

Like everywhere else in Vietnam, traffic in Hanoi is dominated by an incredible number of motorbikes, all of which seem to be making a mad, desperate dash for something just out of reach — all of the time. All the while blowing their horns incessantly. In other words, pedestrian traffic can be overwhelming for visitors, especially in the narrow streets around the [hotels in Hanoi Old Quarter](#). When you leave the curb, look not only both ways but left, right, back and front, and take each step slowly and patiently allowing them to pass because even an eye contact is not enough with the oncoming drivers and actually before you know it, someone is also on your back since there is no such thing as one-directional traffic in Vietnam. The key word here is slowly — don't rush. This way the drivers are aware of you, and can take you into account (along with all of the other motorbikes). It may look, and indeed is somewhat chaotic, but be patient and pay attention when you're crossing any street, large or small, and you should be fine. Definitely, the streets of Hanoi have no place for faint hearted people, with hypertension and heart problems on top of the disabled and the old. You should look everywhere as you proceed. Holding out your arm toward the stream of vehicles as a "slow down, I am crossing" sign may be a good idea but not acknowledged most of the time. Don't stop suddenly when you see one coming a little fast or rush your steps when you are crossing. Just even your pace and walk slowly. The motorbikes will find their way to avoid you themselves.

If you are exploring Hanoi on a motorbike be extremely cautious when going past stationary Taxis, expect the unexpected, like a taxi door suddenly flinging open. Pickpockets are well organized and very fast. They may operate in groups, so please be vigilant in crowded areas. Thieves on motorbikes are known to snatch bags from cafe tables or phones out of the hands of pedestrians. Keep all eyes on your belongings, especially in crowded area like Dong Xuan night market; expect female pickpockets and don't let them surround you. If you carry a backpack or rucksack, do NOT carry it on your back especially in crowded areas with high tourist traffic eg Hoan Kiem Lake area. Pick pockets will open your bag behind you and help themselves to your belongings. Carry it in front of you instead.

There is a dual price policy at food establishments: tourists usually pay more than locals. Be diligent about knowing the price for a meal before you order, or you may end up with a surprising bill. See the Vietnam page for additional advice on how to avoid paying excessive amounts on your food bill. Be vigilant when taking a taxi, if you have bags in the trunk, make sure he does not drive off with your bags. Ask your hotel which taxi companies are reliable – dishonest taxis are equipped with meters that run at an adjusted (much faster) rate. As of June 2014, Hanoi Group Taxi and Mai Linh are generally the two most reputable companies, though even then, dishonesty may occasionally surface from driver to driver. The best action that you should book a service or room in-advance with famous travel company like [Đặt khách sạn](#).

Always ask the price first, and give the hawkers and taxi drivers exact change if possible. Mobile hawkers (carrying food hung on poles across their shoulders) have been known to pocket the (significant) change and stuff more food than you had intended to buy into your hands, and then quickly take off, leaving the bewildered tourist in the dust. The same is true of taxi and Xe Om drivers. Do not allow anyone to sit in back of you on a motorbike. If this happens, disembark immediately. The person behind you may try to steal from you.

As in many Southeast Asian cities, Hanoi is hygienically challenged especially where locals congregate more to dine. Expect that there may be a non-existing Health Department, or this is not in the priority of the city government. [June 2014 — not sure how reliable the following anecdotal information is and whether it is really common or not:] Hotel staff members may try to pick padlocks on travelers' bags, fake mechanics throw nails at tourists on motorbikes to cause flat tires and the police, probably the worst crooks of them all, are known to steal from people (both locals and tourists) and ask for a bribe to get the items back.

Note added in March 2014: The warnings above may be unduly alarmist. The center of Hanoi is remarkably tasteful and laid-back, and violent crime is almost unthinkable. By far your most serious risk or potential danger will be crossing any major road or being part of an accident while riding on a motorbike. Tourist-oriented hassle does exist, but is negligible compared to Yogyakarta, or even some areas of Bangkok (not to mention places like India or Egypt). Overall, be careful, but by no means let yourself be drawn away from this wonderfully stylish and safe city.