Laszlo Hudec’s Architectural Legacy

Art Deco Shanghai
Hanoi’s Street Icons

Be it salesmen on wheels, sidewalk chefs or pavement peddlers, street vendors are a common sight in downtown Hanoi, infusing Vietnam’s capital with a riot of colours. But, a recent clampdown on street vending may mean that these everyday icons will soon disappear.

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY: Claudio Sieber/claudiosieberphotography.com
FLORAL HAUL These flower sellers have just bought their colourful blooms from the Quang Ba Flower Market in Tay Ho District, West Lake, to trade in the bustling city of Hanoi. Many street vendors rise before dawn to procure their goods at wholesale markets for resale on the streets.
1. **Sweet Medley** ‘Getting lost’ in Hoan Kiem district’s narrow streets is the best way to explore its hidden gems. Just a stone’s throw from the infamous Bia Hoi Corner (a popular nightlife spot named after *bia hoi*, a local draft beer) in the Old Quarter, colourful shops line a narrow alley offering a hodgepodge of edible delights. Obviously, the Hanoians have a flair for making the most of small spaces.

2. **True Icon** One of Vietnam’s most famous icons is the local lady expertly balancing on her shoulder a *don ganh* – a wooden pole strung with a basket of goods on either end. These baskets are laden with everything from tropical fruits to ingredients for *banh mi*, a Vietnamese baguette layered with pork, paté, cucumber, pickles and pounded chilli. It’s a tough life, and many street vendors roam the roads for 10 hours a day peddling their wares while sharing their ‘work space’ with Hanoi’s bustling traffic.

3. **Feathers on the Move** Looking like a big bird on wheels, pictured here is a nomadic feather duster salesman on his way to the Old Quarter. Once a flourishing trade, selling handmade feather dusters (each taking two hours to fashion) used to easily rake in about USD300 a month. However, in recent times, revenue from sales of these handmade household items has dramatically decreased, as synthetic dusters are available at cheaper prices.

4. **Timeless Treasures** The Old Quarter is the soul of Hanoi. On closer inspection, one can see a mishmash of the past and present, converging in plain sight. Pictured here is the *non la*, Vietnam’s iconic conical hat, alongside old-fashioned advertisements and a ‘missing dog’ poster, all randomly arranged on a yellow façade – a common feature in the Old Quarter.
In Time to Come

Hanoi is a photographer’s paradise, its cityscape a vibrant medley of colours. Along with colonial buildings and hanging knots of power cables, street sellers crowned with traditional conical hats are one of the city’s most iconic sights. Some of them have a permanent spot on a sidewalk while others constantly move around, either on a bicycle or on foot. Fruits, flowers and household products are the most common goods for sale, and street sellers can still be found all over the city. In recent times, however, the government has moved to restrict street vending due to concerns over street food hygiene. Sadly, this affects all street vendors, and street vending may soon become a thing of the past.

Hot in Hanoi

These three must-experience attractions merely scrape the surface of Hanoi’s brilliant offerings.

Ba Vi National Park Situated 48km west of Hanoi, the park was originally a French hill station. A convenient getaway from the bustling city, the park’s highlights include the Tan Vien mountain peak (one of three prominent mountain summits) – the location for the popular Mountain God shrine. vuonquocgiabavi.com.vn

Thang Long Water Puppet Theatre Hoan Kiem district is where you can catch a traditional water puppet performance. Dating back to the 11th century, water puppetry typically revolves around tales from local folklore. Waist-high water sets the unique stage for this one-of-a-kind puppet performance that began as entertainment for villagers when the rice fields were flooded before harvest time. thanglongwaterpuppet.org

Red River Cruise For a leisurely journey that allows you to see the more tranquil side of Hanoi, a voyage down the Red River is ideal. A boat cruise that meanders through Hanoi takes visitors past handicraft villages, ancient pagodas, and verdant farmland.

Railway Tales From the train station in the heart of Hanoi city, railway tracks pass right through the Old Quarter, leading to Sapa town in the north and Hue city in the south. Trains practically cross through the backyard of homes in this area – where children play and residents hang laundry to dry.
1. All Kinds of Everything
Mobile shops, like this aquarium on wheels, are a part of Hanoi’s colourful urban fabric, but they might soon vanish. For now, the scene is amazing with cooks, clothing vendors, barbers, shoe-shiners and even karaoke singers plying their trade on the streets.

2. Black is Beautiful
A woman with black teeth offers her veggies for sale nearby Hanoi city centre. The custom of blackening the teeth was practised by young indigenous women when they came of marrying age; it was considered a sign of beauty. Nowadays, this custom is fading.

3. Head-turner
On average, the price for a haircut is around USD2. Hanoi’s street barbers are a tradition that dates back to the 18th century. These street barbers can be found almost anywhere – back alleys, sidewalks, parks, markets and even on bicycles. Sadly, the trade is on a decline, as the more the country embraces modernity, the less one witnesses these old street trades.