



Spellbinding Beauty

Vietnam's Hoi An offers culture, cuisine,
history and a heavy dose of charm.



Shops and restaurants along the Thu Bon River are lit for the night and provide a mesmerizing sight

VIETNAM'S COASTAL GEM features a historical old town, relaxing beaches, and is both the foodie and tailoring capital of the country.

Look Around

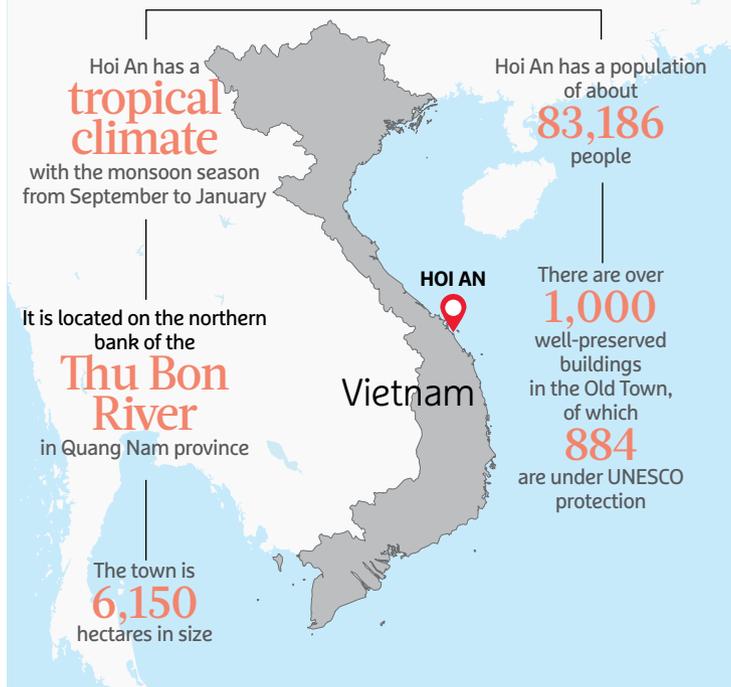
The quaint Old Town is Hoi An's top draw. Reflecting its foreign trade port roots, you'll find French colonial architecture next to ancient Chinese traders' houses and pagodas, with golden yellow-coloured walls everywhere, making for a tremendously photogenic backdrop. You have to pay a USD5 (120,000 dong/RM24) entry fee to the historical area, but this includes tickets to visit any five of a choice of sites or museums, such as the iconic Japanese Covered Bridge, the timber-framed Tan Ky merchant's house, the Folklore Museum, or the Fujian Chinese Assembly Hall. Over 800 17th and 18th-century houses and other architectural wonders here are on UNESCO's protected and preserved buildings list. Several streets are closed to vehicles, making them perfect for strolling. If the heat and distances get to be a bit too much, you can take it all in via a cyclo rickshaw.

Celebrate

If you time your visit for the Lunar Festival, you'll see Hoi An at its best. On full moon nights each month, the old quarter dims electricity, and everything gets illuminated by traditional silk lanterns, making for an incredibly colourful



Fast facts



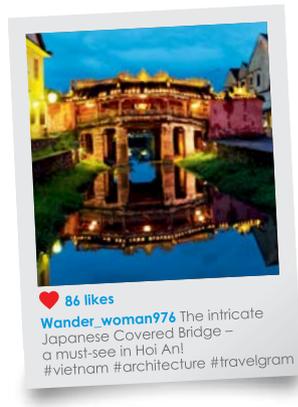
spectacle. Additionally, boatmen and women offer rides on the Thu Bon River, where thousands of local couples come to float candle lanterns, praying for good luck and success in love. The celebration has become such a defining image of Hoi An that even if you aren't here for the lunar fête, you'll still see lantern shops and candle sellers each evening, with loads of couples coming here to shoot honeymoon photos in traditional costumes.

Explore

There is plenty to do just outside and around town as well. Cua Dai and Ao Bang are golden-sand beaches 10-15 minutes away by bicycle, with a mellow vibe should you get saturated with cultural touring and just want to relax with a book and a beer. Snorkel fiends and hikers will love the Cham Islands, just offshore, part of a marine park with turquoise bays and long stretches of white sand. You can cycle across the Thu Bon River and explore Cam Nam or Cam



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Kim Island, where narrow lanes lead to charming fishing villages or small farms. You'll find cottage industries here like floor mat weaving and rice paper making.

Eat Like A Local

Hoi An is home to dishes you won't find elsewhere in Vietnam. 'White rose' or *banh bao vac*, are rice paper dumplings stuffed with shrimp and shaped to resemble flower petals. The recipe for making them is a secret, held by one family restaurant now in its third generation, and they supply every other place in town with the dumplings each day. Head to the source, Tran Tuan Ngai, to sample these succulent treats.

Cheap & Best

The cavernous Cho Hoi An Market features all of Hoi An's specialities at a fraction of the price found elsewhere. Dig

into a bowl of *cau lau*, the noodle and local greens dish that is also unique to the city, as tradition stipulates that the stock for the broth must be made with water drawn from only one well that dates back to the 10th century. Almost all diners in the bustling market are eating this or *mi quang*, a dry rice flour noodle dish topped with grilled rice paper and spices, also only found in the Hoi An region.

Follow Bourdain

Renowned foodie Anthony Bourdain put a hole-in-the-wall French baguette sandwich shop firmly on the world food map when he proclaimed it to be the mother of all *banh mi* shops in Vietnam, remarking "This is symphony in a sandwich." These days, the queue at Banh Mi Phuong often stretches around the block, but the wait is well worth it as in addition to the standard pork paté on a crunchy baguette, Phuong also does barbecued pork, grilled chicken with cheese, tuna fish, and a whole variety of options.

1. Traditional cantilevered fishing nets are still used by locals today
2. Built two centuries ago, the merchant Tan Ky's house has been well preserved
3. A fruit vendor stopping to pose for the camera
4. Rice paper dumplings shaped like flower petals are filled with shrimps



Chic Eats

You can have all of the above dishes served with pizzazz and style at The Cargo Club or Morning Glory, the most popular of a series of hip eateries housed in French colonial buildings with rooftop terraces overlooking the Old Town district. Morning Glory is run by Madame Vy, Hoi An's most famed restaurateur, who also operates Vy's Market restaurant, where she runs a cooking school that will teach you how to make all the specialities you've been filling your belly with.

5. A young girl with candle lanterns on a full moon night

6. Cheap local eats can be found at the Cho Hoi An market

7. Colourful silk lanterns are popular souvenir items

8. Old colonial mansions have been turned into atmospheric restaurants that look out at the river and old town

9. Sharpen your bargaining skills buying from street vendors

Peaceful Rest

Set on a private beach outside of town that's claimed to be one of the best beaches in the world, the Four Seasons Nam Hai surrounds you with water and relaxation. In addition to the sea, there are three infinity swimming pools on the beachfront, including an Olympic-sized lap pool. Closer to the action, the Life Heritage Resort features French colonial architecture, manicured gardens, and all rooms look out on the atmospheric Thu Bon River. Additionally, the old town is just a short stroll away.



Travel Tips:

- Vietnam's currency is the **Dong (VND)**.
- **US dollars** are widely accepted but bills must be relatively new, with no markings or tears.
- Hoi An is known for its **instant tailoring trade**, so make a garment or two to take home.
- The best time to visit is between **May and June**.
- **Silk lanterns** are hung all over town because locals believe they will bring warmth and happiness to those who reside inside as well as to those who visit.



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Café Culture

While pub crawls are somewhat limited in early-to-bed, early-to-rise Hoi An, java fiends will love the strong, bold Vietnamese coffee, sweetened with condensed milk and poured via a slow drip. Arabica beans from Vietnamese highland growers feature prominently. Faifo Coffee has the best rooftop view in the old town and a wide range of local and imported blends.

Sate Your Silk Search

Hoi An is one big souvenir and craft bazaar, and you'd be well-advised to arrive with extra room in your luggage to take some goodies home. The traditional paper or bamboo-framed silk-covered lantern shops are always crowded with shoppers, and if you want to make your own, you can take part in a workshop with the Lifestart Foundation. However, what Hoi An is really renowned for is its tailors. Hundreds of shops offer services to custom-make suits or silk shirts, scarves, and sleeping sheets. Beware that if the price is cheap, it probably isn't real silk. A Dong Silk and Be Be Tailor are two of the more reputable outfitters.

Malaysia Airlines flies daily from Kuala Lumpur (KUL) to Hanoi (HAN) and Ho Chi Minh City (SGN), Vietnam. From there, take an overnight train to Danang for a taxi ride to Hoi An.



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About the writer/photographer

Dave Stamboulis is an American travel writer and photographer based in Bangkok, Thailand. His work has appeared in *Lonely Planet*, *Rough Guides*, *Conde Nast Traveler*, *USA Today*, and other publications around the world. He is the author of *Odysseus' Last Stand*, which received the Silver Medal for Travel Book of the Year from the Society of American Travel Writers.

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