

travel

● 48 hours in hoi an ● travel listings



Japanese Bridge Tourists enjoying the view from the 16th century covered bridge

48 Hours in Hoi An

Making the most of your time in Hoi An is no easy feat. Here's the best way to spend a lucky 48 hours in this town. Words by Will Peach. Photos by Khoa Tran.

AS A UNESCO-LISTED WORLD heritage site, Hoi An is never short of visitors. Thousands of tourists come each year to take advantage of its great food, serene beaches and famous tailors, and it's not hard to see why.

But while the hordes sometimes make it difficult to relax and take in the old town's unique charm and atmosphere, the coming months, and the present tourist lull, means there isn't a better time to go. October and November also provide cooler climates in which to get to grips with all Hoi An has to offer.

● Get Your Bearings

The centre of Hoi An is small and



An Enjoyable Dinner *The Mango Rooms*



Beach Bumming *Tourist enjoying the sun at Cua Dai*



Sightseeing *A view of the ceramic museum*

pedestrianised, motorbikes are banned from the old town from 7am to 11am, 2pm to 5pm and 7pm to 9.30pm, making these the best times to walk around. The main road, Tran Hung Dao, becomes Cua Dai and also the route to the town's most popular beach as it heads east, while Hai Ba Trung is the main route that runs perpendicularly into the Old Quarter. Get your bearings by strolling down the main thoroughfare and shop houses of Tran Phu up towards the river, which runs adjacent to Le Loi.

◉ Check-In

Hoi An caters for a variety of budgets but if you want a particularly luxurious time try **Life Resort** (1 *Pham Hong Thai*) or the **Victoria Hoi An Beach Resort** (*Cua Dai*). Both are priced at the high-end spectrum, but in terms of quality are hard to beat. A great mid-range pick is **Ha An** (6 *Phan Boi Chau*) where rooms cost around US\$25 a night, but include a free buffet breakfast, spotless rooms and helpful staff. A cheaper bet is **Hoa My** (201 *Ly Thuong Kiet*), where rooms cost US\$15 and are only a brisk five-minute walk from the old quarter.

◉ Day One

Spend your first morning meandering through the streets of the Old Quarter.

Head up toward the west end of Tran Phu to catch the quaint splendour of the Japanese covered bridge, constructed in the early 1600's. From there, head to one of the many tourist information outlets to purchase a coupon (priced at VND75,000) which allows access to all the historical sites – very important for the rest of your trip.

You could also take in a dose of *cao lau*, Hoi An's best known speciality. A dish made up of thick round noodles, thinly sliced pork, broken rice cake, cilantro, fresh herbs and a unique soy-based sauce, this is a must for any visitor. A good place to buy a bowl is at 22 Nguyen Hue.

◉ Shopping Then Dropping

Hoi An's famous tailors may well have caught your eye already, but devote a healthy amount of your midday time to some serious shopping. Made-to-measure shirts, blouses, dresses and suits are all available for purchase at very decent prices. High-quality suits range from US\$50, shirts are around US\$10 while skirts cost around US\$15 and dresses go for US\$20 upwards. It's something of a jungle when picking the right tailors (there are over 400 in the city), so inquire at a few first before committing to any purchase. The following places have

been recommended by recent visitors: **Mr Xe** (71 *Nguyen Thai Hoc*), **Khoi** (20 *Tran Hung Dao*), **B' Lan** (23 *Tran Phu*), **Thang Loi** (41 *Le Loi*). Going early in your trip will give tailors enough time to make any readjustments.

◉ Grabbing a Bite

Some furious shopping makes for a well-earned rest, and what better way to unwind than by picking a nice spot by the river and catching a cool breeze? **The Cargo Club** (107-109 *Thai Van Hoc*) is a great daytime lunch spot. Grab a seat on its rooftop terrace for great views down the river while enjoying its varied and extensive menu of western, traditional and fusion-style dishes. An average main here costs around VND100,000, but make sure you have room and money enough for some of the sweet delicacies on offer from their own in-house bakery.

◉ A Cultural Afternoon

A major international port in the 16th and 17th centuries, Hoi An is steeped in a long and varied history. Use your coupon to step back into the old days by paying a visit to the **Cantonese Assembly Hall** (176 *Tran Phu*) that was built in 1885 for congressional meetings. Be sure to take a



look at its half-hidden back yard and dragon statues. Follow this up with a short trip to the **Hoi An Museum of History and Culture** (7 *Nguyen Hue*) to see some relics from Vietnam's Champa period.

◉ Dinner and a Nightcap

Hoi An surges with a new lease of life as night falls with ornate lanterns lighting up the city streets, casting an enchanting glow over the old quarter. Cruise up and down Tran Phu to soak up the atmosphere before crossing over the river via the short wooden bridge and head to **River Lounge Restaurant** at 35 *Nguyen Phuc Chu*. The vibe here is largely European but the excellent Asian menu, complete with dishes designed by Austrian Michelin-star chef Michael Schwartzmann, makes it one of the prime eating spots in town. Afterwards enjoy a tippie back across the river at **White Marble** (98 *Le Loi*), a dedicated wine bar providing one of the best people-watching lookouts in town.

◉ Day Two

Spend the morning of your second day in town scoping out one of the two old houses

on Nguyen Thai Hoc. **Tan Ky House** (number 101) provides a good insight to how the local architecture incorporates both Chinese and Japanese influences. Pay attention to the columns holding up the roof to see Chinese poems written in mother-of-pearl.

◉ Beach Bumming

A trip to Hoi An would almost seem incomplete without a brief sojourn to one of the town's two nearby beaches, Cua Dai and An Bang. Hire a bike and hit either of the two (Cua Dai is the more accessible, being around a 15-minute ride away), rent out a lounger (about VND10,000) and enjoy the warm sea as the waves lap up to the shore. An Bang is the more secluded of the two and makes for a much more intimate and relaxing afternoon as hawkers and tourists are smaller in number.

◉ Seaside Lunching

Both beaches provide decent eating options. **Phatties** (at the far left of the restaurant strip on An Bang) is a low-key, chill-out place complete with pool table, tasty burgers and cheap drinks. Over on Cua Dai there's the

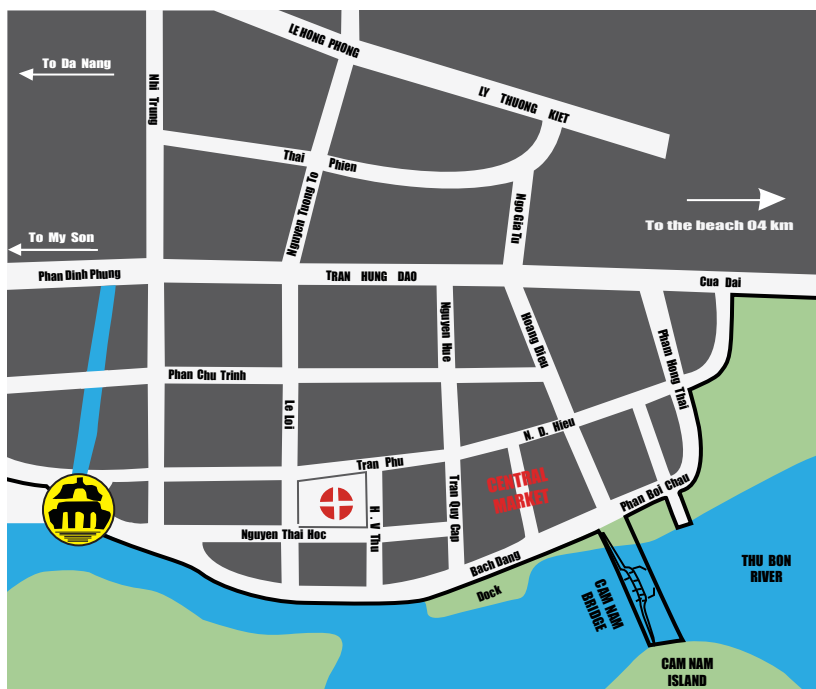
Zero Mile beach club, with cheap cocktails and a large western menu, as well as the option of eating at some of the upscale resorts like the River Beach or Victoria.

◉ Early Evening

Spend the early evening just before sunset by meandering down the central market (Bach Dang Street just before Cam Nam Bridge) hunting for any last-minute souvenirs or sampling some of the produce that serves most of Hoi An's excellent restaurants. Dinner at the elegant **Mango Rooms Restaurant** (111 *Nguyen Thai Hoc*) or its sister restaurant **Mango Mango**, over the river at Nguyen Phuc Chu, comes highly recommended.

◉ Blowout

Finally, celebrate a jam-packed last 48 hours with a heavy drinking session at one of the late-night bars around town. If live music's your thing try **Before and Now** (51 *Le Loi*) or head back to the beach at Zero Mile for some late night skinny dipping. One thing's for sure. A trip to Hoi An, at the very least, is always going to be memorable. **W**



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