



23 Things To Do In Saigon

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How You Can Help

Everything within this guide was photographed, written, and filmed independently by my wife and I. It was a lot of fun, but it took a lot of hard work and time as well.

If you found this guide about Saigon helpful, I would be grateful if you would support us.

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Introduction

Are you ready for some action?

Saigon (also officially known as Ho Chi Minh City or locally in Vietnamese as Sài Gòn) is Vietnam's most booming up and coming city, a places where the action never stops.

In this post I'm going to go over 23 of what I think are the top things you can do and see when you're in Saigon.

Get ready to dodge motorbikes, navigate through market alleys, inhale some incense smoke at temples, and squat on the sidewalk while [slurping down bowls of hot noodles](#).

But first, let's begin with a little bit of useful information...



Where to stay in Saigon?

While I was in Saigon, I walked around some of the most popular areas to stay, and here's some information about some of the top choices:

Dong Khoi: Upscale options

Many of the large 5 star hotels are located in the [Dong Khoi area of Ho Chi Minh City](#) - it's known as being one of the most prestigious areas of the city.

You'll find hotels like the classic [Hotel Majestic Saigon](#) and the famous [Continental Hotel Saigon](#), located adjacent to the Opera House.

If you're looking to stay in a fancy five star hotel, surrounded by French colonial architecture and lush cafe's, Dong Khoi is one of the best areas to base yourself during your stay.



Pham Ngu Lao (District 1)

Sort of like Bangkok's Khao San road, the [area of Pham Ngu Lao](#), and also Bui Vien Street, is the most famous budget backpacker district of Ho Chi Minh City.

There are dozens of hotels, guest houses, and hostels along these two streets, ranging from very budget to mid-range, and I even noticed a few (sort of out of place) higher end hotels on Bui Vien Street as well.

Since this area is dominated by foreign backpackers and travelers, Pham Ngu Lao is also a big party nightlife area, and among the hostels are numerous bars, night-clubs, and massage parlors.

If you want to be right in the thick of the energy of Ho Chi Minh City, with plenty of restaurants (many international restaurants) and nightlife options, and just a short walk from the famous Ben Thanh Market, Pham Ngu Lao is a good area to look for accommodation.

Ben Thanh Market area

Just a short walk across the park from Pham Ngu Lao is the most well known central area of Ho Chi Minh City, the area that surrounds the landmark [Ben Thanh Market](#).

There are plenty of hotel options in the streets surrounding the market, and this is the area where many tour groups stay.



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Many of the hotels around Ben Thanh Market are mid range to upper level, but the location is extremely central and there are plenty of attractions and things to do in the area.

I'd say the [Ben Thanh Market area](#) is one of the best places to base yourself.

Where did I stay?

I stayed on Pham Ngu Lao for a few days, but then I transferred to [LeBlanc Saigon Hotel](#), a family run guest house in a local friendly neighborhood just north of Tao Dan Park.

It's out of the main touristy area, so it's more of a local experience, but the hotel is very nice, family run, and the Vietnamese food in the area is fantastic. I would highly recommend it.



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A Few Tips on Safety

You may read some stories of theft and snatching in Ho Chi Minh City.

And just like any fast and busy city, there's always going to be a risk of carrying belongings with you. One of the main safety concerns in Ho Chi Minh City are thieves swiftly swinging by on motorbikes and grabbing bags or mobile phones or cameras, right out of your hand.

Here are a few things you can do to reduce the risk:



- **Mobile phone** - Never pull out and use your mobile phone facing or open to the busy street. When I busted out my phone I usually went to the side of the street, and tried to duck into a business patio and sheltered myself with the wall.
- **Camera** - Likewise with a camera, you sort of have to use your own discretion of when and when not to be holding your camera out in the open to take photos. Again, try to have your back against a wall or stand to the back of parked motorbikes when you take photos of the open roads to provide a bit of a bunker.
- **Wallet** - I typically like to keep my wallet in my front right pocket, and then I like to keep some small money in my left pocket. When I buy something small on the streets, I just reach into my left pocket to pay, rather than having to take out my entire wallet. Use whatever system works best for you, but it's a good idea to have some small money to buy small things, where you don't have to take out your full wallet.
- **Touristy areas** - The majority of muggings happen in touristy shopping areas, so use extremely caution with your valuables in these areas.

However, just to reassure you, many of the people in Saigon are extremely friendly and very kind.

When I was eating street food and walking around Saigon, I was greeted by dozens of friendly people. So don't be too uptight, enjoy and experience as much as you can, but do take some precautions as mentioned above.

How to get around Saigon

Just like in Bangkok, there are many different methods of getting around Saigon, and you may have to take a couple of methods to get somewhere you want to go.

Though I've heard a rail or subway system may be in the plan, as of now, it's all ground transportation in Saigon.

From the Airport to the City

If you fly into Saigon, you'll arrive at Tân Sơn Nhất International Airport.

From there, the easiest way to get to your hotel is probably to take a taxi. Walk outside of the airport, take a left, and you'll see the taxis waiting for you. Vinasun is a good brand to choose. It cost me a little under 160,000 VND to get from the airport to the Pham Ngu Lao area.

You can also take the bus, which costs just 5,000 VND (pictured above).

Walk out of the airport, cross the street, and look for bus #152. The bus will take you all the way to Ben Thanh Market.



Walk

With motorbikes that control the streets and even sidewalks, Saigon is not quite as pleasant as a city for walking as [somewhere like Tokyo](#).

But that being said, I like to think of walking in Saigon as sort of like an obstacle course; You've got to dodge oncoming objects, jump over blockades, go around sprawling businesses, and cross the rivers of motorbike traffic.

For most of my time in Saigon, especially in the central areas of town, my wife and I walked everywhere (but we are kind of crazy for walking, we like to walk so we can eat more).

Some of the central and most famous things to do in Ho Chi Minh City are located within walking distance, if you can handle the traffic and heat (and traffic fumes).

I think walking is one the best ways to explore any city, and you can stop whenever you like, and find delicious food along your route.

Motorbike scooter

By far the most noticeable way everyone that lives in Ho Chi Minh City gets around is by motorbike (also known as the scooter).

Saigon may very well be the scooter capital of the world. There's an astounding quantity of scooters in the city.

There are two ways to join the army of motorbike scooter traffic:

- **Rent a motorbike** - If you have the confidence to rent and drive a motorbike yourself, there are plenty of rentals agencies, especially located in the Pham Ngu Lao area. You'll probably pay around \$10 per day.
- **Motorbike taxi** - On just about every corner of every street in Saigon, you'll see men reclining on their motorbikes, sometimes sleeping, sometimes just gazing into the traffic and patiently waiting. These men are motorbike taxi drivers. For a price, they will take you anywhere in the city you want to go, small journeys usually start around 20,000 - 40,000 VND.



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Take the local bus

The bus system in Saigon is actually quite good (and not too difficult to figure out if you just go up and down some of the main streets), and it's a very cheap and safe way to get around town.

There's a [color coded map](#), and though it's kind of blurry to see all the numbers and city bus routes, it does help to plan a bus route to somewhere you'd like to go.

My wife and I took the bus in Saigon many times during our stay, and some buses cost 5,000 VND and others were 6,000 VND per ride.

The biggest challenge of taking the bus in Saigon is figuring out all the one-way streets, but just study the bus map a bit, and you can easily take it at least up and down the main streets.

Taxi

Before you go to Ho Chi Minh City, you'll probably read some articles about how bad the taxis are.

Yes, there can be fakes, and drivers occasionally do some extra driving to rack up the meter. But on a whole, I thought the taxis were quite reliable, and even many of the drivers were quite friendly.



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We hardly had a problem with taking any taxis when we were in Saigon, and they are very affordable, and I really like how they are almost all comfortable vans.

However, when you take a taxi in Saigon make sure you take a reliable company and pay attention to confirm the taxi is an authentic brand. Also I like to keep my phone GPS with the map open so I can follow where the taxi is going to make sure we're on track.

Here are the main best taxi companies:

- [Vinasun](#) - Vinasun is one of the most reliable taxi companies in Ho Chi Minh City, and they are also one of the largest. You'll see Vinasun taxis, with their green and red stripe, everywhere you go in the city. Just make sure the logo is correct and make sure the phone number (38 27 27 27 - written on the side of the taxi) is correct as well.
- [Mai Linh](#) - Mai Linh is the other big taxi company in Ho Chi Minh City. Honestly though, I probably took Vinasun 90% of the time.
- [Uber](#) - Uber, the private cab service, is available in Ho Chi Minh City, and it's beginning to take off. Once you download the application, you locate an Uber, and payment is handled all online, so you never have to touch cash. We used Uber quite a bit, and it's almost the same price, if not a bit cheaper than normal taxis (at the time of writing this, things could change).

Alright, now that you know where to stay in Saigon and how to get around, let's jump right into these 23 things to do when you're in Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City).



1. Binh Tay Market

You're going to hear most about Ben Thanh Market.

But I actually found Binh Tay Market to have better prices, be a more local experience, and I overall enjoyed visiting it more than Ben Thanh.

Binh Tay Market is one of the major official markets, located in the Cholon area of Ho Chi Minh City, what is Chinatown.

It has a similar feel to it as Ben Thanh, and even many of the products that are sold - from clothes to food - are basically quite similar.

However, from what I noticed in my few visit to both markets, Binh Tay Market caters a bit more to local Vietnamese, and therefore the prices are lower, and overall a little less touristy geared.

Before going to Binh Tay Market, I had read about it from [Eating Asia](#) that, there was a wet market in the morning behind the market.

If you go in the morning, anytime from about 6 am - 8 am, walk around the back streets of the official indoor market, and you'll find an incredible fresh wet market,

teeming with food and fresh Vietnamese ingredients.

This back lane fresh food market, was probably my favorite part of visiting Binh Tay Market, and one of the top places I would recommend seeing in Saigon.

And also, don't miss the small food court, where you can get some delicious, simple, and affordable Vietnamese food.



I had a plate of [noodles fried with beef](#) (mì gói xào bò), and sitting on a stool in the morning while eating and drinking coffee, I was extremely happy.

If you are looking to do some shopping when you're in Ho Chi Minh City, at Binh Tay Market you'll find just about everything made or produced in Vietnam from clothes to snacks. There's a huge section of Vietnamese cooking utensils, nuts, spices, and tools.

Address: Bình Tây Market, 57 Tháp Mười, 2, Quận 6, Hồ Chí Minh, Vietnam

Open hours: 6 am – 7 pm daily for the main indoor market section, 5 am – 9 am or so for the outdoor wet market

How to get there: The market is located in District 5, and it's easiest to just jump in a taxi to get there. From Ben Thanh Market it cost me 110,00 VND, and the ride took about 15 minutes.





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2. Thien Hau Temple

Located in the Chinatown area (District 5) of Ho Chi Minh City and built back in the 19th century, Thien Hau Temple is dedicated to Thien Hau, the Lady of the Sea ([source](#)).

From the outside, the pagoda honestly didn't look amazing.

The entrance wall face was well weathered, rather unmaintained (but this did also give it an ancient feel), and it had almost a haunted feeling to look at.

However, as soon as you step inside, the beauty of the temple, mostly through the intricate details and carvings, is revealed.

One of my favorite parts of going to Thien Hau Pagoda in Saigon were the incredible sculpture reliefs carved on the upper roof section of the temple, depicting scenes of daily life.

They were colorful, but weathered, and had accumulated years and years of incense smoke, making the sculptures look ancient and dusted in black soot.

Another highlight were the giant coils of incense that burn slowly, hanging from the

ceiling, and filling the temple and atmosphere with smoke.

Ho Chi Minh City has a very strong Chinese presence, and when you're at Thien Hau Pagoda you'll feel like you're actually in China. The pagoda is well worth visiting when you're in Cholon (Saigon's Chinatown).

Address: Thiên Hậu Temple, 710 Nguyễn Trãi, phường 11, Quận 5, Hồ Chí Minh, Vietnam

Open hours: 8 am - 4:30 pm daily

Entrance price: Free

How to get there: The temple is located in Cholon, District 5. It's easiest to get there by taxi.



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3. Museum of Ho Chi Minh City

In the past you might have heard of the Gia Long Palace or the Revolutionary Museum, but now, the same place is officially known as the [Museum of Ho Chi Minh City](#) or HCMC Museum.

When my wife and I visited, on a weekday in the middle of the morning, it wasn't busy at all (unlike the War Remnants Museum which was packed out), so it was nice to peacefully walk around and enjoy the exhibitions.

Most of the displays show the history and making of Ho Chi Minh City, and also there are a number of Vietnamese culture exhibits as well.

But what I liked best, was just the amazing mansion palace that the Ho Chi Minh City Museum was housed in, yet another beautiful neoclassical structure built in 1885, with big pillars and wooden staircases.

This museum, I thought, was a little old and sleepy, but for just 15,000 VND for entrance price, I thought it was still worth having a quick browse.

Address: Hồ Chí Minh City Museum, 65 Lý Tự Trọng, Bến Nghé, Hồ Chí Minh, Vietnam

Open hours: 8 am - 5 pm daily

Entrance price: 15,000 VND

How to get there: The HCMC Museum is located near the Dong Khoi area of the city, walking distance from the Cathedral of Notre Dame.



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4. Bitexco Financial Tower

Standing taller than any other building in Ho Chi Minh City, and towering to the sky, is a skyscraper that's made to look like a [lotus bulb](#), known as Bitexco Financial Tower.

From a distance, or from the sky, it's easily the most recognizable building in Ho Chi Minh City, for its tallness and for its modern design.

There are a number of things you can do when you're at the Bitexco Financial Tower, but by far the most popular attraction is to take advantage of the height of the building to get a view of the city.

The bottom floor of the tower is a small shopping center, with a few cafe's, but there's not really much else. The majority of the building is occupied by offices.

There are two choices for visiting Bitexco Financial Tower for a chance to see the amazing view of the city.

[Saigon Skydeck](#) - Located on the 49th floor, this observation deck offers a panoramic view of the city. This is sort of an official Ho Chi Minh City attraction, and after you pay the entrance, you are free to browse around the floor and enjoy the views.

[Eon Cafe](#) - Located on the 50th floor, and not connected to the Saigon Skydeck, is Eon Cafe, a way overpriced cafe and bar where you can come at the expense of buying a drink. Since having a drink or food in hand will always sway my decisions, I decided to go to the cafe (instead of going to the Skydeck). The coffee was good, but extremely expensive, and the cafe looked kind of like a night-club. But nevertheless, I did enjoy the marvelous view of Saigon while sipping my coffee drip by drip.

So I personally can't speak for the Saigon Skydeck, but whichever place you choose, for sure you'll have an incredible view of the city.

Address: 36 Hồ Tùng Mậu, Bến Nghé Hồ Chí Minh, Vietnam

Open hours: 9:30 am - 9:30 pm daily (for Skydeck), 11:30 am - 11 pm daily for cafe

Entrance price: 200,000 VND for Skydeck entrance. I went to the cafe and paid 130,000 VND for a tiny cup of ristretto - looked like about $\frac{1}{4}$ of a shot of coffee.

How to get there: From the Ben Thanh Market area, you can walk to Bitexco Financial Tower, otherwise a quick taxi ride is a good option.





5. Independence Palace (Reunification Palace)

Now a museum, but still used for official government meetings and events, the Independence Palace was the former home of the president of South Vietnam during the Vietnam War.

After buying a ticket you can then go inside, and walk around a few of the floors to see all sorts of rooms including meeting rooms, dining rooms, and lounges that are fit for royalty.

Every room and space within the Independence Palace is still furnished with original chairs and tables.

The round dragon carpet, located on the second floor, a huge circular red carpet with a dragon etched into the middle, was something I thought was pretty amazing.

After navigating through a few floors and seeing the helicopter pad, you can then head to the basement where you'll find some slightly scary offices, control rooms, and bunkers.

It was very interesting to visit the Independence Palace in Ho Chi Minh City, and I think the highlight for me was strolling through the dark and creepy basement. And also, the palace kitchen, still equipped with old school machines, was pretty cool.

Visiting the Independence Palace is one of the top things to do in Ho Chi Minh City and it's one of the most visited attractions in the city.



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Address: 135 Nam Kỳ Khởi Nghĩa, Bến Thành, Quận 1

Open hours: 7:30 am - 11 am and 1 pm - 4 pm daily. However, occasionally the Palace can be completely closed when there's a large official event taking place. So make sure it's open the day you plan to go.

Entrance price: 30,000 VND per person

How to get there: From Ben Thanh Market, you can walk there in about 10 minutes, it's located right in the heart of Saigon in District 1.



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6. Saigon Cathedral of Notre Dame

Welcome to Paris?

Probably not quite as grand as the [Notre Dame de Paris](#), but nevertheless an important cathedral and landmark in Ho Chi Minh City, the Notre Dame Cathedral marks the center of the French colonial heritage in Saigon.

They still hold services on Sunday if you're interested, but if you just go to visit on any other day, make sure you arrive either in the morning from 8 am - 11 am or in the afternoon from 3 pm - 6 pm.

When I went, I arrived right and noon lunchtime, and the gates were locked; So make sure you plan to visit during open hours so you can get inside.

The next day I returned to enter the cathedral.

The cathedral is beautiful, with two 40 meter high towers, and a statue of the Virgin Mary in the front lawn area. Make sure you go to the very front on the road-side, so you can get a great photo of Virgin Mary with the cathedral in the background.

Inside the cathedral you'll see beautiful stained glass windows, the wooden pews,

and classic plaid floor tiles.

There happened to be a wedding taking place when we visited, a sight I'm sure is quite common.

Address: Bến Nghé, tp. Hồ Chí Minh, Hồ Chí Minh, Vietnam

Open hours: 8 am - 11 am in the morning and 3 pm - 6 pm in the evening on weekdays only (on Sunday, there's an official mass that begins at 9:30 am that you are free to attend)

Entrance price: Free

How to get there: From the Independence Palace, walk northeast through the park directly to the cathedral. It's located on the northwestern side of Dong Khoi street, adjacent to the old post office.





7. Central Post Office

Right across the street from the Saigon's Cathedral of Notre Dame, within the same city square, is yet another renowned landmark, the Central Post Office, that began construction back in 1886.

Again, just like quite a few other buildings in Saigon, it's the French colonial architecture that really stands out.

But even more so here, one of the top reasons the post office is one of the top Saigon attractions is because it was designed by [Gustave Eiffel](#) (yes, the man who also engineered the Eiffel Tower in Paris).

What I liked about the Central Post Office, was that not only has it become a top tourism attraction, but it also remains fully in use and functional.

If you'd like, you can walk into the post office, buy a postcard from Vietnam, stamp it, and send it home to your friends and family right then and there.

Also, I also really loved the floor tiling as well as the giant map murals painted on the walls.

Address: 2 Công xã Paris, Bến Nghé, tp. Hồ Chí Minh

Open hours: 7 am - 7 pm on week-days, 7 am - 6 pm on Saturday, 8 am - 6 pm on Sunday

Entrance price: Free

How to get there: Once you're at the Cathedral of Notre Dame, the Central Post Office is right across the street.





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8. War Remnants Museum

The [War Remnants Museum](#) in Saigon is definitely not a fun attraction to visit.

But it is a place to remember the atrocious and horrible effects that come as a result of war.

Most of the inside of the War Remnants Museum is filled with photography, shown in exhibitions, about various events of the Vietnam War. You are free to walk around the various photo and journalist displays.

On the outside section of the War Remnants Museum is an equally sad life-sized model of a prison, where you'll find replicas of prisoner rooms, stocks, and torturing devices for POW's.

If you visit the War Remnants Museum and you're with kids, there is a playground room that I noticed where many young kids went to hang out while their parents walked through the museum (as you can imagine, it may not a great place for kids to see).

Surrounding the museum, within the compound grounds are displays of previously used military weapons, tanks, and aircraft.

The War Remnants Museum is a worthwhile place to see in Saigon to learn, but again, be prepared for quite a heavy and saddening experience.

Address: 28 Võ Văn Tần, Phường 6, Quận 3, Hồ Chí Minh, Vietnam

Open hours: 7:30 am - 12 noon in the morning and 1:30 pm - 5 pm in the afternoon, daily

Entrance price: 15,000 VND per person

How to get there: The War Remnants Museum is located just northwest of the Independence Palace, you can walk from there in about 10 minutes.



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9. Opera House

Considered to be one of the best representations of French colonial architecture in Saigon, the Opera House theater was built in 1897, and has been beautifully preserved.

If you are interested, the [Opera House hosts A O Show](#), a performance of traditional Vietnamese dance using bamboo.

I didn't go to the show, but if you are interested in live performances, I'm sure it would be pretty cool to see - especially since it takes place in a such a glorious building.

Address: 7 Công trường Lam Sơn, Bến Nghé, Hồ Chí Minh, Vietnam

Open hours: Make sure you check the official site for show times and schedules and you can also buy tickets online as well.

Entrance price: Prices range from 504,000 VND - 1,176,000 VND for show tickets

How to get there: The Opera House is located on the prestigious Dong Khoi street



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10. Dong Khoi Street

Dong Khoi street and area of Saigon, sort of reminds me of [Oxford Street](#), it's an upscale area of Saigon, and along Dong Khoi street you'll find high end boutiques and designer stores.

But along with upscale shopping, it's just a nice place to walk around. Walking around Dong Khoi, I really felt like I was somewhere in between France and Vietnam, plus there's a huge contrast of the old and new, modern and traditional.

Along Dong Khoi street there are a couple of modern shopping malls like [Vincon](#), and plenty of international and specialty stores.

Also, many of the high end 5 star hotels, like the renowned [Hotel Majestic Saigon](#) are located in this area. If you interested in doing some luxury shopping in Ho Chi Minh City, this is an area you'll want to visit.

Address: Dong Khoi street

Open hours: Daytime, plenty of nightlife as well



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11. Saigon Zoo and Botanical Gardens

Clustered together in the same park, is both the [Saigon Zoo and the Botanical Gardens](#).

Instead of having to pay for both attractions, you just pay a single entrance fee and you can then walk around both.

The zoo, that is the animals part of the zoo, is not so great - the animals don't look too happy, and the cages aren't set up very well - it could definitely use a major renovation.

However, the Saigon Zoo does host a range of animals from tigers (that really looked like they wanted to escape) to elephants.

But the part I really liked:

The Saigon Botanical Gardens.

Sort of the entire zoo is a botanical garden, full of lush greenery and natural vegeta-

tion. But if you keep walking around, you'll eventually come to the specific botanical garden section.

The gardens throughout the zoo and the wide paths surrounding by natural lush vegetation was a beautiful.

When I went, it looked like many Vietnamese had come to the Saigon Zoo and Botanical Gardens just to hang out, relax and socialize with friends. It looked like many spent the day at the zoo, to use it more just like a peaceful garden park, like an escape from the noisy motorbike roads of Saigon.

As with me, you probably won't be impressed with the animals or the conditions of the zoo, but the gardens are beautiful, and it's a good place to walk around for some peace and nature within Saigon.

I think visiting the Saigon Zoo and the Botanical Gardens is one of the many great things to do in Ho Chi Minh city with kids, as it's quiet, peaceful, with nice grassy areas, and you don't have to worry about motorbikes!

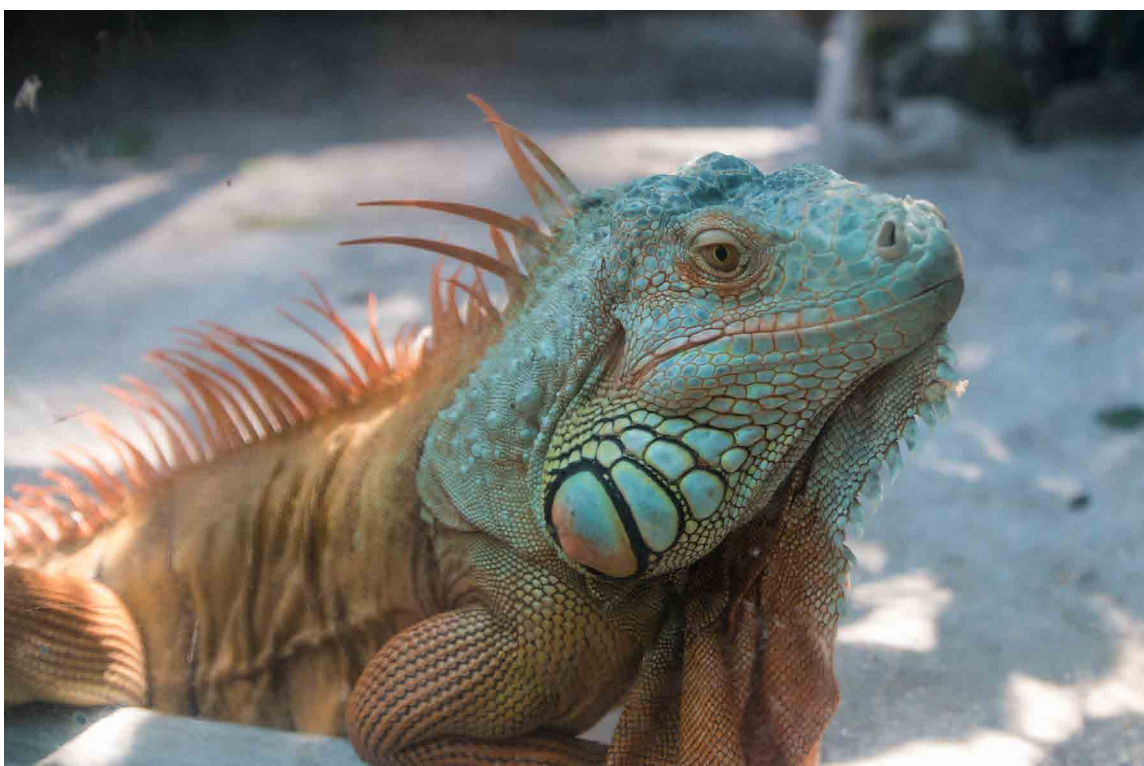
There's even restaurant to eat at if you get hungry while walking around, and a number of little refreshment stations.

Address: 2 Nguyen Binh Khiem Str., Ward Ben Nghe, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City

Open hours: 7 am - 7 pm daily

Entrance price: 20,000 VND per person

How to get there: It's easiest to jump in a taxi, but my wife and I took the bus down Nguyen Thi Minh Khai street directly to the entrance of the museum. Get out of the bus before you cross the river.





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12. FITO Museum (Museum of Traditional Vietnamese Medicine)

I really had no idea what to expect on the day we went to the FITO Museum, also known as the [Museum of Traditional Vietnamese Medicine](#).

But as soon as I paid the entrance fee, and entered the museum, I immediately felt welcomed (the staff were very friendly from the start), and the museum had a wonderful cozy, almost family run feel to it. After reading the pamphlet, I soon discovered that it's one of the few privately operated museums in Ho Chi Minh City.

The Museum of Traditional Vietnamese Medicine is housed in a five story home, built and renovated to resemble a traditional style Vietnamese home. The wooden carved decorations and details within the house were incredible.

Within the museum you'll find a collection of over 3,000 Vietnamese medicinal tools, and a collection of manuscripts, manuals, and guides that document the variety of holistic herbs and natural remedies used in traditional Vietnamese medicine practice.

When you arrive, you'll first be invited to watch a short fifteen minute film about the

progression of ancient Vietnamese medicine, and then you're free to browse the museum at your own pace, or with the help of a staff member.

I was not only impressed by the well thought out presentation of the museum, but also the kindness of the staff and the hospitality.

Also, there were a couple hands on things to try, like putting on a traditional Vietnamese medicine doctor outfits, and rolling a sharp stone to grind medicine.

Once you're finished browsing through the floors of the museum, you can enjoy a complimentary cup of tea on the bottom floor in the small gift shop.

They served me a cup of tea, used specifically to reduce anxiety, stress, and to help one relax... it was pretty good, and I did feel pretty relaxed (and ready to eat afterwards). I ended up purchasing a couple bags of ginger green tea to bring home.

Overall, I was pleasantly surprised with the FITO Museum, and I thought it was a very educational attraction.

Address: 41 Hoang Du Khuong Str., Ward 12, District 10, Ho Chi Minh City

Open hours: 8:30 am - 5:30 pm daily

Entrance price: 50,000 VND per person

How to get there: Since it's a private museum, it's located all by itself in the middle of a neighborhood in District 10, so the best way to get there is to jump in a taxi.





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13. San Art Laboratory

There are numerous museums in Saigon, many of which I've covered in this list of top attractions, but there aren't too many modern art galleries that promote the local artistic scene in the city.

Sàn means "platform" in Vietnamese, and the [San Art laboratory](#) is really a place where artists can learn and nurture their creativity surrounded by other artists.

The gallery is located within a home that's converted into an artistic space.

On the bottom floor you'll find a small library with a collection of contemporary art books and a communal table where you can hang out and connect with other artists.

Within the gallery portion, on the first and second floor of the space, there is a series of rotating exhibitions, so it's best to check their website to see what's currently on display.

The gallery is very small and intimate, but it's also personal and creative.

San Art Laboratory is open to the public, but I would only recommend visiting if you really appreciate contemporary art and creativity, which if you are, I'm sure you'll be

able to connect with other creative artists when you're there.

Also keep an eye out for special events and artist gatherings that they occasionally host.

Address: 48/7 Me Linh Binh Thanh District, Ho Chi Minh City

Open hours: 10.30 am - 6.30 pm on Tuesday - Saturday, closed on Sunday and Monday

Entrance price: Free, non-profit

How to get there: The art gallery is located in a neighborhood right across the river from the Saigon Zoo. It's easiest to take a taxi there, or you can take a bus to the main road and then walk into the neighborhood.





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14. Turtle Lake at Night

If you're looking for one of the top local things to do in Saigon at night, you have got to head over to either the Cathedral of Notre Dame or the roundabout of Turtle Lake after the sun goes down.

Located right within central Saigon, both locations are home to dozens of street food snack vendors that set up shop, and make snacks for the hundreds of young Vietnamese, both groups of friends and families, that come to hang out and socialize.

At the Cathedral of Notre Dame, the snack and tea vendors set out little canvas covers on the planters where you can take a seat and enjoy the social buzzing atmosphere with the lights of the cathedral in the background.

At Turtle Lake, within the roundabout is an old school park, with a [central sculpture](#) that looks like a dead tree in the middle surrounded by a maze of water and fountains, and an awkwardly placed flight of stairs.

The park itself is very unmaintained, not very pretty, and resembles an abandoned structure. But at night is when things change. Just like at Notre Dame, young people flock to Turtle Lake to hang out and mingle with friends, eat snacks, and enjoy life.

There are two main snacks that everyone who goes to hang out eats and you shouldn't miss either:

- **Banh trang tron** - Banh trang are Vietnamese rice paper sheets (the same ones used for summer rolls), and banh trang tron is a snack salad made with strips of dry rice paper mixed with hot sauce, slivers of green mango, quail eggs, strips of dried squid, and all kinds of random goodies. It's the latest and most popular craze snack in Vietnam.
- **Banh trang nuong** - Also known as Vietnamese pizza, banh trang nuong is also made with rice paper, which is grilled like a pizza crust over charcoal, topped with a quail egg, chili sauce, dry pork, green onions, among other things. I thought it was more like a Vietnamese taco, then a pizza.

For a cultural evening experience, visit both places anywhere from about 8 pm - 10 pm.

How to get there: Turtle Lake is located northwest of the Cathedral of Notre Dame, at the cross roads of Vo Van Tan and Pham Ngoc Thach



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15. Ben Thanh Market

Like I mentioned at the top of this list of top attractions in Ho Chi Minh City, I really liked Binh Tay Market, but there was no way I was going to leave out Ben Thanh Market either.

Even as touristy as it may be, it's a buzzing market, full of history, shopping stalls galore, and being located in the heart of Ho Chi Minh City's District 1, it's probably the most important central landmark of the city.

You'll find just about everything ever created or produced in Vietnam somewhere within the market lanes of Ben Thanh.

When I was there, I saw a frenzy of both foreign tourists from around the world, as well as Vietnamese shoppers.

If you're shopping for clothes, souvenirs, Vietnamese cookware, or dry foods like nuts or dried fruit, tea or coffee, you could easily spend a few hours getting lost in the tiny, stuffed lanes of the market. Just make sure you don't knock anything over - they literally have things like glassware dangerously stacked close to walkways.

Additionally the surrounding streets of Ben Thanh Market are a major hub of trans-

portation and a major business district, always full of action and energy.

In the evening, along the roads just outside Ben Thanh Market, they close down the roads to traffic and open them as a [night market](#) with a few restaurants and touristy shops.

This is one of the main night markets in Ho Chi Minh City, but I didn't really care for it too much - it was a bit over hyped for me, but still a good place to walk around.

Address: Lê Lợi, Bến Thành, Hồ Chí Minh, Vietnam

Open hours: 6 am - 6 pm daily for the indoor market, and about 6 pm - Midnight daily for the night market

Entrance price: Free

How to get there: If you're not already staying somewhere close in the area, it seems that all roads lead to Ben Thanh Market.



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16. Phu My Hung and Starlight Bridge

Phu My Hung is an upscale development area in District 7 of Saigon, and while spending the day with [Kyle](#) (a local blogger and vlogger), we decided to swing by to see a different side of Saigon.

Although it's only 6 km south of the central Ben Thanh Market (considered the downtown), the area has a completely different feel to it from other parts of the city.

It's more quiet, there's less traffic, there are malls and cafe's, and there are wide spacious, uncluttered sidewalks; Walking through Phu My Hung almost feels like you've left Vietnam altogether and have taken a day trip to southern California.

Phu My Hung is filled with an abundance of pleasant sit down restaurants, both Vietnamese and international, with big breezy patios, your choice of just about every fast food chain, from Lotteria to Dominoe's, and plenty of Korean restaurants as well.

If you go to Phu My Hung in the evening, you can enjoy the cooler temperatures, and it's also when many local Vietnamese and expats are out and about, eating,

socializing, and hanging out.

Along with restaurants, modern malls, and the shops that fill Phu My Hung, one of the main draws is the Starlight Bridge, a bridge that spans across the lake, with a waterfall cascading down, illuminated by flashing lights in a rainbow of colors.

Spending time with your loved one at Starlight Bridge is said to be one of the most romantic things to do in Saigon.

Address: Tôn Dật Tiên, Tân Phú, Hồ Chí Minh, Vietnam

Open hours: The entire Phu My Hung strip is nice to walk around after the sun goes down, but there's also the major [Crescent Mall shopping mall](#) open from 10 am - 10 pm daily

Entrance price: Free

How to get there: Taxi is the best way to get there since you must leave the main central part of the city



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17. Water Puppet Show

Although [water puppetry](#) originated in the north of Vietnam around the Halong Bay area, performances are also available at a number of locations throughout Saigon.

The art of Vietnamese water puppet performing (known in Vietnamese at múa rối nước) has been around since the 11th century, and most of the skits depict Vietnamese cultural scenes, countryside life, and folklore stories.

The puppets are made from wood, then they are lacquered to become waterproof, and then both painted and decorated, sometimes with paint, and other times with clothes or feathers.

One of the most famous and touristy places where you can see a Vietnamese water puppet show in Ho Chi Minh City is the Golden Dragon Water Puppet theater.

The show lasted for 50 minutes, and as the puppets danced and performed in the pool of water on the front stage, a traditional Vietnamese opera band played instruments, sang, and commented the entire program.

I thought the water puppet performance at Golden Dragon was pretty good. Although the majority of the attendees were giant tour groups, the show was still en-

tertaining. It was interesting to not only see the puppets, but something I enjoyed was listening to the traditional music and singing that was synchronized to the water puppet show.

Make sure to check the Golden Dragon Water Puppet website for up to date information about show times. I went in the morning to purchase my tickets for the evening show, but sometimes (as they informed me), they can sell out because of all the tour groups.

Address: 55B Nguyen Thi Minh Khai Street, Ben Thanh Ward, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Open hours: Official show times are 5 pm and 6:30 pm daily, and you can go to the ticket office to buy your ticket from 8:30 am - 11:30 am and from 1:30 pm - 7:30 pm

Entrance price: 160,000 VND per person

How to get there: The theater is located on the back side of Tao Dan Park on Nguyen Thi Minh Khai street, and just a short walk from the Independence Palace.



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18. Museum of Vietnamese History

There are dozens of museums in Saigon, but the Museum of Vietnamese History is one of the most important.

Inside you'll find artifacts, including sculptures, pottery, and porcelain, showing the history of Vietnam, with artifacts dating all the way back from the bronze age of Vietnamese history at around 2000 BC.

Probably my favorite part of the History Museum was the collection of sculptures and stone reliefs from the temples of Angkor Wat.

Also don't miss taking a peep at the well preserved mummy which was uncovered in District 5, right in the heart of Saigon. That was interesting to see as well.

There's also a traditional Vietnamese water puppet performance at the museum, which you can pay extra to see. I didn't wait around for the show, but if you don't have time to go to the larger Golden Dragon water puppet show (or if you want to avoid it), this might be a good alternative.

The History Museum of Vietnam is located right next to the Saigon Zoo grounds, and it's a very popular museum for local Vietnamese students to visit as well.

Address: Nguyễn Bình Khiêm, Bến Nghé, Hồ Chí Minh, Vietnam

Open hours: 8 am - 12 noon in the morning and 1:30 - 5 pm in the afternoon,
Closed on the first Monday of every month

Entrance price: 15,000 VND for entrance, 40,000 VND to take photos (I think you can get away with cell phone photos without paying, but if you want to take photos with a DSLR like I did, they'll charge you). The water puppet show costs 35,000 VND

How to get there: The Museum of Vietnamese History is located right next to the Saigon Zoo, so you can easily combine visiting both, along with [lunch at the Lunch Lady](#).



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19. Rooftop Bar

Saigon is a rapidly developing and expanding city, and sky-rise offices and condos are going up at near frightening rates.

Along with high-rise buildings, one of the recent trends in the city are rooftop bars and lounges.

The streets of Saigon are loud, crowded, and quite often on the chaotic side - and don't get me wrong, the street life is amazing - but it can also be very nice to see it all from above, in a peaceful environment from a bird's eye view, enjoying the city skyline and sunrise with a cool beverage in hand.

As of now, one of the most popular rooftop bar options in Saigon is [Shri Restaurant and Lounge](#), which is not only a bar, but a full restaurant.

You can go either just for drinks or choose to have either lunch or dinner there. My wife and I went to Shri for a late lunch, and enjoyed the wonderful views of the city, the upscale environment, and the top notch service.

Another idea would be to go to a rooftop bar for sunset and enjoy happy hour, or an activity to do at night.

Other well known spots to enjoy a drink with a view include the [Hotel Continental](#) and [Hotel Majestic](#), but I'm sure there will be more and more rooftop bars in the future as more and more sky scrapers sprout up in Saigon.

It's amazing that you can be eating street food in an alley one minute, and seeing it all from above the next.

Address: Shri, 72 Nguyễn Thị Minh Khai, 6, 3, Hồ Chí Minh, Vietnam

Open hours: For Shri, 10 am - 12 midnight from Monday - Saturday and 4:30 pm - 12 midnight on Sundays and public holidays. Also, don't miss their happy hour from 4:30 pm to 6:30 pm daily.

Entrance price: Rooftop bars in Saigon can be a bit on the pricey side, but it's worth it on a special occasion for the atmosphere and view. Lunch for my wife and I cost a rather pricey 850,000 VND.

How to get there: Shri Restaurant and Lounge is located just up the road from Independence Palace, and very close to Turtle Lake



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20. Fine Arts Museum

Like many of the museums in Ho Chi Minh City, one of the best parts of visiting is to admire the structure its housed in.

Possibly one of the most elegant and well preserved pieces of architecture in the entire city (at least what I thought) is the Fine Arts Museum of Ho Chi Minh City, located just opposite the giant roundabout from Ben Thanh Market.

Inside the museum, you'll discover a great collection of artwork, including many paintings, sculptures, and lacquer-ware, that span the history of art in Vietnam.

One of my favorite exhibitions at the Fine Arts Museum was the collection of sandstone sculptures and ceramics from the [Khmer site of Óc Eo](#), during the [Funan Kingdom](#).

You could easily spend an hour or two browsing through the art exhibitions at this fantastic museum. If you get tired out, there is a beautiful courtyard in the middle of the building where you can take a rest on a bench and just enjoy the peaceful quietness of the museum.

At first I wasn't extremely interested in visiting as I was sort of museumed-out, but I

was pleasantly surprised at how nice it was. I thought the Fine Arts Museum was a hidden gem, and even if you just have 1 or 3 days in Saigon, I would recommend it as one of the top attractions in Ho Chi Minh City.

Address: 97 Phó Đức Chính, Nguyễn Thái Bình

Open hours: 9 am - 5 pm from Tuesday - Sunday (closed Monday)

Entrance price: 10,000 VND per person

How to get there: The museum is located right across the roundabout (sort of to the south) of Ben Thanh Market.



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21. Jade Emperor Pagoda

Dedicated to the [Jade Emperor](#), one of the highest powers and deities in Taoism, the Jade Emperor Pagoda is one of the most important Taoist temples in Saigon.

As soon as you set foot into the compound, the loudness of the road traffic outside drifts away, and you can immediately feel a sense of calm throughout the temple.

The front courtyard is shaded by draping banyan trees, with a spattering of pigeons, and a cloud of incense smoke that burns both inside and outside the temple and sets the mood by making the entire area hazy.



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Inside the temple, there are two main sections, the back section is where the statue of the Jade Emperor sits, surrounded by various other deities and statues.

The Jade Emperor Pagoda is full of symbolism and details, which I don't even begin to understand or even probably notice, but nevertheless, it was an intriguing temple to visit.

Address: 73 Mai Thị Lựu, Đa Kao

Open hours: 7 am - 6 pm daily

Entrance price: Free

How to get there: The Jade Emperor Pagoda is located just off Dien Bien Phu highway, directly north of Ben Thanh and near the river. It's best to catch a taxi there.



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22. Local Wet Market

As much as visiting both Ben Thanh and Binh Thang Markets are wonderful things to do when you're in Saigon, a trip to the city would not be complete without getting lost in one of the countless fresh wet food markets scattered throughout the city.

While the other two markets mentioned above are more wholesale goods markets, right now I want to talk about neighborhood alley markets. It's kind of like going to the supermarket in Saigon.

Literally, sometimes I was just wandering around Saigon, walking around aimlessly, and the next thing I knew, down a side alley, I would find myself in the midst of a wonderful bustling local neighborhood market - I don't know if I've been to another city with as many fresh markets as Saigon.

The reason I love walking through markets in Saigon (or anywhere else) so much, is because it offers a REAL glimpse into the [local life and culture of the destination](#).

People sell and shop, hang out, sleep, eat and drink, and do just about everything you can possibly think of at markets in Vietnam.

On top of that, I found that many of the people in the markets throughout Saigon

that I visited were extremely friendly. Even as I walked by taking photos and videos, many people smiled and laughed and said hello to me and even invited me to stop for something to eat.

Additionally, exploring a wet market in Saigon, you'll see a near mind-blowing quantity and array of different vegetables, herbs, meats, and ingredients, all the raw things that makes Vietnamese food so good.

So along with visiting the two main largest well known markets I encourage you to go off the main paths, into the alleys of Saigon, and deep into some of the local wet markets to explore.

For me, learning about the local life by exploring alley markets was one of my favorite things to do in Saigon.





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23. Vietnamese Street Food

You and I probably agree:

Food and travel goes extremely well together. In fact, food is the main reason I travel in the first place (museums and everything else are all secondary to food)!

Saigon is an overwhelming paradise for food lovers, both because of the delicious flavors and combinations of Vietnamese food, and for the abundance, quantity, and variety of food available everywhere you look.

Vietnam is a huge country that spans from the Mekong Delta in the south to the highlands of the north bordering China, and a coast line of 3,444 kilometers ([source](#)).

Since Saigon is the biggest city in Vietnam, people have moved to the city from around the country and the benefit for the food scene is that you can find nearly everything from around Vietnam somewhere in Saigon.

But let's talk about Vietnamese street food.

Street food is what I would consider a major part of Vietnamese culture.

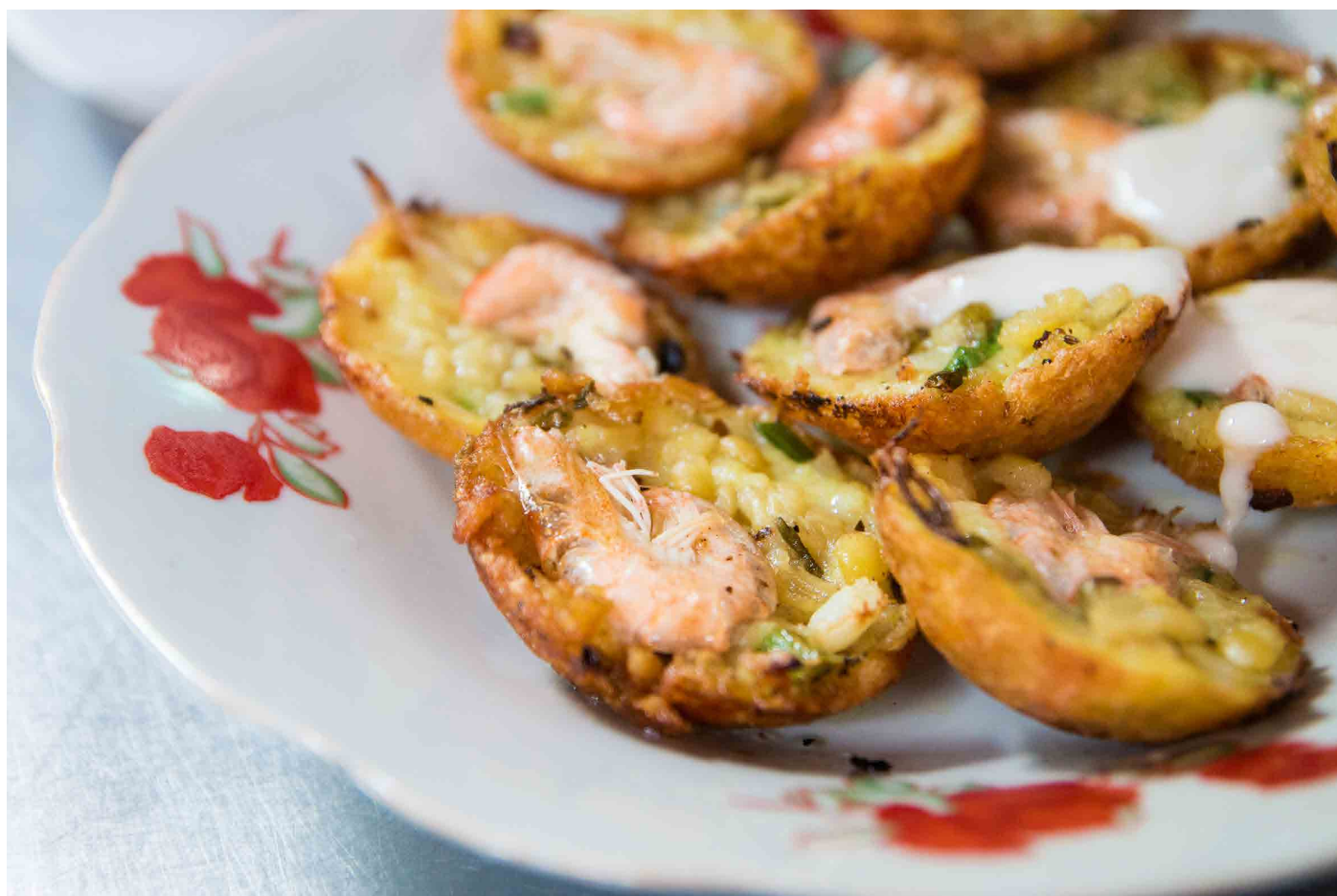
Along with being very affordable, eating street food is a way to socialize with friends, and enjoy the atmosphere of the city. You'll find street food stalls set up in every neighborhood, along every street, and on just about every corner of Saigon.

Yes, hot bowls of pho and [banh mi sandwiches](#) are widespread and remain very popular, but you'll also discover dozens of other delicious Vietnamese dishes like bun rieu (crab noodles), com tam suon (pork chop over rice), banh khot (savory griddle cakes), and one of my personal favorite Vietnamese foods, [bo la lot](#) (minced beef wrapped in wild betel leaves and grilled).

If you go out wandering around Saigon, you'll have no trouble finding unbelievably delicious food to try. Just pull up a tiny plastic stool at a plastic table, and try whatever you see available.

You may not always know what you're eating, but you'll have an incredible time tasting, and the experiences you'll have as a result of being adventurous and samplings different foods is something you'll never forget.

If you love food, be sure to check out my [list of the best 25 dishes to eat in Saigon](#).





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Conclusion

Saigon (known officially as Ho Chi Minh City, though more commonly referred to as Saigon) is Vietnam's most lively and action packed city, growing and developing at a rapid rate.

As soon as you arrive in the city you'll be surrounded by a sea of motorbike traffic, delicious street food everywhere you look, and a host of attractions that will keep you busy and entertained.

I want to say a big thank you for reading through this list of top 23 things to do in Saigon and I hope it gives you great ideas and helps you plan your trip.

Now it's your turn to navigate your way through the bustling traffic, stop at a museum or market, grab a banh mi and slurp down a bowl of hot noodles on the sidewalk, and explore the many possibilities waiting for you in Saigon!

Thank you!

I want to thank everyone who gave me suggestions on what to do and where to eat in Saigon, Vietnam. We couldn't have done this without all of your help.

Also, thank you for downloading this Saigon guide, I hope you're enjoying it!

Was this guide helpful?

My wife and I took the photos, made the videos, and wrote the content in this guide. It took a lot of time and effort. If you found this guide helpful, and would like to support us, we would be grateful. Here are 3 ways you can help:

1. Book your hotel in Saigon / Vietnam:

If you [use this link to book your hotel](#), at NO extra charge to you, I will get a small commission. When you book a hotel, it will help me to continue to provide free food and travel guides like this.



When my wife and I were in Saigon, we stayed at [Le Blanc Saigon](#), a fantastic friendly and family run guest house.

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Thank you again for your support, and I hope you have an amazing time in Vietnam!

- Mark Wiens and Ying Wiens