Ho Chi Minh City

CITI PRESENTS LUXE CITY GUIDES

AH, SAIGON! SISTER TO QUAIN AND QUIETER HANOI, THIS MISCHIEVOUS SOUTHERNER IS A HYPNOTIC SWIRL OF HIP CAFÉS AND HUMBLE STREET EATS, COLONIAL MANSIONS AND GLEAMING TOWER BLOCKS, BAGUETTES, SPICE, AND ELEGANT SILK AO DAIS.

Despite much rebuilding since the war, many of the city’s elegant boulevards and French colonial buildings still exist, mixing effortlessly with the hurly burly of this burgeoning metropolis of 24 districts. The main action stations are in the commercial and retail center District One and lower-key, tree-lined adjoining District Three, plus a generous smattering of goodies across the river in expat compound District Two. Here we go!
Dec-Apr is the dry season and best time to visit, May-Nov is the wet season (wettest Jun-Sep), but it’s warm all year round.

Tan Son Nhat airport to city by cab: 30-60 mins sometimes more, depending on traffic / approximately US$5-$7, but agree on the fare beforehand, even with metered cabs.

Tet (Lunar New Year) occurs around mid-Jan to mid-Feb and Saigon shuts down for 3-4 days but it can be pleasantly cool, uncrowded and colorful.

US$1 is approximately VND21,000.

Have plenty of small dong for taxis/bikes.

Have your hotel’s business card on you at all times as most cabbies/locals don’t speak English.

Taxis – check for working meters and avoid scams by using reliable companies, have places written down, and pre-arrange transfers.

Quickest way around town and to ruin your hairstyle is on the back of a motorcycle, where you’ll pay VND12,000 to VND25,000 a pop depending on destination.

Most large restaurants and shops take credit cards.

Many kitchens open and close early, so dine early.

Beware of light-fingered rouges, especially in crowded places – keep your hand on your purse, bag-grabbers on bikes can also be a problem.

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

Ho Chi Minh City is in a state of flux and businesses change their addresses and hours more often than you change your socks, so call ahead to avoid disappointment.

The international code for Saigon is +848.

Police 113, ambulance 115, information 1080, international operator 110, but limited English is spoken.
After studying fashion design at Central Saint Martins, Alice moved to Hong Kong and fronted the womenswear design at Evisu Jeans for two years. She then moved to Paris for a year to work at Pop Magazine and also became a buyer for the vintage specialist Atelier Mayer, before returning to Asia to develop her own design line Wondaland. Wondaland is a contemporary womenswear label with a rapidly growing reputation, having already picked up fans like Sienna Miller, Poppy Delevigne and Margo Stilley. Now entering its fourth season, the range is available from hip London boutiques such as The Village Bicycle and Donna Ida. Feminine, playful and effortlessly chic, the collection fuses retro glamour with cool contemporary design.

www.wondaland.co.uk
1) WHAT ARE YOUR THREE FAVORITE SHOPS IN HCMC? WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT THEM?

D2 (next to Mekong Merchant) for cool Asian brands, Verlim for Indochine furniture, Saigon Kitsch on Ton That Thiep for pop art and funky design, and L’Usine and Gaya for a great range of lifestyle and interior accessories.

(Verlim see LUXE Loves) (L’Usine and Gaya see LUXE Style Itin.).

2) WHAT MUSEUM/ACTIVITY IN HCMC IS WORTH THE CROWDS AND THE QUEUES?

Don’t bother queuing - go on the Vietnam Art History Tour run by Sophie Hughes.

www.sophiesarttour.com

3) WHAT ARE 4 OF YOUR FAVORITE RESTAURANTS IN HCMC AND WHY? WHAT DISHES DO YOU ORDER?

The Deck for sea bass ceviche; The Brick for stir-fried cactus and thieny flowers; Les Trois Gourmande for chateaubriand, and Thanh Binh for crab noodle soup.

www.thedecksaigon.com

4) WHERE DO YOU TAKE VISITORS WHEN THEY COME TO VISIT YOU AND WHY?

The grand old Post Office, Notre Dame for colonial charm, a boat trip along the river, a cyclo trip for the crazy action, Ben Thanh Market for knick-knacks, and outside HCMC a visit to the Cuchi Tunnels for history, and Cao Dai Temple for sheer kitsch value.

5) WHERE WOULD YOU GO FOR A COCKTAIL AND WHAT WOULD YOU ORDER?

The Deck for a ‘Pair on the River,’ or Martini Bar for a ‘Coconut Water Martini.’

www.thedecksaigon.com
LUXE Loves

PARK HYATT HOTEL
Hotel

The Park Hyatt pedigree shines through this faux Franco-Vietnamese colonial repro exterior with its smart rooms that feature louvre shutters, ceiling fans, iPod docks and WiFi. Don’t miss the urbane dining scene at Square One, and stylish sips at bar 2 Lam Son, or the excellent Xuan Spa and landscaped pool. Try for a terrace poolside room if you can.

2 Lam Son Square / District 1
www.saigon.park.hyatt.com

CARAVELLE HOTEL
Hotel

A historic home away from home in the city center, with flashy public areas that give way to calm chambers in woods and neutrals, some with river views. The perfect accompaniments are complimentary internet, lavish buffets at Nineteen, Pacific Rim-style cuisine at Reflections and Saigon Saigon for sundowners.

19 Lam Son Square / District 1 /
+848 3823 4999
www.caravellehotel.com

TROIS GOURMANDS
Dining

Locals, expats, visitors and Francophiles journey 15 minutes out of town to owner, chef and host Gil’s charming colonial villa with its lush tropical garden for classic French cooking, delectable homemade cheeses, and an extensive, unique and eclectic wine cellar stocked by the sommelier chef himself.

18 Tong Huu Dinh / District 2 / +848 3744 4585 / 11am-11pm Tue-Sun
www.3gourmandsaigon.com
LUXE Loves

SIGNATURE RESTAURANT
Dining
Stunning 360° views over HCMC are served up from this sky-high eatery with an extensive menu of contemporary pan-Asian and international cuisine. Opt for the alfresco rooftop patio seating with ambient lanterns to set the mood, and don’t miss the impressive selection of wines and cocktails.
23/F / Sheraton Saigon / 88 Dong Khoi / District 1 / +848 3827 2828
www.starwoodhotels.com

HOA TUCN
Dining
A pioneer in contemporary Vietnamese cuisine in Saigon, this converted opium refinery serves inventive palate pleasers in a celadon green, art deco environment, complete with cute courtyard furnishings by local artisans. Sample the 3-course business set lunch, or enroll in a cooking class with English-speaking chefs.
74/7 Hai Ba Trung / District 1 / +848 3825 1676 / 11am-11pm
www.saigoncookingclass.com

2 LAM SON
Bar
This happening, stainless steel and glass spot is a go-to venue for international jetsetters and fashionable locals alike, its draw-cards being vintage wines and killer signature cocktails like the Saigontini. Settle into the cozy lounge above the illuminated bar for live DJ performances every Thursday-Saturday.
Park Hyatt Saigon / 2 Lam Son Square / District 1 / +848 3824 1234 / 4pm-2am
www.saigon.park.hyatt.com

CHILL SKY BAR
Bar
Soaring above the city, Chill Sky Bar is Vietnam’s premier open-air rooftop venue, and a welcome escape from the street level heat and hustle. Attracting a fashionable crowd, this bi-level glass box offers slick cocktails by famed mixologist Bernardo Bernard and contemporary cuisine from Australian head chef Andy O’Brien.
26-27/F / AB Tower / 76A Le Lai / District 1 / +848 3827 2372 / 5pm-2am / no sandals, no shorts
www.chillsaigon.com

VIETNAM QUILTS
Shopping
Warm your body and soul by purchasing a hand-stitched silk or cotton, traditional ethnic-style or modern quilt from this not-for-profit organization. They give revenue back to nearby villages in northeast Saigon, and offer sustainable employment to women in rural Viet and Cambodian villages. Allow one month for custom designs.
64 Ngo Duc Ke / District 1 / + branches / +848 3914 2119 / 9am-7pm
www.mekong-quilts.org

ANUPA
Shopping
This tucked-away French villa houses beautiful, hand-stitched leather bags and accessories, all made using ethical principles, and premium, sustainable materials. Add a chic range of cocktail and wedding rings, plus a rotating list of fashion and lifestyle designer-wares, and you’ve got a smart, eco-friendly, one-stop shop!
Villa Anupa / 17/27 Le Thanh Ton / District 1 / +848 3825 7307 / enter via alleyway at 15B next to La Hostaria Italian / 9am-8pm
LUXE Loves

VERLIM
Shopping

A trove of highly desirable, refined lacquer and ceramic lamps, antiques, hand-knotted carpets and French-deco-meets-the-Orient home pieces. Mr Lim can sometimes seem a little frosty at the outset, but his attention to detail and finishes are exquisite, and he is happy to custom make and ship.

152 Le Lai Street / District 1 / +848 3925 3648 / closed Sunday

www.verlimdesign.com

VIETNAM VESPA ADVENTURES
Activities

Beat the traffic and see the sights with these small-group half-day and multi-day tours to Mui Ne, Nha Trang and Hue on restored vintage Vespas. You can ride pillion or take the wheel yourself, and brave the streets as the colonial elites used to, but don’t forget your helmet.

Café Zoom / 169A De Tham / District 1 / +848 0903 652 068 or +848 0122 993 585

www.vietnamvespaadventures.com

SPA AUTHENTIC
Activities

Escape the city chaos at this pretty garden refuge located along the banks of the Saigon River. Indulge yourself with a steam, sauna, Jacuzzi bath and top-to-toe treatments, or simply take a dip in the pool and recline demurely on a lounger, soaking up the afternoon sun. Bliss.

195 Nguyen Van Huong / Thao Dien Ward / District 2 / +848 37 44 6453 / 7am-10pm

www.thaodienvillage.com

VIETNAM COOKERY CENTER
Activities

This Viet-French cooking school, set in a 1930s colonial villa, will have you whipping up a storm of popular local dishes like string bean salad or beef with tamarind in no time. Half day to more intensive classes are offered, as well as optional market tours.

4/F / 26 Ly Tu Trong / District 1 / +848 3827 0349 or +848 3823 8085

www.vietnamcookery.com

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www.vietnamcookery.com
LUXE Loathes

MOTORCYCLE FUMES
Exhaust that will leave you fuming.

ROAD SAFETY
A contradiction in terms, in this city, it's everyone for themselves.

DEMOLITION
The destruction of beautiful old buildings to be replaced by bland and ugly new towers. Enough!

SAIGON'S HERITAGE HOTELS
Desperately waiting to be restored to their former glory.
Fab vs. Drab

TASTING MEMORIES
Carting a suitcase back home full of clichéd souvenirs for family and friends will be completely eclipsed one you take a half-day course at Vietnam Cookery Center and bring the taste of your travels home.

www.vietnamcookery.com

TAILOR TIME
Purchasing a poorly made, ill-fitting suit from any of the city’s 24-hour tailors is what a great many people end up doing, but do as we do and step into decently-priced custom tailor Cao Minh for smart suits, shirts, jackets and pants made from fine English and Italian fabrics.

www.caominh.com

TOUR GUIDES
Trying to put together your own city walks, barge cruises, scooter tours, overnight trips and full or half day excursions can be an exhausting process, when instead you could call the best in the business Exotissimo, to do all your planning and scheduling for you while you relax and enjoy the sights.

www.exotissimo.com

ART SPECIALISTS
Unwittingly buying mass reproduced art and drawings from the city’s less scrupulous ‘galleries’ is an all too often occurrence, but you can avoid it by purchasing original, one-off pieces from up-and-coming and established local artists at the city’s most reputable galleries Apricot and Hanoi Studio.

www.apricotgallery.com.vn
www.arthanoistudio.com

STYLISH SIGHTS
Seeing the sights around the city by cab can end up as a seemingly endless series of curbside waiting, but imagine seeing the sights around the city in a chic, off-white, chauffeur-driven 1954 Citroën Traction called ‘Piaf’! Yes, you can!

Email: citroen4rent@reddoordeco.com
LUXE ITINERARY

Romance

Enjoy a leisurely lie-in in your plush colonial-style suite at the centrally located Park Hyatt Saigon. Skip the hotel breakfast and set the mood for the day in an intimate nook at the aptly named Hideaway Café, where the exotic international tastes are worth seeking out. After breakfast, it’s time for some art appreciation at young talent-focused Craig Thomas Gallery, then travel back to Saigon’s colonial past at Notre Dame (and the wonderfully grand Post Office just beside it), boasting huge original Indochina maps on the walls. Just opposite the Post Office is Arabian restaurant and bar Casbah, with views back to Notre Dame from the terrace, but don’t linger to people-watch for too long, as a shopportunity awaits! Pick up some neo-traditional fashion including stunning hand-embroidered urban wear and traditional Viet silk attire, plus art and lifestyle from Mai’s, then accessorize your new ensemble with beautiful hand-stitched leather bags, accessories, and customizable jewels from Anupa (see LUXE Loves). Looking to feather your love nest? Further along Le Thanh Ton you’ll find Red Door Deco, a great spot for retro/repro, vintage bric-a-brac, furniture, Buddhas, objects and accessories. While away the rest of the afternoon poolside at the delightful Spa Authentic (see LUXE Loves), and enjoy some well-earned R&R while you’re at it with one of their indulgent signature treatments. Now you’re feeling rested, it’s time to recharge with a delicious Vietnamese supper at Temple Club. Situated in a converted Chinese temple, the restaurant, and adjoining Temple Bar, is an ideal spot for a night of romantic drinking and dining. Enjoy a sultry nightcap at sky-high Chill Sky Bar (see LUXE Loves), and take in spectacular panoramic views of the city under a canopy of stars, before retiring to your suite at the Park Hyatt.
A style haven to be reckoned with, the bustling commercial center of Saigon has managed to maintain a modern vibe while keeping intact its traditional Viet ties. With this mix of old and new, plus all the goodies on offer, you’d be wise to think about investing in a spare suitcase in which to tote your loot. Start your spree in the happening Le Thanh Ton area, where Kin Boutique is a must for runway-worthy satin and silk frocks (without the couture price tag) from local sensation Nguyen Cong Tri. Neo-traditionalists should head along Ly Tu Trong to find Vo Viet Chung, home to beautiful, well-made ao dais (traditional Viet dress) with contemporary twists – like vibrant colors and unorthodox materials including lace. Also not to be missed are L’Usine and Gaya, both stocking a wonderful range of lifestyle, fashion and homeware. Lunch! Take a table in the balmy courtyard of former opium refinery Hoa Tuc (see LUXE Loves), where you can enjoy modern, palate-pleasing Vietnamese cuisine, or join the cooking class and learn to make your own. Make your way to stylish wellness center La Maison de L’Apothique for indulgent spa packages, including relaxing body therapies, slimming treatments and facials using their own brand of handmade products from Bordeaux. Head to your pre-booked dinner table at Park Hyatt Saigon’s suave grill Square One, boasting five open kitchens and a fabulous Viet and international menu, served both indoors and on the outdoor terrace. Mingle with the who’s who of Vietnam over a nightcap at the Hyatt’s stainless steel and glass hotspot, 2 Lam Son (see LUXE Loves), before retiring to your modern, Asian-influenced suite in the Sheraton Saigon’s Grand Tower. Dô!
Good morning, Saigon! This city is a culture and history buff’s dream holiday location, with remnants of the War still remaining throughout Saigon and much of Vietnam. Start with a visit to the extraordinary Cu Chi Tunnels, but bear in mind you’ll need to allocate half a day for this activity, as the tunnels are located out of town. You can book a car and driver via Avis and take along a tasty packed lunch from the city’s premier deli Annam Gourmet Market, as food options are limited out of town. Specify to your driver you wish to visit the Ben Dinh Tunnels (rather than the Ben Duoc tunnels, which are a tourist reconstruction), and make a pitstop at Cu Chi Wildlife Rescue Station on the way, to visit with animals like moon bears and pangolins rescued from illegal trade and poaching. Head back to town to visit the War Remnants Museum, a grisly collection that serves as one of the best anti-war messages anywhere in the world. Carry on for a guided tour of the Reunification Palace, formerly the Presidential Palace, where time has literally stood still since 10.45am on 30 April 1975, when a tank of the North Vietnamese Army famously smashed down the gates and effectively ended the war. End on a lighter and charitable note at Vietnam Quilts (see LUXE Loves), where purchasing a hand-stitched quilt will help support rural villages. You’ve certainly earned your supper, and where better to enjoy it than lovely Quan An Ngon, a sprawling, breezy, colonial villa where hawker food is prepared for you on the tropical terrace. Finally, slip back to your suite at the historic Caravelle Hotel (see LUXE Loves), and into what’s sure to be a very deep slumber.
LUXE ITINERARY

The Essentials

ROMANTIC ITINERARY

• Park Hyatt Saigon
  2 Lam Son Square / District 1 / +848 3824 1234
  www.saigon.park.hyatt.com

• Hideaway Café
  41/1 Pham Ngoc Thach / District 3 / +848 3822 4222 / 8am-late
  www.hideawaycafe-saigon.com

• Craig Thomas Gallery
  27i Tran Nhat Duat / Tan Dinh Ward / District 1 / +848 0903 888 431 / noon-6pm Tues-Sat or by appointment
  www.cthomasgallery.com

• Notre Dame
  Han Thuyen / facing Dong Khoi / District 1 / 9am-7pm / 5pm mass daily / some sections closed to visitors / best time to visit is 9-10.30am

• Post Office
  2 Cong Xa Paris Square / +848 3829 6862 / 9am-5pm

• Casbah
  59 Nguyen Du / +848 3824 5130 / 8am-1am

• Mai’s
  132-134 Dong Khoi / District 1 / +848 3827 2733 / 9.30am-9.30pm
  www.mailam.com.vn

• Anupa (see LUXE Loves)

• Red Door Deco
  31A Le Thanh Ton / District 1 / +848 3825 8672 / 10am-7pm but call ahead to check / complimentary pickup service in vintage jeep or Citroën
  www.reddoordeco.com

• Spa Authentic (see LUXE Loves)

• Temple Club
  29-31 Ton That Thiep / District 1 / +848 3829 9244 / 11am-midnight

• Temple Bar
  29-31 Ton That Thiep / District 1 / +848 3829 9244

• Chill Sky Bar (see LUXE Loves)

STYLISH ITINERARY

• Kin Boutique
  198 Le Thanh Ton / +848 3502 3090

• Vo Viet Chung
  115 Ly Tu Trong / +848 3914 2008
  www.vovietchung.com

• L’Usine
  1/F Art Arcade / 151 Dong Khoi / District 1 / +848 6674 3565
  www.lusinespace.tumblr.com

• Gaya
  1 Nguyen Van Trang / District 1 / +898 3925 1495
  www.gayavietnam.com

• Hoa Tuc (see LUXE Loves)

• La Maison de L’Apothiquaire
  100 Mac Thi Buoi / District 1 / +848 3822 2158
  www.lapothiquaire.com

• Square One
  Park Hyatt Saigon / 2 Lam Son Square / District 1 / +848 3520 2385
  www.saigon.park.hyatt.com

• 2 Lam Son (see LUXE Loves)

• Sheraton Saigon
  88 Dong Khoi / District 1 / +848 3827 2828
  www.sheratongrandtower.com
LUXE ITINERARY

The Essentials

CULTURE ITINERARY

- Avis
  86 D3 St / 25 Ward / Binh Thanh / +848 3512 8068
  www.avis.com.vn

- Annam Gourmet Market
  16 Hai Ba Trung / District 1 / +848 3822 9332 / 8am-9pm
  Mon-Sat, 9am-8pm Sun
  www.annam-gourmet.com

- Ben Dinh Tunnels
  Cu Chi Town / +848 3794 6442

- Cu Chi Wildlife Rescue Station
  Ap Cho Cu II / An Nhon Tay Ward / Cu Chi Town / +848 3794 7045 / 7.30-11.30am & 1-4.30pm / call ahead
  www.wildlifeatrisk.org

- War Remnants Museum
  28 Vo Van Tan / District 3 / +848 3930 2112 / 7.30am-noon & 1.30-5pm

- Reunification Palace
  135 Nam Ky Khoi Nghia / District 1 / +848 3822 3652 / 7.30-11am & 1-4pm daily
  www.dinhdoclap.gov.vn

- Vietnam Quilts (see LUXE Loves)

- Quan An Ngon
  160 Pasteur / District 1 / +848 3827 7131 / 7am-10.30pm
  at the historic and luxurious

- Caravelle Hotel (see LUXE Loves)
Your LUXE notes