Forget tin hats and Jane Fonda, this enchanting Viet-French colonial marvel is bursting with atmospheric streets, extraordinary architecture, socialist art, Buddhist temples, Confucian values, great food, and fabulous shopping. Taking Hoan Kiem Lake as the center, the French Quarter lies to the south and southeast, north is the bustling Old Quarter, Resi Nabe Tay Ho flanks West Lake to the northwest, and west is Ba Dinh, home to Ho Chi Minh. Off with you, just watch those motorbikes!
Oct-Nov is cool and dry and the best time to visit; Dec-Feb can be chilly; Feb-Apr drizzly rain; May-Sep hot and humid.

Tet (Lunar New Year) is mid-Jan to mid-Feb. Most shops close, but the lead up to it is colorful.

Noi Bai International Airport to town: 45 mins-1 hr/ VND320,000 to 350,000 depending on the vehicle

Have your hotel’s business card on you at all times as most cabbies don’t speak English, and get your concierge to write addresses down in Vietnamese.

Road safety and traffic law - dream on.

Crossing the road - step out like Moses, and behold, the red moped sea will part before thee. Tarry not at the curb, lest thou grow old and incontinent.

Have lots of small dong for taxis/bikes.

US$1 is approximately VND21,000. You may be approached by black market money changers - buyer beware.

Quickest way around town is by motorcycle, pay around VND20,000 per trip depending on distance, pop a helmet on - it’s the law!

Slowest way around town is by two-seater cyclo, nice for a natter, pay around VND90,000/US$4-5 per hr.

Food, service and hospitality can be inconsistent, but they are improving, so be patient.

Bear in mind that real antiques can be difficult to export - you’ll need all the proper paperwork.

Beware of light-fingered rogues, especially around New Year - keep your hand on your dong.

Hawkers. Ignore them completely. One syllable from you will unleash a discourse on why you must buy.

Most places open for lunch and dinner daily, or all day but hours can change without notice, can be quiet weekdays, and kitchens tend to close early.

International code for Hanoi is +84 4. Once there, dial 04 for local and 00 for international.

Police 113, ambulance 115, but note very limited English is spoken, if at all.
Christina Yu

In 1997 Christina Yu created and launched Ipa-Nima, a new fashion accessories label drawn from her search for an elegant fusion of unusual materials, vivid color schemes and inventive ideas. With a focus on handbags, Christina’s unique and feminine designs have graced the pages of Vogue, Cosmopolitan, Harper’s Bazaar and Time, and are available in select boutiques and exclusive department stores worldwide.

www.ipa-nima.com
1) WHAT’S THE ONE THING EVERY VISITOR TO HANOI MUST DO AND WHY?
Pay homage to the father of Vietnam with a visit to Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum in Ba Dinh Square. It doesn’t open every day of the year as he needs to have his beauty touch up every now and then in Moscow. It is a very “socialist” experience when one gets marched down the large boulevard with guards and yes, you will be told to “behave” all the way, you understand why this man is so much revered in Vietnam.

2) WHAT DO YOU MOST LOVE ABOUT HANOI AND WHY?
The lakes and the French architecture you see everywhere. It has a Gallic charm which is unusual for an Asian city. I also like the people watching and what they do and wear - it is like going back in time. Seeing what they carry on a motorbike sometimes is hilarious - I once saw a coffin balanced on the back of a motorbike!

3) WHERE WOULD YOU GO FOR A DATE NIGHT OUT AND WHY?
For Vietnamese food - Opera on Trang Tien Street - it is set in an old French villa with an Art Deco touch. The food is good and the restaurant is quite small and so, the atmosphere is more intimate. The other option would be the Green Tangerine for French cuisine. It also has a nice French villa setting and the food is interesting.

4) WHAT RESTAURANT OFFERS THE BEST BREAKFAST OR BRUNCH IN HANOI, AND WHAT DO YOU ORDER?
The Metropole Legend Hotel Sunday Brunch Buffet is a local favorite. You do not need to order but just consume - oysters, caviar, pate, prawns, mussels and clams, complete with flowing champagne and all for under USD$80 a person. Otherwise, try Ngon restaurant on Phan Boi Chau Street. They have all kinds of Vietnamese street food but in a nice setting. The bun ho hue (pork knuckle noodle soup) is a local favorite, their banh xe (omelette with minced pork, bean sprouts and herbs) and the grilled pork satay are also excellent. The menu does not have a great English translation - best is to take a waiter with you and go around all the food stands and point to what you want.

5) WHAT ARE YOUR THREE FAVORITE SHOPS IN HANOI? WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT THEM?
Ipa-Nima
All uniquely designed, beautifully crafted handbags and wallets with the best Italian leather and super affordable prices. Yes I am biased!

Tan My
For the best selection of embroidered linens, fashion, home interiors and special work of decorative art from local Vietnamese artists.

Hanoi Moment
For their buffalo Horn “Hermès” inspired accessories - a lot of the necklaces, bracelets made with buffalo horn and silver are very avant garde, and at a fraction of the price where you would get them anywhere else.
LUXE Loves

SOFITEL LEGEND METROPOLE HANOI
Hotel

This lovingly restored French-colonial icon is the top hotel in town, complete with a charming old wing or a stylized new one for guests to choose from, all with access to its sweet Bamboo Bar and rooftop garden Le Balcon, French Le Beaulieu, Italian Angelina, Spices Garden for Vietnamese, fabulous Sunday brunch and cooking school, and dapper Le Spa.

15 Ngo Quyen / Hoan Kiem
+844 3826 6919
www.sofitel.com

INTERCONTINENTAL WESTLAKE HANOI
Hotel

While the Metropole Hotel nestles in the midst of the hurly burly, the InterCon’s waterside position slightly out of town means splendid views of the peaceful lake, with post-colonial style, balconyed rooms, fitness center, multiple dining options and the excellent Sunset Bar.

InterContinental Westlake / 1A Nghi Tam / Tay Ho / +844 6270 8888
www.intercontinental.com

BUN BO NAM BO
Dining

While the décor is typical hole-in-the-wall, no frills & plastic stooled; the specialty dish, bun bo, is exemplary – a delight of wheat noodles layered with beef, herbs, peanuts, beansprouts and tangy lime juice served in 20 seconds flat. Just dig in!

67 Hang Dieu / Old Quarter
+844 3923 0701
LUXE Loves

**CLUB DE L’ORIENTAL**
Dining

Serving up old world elegance with refined Viet flavors, the weekend is the time to book when the Club caters to the well-heeled who flock to the spacious salon and open plan kitchen. Boasting an extensive wine list and both traditional and contemporary Vietnamese cooking, it’s best to avoid the quieter weekday evenings.

22 Tong Dan / Hoan Kiém / +844 3826 8801
www.intercontinental.com

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**MADAME HIÉN**
Dining

This stunning century-old colonial villa with terrace is the perfect setting for chef Didier Corlou’s tribute to his adopted country’s cuisine and grandmother-in-law. In true Parisian form, the prix fixe menu at lunch is the best bargain in town with appetizer, main, and simple but sumptuous dessert.

15 Chan Cam / Hoan Kiém / +844 3938 1588

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**LE BEAULIEU**
Dining

With its vibrant history as a French colony, Vietnam boasts some of the best French cuisine outside of France. Furnished in the glow of yesteryear, the space is a blend of Indochinese and French architecture with marble floors, wooden parquets and gleaming chandeliers. Not to be missed is their Sunday brunch offering a wide selection of French favorites, epic cheeseboard and champagne.

Sofitel Legend Metropole / 15 Ngo Quyen / Hoan Kiém / +844 3826 6919
www.sofitel.com

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**SUNSET BAR**
Bar

Stroll across the bridge to this tranquil semi-alfresco bar perched on its very own private island with fabulous West Lake views. Lounge on its plush daybeds or woven rattan couches with a martini in hand and the breeze in your hair, among diplomats, well heeled NGO workers, designers, and members of the city’s affluent creative scene.

InterContinental Westlake / 1A Nghi Tam / Tay Ho / +844 6270 8888
www.intercontinental.com

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**THE ROOFTOP**
Bar

Situated on the 19th floor of Pacific Place, this hip restaurant-lounge can be potluck on the music front but who cares when you have such incredible bird’s eye views from its wraparound terrace. It’s the perfect place for sundowners.

19/F / Pacific Place / 838 Ly Thuong Kiet / Hoan Kiém / +844 3946 1901
8am-1am daily
www.therooftop.vn

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**TAN MY DESIGN**
Shopping

Now in its 3rd generation, this excellent collection of hand-embroidered cotton, silk and velvet wares has expanded from beautiful pillowcases and handkerchiefs to clothing, bed linens, tablecloths, cushion covers, laundry bags, jewelry, and more.

61 Hang Gai / Hoan Kiém / +844 3938 1154
www.tanmydesign.com
LUXE Loves

VIETNAM QUILTS
Shopping
Rest easy with these high quality, hand-stitched, non-profit, cotton patchwork, classic and contemporary throws, or better yet, devise your own pattern to help offer sustainable employment to women from poor rural regions of Vietnam and Cambodia.
13 Hang Bac / Hoan Kiem / + branches / +844 3926 4831
www.mekong-quilts.org

DAME CLEMENCE
Shopping
All-natural massage oil, room fragrances and candles composed from essential and vegetable oils, like citronella, lavender, patchouli, cinnamon, sunflower, sesame, coconut, and almond. Clemence also hosts perfume workshops and can custom blend to order.
9C Alley 136A / Au Co / Tay Ho / +844 3719 0516 / 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri
www.dameclemence.com

IPA-NIMA
Shopping
Hong Kong-born designer Christina Yu's unashamedly girly handbags are vivaciously colored and crafted from luxurious silks, buttery lambskin, supple Italian, and embossed crocodile leather, as well as kid suede. Off the wall and ever changing, her whimsical line is inspired by travels, infamous figures like Edie Bouvier Beale, and flights of fancy from sci-fi to sunsets. Add to that a well-edited range of shoes, dresses and jewelry and you have a one-stop complete outfit shop!
73 Trang Thi / Hoan Kiem / +844 3933 4000 / 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun
www.ipa-nima.com

HO CHI MINH MAUSOLEUM
Activities
Ho Chi Minh specifically requested to not be preserved and put on show, so here he is. Visitors go to the front of the queue, and remember to wear respectful attire. Afterwards, follow the signs to his residence, a charming bungalow that houses the great man's alarm clock, desk and slippers.
Hung Vuong / Ba Dinh Square / free entry / variable hours, check with your concierge / mornings only / closed Mon & Fri / closed Oct/Nov for maintenance / there is a strict dress code, no shorts, vests or visible flesh

OPERA HOUSE
Activities
Pretty as a picture, it's a great shame that this little chocolate box theatre isn't open more often, but when it is, grab your chance to snag a ticket and have a peek at the sweet interior and enjoy a performance. The eclectic schedule ranges from traditional Viet drama to Afro-American music, dance and classical concerts.
1 Trang Tien / Hoan Kiem / +844 3933 0113 / ticket office open 8am-4pm Mon-Fri
www.hanoioperahouse.org
check Ticket VN for what's on and online booking
www.ticketvn.com

VIETNAM QUILTS
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Rest easy with these high quality, hand-stitched, non-profit, cotton patchwork, classic and contemporary throws, or better yet, devise your own pattern to help offer sustainable employment to women from poor rural regions of Vietnam and Cambodia.
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www.ticketvn.com
LUXE Loathes

SHOCKING ROAD SAFETY AND TRAFFIC
Make the Old Quarter car-free now before it’s utterly ruined.

PIRATED MERCHANDISE
An endless flood of fake art and rip-off bags.

THE ABUNDANCE OF GYPSY CABS
All that distinguishes a disreputable taxi operation is a misplaced letter, as is the case for the reputable Mai Linh, avoid the Mei Lin or Mai Lin cabs.
Fab vs. Drab

FOOD FANATICS
Eating solely at tried and trusted tourist-friendly restaurants denies you a taste of the real city, so try letting the local foodies from Hidden Hanoi guide you to their favorite haunts to ensure you sample the best of Viet street food.

www.hiddenhanoi.com.vn

ARRIVE IN STYLE
Touring town on the back of a noisy, dirty moped is not only dangerous but hardly glam, especially when you consider you could be touring town in a super-chic, classic chauffeur-driven old Citroën via the Sofitel Legend Metropole.

www.sofitel.com

HALONG BAY
Enrolling with the hordes of tourists sailing around Halong Bay, and stopping at all the tourist traps takes the shine off this glorious area. Consider instead chartering your own private junk via Life Resorts to tour the Bay and bypass the tourist activities to access remote islands and hidden caves.

www.life-resorts.com

ART WORKS
Purchasing a lovely ‘one-of-a-kind’ piece of local art only to find it again in the next store can be infuriating, but buying or commissioning art directly from the local artists via Hoang Thi Ngoc, means you get visit the artists’ studios and your artwork is always original.

hoangngoc_art@yahoo.com

PHILANTHROPY
Enjoying Hanoi but not giving anything back to the city is easily done, but even more easily avoided if you eat at one of the philanthropic restaurants that serve excellent food like Song Thu or Koto where the staff are students and your custom helps their education and keeps children off the streets.

www.hoasuaschool.com
www.koto.com.au
Nothing says romance like luxury cars, diamonds and French influence, so with that said, have your concierge contact Sofitel Legend Metropole Hanoi to hire their classic chauffeur-driven Citroën (see Drab vs Fab) to get you about the city. Begin your day with some sparkle at Discovery Diamonds’ factory/showroom, where diamonds are cut and polished for Europe’s jewelry and watch trade, and you can design your own piece. On your way back, stop at charitable café/bar Koto to indulge your appetite for traditional Vietnamese cuisine as well as philanthropy - they’ve been helping keep kids off the streets since the late 1990s. Afterwards, make your way back to town and wander through the nostalgic Old Quarter that still retains much of the atmosphere and bustle of bygone eras. Meandering the narrow winding streets can be exhausting, so recharge with a Viet-style coffee in charming upstairs 69 Ma May before exploring the shrine of the legendary White Horse that led King Ly Thai To to the founding of the city. Much of the Bach Ma Temple dates back to C.18th, and with its grand courtyard of impressive red pillars, large Buddhist statuary and altars, the complex certainly makes for an interesting tour. While in the Old Quarter, invest in some traditionally made lacquerware from Vietnamese Craft Guild, which often stocks newer designs than its competitors, and also offers a custom service (though this can take some time). What doesn’t take long is crossing to the private island locale of semi-alfresco Sunset Bar (see LUXE Loves), where you can drink in fabulous views of West Lake along with your cocktail. From there, take a 10-minute stroll from InterContinental to elegant Mandarin, for a sensational contemporary Viet dinner against the twinkling skyline of the Lake. Ah l’amore.
The modern fashionista can channel the past with a stay in the charming old wing of the lovingly restored Sofitel Legend Metropole Hanoi (see LUXE Loves). There's nothing like a morning shopportunity to wake you up, so begin your spree at the northern tip of Hoan Kiem Lake, where art, décor and fashion abound. First stop is lifestyle retailer Tan My Design (see LUXE Loves), then further along is Hanoi Moment for delicate ceramics and décor, and Ha Linh Thu for custom-made bright cotton and silk frocks by the namesake designer. You must be famished by now, so make your way to suave Madame Hiên (see LUXE Loves), and request a seat on the outdoor terrace of the historic colonial villa to enjoy fine traditional Viet cuisine. The prix fixe lunch is a bargain, although their simple menu listings belie the imaginative dishes and tastes. Back now to the Metropole, where gallery-lined street Trang Tien is just alongside. Marvel at well-known Vietnamese painters’ works in Thanh Binh Gallery or if you’d like to commission a piece by your favorite artist or visit their studio, make an appointment with Hoang Thi Ngoc (see Drab vs Fab). With your masterpiece checked off the to-do list, it’s time for your spa treatment at Le Spa du Metropole’s elegant retreat of dark woods, paneled doors and latticed cabinets, featuring Clarins, botanical Ytsara and Laurent Severac products. Spend some time relaxing at the hammam, sauna, Jacuzzi and heated outdoor pool, before pre-prandial drinks with a bird’s-eye view at The Rooftop (see LUXE Loves). Head to Green Tangerine for an experimental French-Viet fusion supper, then enjoy a quick nightcap at Bamboo Bar before bidding chúc ngủ ngon (good night) to Hanoi.
Cultural haven Hanoi has more to offer than just an expansive Old Quarter and the country’s first university, Van Mieu, it is a city bristling with great handicrafts and arts, in particular, lacquer, buffalo horn, silver and linen. So it’s purses out as you make your first stop at Chi Vang for their glorious hand embroidery, then onto ArtCen where you need to dig deep amongst the touristy flotsam to be rewarded with some pretty nifty cutlery, buffalo horn and silverware. Lunch! Gifts procured, head for a feast of authentic Vietnamese street food at heaving Saigon spin-off, Quan An Ngon. Take a seat at the mansion’s leafy outdoor area and enjoy a beer while you wait for your cooked-to-order food. After lunch, it’s time to escape the heat at contemporary gallery Art Vietnam, where owner Suzanne Lecht gathers the finest, most challenging and newest work in her salon or arranges visits to the artists for serious collectors. For something more historical, the cultural gallery of antique ethnic, tribal and minority collections at 54 Traditions includes over one thousand objects from 53 minority groups. Visitors will be taken on an enlightening anthropological adventure through the country’s central highlands, featuring tribal textiles, shamanic traditions, functional objects and water puppets. Speaking of water puppets, the 4pm showing at the Thang Long Water Puppet Theatre is about to begin. Though it is no longer staged in the traditional flooded rice paddies, this almost thousand-year-old art form is still a fun introduction into Viet folklore. Now for more recent history, it’s time to partake in colonial-inspired fusion French-Viet cuisine at Verticale’s four-storey, 1930s colonial villa. Head to the top floor La Terrace bar afterwards for cigars, cocktails and cityscape views. Go on, enjoy the high life.
LUXE ITINERARY

The Essentials

ROMANTIC ITINERARY

• Discovery Diamonds / Lot 1 Sai Dong B / Industrial Zone / Long Bien / +844 3675 0219 / closed Sun / factory visits by appointment only, ask for a tour www.discoverydiamonds.com

• Citroën / contact the Sofitel Legend Metropole’s concierge at +844 3826 6919

• Koto / 59 Van Mieu / Dong Da / +844 3747 0337 / all day Tues-Sun, closed dinner Mon www.koto.com.au

• 69 Ma May / Hang Buom / Hoan Kiem / +844 3926 1720 / opposite Tamarind Café Bach Ma Temple / Hang Buom

• Vietnamese Craft Guild / 13 To Tich / Hoan Kiem / +844 3828 9717

• Sunset Bar (see LUXE Loves)

• Mandarin / 72 Xuan Dieu / West Lake / +844 3719 1168

STYLISH ITINERARY

• Sofitel Legend Metropole Hanoi (see LUXE Loves)

• Tan My Design (see LUXE Loves)

• Hanoi Moment / 101 Hang Gai / +844 3928 7170 www.hanoimoment.vn

• Ha Linh Thu / 79A Hang Trong / Hoan Kiem / +844 3938 1877

• Madame Hiên (see LUXE Loves)

• Thanh Binh Gallery / 25-27 Trang Tien / +844 3825 1532 www.thanhbinhgallery.com.vn

• Hoang Thi Ngoc (see Drab vs Fab)

• Le Spa du Metropole / Sofitel Legend Metropole / 15 Ngo Quyen / Hoan Kiem / +844 3826 6919 / 10am-10pm daily www.sofitel.com

• The Rooftop (see LUXE Loves)

• Green Tangerine / 48 Hang Be / Old Quarter / +844 3825 1286 / 11am-11pm www.greentangerinehanoi.com

• The Rooftop (see LUXE Loves)
LUXE ITINERARY

The Essentials

HANDICRAFTS & ART ITINERARY

- Van Mieu / Van Mieu / Dong Da / 7.30am-5pm in winter, till 5.30pm in summer

- Chi Vang / 63 Hang Gai / Hoan Kiem / +844 3828 6576

- ArtCen / 80 Hang Gai / Hoan Kiem / +844 3825 6154

- Quan An Ngon / 26 Tran Hung Dao / Hoan Kiem / +844 3933 6133 / book

- Art Vietnam / 2 Ngo 66 / So Nha 2 / Pho Yen Lac / 20-minute drive from Hoan Kiem Lake / +844 3862 3184 / by appointment only www.artvietnamgallery.com

- 54 Traditions / 30 Hang Bun / Truc Bach / +844 3715 0194 / 8am-6pm daily www.54traditions.com.vn

- Thang Long Water Puppet Theatre / 57B Dinh Tien Hoang / Hoan Kiem / +844 3824 9494 / 4pm daily www.thanglongwaterpuppet.org

- Verticale / 19 Ngo Van So / Hoan Kiem / +844 3944 6317 http://www.verticale-hanoi.com

- La Terrace / 19 Ngo Van So / Hoan Kiem / +844 3944 6317 www.verticale-hanoi.com
Your LUXE notes