

# HANOI TRAVEL *Guide*



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*Nestled along wooded boulevards among the city's two dozen lakes you will find architectural souvenirs left by all who conquered this great valley, from the Chinese who first came in the last millennium to the French, booted out in our own century.*



## GETTING INTO HANOI

The trip into the city from Noi Bai Airport takes about an hour and offers some poignant glimpses of modern Vietnamese life: farmers tending their fields, great rivers, modern highways that abruptly become bumpy roads. The drive is especially breathtaking at dusk when the roads fill with bicycles, and everything takes on the same deep colors as the modern paintings you see in Hanoi's galleries. Somehow the setting sun seems enormous here as it dips into the cornfields on the horizon.

On the edge of the city the road dissolves into a maze of winding, narrow, wooded lanes. You are surrounded by roadside artisans, shops and taverns, then by graceful villas and commuters on bicycles, cyclos and motorbikes. Modern buildings appear from nowhere, looking so out of place that you have to wonder if they were dropped from the sky and just left where they came to rest. While you tell yourself that nothing as preposterous as Hanoi can be so beautiful, you cannot help but be dazzled.



## GETTING AROUND

Meter taxis and hired cars are easy to find in Hanoi. If you plan an extended visit you might consider renting a bicycle or motorbike.

The north end of Hoan Kiem Lake is Hanoi's "ground zero." Practically all the city's economical hotels, tourist shops, and cafés catering to visitors are located here. Not only is it the oldest part of the city, it is the busiest and most interesting. Every street is winding, intimate, and shady. At night the lights of storefronts keep the streets lit and animated.

Depending on which guide book you read, this district of Hanoi is variously called the "Old Quarter," the "Ancient Quarter," and "36 streets." It is wedged between the northern shore of Hoan Kiem Lake, the walls of the ancient Citadel, and the levies that protect the city from the Red River. The 36 little streets in the quarter are each named for a commodity once sold by all the businesses on that street. Streets here are named for the medicine, jewelry, fans, copper, horse hair, chicken, and even coffins once sold on them. This explains why the names of some of the longer streets inexplicably change after one or two blocks. As you explore, you will still happen upon entire blocks of tinsmiths, tailors, paper goods merchants, and lacquerware makers.

In the Ancient Quarter the most appealing mode of transportation for those who do not care to enjoy the "36 Streets" on foot is the cyclo. Often they are driven by men wearing pea-green pith helmets that make them look like soldiers. Settle on the fare in advance (a dollar or less one way). Most drivers will also quote you an hourly rate and will take you to all the obligatory cultural and historical spots.





## TRAN QUOC PAGODA

Located on a small peninsula on the East side of West Lake, Tran Quoc Pagoda is regarded as the most ancient pagoda in Hanoi with its history line of more than 1,500 years. The architecture of this Buddhist center is a subtle combination between the solemn and beautiful landscape on the peaceful and quiet ambiance of West Lake's surface. Thanks to these historical and architectural values, Tran Quoc Pagoda attracts many tourists to pay a visit, both inside and outside of Vietnam.

Tran Quoc Pagoda was first erected with the name "Khai Quoc" (Opening a country) during King Ly Nam De Dynasty, between year 544 and 548 on the bank of Red River (approximately within Yen Phu Ward, Tay Ho District now). Till the 15th century, during King Le Thai Tong reign, it was renamed to "An Quoc", which means a peaceful country.

In 1915, due to a serious landslide ingrained into the pagoda's foundation that made the incumbent government and people to move the whole construction to Kim Ngur Island on the East of West Lake, and this is Tran Quoc Pagoda's current location that you can witness in this day and age.

The renaming process didn't stop until it was changed to the name "Tran Quoc Pagoda", meaning protecting the country, during King Le Huy Tong dynasty (1681-1705). Through each name of the pagoda, we can see a milestone of the country as well as the wishes of its people attached to this holy sanctuary.



## SAINT JOSEPH CATHEDRAL

Saint Joseph Cathedral, located at 40 Nha Chung street, Hanoi, is a Roman Catholic cathedral with neo-gothic style, which was built about 120 years ago. Saint Joseph Cathedral, located at 40 Nha Chung street, Hanoi, is a Roman Catholic cathedral with neo-gothic style, which was built about 120 years ago.

### History and Architecture

In 1882, after the French army conquered Hanoi, the cathedral was constructed and completed in 1886. The cathedral and Nha Chung area were built on the land formerly belonging to Bao Thien pagoda, which was built under Ly dynasty.

The architecture with domes of the cathedral follows the Gothic style and design of Paris Cathedral. It is 64.5m in length, 20.5m in width with two bell towers of 31.5m-height. Though the appearance of the cathedral, from the doors, the colorful window glass, to the religious paintings for decoration follows Western style, the main interior part is decorated in Vietnamese way with two typical colors yellow and red. Outside, in front of the cathedral is the statue of Mother Maria.

### Christmas celebration

The first Christmas took place in the cathedral in 1887. Since then, the cathedral is always crowded with hundreds of people including both Christians and non-Christians at the weekend or during religious holidays like Christmas.

### Visitor Information

Today, taking advantage of beautiful architecture and good venue at the center of the city, the area surrounding the cathedral is always packed with hundreds of local people and tourists hanging out with friends for drinking, talking, and watching the street. Nha Chung Street now becomes the "Lemon Tea" street, a popular gathering place to many youngsters in Hanoi, and home to eye-catching souvenir shops and Western style restaurants. It is not only the holy place for Christian couples hold their wedding, but also a great venue for non-religious grooms and brides to take nice wedding shots.





## HANOI OPERA HOUSE

An essential part of Hanoi's 000 year history, Hanoi Opera House is without doubt one of the most famous cultural and architectural monuments of Hanoi. Located on the famous August Revolution Square, Hanoi Opera House is just a few steps from Hoan Kiem Lake, Hanoi Old Quarter and Vietnam History Museum. The Opera house was constructed for ten years from 1901 to 1911 and modeled on Palais Garnier - the older of Paris two opera houses, Hanoi Opera House embraces the European architectural style under the Renaissance period with the Italian-made marble floor, copper chandeliers and exquisite French murals on the ceiling, thus making the place one of Hanoi's singular architectural landmarks.

### Performances

In the past, the theater solely hosted performances by Western artists for French officials and wealthy Vietnamese. Nowadays, Hanoi Opera House is one of Hanoi's cultural centers where art shows, concerts, dance performances and other events usually take place, with the scale ranging from national to international.

The theater is the place where the Vietnamese Orchestra chooses to perform on regular basis, occasionally along with famous artists from all over the world. In the past the place had invited the violinist Hilary Hahn, the cellist Yo-yo Ma, the pianist Wolfgang Glemser or the conductor Gudni Emilsson. The two remarkable classical concerts performed annually at Hanoi Opera House are Toyota Concert and Hennessy Classical Concert, which both are international-scale performances with renowned classical artists.



## LONG BIEN BRIDGE

The Long Bien Bridge was constructed from 1889 to 1902 during French's occupation of the country. Though the bridge was designed by French, it was built directly by Vietnamese workers with indigenous construction materials like woods from Phu Tho, Yen Bai, Thanh Hoa province, cement from Hai Phong, Long Tho lime from Hue. The bridge was formerly named Paul Doumer by the French, but Vietnamese have called it Long Bien or Cai River Bridge for a long time, and Long Bien becomes the most popular name of the bridge. Originally, Long Bien had 19 spans and it was the first steel bridge across Red river in Hanoi, and one of four greatest bridges in the world at the time it was built.

Long Bien was considered the pride, symbol of architecture in the Far East. The bridge was a connection point to transport tons of rice from Northern and Northern Central area of Vietnam to Dien Bien Phu battle, and contributed to the win of Vietnam army against French, 1954.

More than 100 years with decades of war, Long Bien Bridge was bombed many times by air attacks by American army in 1967, 1972; and many spans of the bridge were destroyed. The left spans still remaining today remind us of an unforgettable past. The bridge, hence, is not only a traffic construction, a nice architecture, but also a living historical relic.





## WATER PUPPET THEATRE

Located at 57B, Dinh Tien Hoang street, nearby Hoan Kiem Lake, Thang Long Water Puppet Theater is a familiar address for both domestic tourists and foreign ones, who want to enjoy water puppet shows and discovery the beauty of this unique Vietnam traditional art.

In 1969, the theater was established and since 1990; many water puppet shows have been performed by Thang Long theater artists. Every year, about 500 shows are offered to approximately 150,000 audiences. Moreover, the theater has brought water puppetry art to more than 40 foreign countries like Japan, France, America, Australia, Spain... through performance tours, or international cultural exchange program or puppetry festivals.



### Water Puppet Show

Traditional content of water puppet performance like daily life of Vietnamese farmers (cultivating, tending buffalo, catching fishes...), communal entertainment (swimming contest, dragon dancing...), or historical legends (Le Loi returns precious sword...), with modest performance way have appealed audiences for centuries. However, the artists of Thang Long Water Puppet Theater want to renew the old puppet shows with effect of light, music and combination between people and puppets.

It sounds risky, but the theater has been successful since the beginning the beginning and received favors and praises from audiences.



## HANOI OLD QUARTER

### History

The Old Quarter marked its appearance in the 11th century, when King Ly Thai To decided to build his palace. That means By 2010, Hanoi as well as the 36 old streets turned 1000 years old. Originally a group of workshop villages surrounding the royal palace, the Old Quarter has gradually transformed into craft cooperatives, or guilds and soon gained its reputation as the business trading areas of the Red River delta. Skilled craftsmen migrated to the Quarter to live and work together in the same guilds, which were made specialized for artisans performing similar services. The new allocation of production and service helped to create a cooperative system for merchandise transportation to designated streets. Soon under French colony, the Old Quarter increasingly became a marketplace for trade between the local and businessmen from China, India and France. Despite the damages that Vietnam War left in Hanoi, the Old Quarter still retained much of the original traits that interests tourists, especially those with architectural passion. These houses are neither tall buildings as people normally see in cities nor stilt houses on lines of poles, which were popular in Vietnams' mountainous regions these days. They are also called "tubular houses" which are short and narrow but have great length. In the past, the king stipulated that "citizens' houses could not be built higher than the height of the king's



palanquin". And because of the dense population in a limited area, people needed to spend the front room for stores; the inside room is widened to its length in order to divide places for manufacturing, dining and living of each family.

The house is sometimes too narrow that only one person can pass by at a time. Standing close together, these tubular houses make up the ward along the soil streets; some streets were paved with stone or brick. Only until the later time, they were asphalted.

### Walking

Visitors will certainly be eager to wander along the old streets to drop by stores and buy specialties. Here is an essential guide for tourists who would like to explore the Old Quarter, with some names of specialized streets: China bowls (Bat Su), roasted fish (Cha Ca), silver or jewelries (Hang Bac), women accessories (Cau Go), shoes and sandals (Hang Dau), silk (Hang Gai), mixed fruits (To Tich), combs (Hang Luoc), jars (Hang Chinh), tour services (Ma May), candies and dry apricot (Hang Duong), fried/roasted sour pork hash (Tam Thuong lane on Hang Bong Street), bamboo products (Hang Buom), etc.

In addition, visitors as well as city dwellers can go to the night market taking place along 4 walking old streets: Hang Dao - Hang Ngang - Hang Duong - Dong Xuan in the evening from Friday to Sunday with products on great sale. Read our article on Most Special Streets of Hanoi Old Quarter for more ideas.





# HANOI TRAVEL MAP

### Explain symbolism

Market

Hotel

Museum

Theatre

Hospital

Post Office

Restaurants

1

Highway 4, 25 Bat Su

2

Bun cha, Hang Manh

3

Bun bo Nam Bo, 67 Hang Dieu

4

Pho, 10 Ly Quoc Su

5

Quan An Ngon, 18 Phan Boi Chau

6

Koto, 59 Van Mieu





## TOP 5 FOODS YOU SHOULD NOT MISS WHILE VISITING HANOI

*A list of most popular local foods that should not be missed in Hanoi, take a look and find out what are they..*

### ❶ Xôi xéo:

Chances are you will encounter this dish in almost every outdoors market. There are even two restaurants dedicated fully to this dish in the Old Quarters. Xoi xeo is sticky rice topped with ground de-hulled mung bean and fried onion. Sometimes it can be served with eggs or steamed chicken breast on request. The serving is really filling and it is good for any time of the day but most Vietnamese have it for breakfast or lunch.

#### Where to try:

*Xoi Yen is a all time local favourite sitting just North of Sword Lake (Hoan Kiem lake) on Nguyen Huu Huan street. Ask anyone in the area and they all know what you are referring to. The price varies, without chicken, a bowl of Xoi xeo costs you about 50 cents. Have it with a glass of soy milk and you have more energy boost than a box of granola bars! (Read more about Xoi Xeo).*



### ❷ Bánh cuốn:



If the French has this famous delicious crepe made of wheat, egg and dairy products; Vietnamese and particularly Hanoi is proud of their steamed crepe from rice flour and water. A savoury meal, the inside stuffing contains ground pork, wood-ear and seasoning. Most street chefs make the dish right at door so look for a place that steams are coming up high. Banh cuon is served with nuoc mam, a mixture of fish sauce, sugar and lime.

#### Where to try:

*Banh cuon Gia An - Ba Trieu street (opposite to Vincom tower) is a more upscale restaurants specializing in Banh Cuon. The price is not that big a difference (about \$1.5 for a serving) compared with other street vendors (about 50-70 cents). Banh cuon there is made without preservative and of high hygiene condition. You can ask for a vegetarian option as well. (Read more about Banh Cuon Vietnam).*

### ❸ Phở (Noodle soup):

This universally famous food is best enjoyed in Hanoi, where it was “invented” in the early 20th century. Pho- or rice noodle soup- is omnipresent in Hanoi, appearing anywhere from street vendors to high end restaurant chain Pho 24. Some is served with chicken and some with beef. Each type of meat entails a variety of sub-dish, using from beef tenderloin to beef brisket, chicken wing to chicken thigh. The tip is, look for the place where locals gather the most and you know where you should order and sit down.

#### Where to try:

*Pho Bat Dan is a famous local restaurants famous for its pho bo (beef rice noodle soup). Located in the Old quarter “jungle”, the store easily stands out for the long line of people waiting to be served. You are highly recommended to join the local, line up for the pho bowl and bring it to a selected table to eat (Read more about Pho).*



### ❹ Bún thang:



If Pho is compatible to linguine in shape, Bun is more like spaghetti. Bun thang is one of the most popular yet hidden fares in Hanoi and one can hardly find it outside of the Old quarters or a few special restaurants scattering across the city. The chicken broth is artistically done and the dish is beautifully served. Bun thang is a harmonious blend of color- the yellow of sliced egg; the white of bun; the off-white of chicken and the green of onions and herbs.

#### Where to try:

*Bun thang Ba Duc on Cau Go street is a great place to try the dish. This street vendor has a limited number of seats on the pavement but you will be surprised how many people can fit in the two storey old house behind the stall. Enjoy bun thang in such a setting gives the meal enormous highlights in your trip to Hanoi.*

## 5 Cha ca La Vong:



You think you have read about this name somewhere and yes, you are right. Cha ca La Vong is listed as one of the top 100 things you gotta try before you die by many cuisine experts. It is exquisitely grilled fish served with bún, peanut, green onions, dills and shrimp paste. The fish is carefully chosen so that there are not too many bones and fishy smells. A glass of bia hoi or tra da will definitely give your meal more flavour.

### Where to try:

*Cha ca La Vong restaurant on 14 Cha Ca street is renowned nationally and internationally for its tradition and quality of serving the dish. It is much more expensive than other local food but the fact that you are sitting in one of the oldest house in Hanoi, served by the most traditionally styled chef is all worth it. (\$6-8, with drink).*



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