Hanoi is the capital of Vietnam and the country’s second largest city with a population of approximately 7.1 million. The climate is tropical with wet and hot weather most of the year, though make sure to pack a jumper if visiting during the winter months as it can get quite chilly in the evenings. Many people suggest avoiding the summer months of July and August as the bustling city can get very very hot as there is little or no wind. Hanoi is a great place to stay of you want to visit places such as Halong Bay or Sapa as trips to both can be booked and taken from here, all of which is explained in this Hanoi Guide and additional posts.
Before you visit Vietnam you will need to make sure you have a visa in place. You can either apply for a visa on arrival or arrange one before you enter the country. You can read our Vietnam visa post here.

Hanoi can be reached by train, bus or plane depending on where you are travelling from. Many people travelling to Hanoi from another country choose to arrive by plane due to visa requirements.

- **Noi Bai International Airport** – this airport is the biggest airport in northern Vietnam and is located 35km (45-60 minutes) from the north of the city. The airport is serviced by a number of Vietnamese and international airlines including Vietnam Airlines, AirAsia, Hong Kong Airlines, Cathy Pacific, Thai Airways, Tiger Airways and Nok Air. If you fly to Hanoi then this is where you’ll come. Options to transfer into the city are not great but at least there is a choice!

- **Hotel transfer** – The most hassle free way to get into the city from the airport is via hotel transfer. If you do this be prepared to pay $18-$20 for the privilege and arrange it with your hotel or hostel in advance. You may also be able to use a local tour agency via an online booking.

- **Taxi** – Another option is to take a taxi into the city. When you walk out of the airport be sure to ignore the ‘bogus’ taxi drivers who will be asking you if you need a taxi (and will charge you for the privilege) and look for the following taxi companies instead: Hanoi Tourist Taxi, Hanoi Taxi and Mai Linh Taxi, these taxis will charge you by the meter and won’t rip you off.

  **TIP:** Most of the Mai Linh taxis are bright green so you won’t be able to miss them.

- **Bus** – If you’re feeling adventurous you can also attempt to take a Vietnam Airlines bus for about $3 per person into the city. If you choose this option, make sure you have the address of your hotel written down in Vietnamese to show to the bus driver so he can let you know where to get off.

- **Hanoi Railway Stations** – the main train station in the city is Hanoi train station. Trains from here go to southern destinations such as Hue and further down the north south reunification route all the way to Ho Chi Minh city (Saigon). If you want to buy your train tickets yourself you can buy them directly from the station as the staff here speak good English. If you’re buying more than one ticket and want to be in the same cabin or pick your beds (e.g. 1 top and 1 bottom bunk) it is worth booking your onward tickets as soon as you get to Hanoi to ensure you get the seat or the sleeper you want. The best way to transfer to and from the centrally based station is using a meter taxi.

- If you are planning to travel north of Hanoi there is a separate ticket office for northbound trains, just ask a member of staff when you visit the station and they will point you in the right direction. The majority of northbound trains leave from Tran Quy Cap station but if you are unsure of which station or platform your train leaves from you can ask a member of station at the station. There are not many trains so it’s fairly easy to understand what is happening. Check with Vietnam Rail (www.vr.com.vn) for current timetables.

- **Hanoi Bus Stations** – there are 4 main long distance bus stations in Hanoi; Kim Ma bus station, Gia Lam bus station, Giap Bat bus station and My Dinh bus station. Each serves a different area and which you use will depend on where you are travelling to.
or from. Like train tickets, it is worth booking your onward ticket as soon as you arrive in the city (or at the very latest the day before you depart) to ensure you get a seat on the bus you want. Tickets can be booked at either bus station, through your hotel or through one of the many travel cafés in Hanoi.

**TRANSPORT**  
*Once you’re there*

Public transport in Vietnam is not as advanced as in some other major South East Asian cities (Bangkok springs to mind), however the layout of the city means that usually you don’t need transport, and if you do you will not struggle to find a taxi or willing person to drive you there!

- **Walking** – Whilst we were in Hanoi we walked from our hotel to most tourist destinations, if you stay in the old quarter most places are within walking distance. If you do choose to explore the city on foot, be careful when crossing the road. Often when the green man is lit at crossings, bikes can still go so make sure you look both ways and make eye contact so that they stop. The best tip given to us in Hanoi was just keep moving at a steady pace, a car/bike will see you and make plans to move around you so don’t stop!

- **Taxi** – taxis are cheap but there are so many companies it is difficult to know who to trust. We have heard stories of quick taxi meters and drivers taking passengers to the wrong place to try and get them to eat or stay there. Taxi companies to trust are Mai Linh, Hanoi, Hanoi tourist. If you decide you need a taxi it may be worth heading out of the manic old quarter streets first.

- **Motorbike taxi** – if you feel a bit daring then give this a go. You will be asked frequently if you want to ride on the back of a scooter. Agree the destination and price first and hold on tight. You will probably reconsider after seeing the Hanoi scooter traffic!
Accommodation

Hanoi is crammed full of nice hotels at reasonable prices, many of which are small, boutique hotels with no more than 8-10 rooms. One thing to be wary of however, is that unscrupulous taxi drivers may advise you that your hotel has closed down or simply take you to another hotel with the same name (a fake hotel) owned by somebody that will pay them commission on the extortionate rate you will pay. Before you get to Hanoi make sure you write down the hotel address and double check your booking direct with the hotel, then you are in a position to demand to be taken to that address with confidence.

➢ Areas to stay

There are two main places to stay in Hanoi for the best experience: the Old Quarter and around Hoan Kiem Lake. As we stayed in the old quarter we can make the following recommendations:

- **Hanoi Backpackers** – perhaps the most popular hostel in Hanoi located in the old quarter. Be prepared to book in advance to secure your bed in peak times. The hostel has a good atmosphere and runs daily tours at reasonable prices, though it is still worth checking tour agencies.
- **Hanoi Lotus Blue Hotel** – Large rooms with a/c, mini bar, tv and private bathroom. The hotel also do a great breakfast to help wake you up for a big day of exploring!
- **Au Trieu** – not a hotel but a street with many nice looking boutique hotels. If you filter your search by this road you will end up in a brilliant location and be staying at a nice hotel. The area is quiet whilst being right in the heart of the action. We wouldn’t stay anywhere else!

**TIP:** You can find more hotel and hostel in a mail that VN Hat 2014 Committee have sent before.

➢ Local cuisine

If you’re dying to sample Vietnamese cuisine (and we strongly recommend that you do), these are the foods to try:

- **Bun Cha** – grilled minced pork and noodles
- **Bun Bo Nam Bo** – rice noodle and stir fried beef
- **Pho Bo** – rice noodle with beef soup and beef
- **Pho ga** – rice noodle with chicken soup and chicken
- **Banh my pate** – a crusty bread roll filled with pate, pork, onion and cabbage.
- **Banh ghai** – a type of deep fried pasty filled with pork, mushrooms and vermicelli noodles
- **Street donuts** – during your time in Hanoi you will be undoubtably approached by Vietnamese woman with baskets of donuts. These cost about 10,000VND each so you should definitely give them a try.
- **Deep fried bananas**- these are usually served on street corners and at about 10,000VND each they must be sampled. They are perhaps the tastiest things I tried in Hanoi but tried not to eat too many as they aren’t great for the bikini body!
Vietnamese food is, for the most part, incredibly healthy. We have heard many stories of people that go on a strict ‘local food only’ diet, eat loads and still lose weight. Food is fresh, flavoursome, and more importantly for many people, safe to eat – there is a low chance that you will become ill on Vietnamese food, particularly if you choose well. Hanoi is definitely one of those places that you need to just have a culinary exploration, but make sure you stick to the busy places with high food turnover!!

➢ Food & Drinks

This is always the subject that excites us, especially in South East Asia! There are so many places to sample Vietnamese food around the city, with restaurants every 10 metres in the old quarter. The food culture in Vietnam is for locals to eat out at street side kitchens whilst watching the world go by so the choice is endless and the atmosphere is electric. A few of our favourite restaurants are below:

- **Minh Thuys** – The owner of this restaurant came 7th on the Vietnamese Masterchef! The food is tasty and reasonably priced, whilst a 660ml bottle of a Tiger beer is a steal at 10,000VND (£30p). Find it on Ngo Huyen, just near Hanoi Backpackers.
- **Quan An Ngon** – This is a huge restaurant that serves so many Vietnamese dishes and whilst the food is a bit expensive compared to other restaurants, it is tasty and the (English speaking) staff show you how to eat each dish. Find it on Phan Boi Chau.
- **Bun Cha Dac Kim** – The famous Vietnamese dish ‘Bun Cha’ (grilled pork and noodles) can be found in restaurants and on the streets all over the city. However, if you don’t want fancy street food but want an authentic experience, this is the place to go! When you visit this jam packed restaurant you will be given a seat at a table and automatically served the famous dish (you can choose to have it with or without pork and shrimp spring rolls). Drinks here are reasonably priced at 10,000VND for a water.

![The famous ‘Bun Cha’](image)

- **Mon Ngon** – another cheap and cheerful restaurant in the old quarter. The dishes here cost around 35,000dVND each and are delicious. The restaurant is fairly open, but the owner will make sure you’re not bothered by street sellers flogging their goods. Hue style beef noodles are recommended. You’ll find this place on Pho Duan.
- If you find yourself craving Western Food, music and a coffee bar atmosphere then visit any of the **Gecko** cafés around the city. They have a permanent happy hour where you can get Tiger beer for 10,000VND and 40% off (tasty) king sized pizzas. The salads and carbonara are great here too.
Hanoi is a beautiful city to stroll around. As you dodge in and out of the scooters you will see a huge collection of temples, statues, churches and pretty traditional style buildings. The atmosphere is also electric from early in the morning until around 23:00 when shops, bars and restaurants are ‘advised’ to start closing – not a rule that is always followed too strictly!

Additionally, Hanoi also serves as a gateway to the famous Halong Bay and to the trek friendly Sapa as well as being the northern Vietnam transport hub. There is so much to see and do around Hanoi that you will undoubtedly have to run prioritise or run the risk of running out of time!

- **Halong Bay Tour** – as I’m sure everyone who has visited Vietnam has already told you, a Halong Bay tour is a MUST! You can book a 2 night 3 day tour to Halong Bay through Handspan Travel Indochina ([http://www.handspan.com](http://www.handspan.com)), you can read our experience [here](#). As you will no doubt discover, booking can be a minefield but we have created a [checklist](#) to hopefully make things a little easier.

- **Sapa trekking** – The tours range from 1-3 days but as Sapa is a distance from a Hanoi even the 1 day tour will require you to take a sleeper train the night before which makes even a 1 day tour quite expensive.

- **B52 bomber wreckage** – during the war part of a B52 bomber crashed into Huu Tiep Lake in Hanoi. The lake is located in a neighborhood to the west of the Ho Chi Minh mausoleum but can be a little tricky to find so get make sure you google map search
it before hand. The lake is free to visit and there is a pleasant little cafe beside it for a quiet coffee. The B52 museum is also just down the road.

- **Municipal Water Puppet Theatre** – perhaps one of the strangest shows we have seen on our travels so far, this art form originated in Northern Vietnam and is worth a visit simply for the experience. Tickets cost 60,000 for minor nose bleed seats or 100,000VND for close up front. We recommend the 60,000VND tickets just in case you drift off...

- **One Pillar Pagoda** -this pagoda is located near the Ho Chi Minh Museum and is free to visit. It’s not overly impressive but definitely worth a picture.

- **Ho Chi Minh Museum** – this is a museum dedicated to the famous Ho Chi Minh and his life. If you want to see Ho Chi Minh himself, just visit the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum which is free to visit and is his final resting place. His body is re-embalmed for 2 months a year so it may be worth checking when this will be first. No pictures allowed in here, obviously.

- **Bach Thao** - this botanical garden is a green paradise in the city. If you are exploring the city on foot it is definitely worth a look around. It isn’t free to visit but at 2000VND it won’t break the bank and the garden even houses two beautiful peacocks.

- **Weekend night market** – on Friday and Saturday nights there is a huge night market in the centre of the city on Hang Duong. You can buy clothes, food and souvenirs here, but be prepared to barter as prices have been inflated for tourists. Hold your ground and you will be able to knock anything from 10% to 50% off the price.
- **Hoa Lo Prison Museum** – nicknamed the ‘Hanoi Hilton’ this is a great museum to learn about Vietnam history. It costs just 20,000VND per person to visit and as you get to enter the prison cells and learn about how the American POWs were treated. Snr John McCain spent some time in this prison too!

- **Hoan Kiem Lake** – This lake is situated in the heart of the Old Quarter of the city and is a great place to have a walk or run around both day and night. Visit early in the morning and you are likely to see many people participating in exercise classes or simply jogging and stretching.

- **St Joseph Cathedral** – with this being smack bang in the old quarter, it’s worth a visit if only for a picture. It is a quintessential European style cathedral complete with local children kicking a football about all day by the entrance.

**TIP:** - *You can book your tour through our two engaged partners, Handspan Travel Indochina and Umove Travel. They have many options with reasonable price. Their contact is as following:*

### Handspan Travel

- 78 Ma May, Ha Noi
- Phone: +84 4 3926 2828
- Fax: +84 4 3926 2792
- Email: info@handspan.com
- [Http://www.handspan.com](http://www.handspan.com)

### Umove Travel

- 13A Hang Dieu Str, Hanoi
- +84 4.3771 3305
- +84 4 3771 3306
- [Http://www.umovetravel.com](http://www.umovetravel.com)
Top tips

- **Barter for everything**, even when items have prices on them. You should be able to knock about 10% off the price of souvenirs and even tours with prices attached, and 50% off non priced items.
- **Walk, walk, walk**. Most of the city is accessible on foot so forget the taxis and walk around to explore the city.
- Most places in the city have **wifi** so if you get lost just pop in, buy a drink and find your way back to your accommodation or your desired location by using the World Wide Web.
- **Try the street food** – perhaps the tastiest we have tried yet!
- **Crossing the road** isn’t as scary as it seems. Just take a deep breath, wait for a break in the traffic and go for it! You need to walk slowly and keep going as the drivers will see you and move around you.

Hanoi is both a wonderful city and a gateway to some brilliant scenery in the shape of Halong Bays majestic islands and Sapa’s rolling green rice paddy hills. No trip to Vietnam would be complete without spending a week in Hanoi (maybe two weeks if you do both Sapa and Halong Bay!).

(Source: http://www.professionalbackpacker.com/hanoi-guide.htm)