

# HO CHI MINH CITY

We spoke to locals and expats living in both cities to find out what they think of their ‘rival’ up north or down south



**CECILIA TRAN**

*Banking & Finance  
Ho Chi Minh City*

**[H]**anoi is] traditional and conservative. Despite the fact that the younger generation are trying hard to be westernised, Hanoi is still a closed community. Contrary to Hanoi, Saigon is a vibrant and friendly city. The people here are more relaxed and that is reflected in the way the service industry is being run. The city has a buzz about it especially in the evenings that I have not found anywhere else in the world.

I would consider living in Hanoi, but it’s not my first choice due to the harsh weather and the lack of things to do in your free time.



**GREG OHAN**

*Real Estate  
Ho Chi Minh City*

**[H]**anoi is] “Old Vietnam” as I’ve always imagined it. For me Saigon is the future. Just look out the window. It’s an international city like no other with a spirit you have to experience to believe.

I have a love-hate relationship with Hanoi. I lived there for a while. While it’s more tough, challenging and unforgiving, it is gritty, raw and has this underground vibe that is a refreshing change to the more polished and westernised south.



**NGUYEN HANG PHUONG**

*Health  
Ho Chi Minh City*

**H**anoi is a charming, historical city with unique culture. Hanoians are more traditional [than Saigonese], conservative, elegant, sophisticated but sometimes ceremonious.

Everyone in Hanoi and Saigon loves hanging out after work in a coffee shop or beer joint, and eating. However, the food in Hanoi is more original, whereas Saigonese food is a mix of Vietnamese, Chinese and Cambodian. Southern people prefer fast food, oily dishes, much more than Hanoians.



**LY NGUYEN**

*Hospitality  
Ho Chi Minh City*

**I**was born and raised in Hanoi. The Hanoi image in my head is very old and quiet — it’s from the 1990s.

I moved to Saigon a year ago. It is like being in another country because at first I had difficulty understanding or being understood by people with a southern accent. Imagine going to the market and not knowing how to ask for something because of the different dialect.

Hanoi is ‘sleeping’ and will not awaken any time soon. Don’t get me wrong, I love Hanoi. It’s just that you need to find your true calling there.



**CHRIS BERG**

*Photography  
Ho Chi Minh City*

**I**do like Hanoi a lot. It’s an immensely photogenic city. I especially like its medieval charm in winter. Hanoi is also a rough city and is not always easy for the first-time visitor.

I lived in Hanoi for a while in 2005. I met some of my best friends during that time, and I always think back to those magic days. I have been back to Hanoi countless times since. However, I wouldn’t live there again. The bad air quality is a big argument for me not to move. And for the type of work I am doing as a commercial photographer, Saigon is a much better base.



**ALEX FALTER**

*Textiles  
Ho Chi Minh City*

**I**’ve lived in both cities but I know Hanoi a little better. A distinction I make [between them] is Paris and LA. Hanoi is the snobby Parisian and Saigon is the city of hope for the starry-eyed.

Saigon is really easy to live in and the weather outside the rainy season is great. But ultimately I find Saigon a little sterile — I have not made the depth of friendships that I did in Hanoi with Vietnamese people. I also miss having the seasons and the mountains on my doorstep.

# HANOI



**MIKE ELLIS**  
*Travel Industry*  
Hanoi

I think of Saigon as like the midpoint between Hanoi and Bangkok. It's a place with a bit more energy and nightlife — more like home — but still very much Vietnam. I sometimes wish I had moved there after a couple of years in Hanoi, but after six years in the capital, the move wouldn't be different or interesting enough to balance the loss of my network in Hanoi.

I dislike the lack of distinct character in Saigon that Hanoi has. *Bia hoi*, basically. And lakes. I like lakes. But I like parks, too.



**THOI SINH MAI**  
*Finance*  
Hanoi

Saigon is an interesting place to explore. I really want to live there for a couple of years. I want to go there to enjoy tasty cups of coffee, visit beautiful places such as Ben Thanh Market and find out about *nhau* culture.

I think Hanoi is a good place to search out opportunities as well-known universities, corporations and government agencies are all located here. However, the city is overcrowded and the job market is fiercely competitive.



**JOHNNY TRAN**  
*Retail*  
Hanoi

In Saigon, they work hard and party hard. They take bigger risks than Hanoians. They live for today. Hanoians save more money, for our children, for our future. We are more conservative in Hanoi, particularly the older generation. The younger generation is more open.

I think in Hanoi, it's easier to make money... if you know the way. And things get done faster. People are more protective of who they are. In Saigon, people are freer, more approachable. I think the Saigonese are very straight up. In Hanoi, people are more subtle.

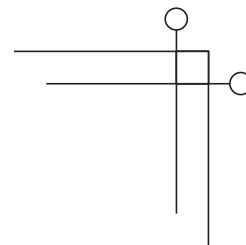


**CONG NGUYEN**  
*Service Industry*  
Hanoi

Saigon is like the New York of Vietnam compared to Hanoi, which is Washington DC. There's always more happening and more opportunities. Most foreign business that comes into Vietnam comes through Saigon first. Saigon is the land of opportunity.

My main edge here in Vietnam is my foreign experience and languages, and in Saigon, I would be competing with not only the other Vietnamese — who came back from the US or the UK like I did — but with a lot of expats as well. Also, life in Saigon is more expensive for transportation and definitely for housing.





**CK**  
*IT/Tech*  
*Hanoi*

**S**aigon and Hanoi are among the most dynamic cities in the world. Saigon is still the best place to do business because there are more corporates and more companies, and the business environment is much better. Hanoi is still developing. There's a lot more culture [music and art] in Hanoi.

I like the food in Saigon more. There are more options. What I don't like about Saigon is it doesn't have a unique identity like Hanoi.



**HA EJIN LUPINA CHO**  
*Hanoi*

**A**s a foreigner in Hanoi, you can get a bit frustrated with things, like people taking advantage of foreigners, especially taxi drivers. New things are happening all the time, though, so you never get bored, plus the food is amazing.

I wouldn't want to live in Saigon. Hanoi has more culture, even though it is less developed. The food is better in Hanoi, too, and I like the lakes.



**NGUYEN XUAN PHUONG**  
*Hanoi*

**H**anoi is where I was born and raised. It is so green and peaceful. But the thing I like the most is all the lakes. It makes Hanoi more beautiful and clean.

I don't think I could live in Saigon. The weather is too hot, and the tide of the Saigon River is very unusual; it's unpredictable, and can flood the roads any time, even twice a day. Also, Saigon doesn't really have any specific culture; it's affected by America too much.

