



Local Currency In Viet Nam the local currency is the dong (D). They come in denominations of 100 / 200 / 500 / 1,000 / 2,000 / 5,000 / 10,000 / 20,000 and 50,000 100,000 / 200,000 / 500,000 dong.

US dollars are widely accepted in shops and restaurants. Traveler's checks and credit cards are rarely accepted except in major hotels and restaurants.

ATMs can be found near most tourist sites.

Office/Telephone Facilities **Main Post Office:** Located on the east side of Hoan Kiem Lake on Dinh Tien Hoang. It offers full postal, telephone and fax service. Incoming and outgoing mail is often inspected by postal officials.

Internet / Public Telephone: Internet cafes are common in the main tourist areas, particularly in the Old Quarter. International Hotels offer use of their business centers for a small fee.

As mobile phone use is prevalent, public telephones are not common on the city streets. International calls can be made from the main post office.

Tourist Information Center, Dinh Tien Hoang, north of Hoan Kiem Lake Telephone: (84-4) 926 3366.

Transportation Taxis are the best way to travel around Hanoi if you are not on a guided tour. The licensed companies with the best reputation in town are Hanoi Taxi and Taxi CP. If a taxi driver tries to negotiate a flat rate, be a little careful. You probably don't know the city and the distances.

If you are heading to a specific location in a metered cab be careful of "sight-seeing". In other words, if you happen to notice that you are passing the Empire State Building for the third time (just an example) and the taxi meter is still running...well...you get the point. Try to keep a perspective of where you are and where you want to go.

Many taxis accept US dollars for the fare.

We do not recommend renting a scooter. Unless you are an expert rider and know the city and the local driving habits, it is simply not a safe way for you to get around.

Useful Words

Greetings	Chao ong (ba)
How are you?	Ong (ba) co khoe khong?
Fine, thanks	Cam on rat tot
My name is...	Tên tôi là...
I don't understand	Tôi không hiểu
Restaurant	Nhà hàng
Telephone	điện thoại
Hotel	khách sạn

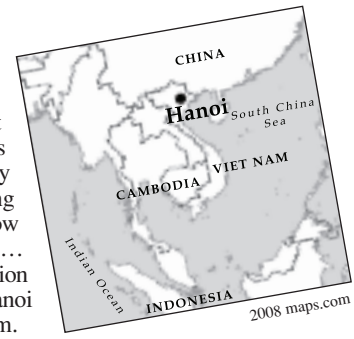
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Hanoi Viet Nam



General Information

The area along the banks of the Song Hong, the Red River, in northern Viet Nam, has been cultivated and fished for the past 5,000 years. Over the centuries as the city grew, it has had many names. In 1831 King Minh Mang gave the city the name we know today. Ha (river) Noi (in). Hanoi... the city in the river. With a population of over 3,500,000, modern day Hanoi is the bustling capital of Viet Nam.



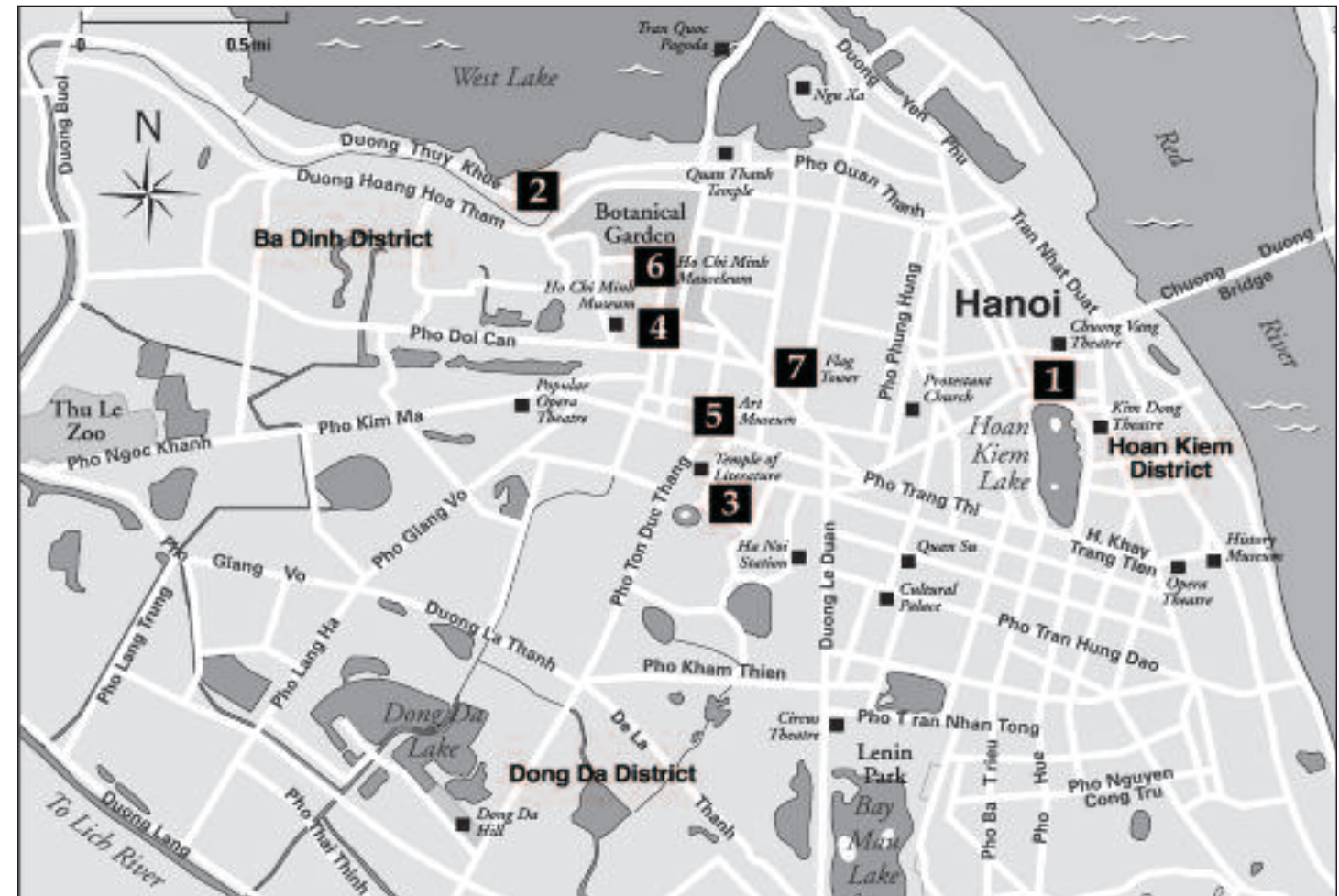
The city, regardless of the name changes through its history, has been growing along the banks of the Red River for nearly a thousand years. As Viet Nam's intellectual, artistic and cultural center, over the centuries it has drawn the best and brightest from around the country. Many of the streets of the 36 pho (the old district) still bare the name of the products that were built and sold there. The crafts or products may no longer be there, but you can often find an old shrine erected to the artisan's god.

Though much has been lost due to the ravages of time and war, every dynasty and King, every age and epoch has made its contribution to this beautiful city.

In more recent times, the French, with their formation of French Indochina, made Hanoi the capital in the late 1800's. Together with their language and cuisine, the French brought their love for wide tree-lined boulevards and western architecture. The Grand Opera House and the Presidential Palace are just two of the many beautiful examples of Hanoi's French Colonial architecture.

Durring World War II Hanoi was occupied by the Japanese. After the war France sought to regain its lost colonial possessions and sent its military back into Viet Nam. The Vietnamese, led by Ho Chi Minh, decided to resist and fight for their independence. So began long years of war that would lead to the defeat of France, the bitterly devisive involvement and withdrawal of the United States and the uniting, with Hanoi as its capital, of North and South Viet Nam under Communist rule.

Places of Interest



1 Ho Hoan Kiem (Lake of the Returned Sword) got its name from the 15th century legend of King Le Thai To who, after defeating the Chinese and gaining Viet Nam's independence, lost his sword in the lake. The King determined that the gods had given him the sword till victory had been won and now, with peace in the land, the battle sword must be returned to them.

Each King and dynasty since then has done their part to beautify the lake. There are many ancient shrines, bridges and gardens that now surround it.

2 Ho Tay (West Lake) is the largest lake in Hanoi and the site where many of the ancient Kings built their summer homes. Many of these beautiful homes have, over the centuries, been turned into shrines and temples. There are flower gardens and fruit plantations that surround the lake. During the lunar holidays many of the people of Hanoi visit the shrines to honor the deities.

3 Van Mieu (The Temple of Literature) was built in 1070 as a temple of learning devoted to the teachings of Confucius. Beginning in the late 1400's all those who completed the years of difficult study and examination were given the great honor of having their names, together with the name of their village, engraved in stone as recognition of being one of Viet Nam's preeminent scholars.





4 Chua Mot Cot (One Pillar Pagoda): In 1050 the King Ly Thai Tong had a dream in which he was mysteriously drawn to a lotus pond. In the middle of the pond was a beautiful shrine. After he awoke the King commissioned the design and construction of a real pagoda to be built to look like the shrine and the blossoming of the beautiful lotus that he had seen in his dream. The now famous shrine has become a symbol of the culture of Viet Nam.

5 Museum of Fine Arts is at 66 Nguyen Thai Hoc Street. The museum has on display a wide variety of ancient art, sculpture, implements and jewelry that shows the rich cultural contributions made by the many different ethnic groups that make up the people of Viet Nam. Many of the items date back over 3,000 years to the Bronze Age.

6 Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum: Uncle Ho, as he is often and affectionately referred to, is the father of modern Viet Nam. The people remember and revere his tenacity and determination as he led them in their long fight for their country's independence. In the communist Leninist custom, a large and imposing mausoleum was built following the death of Ho. His body was embalmed and put on display. Though it was Ho's wish to be cremated and his ashes scattered, the Vietnamese are grateful that they can visit the site and pay their respect.

7 Army Museum: There are thousands of exhibits of artifacts, maps and battle models that tell the story of Viet Nam's fight for reunification and independence. On display is a Mig fighter, SAM missiles and a wide variety of Russian, Chinese and US made weaponry that was used during the war.

One of the most interesting displays is the Russian built T-54 tank that crashed the gate of the US embassy in Saigon on April 30, 1975. The iconic film footage of the dramatic event was shot by Australian news cameraman, Neil Davis, as he stood just inside the compound...North Vietnamese tanks and his camera both rolling.

The museum is not a piece of anti-US propaganda, but rather homage to the people of Viet Nam that fought to overthrow foreign influence and domination. Many American veterans of the war visit the museum and have always been welcomed with respect.

Beyond Hanoi

Cuc Phong National Park: A primal forest located 60 miles southwest of Hanoi, the park is famous for its caves, hot springs and limestone mountains. Prehistoric stone tools have been found in a number of the caves. Beautiful and mysterious, with one of the few virgin forests remaining, a visit is truly a step back in time.

Cat Ba Island: The largest and one of the most beautiful islands that make up the Cat Ba Archipelago is an example of the amazing diversity of plant and animal life to be found in costal Viet Nam. Waterfalls, tropical forests and hot springs cover this jewel which is set in the Tonkin Gulf of the South China Sea.

Halong Bay: In 1994 the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) designated the bay as a World Heritage Site. Over 2,000 islands are sprinkled like emeralds in a shimmering aqua sea. Blanketed by tropical forests, explore the hidden grottos and wondrous rock formations in the caves that dot the islands.



History

The land that makes up present day Viet Nam has been inhabited long before recorded history. Rich soil along the banks of innumerable rivers, fruits and crops easily grown, lakes and coastlines teeming with fish...the land was rich and capable of providing the needs of the people. As beautiful as it is, the country has a long, violent and extremely complicated history of invasion, dynastic conquest, internal power struggles and political rivalry.

At first the people that inhabited the Red River delta, the area around Hanoi, were indigenous to Southeast Asia. Over countless generations many others made their way south from China and intermingled. China, the great kingdom to the north, was already over 2,000 years old when it invaded Viet Nam in the 1st century. China conquered and ruled the land for nearly a thousand years.

After countless invasions and centuries of subjugation by China, Viet Nam was able to win its independence in the 10th century. Soon afterwards the onslaught of invading Mongols who had conquered the mysterious Middle Kingdom of China, rolled south over Viet Nam. Rather than face certain destruction, Viet Nam became a tribute state to the ruling Mongols of the Yuan Dynasty.

Roman merchants had reached Viet Nam as far back as 166 BC. Coins bearing the likeness of Caesar have been discovered in ancient palaces and shrines. Marco Polo visited briefly in 1292 as he sailed home to Venice from China. Portuguese merchants together with Roman Catholic missionaries came in early 1500's. But it was in 1887, after nearly 30 years of trying to gain a financial and military foothold in Southeast Asia, that Viet Nam was occupied and colonized as part of French Indochina.

Early in World War II the Empire of Japan occupied Viet Nam and allowed the collaborating Vichy French government to continue the administration of the country. At the close of World War II French President Charles de Gaulle said, "A great nation like France must have overseas possessions or she will not be a great nation." De Gaulle wanted to regain Viet Nam as a French colony. The French army, with the material and financial support of the United States, returned to take back what they believed to be rightfully theirs... Viet Nam.

One of the most important turning points in Viet Nam's recent history came in 1954. Under the political leadership of Ho Chi Minh, General Nguyen Giap ordered his rag-tag army to surround and destroy the 20,000 professional French soldiers who were holding their firebase at Dien Bien Phu. The destruction of the French army in Viet Nam would soon lead the United States to commit its military to war in Southeast Asia.

In 1973 a deeply divided United States withdrew its military forces from Viet Nam. Two years later, in 1975, Saigon fell to the North Vietnamese army.

In the decades since the end of the war, a great deal of personal and political healing, together with countless examples of mutual goodwill, has taken place. Led by the veterans themselves, from both sides, the former foes have decided to make peace with themselves, peace with each other and peace with the past as they look to a bright future.



Shore Excursions

To make the most of your visit to Hanoi and surrounding areas we suggest you take one of our organized Shore Excursions. For Information concerning tour content and pricing, consult your Shore Excursion Brochure or contact the Shore Excursion Desk.

- When going ashore, guests are advised to take with them only the items they need and to secure any valuables.
- Remember to take along plenty of sun-screen and bottled water.



Local Customs

Much of the social fabric of the Vietnamese people is based on the teaching of Confucius; live modestly and put the needs of the family and others before self.

The Vietnamese are an honest and hardworking people. But for many years, understandably, the people in northern Viet Nam had very little contact with Westerners. However, they do not hold a grudge against Americans because of the war. The war is in the past and they are looking to the future. Western visitors are appreciated, welcomed with respect and treated warmly.

Because visiting Westerners are still relatively new, do not be surprised by the curiosity of the Vietnamese. You may even be asked questions by a perfect stranger that you may find mildly shocking; your age, marital status or the number of children you have. Please do not take offense. They are just curious about you.

Bargaining: Shop owners may bargain with you to get the very highest price they think you are willing to pay. Be polite yet firm when you bargain.

Tiping: Though it is not the custom, it is accepted and appreciated. 5-10% for a good meal would be appropriate. As wages are very low, a fair tip could equal a day's pay. Be careful not to over tip as other tourists will be taking your place tomorrow. US dollars are always accepted.

Local Cuisine: As with most of the Orient, rice and noodles are staples. Due to proximity or the colonial period, Chinese, Thai and French cooking have had a great influence on Vietnamese cuisine. Fresh herbs and hot chilies are favorites. Soup is commonly served.

Pho, a beef noodle soup is Viet Nam's answer to fast food. You can find a noodle house anywhere. They will also offer the customer a selection of pork sausages, called gio lua, or fish balls, called cha ca.

With such an abundance of lakes and rivers and a coastline on the South China Sea almost 1,500 miles long it is understandable that fresh fish, crab, shrimp and squid are often on the menu.

Being a tropical country, Viet Nam grows and enjoys an abundance of fruit, from melons, pineapples and coconut to the fancy and exotic green dragon.

All countries have a favorite condiment. In Viet Nam they love a pungent fermented fish sauce called nuoc mam. It is found on almost every table at every meal.

A couple of the more popular Vietnamese dishes are:

Pho – A noodle soup with chicken or beef. From a side plate you add the chilies and bean sprouts.

Goi Cuon: Often served in separate dishes so you can make your own, these spring rolls include raw vegetables combined with your choice of grilled shrimp, beef, chicken or pork.

And finally...some people say you can find a better baguette in Hanoi than you can in the middle of Paris. We will leave that debate to the culinary critics.



Shopping Facilities

Hanoi has some of the best bargains for visitors in Asia. In the area of the Old Quarter(36 pho), many of the streets are named after the product that generations of craftsmen have made there.

The most popular shopping area for visitors to Hanoi is called Hang Gai. It is located in the part of the city just north of Hoan Kiem Lake. All the taxis will know where it is. If you want to go, tell them...Hang Gai. In this area you will find beautifully carved lacquered pieces and hand-woven silks. Some of the "antiques" might not be all that old, but if you like the piece, bargain for a fair price.

Across from the Temple of Literature on Van Mieu Street is a store with a very good reputation for having a wide variety of beautiful locally made crafts. The store is called, appropriately enough, Craft Link.

Near Hoan Kiem Lake, there are a number of art galleries. As with any gallery in any city, you can find some pieces that are stunning and some...not quite as good. The price of the art varies as widely as the quality. But then, we all know the saying..."Beauty is in the eye of the beholder."

Depending on the shop, you might be able to have a special piece shipped home. Despite the fact that you will be paying a little extra for the shipping, you are most likely still getting a very good deal.