



lonely planet

EXPERIENCE
VIETNAM

GET AWAY FROM THE EVERYDAY



Street vendors, Hoi An (p118)



Joshua Zukas

@joshuazukas

British by birth, Joshua has considered Hanoi home since 2013. His ideal day in the city is spent hunting out street food for lunch, coffee shop hopping in the afternoon and cocktail bar crawling in the evening.

HANOI

CULTURE | STREET FOOD | URBAN DISCOVERY



- ▶ **Trip Builder** (p40)
- ▶ **Practicalities** (p42)
- ▶ **Coffee-Shop Hop** (p44)
- ▶ **Culture Hubs** (p46)
- ▶ **Sidewalk Bounties** (p48)
- ▶ **Parks & Recreation** (p50)
- ▶ **Looping Truc Bach Lake** (p54)
- ▶ **Friendly Fire** (p56)
- ▶ **Medley of Museums** (p58)
- ▶ **Cocktail-Bar Crawl** (p60)
- ▶ **Architecture Through the Ages** (p62)
- ▶ **Open-Air Art** (p64)
- ▶ **Craft Attack** (p66)
- ▶ **(Window) Shopper's Paradise** (p70)
- ▶ **Listings** (p72)

Experience Hanoi online



18-L1
11/16

06 Cocktail-Bar CRAWL



NIGHTLIFE | COCKTAILS | MUSIC

The Old Quarter's convoluted road network and parasitic architecture have hatched secret speakeasies buried down alleyways and kooky cocktail bars resting above storefronts. When you've had enough of squatting on the pavement and chugging *bia hoi* (as fun as that is), try this eclectic cocktail-bar crawl.



The Pho Cocktail

The story behind the *pho* cocktail is reflected in history. Hanoi was bombed relentlessly during the war, so I designed the cocktail preparation to look like bombs falling. Liquid is set alight and then cascades from tiered metal compartments before making its way to the glass. At the same time, it draws on Hanoi cuisine's unique flavour profile.

Trip Notes

When to go Any time after 6pm. Message ahead on Facebook or Instagram to book a table (and find out if there's live music).

What to wear Anything you like, though you'll feel out of place in flip-flops and a vest top.

How to get around This itinerary features two pockets of cocktail bars: Bee'Znees and Ne Cocktail Bar to the east of Hoan Kiem Lake, and the rest to the west. Consider taking a taxi between these two clusters.



Insight from Pham Tien Tiep, co-founder of Ne Cocktail Bar @nehanoi

0 0.1 miles 200 m

02 Continue the crawl in **Bee'Znees**, a Roaring Twenties-inspired speakeasy concealed behind a pretend bookshop. You'll need to pull the right book to open the bookcase. Hint: 'Hello old sport!'



03 **Leo's** is a swanky city cocktail bar with on-point mood lighting, theatrical mixology and a seasonal cocktail menu. Or just tell the English-speaking bartenders what you fancy.

01 **Ne Cocktail Bar** was co-founded by the creator of the *pho* cocktail, which uses the same herbs and spices as Vietnam's world-famous dish. It would be a crime to order anything else.

05 **Kumquat Tree** morphs from cocktail bar to miniature nightclub with regular DJ nights past midnight, so it's the perfect bar to keep the party going.

04 Established by journalist, aesthete and raconteur Nguyen Qui Duc, **Tadioto** has become something of a Hanoi institution. Peruse the wine list if you're winding down for the evening.



HAI BA TRUNG DISTRICT

TOP: BEE'ZNEES © OPPOSITE PAGE: MONTICELLO/GETTY IMAGES ©



Friendly Fire

BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE

All surviving Vietnamese traditions change with the times, but no custom demonstrates this as fervidly as ancestral worship.



In 2021, when countries were scrambling for COVID-19 vaccines, villages in Vietnam were pumping out thousands of Pfizer jabs. The world hardly took notice of how the manufacturers got their hands on the technology, nor did health officials challenge the vaccines' efficacy and safety. Perhaps it's because the doses are simply cardboard replicas – and they aren't meant for the living.

According to practitioners of joss-paper burning, the ceremonial cremation of diminutive cardboard replicas of everyday essentials, life after death mirrors life before it. They believe these incinerated models will drift into a parallel afterlife and manifest as tangible (and usable) items. Before setting them alight (usually outside the house on the street), the bereaved place the replicas on the family altar and pray to the ancestor that they're for – ensuring the gifts make it to the intended recipient. This can take place decades after the family member's passing, usually on death anniversaries.

The custom has humble beginnings. It started in China centuries ago, but only fake money and gold were burned so that the dead had currency to pay for a comfortable afterlife. Over the years, joss-paper burning has morphed into a more elaborate affair. While money and gold remain the most desirable combustibles, the gift options now include fancy townhouses, dapper clothes, luxury jewellery, air-conditioning units, wi-fi routers, iPhones and more. The surviving family members tend to match the items they purchase with the personalities and passions of the deceased: if grandma was a keen photographer, she receives cameras, lenses and tripods; if grandpa was fond of singing, he's gifted a karaoke machine, microphone and television set.

Left Joss-paper burning Middle Tet festivities Right Paper house for burning, Hungry Ghost Festival



Despite the custom's ability to adapt and endure, its future remains uncertain. In recent years the local media has looked unfavourably on joss-paper burning, citing environmental and health concerns, and the government occasionally speaks out against overindulgent ancestral-worship practices. Proponents argue that it isn't just cultural heritage, but also a mechanism to cope with loss. The joss-paper-producing villages have entire shops dedicated to children's items, from cardboard cots and prams to paper toys and clothes – a poignant illustration of how some Vietnamese might choose to process the death of a loved one.

Joss-paper burning isn't just cultural heritage, but also a mechanism to cope with loss.

To get a sense of the custom's diversity, it's best to visit a joss-paper shop.

P Hang Ma, one of the Old Quarter's most vivid streets, is the traditional place to buy *ma* (joss paper). It

has also become the place to go for festival decorations, so you'll have to hunt out the bigger shops that usually keep the cardboard miniatures at the back. Better yet, visit one of the joss-paper-producing villages. **Dao Tu** (p69), 35km west of Hanoi, is the most hectic, with cardboard replicas that spill out onto the street and millions of (fake) dollars packed on the back of motorbikes. **Phuc Am**, 17km south of Hanoi, is a quieter village specialising in joss-paper models to commemorate national heroes during elaborate ceremonies. Multicoloured horses, glistening dragons, gigantic boats and armoured platoons fill the workhouses.

☀ When to See It

Death anniversaries Death anniversary ceremonies occur on the date the deceased passed away, so they may happen at any time during the year.

Vietnamese New Year (Tet)

The days preceding and following Vietnam's biggest holiday, which falls in January or February, can be particularly incendiary.

Hungry Ghost Festival

This spirited festival is when the gates of hell are thrown open, enabling wraiths to roam the land of the living. It begins on the 15th day of the seventh lunar month (usually August or September). People often burn joss paper to satisfy these vacationing spirits – and to keep them from wreaking havoc.

CENTRAL VIETNAM

HISTORIC TOWNS | CAVES | MOTORBIKING



Experience
Central
Vietnam
online



- ▶ **Trip Builder** (p104)
- ▶ **Practicalities** (p106)
- ▶ **Two-Day Tomb Expedition** (p108)
- ▶ **Enter the Underworld** (p110)
- ▶ **Central Vietnam's Specialities** (p114)
- ▶ **All Aboard!** (p116)
- ▶ **One Town, Five Centuries** (p118)
- ▶ **Christian Vietnam** (p120)
- ▶ **Motorbiking Vietnam** (p122)
- ▶ **O Wild Night** (p124)
- ▶ **Chasing Waterfalls** (p126)
- ▶ **Listings** (p128)

18 All ABOARD!



SLOW TRAVEL | MOUNTAINS | COASTLINE

The Reunification Express is essentially one long track that runs from the Chinese border to Ho Chi Minh City (with a few offshoots). Narrow and hilly, central Vietnam has some especially alluring trackways, from coast-hugging curves to river-hopping bridges. Travelling by train in Vietnam is rarely quicker than bus or car, but taking it slow while absorbing the scenery is part of the experience.



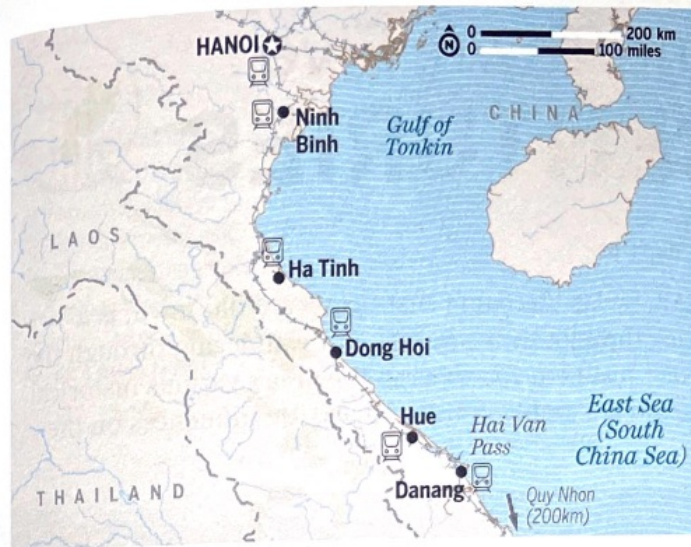
How to

Buying tickets Try dsvn.vn for online booking, including seat selection. You can also buy tickets at the train station.

When to go Take advantage of the light and travel during the day for the best bits.

Train classes Most trains have four class types: hard seat, soft seat, six-person sleeper and four-person sleeper.

Where to sit Choose wisely when deciding which side of the carriage to sit in, to make the most of the views.



Below are some of the most notable journeys – they assume travelling north to south, but they'd be just as enjoyable in the other direction.

Hanoi to Ninh Binh Escaping Hanoi by train is a unique way to observe the chaotic capital as it swirls over, under and next to the tracks. A bizarre combo of communist and colonial architecture, the **Hanoi Train Station** (p63) is also an iconic place to start. After Hanoi the scenery is rather humdrum until the looming karst mountains of Ha Nam and Ninh Binh start to emerge. (Sit on the west side of the carriage.)

Ha Tinh to Dong Hoi The northern part of the region (Thanh Hoa, Nghe An and Ha Tinh) is devoid of any popular highlights, so most travellers opt instead to take a flight or overnight train between the north and the centre. In both cases, they miss this spectacular, mountain-flanked stretch of track, which moves away from the coast in Ha Tinh before entering Quang Binh and descending to Dong Hoi. These hills are home to several Christian communities, evidenced by the picturesque, pointed church steeples. (Sit on the east side of the carriage.)

Hue to Danang Combining craggy coastline with forested mountains, the track between Hue and Danang offers spellbinding vistas of lagoons, beaches, islets and villages. The highlight is the **Hai Van Pass**, where the track clings to mountains that caress the sea. If you're lucky, the train will stop briefly for a view of **Lang Co Beach**, a pretty stretch of white sand on the north side of the pass. (Sit on the east side of the carriage.)

Top left Hai Van Pass Bottom left Hanoi Train Station

Vintage Travel on The Vietage

For a lavish experience, *The Vietage* (thevietage.train.com) connects Danang with Quy Nhon on the south-central coast with unabashed nostalgia for the era of romantic rail travel. The opulent 12-person carriage offers gourmet dining, a cocktail bar, head and shoulder massages, free-flow drinks and private, two-person compartments. *The Vietage* leaves Danang for Quy Nhon each morning and makes the return journey in the evening. The trip in one direction takes a little over six hours.

Central Vietnam's SPECIALITIES

01



02



04



05



03



06



11



07



10



08



09



12



01 Bun bo Hue
A spicy beef noodle soup seasoned with lemongrass. Hue's favourite breakfast dish.

rice cakes originally concocted for the kings of old.

02 Banh Hue
There are several *banh Hue* varieties, which are delicate savoury

03 Nem lui
Chargrilled pork patties wrapped with salad and pickles. Served with a peanut sauce. Try it in Hue and Danang.

04 Com hen
Minuscule muscles served with soupy rice, crackling, peanuts and salad bits. Try it in Hue.

05 Mon an chay
Hue is Vietnam's Buddhist capital and hence also its vegan capital, full

of great animal-friendly establishments.

06 My quang
Central Vietnam's favourite noodle dish is a flat yellow noodle served with meat, seafood and a rice cracker. Try it in Hoi An and Danang.

07 Cao lau
Hoi An's speciality noodle dish is thick yellow noodles served with wontons, pork and shrimp.

08 Com ga Hoi An
Try Vietnam's best chicken and rice in the centre,

especially in Hoi An and Danang. Usually served with a herby onion salad.

09 Chao canh
Try this round-noodle soup served with fish, pork and a side of dip-able spring rolls in Phong Nha and Dong Hoi.

10 Chao luon
Eel soup with bread, popular in the northernmost central provinces. Try it in Nghe An, Ha Tinh or Thanh Hoa.

11 Hai san
Hai san means 'seafood', and it's fresh and

plentiful anywhere with a beach. Try it anywhere you can see the sea.

12 Pho Nam Dinh
Nam Dinh has its own take on Vietnam's national dish. Some argue this is where it originated.

Practicalities

ARRIVING



240

GETTING
AROUND

242

SAFE TRAVEL



244

MONEY



245

RESPONSIBLE
TRAVEL

246

ACCOMMODATION



248

ESSENTIALS



250

LANGUAGE



252

XUANHONGHO/Shutterstock.com





RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL



ON THE ROAD

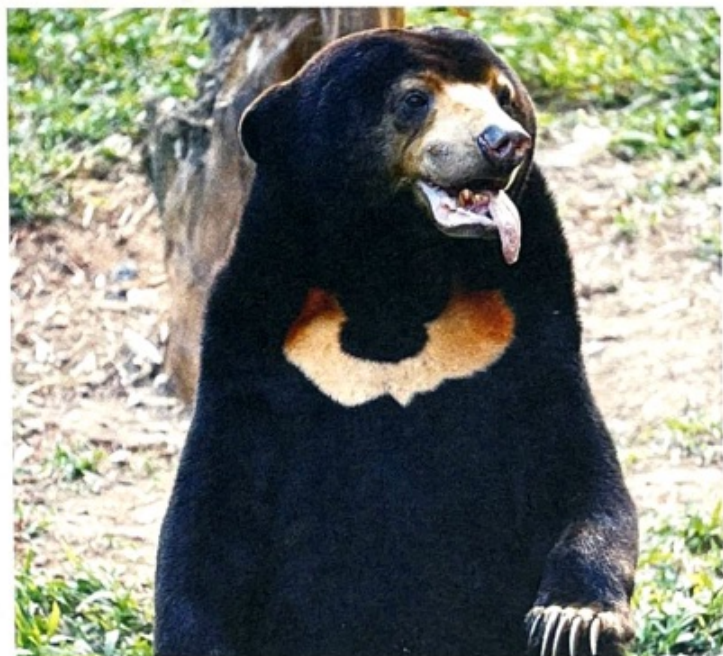
Calculate your carbon There are a number of online calculators. Try resurgence.org/resources/carbon-calculator.html.

Reusable bottles, cutlery and straws Make a handy eco-friendly travel kit. It's also good to get into the habit of asking for no straw when you order drinks.

Refuse plastic bags Bagging up purchased items is the norm in Vietnam. If it happens before you've had a chance to refuse a bag, simply take your items out and politely return the bag – you won't cause offence.

Wear a mask If people around you do, or if you're asked to. This simple gesture can make people feel a lot more comfortable, especially in remote areas.

Adventurous eating Eating things you wouldn't find at home is all part of the fun of travel. But think twice before eating wild animals, such as turtle.



TIM WHEISS/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

GIVE BACK

Visit wildlife reserves and protected areas and support organisations conserving wildlife and biodiversity. Animals Asia (animalsasia.org) programmes include visiting a bear sanctuary near Hanoi. They also helped to set up an ethical elephant experience in Yok Don National Park.

Make a financial donation to children's charities that you think are doing good work. It's often more useful than donating clothes, books, food or your time. Blue Dragon (bluedragon.org), Saigon Children's Charity (saigonchildren.com) and Hue Help (huehelp.org) all have good reputations.

Be sceptical about short-term volunteering, sometimes called 'voluntourism', as it can do more harm than good. Many small charities will invite you to their office to speak about their programmes, but may be unwilling to take you on site visits, especially if children are involved.



DOS & DON'TS

Do take your shoes off before entering homes.

Do cover your shoulders when entering a temple or pagoda.

Do shake hands with one hand on your forearm to show respect.

Don't haggle unless you're confident the item is overpriced.

Do give and receive money with two hands.

Don't sit with your back to the altar in a family home.



LEAVE A SMALL FOOTPRINT

Flights Do you really need to fly? Consider an overnight train or bus for some journeys – if you travel while asleep, you won't lose time.

Reduce your impact on nature by staying on trails in national parks and not touching trees, plants or coral.

Bring your own soap and other toiletries rather than using the little plastic bottles provided by the hotels.

Think about eating locally produced food as much as possible rather than steak from Australia or salmon from Norway.



SUPPORT LOCAL

Support social enterprises Seek out businesses giving back to their community. Koto (kotovilla.com) in Hanoi and Streets International (streetsinternational.org) in Hoi An are good places to start.

Help small businesses Eat, stay and shop in small, family-owned establishments whenever you can. After the pandemic they'll need help more than ever.

Conserve intangible heritage Take home something meaningful by buying from artisans and artists.



EO NAVA/SHUTTERSTOCK ©

CLIMATE CHANGE & TRAVEL

It's impossible to ignore the impact we have when travelling, and the importance of making changes where we can. Lonely Planet urges all travellers to engage with their travel carbon footprint. There are many carbon calculators online that allow travellers to estimate the carbon emissions generated by their journey; try resurgence.org/resources/carbon-calculator.html. Many airlines and booking sites offer travellers the option of offsetting the impact of greenhouse gas emissions by contributing to climate-friendly initiatives around the world. We continue to offset the carbon footprint of all Lonely Planet staff travel, while recognising this is a mitigation more than a solution.



RESOURCES

vietnam.travel/sustainability
env4wildlife.org
vacne.org.vn
nature.org.vn
visitquangnam.com