

# Hanoi



Imagine a city where the exotic chic of old Asia blends with the dynamic face of new Asia. Where the medieval and modern co-exist. A city with a blend of Parisian grace and Asian pace, an architectural museum piece evolving in harmony with its history, rather than bulldozing through like many of the region's capitals. Hanoi is where imagination becomes reality.

A mass of motorbikes swarms through the tangled web of streets that is the Old Quarter, a cauldron of commerce for almost 1000 years and still the best place to check the pulse of this resurgent city. Hawkers in conical hats ply their wares, locals sip coffee and *bia hoi* (beer) watching life (and plenty of tourists) pass them by. Witness synchronised t'ai chi at dawn on the shores of Hoan Kiem Lake while goateed grandfathers tug at their wisps over the next chess move. See the bold and beautiful dine at designer restaurants and cut the latest moves on the dance floor. Hanoi has it all: the ancient history, a colonial legacy and a modern outlook. There is no better place to untangle the paradox that is modern Vietnam.

The grand old dame of Asia, Hanoi lay in a deep slumber after Vietnam's partition in 1954 until the effects of economic reforms kicked in four decades later. The city survived American bombs and Russian planners to emerge relatively unscathed in the early 1990s as an example of a French-conceived colonial city. Huge mansions line grand boulevards, and lakes and parks dot the city, providing a romantic backdrop to the nonstop soundtrack. There are still moments of Paris, as the smell of baguettes and *café au lait* permeates street corners.

Known by many names down the centuries, Thanh Long (City of the Soaring Dragon) is the most evocative, and let there be no doubt that this dragon is on the up once more.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Discover the Asia you dreamed about in the bustling back streets of the **Old Quarter** (p95)
- Step into history, and a spiritual retreat from the busy streets beyond, at the **Temple of Literature** (p100)
- Enjoy a giggle at Punch and Judy in a pool, watching the city's famed **water puppets** (p119)
- See 'Uncle Ho' in the flesh at **Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum** (p99)
- Piece together the country's ethnic mosaic at the wonderful **Vietnam Museum of Ethnology** (p101)



TELEPHONE CODE: 04

POPULATION: 3.5 MILLION

BEST TIMES TO VISIT:  
MAR-MAY & SEP-NOV

## HISTORY

The site where Hanoi stands today has been inhabited since the Neolithic period. Emperor Ly Thai To moved his capital here in AD 1010, naming it Thang Long (City of the Soaring Dragon). There should be some spectacular celebrations in honour of the 1000th birthday of the city in 2010. The decision by Emperor Gia Long, founder of the Nguyen dynasty in 1802, to rule from Huế relegated Hanoi to the status of a regional capital for a century.

Down the centuries, Hanoi has been called many names, including Dong Kinh (Eastern Capital), from which the Europeans derived the name they eventually applied to all of northern Vietnam – Tonkin. The city was named Hanoi (The City in a Bend of the River) by Emperor Tu Duc in 1831. From 1902 to 1953, Hanoi served as the capital of French Indochina.

Hanoi was proclaimed the capital of Vietnam after the August Revolution of 1945, but it was not until the Geneva Accords of 1954 that the Viet Minh, driven from the city by the French in 1946, were able to return.

During the American War, US bombing destroyed parts of Hanoi and killed hundreds of civilians; almost all the damage has since been repaired. One of the prime targets was the 1682m-long Long Bien Bridge, originally built between 1888 and 1902 under the direction of the same architect who designed the Eiffel Tower in Paris. US aircraft repeatedly bombed the strategic bridge, yet after each attack the Vietnamese managed to improvise replacement spans and return it to road and rail services. It is said that the US military ended the attacks when US prisoners of war (POWs) were put to work repairing the bridge.

## ORIENTATION

Hanoi sprawls along the banks of Song Hong (Red River), which is spanned by two bridges – the Long Bien Bridge (now used only by nonmotorised vehicles and pedestrians) and, 600m to the south, the newer Chuong Duong Bridge.

The elegant heart of Hanoi is centred on the Hoan Kiem Lake. Just north of this lake is the Old Quarter (known to the French as the Cité Indigène), which is characterised by narrow streets with names that change every one or two blocks. Most visitors prefer to base themselves in this part of town thanks to the incredible energy of the area.

Along the western periphery of the Old Quarter is the ancient Hanoi Citadel, which was originally constructed by Emperor Gia Long. Unfortunately, the citadel is now a military base and also the residence of high-ranking officers and their families – in other words, closed to the public. Most of the ancient buildings were tragically destroyed by French troops in 1894, and US bombing during the American War took care of the rest. There are persistent rumours that this area will soon be opened up to development, but the military remain a powerful force in Vietnam, more than three decades after the war.

Further west is Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum. Most of the foreign embassies, which are housed in classical architectural masterpieces from the French-colonial era, are found in this neighbourhood and posh joint-venture hotels have also sprung up here. Ho Tay (West Lake), Hanoi's largest lake, is north of Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum and is emerging as a new front on the drinking and dining scenes.

Taxis, an airport minibuses and local buses link Hanoi's Noi Bai International Airport with the city centre. From bus and train stations, there are metered taxis, *xe om* (motorbike taxis) or *cyclos* to ferry you to your destination.

## Maps

Hanoi city maps come in every size and scale. Some are freebies subsidised by advertising and others precise works of cartography.

Leading maps include detailed ones at a scale of 1:10,000 or 1:17,500. Covit produces a couple of hand-drawn 3D maps of Hanoi, including a detailed Old Town map, which make nice souvenirs. These maps are available at leading bookshops in Hanoi.

There is also an excellent bus map available. *Xe Buyt Ha Noi* (5000d) is an essential companion for anyone planning to get about on the improved bus network and is easy to use.

## INFORMATION Bookshops

If you're running low on reading material, Hanoi is a good place to stock up. Many of the budget hotels and travellers cafés in the Old Quarter have small book exchanges.

**Bookworm** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 943 7226; bookworm@fpt.vn; 15a Ngo Van So; 🕒 10am-7pm Tue-Sun) Definitely the place for bookworms, this place has the best selection of English-language books in Hanoi. New and secondhand books, plus plenty of fiction and some good travel stock.

## AROUND HANOI





**New Hanoian** (www.newhanoian.com) This is the place to get the rub on what Hanoi expats get up to in the city. Places to see, dining out, special events, even jobs – it's all here.

**Shivaaa!** (www.shiva.com.vn) Shiva is an internet search site for Hanoi, an online gateway to lots of small restaurants, bars and shops in the city. The site includes detailed maps and customer reviews.

**Sticky Rice** (http://stickyrice.typepad.com) The website for foodies in Hanoi, this has the lowdown on dozens of places to dine and drink in the city.

## Libraries

**National Library and Archives** (Map p96; ☎ 825 3357; 31 Pho Trang Thi) This grand old building has some English and French material available, but it's mostly Vietnamese.

## Medical Services

**Dental Clinic** (Map pp88-9; ☎ 846 2864; the dental@netnam.vn; Van Phuc Diplomatic Compound, 1 Pho Kim Ma) The tooth hurts? Deal with it here, part of the Hanoi Family Medical Practice.

**French Embassy Clinic** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 825 2719; 49 Pho Ba Trieu) A 24-hour clinic for French nationals.

**Hanoi Family Medical Practice** (Map pp88-9; ☎ 843 0748; 24hr emergency service 090-340 1919; www.vietnammedicalpractice.com; Van Phuc Diplomatic Compound, 1 Pho Kim Ma) Includes a team of well-respected international physicians. Prices are high, so check your medical insurance is in order.

**SOS International Clinic** (Map p96; ☎ 934 0555; fax 934 0556; 31 Pho Hai Ba Trung; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat, emergency 24hr) International chain of clinics with annual policies for expats living in Vietnam. English, French and Japanese are spoken.

**Viet Duc Hospital** (Benh Vien Viet Duc; Map p96; ☎ 825 3531; 40 Pho Trang Thi; ☎ 24hr) Old Quarter unit for emergency surgery; the doctors here speak English, French and German.

**Vietnam-Korea Friendship Clinic** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 843 7231; 12 Chu Van An; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri) Anyone crazy enough to travel without insurance should head here. This nonprofit clinic is the cheapest in town.

## TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

**Institute of Acupuncture** (Map pp88-9; ☎ 853 3881; 49 Pho Thai Thinh) Holistic medicine? Well, very small holes anyway.

**National Hospital of Traditional Medicine** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 826 3616; 29 Pho Nguyen Binh Khiem) Vietnamese solutions to some Vietnamese problems.

## Money

**ANZ Bank** (Map p96; ☎ 825 8190; 14 Pho Le Thai To; ☎ 8.30am-4pm Mon-Fri) On the western edge of Hoan Kiem Lake, this international bank has cash advances in dong and dollar with a 24-hour ATM.

**Industrial & Commercial Bank** (Map p96; ☎ 825 4276; 37 Pho Hang Bo) In a convenient location in the Old Quarter, it cashes travellers cheques at the standard 0.5% commission for dong, 1.25% for US dollars and 3% for credit-card cash advances.

**Vietcombank** Pho Hang Bai (Map p96; ☎ 826 8031; 2 Pho Hang Bai); Pho Tran Quang Khai (Map p96; ☎ 826 8045; 198 Pho Tran Quang Khai) The towering HQ is located a few blocks east of Hoan Kiem Lake and it has an ATM and offers most currency services. Several smaller branches are scattered around town, including a handy one on Pho Hang Bai, near Hoan Kiem Lake.

## Post

There are small post-office kiosks all over the city that do the basics. Go to the main domestic and international post offices in the event that you need to do anything complicated.

**Domestic post office** (Buu Dien Trung Vong; Map p96; ☎ 825 7036; 75 Pho Dinh Tien Hoang; ☎ 7am-9.30pm) Occupies a full city block overlooking Hoan Kiem Lake. Send letters, pick up domestic packages and purchase philatelic items.

**International postal office** (☎ 825 2030; cnr Pho Dinh Tien Hoang & Pho Dinh Le; ☎ 7am-8.30pm) With its own entrance to the right of the domestic office.

Some courier companies in Hanoi:

**DHL** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 733 2086; 49 Pho Nguyen Thai Hoc)

**Federal Express** (Map pp88-9; ☎ 824 9054; 63 Pho Yen Phu)

## MAKE THAT COMPLAINT COUNT...

We get a lot of letters complaining about hotels, guesthouses, travel companies and more. We're not complaining. It's great to give us feedback about all these things, as it helps to work out which businesses care about their customers and which don't. However, as well as telling us, make sure you tell the **Vietnam National Administration of Tourism** (Map p96; ☎ 824 7652; www.hanoitourism.gov.vn; 3 Pho Le Lai); its Hanoi office is reasonably helpful and needs to know about the problems before it can do anything about them. Make a complaint here and in time it might well pressure the cowboys into cleaning up their act.

## HANOI IN...

### A Day

Begin with breakfast in an Old Quarter café before jumping on a *cyclo* to **Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum** (p99), where you might be lucky enough to catch a changing of the guard. Check out the surreal **museum** (p99) and the balancing act that is the **One Pillar Pagoda** (p100) before moving on to the **Temple of Literature** (p100). This is a great escape from the hustle and bustle of Hanoi and just opposite is **KOTO** (p111) on Van Mieu, an essential lunch stop as all proceeds from this great restaurant go towards helping street children. In the afternoon, it is time to take a serious look at the **Old Quarter** (p95), browsing its buildings, shops or bars to soak up the unique atmosphere. If you haven't already been tempted, stop for a *bia hoi* (draught beer) around sunset and watch Hanoi shift from work to play. Catch a performance of the wonderful **water puppets** (p119) before enjoying a local meal and some beers on nearby Pho Bao Khanh.

### Two Days

After the fun of day one, it is time to immerse yourself in some museums. Head into the suburbs to the excellent **Vietnam Museum of Ethnology** (p101) to discover the ethnic mosaic that makes up Vietnam today. Have a local lunch in **Nha Hang Lan Chin** (p118), tucked away next to the **Museum of Vietnamese Revolution** (p102) and hop across the road to the **History Museum** (p101). The building is stunning and the contents a fine introduction to 2000 years of highs and lows. Head back to the Old Quarter for a look at **Memorial House** (p102) and then kick back in a café and contemplate the next part of your journey.

## Telephone

For domestic telephone calls, the post offices throughout town are as good as anywhere. Guesthouses and internet cafés are also a convenient option for local calls within Hanoi. For international telephone calls, the cheapest option are guesthouses or internet cafés as they offer cheaper internet services. Even the post office is getting in on this game, so essentially calls are good value everywhere now.

## Tourist Information

The new **Tourist Information Center** (☎ 926 3366; www.vntourists.com; 46 Đ Le Loi) is a pretty slick operation with free information and plenty of handouts on hotels, restaurants and activities. However, it's privately-run and it also sells tours and the like.

Even though this is the capital of the country, forget anything really useful like a helpful government-run tourism office that dishes out free information. There is a tourist information office at Noi Bai International Airport these days, but beyond a few handouts it doesn't have much to offer.

The best source of tourism information in Hanoi, as in the rest of Vietnam, is asking around at different guesthouses, travel agencies and bars, and talking to your fellow travellers. See Internet Resources (p89) earlier for some recommended websites covering Hanoi.

## Travel Agencies

There are lots of travel agencies in Hanoi, both government-run and privately owned, that can book tours, provide cars and guides, issue air tickets and arrange visa extensions.

Several budget agencies also double as restaurant-cafés, which offer cheap eats, rooms for rent and internet access. However, there are so many clones these days that it is sometimes difficult to differentiate the good from the bad. In the old days, it was only Sinh Café that was copied, but these days most of the main operators have experienced the problem. Some places are blatant, some more subtle, but you should be able to gain some clues from the set-up of the office and the knowledge of the staff. The harder the sell, the more likely they are fly-by-night operators trying to make a quick buck. Check the address and website carefully to make sure you are buying the authentic product.

The majority of Hanoi's hotels also peddle tours, but it is not advisable to book trips through hotels: although the prices are roughly the same, booking directly with the tour operators will give a much better idea of what you'll get for your money.

There has been a torrent of complaints about various budget tour operators in Hanoi. The biggest issue seems to be the gap between what they promise and what they actually





| INFORMATION  |          |
|--|----------|
| Bookworm.....                                      | 1 D6     |
| British Council.....                               | 2 A4     |
| Cambodian Embassy.....                             | 3 D5     |
| Canadian Embassy.....                              | 4 B3     |
| Chinese Embassy.....                               | 5 B3     |
| DHL.....   | 6 C4     |
| French Embassy.....                                | 7 D5     |
| French Embassy Clinic.....                         | (see 7)  |
| German Embassy.....                                | 8 C4     |
| Immigration Police.....                            | 9 E5     |
| Lao Embassy.....                                   | 10 C6    |
| National Institute of Traditional<br>Medicine..... | 11 D6    |
| Philippines Embassy.....                           | 12 E6    |
| Singapore Embassy.....                             | 13 B3    |
| Thailand Embassy.....                              | 14 B4    |
| Vietnam-Korea Friendship<br>Clinic.....            | 15 B3    |
| SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES                                |          |
| Ambassadors' Pagoda.....                           | 16 C5    |
| Army Museum.....                                   | 17 C3    |
| Ba Dinh Square.....                                | 18 B2    |
| Botanical Gardens.....                             | 19 A2    |
| Cua Bac (Northern Gate of Old<br>Citadel).....     | 20 C2    |
| Cua Bac Church.....                                | 21 C1    |
| Cua Nam Market.....                                | 22 C4    |
| Fine Arts Museum.....                              | 23 B4    |
| Flag Tower.....                                    | 24 B3    |
| Hai Ba Trung Temple.....                           | 25 E7    |
| Ham Long Church.....                               | 26 E6    |
| Hanoi Foreign Language<br>College.....             | (see 28) |
| Hanoi University.....                              | 27 C8    |
| History Museum.....                                | 28 F5    |
| Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum<br>Complex Entrance.....     | 29 B3    |
| Ho Chi Minh Museum.....                            | 30 A3    |
| Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum.....                       | 31 B2    |
| Ho Chi Minh's Stilt House.....                     | 32 A2    |
| Hoa Binh Hotel.....                                | 33 E5    |
| Hoa Sua.....                                       | (see 52) |
| Lenin Park Main Gate.....                          | 34 C6    |
| Museum of Vietnamese<br>Revolution.....            | 35 F5    |
| One Pillar Pagoda.....                             | 36 A2    |
| Presidential Palace.....                           | 37 A2    |
| Quan Thanh Temple.....                             | 38 B1    |
| Revolutionary Museum.....                          | 39 F5    |
| Temple of Literature (Van<br>Mieu).....            | 40 B4    |
| Vu Doo Salon.....                                  | 41 B4    |
| SLEEPING   |          |
| Army Hotel.....                                    | 42 F5    |
| De Syloia Hotel.....                               | 43 E6    |
| Galaxy Hotel.....                                  | 44 D2    |
| Guoman Hotel.....                                  | 45 C5    |
| Hotel 30/4.....                                    | 46 C5    |
| Hotel Nikko.....                                   | 47 C6    |
| EATING   |          |
| Benkay Restaurant.....                             | (see 47) |
| Brothers Café.....                                 | 48 C4    |
| Com Chay Nang Tam.....                             | 49 D5    |
| Duong Thuy Khue (Specialty<br>Food Street).....    | 50 A1    |
| Emperor.....                                       | 51 F6    |
| Hoa Sua.....                                       | 52 D5    |
| Kinh Do Café.....                                  | 53 C4    |
| KOTO on Van Mieu.....                              | 54 B4    |
| Luna d'Autumno.....                                | 55 C4    |
| Maison Vanille.....                                | 56 E6    |
| Nam Phuong.....                                    | 57 E5    |
| P Cam Chi (Speciality Food<br>Street).....         | 58 C4    |
| P To Hien Thanh (Speciality<br>Food Street).....   | 59 D7    |
| Quan An Ngon.....                                  | 60 C4    |
| Restaurant 1,2,3.....                              | 61 E6    |
| San Ho Restaurant.....                             | 62 C5    |
| Seasons of Hanoi.....                              | 63 C1    |
| Van Anh.....                                       | (see 58) |
| Wild Lotus.....                                    | 64 D6    |
| Wild Rice.....                                     | 65 E6    |
| DRINKING   |          |
| Luna Lounge.....                                   | (see 55) |
| Nha Hang Lan Chin.....                             | (see 35) |
| ENTERTAINMENT                                      |          |
| Apocalypse Now.....                                | 66 A8    |
| Cay Cau.....                                       | (see 43) |
| Central Circus.....                                | 67 C6    |
| Megastar Cineplex.....                             | 68 D7    |
| Nam Phuong.....                                    | (see 57) |
| Seventeen Saloon.....                              | 69 C5    |
| SHOPPING   |          |
| Antique Shops.....                                 | 70 C6    |
| Craft Link.....                                    | 71 B4    |
| Hom Market.....                                    | 72 E6    |
| Ipa-Nima.....                                      | 73 E6    |
| Viet Art Centre.....                               | 74 C5    |
| TRANSPORT  |          |
| Kim Ma Bus Station.....                            | 75 A3    |
| Long Bien Bus Station.....                         | 76 E1    |
| Pacific Airlines.....                              | 77 C4    |

deliver. Competition is fierce and price-cutting among various tour operators has driven the cost of tours so low that in some cases it has become difficult to deliver.

You can buy a two-day/one-night, all-inclusive excursion to Halong Bay for less than US\$20, but do you really want to travel on a 45-seat bus and be herded en masse onto a boat to tour the bay and grottoes? Plus, you can't expect gourmet meals at this price. In the long run, the dollars saved will probably not be remembered as much as the experience itself. Each to their own, but if you buy the cheapest trip available it probably won't live up to expectations.

We suggest that you take time to seek out tour operators who stick to small groups and use their own vehicles and guides. New places open all the time, and existing places change, so the suggestions here are not exhaustive. Shop around and consider the following companies:

**A to Z Queen Café** (Map p96; ☎ 826 0860; www.queencafe.com.vn; 65 Hang Be) One of the original budget

companies offering tours to Halong Bay and the far north. Cheap trips at budget standards.

**ET Pumpkin** (Map p96; ☎ 926 0739; www.et-pumpkin.com; 89 Pho Ma May) Strange name, but there's nothing wrong with the service at this company. It offers tours throughout the north, and operates its own private carriage on the night train to Sapa.

**Ethnic Travel** (Map p96; ☎ 926 1951; www.ethnic-travel.com.vn; 35 Pho Hang Giay) One of the newer companies in the north, offering an innovative selection of adventures that also involve some public transport to meet the real Vietnamese. Plus Bai Tu Long Bay.

**Explorer Tours** (Map p96; ☎ 923 0713; www.explorer.com.vn; 85 Pho Hang Bo) This company has steadily moved upmarket and offers a good selection of tailored trips around the north.

**Free Wheelin Tours** (Map p96; ☎ 747 0545; www.freewheelin-tours.com; Pho Luong Ngoc Quyen) Best known for its adventurous motorbike tours (p491), this company also offers 4WD tours, local homestays and boat trips to Bai Tu Long Bay.

**Handspan Adventure Travel** (Map p96; ☎ 926 0581; www.handspan.com; 80 Pho Ma May) A deservedly popular company offering Halong Bay tours with some

kayaking, cruises into Bai Tu Long Bay and jeep tours in the northeast. This outfit also operates an office in Sapa for biking and hiking. The walk-in office is in the Tamarind Café.

**Ocean Tours** (Map p96; ☎ 926 1294; www.oceantours-vietnam.com; 7 Pho Dinh Liet) This operator has been earning a good name for itself by specialising in Halong Bay. Also operates the backpacker retreat Ocean Beach Resort (p147) at Cat Ba.

**ODC Travel** (Map p96; ☎ 824 3024; www.odctravel.com; Camellia Hotel, 13 Pho Luong Ngoc Quyen) Formerly Old Darling Café, this is one of the most established names in the business. It forsook the café business to concentrate on travel and it seems to have paid off, with very positive reviews for all its budget tours of the north.

**Sinh Café** (Map p96; ☎ 926 0646; www.sinhcafevn.com; 52 Pho Luong Ngoc Quyen) The original open tour bus operator, it remains one of the better options for travellers taking the long road south.

**Vega Travel** (Map p96; ☎ 926 2092; www.vega-travel.com; 24a Pho Hang Bac) Formerly known as Fansipan Tours, the company decided to change its name after as many as 10 copycats sprung up. Let's hope it sticks with Vega, as it has a good range of budget trips throughout the north.

For an extensive list of nationwide operators that also offer tours of Hanoi and northern Vietnam, see p490. For more on specialist companies offering motorbike tours of the north, see p491.

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Back in the bad old days, Hanoi used to be the hardest place to travel in Vietnam, then in the late 1990s things improved massively. More recently it has become the capital of hotel and tour scams in Vietnam, so be sure to keep your antennae up. We have heard several substantiated reports of verbal aggression and physical violence towards tourists when deciding against a hotel room or tour. Stay calm and back away slowly or things could quickly flare up. Some Western women have been hassled by young men around town who follow them home, so it pays to hit the town in larger numbers. Walking alone in well-lit areas of the Old Quarter is usually safe, but stay alert in the darker streets, particularly in the early hours of the morning. When getting from one part of town to the other at night, particularly from late-night spots, it is more sensible for solo women, and even men, to take a metered taxi or *xe om*.

## Scams

The biggest scams in town are inextricably linked. The taxi and minibus mafia at the airport shuttle unwitting tourists to the wrong hotel. Invariably, the hotel has appropriated the name of another popular property and will then attempt to appropriate as much of your money as possible. For more on the airport-hotel scam and how to avoid it, see the boxed texts on p109 and p124.

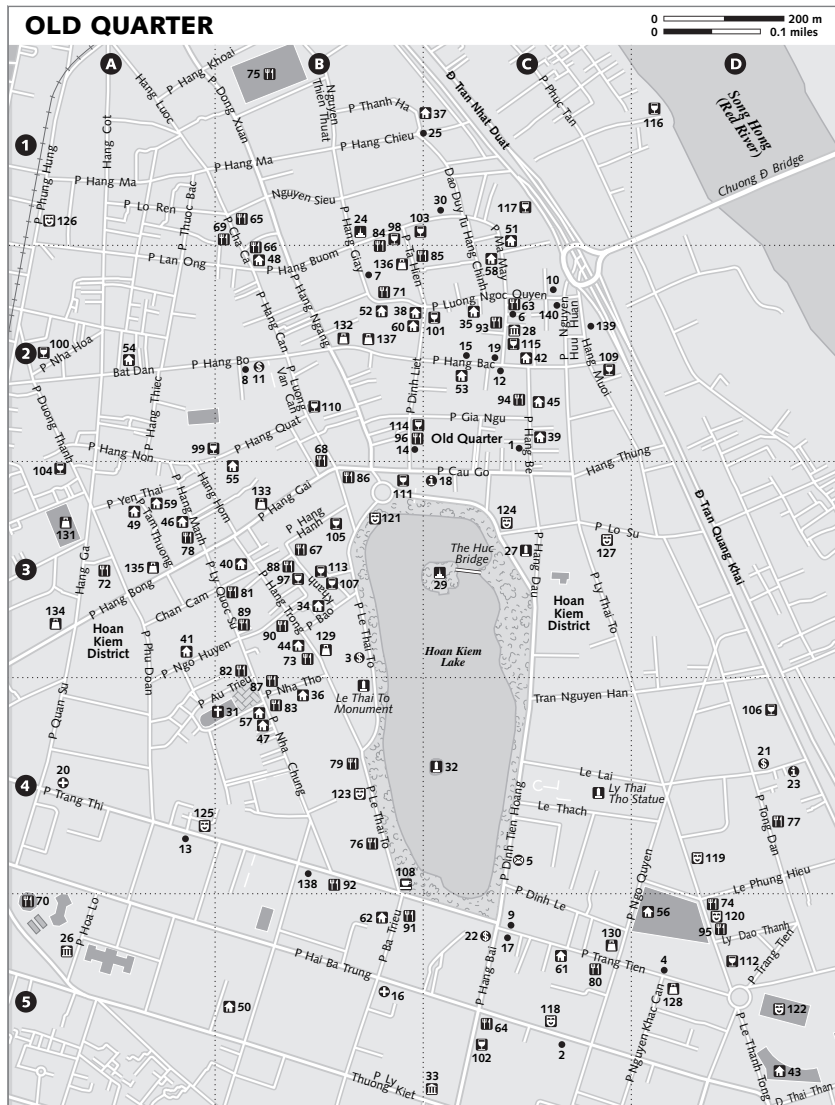
Gay men should be aware of a scam going on around the Hoan Kiem Lake. It starts with a friendly stranger approaching a foreigner and suggesting a night out. This leads to a karaoke bar and a private room for a few drinks and some songs. The bill arrives and it's miraculously US\$100 or more. The situation deteriorates from here and ends in extortion. Be careful and follow your instincts. Subtle variations on this theme involving Western men and local women have been going on for years, and few 'victims' think of it as a scam.

## SIGHTS Old Quarter

This is the Asia we dreamed of from afar. Steeped in history, pulsating with life, bubbling with commerce, buzzing with motorbikes and rich in exotic scents, the Old Quarter is Hanoi's historic heart. The streets are narrow and congested, and crossing the road is an art form, but remember to look up as well as down, as there is some elegant old architecture in and among the chaos. Hawkers pound the streets, sizzling and smoking baskets hiding a cheap meal for the locals. *Pho* stalls and *bia hoi* dens hug every corner, resonant with the sound of gossip and laughter. Modern yet medieval, there is no better way to spend time in Hanoi than walking the streets, soaking up the sights, sounds and smells.

Home to a thousand years of history, the commercial quarter of the city evolved alongside the Red River and the smaller To Lich River, which once flowed through the city centre in an intricate network of canals and waterways, teeming with boats. Waters could rise as high as 8m during the monsoon. Dikes were constructed to protect the city and these can still be seen along Tran Quang Khai.

In the 13th century Hanoi's 36 guilds established themselves here, each taking a different street – hence the original name '36 Streets'. Today, there are more than 50 streets in today's Old Quarter. *Hang* means



‘merchandise’ and is usually followed by the name of the product that was traditionally sold in that street. Thus, Pho Hang Gai translates as ‘Silk Street’ (see the boxed text, p98, for the rest); these days the street name may not indicate what’s sold there, otherwise there would be lots of Pho Hang Du Lich (Tourism Streets).

Exploring the maze of back streets is fascinating: some streets open up while others narrow into a warren of alleys. The area is known for its tunnel (or tube) houses – so called because of their narrow frontages and long rooms. These tunnel houses were developed to avoid taxes based on the width of their street frontage. By feudal law, houses were

|  |                                     |  |  |
|--|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>INFORMATION</b>                                   |                                     | Manh Dung Guesthouse.....49 A3                   | Bia Hoi 68 Hang                                  |
| A to Z Queen Café.....1 C2                           | Melia Hotel.....50 B5               | Quat.....99 A2                                   | Quat.....99 A2                                   |
| American Club.....2 C5                               | Old Street Hotel.....51 C1          | Bia Hoi Ha Noi.....100 A2                        | Bia Hoi Ha Noi.....100 A2                        |
| ANZ Bank.....3 B3                                    | Prince Hotel.....52 B2              | Bia Hoi Junction.....101 C2                      | Bia Hoi Junction.....101 C2                      |
| British Embassy.....(see 16)                         | Queen Hotel.....53 C2               | Bia Hoi Viet Ha.....102 C5                       | Bia Hoi Viet Ha.....102 C5                       |
| Centre Culturelle Française de Hanoi.....4 D5        | Quoc Hoa Hotel.....54 A2            | Dragonfly.....103 B1                             | Dragonfly.....103 B1                             |
| Domestic Post Office.....5 C4                        | Reflet Darling Café.....55 B3       | Finnegan’s Irish Pub.....104 A3                  | Finnegan’s Irish Pub.....104 A3                  |
| ET Pumpkin.....6 C2                                  | Softel Metropole Hotel.....56 D5    | Funky Monkey.....105 B3                          | Funky Monkey.....105 B3                          |
| Ethnic Travel.....7 B2                               | Spring Hotel.....57 B4              | Gambrinus.....106 D4                             | Gambrinus.....106 D4                             |
| Explorer Tours.....8 B2                              | Sunshine Hotel.....58 C2            | GC Pub.....107 B3                                | GC Pub.....107 B3                                |
| Foreign Language Bookshop.....9 C5                   | Thu Giang Guesthouse.....59 A3      | Hapro.....108 B4                                 | Hapro.....108 B4                                 |
| Free Wheelin’ Tours.....10 C2                        | Thuy Nga Guesthouse.....60 B2       | Highway 4.....109 C2                             | Highway 4.....109 C2                             |
| Handspan Adventure Travel.....(see 93)               | Trang Tien Hotel.....61 C5          | Jazz Club By Quyen Van Minh.....110 B2           | Jazz Club By Quyen Van Minh.....110 B2           |
| <b>Industrial &amp; Commercial Bank</b>              | Viet Fun Hotel.....(see 58)         | Le Pub.....(see 45)                              | Le Pub.....(see 45)                              |
| International Post Office.....(see 5)                | Zephyr Hotel.....62 B5              | Legends Beer.....111 B3                          | Legends Beer.....111 B3                          |
| Love Planet.....12 C2                                | <b>EATING</b>                       | Met Pub.....(see 56)                             | Met Pub.....(see 56)                             |
| National Library & Archives.....13 A4                | 69 Bar-Restaurant.....63 C2         | My Pub.....112 D5                                | My Pub.....112 D5                                |
| New Zealand Embassy.....(see 74)                     | Al Fresco’s.....64 C5               | Polite Pub.....113 B3                            | Polite Pub.....113 B3                            |
| ODC Travel.....(see 35)                              | Ba Mien.....(see 43)                | Quan Bia Minh.....114 B2                         | Quan Bia Minh.....114 B2                         |
| Ocean Tours.....14 B2                                | Baan Thai Restaurant.....65 B1      | Red Beer.....115 C2                              | Red Beer.....115 C2                              |
| Sinh Café.....15 C2                                  | Baguette & Chocolat.....66 B2       | Solace.....116 D1                                | Solace.....116 D1                                |
| SOS International Clinic.....16 B5                   | Café des Arts.....67 B3             | Thuy Ta Café.....(see 121)                       | Thuy Ta Café.....(see 121)                       |
| Thang Long Bookshop.....17 C5                        | Café Pho Co.....68 B2               | Toilet Pub.....117 C1                            | Toilet Pub.....117 C1                            |
| Tourist Information Center.....18 C3                 | Cha Ca La Vong.....69 B1            | <b>ENTERTAINMENT</b>                             | <b>ENTERTAINMENT</b>                             |
| Vega Travel.....19 C2                                | Citimart.....70 A5                  | Centre Culturelle Française de Hanoi.....(see 4) | Centre Culturelle Française de Hanoi.....(see 4) |
| Viet Duc Hospital.....20 A4                          | Club Opera.....(see 95)             | Cinematheque.....118 C5                          | Cinematheque.....118 C5                          |
| Vietcombank.....21 D4                                | Culi Café.....71 B2                 | Club 51.....119 D4                               | Club 51.....119 D4                               |
| Vietcombank.....22 C5                                | Cyclo Bar & Restaurant.....72 A3    | Club Opera.....120 D5                            | Club Opera.....120 D5                            |
| Vietnam National Administration of Tourism.....23 D4 | Dakshin.....73 B3                   | Dinh Lang Restaurant.....121 B3                  | Dinh Lang Restaurant.....121 B3                  |
| <b>SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES</b>                       | Diva.....74 D5                      | Hanoi Opera House.....122 D5                     | Hanoi Opera House.....122 D5                     |
| Bach Ma Temple.....24 B1                             | Dong Xuan Market.....75 B1          | I-Box.....123 B4                                 | I-Box.....123 B4                                 |
| Cua O Quan Chuong (Old East Gate).....25 C1          | Fanny Ice Cream.....76 B4           | Municipal Water Puppet Theatre.....124 C3        | Municipal Water Puppet Theatre.....124 C3        |
| Dong Xuan Market.....(see 75)                        | Fimarm.....77 D4                    | New Century Nightclub.....125 A4                 | New Century Nightclub.....125 A4                 |
| Hoa Lo Prison Museum.....26 A5                       | Golden Land Restaurant.....(see 66) | Piano Bar.....126 A1                             | Piano Bar.....126 A1                             |
| Martyrs’ Monument.....27 C3                          | Green Tangerine.....(see 1)         | R&R Tavern.....127 C3                            | R&R Tavern.....127 C3                            |
| Memorial House.....28 C2                             | Hanoi Garden.....78 A3              | Terrace Bar.....(see 95)                         | Terrace Bar.....(see 95)                         |
| Ngoc Son Temple.....29 C3                            | Intimex.....79 B4                   | <b>SHOPPING</b>                                  | <b>SHOPPING</b>                                  |
| QT Salon.....(see 79)                                | Kem Trang Tien.....80 C5            | A Gallery.....(see 130)                          | A Gallery.....(see 130)                          |
| SF Salon & Spa.....30 C1                             | La.....81 B3                        | Chi Vang.....128 D5                              | Chi Vang.....128 D5                              |
| St Joseph Cathedral.....31 B4                        | La Place.....82 B3                  | Dome.....129 B3                                  | Dome.....129 B3                                  |
| Thap Rua (Tortoise Tower).....32 C4                  | La Salsa.....83 B4                  | Gallery Huong Xuyen.....130 C5                   | Gallery Huong Xuyen.....130 C5                   |
| Women’s Museum.....33 C5                             | Ladybird Restaurant.....84 B1       | Hadong Silk.....(see 133)                        | Hadong Silk.....(see 133)                        |
| <b>SLEEPING</b>                                      | Le Beaulieu Restaurant.....(see 56) | Hang Da Market.....131 A3                        | Hang Da Market.....131 A3                        |
| Artist Hotel.....(see 118)                           | Little Hanoi 1.....85 B2            | Hanoi Contemporary Art Gallery.....(see 130)     | Hanoi Contemporary Art Gallery.....(see 130)     |
| Bao Khanh Hotel.....34 B3                            | Little Hanoi 2.....86 B3            | Hanoi Gallery.....132 B2                         | Hanoi Gallery.....132 B2                         |
| Camellia Hotel.....35 C2                             | Mediterraneo.....(see 83)           | Khai Silk.....133 B3                             | Khai Silk.....133 B3                             |
| Church Hotel.....36 B4                               | Moca Café.....87 B4                 | Mai Gallery.....134 A3                           | Mai Gallery.....134 A3                           |
| City Gate Hotel.....37 B1                            | Old Hanoi.....(see 19)              | Pearl Ha.....135 A3                              | Pearl Ha.....135 A3                              |
| Classic Hotel.....38 B2                              | Pane E Vino.....(see 73)            | Shoe Market.....(see 27)                         | Shoe Market.....(see 27)                         |
| Classic Street Hotel.....39 C2                       | Pepperoni’s Pizza & Café.....88 B3  | Things of Substance.....(see 36)                 | Things of Substance.....(see 36)                 |
| Golden Lotus Hotel.....40 B3                         | Pepperoni’s Pizza & Café.....89 B3  | Viet Hien.....136 B2                             | Viet Hien.....136 B2                             |
| Hanoi Backpackers Hostel.....41 A3                   | Pho 24.....(see 22)                 | Vietnamese House.....137 B2                      | Vietnamese House.....137 B2                      |
| Hanoi Elegance Hotel.....42 C2                       | Phuket.....90 B3                    | <b>TRANSPORT</b>                                 | <b>TRANSPORT</b>                                 |
| Heart Hotel.....(see 105)                            | Restaurant Bobby Chinn.....91 B5    | Airport Minibus.....138 B4                       | Airport Minibus.....138 B4                       |
| Hilton Hanoi Opera.....43 D5                         | Saigon Sakura.....92 B4             | Buffalo Tours.....139 C2                         | Buffalo Tours.....139 C2                         |
| Ho Guom Hotel.....44 B3                              | Spices Garden.....(see 56)          | Cuong’s Motorbike Adventure.....140 C2           | Cuong’s Motorbike Adventure.....140 C2           |
| Hoa Binh Palace Hotel.....45 C2                      | Stop Café.....(see 67)              | Vietnam Airlines.....(see 138)                   | Vietnam Airlines.....(see 138)                   |
| Hong Ngoc Hotel 1.....46 A3                          | Tamarind Café.....93 C2             |  |  |
| Hotel Thien Trang.....47 B4                          | Tandour.....94 C2                   |  |  |
| Majestic Salute Hotel.....48 B2                      | The Restaurant.....95 D5            |  |  |
|  | Whole Earth Restaurant.....96 B2    |  |  |
|  | <b>DRINKING</b>                     |  |  |
|  | Amazon Bar.....97 B3                |  |  |
|  | Bar Le Maquis.....98 B1             |  |  |

## OLD QUARTER STREET NAMES

| street name | description        | street name | description        |
|-------------|--------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| Bat Dan     | wooden bowls       | Hang Giay   | paper or shoes     |
| Bat Su      | china bowls        | Hang Hanh   | onions             |
| Cha Ca      | roasted fish       | Hang Hom    | cases              |
| Chan Cam    | string instruments | Hang Huong  | incense            |
| Cho Gao     | rice market        | Hang Khay   | trays              |
| Gia Ngu     | fishermen          | Hang Khoai  | sweet potatoes     |
| Hai Tuong   | sandals            | Hang Luoc   | combs              |
| Hang Bac    | silversmiths       | Hang Ma     | votive papers      |
| Hang Be     | rafts              | Hang Mam    | pickled fish       |
| Hang Bo     | baskets            | Hang Manh   | bamboo screens     |
| Hang Bong   | cotton             | Hang Muoi   | salt               |
| Hang Buom   | sails              | Hang Ngang  | transversal street |
| Hang But    | brushes            | Hang Non    | hats               |
| Hang Ca     | fish               | Hang Phen   | alum               |
| Hang Can    | scales             | Hang Quat   | fans               |
| Hang Chai   | bottles            | Hang Ruoi   | clam worms         |
| Hang Chi    | threads            | Hang Than   | charcoal           |
| Hang Chieu  | mats               | Hang Thiec  | tin                |
| Hang Chinh  | jars               | Hang Thung  | barrels            |
| Hang Cot    | bamboo lattices    | Hang Tre    | bamboo             |
| Hang Da     | leather            | Hang Trong  | drums              |
| Hang Dao    | (silk) dyers       | Hang Vai    | cloth              |
| Hang Dau    | beans or oils      | Lo Ren      | blacksmiths        |
| Hang Dieu   | pipes              | Lo Su       | coffins            |
| Hang Dong   | copper             | Ma May      | rattan             |
| Hang Duong  | sugar              | Ngo Gach    | bricks             |
| Hang Ga     | chicken            | Thuoc Bac   | herbal medicines   |
| Hang Gai    | silk               |             |                    |

also limited to two storeys and, out of respect for the king, could not be taller than the Royal Palace. These days there are taller buildings, but no real high-rise buildings.

Opportunities to dispense with your dong are endless. As you wander around you'll find clothes, cosmetics, fake sunglasses, luxury food, T-shirts, musical instruments, plumbing supplies, herbal medicines, jewellery, religious offerings, spices, woven mats and much, much more (see Shopping, p119 for details).

Some of the specialised streets include Pho Hang Quat, with its red candlesticks, funeral boxes, flags and temple items; and the more glamorous Pho Hang Gai, with its silk, embroidery, lacquerware, paintings and water puppets – silk sleeping-bag liners and elegant *ao dai* (the national dress of Vietnam) are popular here. Finally, no trip to the Old Quarter would be complete without a visit to

the **Dong Xuan Market** (Map p96; cnr Pho Hang Khoai & Pho Dong Xuan), rebuilt after a fire in 1994.

A stroll through the historic Old Quarter can last anywhere from an hour to the better part of a day, depending on your pace. However long, or whatever detours you might take, the Walking Tour (p105) will provide you with a heady dose of Vietnamese culture, lots of shopping opportunities and some insight into the city's long history.

### Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum Complex

This is the holiest of the holies for many Vietnamese. To the west of the Old Quarter, the **Ho Chi Minh mausoleum complex** (Map pp92-3; entrance cnr Pho Ngoc Ha & Pho Doi Can) is an important place of pilgrimage for many Vietnamese, combining the secular and the spiritual. A traffic-free area of parks, monuments, memorials and pagodas, it's usually crowded with groups of all ages who have come to pay their respects.

### HO CHI MINH'S MAUSOLEUM

In the tradition of Lenin and Stalin before him – and Mao afterwards – **Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum** (Map pp92-3; admission free; ☎ 8-11am Tue-Thu, Sat & Sun Dec-Sep, last entry usually 10.15am) is a monumental marble edifice that is a mecca for many Vietnamese. Contrary to his desire for a simple cremation, the mausoleum was constructed of native materials gathered from all over Vietnam between 1973 and 1975. The roof and peristyle are said to evoke either a traditional communal house or a lotus flower, though to many tourists it looks like a concrete cubicle with columns. Set deep in the bowels of the building in a glass sarcophagus is the body of Ho Chi Minh. The mausoleum is closed for about three months each year while Ho Chi Minh's embalmed corpse goes to Russia for maintenance. Some sceptics have suggested Madame Tussaud's has the contract these days.

The queue, which moves quite quickly, usually snakes for several hundred metres to the mausoleum entrance itself. Inside, more guards, regaled in snowy-white military uniforms, are posted at intervals of five paces, giving an eerily authoritarian aspect to the slightly macabre spectacle of the embalmed body with its wispy white hair.

The following rules are strictly applied to all visitors to the mausoleum:

- People wearing shorts, tank tops and so on will not be admitted.
- Nothing (including day packs, cameras and mobiles) can be taken inside.
- Maintain a respectful demeanour at all times: no talking or sniggering.
- For obvious reasons of decorum, photography is absolutely prohibited inside the mausoleum.
- It is forbidden to put your hands in your pockets.
- Hats must be taken off inside the mausoleum building.

Most of the visitors are Vietnamese and it's interesting to watch their reactions. Most show deep respect and admiration for Ho Chi Minh, who is honoured for his role as the liberator of the Vietnamese people from colonialism, as much as for his communist ideology. This view is reinforced by Vietnam's educational system, which emphasises Ho's deeds and accomplishments.

If you're lucky, you'll catch the changing of the guard outside Ho's mausoleum – the

pomp and ceremony displayed here rivals the British equivalent at Buckingham Palace.

Photography is permitted outside the building but not inside and visitors must leave their bags and mobile phones at a counter just inside the entrance.

### HO CHI MINH'S STILT HOUSE & THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE

Behind Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum is a **stilt house** (Nha San Bac Ho; Map pp92-3; admission 5000đ; ☎ 8-11am & 2-4pm), where Ho lived on and off from 1958 to 1969. The house is an upmarket interpretation of traditional rural dwelling, and has been preserved just as Ho left it. It's set in a well-tended garden next to a carp-filled pond. Just how much time he actually spent here is questionable – the house would have been a tempting target for US bombers had it been suspected that Ho was hanging out here.

In stark contrast to the understated stilt house is the imposing **Presidential Palace** (Map pp92-3), a beautifully restored colonial building constructed in 1906 as the Palace of the Governor General of Indochina. It is now used for official receptions and isn't open to the public. There is a combined entrance gate to the stilt house and Presidential Palace grounds on Pho Ong Ich Kiem, inside the mausoleum complex; when the main mausoleum entrance is closed, enter from Đ Hung Vuong near the palace building.

### HO CHI MINH MUSEUM

The two separate sections of the **Ho Chi Minh Museum** (Bao Tang Ho Chi Minh; Map pp92-3; admission 5000đ; ☎ 8-11am & 1.30-4.30pm Tue-Thu, Sat & Sun) relate to the past and future. Start in the past and move to the future by walking in a clockwise direction downwards through the museum, starting from the right-hand side of the top of the stairs. The modern displays all have messages, such as 'peace', 'happiness' and 'freedom'.

It's probably worth taking an English-speaking guide, since some of the symbolism is hard to interpret. The 1958 Ford Edsel bursting through the wall – a US commercial failure to symbolise its military failure – is a knockout. All in all, it's slightly surreal, but worth a visit if time allows.

The museum is the huge cement structure next to Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum. Photography is forbidden and, upon entry, you must leave bags and cameras at reception.



## ONE PILLAR PAGODA

A Hanoi landmark, the **One Pillar Pagoda** (Chua Mot Cot; Map pp92-3; Pho Ong Ich Kiem) was built by the Emperor Ly Thai Tong, who ruled from 1028 to 1054. According to the annals, the heirless emperor dreamed that he had met Quan The Am Bo Tat, the Goddess of Mercy, who, while seated on a lotus flower, handed him a male child. Ly Thai Tong then married a young peasant girl and had a son and heir by her. As a way of expressing his gratitude for this event, he constructed this pagoda in 1049.

The delicate One Pillar Pagoda, built of wood on a single stone pillar, is designed to resemble a lotus blossom, the symbol of purity, rising out of a sea of sorrow. One of the last (malicious and pointless) acts of the French before quitting Hanoi in 1954 was to destroy the original One Pillar Pagoda; the structure was rebuilt by the new government. The pagoda is between the mausoleum and the museum.

## Temples & Pagodas

### TEMPLE OF LITERATURE

A rare example of well-preserved traditional Vietnamese architecture, the **Temple of Literature** (Van Mieu; Map pp92-3; ☎ 845 2917; Pho Quoc Tu Giam; admission 5000d; 🕒 8am-5pm) is a relaxing retreat from the noisy streets of Hanoi. If you only plan to visit one temple in Hanoi, be sure to make it this one.

It was founded in 1070 by Emperor Ly Thanh Tong, who dedicated it to Confucius (Khong Tu) in order to honour scholars and men of literary accomplishment. Vietnam's first university was established here in 1076 to educate the sons of mandarins. In 1484 Emperor Le Thanh Tong ordered that stelae be erected to record the names, places of birth and achievements of men who received doctorates in triennial examinations held from 1442. Although 116 examinations were held between 1442 and 1778, when the practice was discontinued, only 82 stelae are extant. In 1802 Emperor Gia Long transferred the National University to his new capital, Huế. Major renovations were carried out here in 1920 and 1956.

The Temple of Literature is made up of five separate courtyards. The central pathways and gates between them were reserved for the king. The walkways on one side were for the use of administrative mandarins, while those on the other side were for military mandarins.

The main entrance is preceded by a gate, on which there's an inscription requesting that visitors dismount their horses before entering. Make sure you do. Khué Van Pavilion, at the far side of the second courtyard, was constructed in 1802 and is a fine example of Vietnamese architecture. The 82 stelae, considered to be the most precious artefacts in the temple, are arrayed to either side of the third enclosure; each one sits on a stone tortoise.

The secular intrudes on the spiritual these days, with a host of souvenir shops flanking the Thai Hoc courtyard. Everything from postcards to retired water puppets are available but bargain hard as prices are high.

The Temple of Literature is about 2km west of Hoan Kiem Lake.

### NGOC SON TEMPLE

Founded in the 18th century, **Ngoc Son Temple** (Jade Mountain Temple; Map p96; admission 2000d; 🕒 8am-5pm) is on an island in the northern part of Hoan Kiem Lake. Surrounded by water and shaded by trees, it is a delightfully quiet place to escape the bustle of Hanoi. The temple is dedicated to the scholar Van Xuong, General Tran Hung Dao, who defeated the Mongols in the 13th century, and La To, the patron saint of physicians.

Ngoc Son Temple is reached via the red The Huc (Rising Sun) Bridge, constructed in 1885. The nearby **Martyrs' Monument** was erected to those who died fighting for Vietnam's independence.

### AMBASSADORS' PAGODA

The official centre of Buddhism in Hanoi, the **Ambassadors' Pagoda** (Chua Quan Su; Map pp92-3; ☎ 825 2427; 73 Pho Quan Su) attracts quite a crowd on holidays. During the 17th century there was a guesthouse here for the ambassadors of Buddhist countries. Today there are about a dozen monks and nuns based at the Ambassadors' Pagoda. Next to the pagoda is a shop selling Buddhist ritual objects.

The Ambassadors' Pagoda is located between Pho Ly Thuong Kiet and Pho Tran Hung Dao.

### BACH MA TEMPLE

Nestled in a corner of the Old Quarter, the small **Bach Ma Temple** (Map p96; cnr Pho Hang Buom & Pho Hang Gai) is the oldest temple in the city. It was built by King Ly Thai To to honour

a white horse that guided him to the site to construct his city walls. The pagoda includes a statue of the legendary white horse, as well as a beautiful red-lacquered funeral palanquin.

### HAI BA TRUNG TEMPLE

Two kilometres south of Hoan Kiem Lake, this **temple** (Map pp92-3; Pho Tho Lao) was founded in 1142. A statue shows the two Trung sisters (who lived in the 1st century AD) kneeling with their arms raised in the air, as if they are addressing a crowd. Some say the statue shows the sisters, who had been proclaimed the queens of the Vietnamese, about to dive into a river. They are said to have drowned themselves rather than surrender following their defeat at the hands of the Chinese.

### QUAN THANH TEMPLE

Shaded by huge trees, **Quan Thanh Temple** (Map pp92-3) was established during the Ly dynasty (1010-1225) and was dedicated to Tran Vo (God of the North), whose symbols of power were the tortoise and the snake. A bronze statue and bell date from 1677. The temple is on the shores of Truc Bach Lake, near the intersection of Đ Thanh Nien and Pho Quan Thanh.

### TAY HO PAGODA

The most popular spot for worship in Hanoi is at **Tay Ho Pagoda** (Map pp88-9; Pho Tay Ho). Throngs of people come here on the first and 15th day of each lunar month in the hope of receiving good fortune. The entrance includes a colourful lane of stalls selling temple offerings and food, while a line of good fresh seafood restaurants fronts the lake. It's a great place to watch the world go by.

### TRAN QUOC PAGODA

One of the oldest in Vietnam, **Tran Quoc Pagoda** (Map pp88-9) is on the eastern shore of Ho Tay, just off Đ Thanh Nien, which divides Ho Tay from Truc Bach Lake. A stele here, dating from 1639, tells the history of this site. The pagoda was rebuilt in the 15th century and again in 1842. There are a number of monks' funerary monuments in the garden.

## Museums

It's worth noting that in addition to the usual two-hour lunch break, most of the museums in Hanoi are closed on Monday.

## VIETNAM MUSEUM OF ETHNOLOGY

The Musée de l'Homme in Paris helped design the wonderful **Vietnam Museum of Ethnology** (Map p126; ☎ 756 2193; Đ Nguyen Van Huyen; admission 20,000d; 🕒 8.30am-5.30pm Tue-Sun). It features a fascinating collection of art and everyday objects gathered from Vietnam and its diverse tribal people.

The museum has excellent maps and the displays are well labelled in Vietnamese, French and English. Interesting sections portray a typical village market, the making of conical hats, and a Tay shamanic ceremony, while videos show the real-life contexts. There are fabulous displays of weaving and fabric motifs. Visitors can also enter a traditional Black Thai house reconstructed within the museum, and there are outdoor exhibits in the landscaped grounds. Ede, H'mong and Jarai houses are popular places to pose for wedding photos: quite a surreal sight. There are often special exhibitions, including the current display on life in the early 1980s under the coupon system. This could become a permanent feature, as it is so well presented and surprisingly honest about the hardships of life at the time.

A craft shop – affiliated with Craft Link, which is a fair-trade organisation – sells books, beautiful postcards, and arts and crafts from ethnic communities.

The museum is quite a way from central Hanoi, but it shouldn't be missed.

## Getting There & Away

The museum is in the Cau Giay district, about 7km from the city centre. A good way to get here is by rented bicycle (30 minutes). If you're short of time or energy, an air-con metered taxi costs around 40,000d each way. The cheapest way to get here is to take local bus 14 (3500d) from Hoan Kiem Lake and get off at the junction between Đ Hoang Quoc Viet and Đ Nguyen Van Huyen.

## HISTORY MUSEUM

A must for the architecture more than the collection, the **History Museum** (Bao Tang Lich Su; Map pp92-3; 1 Pho Trang Tien; admission 15,000d; 🕒 8-11.30am & 1.30-4.30pm Tue-Sun) was formerly home to the École Française d'Extrême Orient in Vietnam. It is an elegant, ochre-coloured structure built between 1925 and 1932. French architect Ernest Hebrard was among the first in Vietnam to incorporate a blend of Chinese and French design elements in his creations, and this



particular building remains one of Hanoi's most stunning architectural showpieces.

Collections here cover the ups more than the downs of Vietnamese history. Highlights include some excellent bronzes from the Dong Son culture (3rd century BC to 3rd century AD) and some striking Hindu statuary from the Khmer and Champa kingdoms. More recent history is a little one-sided and includes the struggle against the French and the story of the Communist Party.

### MUSEUM OF VIETNAMESE REVOLUTION

A must for all budding revolutionaries, the history of the Vietnamese Revolution is enthusiastically presented in this **museum** (Bao Tang Cach Mang; Map pp92-3; 216 Pho Tran Quang Khai; admission 10,000đ; ☎ 8-11.45am & 1.30-4.15pm Tue-Sun). It's diagonally across the road from the History Museum.

### MEMORIAL HOUSE

It is worth making a detour to this delightful **house** (Map p96; 87 Pho Ma May; admission 5000đ; ☎ 9-11.30am & 2-5pm), north of Hoan Kiem Lake in the Old Quarter. This thoughtfully restored traditional Chinese-style dwelling is sparsely but beautifully decorated, and offers a bygone glimpse into the lives of local merchants in the Old Quarter. The restoration of the house was carried out in 1999 in cooperation with the city of Toulouse, France. While there are many such living museums in Hoi An, there is nothing else like this in Hanoi.

### FINE ARTS MUSEUM

The former French Ministry of Information is home to Hanoi's **Fine Arts Museum** (Bao Tang My Thuat; Map pp92-3; 66 Pho Nguyen Thai Hoc; admission 10,000đ; ☎ 9.15am-5pm Tue-Sun). The collection here includes some very intricate sculptures, paintings, lacquerware, ceramics and other traditional Vietnamese fine arts. It's a good starting point for anyone seriously considering investing in Vietnamese art. Reproductions of antiques are on sale here, but be sure to ask for a certificate to clear these goods through customs when you leave Vietnam.

The Fine Arts Museum is on the corner of Pho Cao Ba Quat, across the street from the northern wall of the Temple of Literature.

### WOMEN'S MUSEUM

There are some engaging displays in the worthy **Women's Museum** (Bao Tang Phu Nu; Map p96;

36 Pho Ly Thuong Kiet; admission 20,000đ; ☎ 8am-4pm). The inevitable tribute to women soldiers is balanced by some great exhibits from the international women's movement protesting the American War. And there's much more in terms of cultural and political information. The 4th floor includes different costumes worn by the women of the ethnic-minority groups, and examples of tribal basketware and fabric motifs. This is one place where many of the exhibits have multilingual explanations.

### ARMY MUSEUM

Easy to spot thanks to a large collection of weaponry out front, the **Army Museum** (Bao Tang Quan Doi; Map pp92-3; Pho Dien Bien Phu; admission 20,000đ; ☎ 8-11.30am & 1.30-4.30pm Tue-Sun) displays Soviet and Chinese equipment alongside French- and US-made weapons captured during years of warfare. The centrepiece is a Soviet-built MiG-21 jet fighter, triumphant amid the wreckage of French aircraft downed at Dien Bien Phu, and a US F-111. The displays include scale models of various epic battles from the long military history of Vietnam, including Dien Bien Phu and the capture of Saigon.

Next to the Army Museum is the hexagonal Flag Tower, which has become one of the symbols of Hanoi. Some museum guards may offer to show you this tower, but will then ask for US\$10 to pay for the privilege.

### HOA LO PRISON MUSEUM

This thought-provoking site is all that remains of the former **Ho Lo Prison** (Map p96; ☎ 824 6358; 1 Pho Hoa Lo, cnr Pho Hai Ba Trung; admission 5000đ; ☎ 8-11.30am & 1.30-4.30pm Tue-Sun), ironically nicknamed the 'Hanoi Hilton' by US POWs during the American War. Those incarcerated at Hoa Lo included Pete Peterson, who later became the first US Ambassador to a unified Vietnam in 1995, and Senator John McCain.

The vast prison complex was built by the French in 1896. Originally intended to house around 450 inmates, records indicate that by the 1930s there were close to 2000 prisoners. Much of the prison was razed to make room for the Hanoi Towers skyscraper, though the section at the front of the site has been thoughtfully preserved and restored as a museum – look for the sign over the gate reading 'Maison Centrale'. There are some English and French labels corresponding with the

displays, and it is possible to find an English-speaking guide on site.

The bulk of the exhibits here relate to the prison's use up to the mid-1950s, focusing on the Vietnamese struggle for independence from France. Notable gruesome exhibits in the dark chambers include an ominous French guillotine that was used to behead Vietnamese revolutionaries during the colonial period, and the fetters with which prisoners were chained to the bunks. Even allowing for the propaganda, it looks like the treatment of Americans by the Vietnamese was infinitely better than that of Vietnamese nationalists by the French.

There are also mug shots on display of Americans and Vietnamese who served time at Hoa Lo. Missing in Action (MIA) teams continue to search for remains of missing US air personnel all over Vietnam.

### Lakes

#### HOAN KIEM LAKE

The epicentre of old Hanoi, **Hoan Kiem Lake** (Map p96) is an enchanting body of water. Legend has it that, in the mid-15th century, Heaven sent Emperor Le Thai To (formerly Le Loi) a magical sword, which he used to drive the Chinese out of Vietnam. One day after the war he happened upon a giant golden tortoise swimming on the surface of the water; the creature grabbed the sword and disappeared into the depths of the lake. Since that time, the lake has been known as Ho Hoan Kiem (Lake of the Restored Sword) because the tortoise restored the sword to its divine owners.

**Ngoc Son Temple** (p100) sits on an island near the northern end of Hoan Kiem Lake. The ramshackle **Thap Rua** (Tortoise Tower),

on an islet near the southern end of the lake, is topped with a red star and is often used as an emblem of Hanoi. Early risers should make for the lake, as every morning around 6am local residents can be seen doing their traditional t'ai chi on the shore. It's a graceful sight, plus there are joggers and games of badminton.

#### HO TAY (WEST LAKE)

The largest lake in Hanoi – about 13km in circumference – the shores of **Ho Tay** (Map pp88-9) are fast developing a reputation as a desirable place to live for those that can afford the luxury villas. To the south of the lake, along Đ Thuy Khue, there's a string of popular seafood restaurants (p116) that are *de rigueur* for a local night out. To the east are some luxury hotels and an emerging enclave of restaurants, bars and boutiques. The rest is mainly residential.

Two legends explain the origins of Ho Tay, which is also known as the Lake of Mist and the Big Lake. According to one legend, Ho Tay was created when the Dragon King drowned an evil nine-tailed fox in his lair, which was in a forest on this site. Another legend relates that in the 11th century a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, Khong Lo, rendered a great service to the emperor of China, who rewarded him with a vast quantity of bronze from which he cast into a huge bell. The sound of the bell could be heard all the way to China, where the Golden Buffalo Calf, mistaking the ringing for its mother's call, ran southward, trampling on the site of Ho Tay and turning it into a lake.

The geological explanation is that the lake was created when Song Hong (Red River) overflowed its banks. The flood problem has been partially controlled by building dikes,

#### THE TORTOISES OF HOAN KIEM LAKE: FACT OR FICTION?

Unbelievably, there *are* tortoises in the mysterious and murky waters of Hoan Kiem Lake.

Surfacing on rare occasions, and bringing luck to anyone fortunate enough to see one, the Sword Lake tortoise (*Rafetus leloii*) is not just your common garden-variety tortoise: it is a huge beast. A specimen that died in 1968 weighed in at 250kg and was 2.1m long! Its preserved remains are on show in the Ngoc Son Temple complex (p100), together with a photo taken of a tortoise that appeared in the lake in 2000. No-one is sure how many there still are, or how they have survived in this urban setting.

Rumours abound. Are these really the lake-dwelling descendants of the golden tortoise of Le Thai To? Or are they safeguarded in enclosures elsewhere and transported to the lake from time to time, where their occasional appearance is simply an orchestrated ploy to keep the legend of the lake alive?

Those ripples on the lake surface will never seem so innocent again.

and the highway along the eastern side of Ho Tay is built upon one.

### TRUC BACH LAKE

This **lake** (Ho Truc Bach; Map pp88-9) is separated from Ho Tay by Đ Thanh Nien, which is lined with flame trees. During the 18th century the Trinh lords built a palace on the lakeside; it was later transformed into a reformatory for wayward royal concubines, who were condemned to spend their days weaving a pure white silk.

### St Joseph Cathedral

Stepping inside the Old Quarter's neo-Gothic **St Joseph Cathedral** (Map p96; Pho Nha Tho; ☎ main gate 5-7am & 5-7pm) is a journey to medieval Europe. The cathedral, inaugurated in 1886, is noteworthy for its square towers, elaborate altar and stained-glass windows. Unfortunately, it is in dire need of a paint job these days. The cathedral stands facing the western end of Pho Nha Tho, which is a fashionable strip of restaurants, cafés and boutiques.

The main gate to St Joseph Cathedral is open when Mass is held. Guests are welcome at other times of the day, but must enter the cathedral via the compound of the Diocese of Hanoi, the entrance to which is a block away at 40 Pho Nha Chung. Walking through the main gate, go straight and then turn right. When you reach the side door to the cathedral, ring the small bell high up to the right-hand side of the door and someone should let you in.

### Thu Le Park & Zoo

With its vast expanses of shaded grass and ponds, **Thu Le Park & Zoo** (Bach Thu Le; Map pp88-9; admission 2000d; ☎ 4am-10pm) is about 4km west of Hoan Kiem Lake. While it's not Singapore Zoo, it is not one of Asia's horror shows either, and children will enjoy the fun park and swan pedal boats. The easiest way to get here is by metered taxi. From Hoan Kiem Lake, bus 9 runs right past the park.

## ACTIVITIES

### Fitness Clubs

A number of international hotels open their exercise centres to the public for a fee. Among these is the top-of-the-market **Clark Hatch Fitness Centres** (☎ 8266919) in the Sofitel Metropole Hotel (p110) and Sofitel Plaza (p110), which each has a day-use fee of US\$15 for the gym,

including pool access. Similar is the **Daewoo Hotel Fitness Centre** (Map pp88-9; ☎ 835 1000; 360 Đ Kim Ma) which has a day-use fee of US\$20 for all facilities including the pool.

### Golf

**King's Island** (☎ 772 3160; www.kingsislandgolf.com), 45km west of Hanoi, close to the base of Ba Vi Mountain, is north Vietnam's first 36-hole golf course. Offering a lakeside or mountain view course, membership starts at a whopping US\$14,000, but the club is open to visitors from US\$70 during the week.

On the western side of Hanoi, but still within the city limits, is the **Lang Ha Golf Club** (Map pp88-9; ☎ 835 0909; 16A Pho Lang Ha; nonmember fee US\$20; ☎ 6am-10pm), opposite the TV tower. Basically, this is just a driving range – you'll have to go to King's Island if you want to pursue a white ball over hills and fields.

There is a popular new course at Tam Dao Hill Station; see p128 for more details.

### Hash House Harriers

For the uninitiated, these are the drinkers with a running problem. The 'hash', as all expats refer to it, meets at Finnegan's Irish Pub (p117) at 2pm on Saturdays. It costs around US\$5 and includes a lot of drinks.

### Massage & Spa

The government has severely restricted the number of places licensed to give massages because of the concern that naughty 'extra services' might be offered (as indeed they are at many places). At present, you can get a good legitimate massage at the **Hoa Binh Hotel** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 825 3315; 27 Ly Thuong Kiet; per hr US\$8). Other places include the upmarket Guoman Hotel (p110), charging US\$18 per hour, and the Sofitel Metropole Hotel (p110), at US\$32.

For a spa splurge on facials or body treatments, head to **QT Salon** (Map p96; ☎ 928 6116; 28 Pho Le Thai To; ☎ 10am-8pm), overlooking Hoan Kiem Lake.

A newer spa, **SF Salon & Spa** (Map p96; ☎ 926 2032; 16 Pho Hang Buom; ☎ 8.30am-11pm) offers Swedish and Thai massage (US\$10), plus the full range of spa treatments, including wraps, scrubs and polishes.

If you feel in need of sprucing, **Vu Doo Salon** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 823 3439; 32c Pho Cao Ba Quat) is a reliable hairdresser. Cuts start from US\$10; manicures and pedicures from about US\$5.

### Swimming

Hotels that open their swimming pools to the public include the Army Hotel (p110), near the History Museum. It charges US\$3.50 for day use of its pool, which is big enough to do laps and is open all year.

Just about big enough to do laps – but a much nicer place to lounge around afterwards – is the pool at the Melia Hotel (p110), where 'walk-in-members' pay US\$6 to swim, or US\$10 to swim and use the gym. Some other hotels charge a US\$10 day-use fee.

Out by Ho Tay, the Thang Loi Hotel (Map p110) has a swimming pool in a fine lakeside location that's just 30,000d for nonguests, but it is only open from about May to October.

**Hanoi Water Park** (Map p126; ☎ 753 2757; ☎ 9am-9pm Wed-Mon Apr 15-Nov) is about 5km north of the city centre and offers a fun selection of pools, slides and splashing opportunities. Entry costs 50,000d for those over 110cm tall, and 30,000d for shorter people, translating roughly as adults and children.

## WALKING TOUR

If the Old Quarter is the heart of Hanoi, there is no better way to check its beat than pounding the narrow streets on foot. Start by paying your respects at the **Ngoc Son Temple** (1; p100) at the northern end of Hoan Kiem Lake. Cross back over bright-red **Huc Bridge** (2), stop for a quick look at the **Martyrs' Monument** (3; p100). Follow the lake around on Pho Dinh Tien Hoang and pick up some tickets for an evening performance at the **Water Puppet Theatre** (4; p119) on So Lau. Head north on Pho Hang Dau and you'll soon be swimming in **shoe shops** (5) selling every shape, size and style – demonstrating how serious Hanoians are about their footwear. Cross over Pho Cau Go to Pho Hang Be, and browse the colourful **market** (6), which occupies the narrow eastern terminus of Pho Gia Ngu.

Back on Pho Hang Be, continue north to the T-junction with Pho Hang Bac. Near here are several shops where artisans hand-carve intricate **gravestones** (7), most bearing an image of the deceased. A short detour north on Pho Ma May leads you to the **Memorial House** (8; p102) at No 87, an exquisite Chinese merchant's home that has been restored as a museum.

Return to Pho Hang Bac and head west past a strip of snazzy **jewellery shops** (9). Don't miss the small entry to **house 102** (10), which includes a fully functioning temple where

most people would have a lounge room. Exit and turn right onto Pho Hang Ngang past a row of **clothing shops** (11), and right again onto Pho Hang Buom. This will take you past the small **Bach Ma Temple** (12; p100). As you pass the pagoda, with its red funeral palanquin, look for its white-bearded guards, who spend their days sipping tea.

Legend has it that Ly Thai To used the pagoda to pray for assistance in building the city walls because they persistently collapsed, no matter how many times he rebuilt them. His prayers were finally answered when a white horse appeared out of the temple and guided him to the site where he could safely build his walls. Evidence of his success is still visible at **Cua O Quan Chuong** (13), the quarter's well-preserved Old East Gate at the eastern end of Pho Hang Chieu, near the intersection with Pho Tran Nhat Duat.

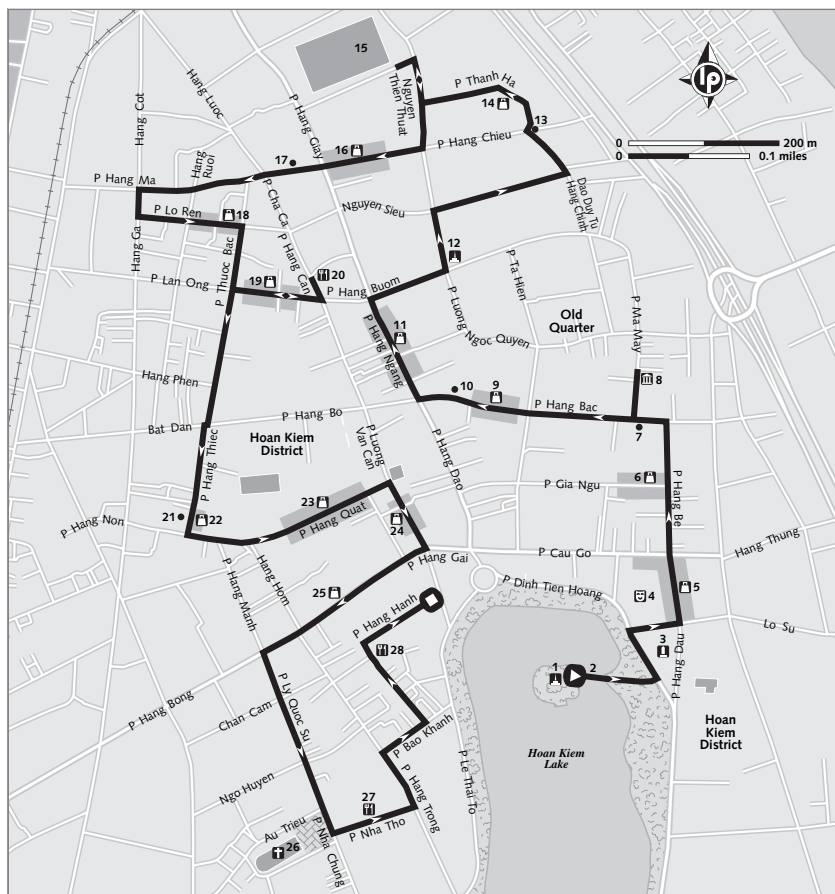
Continue north along the narrow Pho Thanh Ha, which has a **traditional street market** (14), with squirming fish, chunky frogs and heaped produce. Follow this round to the left and emerge near **Dong Xuan Market** (15; p120), one of the most important in the city. Venture in, but bookmark any serious shopping for later as there is still plenty to experience.

Backtrack south on Nguyen Thien Thuat and turn right on to Pho Hang Chieu, past a handful of **shops** (16) selling straw mats and rope. This becomes one of Hanoi's most interesting streets, **Pho Hang Ma** (17) – the name translates as Counterfeit Street – where imitation 'ghost money' is sold for burning in Buddhist ceremonies – there are even US\$5000 bills! Loop around and follow your ears to the sounds of **blacksmiths** (18) pounding away on metal on the corner of Pho Lo Ren and Pho Thuoc Bac. Moving south on Pho Thuoc Bac, turn onto Pho Lan Ong, where a fantastic row of **herb sellers** (19) fills the street with pungent aromas. Continue to the end and take a breather at the **Baguette et Chocolat** (20; p111), a café with cold drinks and exquisite pastries.

Double back to Pho Thuoc Bac and head south past the **tin-box makers** (21), opposite the **mirror shops** (22) on Pho Hang Thiec, then turn left towards the interesting shops selling **Buddhist altars and statues** (23) along Pho Hang Quat.

From here, head south on Pho Luong Van Can past all the **toy shops** (24), which could save the day if you are following this walk with flagging children. Then wander west along





### WALK FACTS

**Distance** 3.5km

**Duration** Minimum two hours; more with sights and stops

**Start** Ngoc Son Temple, Hoan Kiem Lake

**Finish** Pho Bao Khanh bar strip

Pho Hang Gai, window shopping as you pass the elegant designer **silk shops** (25; p119). Head south on Pho Ly Quoc Su to the superb neo-Gothic **St Joseph Cathedral** (26; p104). If the exercise is taking its toll on a hot day, just a few steps from the church, along Pho Nha Tho, there's a cluster of stylish **restaurants and cafés** (27).

If you're looking for something a bit more local in flavour, turn left at the end of Pho Nha Tho onto Pho Hang Trong, right onto Pho Bao Khanh and left at Pho Hang Hanh. This street is chock-a-block with Vietnamese **cafés and bars** (28) and is a good place to stop, rest your weary legs and watch the world go by.

### COURSES

#### Cooking

Cooking classes are really taking off all over Vietnam and Hanoi is no exception.

**Hidden Hanoi** (Map pp88-9; ☎ 091-225-4045; www.hiddenhanoi.com) offers cooking classes for US\$30 per person in its hidden garden out near the Sheraton Hanoi Hotel on Ho Tay. It also offers language classes.

Hoa Sua (p111) offers classes for a cause to raise funds for its training programme for disadvantaged youth. Costs vary from US\$7 to US\$10 for soups and salads, to US\$10 to US\$15 for main courses.

Popular restaurant-bar Highway 4 (p112) also has cooking classes. Prices range from US\$19 to US\$32 depending on numbers and include a trip to Hom Market, three dishes and, of course, a feed. It starts at 8am.

### Language

**Hanoi Foreign Language College** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 826 2468; 1 Pho Pham Ngu Lao), housed in the History Museum compound, is a branch of Hanoi National University where foreigners can study Vietnamese for about US\$7 per lesson.

### HANOI FOR CHILDREN

Hanoi is a fun city for children thanks to the all-action Old Quarter (p95) and the city's many parks and lakes. Wandering the Old Quarter can be tiring for young ones, but there are enough diversions to keep them entertained, and plenty of ice-cream shops and fruit markets for those little treats along the way.

Boating is a fun family activity and there is the choice of bigger boats on Ho Tay (p103) or pedal-powered boats in Thu Le Park (p104). Hanoi Water Park (p105) is a great place to take children to cool off, but it is only open half the year. Come the evening, there is only one place for any self-respecting child to be, and that is at the water puppets (p119), a Punch and Judy pantomime on the water.

### TOURS

Anyone arriving in Hanoi on an organised trip will have a city tour included. If you're travelling independently, Hanoi is a city best enjoyed at your own pace without the timetable of a tour. If you really want an organised city tour, contact one of the travel agencies recommended on p91. Prices start from US\$12 for a group tour, including guide, transport and entrance fees. For a private tour by car, expect to pay more in the region of US\$50.

### Motorbike Tours

If you're a competent motorbiker, it's easy to organise a trip on your own. For general information about motorbike rental in Hanoi, see p122.

There is a handful of motorbike tour companies based in Hanoi that know secret roads in the mountains and can open doors that you would never imagine from a cursory scan of the map. For more on a motorbike tour through the hidden north, see p491.

### FESTIVALS & EVENTS

**Tet** (Tet Nguyen Dan/Vietnamese Lunar New Year; late January or early February) During the week preceding Tet, there is a flower market on Pho Hang Luoc. There's also a colourful, two-week flower exhibition and competition, beginning on the first day of the new year, that takes place in Lenin Park near Bay Mau Lake. For much, much more on Tet, see the boxed text, p64.

**Quang Trung Festival** (February/March) Wrestling competitions, lion dances and human chess take place on the 15th day of the first lunar month at Dong Da Mound, site of the uprising against Chinese invaders led by Emperor Quang Trung (Nguyen Hue) in 1788.

**Vietnam's National Day** (2 September) Celebrated with a rally and fireworks at Ba Dinh Sq, in front of Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum. There are also boat races on Hoan Kiem Lake.

### SLEEPING

The majority of Hanoi's budget accommodation is within walking distance of Hoan Kiem Lake. Unlike Ho Chi Minh City's (HCMC) Pham Ngu Lao district, where the cheapies are lined up wall-to-wall, lodgings here are more scattered, though they're mostly in and around the Old Quarter.

There are several budget places around with both dorm beds and cheap rooms (under US\$10), but for between US\$10 and US\$20 the choice includes a wide selection of mini-hotels, which offer clean, air-con rooms, satellite TV and hot water.

In the US\$25 to US\$75 range, there is usually a step up in service, and the rooms may be larger than those in the minihotels or guesthouses.

Above and beyond US\$75, it is possible to stay in plush four- and five-star hotels that would cost double in cities, such as Hong Kong or Bangkok. Keep an eye out in the *Guide* and *Time Out* for the latest deals, and always ask about current 'promotions' at reception.

Most of the budget and midrange hotels include free internet access. Most of the top-end hotels levy a charge. Always check whether tax and service is included. It should be at cheaper places, but staff will sometimes spring a surprise at the last minute.

## Old Quarter BUDGET

**Thu Giang Guesthouse** (Map p96; ☎ 828 5734; www.tgguesthouse.com; 5A Pho Tam Thuong; r US\$5-10; 🏠 📶) This is a flashback to old Hanoi, a small, friendly, family-run place with cheap yet cheerful rooms. You'll find it tucked away down a narrow alley between Pho Yen Thai and Pho Hang Gai. This guesthouse now has a second branch for overspills at 35A Pho Hang Dieu.

**Manh Dung Guesthouse** (Map p96; ☎ 826 7201; tranmanhdungvnn@yahoo.com; 2 Pho Tam Thuong; r US\$5-10; 🏠 📶) Opposite the Thu Giang, this place was under wraps for a renovation during our last visit, but is well worth seeking out as the family really look after its guests. Prices may rise.

**our pick City Gate Hotel** (Map p96; ☎ 828 0817; www.citygatehotel.com.vn; 10 Pho Thanh Ha; r US\$8-18; 🏠 📶) Hidden away down a small lane near the old East Gate, this smart minihotel offers a warm welcome and friendly service. Rooms are super clean, bathrooms include a bath, there's free internet downstairs and even a lift.

**Spring Hotel** (Map p96; ☎ 826 8500; spring.hotel@fpt.vn; 8A Pho Nha Chung; r US\$10-30; 🏠 📶) Close to the Thien Trang, the friendly family here ensures a warm welcome to all. The cheaper rooms are a little small, but good value for this upwardly mobile part of town.

**Thuy Nga Guesthouse** (Map p96; ☎ 826 6053; thuyngahotel@hotmail.com; 24C Pho Ta Hien; s/d/t US\$10/12/15; 🏠 📶) The area may be rapidly gentrifying but this place is staying loyal to its roots. Consisting of just six rooms, it's a family affair with smallish but smart rooms including extras, such as TV, fridge and IDD telephone.

**Viet Fun Hotel** (Map p96; ☎ 926 2353; vietfunhotels@yahoo.com; 48 Pho Ma May; r US\$8-15; 🏠 📶) This place should appeal to those for whom size matters almost as much as money. Rooms this big usually come at a higher price, and the enthusiastic service and helpful advice ensure it is, well, fun.

**Hanoi Backpackers Hostel** (Map p96; ☎ 828 5372; www.hanoibackpackershostel.com; 48 Pho Ngo Huyen; dm/r around US\$6/20; 🏠 📶) This Aussie-style backpackers' pad offers smart and secure dorms and a couple of dedicated rooms. The price includes breakfast, lockers, internet access, and tea and coffee, not forgetting fun and frolics on the rooftop bar.

**Hotel Thien Trang** (Map p96; ☎ 826 9823; thientranghotel24@hotmail.com; 24 Pho Nha Chung; r US\$10-20; 🏠 📶) Close enough to the trendy Nha Tho to live the dream, but cheap enough not to break the budget, the Thien Trang is a popular place. The spacious rooms are great value given the location.

**our pick Artist Hotel** (Map p96; ☎ 825 3044; vietcultour@hn.vnn.vn; 22A Pho Hai Ba Trung; s/d US\$18/21; 🏠 📶) The rooms might be more appropriate to the struggling artiste, but the atmosphere will appeal to anyone wanting to meet locals and expats with a creative bent. Set around a lovely leafy courtyard, rooms include satellite TV, but who needs it when there is the Cinemathèque (p118) downstairs?

**Camellia Hotel** (Map p96; ☎ 828 3583; www.camellia-hotels.com; 13 Pho Luong Ngoc Quyen; r US\$15-24; 🏠 📶) The Camellia family now includes six properties. The original remains top value for money, as the rates include satellite TV, a buffet breakfast and free internet access.

**Prince Hotel** (Map p96; ☎ 828 0155; www.hanoi.princehotel.com; 51 Pho Luong Ngoc Quyen; r US\$15-25; 🏠 📶) Barely scraping into the budget category these days, this is the original Prince, a name now borrowed by countless impostors. The big rooms include chunky Chinese-style furnishings and are well tended. Breakfast and internet access are included.

A couple more options among the 999 other minihotels:

**Old Street Hotel** (Map p96; ☎ 828 0195; www.oldstreethotel.com; 23 Pho Ma May; r US\$10-15; 🏠 📶) Clean rooms, smart touches and a good location make this worth the walk.

**Real Darling Café** (Map p96; ☎ 826 9386; darling\_cafe@hotmail.com; 33 Pho Hang Quat; r US\$5-12; 🏠 📶) Almost as old as the Old Quarter, it's still one of the cheapest in town.

## MIDRANGE

**Hanoi Elegance Hotel** (Map p96; ☎ 825 3740; www.hanoielegancehotel.com; 8 Pho Hang Bac; r US\$18-30; 🏠 📶) The friendly staff here make it feel like a home from home. Rooms are large and each includes a computer for personal internet access. The only drawback is the lack of a lift, as the best rooms are on the upper floors.

**Sunshine Hotel** (Map p96; ☎ 926 1559; www.hanoisunshinehotel.com; 42 Pho Ma May; r US\$25-30; 🏠 📶) The rooms are indeed bright at the Sunshine. Nicely proportioned and well finished, some have balconies with a perfect view of the mighty Ma May strip below.

**Bao Khanh Hotel** (Map p96; ☎ 928 7702; www.baokhanhhotel.com.vn; 22 Pho Bao Khanh; r US\$20-55; 🏠 📶) In stumbling distance of the popular Bao Khanh bar strip, this rambling complex has 50 rooms. The US\$20 rooms are a little pokey, but they get bigger as the price rises, as do the views.

**Classic Street Hotel** (Map p96; ☎ 825 2421; www.classicstreet-phochotel.com; 41 Pho Hang Be; r US\$25-30; 🏠 📶) Hang Be is one of the liveliest streets in the Old Quarter and this hotel is a stylish base to explore. All rooms have air-con and satellite TV, and some have fantastic views of the quarter's higgledy-piggledy rooftops. Also known as the Pho Co Hotel.

**Heart Hotel** (Map p96; ☎ 928 6682; www.heart-hotel.com; 11B Pho Hang Hanh; r US\$25-35; 🏠 📶) A smart little hotel in the centre of the action near Hoan Kiem Lake. The rooms show real attention to detail at this price, with hairdryers and even slippers. The lobby is an art gallery: still it's a welcome change from being peddled tours.

**our pick Queen Hotel** (Map p96; ☎ 826 0860; www.azqueentravel.com; 65 Pho Hang Bac; r US\$35-65; 🏠 📶) The Zen lobby sets the standard for one of Hanoi's most atmospheric little properties. The rooms are thoughtfully decorated with wooden furnishings and silk lamps, and include a personal DVD player. Book ahead as there are just 10 rooms.

**our pick Golden Lotus Hotel** (Map p96; ☎ 928 8583; www.goldenlotushotel.com.vn; 32 Pho Hang Trong; r US\$40-50; 🏠 📶) A rich blend of Eastern flavours and Western chic, the Golden Lotus is a touch more expensive than its neighbours, but it's money well spent. Rooms have

wooden floors, silk trim, art aplenty and broadband internet connections. Breakfast is included.

**Church Hotel** (Map p96; ☎ 928 8118; churchhotel@vnn.vn; 9 Pho Nha Tho; r US\$40-70; 🏠 📶) Looking for a hotel with a holistic touch? Look no further, the Church has elegant rooms with decorative flair, plus the functional extras like in-room internet. On the happening Nha Tho strip, this is a fine base, particularly if you indulge in the US\$70 suite.

**Hong Ngoc Hotel 1** (Map p96; ☎ 828 5053; hongngochotel@hn.vnn.vn; 34 Pho Hang Manh; r US\$45-55; 🏠 📶) The Hong Ngoc group has four properties scattered across the Old Quarter. This is a smart business-like hotel with spacious and well-appointed rooms. Breakfast is included in the popular downstairs restaurant.

**Hoabinh Palace Hotel** (Map p96; ☎ 926 3646; www.hoabinhpalacehotel.com.vn; 27 Pho Hang Be; s/d US\$50/60; 🏠 📶) An unlikely intruder in the heart of backpackersville, this smart new property brings new-world comforts to old-world Hanoi. All rooms include extra touches like safety deposit boxes and hairdryers, plus the suites include Jacuzzis.

**Majestic Salute Hotel** (Map p96; ☎ 923 0036; www.majesticsalutehotel.com; 19 Pho Cha Tra; r US\$69-89; 🏠 📶) Continuing the upward trend in the Old Quarter, in height as much as comfort, this hotel offers genuine three-star comfort. Facilities include Jacuzzi, sauna and steam bath.

Still want more? Try these wholesome hotels:

**Classic Hotel** (Map p96; ☎ 826 6224; www.hanoi.classichotel.com; 22A Pho Ta Hien; r US\$16-30; 🏠 📶)

## DO THE HUSTLE

Hanoi is not only the political capital of Vietnam, it is also the capital of hotel hustles. Copycat hotels and fly-by-night hotels abound. These sharks rent a building, appropriate the name of another hotel, and then work with touts to bring unwitting tourists to their 'chosen' accommodation. Visitors who question the alternative location are told the hotel has moved and it is not until they check the next day that they realise they have been had. These hotels overcharge on anything they can, often giving a price for the room on check-in and a price per person on check-out. The best way to avoid this is to pre-book a room by phone or via email. This way, you know the hotel is still open, still in the same location and not full. Airport taxis and minibuses often work in partnership with these copycat hotels, as they give the biggest commissions.

Worse still, some of these hotels are working in partnership with unscrupulous Westerners who help to steer backpackers their way. In return for free board and lodging, these backpackers will latch onto tourists wandering the Old Quarter and tell them about the 'great hotel' they have found. It's sad but true: friendly advice might not be as friendly as it seems. For more on scams and how to avoid them, see p95 and the boxed text, p124.



Clean, comfortable, friendly and secure, just the adjectives to ensure a hassle-free stay.

**Ho Guom Hotel** (Map p96; ☎ 825 2225; hoguomtj@hn.vnn.vn; 76 Pho Hang Trong; r \$US20-30; 🏠 📺 🚿) A rare government-run hotel that's clean and quiet, with friendly staff and a good location.

**Trang Tien Hotel** (Map p96; ☎ 825 6115; fax 825 1416; 35 Pho Trang Tien; r US\$15-30; 🏠 📺) It's overdue a facelift some time soon, but the location is perfect: between Hoan Kiem Lake and the Opera House.

## TOP END

**Melia Hotel** (Map p96; ☎ 934 3343; www.meliahanoi.com.vn; 44B Pho Ly Thuong Kiet; r from US\$90; 🏠 📺 🚿) An ugly duckling on the outside, things get a bit more swan-like on the inside, with all the five-star features anyone could need. Ask for an upper floor for some big, big views over Hanoi.

**Hilton Hanoi Opera** (Map p96; ☎ 933 0500; www.hanoi.hilton.com; 1 Pho Le Thanh Tong; r from US\$110; 🏠 📺 🚿) Rubbing shoulders with the grand old dame that is Hanoi Opera House, this striking property is an indulgent base to discover the city. The rooms are Hilton through and through, and at these rates it is the best all-rounder for location and comfort at this end of the scale. Treat yourself to day-use of the luxurious health club and swimming pool for US\$15.

**our pick Sofitel Metropole Hotel** (Map p96; ☎ 826 6919; sofitelhanoi@hn.vnn.vn; 15 Pho Ngo Quyen; r from US\$169; 🏠 📺 🚿) Whispered in the same breath as Raffles in Singapore and the Oriental in Bangkok, this is one of Asia's great luxury hotels. The property has undergone an extensive renovation in the past few years and the rooms in the old wing are to be savoured. Wide-screen TVs, Jacuzzi-like bathtubs: you won't want to leave. The modern Opera Wing has also been beautifully renovated, but doesn't have the history. This place has a French motif that just won't quit – close the curtains and you'll think you're in Paris.

There are also a couple of business-like 'boutique' hotels, although they are not that boutique:

**Quoc Hoa Hotel** (Map p96; ☎ 828 4528; www.quochoahotel.com; 10 Pho Bat Dan; s/d from US\$110/120; 🏠 📺) Smart and sophisticated, this is a sound option, but the rates are a little ambitious.

**Zephyr Hotel** (Map p96; ☎ 934 1256; www.zephyrhotel.com.vn; 4 Pho Ba Trieu; s/d from US\$88/98; 🏠 📺) Pitching itself as a boutique hotel, the rooms feature sharp lines and subtle trim. Great location.

## Central Hanoi

**Hotel 30/4** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 942 0807; 115 Pho Tran Hung Dao; r US\$10-20; 🏠 📺) Right opposite Hanoi train station and named in honour of Saigon's liberation on 30 April 1975, it is, unsurprisingly, state-owned. This Art Deco-style place retains a certain olde worlde charm even if the staff are, on the whole, charmless.

**Army Hotel** (Khach San Quan Doi; Map pp92-3; ☎ 825 2896; armyhotel@fpt.vn; 33C Pho Pham Ngu Lao; r US\$30-40; 🏠 📺 🚿) Owned by the army and operated by the army, but it's a world away from boot camp. The uninspiring décor may owe something to its military mentors, but it's the cheapest place with a pool, which is a pretty impressive saltwater number.

**Galaxy Hotel** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 828 2888; galaxyht@netnam.org.vn; 1 Pho Phan Dinh Phung; s/d US\$40/45; 🏠 📺) The long-running Galaxy is based around an original 1918 building and includes a business centre and a popular café-restaurant. All rooms feature satellite TV and a safe.

**DeSyloia Hotel** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 8245346; www.desyloia.com; 17A Pho Tran Hung Dao; s/d US\$65/75; 🏠 📺) This place must be feeling the competition, as it is one of the few properties to have lowered its rates. The theme is decidedly French and the rooms are finished to European levels of comfort. Plus, there's a fitness centre and sauna.

**Guoman Hotel** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 822 2800; guomanhn@hn.vnn.vn; 83A Pho Ly Thuong Kiet; r US\$90-115; 🏠 📺 🚿) This grandiose building is home to a friendly, four-star standard hotel with staff who remember your name. It is often possible to get discounts here so inquire ahead. Facilities include a sleek health club, fine dining and two bars.

## Greater Hanoi

**Ho Tay Villas** (Map pp88-9; ☎ 804 7772; hotayvillas@fmail.vnn.vn; Đ Dang Thai Mai; r US\$45-120; 🏠 📺 🚿) Once the Communist Party guesthouse and the exclusive preserve of top party officials, these spacious villas even played host to Ho Chi Minh – room 505 for history buffs. These days, dollar-toting tourists are welcome to use the once-splendid facilities. The hotel is 5.5km north of central Hanoi, overlooking Ho Tay.

**Thang Loi Hotel** (Cuban Hotel; Map pp88-9; ☎ 829 4211; thangloihl@hn.vnn.vn; Đ Yen Phu; r from US\$80; 🏠 📺) Unique and not always for the right reasons, the 'Cuban Hotel' was constructed in the 1970s with Castro's assistance. Built over the water, it feels like an oversized beach house. The hotel also has a swimming pool and tennis courts.

Check the rates, as the list prices are a little unrealistic for such dated kitsch. It is 3.5km from the city centre on the shores of Ho Tay.

**Moon River** (Map pp88-9; ☎ 871 1658; wildrice@fpt.vn; Bac Cau, Gia Lam; r US\$90-120; 🏠 📺 🚿) This little gem of a hideaway feels like an ancient temple in a secret garden. Hard to find and harder to leave, the rooms here are exquisitely decorated with antiques and drapes, and the larger suites include Balinese-style sunken baths. It is way out in the Gia Lam suburb on the east bank of the Song Hong, 3km north of the Chuong Duong Bridge.

Some of the biggest names in the hotel industry are also found in the Hanoi suburbs: **Sheraton Hanoi Hotel** (Map pp88-9; ☎ 719 9000; www.sheraton.com/hanoi; 11 Pho Xuan Dieu; r from US\$130; 🏠 📺 🚿) George Bush took over three floors of this place during the APEC summit. Most guests opt for just one room. Luxurious indeed.

**Sofitel Plaza** (Map pp88-9; ☎ 823 8888; www.sofitelplazahn.com.vn; 1 Đ Thanh Nien; r from US\$135; 🏠 📺 🚿) Sofitel's not-so-historic other half, it boasts the region's first indoor-outdoor swimming pool with a retractable roof.

## EATING

In recent years Hanoi has undergone a miraculous transformation from a culinary wasteland to a world-class city for drinking and dining. The city boasts everything from cheap backpacker joints (yes, *more* banana pancakes) to exquisite Vietnamese restaurants and a growing legion of chic cafés.

Restaurants, bars and cafés have a strong tendency to change names, location, management and just about everything else, so ask around or check out the current listings in the *Guide* and *Time Out*.

## Dining for a Cause

Combine food for the body with food for the soul at restaurants and cafés that run vocational training programmes for street kids. Good cause, good food, good idea.

**KOTO on Van Mieu** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 747 0338; www.streetvoices.com.au; 59 Pho Van Mieu; mains 30,000-50,000đ; 🚿) closed dinner Mon; 📺) Recently relocated into a much larger property, KOTO has a cracking menu of local specialities, home comforts, delicious sandwiches and cakes, real coffees, fruit shakes and other wholesome dishes. With five floors, there is something for everyone, including an expanded bar with cocktails. KOTO is a not-for-profit grassroots project providing

career training and guidance to former street kids. KOTO stands for 'Know One, Teach One'. The restaurant overlooks the Temple of Literature, making it the perfect place to recharge the batteries before or after some sightseeing. Want more? Free wi-fi it is.

**Hoa Sua** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 824 0448; www.hoasuaschool.com; 28A Pho Ha Hoi; Vietnamese/French set lunch 35,000/75,000đ; 🚿) lunch & dinner) A shady retreat by day, a dignified diner by night, this restaurant offers the perfect blend of East and West. The set menus are a good deal, or go à la carte for some DIY fusion. Menu highlights include Argentinean steaks and a pistachio crème brûlée. Hoa Sua is a successful goodwill project that trains a steady stream of disadvantaged kids for culinary careers. It also offers cooking classes (p106) at its training school.

**Baguette & Chocolat** (Map p96; ☎ 923 1500; 11 Pho Cha Ca; cakes around 10,000đ; 🚿) breakfast, lunch & dinner) Another member of the extended Hoa Sua family, this is a bewitching bakery with divine (or devilish) cakes and pastries, depending on your calorie count. Remember those patisseries in Paris, with artistic creations at €4 a go? Try them here for less than US\$1.

## Vietnamese

For some of the tastiest, and certainly cheapest Vietnamese food, stroll up to some of the street stalls around town. The food is as fresh as it comes and the kitchen is right there in front of you. Most of Vietnam's greatest hits are available if you shop around, and it's a great way to plug the hole after a long night on the town. Almost every corner and alley in the Old Quarter has street stalls. Check out how many locals are eating there: the more, the merrier, as the food must be good. Overcharging is the norm rather than the exception at many of these places, so it is worth checking the price before you order a spread.

Another excellent and inexpensive fast track to a feed is to visit one of the innumerable *bia hoi* joints around the city. All of them have minimenus to help hold off the hangover. For more on the national institution that is the *bia hoi* scene, see the boxed text, p118.

For other Vietnamese options, consider the speciality food streets (p115).

## OLD QUARTER

There is an incredible array of Vietnamese restaurants to choose from in the Old Quarter.

**Little Hanoi 1** (Map p96; ☎ 926 0168; 9 Pho Ta Hien; meals from 20,000d; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Blink and you'll miss it, this tiny little restaurant recently moved up the road. This small place has a big personality and the popular speciality is do-it-yourself fish spring rolls, a delicious dish.

**Pho 24** (Map p96; 1 Pho Hang Khay; meals 25,000d; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Fast *pho*, Vietnamese-style, this may be part of an expanding chain, but it's growing for a reason: heavenly noodle soups. *Pho* is cheaper on the street, but rarely better. Choose by the cut.

**our pick 69 Bar-Restaurant** (Map p96; ☎ 926 0452; 69 Pho Ma May; meals 20,000-60,000d; ☺ lunch & dinner) Located in a beautifully restored old Vietnamese house, this is an atmospheric escape from the bustle of the Old Quarter. The predominantly Vietnamese menu includes succulent tuna steaks and a large vegetarian selection.

**Ladybird Restaurant** (Map p96; ☎ 926 1863; 57 Pho Hang Buom; meals 25,000-35,000d; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Hidden away in the northern section of the Old Quarter, this little restaurant has been earning rave reviews for its affordable eats. Whether it is Vietnamese or Western, it's all tasty.

**Hanoi Garden** (Map p96; ☎ 824 3402; 36 Pho Hang Manh; à la carte/set menus from 40,000d/80,000d; ☺ lunch & dinner) This restaurant is very popular with Vietnamese diners: always a positive sign. Hanoi Garden serves southern Vietnamese and spicy Chinese dishes in a relaxed setting with an open-air courtyard for steamy summer nights.

One of Hanoi's most famous food specialities is *cha ca* (filleted fish slices grilled over charcoal), your very own fresh fish barbecue. **Cha Ca La Vong** (Map p96; ☎ 825 3929; 14 Pho Cha Ca; cha ca 70,000d; ☺ lunch & dinner), the *cha ca* capital of the Old Quarter, has been family-run for five generations. It cracks out the condiments, fire up the hot coals and so begins a free cooking class in the art of *cha ca*. The succulent fish is all that's on the menu, so it's great for indecisive types.

Other places to seek out:

**Golden Land Restaurant** (Map p96; ☎ 828 1056; 15 Pho Cha Ca; meals 20,000-60,000d; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Elegant décor, efficient air-con and a hearty mixed menu add up to a good place.

**Old Hanoi** (Map p96; ☎ 824 5251; 106 Pho Ma May; meals 25,000-75,000d; ☺ lunch & dinner) A sophisticated little eatery with tasty Vietnamese specialities.

## CENTRAL HANOI

**Restaurant 1,2,3** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 822 9100; 55 Pho Hué; meals 30,000d; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Need a quick fix? This place delivers a range of Vietnamese favourites in double-quick time. The barbecued fish and 'fish porridge' (*chao*) are smart selections.

**our pick Quan An Ngan** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 942 8162; 15 Pho Phan Boi Chau; dishes 30,000-60,000d) Fancy that street food experience, but afraid to take the plunge? Build your courage with a meal here; it brings street and market food to the middle-class masses. Minikitchens turn out terrific food, including *banh cuon* (rice-paper rolls with minced pork) and *chao tom* (grilled sugar cane rolled in spiced shrimp paste).

## GREATER HANOI

**Highway 4** (Map pp88-9; ☎ 212 8998; 575 Pho Kim Mai; meals 30,000-80,000d; ☺ lunch & dinner) Bringing the fabled food of the mountains to lowland Vietnam, this is the latest in a growing family. Specialities include the catfish spring rolls with *wasabi* dip and the Son La smoked pork. Wash it down with its smooth signature Son Tinh rice wine. There's another **Highway 4** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 976 2647; 5 Pho Mai Hac De; ☺ lunch & dinner) that's very popular with the Vietnamese.

## Gourmet Vietnamese

### OLD QUARTER

**Club Opera** (Map p96; ☎ 824 6950; 59 Pho Ly Thai To; mains from US\$6; ☺ lunch & dinner) Tucked away beneath the Press Club, the Opera has delectable Vietnamese dining with a refined European atmosphere. The menu changes, but always includes an impressive array of seafood.

**Club 51 Ly Thai To** (☎ 936 3069; 51 Pho Ly Thai To; meals 50,000-200,000d; ☺ lunch & dinner) Set in an elegant old residence, entering Club 51 is like gaining membership to the Groucho, a hidden world of lounge chairs, long drapes and fine food. Drop by for a drink or some fusion flavours.

## CENTRAL HANOI

**Wild Rice** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 943 8896; 6 Pho Ngo Thi Nham; mains 40,000-120,000d; ☺ lunch & dinner) Deceptively simple from outside, the elegant interior is a fine backdrop for the contemporary Vietnamese cuisine. Start with a spring roll selection, as there is a unique take on this most traditional of foods.

**Emperor** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 826 8801; 188 Pho Le Thanh Tong; mains 50,000-100,000d; ☺ lunch & dinner) Long considered one of the best Vietnamese restau-

rants in town, try to get a table overlooking the lively courtyard. Experience live traditional music (7.30pm to 9.30pm) on Wednesday and Saturday, and good food at any time.

**our pick Wild Lotus** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 943 9342; 55A Pho Nguyen Du; mains 50,000-150,000d; ☺ lunch & dinner) The ultimate designer restaurant, this is an art gallery as much as an eatery. The menu includes three spice journeys: set menus that guide you through the highlights of the Vietnam table. The seafood is superb, including scallops and king crab.

**Brothers Café** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 733 3866; 26 Pho Nguyen Thai Hoc; lunch/dinner buffet US\$6.50/12) Located in the courtyard of a beautifully restored 250-year-old Buddhist temple, this brings a touch of Zen to the buffet experience. Yes, it's buffet only and the lunch is a snip. For those who like choice, try the wine list as it's extensive.

And the style goes on:

**Nam Phuong** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 824 0926; 19 Pho Phan Chu Trinh; mains from 50,000d; ☺ lunch & dinner) A chic place in a charming villa with authentic and delicious Vietnamese food.

**Seasons of Hanoi** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 843 5444; 95B Pho Quan Thanh; dishes 40,000-100,000d; ☺ lunch & dinner) This classic French villa is decorated with Vietnamese and colonial-era antiques. The food is equally impressive.

There are also some good Vietnamese restaurants at the leading hotels in town. **Ba Mien** (Map p96; ☎ 933 0624; Hilton Hanoi Opera, 1 Pho Le Thanh Tong; US\$12 set lunch; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) is causing a stir thanks to its authentic regional cuisine. **Spices Garden** (Map p96; ☎ 826 6919; Sofitel Metropole Hotel, 15 Pho Ngo Quyen; mains around US\$7-15; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) offers a serious spread from around the region.

## Other Asian

### OLD QUARTER

**Baan Thai Restaurant** (Map p96; ☎ 828 1120; 3B Pho Cha Ca; mains 30,000-100,000d; ☺ lunch & dinner) An established Thai restaurant with a loyal following among the growing Thai community in Hanoi. For anyone that has been in Vietnam long enough to have forgotten their Thai favourites, there is a handy photo-illustrated menu at the door.

**Tandoor** (Map p96; ☎ 824 5359; 24 Pho Hang Be; mains 40,000-80,000d; ☺ lunch & dinner) Right in the thick of things in the Old Quarter, this is a place to spice up your life. Not surprisingly, the tandoori is tops here, plus there are good value thalis if you feeling indecisive. Halal food.

**Saigon Sakura** (Map p96; ☎ 825 7565; 17 Pho Trang Thi; ☺ lunch & dinner) There are lots of Japanese restaurants in Hanoi these days, but this one remains a firm favourite thanks to fresh sashimi and beautifully presented sushi. Expect to pay around US\$15 for a set.

## CENTRAL HANOI

**Benkay Restaurant** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 822 3535; 84 Tran Nhan Tong; set lunches around US\$10; ☺ lunch & dinner) Talk to Hanoi's resident Japanese, and they'll tell you that it is hard to beat Benkay for a taste of the motherland. Location is another matter, as it's on the 2nd floor of the sprawling Hotel Nikko.

**Van Anh** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 928 5163; 5A Pho Tong Duy Tan; meals 30,000-100,000d; ☺ lunch & dinner) This was the first non-Vietnamese restaurant to dare to take on the mass of Vietnamese restaurants in speciality food street Pho Cam Chi (p116). The taste of Thailand.

## International

### OLD QUARTER

**Cyclo Bar & Restaurant** (Map p96; ☎ 828 6844; 38 Pho Duong Thanh; mains from 60,000d; ☺ lunch & dinner) No-one ever forgets this place...no, it's not down to the tasty Vietnamese and French food, but the *cyclos* that have been creatively transformed into tables. The set lunch is a good deal at 80,000d.

**Al Fresco's** (Map p96; ☎ 826 7782; 23L Pho Hai Ba Trung; meals from 80,000d; ☺ lunch & dinner) The original location of this expanding empire, this place has been turning out juicy Tex-Mex ribs, fish fajitas and pastas for a decade now. Al Fresco's is also well known for its margaritas, but beware as they are seriously strong.

**Café des Arts** (Map p96; ☎ 828 7207; 11B Pho Bao Khanh; mains from US\$5; ☺ 9am-late) Part Parisian brasserie, part art gallery, this gastronomic grill has an impressive menu of French flavours. The steaks are particularly good, but rare really means rare here.

**Stop Café** (Map p96; ☎ 828 7207; 11A Pho Bao Khanh; steaks 60,000d; ☺ 9am-late) The phone number sort of gives it away: this is the place to sample Café des Arts cuisine at cheaper prices.

**La** (Map p96; ☎ 928 8933; 49 Pho Ly Quoc Su; mains 135,000-210,000d; ☺ lunch & dinner) A loveable little bistro with an inviting menu of international fare. Fresh sea bass, chunky tenderloins and desserts to die for...chocolate espresso brownie tart anyone?



**our pick Green Tangerine** (Map p96; ☎ 825 1286; 48 Pho Hang Be; mains around US\$15; ☎ lunch & dinner) A beautifully restored 1928 house is the backdrop for this renowned French restaurant. Salmon steak in tamarind sauce and delicate cuts of duck headline the menu. The wine list is impressive for those who appreciate a liquid accompaniment to their meal.

**La Salsa** (Map p96; ☎ 828 9052; 25 Pho Nha Tho; meals 25,000-150,000d; ☎ 10.30am-midnight) Specialising in paella, slabs of steak and tapas, this bar-restaurant has a prime position on the hip strip opposite St Joseph Cathedral.

**our pick Restaurant Bobby Chinn** (Map p96; ☎ 934 8577; www.bobbychinn.com; 1 Pho Ba Trieu; mains US\$10-20; ☎ 10am-late) Owner-chef Bobby Chinn is part Chinese and Egyptian, and draws on his roots to offer the liveliest of menus. It changes monthly, but includes rich tastes and textures. For an aperitif or a coffee, move through the silk drapes to the chill-out cushions at the back where smokers can stoke up a *sheesha* (water pipe) with fruit-flavoured tobacco.

**Restaurant** (Press Club; Map p96; ☎ 934 0888; 59A Pho Ly Thai To; mains US\$15-25; ☎ lunch & dinner) *The* restaurant to see and be seen for a business lunch or dinner, it is drawing more tourists who come in search of innovative international flavours. Specials include imported salmon and lamb, plus a smattering of seafood.

**Le Beaulieu Restaurant** (Map p96; ☎ 826 6919 ext 8028; Sofitel Metropole Hotel, 15 Pho Ngo Quyen; mains from US\$20; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) At the refined Sofitel Metropole Hotel, Le Beaulieu is the home of fine French food. This is the place for authentic French cooking, regular regional specialities and a professional wine list.

## GREATER HANOI

**Vine** (Map pp88-9; ☎ 719 8000; 1A Xuan Dieu; mains US\$10-20; ☎ lunch & dinner) Home of the grape, this restaurant, on the shores of Ho Tay, has one of the best wine lists in the world according to *Wine Spectator* magazine. Sink a bottle with a rib eye steak with blue cheese and you will sleep well. The Xuan Dieu strip is taking off, with plenty of restaurants and shops in this area.

## Italian

### OLD QUARTER

**Pepperoni's Pizza & Café** (Map p96; ☎ 928 5246; 29 Pho Ly Quoc Su; mains from 40,000d; ☎ lunch & dinner) This is a laudable lunch stop, thanks to the US\$2 all-you-can-eat weekday lunchtime pasta and salad bar. It also has authentic pizzas and take-

away. Try the busy **branch** (Map p96; ☎ 928 7030; 31 Pho Bao Khanh) on the popular Bao Khanh strip.

**Mediterraneo** (Map p96; ☎ 826 6288; 23 Pho Nha Tho; mains US\$5-7; ☎ lunch & dinner) This small Italian restaurant is in the heart of happening Nha Tho. The pasta sauces are rich and filling, including gorgonzola ravioli, and perfect with a crisp salad.

**Pane e Vino** (Map p96; ☎ 826 9080; 98 Pho Hang Trong; meals US\$5-15; ☎ lunch & dinner) This trattoria-wine bar is a great place to take a break from commercial blitz of Hang Trong. Memorable moments include chestnut and almond ravioli, and rice Italian style, such as porcini mushroom with truffle oil.

## CENTRAL HANOI

**our pick Luna d'Autunno** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 823 7338; 11B Pho Dien Bien Phu; pizza from 60,000d, fresh pasta from 90,000d) It doesn't get more popular than Luna, one of the best-known and best-loved Italian restaurants in Hanoi. The menu includes a superb selection of homemade antipasto and some of the only fresh pasta in town. Upstairs is the Luna Lounge, a lively drinking den for the after-dinner crowd.

## Seafood

**Sam Son Seafood Market** (☎ 825 0780; 77 Pho Doc Bac) This huge restaurant doubles up as a giant fish market. On the banks of Song Hong (Red River), this is fish heaven, or fish hell if you happen to be a fish. Survey the scene, choose your fish and it will be at your table in minutes.

**San Ho Restaurant** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 934 9184; 58 Pho Ly Thuong Kiet; meals around 200,000d) Set in an attractive French-era villa, San Ho is considered one of the best seafood restaurants in Hanoi. Crustaceans and molluscs come in every shape and size, bathed in delicious sauces. Most prices are by the kilo.

## Vegetarian

**Dakshin** (Map p96; ☎ 928 6872; 94 Pho Hang Trong; meals 25,000-60,000d) Under the same ownership as Tandoor, Dakshin is all-vegetarian and enjoys legendary status among the curry crew in Hanoi. The menu features speciality southern Indian food, including delicious *dosas* (paper-thin lentil-flour pancakes).

**Whole Earth Restaurant** (Map p96; ☎ 926 0696; 7 Pho Dinh Liet; set menus from 30,000d; ☎ 8am-11pm) In the middle of the lively Dinh Liet strip, this is

the place to come and be healthy before moving on to the less healthy pursuits in nearby bars. It specialises in mock meat dishes.

**Com Chay Nang Tam** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 826 6140; 79A Pho Tran Hung Dao; meals from 30,000d) It is a mystery how this place can make simple vegetables and pulses look and even taste like meat. Hardcore vegetarians may find this a contradiction, but it is actually an ancient Buddhist tradition that is designed to make meat-eating guests feel at home. Yes, it really is down that unlikely looking alley behind those buildings. It's smoke free, so it's healthier still.

**our pick Tamarind Café** (Map p96; ☎ 926 0580; 80 Pho Ma May; meals US\$2-4; ☎ 6am-midnight) Vegetarian heaven: there are some wonderful creations here blending together Asian and European elements. Impressive shakes and smoothies include some healthy anti-oxidants for the morning after. Free wi-fi too.

## Cafés

### OLD QUARTER

**Café Pho Co** (Map p96; ☎ 928 8153; 11 Pho Hang Gai; shakes 15,000d) One of Hanoi's best-kept secrets, this old house has a historic courtyard and plum views over Hoan Kiem Lake. Enter through the Feeling Gallery, which sells paintings, and continue up to the top floor for the monumental vista.

**Moca Café** (Map p96; ☎ 825 6334; 14-16 Pho Nha Tho; espresso 20,000d; ☎ 7.30am-11pm) One of the most popular cafés in Hanoi, this the perfect spot for people-watching thanks to its huge windows. See which boutiques are in fashion this month by the names on the shopping bags while tucking into excellent Vietnamese, Western and Indian food.

**Little Hanoi 2** (Map p96; ☎ 928 5333; 21 Pho Hang Gai; sandwiches from 25,000d; ☎ 7.30am-11pm) Unrelated to Little Hanoi 1, this is a likeable little café with a tempting selection of baguettes, pastas and salads. On a busy corner near Hoan Kiem Lake, the French breakfast is a steal at around US\$2.

**Puku** (Map p96; ☎ 928 5244; upstairs 60 Pho Hang Trong; snacks 25,000-35,000d; ☎ 7am-10pm) A funky little café on fashionable Hang Trong, this place has a fun vibe, tasty food and two floors. It also has regular art exhibitions showcasing emerging artists.

**our pick La Place** (Map p96; ☎ 928 5859; 4 Pho Au Trieu; meals from 30,000d) Readers have been raving about this place so we checked it out.

We're joining the rave. The menu is small but includes iced shakes with bite and delicious savoury crepes. After dark, it morphs into a café-bar and drinking is the name of the game.

**Divia** (Map p96; ☎ 934 4088; 57 Pho Ly Thai To; light meals from 35,000d; ☎ 7am-midnight) You don't have to be a diva to come here for a leisurely lunch or a sneaky sundowner. Divia is set in a charming French-period villa with a big outdoor terrace.

**Culi Café** (Map p96; ☎ 926 2241; 40 Pho Luong Ngoc Quyen; meals around 50,000d; ☎ 7.30am-11pm) Sangers, pies, burgers and more, this Australian-run café-bar is a popular stop for tasty tucker. There are also pizzas and all-day breakfasts, plus plenty of beer. Good travel information too, as the owners run Wide Eyed Tours (p484), plus free wi-fi.

## CENTRAL HANOI

**Maison Vanille** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 933 2355; 49 Pho Phan Chu Trinh; cakes 10,000-20,000d) Caffeine addicts suggest that this is home to the best coffee in town. The pastries could in the running too, as they are almost too beautiful to eat.

**Kinh Do Café** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 825 0216; 252 Pho Hang Bong; light meals 20,000d; ☎ 7am-10pm) Fans of Catherine Deneuve will want to make a pilgrimage here, as this was the simple setting where she had her morning cuppa during the making of the film *Indochine*. It serves healthy yoghurt, plus tasty French pastries and feisty coffee. Le patron speaks French.

## Ice Cream

### OLD QUARTER

**Fanny Ice Cream** (Map p96; ☎ 828 5656; 48 Pho Le Thai To; ice creams from 10,000d) The place for French-style ice cream in Hanoi. During the right season try the *com*, a delightful local flavour extracted from young sticky rice; otherwise taste the ginger for the flavour of Asia.

**Kem Trang Tien** (Map p96; ☎ 54 Pho Trang Tien; ice creams from 5000d) There is always a scrum outside this place, as locals struggle to get their hands on the popular ice cream. Located between the Opera House and Hoan Kiem Lake, you'll spot the crowd long before you see the café.

## Speciality Food Streets

If you would like to combine eating with exploration, most of the following food streets are in central Hanoi.

**PHO CAM CHI**

A super-small street – more of an alley – Pho Cam Chi (Map pp92–3) is crammed full of lively street stalls turning out cheap and tasty food. Forget about English menus and don't expect comfortable seating. But there's little room for complaint when you get a small banquet for a few dollars. Cam Chi translates as 'Forbidden to Point' and dates from centuries ago. It is said that the street was named as a reminder for the local residents to keep their curious fingers in their pockets when the king and his entourage went through the neighbourhood. Cam Chi is about 500m northeast of Hanoi train station.

**DUONG THUY KHUE**

On the southern bank of Ho Tay, Đ Thuy Khue (Map pp92–3) features dozens of outdoor seafood restaurants. The peaceful lakeside setting is popular with locals. The level of competition is evident by the daredevil touts who literally throw themselves in front of oncoming traffic to steer people to their tables. You can eat well here for about 100,000d a head.

**PHO NGHI TAM**

About 10km north of central Hanoi, Pho Nghi Tam has a 1km-long stretch of about 60 **dog-meat restaurants** (Map p126; meals from 75,000d). The street runs along the embankment between West Lake and Song Hong (Red River) and the restaurants are on the right as you leave town: look for the words *thit cho*. Even if you have no interest in eating dog meat, it's interesting to cruise this stretch of road on the last evening of the lunar month. Hanoians believe that eating dog meat in the first-half of the month brings bad luck, so the restaurants are deserted. Business picks up in the second-half of the month and the last day is particularly auspicious with the restaurants packed. Now

we know why dogs howl at the moon! Cruise by in the evening and you'll see thousands of motorbikes parked here.

**Self-Catering  
OLD QUARTER**

**Fivimart** (Map p96; 210 Tran Quang Khai) One of the best stocked supermarkets in the centre of town.

**Citimart** (Map p96; Hanoi Towers, 49 Hai Ba Trung) A supermarket with a teasing range of treats for the many expats that live in the skyscraper above.

**Intimex** (Map p96; Pho Le Thai Tho) This is another option for any creature comforts you might need. It's on the western side of Hoan Kiem Lake, tucked down a driveway behind the Clinique beauty shop.

**DRINKING  
Bars**

There is a drink for all seasons in Hanoi, with sophisticated bars, congenial pubs and grungy clubs. Don't forget to warm up with some quality time drinking *bia hoi*, the world's cheapest beer (see the boxed text, p118 for more). Busy Bao Khanh has a cool choice of bars and is a good starting or finishing point for a bar crawl.

Bear in mind that the fun police supervise a fairly strict curfew of midnight during the week and 1am at the weekend, which takes the edge off the nightlife. However, there are some late-night lock-ins; read on for the inside story.

**our pick Le Pub** (Map p96; ☎ 926 2104; 25 Pho Hang Be) The name says it all: the attitude of a British pub with the atmosphere of a continental bar. It's rapidly earning a name for itself as a friendly place to drink and draws both expats and tourists. Late-night lock-ins have been known.

**GAY & LESBIAN HANOI**

By Vietnam's standards there's a lively gay scene in Hanoi, but there are few, if any, gay venues: just some places that are more gay-friendly than others. There is a bustling cruising area along Pho Bao Khanh, plus nearby Hoan Kiem Lake, although gay males should watch out for an extortion scam linked to the latter (see p95).

Official attitudes are still fairly conservative and Hanoi is home to these official attitudes. Police raids in the name of 'social reform' aren't unknown and that tends to ensure gays and lesbians keep a low profile. **Funky Monkey** (opposite) is a lively bar-cum-club that turns up the volume at weekends, while late-night bars **Apocalypse Now** (p118) and **Solace** (opposite) both attract a small gay crowd.

**Quan Bia Minh** (Map p96; ☎ 934 5233; 7A Pho Dinh Liet) Bottled beer doesn't come much cheaper than this, a buzzing backpacker favourite with a blissful balcony terrace overlooking Dinh Liet.

**Red Beer** (Map p96; ☎ 8260247; 97 Pho Ma May) Micro-breweries, sort of upmarket *bia hoi* places, are taking off in Hanoi and this was one of the first. There are several flavours of home brew for those who like to experiment.

**our pick Gambrinus** (Map p96; ☎ 935 1114; 198 Pho Tran Quang Khai) Czech beer lovers will be rubbing their hands in glee. Gambrinus, that shy and retiring Czech beer, even has a home here. It's a vast, impressive brauhaus with shiny vats of freshly brewed Czech beer. Very popular with the Vietnamese.

**Legends Beer** (Map p96; ☎ 557 1277; 109 Pho Nguyen Tuan) Every beer comes with free views of Hoan Kiem Lake. The 2nd-floor balcony is a good place to watch the traffic below and homebrews include an excellent *weiss* (white) beer.

**our pick Highway 4** (Map p96; ☎ 926 0639; 5 Pho Hang Tre) Head here to discover the mystical, medicinal, not to mention intoxicating qualities of Vietnamese rice wine (*xeo*). Take it straight, fruity or 'five times a night' – the possibilities are endless. A popular rallying point for members of Hanoi's infamous Minsk Club (p123), the bar downstairs is for drinkers and there's a rooftop terrace for diners. For more on its food, see p112.

**Bar Le Maquis** (Map p96; ☎ 928 2618; 2A Pho Ta Hien) Small but perfectly formed, this little bar doesn't need a crowd to make it feel busy. Like many of the bars around Ta Hien, it stays open later than most.

**Dragonfly** (Map p96; 15 Pho Hang Buom) Just around the corner from Le Maquis, Dragonfly has an inviting upstairs lounge and DJs rumble on into the night. One of the latest spots in the Old Quarter.

**Finnegan's Irish Pub** (Map p96; ☎ 828 9065; 16A Pho Duong Thanh) Every city has an Irish pub these days and Hanoi is not to be left out. It's a popular sports bar for the weekend games.

**Polite Pub** (Map p96; ☎ 825 0959; 5 Pho Bao Khanh) Don't forget your manners at this place, unless your favourite English Premier League team is 3-0 down at half-time. There is always a crowd here and the drinks are pretty reasonable.

**GC Pub** (Map p96; ☎ 825 0499; 7 Pho Bao Khanh) Bars come in and out of fashion in Hanoi, and GC

has swung right back into favour with Hanoi residents. There's a popular pool table and very friendly staff.

**Amazon Bar** (Map p96; ☎ 928 7338; 10 Pho Bao Khanh) Just over the road and reinforcing Bao Khanh's reputation as a drinkers' den, Amazon has Russian (vodka and Red Bull 25,000d), London (gin and tonic 25,000d) and other promo nights that keep pulling the crowds.

**Funky Monkey** (Map p96; ☎ 928 6113; 15B Pho Hang Hanh) An extension of the Bao Khanh beat, the action regularly spills over on to the dance floor at this hip bar-club. Not the place to come for a quiet conversation.

**Toilet Pub** (Map p96; ☎ 928 7338; 10 Pho Bao Khanh) If you're squeamish about bathroom talk, avoid this place. Spirits are displayed in urinals and toilets are everywhere. Trendy as hell with rich Vietnamese, drinks are expensive (50,000d a beer).

**Solace** (Map p96; ☎ 932 3244; Song Hong, Phuc Tan district) Floating in the Song Hong, many a drinker has found their night floats by here as well. A late-night spot, it doesn't really warm up until after midnight and bobs along until daybreak.

**Met Pub** (Map p96; ☎ 826 6919; Sofitel Metropole Hotel, 15 Pho Ngo Quyen) For a more refined atmosphere, check out the bar at the Sofitel Metropole Hotel. The Met is an atmospheric pub with fine food and a good beer selection, but it's also expensive unless you hit the happy hour (5pm to 7pm).

**My Way** (☎ 936 5917; www.myway.com.vn; 60 P Ly Thai To) This trendy new lounge bar offers a grand tour of world beers, including the best of Belgian, German and, of course, Vietnamese. Some come by the keg, but aren't cheap.

**Coffee Shops**

**Thuy Ta Café** (Map p96; ☎ 828 8148; 1 Pho Le Thai To; pastries 10,000d; ☎ 6am–11pm) One of the most memorable settings in all of Hanoi for a morning coffee, Thuy Ta's shady garden is smack-bang on the northern shore of Hoan Kiem Lake.

**Hapro** (Map p96; Pho Le Thai Tho) At the opposite end of Hoan Kiem Lake, this café has a prime patio for drinks and is an ideal place to watch the world go by on a warm day.

There is a lively, packed and chaotic cluster of coffee shops on the Old Quarter's Pho Hang Hanh; relax on one of the upstairs balconies and watch the bustle below on one of Hanoi's most happening streets.

**BIA AHOY!**

'Tram phan tram!' Remember these words well as all over Vietnam, glasses of *bia hoi* are raised and emptied, cries of '100%' or 'bottoms up' echo around the table.

*Bia hoi* (beer) is Vietnam's very own draught beer or microbrew. This refreshing, light-bodied Pilsener was first introduced to Vietnam by the Czechs. Decades later *bia hoi* is still brewed and delivered daily to drinking establishments throughout Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC), Hanoi and all points between. Brewed without preservatives, it is meant to be enjoyed immediately. And enjoyed it is! Many tourists and expats have never heard of this nectar, but that's their loss, especially given it costs as little as 2000d a glass.

If you think you're ready to try *bia hoi*, be prepared – drinking with the pros is not for the meek. A Western face is a bit unusual at any *bia hoi* establishment and inevitably attracts curious attention from fellow patrons. Raising your glass in toast more often than not results in an invitation to join a group.

Hanoi is the *bia hoi* capital of Vietnam and there are microbars on almost every street corner. Hitting the Old Quarter for a *bia hoi* crawl is a brilliant way to get beneath the skin of the capital. Put US\$10 in your pocket and you will be able to afford nearly 100 beers, so you'll soon make lots of friends. One of the best places to sample this bargain beer is 'bia hoi junction' (Map p96) in the heart of the Old Quarter where Pho Ta Hien meets Pho Luong Ngoc Quyen. Here are three bustling *bia hoi* places occupying different corners, all packed with backpackers and locals every night and knocking out the ale. Don't forget that most *bia hoi* also serve delicious and inexpensive food.

An alternative *bia hoi* junction that is more local in flavour is where Pho Nha Hoa meets Pho Duong Thanh on the western edge of the Old Quarter. **Bia Hoi Ha Noi** (Map p96; 2 Pho Duong Thanh), does the best spare ribs in town for a little something to go with the beer.

For the best quality *bia hoi*, try **Bia Hoi Viet Ha** (Map p96; Pho Hang Bai), which is well loved by Hanoi insiders, as it has the biggest chillers in town. It recently relocated to a much bigger premises on Hang Bai, but it's still hard to get a table.

Other good spots to sample the brew include **Bia Hoi 68 Hang Quat** (Map p96; Pho Hang Quat), which we have been drinking at for a decade now, and **Nha Hang Lan Chin** (Map pp92-3; 2 Pho Trang Tien), one of the most popular local lunch spots in town.

**ENTERTAINMENT  
Cinemas**

**Megastar Cineplex** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 974 3333; 6th fl, Vincom Tower, 191 Ba Trieu) The international multiplex cinema arrives in Hanoi. This is a serious place, complete with the latest international films.

**Cinematheque** (Map p96; 22A Hai Ba Trung; ☎ 936 2648) The Cinematheque is popular with the Hanoi expat community thanks to its adventurous choice of films – from shorts to a mixed selection of arthouse films.

**Centre Culturel Française de Hanoi** (Map p96; ☎ 936 2164; 24 Trang Tien) Set in the sublime L'Espace building near the Opera House, it offers a regular programme of French flicks.

**Circus Troupes**

**Central Circus** (Rap Xiec Trung Uong; Map pp92-3; admission US\$2.50; ☎ shows 8-10pm Tue-Sun, 9am Sun) The circus is one Russian entertainment tradition that has survived and thrived in Vietnam. Performers –

gymnasts, jugglers, animal trainers – were originally trained in Eastern Europe, though today's new recruits learn their skills from their Vietnamese elders.

Performances are held in a huge tent near the northern entrance to Lenin Park. A special show is staged for children on Sunday morning. However, animal lovers won't appreciate the conditions in which the animals are kept.

**Nightclubs**

If you want to see the beautiful people of Vietnam cutting their moves, there are several local clubs to check out. Many of the aforementioned bars morph into clubs come the weekend. New clubs tend to blow hot and cold, so ask around for what's hot or not before venturing forth.

**Apocalypse Now** (Map pp92-3; Pho Dong Thac; ☎ 8pm-1am) This place has lost some of its lustre since moving a long way south in town. However,

it remains a popular place of pilgrimage for Hanoi's hedonists. Definitely one of the more gay-friendly clubs in town.

**New Century Nightclub** (Map p96; ☎ 928 5285; 10 Pho Trang Tien) New places come and go, but the New Century remains the place to see and be seen for young Vietnamese ready to flash the cash. Dress sharp, as the beautiful people are out in force.

**I-Box** (Map p96; ☎ 828 8820; 32 Pho Le Thai Tho) Café-bar by day, with luxurious drapes and free wi-fi, by night it turns club with decent DJs and a throbbing dance floor.

**Live Music****CLASSICAL**

**Hanoi Opera House** (Nha Hat Lon; Map p96; ☎ 825 4312; Pho Trang Tien) This magnificent 900-seat venue looks along Pho Trang Tien to Hoan Kiem Lake. It was built in 1911 and has been restored to its former glory. It was from a balcony on this building that the Viet Minh-run Citizens' Committee announced, on 16 August 1945, that it had taken over the city. Performances of classical music are periodically held here in the evenings and the atmosphere is incredible. The theatre's Vietnamese name appropriately translates to 'House Sing Big'.

Check the listings in the *Guide* or *Time Out* to find out if anything is happening here during your stay.

**JAZZ & MODERN**

**Jazz Club By Quyen Van Minh** (Cau Lac Bo; Map p96; ☎ 825 7655; 31-33 Pho Luong Van Can; ☎ performances 9-11.30pm) *The* place in Hanoi to catch live jazz. Owner Minh teaches saxophone at the Hanoi Conservatory and moonlights here, jamming with a variety of musicians from his talented son to top international jazz players.

**Piano Bar** (Map p96; ☎ 923 2677; 93 Pho Phung Hung) The Piano Bar is reborn after a long absence. There's a grand piano on the 1st floor to serenade couples while they wine and dine, and weekends see a string quartet join the action. Happy hour is from 5pm to 7pm daily.

**R&R Tavern** (Map p96; ☎ 934 4109; 47 Pho Lo Su) A reliable little venue for live music, the Vietnamese band here knows all the counter-culture '60s classics. Drinks are very reasonably priced given the free soundtrack.

**Seventeen Saloon** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 942 6822; 98 Tran Hung Dao) Yee-haa! Welcome to the wild west. Cowboy bars are curiously popular in Asia and this place has live bands every night.

**Terrace Bar** (Press Club; Map p96; ☎ 934 0888; 59A Pho Ly Thai To) A popular place to be on Friday, when half of Hanoi's high-flyers seem to descend here for the happy hour (6pm). Drink specials include access to the roving platters of finger food and a soundtrack of live music.

**TRADITIONAL**

The best places to catch live traditional music are upmarket Vietnamese restaurants in central Hanoi, like **Cay Cau** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 824 5346; De Syloia Hotel, 17A Pho Tran Hung Dao) in De Syloia Hotel, **Club Opera** (Map p96; ☎ 824 6950; 59 Pho Ly Thai To), **Dinh Lang Restaurant** (Map p96; ☎ 828 6290; 1 Pho Le Thai Tho) and **Nam Phuong** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 928 5085; 16 Pho Bao Khanh). It's aimed at tourists, but close your eyes and the music is hauntingly beautiful.

There is also live music performed daily at the Temple of Literature (p100).

**Water Puppets**

This fascinating art form (see the boxed text, p121) originated in northern Vietnam, and Hanoi is the best place to catch a show.

Performances are held at the **Municipal Water Puppet Theatre** (Roi Nuoc Thang Long; Map p96; ☎ 825 5450; 57B Pho Dinh Tien Hoang; www.thanglongwaterpuppet.org; admission 20,000-40,000d, still-camera fee 10,000d, video fee 50,000d; ☎ performances 4pm, 5.15pm, 6.30pm, 8pm & 9.15pm). The higher admission price buys the best seats and you can take-home a CD of the music for US\$2. Multilingual programmes allow the audience to read up on each vignette as it's performed. Check out the faces of enthralled Vietnamese kids in the audience – they're magic. Try and arrange a ticket in advance, as shows are often sold out, especially during high season.

**SHOPPING  
Designer Boutiques**

**Khai Silk** (Map p96; ☎ 825 4237; khai silk@fpt.vn; 96 Pho Hang Gai) Almost a national institution these days, Khai Silk is the place to find funky, fashionable silk clothing, as well as more austere classical creations.

**Hadong Silk** (Map p96; ☎ 928 5056; 102 Pho Hang Gai) One of the biggest silk shops on (appropriately enough) silk street. Hilary Clinton shopped here during her visit with Bill in 2000.

**Pearl Ha** (Map p96; ☎ 942 1872; 40 Pho Hang Bong; www.pearlha.com) Home to an eclectic collection of cool clothing, designer jewellery and other tit-bits, designer Ha Linh Thu has outlets in major hotels including the Hilton and the Melia.



**Ipa-Nima** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 933 4000; 34 Pho Han Thuyen; www.ipa-nima.com) This boutique promises 'smart humour, bright colours, subtle satire' and it delivers. Designer clothing, bags and jewellery for those in the market for something original.

**Things of Substance** (Map p96; ☎ 828 6965; 5 Pho Nha Tho) A popular clothes shop on Nha Tho, this offers tailored fashions at affordable prices – a thing of substance indeed.

**Chi Vang** (Map p96; ☎ 824 0933; 17 Pho Trang Tien) Anyone who has been to Bali and browsed the beautiful Ulu Watu lace shops will know the script here. Exquisite lace creations, including clothing and homewares.

**Dome** (Map p96; ☎ 843 6036; 71 Pho Hang Trong) One of the best shops for home accessories. Unique designs and the best of Vietnamese materials make the perfect keepsake.

There are several beautiful furnishings shops on Pho Nha Tho if you are in the mood for shipping stuff back home or planning to set up house.

## Galleries

Aspiring young artists display their works in Hanoi's private art galleries in the hope of attracting a buyer. The highest concentration of upmarket galleries is on Pho Trang Tien, between Hoan Kiem Lake and the Opera House – just stroll down the strip. Most art galleries have some English-speaking staff, and are open daily until 8pm or 9pm. Prices range from a few dollars to a few thousand and polite bargaining is the norm.

**Viet Art Centre** (Map pp92-3; 42 Pho Yet Kieu) This new art centre was just opening its doors as we were in town, and promises cutting edge contemporary art and classic paintings. Worth a browse plus there is an excellent little café to contemplate.

**Hanoi Gallery** (Map p96; 110 Pho Hang Bac) If you are in the market for propaganda posters from the old days, this place has a huge selection. It includes translations of the slogans and mailing tubes for easy carrying or posting.

**Mai Gallery** (Map p96; ☎ 828 5854; www.mai-gallery-vietnam.com; 183 Pho Hang Bong) Run by resident artist Mai, this is a good place to learn more about Vietnamese art before making a purchase.

In a cluster around the Old Quarter corner of Pho Trang Tien and Pho Ngo Quyen are Gallery Huong Xuyen (Map p96), which also stocks some beautiful greetings cards;

**A Gallery** (Map p96; www.vietnamesepainting.com), with both permanent and visiting exhibitions; and **Hanoi Contemporary Art Gallery** (Map p96; www.hanoiartgallery.com), with some ceramics as well as paintings.

## Handicrafts & Antiques

There are quite a few shops in Hanoi offering new and antique Vietnamese handicrafts (lacquerware, mother-of-pearl inlaid furniture, ceramics, sandalwood statuettes and so on), as well as watercolours, oil paintings, prints and assorted antiques (real and fake). Pho Hang Gai, Pho To Tich, Pho Hang Khai and Pho Cau Go are happy hunting grounds.

**Viet Hien** (Map p96; ☎ 826 9769; 8B Pho Ta Hien) An enormous warehouse of antiques, paintings, furniture and handicrafts, including rattan creations that are a hell of a lot cheaper than at home.

**Vietnamese House** (Map p96; ☎ 826 2455; 92 Pho Hang Bac) A small but attractive shop dealing in a mix of old and new treasures.

There is a strip of antique shops (Map pp92-3) located on Le Duan, across from Hotel Nikko on Tran Nhan Tong, but most tend to be overpriced.

## Markets

**Dong Xuan Market** (Map p96) is a three-storey market located in the Old Quarter of Hanoi, 900m north of Hoan Kiem Lake. The market burned down in 1994, killing five people, all of whom had entered the building after the fire started, to either rescue goods or steal them. It has now been rebuilt and is a tourist attraction in its own right. There are hundreds of stalls here, employing around 3000 people.

**Hang Da Market** (Map p96) is a relatively small market, but it is good for imported foods, wine, beer and flowers. The 2nd floor is good for fabric and ready-made clothing. It is very close to the Protestant Church off Pho Hang Ga, 300m west of Hoan Kiem Lake.

**Hom Market** (Map pp92-3), on the north-east corner of Pho Hué and Pho Tran Xuan Soan, is a good general-purpose market with lots of imported food items. It's a good place to buy fabric if you plan to have clothes made.

**Cua Nam Market** (Map pp92-3) is a few blocks north of the Hanoi train station. The market is itself of no great interest (except maybe for the flowers), but Đ Le Duan between the market and the train station is a

## PUNCH & JUDY IN A POOL

The ancient art of water puppetry (*roi nuoc*) was virtually unknown outside of northern Vietnam until the 1960s. It originated with rice farmers who worked the flooded fields of the Red River Delta. Some say they saw the potential of the water as a dynamic stage, others say they adapted conventional puppetry during a massive flood. Whatever the real story, it is at least 1000 years old.

The farmers carved the puppets from water-resistant fig-tree timber (*sung*) in forms modelled on the villagers themselves, animals from their daily lives and more fanciful mythical creatures such as the dragon, phoenix and unicorn. Performances were usually staged in ponds, lakes or flooded paddy fields.

Contemporary performances use a square tank of waist-deep water for the 'stage'; the water is murky to conceal the mechanisms that operate the puppets. The wooden puppets can be up to 50cm long and weigh as much as 15kg, and are painted with a glossy vegetable-based paint. Each lasts only about three to four months if used continually, so puppet production provides several villages outside Hanoi with a full-time livelihood.

Eleven puppeteers, each one trained for a minimum of three years, are involved in each performance. The puppeteers stand in the water behind a bamboo screen and have traditionally suffered from a host of water-borne diseases – these days they wear waders to avoid this nasty occupational hazard.

Some puppets are simply attached to a long pole, while others are set on a floating base, in turn attached to a pole. Most have articulated limbs and heads, some also have rudders to help guide them. In the darkened auditorium it looks as if they are literally walking on water.

The considerable skills required to operate the puppets were traditionally kept secret and passed only from father to son; never to daughters through fear that they would marry outside the village and take the secrets with them.

The music, which is provided by a band, is as important as the action on stage. The band includes wooden flutes (*sao*), gongs (*cong*), cylindrical drums (*trong com*), bamboo xylophones and the fascinating single-stringed zither (*dan bau*).

The performance consists of a number of vignettes depicting pastoral scenes and legends. One memorable scene tells of the battle between a fisherman and his prey, which is so electric it appears as if a live fish is being used. There are also fire-breathing dragons (complete with fireworks) and a flute-playing boy riding a buffalo.

The performance is a lot of fun. The water puppets are both amusing and graceful, and the water greatly enhances the drama by allowing the puppets to appear and disappear as if by magic. Spectators in the front-row seats can expect a bit of a splash.

treasure-trove of household goods, such as electronics and plasticware.

**Buoi Market** (Map pp88-9) is located out in the far northwest. Notable for live animals (chickens, ducks, pigs and so on), it also features ornamental plants.

For something completely different, there is now a **night market** (📍 7pm-midnight) running through the heart of the Old Quarter. It starts near Dong Xuan Market on Pho Hang Giay and runs almost to Hoan Kiem Lake on Pho Hang Dao. It is little more than a spill-over from the many shops that now dot the Old Quarter, but at least the streets are closed to traffic and it's cooler to browse. Watch out for pickpockets, as this has become the new Hanoi hotspot.

## Souvenirs & Other Shops

Around Pho Hang Bong and Pho Hang Gai, just northwest of Hoan Kiem Lake, are plenty of souvenir shops selling T-shirts and Viet Cong (VC) headgear. It might be worth noting, however, that neither Ho Chi Minh T-shirts nor VC headgear are very popular apparel with Vietnamese refugees and certain war veterans living in the West. Wearing such souvenirs while walking down a street in Los Angeles or Melbourne might offend someone and result in a costly trip to the dentist.

Pho Hang Gai and its continuation, Pho Hang Bong, are good places to look for embroidered tablecloths, T-shirts and wall hangings. Pho Hang Gai is also a good place to have

clothes custom-made. Take a look along Pho Hang Dao, just north of Hoan Kiem Lake, for souvenir Russian-made watches.

If you don't make it up to Sapa (p172), there is a wide selection of ethnic-minority garb and handicrafts available in Hanoi; a stroll along Pho Hang Bac or Pho To Tich will turn up close to a dozen places.

**Craft Link** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 843 7710; 43 Pho Van Mieu) is a not-for-profit organisation that buys good quality tribal handicrafts and weavings at fair-trade prices, and funds community development initiatives for the artisans.

There is an outstanding **shoe market** (Map p96; Pho Hang Dau) at the northeast corner of Hoan Kiem Lake.

For the best in CDs and DVDs, there are several shops along Pho Hang Bong and Pho Trang Tien. Be aware that they're bootleg, though, so not strictly legal.

On Pho Trang Tien you'll also find many shops willing to make dirt-cheap eyeglasses in a mere 10 minutes, using decent imported lenses from France or Japan.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

Hanoi has fewer direct international flights than HCMC, but with a change of aircraft in Hong Kong or Bangkok you can get to almost anywhere. For further information about international flights, see p477.

**Vietnam Airlines** (Map p96; ☎ 943 9660; www.vietnamair.com.vn; 25 Pho Trang Thi; ✈ 7am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8-11.30am & 1.30-5pm Sat, Sun & holidays) links Hanoi to destinations throughout Vietnam. Popular routes include Hanoi to Danang, Dien Bien Phu, HCMC, Hué and Nha Trang, all served daily.

**Pacific Airlines** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 974 5555; 193 Đ Ba Trieu) has daily flights to Danang and HCMC.

### Bus & Minibus

Hanoi has several main long-distance bus stations and each one serves a particular area. They are fairly well organised, with ticket offices, fixed prices and printed schedules. You should consider buying tickets the day before you plan to travel on the longer-distance routes to ensure a seat.

In central Hanoi, **Kim Ma bus station** (Map pp92-3; cnr Pho Nguyen Thai Hoc & Pho Giang Vo) has buses to the northwestern part of Vietnam, including Hoa Binh (25,000d, two hours) and Dien Bien Phu (120,000d, 16 hours).

**Gia Lam bus station** (Map p126; ☎ 827 1569; Đ Ngoc Lam) is the place for buses to points northeast of Hanoi. These include Halong Bay (40,000d, 3½ hours), Haiphong (35,000d, two hours), and Lang Son (50,000d, three hours) and Lao Cai (53,000d, nine hours), both near the Chinese border. The bus station is 2km northeast of the centre – cross the Song Hong (Red River) to get there. *Cyclos* can't cross the bridge, so take a taxi (around 30,000d) or motorbike. More convenient is the Loung Yen bus station in the southeast of town, serving the same places, plus Cao Bang (80,000d, eight hours) and Ha Giang (76,000d, seven hours).

**Giap Bat bus station** (Map p126; ☎ 864 1467; Đ Giai Phong) serves points south of Hanoi, including Ninh Binh (28,000d, two hours) and Hué (80,000d, 12 hours). It is 7km south of the Hanoi train station.

**My Dinh bus station** (Map p126; ☎ 768 5549, Đ Pham Hung) is another option in the west of town, which serves a range of destinations, including Halong City, Lang Son, Cao Bang, Ha Giang and Dien Bien Phu.

Tourist-style minibuses can be booked through most hotels and cafés. Popular destinations include Halong Bay and Sapa.

Many open-ticket tours through Vietnam start or finish in Hanoi – for more details see p487.

### Car & Motorcycle

To hire a car with a driver, contact a hotel, travellers café or travel agency. The main roads in the northeast are generally OK, but in parts of the northwest they can be dire in the wet season and only suitable for a 4WD.

The average cost for a six-day trip in a Russian jeep is about US\$300 per person, including the jeep, a driver and petrol. These old jeeps fit only two passengers and are pretty uncomfortable; they're dusty and hot, or damp and cold, depending on the weather. For a smarter Japanese air-con 4WD, double the rate. The price usually includes the driver's expenses, and it's a good idea to clarify this.

If you plan to tour the north by bike, there are several good outfits that can arrange guides and rentals and help with itinerary planning. Check out p491 for more details.

The 125cc Russian-made Minsk is the best overall bike for touring the north – you'll need this kind of power for the mountainous regions, and all mechanics know how to fix them. Quality of rental motorbikes can be extremely

variable, so try to find a reputable dealer, especially if you're planning long trips.

For the most reliable Minsk rental in town, make for **Cuong's Motorbike Adventure** (Map p96; ☎ 926 1534; 1 Pho Luong Ngoc Quyen). Cuong rents out bikes for US\$5 a day, including a full range of spares and a repair manual.

For more on the mighty Minsk, check out the official website of the **Minsk Club** (www.minskclubvietnam.com). Its motto is 'In Minsk We Trust' and the site is full of useful information on the motorbike and the mountains to explore.

### Train

The main **Hanoi train station** (Ga Hang Co; Map pp92-3; ☎ 825 3949; 120 Đ Le Duan; ✈ ticket office 7.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-7.30pm) is at the western end of Pho Tran Hung Dao; trains from here go to destinations south. Foreigners can buy tickets for southbound trains at counter 2, where the staff speak English. It's often best to buy tickets at least one day before departure to ensure a seat or sleeper.

To the right of the main entrance of the train station is a separate ticket office for northbound trains to Lao Cai (for Sapa) and China. Tickets to China must be bought from counter 13.

However, the place where you purchase the ticket is not necessarily where the train departs. Just behind the main 'A Station' on Đ Le Duan is **Tran Quy Cap station** (B Station; Pho Tran Qui Cap; ☎ 825 2628) and all northbound trains leave from there.

To make things even more complicated, some northbound (Lao Cai and Lang Son included) and eastbound (Haiphong) trains depart from Gia Lam (Map p126) on the eastern side of the Song Hong (Red River), and **Long Bien** (Map pp92-3; ☎ 826 8280) on the western (city) side of the river. Be sure to ask just where you need to go to catch your train. Tickets can be bought at the main station until about two hours before departure; if it's any closer to the departure time, go to the relevant station and buy tickets there.

Check with **Vietnam Rail** (Duong Sat Viet Nam; www.vr.com.vn) for current timetables. For more information on trains see p492.

## GETTING AROUND

### To/From the Airport

Hanoi's Noi Bai International Airport (Map p126) is about 35km north of the city and the trip takes 45 minutes to an hour. The airport

freeway is one of the most modern roads in Vietnam and terminates in the north of town after crossing the Thang Long bridge.

Vietnam Airlines minibuses between Hanoi and Noi Bai airport charge US\$2 a seat. There are few information signs inside the new terminal building; you need to go outside and look for the signs for taxis and minibuses. See the boxed text (p124) for more on avoiding potential problems.

To get to the airport from town, you can take one of the minibuses that depart roughly every half-hour from opposite the same Vietnam Airlines office on Pho Trang Thi. It's best – though not essential – to book the day before.

The cheapest way to get between Noi Bai airport and central Hanoi is to use public buses 7 or 17, which run to/from Kim Ma bus station and Long Bien bus station (Map pp92-3) respectively. Services depart every 15 minutes from around 5am to 9pm and tickets are just 3500d – perhaps the cheapest airport run in the world. It can take more than an hour, however. Arrange an onward metered taxi from the bus station to your chosen hotel.

**Airport Taxi** (☎ 873 3333) charges US\$10 for a taxi ride door-to-door to or from Noi Bai airport. They do *not* require that you pay the toll for the bridge you cross en route. Some other taxi drivers require that you pay the toll, so ask first.

Inside the terminal, touts will offer taxi services. Don't use the meter with a tout, as it may well be rigged. The 'official' taxi rank is outside the concourse and you buy tickets from the seller at the head of the taxi line.

In central Hanoi, there is always a collection of taxi drivers just outside the Vietnam Airlines office or at the northern end of Hoan Kiem Lake.

### Bicycle

A good way to get around Hanoi is by bicycle, although the traffic can be daunting at first. Many guesthouses and cafés offer these for rent for about US\$1 to US\$2 per day.

### Bus

There are now more than 60 public bus lines serving routes in and around Hanoi. The buses are clean and comfortable, and the fare is just 3500d: only walking would be cheaper. Pick up a copy of the *Xe Buýt Hanoi* (Hanoi bus

## MIND THE MAFIA

It happens all over the world and Hanoi is no exception. Many of the drivers who hang out at Noi Bai airport are working in cahoots with hotels in Hanoi to fill their rooms. They know every trick in the book and usually carry the cards of all the popular budget hotels. 'It's full today' is popular, as is 'they have a new place, much nicer, number two'. Usually it's a bunch of lies. The best defence is to insist you already have a reservation. Even if the place does turn out to be full, you can plot your own course from there. When it comes to the Vietnam Airlines minibus, the best bet is to bail out at the Vietnam Airlines office, usually the first stop in the centre. Otherwise you will be dragged around endless commission-paying hotels in the Old Quarter. Another option to avoid the nonsense is to book a room in advance and arrange an airport pick-up. Someone will be waiting with a nameboard and you can wave to the taxi touts as you exit the airport.

map; 5000d) from recommended bookstores on Pho Trang Tien. It is all in Vietnamese but easy enough to follow with routes and numbers clearly marked.

## Car & Motorbike

For travellers well versed in the ways of Asian cities, Hanoi is a lot of fun to explore by motorbike. Most guesthouses and hotels can arrange new motorbikes for around US\$5 a day. However, for the uninitiated, it is *not* the easiest place to learn. Traffic conditions are definitely not as orderly as home, and driving at night can be dangerous, particularly crossing the busy junctions with no traffic lights. Then there are the hassles of dealing with parking and possible theft. It's also easy to unknowingly violate road rules, in which case the police will help you part with some cash.

## Cyclo

The *cyclos* in Hanoi are wider than the HCMC variety, making it possible for two people to fit in one and share the fare. One common *cyclo* driver's ploy when carrying two passengers is to agree on a price, and then *double* it upon arrival, gesturing 'no, no, no...that was per person'.

Aim to pay around 10,000d per person for a journey in the city centre. Longer rides or night rides are double that or more. It should be cheaper but they won't budge with tourists. Try to negotiate in dong, not dollars. You'll also find that a little bit of Vietnamese goes a long way when talking about prices.

The *cyclo* drivers in Hanoi are even less likely to speak English than in HCMC, so take a map of the city with you. That said, many are now wising up and now have a command of basic English.

## Motorbike Taxi

You won't have any trouble finding a *xe om* in Hanoi. Just stroll along any major street and you'll get an offer from a driver almost every 10 seconds.

Like *cyclos*, expect to pay around 5000d to 10,000d for shorter rides and more again for longer rides.

## Taxi

There are several companies in Hanoi offering metered taxi services. All charge similar rates. Flag fall is around 10,000d to 15,000d, which takes you one or two kilometres; every kilometre thereafter costs about 8000d. Bear in mind that there are lots of dodgy operators with high-speed meters. Try and use the more reliable companies:

**Airport Taxi** (☎ 873 3333)

**Hanoi Taxi** (☎ 853 5353)

**Mai Linh Taxi** (☎ 822 2666)

**Taxi CP** (☎ 824 1999)

## AROUND HANOI

The rich alluvial soils of the Red River Delta nurture a rich rice crop and many of the communities surrounding Hanoi are still engaged in agriculture. The contrast between the modern face of Hanoi and the medieval lifestyle of the villages is stark. Many of the small tour operators (p91) in Hanoi offer cycling tours to villages near Hanoi, which are a great way to discover a different world. **Onbike Tour** (☎ 732 4788; www.onbikevietnam.com) specialises in cycling tours around Hanoi. Taking a tour also avoids having to survive the suburbs of Hanoi on your own, as a minibus takes the strain.

## HO CHI MINH TRAIL MUSEUM

If you're interested in this amazing feat of human determination, the **Ho Chi Minh Trail Museum** (Bao Tang Duong Ho Chi Minh; Map p126; Hwy 6; admission 10,000d; ☎ 7.30-11am & 1.30-4pm Tue-Sun) is an introduction to the famous supply route from the communist north to the occupied south of Vietnam. There is a great model of the trail, which shows the nightmarish terrain through which it passed. It is located about 13km southwest of Hanoi and can be combined with a visit to Van Phuc handicraft village (right), or visited on the way to the Perfume Pagoda.

## PERFUME PAGODA

North Vietnam's very own Marble Mountains (p236), the **Perfume Pagoda** (Chua Huong; admission 35,000d incl return boat trip) is a striking complex of pagodas and Buddhist shrines built into the karst cliffs of Huong Tich Mountain (Mountain of the Fragrant Traces). Among the better-known sites here are Thien Chu (Pagoda Leading to Heaven); Giai Oan Chu (Purgatorial Pagoda), where the faithful believe deities purify souls, cure sufferings and grant offspring to childless families; and Huong Tich Chu (Pagoda of the Perfumed Vestige). This is a domestic drawcard and it is an interesting experience just to see the Vietnamese tourists at play.

The entertaining boat trip along the scenic waterways between limestone cliffs takes about two hours return; allow a couple more hours return to climb to the top. The path to the summit is steep in places and if it's raining the ground can get very slippery. However, the good news is that there is now a cable car to the summit, costing 30,000d one way. A smart combination is to use the cable car to go up and then walk down.

Great numbers of Buddhist pilgrims come here during a festival that begins in the middle of the second lunar month and lasts until the last week of the third lunar month (usually corresponding to March and April). It's very busy during this period, especially on the even dates of the lunar month; you'll have a much easier time if you establish the lunar date and plan to go on an odd date. Weekends tend to draw crowds year round, when pilgrims and other visitors spend their time boating, hiking and exploring the caves. Litter and hawkers are part and parcel of the visit, and some hawkers are persistent enough to hassle visitors all the way to the top; you have been warned!

## Getting There & Away

The Perfume Pagoda is about 60km southwest of Hanoi by road. Getting there requires a journey first by road, then by river, then on foot or by cable car.

First, travel from Hanoi by car for two hours to the township of My Duc. Vehicles usually drop you about a 15-minute walk from the boat ramp, or you can hop on a *xe om*. Then take a small boat, usually rowed by women, for one hour to the foot of the mountain.

The main pagoda area is about a 4km-steep hike up from where the boat lets you off. Allow yourself at least two hours to make the return trip, longer if it's been raining and is slippery.

Most of the travellers' cafés in Hanoi offer inexpensive tours to the pagoda. You can find day trips as cheap as US\$10, inclusive of transport, guide and lunch. For a higher quality small-group tour expect to spend up to US\$20. This is one of those places where it is easier to take a tour. Unless you charter a vehicle, it's a real pain trying to do this trip by public transport.

## HANDICRAFT VILLAGES

There are numerous villages surrounding Hanoi that specialise in a variety of cottage industries. Visiting these villages can make for a rewarding day trip, though you will need a good guide to make the journey worthwhile.

**Bat Trang** (Map p126) is known as the 'ceramic village'. Here artisans mass-produce ceramic vases and other pieces in their kilns. It's hot, sweaty work, but the results are superb and very reasonably priced compared with the boutiques in town. There are masses of ceramic shops but poke around down the lanes and behind the shops to find the kilns. Bat Trang is 13km southeast of Hanoi. Public bus 47 runs here from Long Bien bus station (Map pp92-3).

**So** is known for its delicate noodles. The village even produces the flour from which the noodles are made. The flour is made from yams and cassava (manioc) rather than wheat. So is in Ha Tay province, about 25km southwest of Hanoi.

**Van Phuc** (Map p126) specialises in silk. Silk cloth is produced here on looms and lots of visitors like to buy or order tailor-made clothes. Many of the fine silk items you see on sale in Hanoi's Pho Hang Gai originate here. There's a small daily fruit-and-vegetable



market here in the morning, and a pretty village pagoda with a lily pond. Van Phuc is 8km southwest of Hanoi in Ha Tay province. City bus 1 runs here from Long Bien bus station.

**Dong Ky** (Map p126) was known as the 'firecracker village' until 1995, when the Vietnamese government banned firecrackers. With that industry now extinguished, the village survives by producing beautiful traditional furniture inlaid with mother-of-pearl. You can have handcrafted furniture custom-made here and exported directly to your door. Dong Ky is 15km northeast of Hanoi.

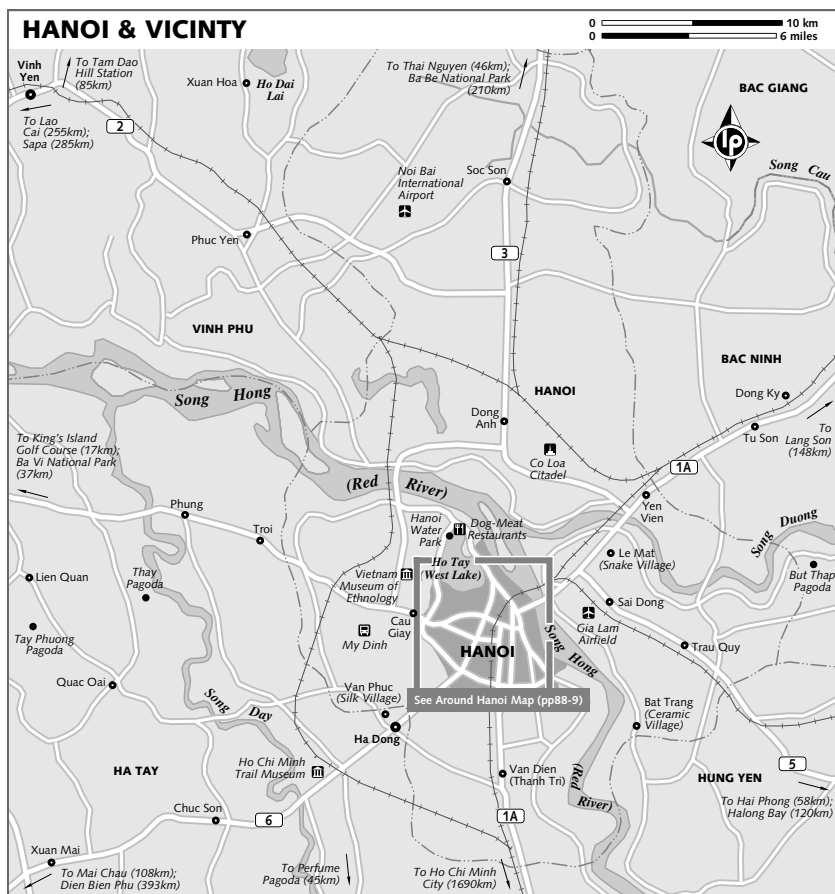
**Le Mat** (Map p126), 7km northeast of central Hanoi, is a snake village. The locals raise snakes for upmarket restaurants in Hanoi,

as well as spicing up medicinal spirits. Fresh snake cuisine and snake elixir is available at this village, and for around US\$10 you can try a set course consisting of snake meat prepared in around 10 different ways. On the 23rd day of the third lunar month is the colourful **Le Mat Festival**, featuring 'snake dances' and other activities.

Other handicraft villages in the region produce conical hats, delicate wooden bird cages, and herbs.

## THAY & TAY PHUONG PAGODAS

Stunning limestone outcrops loom up from the emerald green paddy fields and clinging to the cliffs are these two pagodas, about 20 minutes apart from each other by road.



## MRS THUYEN, BOAT WOMAN

Anyone who visits the Perfume Pagoda will approach the sacred mountain by rowing boat. Here, one of the rowers tells her story:

'I've rowed tourists to the Perfume Pagoda for about two years now. Our boat group is made up of 27 boats rowed by women who all belong to martyrs' families – our husbands or fathers or children were killed or injured in the war. There are more than 100 of us in the same group, but only 27 of us are allowed to work at one time, so there's an annual lottery to establish which of us will row each year. So I may not work every year, but when I do it's consistent and I get paid 30,000d every day, regardless of how many trips I do, or even if there's no work for a day or two.

'You see our group of martyrs' families has priority for rowing all the foreigners. It's easier because there are fewer people in the boat and if we're lucky we get tips. Other boats have to compete on their own for customers and sometimes might not have any and might not make any money. A boat costs about one million dong, and we all save to buy our own. Every three or four years we have to change the floor of the boat and that costs 300,000d.

'We all also have a plot of land nearby, and we grow and sell things when we're not working on the boats. I grow longan fruit. My husband raises bees; he moves his hives around other people's plantations depending on what's flowering, and pays for the bees' use of the flowers with a litre or two of honey. Honey sells for about 80,000d a litre. Last year was a bad year; my husband only made 50L all year, but in the first three months of this year he's already made 30L.

'I used to be a soldier; that's how I met my husband. Our children are 19, 16 and 14 years old and when they were little I didn't row the boat; I sold jewellery and incense at the pagoda. It's hard work but I think about my children finishing their study and becoming successful and that keeps me going.'

**Thay Pagoda** (Master's Pagoda; Map p126; admission 5000d), also known as Thien Phuc (Heavenly Blessing), is dedicated to Thich Ca Buddha (Sakyamuni, the historical Buddha). To the left of the main altar is a statue of the 12th-century monk Tu Dao Hanh, the master in whose honour the pagoda is named. To the right is a statue of King Ly Nhan Tong, who is believed to have been a reincarnation of Tu Dao Hanh.

In front of the pagoda is a small stage built on stilts in the middle of a pond; water-puppet shows are staged here during festivals. Follow the path around the outside of the main pagoda building, and take a steep 10-minute climb up to a beautiful smaller pagoda perched high on the rock. Thay Pagoda is a big and confusing complex for non-Buddhists – consider hiring a pagoda guide to get the most from a visit.

The pagoda's **annual festival** is held from the fifth to the seventh days of the third lunar month. Pilgrims and other visitors enjoy watching water-puppet shows, hiking and exploring caves in the area.

**Tay Phuong Pagoda** (Pagoda of the West; Map p126; admission 5000d), also known as Sung Phuc Pa-

goda, consists of three single-level structures built in descending order on a hillock said to resemble a buffalo. The figures representing 'the conditions of man' are carved from jackfruit wood, many dating from the 18th century, and are the pagoda's most celebrated feature. The earliest construction here dates from the 8th century. Take the steep steps up to the main pagoda building, then find a path at the back that loops down past the other two pagodas and wanders through the hillside village that surrounds the complex.

## Getting There & Away

The pagodas are about 30km west of Hanoi in Ha Tay province. Travel companies in Hanoi offer combined day tours of the Thay and Tay Phuong Pagodas. Alternatively, hire a car and driver for about US\$40, and plot a rewarding day trip combining the pagodas and Ba Vi National Park.

## BA VI NATIONAL PARK

☎ 034

Centred on scenic Ba Vi Mountain (Nui Ba Vi), **Ba Vi National Park** (☎ 881 205; admission 10,000d, motorbike 5000d) attracts Hanoians looking for

a weekend escape from the city. The park has several rare and endangered plants in its protected forest, and its mammals include two species of rare 'flying' squirrel. Human encroachment on the area has made the chances of seeing any of these pretty rare.

There's an orchid garden and a bird garden, and **hiking** opportunities through the forested slopes of the mountain. There's a **temple** to Uncle Ho at the mountain's summit (1276m) – it's a hard but beautiful 30-minute climb up 1229 steps through the forest – with spectacular views of the Red River valley and Hanoi in the distance. At least there are views between April and December when the air is clear; at other times it's damp and misty but eerily atmospheric. The road to the summit car park is seriously steep, slippery and narrow, but road widening is ongoing.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Ba Vi Guesthouse** (☎ 881 197; r 120,000-150,000d) spreads over several blocks in the heart of the park. Prices are an extra 50,000d per room on weekends and there's a big swimming pool that is chaos in the summer months. Go for one of the less-noisy guesthouses away from the pool and restaurant area if you're here on a weekend. You *must* have your passport with you to check into the guesthouse here.

Despite its unpromising appearance, the park restaurant serves good, cheap, fresh-cooked food; a tasty meal for two costs around 50,000d, so make this your lunch stop if you're on a day trip. The toilets are terrible – pee behind a tree.

### Getting There & Away

Ba Vi National Park is about 65km west of Hanoi, and the only practical option for visiting is by hired vehicle from Hanoi. Travelling by motorbike, it is possible to visit Ba Vi before taking a beautiful riverside road down to Hoa Binh and onwards into the northwest.

There has been some confusion between attractions near Ba Vi town, which is well away from the park boundaries, and Ba Vi National Park. Make sure your driver knows you want the national park.

### CO LOA CITADEL

Dating from the 3rd century BC, **Co Loa Citadel** (Co Loa Thanh; Map p126; admission per person/car 2000/5000d; ☎ 8am-5pm) was the first fortified citadel in Vietnamese history and became

the national capital during the reign of Ngo Quyen (AD 939-44). Only vestiges of the ancient ramparts, which enclosed an area of about 5 sq km, remain.

In the centre of the citadel are temples dedicated to the rule of King An Duong Vuong (257-208 BC), who founded the legendary Thuc dynasty, and his daughter My Nuong (Mi Chau). Legend tells that My Nuong showed her father's magic crossbow trigger, which made him invincible in battle, to her husband, the son of a Chinese general. He stole it and gave it to his father. With this not-so-secret weapon, the Chinese defeated An Duong Vuong, beginning a thousand years of Chinese occupation.

Co Loa Citadel is 16km north of central Hanoi in Dong Anh district, and can be visited as a short detour while on the way to or from Tam Dao Hill Station. Public bus 46 runs here from My Dinh bus station (p122). Buses 15 and 17 run past the access road from Long Bien bus station (Map pp92-3).

### TAM DAO HILL STATION

☎ 0211 / elevation 930m

'La Cascade d'Argent' (Silver Waterfall) to the French, and Thac Bac to the Vietnamese, Tam Dao Hill Station was a popular place of escape from the heat of the Red River Delta. Founded in 1907 by the French, most of the grand old colonial villas were destroyed during the Franco-Viet Minh War in the 1950s and the ruins have since been replaced by Soviet-inspired, concrete-box architecture. A somewhat belated effort to restore some of the colonial villas is now under way.

Hanoi residents sometimes call Tam Dao 'the Dalat of the north'. This has more to do with its high elevation and cool climate than any resemblance to Dalat. If you're living in Hanoi and would like to find a summer weekend retreat, it's worth heading up for the cool weather and a change of pace. However, unless you plan to do some serious hiking or bird-watching, there really isn't that much to see and do here.

**Tam Dao National Park** was designated in 1996 and covers much of the area. Tam Dao means 'Three Islands', and the three summits of Tam Dao Mountain, all about 1400m in height, are sometimes visible to the northeast of the hill station, floating like islands in the mist. The relative dampness and altitude makes the area particularly rich in rainforest and associated

animals. There are at least 64 mammal species, including langurs, and 239 bird species in the park, but you'll need a good local guide and be prepared to do some hiking to find them. Illegal hunting remains a big problem.

Remember that it is cool up in Tam Dao and that this part of Vietnam has a distinct winter. Don't be caught unprepared. Hikes vary from half an hour return to the **waterfall**, to eight hours into **primary rainforest**. A guide is essential for the longer treks and can be hired from 50,000d; ask about these at the Mela Hotel (right). The best time to visit is between late April and mid-October, when the mist sometimes lifts and the weather can be fine. As with other popular sites in Vietnam, weekends can be packed with Vietnamese tour groups, so try to make your visit during the week if possible.

The new **Tam Dao Golf and Resort** (☎ 04-736 6457; <http://tamdaogolf.com>) is causing quite a stir in the capital. Set against the beautiful backdrop of the 'Three Islands', membership starts at a hefty US\$13,000 or you can swing your club for just US\$30 during the week.

### Sleeping & Eating

There's a host of hotels and guesthouses in Tam Dao. The town is easy to navigate, so look around, negotiate and watch out for neighbouring karaoke bars.

**Huong Lien Hotel** (☎ 824 282; r 150,000d) One of the cheaper hotels amid the misty mountains, it's a family-run place with clean rooms.

**Green World Hotel** (☎ 824 315; r 180,000-350,000d) The biggest hotel in town, if Tam Dao can be called a town, it has all wood furnishings, sparkling bathrooms and balconies.

**Mela Hotel** (☎/fax 824 352; r US\$45-65) This is a favoured haunt for Hanoi expats looking to escape for the weekend. The most stylish hotel in town, the rooms are seriously smart and the roaring fire downstairs is inviting on a chilly night.

There are hotel restaurants galore and several rows of *com pho* (rice-noodle soup) places in town. Try to avoid eating the local wildlife.

### Getting There & Away

Tam Dao is 85km northwest of Hanoi in Vinh Phuc province. Buses run from Kim Ma bus station (p122) in Hanoi to Vinh Yen (20,000d, one hour). From there you can hire a motorbike (about 50,000d one way) to travel the 24km single-lane road that leads to the national park.

Hiring a car and driver for the day from Hanoi will cost about US\$50. If you rent a motorbike in Hanoi, the journey time is about two hours, and the last part of the ride into the park is beautiful.

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