

SAWASDEE



{CITY GUIDE}

THIS IS HANOI & HO CHI MINH VIETNAM

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**The best bites
in Hanoi**
Dining

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**Local fashion
designers to follow**
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**Hip and
heritage stays**
Hotels

CURATOR'S NOTE

There's a spirited sibling rivalry between Vietnam's two major metropolises. Hanoi basks in its 1,000-year-old history, boasting grand architectural heritage and legendary food culture. By contrast, Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon), Hanoi's younger and glitzier sister, flaunts hedonistic nightlife and avant-garde creative scenes. The cities are opposites in many ways, but the country's infectious dynamism courses through both.

Kindling the energies of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City are their respective residents. While Hanoians might spend their evenings motorbiking through verdant boulevards before huddling over bowls of noodle soup, the Saigonese throw themselves to the night, party until the early hours and concoct a plan to launch a new fashion brand over coffee the next morning. Eventually, everyone settles on a favorite city. The hard part is choosing which. – *Joshua Zukas*

Motorcycles are everywhere in Vietnam. They don't tend to stop for pedestrians, so be bold. Cross the road slowly and always have your wits about you.





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IN THIS ISSUE

We shine a spotlight on two Vietnamese cities that stand out with their own unique flair: Heritage Hanoi and Hip Ho Chi Minh City

Hanoi



LOVE FOR LOCAL BITES

Where to taste traditional dishes on the streets



Café culture

Coffee with egg? Yogurt? Coconut juice? Take your pick



HERITAGE SIGHTS

Take in the culture and history of Hanoi through these five stops



Lakeside serenity

A Hanoi designer on the charms of West Lake



Ho Chi Minh



FASHION FORWARD

The hottest Vietnamese fashion designers to check out



District 3, rediscovered

A guide to one of the world's coolest neighborhoods



THE HEAT IS ON IN SAIGON

Drink and dance across local streets or rooftop bars



Brewed with love

The city's innovative brewing culture makes way for crafted sake





Hanoi



LOVE FOR LOCAL BITES

Hanoi's high-end dining scene has improved by leaps and bounds in recent years, but traditional dishes remain the heart of the city's culinary culture. Tuck into them on the street, in humble mom-and-pop joints or in funky modern eateries





BUN CHA

A Hanoian's lunch of choice is *bun cha*: chargrilled pork, vermicelli noodles and a sweetened fish sauce dip served with herbs and garden greens. The better places also serve *nem* (fried spring rolls). Try a traditional version at **Bun Cha Huong Lien**, also known as **Bun Cha Obama** (yes – the former American president really did eat here) or an elevated deviation at **Chopsticks Hanoi**.



PHO

Don't tell the folks down south, but Vietnam's national dish tastes best in the capital. *Pho* is flat rice noodles served in a hearty broth made with chicken or beef – but never both. Try the beef version at **Pho Thin** right next to Hoan Kiem Lake, and the chicken version at **Pho Huyen** on Chau Long Street.





BANH CUON

Banh cuon, steamed rice pancakes usually packed with minced pork and mushroom, but sometimes chicken or shrimp, are Hanoi's answer to Chinese dumplings. For a family-run, hole-in-the-wall experience, head to **Banh Cuon Bao Khanh**. **Banh Cuon Gia Truyen Thanh Van** is a step up with a bigger menu.

PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



CHA CA

Until recently, *cha ca* was nearly impossible to find outside Hanoi. While the dish is becoming commonplace across the country, the capital is still the place to tuck into the fish stir-fried with turmeric, dill, spring onions and served with noodles, peanuts and dipping sauces. Try it at **Cha Ca Thang Long**.





BUN THANG

Criminally overshadowed by chicken pho, *bun thang* is also chicken noodle soup, but it rarely features on lists of “must-eat” Hanoi dishes. The herby broth, spruced up by sliced fried egg and dried shiitake mushrooms, may have originally been medicinal. Slurp up the dish at **Bun Thang Co Binh**.

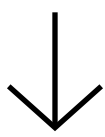


SOMETHING FANCY

Undisputedly one of Southeast Asia’s best restaurants, **TUNG Dining** pioneered fine dining in the capital. The tasting menu features around 20 dishes, each one crafted by culinary artisans. The 3D food printing techniques used here elevate ingredients such as pea puree to a photogenic extravaganza. Bookings essential.



PHOTOS BY CHRISTIAN BERG (BUN THANG), TUNG DINING



Café culture

Do you take your coffee with milk?
How about condensed milk, frozen yogurt,
iced coconut or egg yolk?

Hanoi's café culture is constantly expanding, evidenced by the spread of white coffee alternatives. While *ca phe sua da* (iced coffee with condensed milk) is well known and widespread, hit **Cong Ca Phe** or **Bancong** to try the alternatives.



More egg coffee cafés at
Sawasdee.thaiairways.com

Hanoi



HERITAGE SIGHTS

Absorbing Hanoi's atmosphere is an organic process, best achieved by looping the lakes and burrowing into the alleyways to unearth temples, pagodas, churches and other storied sights





Did you know?

Hoan Kiem Lake is home to semi-mythical turtles. One such cryptid died in 1967, but was preserved, and the turtle lives (again) in the temple.

NGOC SON TEMPLE

Visit this bustling religious shrine when it opens at 8am to beat the crowds and observe incense-clasping worshippers pay tribute to a handful of heroes and deities, including Tran Hung Dao, who thwarted a Mongol invasion in the 13th century. The temple graces an island on Hoan Kiem Lake, accessible by a picturesque scarlet bridge.



PHAN DINH PHUNG STREET

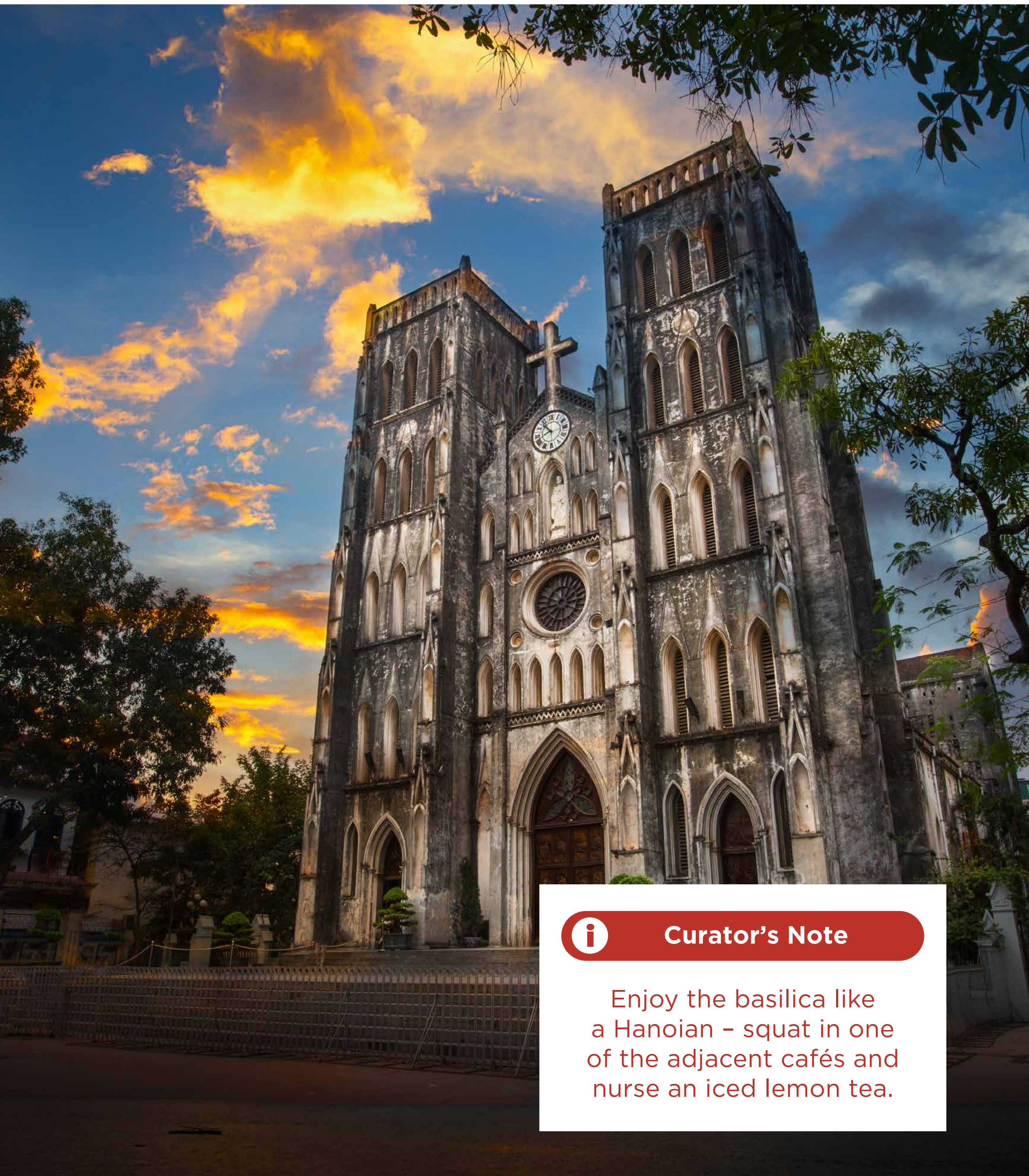
Probably Vietnam's most cinematic street, particularly for walkers, photographers and heritage architecture enthusiasts, Phan Dinh Phung bulges with dracontomelum trees that envelop gigantic French mansions. While strolling along the broad, shaded pavements, look out for the pineapple-yellow Cua Bac Church and imposing Cua Bac citadel gate just opposite.



Insider tip

Side streets north of Phan Dinh Phung are packed with eclectic cafés. Try Café Yen, Bluebird's Nest, Tranquil, La Viet or Manzi.





Curator's Note

Enjoy the basilica like a Hanoian – squat in one of the adjacent cafés and nurse an iced lemon tea.

ST JOSEPH'S CATHEDRAL

From *banh mi* to café culture, iconic bridges to the national railway, French colonists made their mark on Vietnam. In Hanoi, this is most apparent in the architecture, evidenced by the grandiose neo-gothic bell towers of St Joseph's Cathedral. Opening hours are sporadic, but Sunday morning scenes are always photogenic, as *ao dai*-wearing churchgoers gather in the small garden in front.



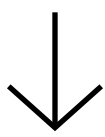
THE RAILWAY

Over the past decade or so, Instagrammers have made Hanoi’s (in)famous train street, where locomotives squeeze through a densely packed neighborhood, a true hotspot. These days, however, nervous city officials don’t always allow pedestrians access for safety reasons. If you’re turned away from visiting, enjoy the optical illusions of the murals on Phung Hung Street instead.



Curator's Note

Follow the tracks northeast to Long Bien Bridge, a Hanoi landmark that is often (incorrectly) attributed to Gustave Eiffel of the Eiffel Tower.



TRAN QUOC PAGODA

Tran Quoc Pagoda, one of the city's oldest religious complexes, perches dramatically on tree-lined Thanh Nien Street, a causeway that divides Truc Bach Lake and West Lake. It's an excellent spot to watch the sunset.



PHOTO BY SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



Did you know?

Ngoc Son Temple is Daoist whereas Tran Quoc Pagoda is Buddhist, but many Hanoians aren't particularly fussy and will worship at both.



For contemporary art lovers



“Hanoi is packed with heritage, but there’s still room for contemporary expression. At Manzi, we showcase artistic creativity in all its forms, with boundary-pushing exhibitions, experimental live music events and an art boutique with one-of-a-kind souvenir alternatives. Other spaces worth exploring are Work Room Four and the Vincom Centre for Contemporary Art.”



Tram Vu, co-founder of Manzi Art Space & Café and Manzi Exhibition Space

More art inspiration at
[Sawasdee.thaiairways.com](https://www.sawasdee.thaiairways.com)



Lakeside serenity

Thao Vu, founder of pioneering slow fashion brand Kilomet109, talks about life in Hanoi's West Lake, where she lives and has her store.



“The Old Quarter is amazing, but it’s so dense and intense. West Lake gives me the space to be slow. The area gets the breeze off the lake, but also from the Red River. I like to walk with my kids on Banana Island, a huge green patch with small clusters of local cafés. I also love the Flower Market, but I don’t go before 10pm as it’s more magical when the rest of the city is going to bed – but the market is only just beginning.”

EXPLORE MORE

East of Hanoi is Halong Bay, the most popular side trip destination from the capital. Head in the opposite direction, however, and you’ll find **Mai Chau**, an ethereal karst-encircled valley with tasty home-cooked food, a matrix of countryside cycling lanes and a score of superb accommodation options, like the new and award-winning Avana Retreat, pictured above.



Where to stay

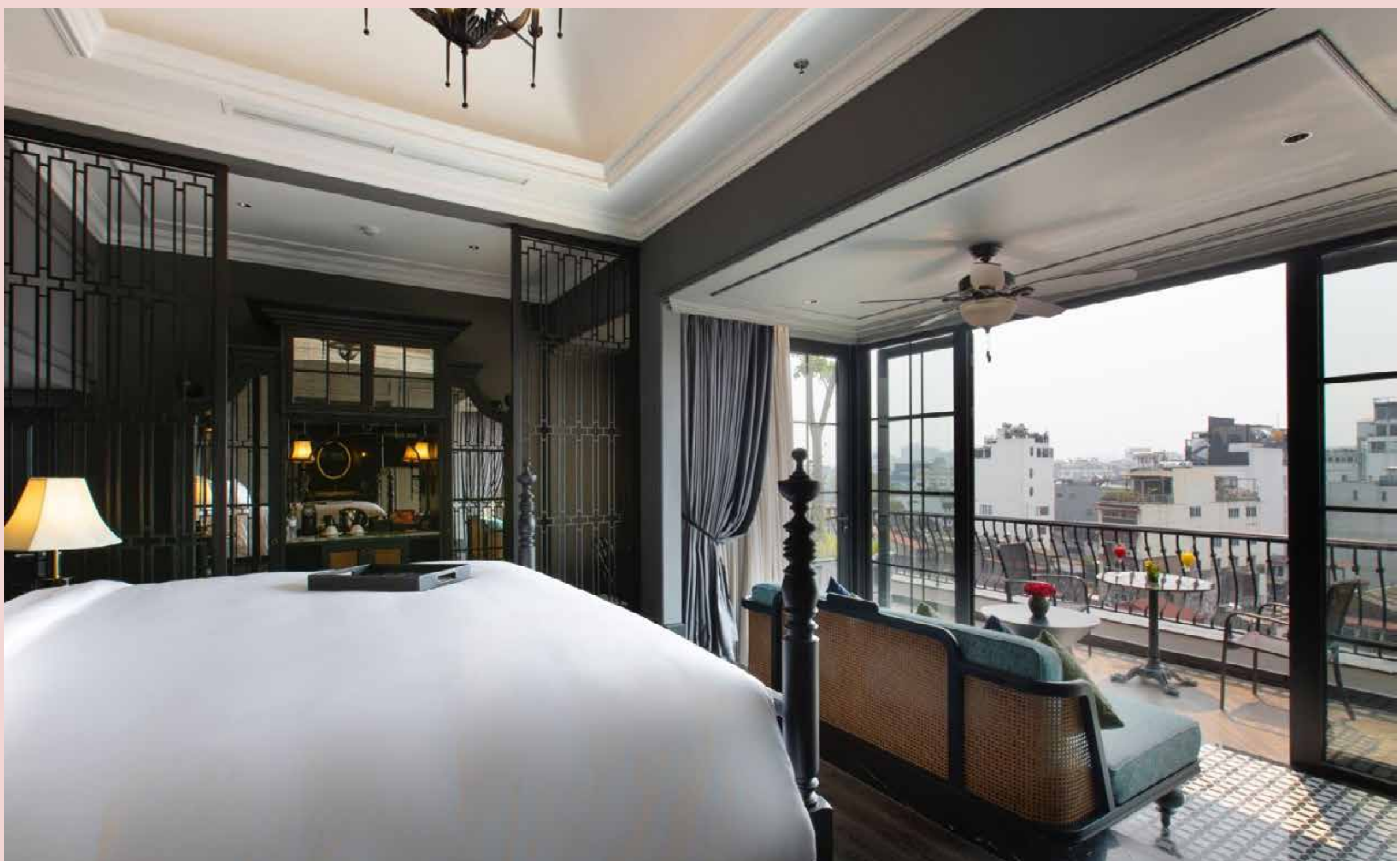
Get a whiff of old-world charm with these heritage treasures in the Old Quarter



Sofitel Legend Metropole Hanoi

It's a little cliché to call the Metropole a grand old dame, but that's exactly what she is. Vietnam's iconic heritage hotel has welcomed a long list of celebrities, from Charlie Chaplin to Angelina Jolie.





La Siesta Premium Hang Be

La Siesta, a collection of hotels in the Old Quarter, raises the bar for boutique accommodation in Hanoi. Their newest chapter opened in 2019 and sits on Hang Be, right in the heart of the ancient trading neighborhood.

Ho Chi Minh

Thuy Design
House



FASHION BRANDS TO FOLLOW

Ho Chi Minh City has long been Vietnam's fashion mecca, but for years the country has had limited global impact. No longer. Here are five fashion brands that are making waves across the world



METISEKO

Metiseko is an award-winning, slow fashion brand that partners with local artisans and prizes natural textiles.



FIND ONE OF THEIR FLAGSHIP BOUTIQUES AT
101 DONG KHOI STREET. ***metiseko.com***



PARADISE 4 SAIGON

Paradise 4 Saigon designs delightfully postmodern streetwear, always with a wicked sense of humor.



CHECK THE WEBSITE TO SEE WHERE THEY'RE
POPPING UP WHEN YOU'RE IN TOWN.

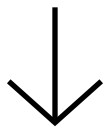
paradise4saigon.com

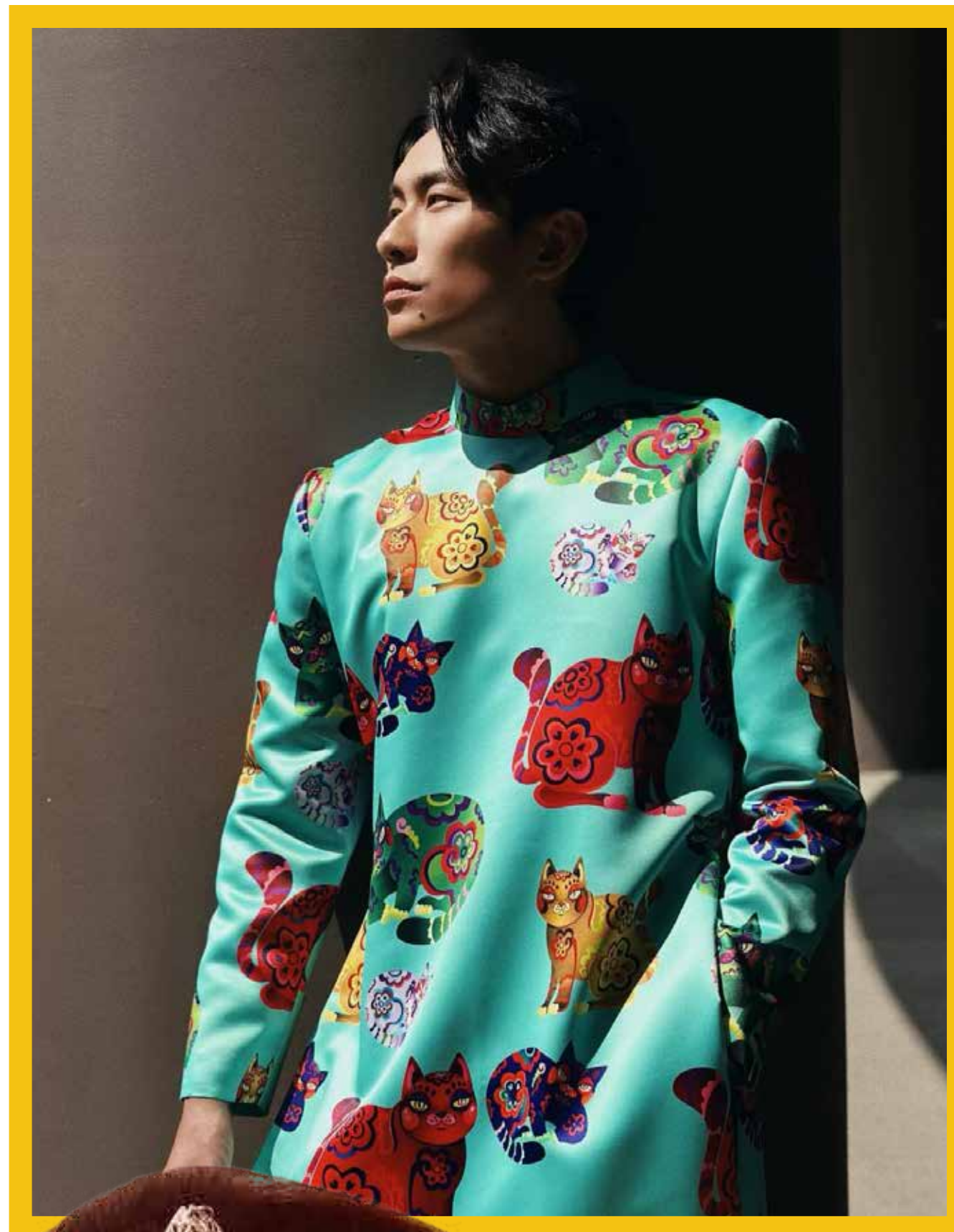
MOI DIEN

Moi Dien crafts uber-hip, boundary-pushing and boldly androgynous collections, which are still somehow completely affordable.



FIND THEM AT 28 TON THAT THIEP STREET.
moidien.com





THUY DESIGN HOUSE

Hanoi-born Thuy Nguyen of Thuy Design House bridges classic grace with modern flair, especially with her courageous line of kaleidoscopic *ao dai*, Vietnam's national dress.



HER FLAGSHIP STORE IS AT 29A LE THANH TON STREET. ***thuydesignhouse.com***

NGUYEN CONG TRI

Nguyen Cong Tri made a name for himself designing signature looks for Vietnamese celebrities, and his elegant creations have since bedecked the likes of Adele and Katy Perry.



PHOTOS BY CONG TRI FACEBOOK

EXPLORE MORE OF HIS DESIGNS AT 194 NGUYEN DINH CHIEU. ***congtri.com***

District 3, rediscovered

These are the stops to make at one of Ho Chi Minh's coolest neighborhoods



Inside The Cocoa Project

Decades ago, District 3 was one of Ho Chi Minh City's most desirable residential neighborhoods, but as the city expanded, many urbanites moved onto greener pastures, choosing to settle in the quieter areas of District 2, District 7 and Thu Duc instead. This has left space among District 3's (relatively) pedestrian-friendly streets for intimate art spaces and independent boutiques – prompting *Time Out Magazine* to name it one of the world's coolest neighborhoods in 2019.





Mua Craft
Sake's taproom



While strolling through the leafy streets and along the meandering canal, don't miss **The Cocoa Project**, a new sustainable chocolatier housed in a restored modernist building. Just around the corner is **La Viet**, a trendy café group that began in Dalat, and **Mua Craft Sake's** stylish taproom (see page 32 sidebar). A few blocks northeast and tucked down an alleyway is **The Nutshell**, one of the city's hippest creative hubs, with dance workshops, temporary exhibitions and a gift shop selling funky souvenirs.

GOING UNDERGROUND

Ho Chi Minh City is boldly striding into the future, but it hasn't forgotten its checkered past. At the very edge of the city limits is the sprawling **Cu Chi** tunnel network, used by the Viet Cong during the American War. They remain a poignant reminder that, not so long ago, the city was in the grip of war.



Read the full Cu Chi travelogue at
Sawasdee.thaiairways.com

Ho Chi Minh



THE HEAT IS ON IN SAIGON

If you're galvanized by Ho Chi Minh City's energy in the daytime, just wait until the lights go down. From hushed speakeasies to thundering nightclubs, the city's 24 districts have your after-dark ambitions covered



BUI VIEN STREET

Love it or hate it, a stroll down Bui Vien Street, District 1’s electric avenue and largest nightlife hub, is a rite of passage. Prepare for sensory overload, with polychrome neon bars that compete for your attention with outlandish cocktails, charismatic bar keepers and pumping pop music.

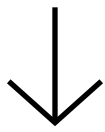


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DISTRICT 4

The nightlife scene in compact District 4 skilfully balances affordability, accessibility and choice, especially on Vinh Khanh Street, where bar-cum-restaurants sit shoulder-to-shoulder. There’s a huge variety on offer, though locals tend to come for fresh grilled seafood, like oysters, clams and shrimp and ice-cold bottled beer.



SUMMER EXPERIMENT

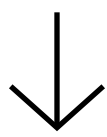
Summer Experiment is one of a multitude of craft speakeasy bars hidden in decades-old buildings in District 1, with a beautiful menu book of signature tropical cocktails that tempts readers with house creations like Banana’s Be Smoking and Sassy Lassi. There’s also an airy balcony with a jungle of tropical plants and a funky lounge soundtrack.

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LE CAFÉ DE STAGIAIRES

Hop over the Saigon River to District 2, Ho Chi Minh City’s expat enclave, to find neighborhood bar Le Café de Stagiaires. Its rooftop overlooks the river, with fine views of Landmark 81, Vietnam’s tallest building. The bar also boasts an eclectic events calendar that covers comedy, live music and DJ nights and appeals to a fun-loving, cosmopolitan crowd.



ATMOS

Of the handful of fully-fledged nightclubs in Ho Chi Minh City, afterhours club ATMOS takes the cake with a sizable dance floor and acts from across the globe. This is the club to see and be seen, at least for the young and monied Saigonese that frequent it. When ATMOS hosts big local names – which is often – the crowd goes wild and the atmosphere is electrifying.

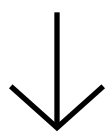


HERE TO HANGOUT

A quaint and distinctive feature unique to Ho Chi Minh City is the collection of disused apartment blocks that have been transformed



into clusters of hip hangouts. Dotted around District 1 are several old apartment buildings crammed with independent businesses. Head to **Café Apartment** on Nguyen Hue Street, which is under constant threat of demolition and yet somehow survives. The inhabiting businesses are continually chopping and changing, but you'll always find a decent selection of cafés, bars and restaurants.

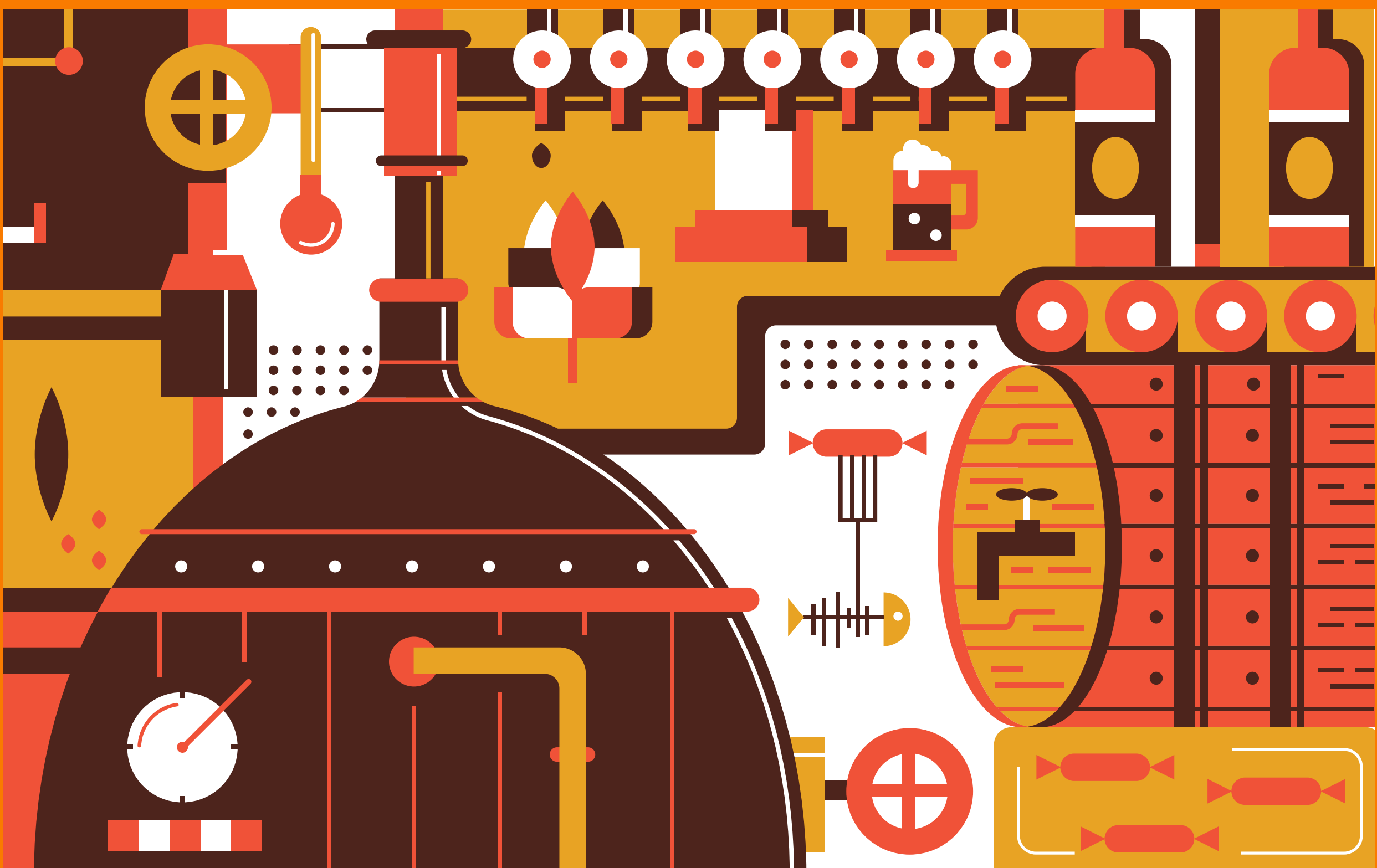




Brewed with love

“We’ve seen great innovations in Vietnam’s craft brewing culture over the decade. Brewers are increasingly using Vietnamese ingredients, which ultimately resonate better with locals, and this has prompted a shift towards lighter, more refreshing and fruit-infused products. We’ve also seen different types of producers entering the market outside of craft beer, such as cider – and now sake. When visiting Ho Chi Minh City, come check out Mua Craft Sake’s new taproom. Featured is our fresh sake on tap, which is robust and infused with local fruits and spices. We’re Vietnam’s first craft sake to use local ingredients, including Vietnam’s ST25, awarded World’s Best Rice in 2019.”

Na Dai Kang – CEO of Mua Craft Sake



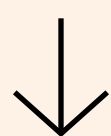
Where to stay

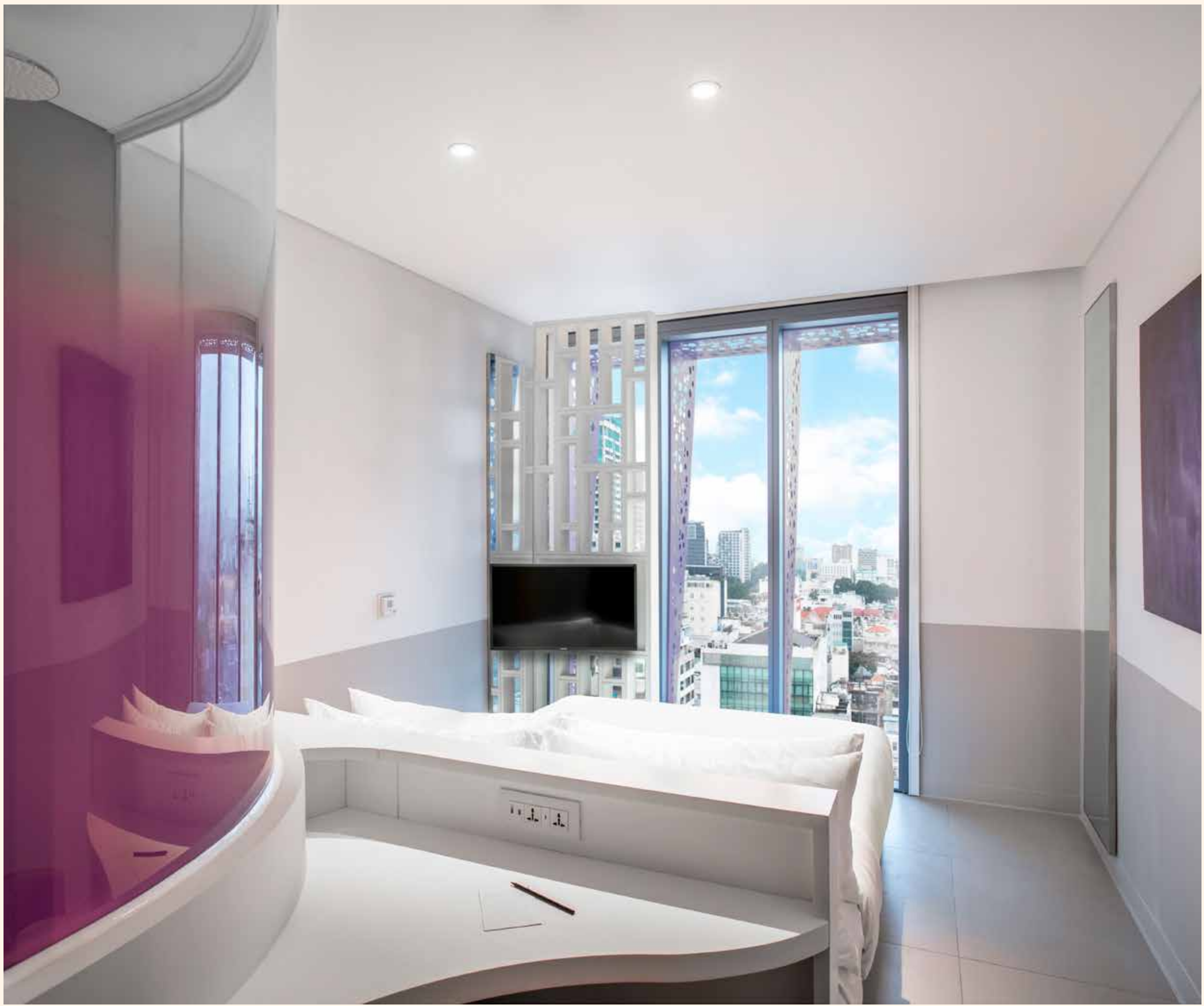
Hip hotels in Ho Chi Minh City bring a contemporary edge to your stay



The Myst Dong Khoi

With plants protruding from rectangular holes in the building façade, The Myst is an example of Vietnam's blossoming biophilic modern architecture. The rooms boast elegant interior design and there's a rooftop bar and pool.





Wink Hotel Saigon Centre

Since they opened in 2021, Wink has been at the forefront of hospitality innovation in Vietnam, with tech-driven services, eye-popping contemporary art and a 24-hour guest stay for those checking in late.

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