



Spring is in the air in Hanoi, which means that courting couples are flocking to West Lake to shake off the winter drizzle. Myths abound about how this vast body of water came into being: one story tells of a homesick and disorientated calf that carved out the lake basin after furiously running in circles. Another claims

that the lake imprisons the soul of a troublesome nine-tailed fox.

Today, West Lake is better known for its capacious villas and cosmopolitan vibes, though sights steeped in legend are hidden among cocktails and cappuccinos, as travel writer Joshua Zukas describes here.

Let's go!



9AM

HAVE A CUPPA AT CAFFE DOPPIO

A successful day in Vietnam starts with coffee, so begin at this casual corner café to try their *nau da* (Vietnamese iced coffee with milk), a blend of Robusta and Arabica crafted by founder and coffee expert Huyen Tran. Grab a stool outside and look over the junction, a microcosm of West Lake life, replete with bickering taxi drivers, suited diplomats and fruit sellers on bicycles.

[@caffedoppio.hanoi](#)



10AM

FLY HIGH AT ARCH ROCK CLIMBING

Once you're energized, stroll over to Arch Rock Climbing, which takes its name from the space's curved wall. The gym, a hub for Hanoi's active community and suitable for both experts and beginners, opened in 2021 and has around 55 bouldering routes and 35 sport-climbing routes.

[@archrockclimbinghanoi](#)

11.30AM

SOUVENIR ALTERNATIVES AT WORK ROOM FOUR

On your way to lunch, stop by Work Room Four, a creative agency, gallery and design shop, to see what's on. Even if there's no exhibition, you can still pick up some carefully curated design pieces to take home – a welcome alternative to the tried-and-tested souvenirs found in the Old Quarter.

[@workroomfour](#)



12.30PM

LUNCHTIME AT MAII BISTRO



West Lake is perhaps the only neighborhood in Hanoi where international restaurants outnumber Vietnamese eateries. Bucking this trend, however, is Maii Bistro, which serves classic Vietnamese dishes, like the sweet and crunchy pomelo salad and Nha Trang-style *nem lui* (grilled pork-meatball skewers), with contemporary flair. Lunch on these delicacies on their newly opened rooftop.

[@maii Bistro](#)

2PM

COFFEE AND CAKE AT BAKED

A 10-minute walk from Maii Bistro is BAKED, set up by Singaporean cake queen Sheereen Amran. She uses beans sourced from Cau Dat in Vietnam's Central Highlands subregion for her creamy cappuccinos, but BAKED is best known for its melt-in-the-mouth cookies and creative cupcakes, including the red velvet, generously topped with cream cheese frosting.

[@bakedandfriends.hn](#)



[@johnpaultuy](#)

#TheJuanThingToDo
...IN SAPPORO

“ An absolute must-do: Treat yourself to the island's soft-serve ice cream. Made from Hokkaido milk, the soft-serve has a smooth, rich and unique taste – and you'll find it in every shop, from convenience stores and roadside stands to tourist attractions and restaurants. The most common flavor would be vanilla but other shops have varieties like sea salt, lavender and others. ”



Let's go!

3PM

PILGRIMAGE TO PHU TAY HO

For a month after Tet (Lunar New Year), Phu Tay Ho is packed with pilgrims wishing for a year of good fortune, but by April this waterside spot has returned to its tranquil self. A shrine of sorts has probably existed here since the 17th century, and at some point it was dedicated to Lieu Hanh, a princess of heaven who was banished to Earth for breaking a priceless cup.



5PM

CHUA KIM LIEN

Before dinner, stop by Chua Kim Lien, or Kim Lien Pagoda, which dates back to the 12th century but was reconstructed in the

18th century. Encircled by a lotus pond that blooms in the summer months, the pagoda's tiled courtyard is filled with kumquat trees and occasionally plays host to spirited neighborhood badminton games. On the water, you might spot people from the area fishing from a precarious wooden platform.



6PM
HANOI TACO BAR

From Sri Lankan curries to West African stews, there is no shortage of eclectic international food in West Lake. For dinner with a view, head to Hanoi Taco Bar, perfectly positioned to catch the sunset over the water on a clear spring day. The tacos – both soft and crunchy – are a clear winner, and the bar staff can concoct a mean margarita to get the evening started.

[@hanoitacobar](#)



8PM
BEERS IN PHILO GARDEN

Skirt the lake and dive down an alleyway to Philo Garden. Though primarily an all-day coffee-and-juice stop, Philo stays open late and has a (limited) menu of beers, which you can enjoy in their secret garden filled with ferns and fig trees.

[@philogarden23](#)



Let's go!



9PM
**COCKTAILS AT
WORKSHOP14**

Nearby is Workshop14, a new cocktail bar and one of the most refined evening spots in town. Cocktail magician Rich McDonough, the bar's co-founder and beverage director, has crafted a winning menu of can't-go-wrong classics, but instead try one of their one-of-a-kind signatures. The Hi Ma Gin uses local Song Cai floral gin distilled with herbs from Vietnam's northern mountains. Reservations essential.

[workshop14.hanoi](#)

11PM
**LOSE YOURSELF TO
SAVAGE**

One of Hanoi's best sound systems is encased in a haunted house on a muddy swamp shoreline. Despite the name, Savage draws a friendly and eclectic crowd of night owls that descend on the club to see visiting DJs from all four corners.

[savagehanoi](#)



PHOTO BY SABRINA CHIONGBIAN (SAVAGE)



**Lunch like
a local**



West Lake is known for its international dining scene, but this is Vietnam, and a street kitchen is never too far away. Here are three alternative spots if you're looking to go local at lunchtime.

Bun Ca Mang Chu Co Hanh
(6 Ng 31 Xuan Dieu)
Serves just two dishes: *bun cha* (grilled pork, herb salad and vermicelli noodles) and *bun ca* (noodle soup with fried fish).

Three Sisters
(11 Dang Thai Mai)
Classic point-and-pick rice place, where you can load up your plate with Vietnamese favorites.

Bun Oc Ba Ngoai
(Ngo 11 To Ngoc Van)
Hidden spot selling a Hanoi favorite – snails – cooked in a variety of ways.



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