

## **Hanoi Old Quarter**

By turns exotic, squalid, gauche and hip, the high – octane Vietnamese capital of Hanoi provides a full – scale assault on the senses. Its crumbly, lemon – hued colonial architecture is a feast for the eyes: swarms of buzzing motorbikes invade the ear, while the delicate scents and tastes of delicious street food can be found all across a city that – unlike so many of its regional contemporaries – is managing to modernize with a degree of grace. Despite its political and historical importance, as well as the incessant noise drummed up by a population of over six million, Hanoi exudes a more intimate, urbane appeal than Ho Chi Minh city.

At its center lies a tree – fringed lake and shaded avenues of classy French villas dressed up in jaded stucco, but the rest of Hanoi is bursting at the seams and nowhere is this more evident than in the teeming traffic and the vibrant, intoxicating tangle of streets known as the Old Quarter, the city's commercial heart since the fifteenth century. Delving back even further, a handful of Hanoi's more than six hundred temples and pagodas hail from the original, eleventh – century city, most notably the Temple of Literature, which encompasses both Vietnam's foremost Confucian sanctuary and its first university. Many visitors, however, are drawn to Hanoi by more recent events, seeking explanations among the exhibits of the Military History Museum and in Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum for the extraordinary Vietnamese tenacity displayed during the wars of the twentieth century.

Modern Hanoi has an increasingly, "can do" air about it and a buzz that is even beginning to rival Ho Chi Minh city. There's more money about nowadays and the wealthier Hanoians are prepared to flaunt it in the ever – more sophisticated restaurants, cafes and designer boutique that have exploded all over the city. Hanoi now boasts glitzy shopping malls and wine warehouses; beauty parlours are the latest fad and some seriously exploded cars cruise the streets. Almost everyone else zips around on motorbikes rather than the deeply unready bicycle. The authorities are trying – with mixed success – to temper the anarchy with laws to curb traffic and regulate unsympathetic building projects in the Old Quarter, coupled with an ambitious twenty- year development plan that aims to ease congestion by creating satellite towns. Nevertheless, the city center has not completely lost its old – world charm nor its distinctive character.

The best time to visit and stay at [hotels in Hanoi Old Quarter](#) is during the three months from October to December; when you'll find warm, sunny days and levels of humidity below the norm of eighty percent, though it can be chilly at night. From January to March, cold winds from China combine with high humidity it gives a fine mist which often hangs in the air for days. March and April usually bring better weather, before the extreme summer heat arrives in late April, accompanied by monsoon storms which peak in August and can last until early October, causing serious flooding throughout the delta.

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