

ROAD RULES

THE ROADS IN HO CHI MINH CITY MAY SEEM LIKE AN EXERCISE IN ANARCHY BUT...ERM...NO THEY ACTUALLY ARE. THE BEST SURVIVAL POLICY HERE IS TO DO AS THE LOCALS DO. **GISELLE WHITEAKER** GOES NATIVE.



ILLUSTRATION BY NACHO MADRAZO

THE LAW OF CRITICAL MASS

To cross a busy road halt at the edge of traffic until sufficient mass is attained, generally a minimum of five motorbikes. Inch forward until you are obstructing the lane of traffic. At the halfway point, repeat for the opposite lane. Once clear, accelerate and jockey for position. If you are at the rear of the critical mass advance, wait, as traffic will flow around the mass. You will need to achieve your own critical mass. Aim to be in the centre for added protection.

Where: The slipway from Phan Liem crossing Dien Bien Phu

The law: At crossroads vehicles should give way to the right, except at crossroads between a priority road and a non-priority road where priority is given to the priority road (Article 40). We suspect that without critical mass, non-priority road users would be waiting a long time.

THE WRONG WAY RULE

If going the wrong way down a one way street, enthusiastically apply the Law of Noise. If you do not, the opposing traffic will.

Where: Turning on to Ngo Duc Ke the wrong way from Nguyen Hue

The law: Fire engines on the way to extinguish a fire, military and police vehicles on emergency missions, ambulances carrying patients to hospitals (other ambulances have no priority), vehicles assigned the emergency task of protecting dykes, a motorcade led by motorcycle escort, vehicles assigned the emergency task of keeping traffic clear and funeral processions only are permitted to drive against the traffic flow and only if they signal.



THE LAW OF PERSONAL MASS

If your bike is fully laden with a minimum of three people, or luggage equivalent to a small fridge, you have right of way. If in doubt as to whether you reach the minimum weight requirements, try braking. This will dictate your give way zone.

Where: The roundabout at Ben Thanh Market

The law: The driver must always pay attention to the conditions of the road surface, traffic signs, traffic density and obstacles in order to drive at a reasonable speed in keeping with its capabilities (brakes, the weight of the vehicle, passengers or freight in the vehicle ...). (Article 32.b)

THE LAW OF MOTION

When approaching a traffic light or stopping point, crawl to a halt and allow the people behind to creep past you in the waiting mass. It is important to fill every gap. Spend the red-light time productively by inching forward. Be ready to depart the instant the countdown reaches one second.

Be warned that fast halting at lights leads to gentle rear-ending. Acknowledge with a friendly glance. The crunching sound is unlikely to be serious.

Where: The intersection of Tran Hung Dao and Nguyen Thai Hoc

The law: The law dictates that when seeing the 'Stop' sign, the driver must stop on the right of the road before the 'Stop' line. It does not discuss en masse strategy.

THE RULE OF ROADWORKS

If roadworks are occurring in the road median, you may pass on either side, regardless of traffic flow. If passing on the opposite side, inch forward in single file until past the offending section, and then cut back into the lane.

Where: As roadworks constantly shift we cannot confirm a location.

The law: The closest reference is Article 33 - The driver must slow down his vehicle speed to a safe level...when there is a speed limit sign or an obstacle on the road.

THE LAW OF 'AS THE CROW FLIES'

The shortest distance between two points is a straight line. This applies in a number of circumstances in city driving, including mounting the pavement to scoot around a corner; cutting from right to left without indicating at traffic lights and speeding the wrong way down a one-way street.

Where: The parking bay on Le Thanh Ton, along the pavement to Pasteur

The law: Article 56 refutes this, stating that motorcycles are banned from zigzagging on the road, causing danger to traffic. The law does say that streets and pavements can be used only for traffic. (Article 62.1). For pavements this probably means pedestrians.

THE LAW OF SHIELDING

When approaching an uncontrolled intersection, use the nearest car as a shield. Be prepared for the car to cut you off as it leaves the intersection. The protection afforded by shielding is a double-edged sword, however, as car drivers are often unaware of external vehicles.

Where: The roundabouts on Nguyen Hue

The law: The road rules do not stipulate this behaviour except to say that at a crossroads with a traffic circle, vehicles on the left have priority. (Article 40.a)

THE LAW OF PERIPHERAL VISION

Peripheral vision is a hindrance to city riding. Do not look left, do not look right, and do not check your blind spots. Any vehicle not clearly in your vision is obliged to give way. The leader has right of way and may veer left or right until clearly overtaken.

Where: Everywhere

The law: Only when the vehicle in front keeps to the right and gives a signal allowing the overtaking can the driver behind overtake the vehicle on its left side. (Article 37)

THE LAW OF TURNING LEFT

If you reach a controlled intersection on a red light between the three second countdown and a green light, you may start turning left immediately to avoid oncoming traffic. If you miss this window, apply the law of critical mass or the law of shielding.

Where: Nguyen Thi Minh Khai, turning on to Mac Dinh Chi

The law: No one is allowed to move on when the red light is on at crossroads (Article 51.2)...but if you hit the crossroad as the light changes you may be in the clear.

THE LAW OF LANES

Lane markers seem incidental. Overtake left or right and cut in and out of road lanes as desired. Cars have right of way in the left lane unless at traffic lights. Bikes travel faster than cars, therefore can overtake at traffic lights to improve traffic flow.

Where: Dinh Tien Hoang into Binh Thanh District.

The law: All types of vehicle in traffic must keep to the right side of the road on the lane marked for them. (Article 32.c)

THE LAW OF NOISE LEVELS

The louder you are the better you can be seen and therefore avoided. It is safer to drive with your left thumb on the motorbike horn, unless you are on the phone or smoking. At intersections, the loudest vehicle has right of way. If you hesitate, you must give way to all traffic.

Where: The intersection of Nguyen Van Chiem and Pasteur

The law: Before driving, turning, pausing or stopping, the driver must indicate by honking, signalling or stretching his arm to warn other vehicles and people. (Article 32). On the other hand, all vehicles are banned from using hooter, hooting continually, and revving the engine hard in all circumstances. (54.1) Use this law at your own discretion.

HAPPY MOTORING!



ROAD RULES YOU MAY NOT BE AWARE OF

- All under-sixteen-year-olds are banned from driving motorised vehicles of any kind.
- All vehicles are banned from cutting across a convoy of vehicles, a funeral procession, or a group of people in march.
- All vehicles are banned from honking from 10 pm to 5 am.
- All bicycle and motorcycle riders are banned from using an umbrella.

Translation of traffic rules taken from the Regulation On Traffic Order And Safety On Roads And In Urban Centres at <http://coombs.anu.edu.au/~vern/luat/luat.html>