



Architecture

7

Arts & Culture

4

Buzz

8

Food & Drink

6

Quality of Life

4

World Status

4

Total

33/60

Rank

39

# Hanoi

## VIETNAM

*A 1,000-year-old city with irrepressible rickshaws*

Hanoi is a city a thousand years old that has gone by many names over the centuries. Emperor Ly Thai To named it Thang Long (Soaring Dragon) when he founded it in AD 1010. More recently, as both the political and cultural capital of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, this dragon's influence reaches every part of the country and, at times, its neighbours as well.

The Vietnamese capital is rich in ambience: here ancient architecture, refined culture and shrewd conservativeness blend harmoniously with modern Asian chic. Hanoi has a much slower pace than its rival, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam's southern centre of industry, commerce and pop culture. Men and women rise early for t'ai chi and relaxing walks around the city's many lakes, such as the legendary Hoan Kiem. Elderly men in berets pass the afternoon in peaceful parks or on shaded street corners, playing Chinese chess and sipping green tea. In the evenings, the city's youth flock to myriad trendy Vietnamese and Western bars, cafés, restaurants and nightclubs.

During the Vietnam War, Hanoians suffered constant hardship; the Christmas Bombings of 1972 did considerable damage to the city. However, the Old Quarter and central city survived, and though it suffered a sharp decline during the initial isolated years of the current communist government, Hanoi has emerged into the 21st century as one of Southeast Asia's premier cities.

The Old Quarter, originally known as '36 Streets' after the 36 ancient merchant guilds that settled there, dates back to the 13th century, although the current incarnation is only 100 or 150 years old. The streets are no longer so strictly organised by craft, but the area remains the centre of activity. Narrow alleyways heave with honking motorbikes, old women in conical hats selling tropical fruit,

## Instant Passport

**Population**  
6,232,940 (core city 3,400,000)

**Area**  
186sq km

**Where is it?**  
On the Red River Delta in northern Vietnam. Hanoi occupies a 'rolling dragon and sitting tiger' position with its back to a mountain and facing a river, a sign of a city where art and science may flourish

**Climate**  
Temperate and mild, although summers are usually humid and hot (averaging 31°C or 32°C)

**Ethnic mix**  
Kinh (ethnic Vietnamese), Hoa (ethnic Chinese), various hill tribe minorities

**Major sights**  
Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum Complex and One Pillar Pagoda; Museum of Ethnology; Temple of Literature; Thanh Long Water Puppet Theatre; Museum of Vietnamese History, Military History Museum and Citadel Flag Tower; Hoa Lo Prison (the 'Hanoi Hilton'); Ha Long Bay (outside the city)

**Insiders' tips**  
Home by Restaurant Bobby Chinn; Highway 4; late at night on the food streets at Cam Chi, Thuy Khue and Tong Duy Tan; Café Pho Co; Bia Hoi Corner (Luong Ngoc Quyen and Ta Hien); Minh's Jazz Club; Forest (Rung) Restaurant; the Russian circus at Lenin Park

**Where's the buzz?**  
The Old Quarter, around Hoan Kiem lake, around St Joseph's Cathedral, around the Opera House, New Century Nightclub, Vincom Tower

**Livestock living within the city limits**  
13,847 water buffalo, 39,142 oxen, 338,950 pigs

**Number of motorbikes on the road**  
More than 1.36 million

**Number of sizeable lakes within the city**  
At least 25

**Number of high-rise apartment buildings**  
488

**Number of art objects on display at the Museum of Fine Arts**  
Over 2,000 Stone and Bronze Age artifacts, Buddhist statues, lacquer paintings and other culturally significant pieces

**Number of temples and pagodas**  
More than 600, with 130 of them recognised as being historically and culturally significant

**Number of significant traditional markets**  
25 inner-city markets, with at least another 40 in the suburbs

**Proportion of the population working for the government**  
Over 10%



Above: Downtown nightlife. Below: fowl market near Long Bien Bridge. Right: top, Quan Thanh pagoda; bottom, junks sailing between the limestone peaks of Ha Long Bay



young women selling sesame doughnuts stuffed with sweet green bean filling, pho noodle stands, shoe-shiners, hawkers of hats and T-shirts with Vietnam's solitary gold star in a sea of red, and mobs of foreign and local shoppers. Although *xich lo*, or rickshaws, are now officially banned, their stubborn drivers typify the defiant Vietnamese spirit, still managing to clog the city streets.

Hanoi also has an elegant and complex array of unique local cuisines. French colonists gifted the Vietnamese a love for baguettes and strong coffee, but the best French pastries are found in Hanoi – at a fraction of the price you'd pay in Paris. Bia hoi (fresh draught beer) outlets occupy many street corners, a cheap place to meet friends and soak up the atmosphere. Hanoi also lays claim to Vietnam's signature dish, pho, a rice-noodle soup served most commonly with beef. Unfortunately, it's Hanoians' love of dog meat and snake (most famously served in Le Mat village) that garner most attention from outsiders.

**Adam Bray**



*'Hanoi is a beautiful city, where many talented singers and musicians were raised. Hanoian music has a long history. Everybody knows Trinh Cong Son, and other famous musicians: Quoc Trung, Anh Quan, Huy Tuan, or singers Tran Thu Ha, Hong Nhung and Thanh Lam. I like to hear them at Ho Guom Xanh'*

**Le Hieu pop singer**

