



HOAN KIEM LAKE & NGOC SON TEMPLE

Hang out on the shores of "lake of the returned sword" and take in the full spectrum of Hanoians, from old women doing sunrise aerobics to teenage couples canoodling. Take a stroll over the red bridge and brush up on the lake's legendary turtle at the 17th century Ngoc Son Temple (you can see its cousin mounted in a glass case).

Location: Bordered by Le Thai To, Hang Khay and Dinh Tien Hoang Str., Hanoi



OLD QUARTER

Like the Minotaur's maze, the 36 streets that make up the Old Quarter are famously difficult to navigate. This section of the city has a 2,000-year-old history of commerce and though much has changed (Ma May, which once sold religious items and was home to an infamous bandit, is now a hub for tourism offices), items are still sold according to type with entire streets dedicated to single items. This whole area at one time was walled off to ward off thieves, but the wall was torn down in the late 1800s. It's also the place to be for every shopaholic.



ANCIENT CITADEL

While digging the foundation for a new national assembly building in 2002, workers began to unearth remnants of a much older building. Archaeologists discovered the ancient foundations of an imperial city that dates back 1,300 years to the Chinese Tang dynasty. The complex now houses the main office of the Ministry of Defence, and Cot Co Tower.

Location: Entrance from Hoang Dieu Street



HANOI OPERA HOUSE

One of the few places in Hanoi to catch the symphony, this century-old French colonial building is Hanoi landmark. While the interior could use some sprucing up, its still worth a visit. Check out the program and buy tickets on www.ticketvn.com

Location: 1 Trang Tien, Hanoi



HO CHI MINH MAUSOLEUM

Silence reigns as visitors file by the preserved body of Vietnam's revered leader, Ho Chi Minh. The long lines and quick glimpse are worth it; how often do you get to meet a historical figure in the flesh, so to speak? Although the embalming was against the former leader's wishes, it still makes for an interesting yet gruesome morning tour. The line can be long so bring water.

Location: Entered from Ngoc Ha Street, Hanoi



THE ROOFTOP

Perched atop the Pacific Place building, The Rooftop more than lives up to its name. Offering a prime view of the city for miles around, the restaurant and bar is equipped with inviting booths, a wraparound deck and a bar serving an extensive wine and cocktail list. Ideal for everything from after work cocktails to late night carousing, be sure to swing by for events featuring DJ's spinning the latest hits long into the night. This is the one stop shop for Hanoi's party crew.

Location: 19 flr. Pacific Place, 83B Ly Thuong Kiet, Hoan Kiem, Hanoi



PARIS DELI

Located near two Hanoi landmarks, the Opera House and St. Joseph's Cathedral, this Café and deli is a slice of Paris in the heart of Hanoi. Serves an extensive array of salads, sandwiches and lunch fare.

Location: 13 Nha Tho / 6B Phan Chu Trinh, Hanoi



CIAO CAFE

Ciao Cafe has been serving up cuisines from Veal Cutlet Cordon Blue to a special fried rice clay pot fried rice with chicken with mushroom and everything in between around the Hoan Kiem Lake area for the past 14 years.

Location: 2 Hang Bai St, Hoan Kiem, Hanoi



QUAN AN NGON

For delicious and authentic Vietnamese food under the comfortable shade of beautiful yellow awnings, Quan An Ngon is the place to be. One of Hanoi's most charming spots to grab a bite, the Miele guide voted it one of Vietnam's top 5 restaurants. Stalls situated around the open-air courtyard serve up Vietnam's best traditional dishes, allowing you to window shop before ordering.

Location: 18 Phan Boi Chau, Hoan Kiem, Hanoi



HIGHWAY 4

A subsidiary of the famous local food chain House of Son Tinh. This restaurant serves a variety of authentic Vietnamese liquor fermented from fruit, herbs and rice as well as traditional cuisines in a cosy and friendly atmosphere. Their modern cooking style and imported ingredients guarantee satisfaction.

Location: 25 Bat Su, Hoan Kiem District, Hanoi



GINGER RESTAURANT AND BAR

The cuisine of Ginger Restaurant and Bar is Vietnamese with an international twist - fresh tomato soup with quail eggs, duck spring rolls wrapped in mustard leaf - the artwork is hip, and the ambiance is undeniably modern. Ginger is the place to be, either for business or leisure. Fine dining made cool.

Location: 87C Ly Thuong Kiet, Hoan Kiem, Hanoi



THE OLD QUARTER

Beginning as an alligator infested swamp nearly 2,000 years ago, the Old Quarter's winding streets are the heart and soul of the capital. The Old Quarter began to garner its reputation as a crafts location when the Vietnamese people gained independence in the 11th Century and King Ly Thai To had his palace built there. Two hundred years later, the artisan villages built up around the palace walls evolved into craft guilds. Though history refers to the '36 streets,' there are actually closer to 50 (historians believe that 36 refers to the number of guilds with workshops in the area). Many of the streets were named after these guilds and the merchandise they sold and some have vendors that have been selling the same wares for hundreds of years.



KHAI SILK

Khai Silk, the largest silk retailer in Vietnam, provides a grand selection of high quality silk. They have western styles along with traditional oriental garments for sale. Looking for unique threads? Locations throughout Vietnam offer tailoring services to create everything from suits to hand bags.

Location: 26 Nguyen Thai Hoc, Hanoi



KANA

From simple silk dresses to brightly printed headbands, Kana has something for every size and taste. The line of flattering basics arranged by cut and color make shopping a breeze.

Location: 41-56 Hang Trong, Hoan Kiem, Hanoi



MASKS

Found hanging in shops throughout the narrow winding lanes of the Old Quarter, these faces painted on woven round bamboo trays evoke the characters in Vietnam's traditional theatre Cheo. Each of the masks is painted in the theatrical makeup style and is meant to represent a single emotion. Embrace your inner drama queen and buy one for every day of the week.



TAILORS

Though Hoi An is where most travelers head to get their new wardrobe made, Ha Noi offers a decent smattering of tailors for anyone on a tight schedule. Bring your favorite suit along to get copied or a picture of the dress you've always wanted and get it made from scratch. You can even stop by the fabric market on Hue street first to pick out your own material.



THINGS TO BE AWARE OF WHEN TRAVELLING

- Stick with reliable taxi operators and don't trust the taxi meter.
- Don't stop, dash or backtrack while crossing the street as motorbike try to anticipate your movements.
- As northern Vietnam is still a cash economy, leave your cards at the hotel.
- Vietnamese street food is delicious, but be aware of hygiene. If a spot looks sketchy, move on to the next.
- Negotiating is not rude, but expected.
- Violent crime is rare, but be aware of ever-present pickpockets, especially in the Old Quarter.
- If you brave traffic yourself, take proper precautions. Always wear a helmet and keep your bag close.
- While most people in Vietnam love having their picture taken, stay respectful at temples and government buildings.



TAXIS

Make sure they start the meter, have small notes and write down the address. 1km costs around VND16,000 and the starting fee depends on the company.

Reliable taxi companies include Mai Linh (04 3822 2666) and Taxi CP (04 3826 2626), part of the larger and trustworthy Taxi Group.



CURRENCY EXCHANGE

Major currencies can be exchanged in larger cities. Hotels generally charge at the prevailing bank rate and you may get a better deal at state-controlled banks.

Gold shops often have the best exchange rate, but remember that you'll have none of the security a bank offers.

DEBIT / CREDIT CARDS

An increasing number of outlets accept Mastercard and Visa, but Hanoi is still a cash-based economy. Amex outlets are also growing rapidly. Most will charge you an extra 3% per transaction.

It might be better to use cash at smaller venues as not all places offer the same level of security.



HOSPITALS/CLINICS

The capital has a number of international standard clinics for minor ailments. They take walk-ins, but it is better to make an appointment.

International SOS medical and dental clinic / 51 Xuan Dieu, Tay Ho District / 04 3826 4545 / Open 24hrs

Hanoi Family Medical Practice / Van Phuc Compound, 298 Kim Ma, Ba Dinh / 04 3843 0748 / Open 24hrs

For larger problems, you will probably be directed to the **French-Vietnamese hospital**.

