

## Xin Chào, Hanoi!

When we chose Saigon as our seventeenth "For 91 Days" destination, we never expected that Hanoi might be the eighteenth. We've never stayed in a country for a second consecutive adventure, and it wasn't even under consideration. But we never expected to be so completely enamored by the people, culture and cuisine of Vietnam. After spending three months in the south, we simply couldn't leave without devoting an equal amount of time to the north.



Comparisons between the north and the south are going to be inevitable, so we won't even try to avoid them. Where [Saigon](#) is flashy and cosmopolitan, Hanoi is older and culturally closer to China than the West. Southern Vietnam is all about the Mekong Delta, while the north is dominated by rice terraces and limestone mountains. And if you speak exclusively to Southerners, as we did, you'll get the impression that Northerners are mean, stingy and xenophobic. There's definitely some rivalry! But we didn't pay much attention to the trash-talking, because we'd soon be reaching our own opinions.

There's a common consensus that Saigon and Hanoi are so far apart in attitude and style, that they might as well be in different countries. Of course, for much of history, they were. Vietnam wasn't even united under its modern borders until the 18th century, and spent most of the 20th century as two separate countries, beholden to two totally