas. Splashy non-Asian places include Il Grillo, the Red Onion Bistro and the Press Club Restaurant.

When quantity is your main objective try the ribs and pub grub at Al Fresco's or the Vietnamese buffet at the classy Brother's Café. Stomachs never leave empty after a hearty Indian meal at Tandoor.

For sweets Vietnamese style, try the soupy blends of creamy and crunchy textures ladled over ice at Che Sai Gon. Traditionalists can enjoy the cool richness of Fanny's ice cream while circling Hoan Kiem Lake or the soft-serve cool treats at Kem Kiwi Ice.

Vietnamese couples sit in the quiet shadows under the trees at Dak-Linh Café, drinking teas and juices while foreigners tend to frequent the pricier Thuy Ta Café. Both boast prime spots on the edge of Hoan Kiem Lake for watching the night scene unfold and digest the day's events.

©

Nightlife Insights

Hanoi's nightlife is all about legs: the squat, plastic legs of tiny stools crowding around equally diminutive tables in your average bia hoi(beer hall); the proud, carved wooden legs of the chairs in fine restaurants; and, your own two legs sashaying your body across the dance floor. Whichever kind of legs you choose to employ, select early, as Hanoi operates on your grandparents' clock.

Low Legs

Short, plastic table legs usually indicate a low-budget dining/entertainment option. Groups of men puffing on cigarettes and sipping coffee sit pretzel-like on stools inches from the ground in cafés scattered about the city. A concentration of local cafés can be found on Trieu Viet Vuong Street and Bao Khahn.

The backless, plastic stool is also almost compulsory in Hanoi's other renowned watering hole, the aforementioned bia hoi. Also generally male turf, these airplane hangar-like venues offer cheap beer on tap and local munchies and meals. Some spots do not beckon the lone female traveler, but there are a few other options frequented by a mix of locals and foreigners. They include Quan Bia Minh, Cua Hang Bac Nam Bia Hoi and 60 Ly Thuong Kiet Street and provide an inexpensive and casual place for groups to chat away the afternoon and early evening.

Another low-to-the-earth entertainment choice is paddling across Hanoi's several lakes. On weekend afternoons, swarms of Vietnamese flock to West Lake for picnics and floats atop the water. Keeping with the outdoorsy theme, soccer matches at

National Stadium provide an insider's view into the lives of Vietnamese soccer fanatics.

Higher Legs

Restaurants and cafés that cater to a mostly foreign clientele raise both the seats and the prices. The newspapers at Moca Café and the books and evening movies at Lac Viet Café provide you with something to do while you eat.

Chairs of a similar height, but with more cushioned comfort than those of restaurants, fill establishments that offer sensory distractions. Several movie theaters, such as the Alliance Francais Cinema, Fansland Cinema and New Age Cinema screen foreign flicks. Check the local English papers or call 1080 for listings. The Hanoi Opera House, the Central Cultural House, Green Ho Guom, the Terrace Bar in the Press Club and several of the bigger hotels provide space for musicians, dancers and actors to perform. The Municipal Water Puppet Theater and several of the more refined Vietnamese restaurants, such as Indochine, Van Xuan and Dinh Lang Restaurant feature nightly traditional performances. The private rooms furnished with plush, body-hugging sofas in karaoke bars provide venues for rock-star wannabes to live out their fantasies.

Human Legs

Off the chair and on your own two legs, roaming the maze-like streets of the Old Quarter, poking into shops, galleries and pagodas offers a pleasant way to pass an afternoon. Several museums displaying elements of Vietnamese history and culture provide a rich view of the nation's heritage. The Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum and adjacent museum are frequented by Vietnamese and foreign tourists alike.

The more than 600 temples and pagodas scattered throughout the city provide a glimpse of traditional Vietnamese architecture and heritage. The One Pillar Pagoda, constructed in 1049, is perhaps Hanoi's most famous place of worship. The tranquil grounds of the Temple of Literature, Hanoi's first university(built in 1076) provide a peaceful retreat from the

Hanoi Snapshot continued

chaos of the city streets. The Botanical Gardens, a smattering of parks and the Thu Le Park and Zoo appeal to those in search of a bit of greenery amidst Hanoi's urban landscape.

If you're out in the evening hours, you'll probably find yourself passing the time at a few nondescript bars. Backpackers and young expatriates tend to bop between the Thu Le Park and Zoo and other bars in the Bao Khanh area. Friday night happy hour at the Press Club draws a regular, button-down-shirt-wearing expatriate crowd. If you're looking for a more low-key vibe, the R & R Tavern features Friday night specials and endless Grateful Dead tunes. On the fringe of the Old Quarter, the simple but grooving Modern Toast draws a late-night pre-dancing crowd.

When Legs Move

Several loosely organized sporting events, pools and gyms attract entertainment seekers needing activity. Regular gatherings include weekly soccer, volleyball and Frisbee matches, as well as Saturday morning running, walking and drinking excursions organized by the Hanoi Hash House Harriers. Look for signs in cafés and hotels around the city. The Minsk Club, headquartered in the moody Le Maquis Bar, often coordinates trips outside the city for those who love the road. A few bowling alleys, fitness clubs, swimming pools and the recently opened Ho Tay Lake Water Park offer sporting venues for independent athletes.

Nightclubs provide the space to flail your limbs without the competitive edge. Try Hanoi's only after-hours dance venue, the venerable Apocalypse Now.

Horizontal Legs

Weary bodies and aching muscles might want a workout of a different sort—a massage. Several hotels, including Thang Loi Hotel and the Hanoi Hotel offer reasonably-priced sessions. For a quick dose of relaxation, trundle over to the nearest cat (hairstylist). Almost all hair

washings include a lengthy head and scalp massage that will rub tension away.

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Things to Do Insights

Hanoi spreads over 2,000 square kilometers, but most important sites lie in compact areas. Walking can be daunting, with the onslaught of motorcycles, but in fact is relatively easy. The traffic in Hanoi moves like a snake in that it appears to continually move, sliding around things if they get in the way. However, when crossing a road, go slowly and carefully—any sudden movements may cause a domino effect!

Below are suggestions for touring the labyrinth-like Old Quarter, the major landmarks of Hanoi, and for those with more time, try a trip around West Lake that takes in the rural suburbs. The first two tours could be by foot, bicycle or for a leisurely experience, try acyclo. The third offers a longer trip those with a bicycle or motorcycle.

Old Quarter Walking Tour

The Old Quarter offers one of the most fascinating inner-city areas in Vietnam and is well worth exploring. It is based around 36 streets, each named after the merchandise sold there. To some extent this tradition continues, although Hang Gai might just as likely sell CDs these days as silk.

This walk covers only about three kilometers but could take around two hours. The streets are a maze, so bring a map. The tour begins at St. Joseph's Cathedral, completed in the 1880s. It stands at the end of Nha Tho, which is fast becoming one of Hanoi's trendiest streets with its fashionable foreign restaurants and boutiques. A walk along the right-hand side of the cathedral, takes you through alleyways that offer an interesting insight into Vietnamese daily life. Turn right onto Thanh Phu Doan and across Hang Bong Street and you will come to an open intersection with Hang Da Market to your left. As with most Vietnamese markets, it makes for an interesting stroll. Piles

of fresh vegetables, animal entrails and slices of pig fat fill the hall. The Market also reveals a good spot for buying pottery.

Opposite the market runs another narrow alley, Yen Thai, which takes you to Hanh Manh. This street sells traditional musical instruments, and you may see workers making ceremonial drums. From Hang Manh turn right into the colorful Hang Quat, which sells religious and temple paraphernalia. Then turn left at Luong Van Can and right onto Hang Bac. Originally Silver Street, it is now the heart of backpacker land. Check the hand-carved funeral headstones on this road.

When you turn left up Ta Hien onto Hang Buom, you can see to your left Bach Ma Pagoda, founded in the Ly Dynasty. Turn left yet again down Dao Duy Tu and straight on until you spot the archway of the original city walls to your right. A narrow alley straight ahead takes you to the back of Dong Xuan Market, one of Hanoi's busiest. The alley abounds with ladies selling seafood and other fresh, often live, produce.

Keeping the concrete market building to your left, go to Pho Dong Xuan past a picturesque pagoda with a cooking pan shop at its entrance. Walking south along the main street at the market's front takes you past fashion clothes stores and expensive watch shops back to the north shore of Hoan Kiem Lake.

Central Hanoi Landmarks Tour

This tour takes in Hanoi's major tourist sights from Ba Dinh Square, where Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnam's independence, to the ancient Confucian Temple of Literature and finishes in the French Quarter's wider boulevards.

Start at Ba Dinh Square and Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum opposite the National Assembly Building. Behind the mausoleum are Uncle Ho's stilt house and museum and the One Pillar Pagoda. Follow Dien Bien Phu southeast until you see Lenin's statue on your right. Watch for the old French villas, now housing embassies and government offices and the Cot Co Flag Tower on the grounds of the Army Museum.

Hanoi Snapshot continued

Go along Duong Hoang Dieu south to Nguyen Thai Hoc and you will come to the Fine Arts Museum. Opposite is the back of the Temple of Literature, the Confucian center dating from 1070. Travel east along Ngyuyen Khyuyen, until it becomes Hai Ba Trung, then turn right onto Quan Su. At number 73 is Quan Su Pagoda, Hanoi's center of Buddhism. Carry on for about one kilometer along Ly Thong Kiet and left at Phan Chu Trinh to reach the Opera House at the heart of the French Quarter. Behind this at 1 Trang Tinh lies the Vietnam History Museum with its beautiful French-Vietnamese architecture.

West Lake Bicycle Tour

This tour covers about 15 kilometers and can be accomplished on bicycle or motorbike. Start at Thuy Khue Street and meander around West Lake through houses and shops. Carry on past several pagodas, which can offer a respite from the busy road. Turn right onto Long Quan and after one kilometer you will reach West Lake. The countryside lies to the left, and alongside the lake are a variety of bars and restaurants selling snails, seafood and even deer. You cannot miss the Ho Tay Lake Water Park, with its huge Ferris wheel. Continue along Long Quan until the junction of Ao Co. This area boasts many flower nurseries and busy early morning flower markets. Look for kumquat trees around Tet (lunar new year).

Turn right, back to town passing dog meat (thit cho) restaurants to your left and then turn right again onto Duong Xuan Dieu. This takes you through the villas of the Tay Ho area, which are popular with foreign residents. Take the third lane right down Duong Dang Thai Mai and continue past fishing ponds and lotus lilies. At the end of the road looms Tay Ho Pagoda, one of Hanoi's most popular.

Returning to Duong Xuan Dieu check out the fine view of Kim Lien Pagoda to your left before turning right onto Yen Phu Dyke Road toward the Meritus Westlake Hotel. Finish your tour at the southwest corner of West Lake with a visit to Tran Quoc and Quan Thanh pagodas.

Guided Tour

If you're seeking a bit more direction, HappyDays Travel offers a Full-Day City Tour that will take you to the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum, the Presidential Palace, the One Pillar Pagoda, the Temple of Literature, the Museum of Ethnology and the Hoan Kiem Lake. The tour ends in Hanoi's Old Quarter, with free time for shopping in Old Town, and a traditional water puppet show. The tour provides an air-conditioned vehicle, English-speaking tour guide, all entrance fees, and lunch.

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Travel Tips

Getting There:

By Air:

The Noi Bai International Airport (VVNB/HAN) (+84 4 827 1513), is located in the Soc Son District about 25 miles north of Hanoi. The Airport's four terminals serve international and domestic airlines including:

Air Asia (+603 8660 4343/<http://www.airasia.com>)

Air France (<http://www.airfrance.com>)

China Airlines (<http://www.china-airlines.com>)

KLM Royal Dutch (<http://www.klm.com>)

Korean Airlines (<http://www.koreanair.com>)

Lufthansa Airlines (<http://www.lufthansa.com>)

Qantas (<http://www.qantas.com.au>)

Scandinavian Air (<http://www.scandinavian.net>)

Singapore Airlines (<http://www.singaporeair.com>)

Thai Airways (<http://www.thaiairways.com>)

Vietnam Airlines (<http://www.vietnamairlines.com.vn>)

Taxis are easy to find outside the airport's terminals. Depending on traffic, the trip to downtown Hanoi takes about 45 minutes.

Vietnam Airlines also offers a cheap and convenient minibus to get you into town from the Airport.

By Train:

Hanoi Railway Station is located on the western tip of Hoan Kiem district at 120 Le Duan (+84 4942 3949) and is a stop along the Reunification Railroad. Trains run on a daily basis throughout Vietnam along with service between Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh.

By Bus:

Buses are always packed, but offer a cheap way of getting into the city. Hanoi has three main bus stations. Long-distance buses from the south arrive at Giap Bat Station, buses from the northeast stop at Gia Lam Station and those from the northwest go to Kim Ma station. These stations are located a little ways from the city centre, and it's recommended to grab a taxi or cyclo to get downtown.

By Car:

Drivers must obtain a Vietnamese driver's license to drive in the country, as International licenses are not valid. Highway 1 runs along the outskirts of the city.

Getting Around:

As far as public transportation, Hanoi only has buses, which are often crowded and hard to understand for non-Vietnamese speakers.

Metered taxis can be hailed off the street and at hotels. Major cab companies include: Vina Taxi (+84 4 81 1111) 52 Taxi (+84 4 852 5252)

Motorcycle taxis are a fun and cheap way to get around Hanoi. Motorbikes are also available to rent hourly or daily.

Another enjoyable way to get around is with cyclos, which are two-seated carts run by a foot-pedal bike rider behind the cart. These are also available to rent hourly or daily at a reasonable price.

Car and bike rentals are also popular ways of getting around and can be arranged at various hotels, travelers' cafes and tour agencies.

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Hanoi Snapshot continued

Fun Facts

Hanoi

Country: Vietnam

Hanoi by the Numbers:

Population: 4.1 million

Elevation: 19 feet

Average Number of Days With

Precipitation: 169 days

Average January Temperature: 62°F

Average July Temperature: 85°F

Quick Facts:

Major Industries: machinery, IT, electronic, metallic products, textiles, leather, wood, chemicals

Electricity: 220 volts, 50 Hz; standard two-pin plug

Time Zone: GMT/UTC+7

Country Dialing Code: 84

Area Code: 4

Did You Know?

Hanoi became the capital of Vietnam in the 7th century and has been occupied by both the French and Japanese throughout its history.

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