

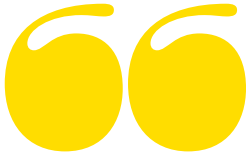
3 days in Ho Chi Minh City under \$150*

As gastronomic destinations go, Vietnam is one of the most varied – and satisfying – anywhere in the world, and its largest city offers excellent options for an unforgettable food trip. The best part? You don't have to break the bank to take a bite out of Ho Chi Minh

TEXT BY JOSHUA ZUKAS

* not including airfare and accommodations

PHOTO BY SHUTTERSTOCK



Going to Vietnam the first time was life-changing for sure,” recounted the late celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain to *Condé Nast Traveler* in 2014. “It just seemed like another planet; a delicious one that sort of sucked me in and never let go.”

Bourdain was on to something. The herb-infused soups, charcoal-fired meats, stir-fried seafood and brewing robusta make Ho Chi Minh City, commonly known as Saigon, feel like a whirlwind of taste and aroma. And while it's easy to get caught up in the culinary buzz, it's also important to get lost in markets, stroll around parks and lose track of time in galleries. Here's how to spend three fantastic days soaking in the culture and flavors of Ho Chi Minh City.

Day 1

STREET FOOD IN THE CENTER

Districts 1 and 3 constitute the city's heart and soul. Here you'll find cafés hiding in ramshackle buildings, galleries tucked down alleyways and some of the city's most time-honored restaurants. Perhaps it's too obvious to start a food adventure in Vietnam with pho, the country's national dish, but this isn't your average bowl. The speciality dish at **Pho Phuong** along the Thi

Nghe Canal comes with oxtail (110,000VND), braised for two days to make the meat melt-in-the-mouth soft. This may be twice as much as your standard pho – but it's more than worth the markup.

Walk off breakfast with a stroll west along the Thi Nghe Canal before ducking into the neighborhood's neat grid system for coffee at **Soo Kafe**. The café specializes in premium robusta, the beans used for Vietnamese coffee, which they grind and filter for their delectable egg



coffee (65,000VND), a Hanoi speciality. After coffee, walk a few blocks southwest to **Le Van Tam Park** (free), stopping by **Galerie Quynh** (free), a contemporary art space. If you're



(Top to bottom)
Le Van Tam Park; Galerie Quynh



on the lookout for souvenirs, stop by **OHQUAO Concept Store** for some well-priced prints and cute stationery.

When the pangs of hunger return, head north to the Michelin-recommended **Banh Xeo 46A** for Vietnam's famous sizzling savory pancake with shrimp, pork, beansprouts and garden greens. Order a regular (110,000VND) so you leave room for a side of summer rolls (90,000VND). Much like banh xeo, Saigon sizzles in June, so hide from the afternoon heat in a nearby café, **Sipply**, which sits in a repurposed modernist house. Each drink here is a work of art, but try their refreshing signature triple citrus (80,000VND): mixed citrus, kombucha and espresso over ice. Once it cools down, consider a walk around

Tan Dinh Market and **Tan Dinh Church** (both free) before dinner in nearby **Cuc Gach Quan** (350,000VND), which cooks up almost a hundred dishes served with rice – a stunning colonial house once frequented by Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie.



Day 2

CHOW DOWN IN CHINATOWN

After a day of Vietnamese classics, head to the world's biggest Chinatown by area, Cholon. Hop in a taxi (75,000VND) to Cho Binh

Tay (free), one of Vietnam's most atmospheric markets. The food court towards the back bustles with action throughout the day and has all the classic Saigon dishes available, including *hu tieu* (60,000VND), a noodle dish crafted by the Chinese diaspora. You may not have


heard of *hu tieu* before, but you might be familiar with its regional siblings: *kuai tiao* in Thailand, and *char kway teow* in Malaysia and Singapore. Grab a takeaway Vietnamese coffee or fresh juice (25,000VND) from one of the stalls, and spend the rest of the morning losing yourself



Head northeast for lunch, passing St Francis Xavier Church (free), a small Catholic church locally known as Cha Tam, built over a century ago

to the sights and smells of this mega-market.

Head northeast for lunch, passing **St Francis Xavier Church** (free), a small Catholic church locally known as **Cha Tam**, built over a century ago. Enjoy a starter of six different types of dim sum (30,000VND) at **Ha Cao Kieu Ky** before moving around the corner for banh mi (30,000VND) at **Banh Mi Tang**, which has been around since the 1960s. Then spend the afternoon criss-crossing the neighborhood to visit its various assembly halls, temples and pagodas (all free), almost all of which were established by Chinese traders centuries ago. For dinner, tuck into another Chinese classic – chicken and rice (80,000VND) – at **Com Ga Dong Nguyen**. Then roll into a taxi and head home (75,000VND).

CASH RECEIPT	
Breakfast and coffee:	85,000VND
Dim sum:	30,000VND
Banh mi:	30,000VND
Dinner:	80,000VND
Taxis:	150,000VND
Total:	375,000VND
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THANK YOU!	
	



EAT GLOBAL

Ho Chi Minh City is home to Vietnam's most cosmopolitan food scene – but it doesn't come cheap. Fortunately, you've been eating local and counting your pennies for the past two days, so now you can splurge. Jump in a taxi (150,000VND) and head to **Thao Dien**, Ho Chi Minh City's international food hub. Grab a cornetto (47,000VND with a filling) at the brand-new Italian bakery **Brianza**, then munch and amble to **Café Slow** to relax into a latte (75,000VND). When lunchtime rolls around, head to Australian brunch spot **WKND** for one of their indulgent all-day breakfast plates (250,000VND) and wash it down with a glass of wine or a craft beer (200,000VND).

If you couldn't find anything on Day 1, head two blocks over to **Vesta's** flagship store, a cavernous collection of hip home décor sourced from across the country – think design

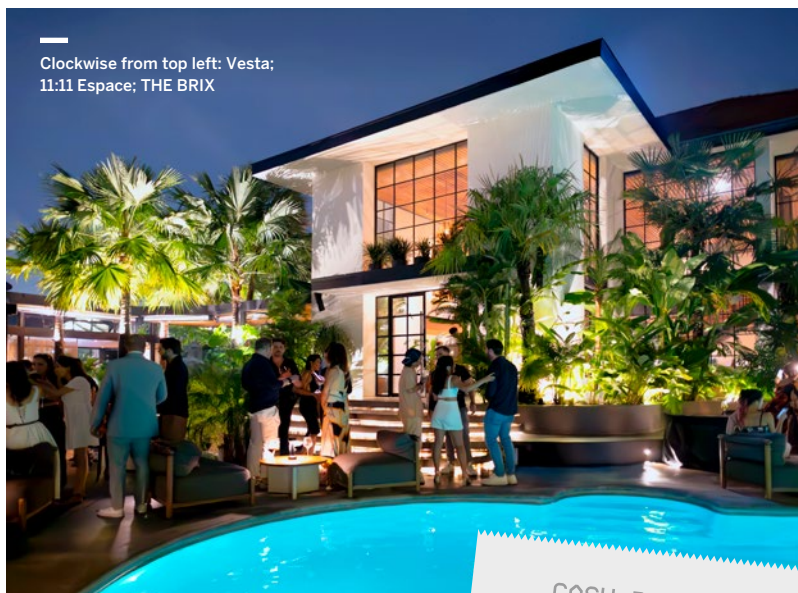




Stylish stays



Clockwise from top left: Vesta;
11:11 Espace; THE BRIX



cushion covers and funky posters. A further few blocks in the same direction is **11:11 Espace**, a creative space that renews its exhibits every few months. The gallery sits hidden within a boutique hotel, and if you buy a drink (60,000VND) you can explore the art for free.

For dinner, move to **THE BRIX**, which serves “Mediterranean” salads, grills and sweet treats, and you can get a world-class, multi-course meal for less than 1,000,000VND. Now settled into Thao Dien’s dynamic vibe, blow the rest of the budget on wine or cocktails before taking a taxi home (150,000VND). **5**

CASH RECEIPT

Pastry:	47,000VND
Coffee:	75,000VND
Lunch:	450,000VND
Afternoon drink:	60,000VND
Dinner:	1,000,000VND
Wine/cocktails:	150,000VND
Taxis:	300,000VND
Total:	1,932,000VND

Three-day total:
3,112,000VND (Approx. US\$121)

THANK YOU!



Forgo the indulgent hotel with breakfast buffet and look for a no-nonsense modern stay instead. **M Village** is a fast-growing hotel group with locations across central Ho Chi Minh City and beyond. Most don’t include breakfast – ideal for those wanting to get out and eat on the street – and all offer free self-service laundry, cooking areas and co-working spaces. In Districts 1 and 3, the best places to stay for this itinerary, M Village has more than a dozen options to suit different price points.

mvillage.vn


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