

Tiny Dragon..... Welcome to Vietman

Vietman is the easternmost country on the Indochina Peninsula in Southeast Asia. Viet Nam is a strip of land shaped like the letter "S". With an estimated 90.5 million inhabitants as of 2014, it is the world's 13th-most-populous country, and the eighth-most-populous Asian country. The name Vietnam translates as "Southern Viet" (synonymous with the much older term Nam Viet); it was first officially adopted in 1802 by Emperor Gia Long, and was adopted again in 1945 with the founding of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh. The country is bordered by China to the north, Laos to the northwest, Cambodia to the southwest, and the South China Sea to the east. Its capital city has been Hanoi since the reunification of North and South Vietnam in 1976.

Vietnam was part of Imperial China for over a millennium, from 111 BC to AD 938. The Vietnamese became independent from Imperial China in 938, following the Vietnamese victory in the Battle of Bạch Đằng River. Successive Vietnamese royal dynasties flourished as the nation expanded geographically and politically into Southeast Asia, until the Indochina Peninsula was colonized by the French in the mid-19th century. Following a Japanese occupation in the 1940s, the Vietnamese fought French rule in the First Indochina War, eventually expelling the French in 1954. Thereafter, Vietnam was divided politically into two rival states, North and South Vietnam. Conflict between the two sides intensified, with heavy intervention from the United States, in what is known as the Vietnam War. The war ended with a North Vietnamese victory in 1975.

Vietnam was then unified under a communist government but remained impoverished and politically isolated. In 1986, the government initiated a series of economic and political reforms which began Vietnam's path towards integration into the world economy. By 2000, it had established diplomatic relations with all nations. Since 2000, Vietnam's economic growth rate has been among the highest in the world and, in 2011, it had the highest Global Growth Generators Index among 11 major economies. Its successful economic reforms resulted in its joining the World Trade Organization in 2007.

In 1802, Nguyen Anh claimed his coronation to become the first King Nguyen, starting the Nguyen dynasty and changing the country's name to **Viet Nam**. This name was officially recognized in many diplomatic missions in 1804. However, the words "Viet Nam" had already appeared very early in history. In the 14th century, there was a book of code entitled "Viet Nam the Chi", edited by Doctor Ho Tong Thoc. In the book by scholar Nguyen Trai entitled "Du Dia Chi" at the beginning of 15th century; the words "Viet Nam" were repeated several times. Doctor Trinh Nguyen Binh Khiem (1491-1585) had written on the first page of his work "Trinh Tien Sinh Quoc Ngu" the following: "... Viet Nam have constructed its foundation..." The words "Viet Nam" were also found in some carved stelae of the 16th - 17th century in Bao Lam Pagoda, Haiphong (1558), in Cam Lo Pagoda, Ha Noi (1590), in Phuc Thanh Pagoda, Bac Ninh (1664), etc. In particular, in the first sentence on the stele Thuy Mon Dinh (1670) at the landmark on the border at Lang Son, it was written: "This is the gateway of Viet Nam that guards the northern frontiers..." In terms of meaning, there are many theories that prove the words "Viet Nam" are created by combining two racial and geographic elements, which is understood as "Viet people from the south". During the reign of King Minh Mang (1820-1840), the name of the country was changed to Dai Nam, but Viet Nam was still widely used in many literary works, civil business affairs, and social relations. Following the triumph of the August Revolution on August 19th 1945, which had entirely swept away Vietnamese feudal and French colonial oppression and began a new era in the country, President Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the nation's independence and the national name Democratic Republic of Viet Nam was born on September 2nd 1945. Although Viet Nam suffered from war and separation in the following 30 years, the sacred words "Viet Nam" were very popularly used from the North to the South, and were deeply imprinted in the hearts of the Vietnamese people. Following the liberation of Southern Viet Nam on April 30 1975, the entire country of Viet Nam was completely unified. In the first meeting of the National Assembly of the Unified Viet Nam on July 2nd 1976, the assembly decided to name the country The Socialist

Republic of Viet Nam. The constitution of 1980, and 1992, continued its affirmation of the country's official name, legally and actually.

Vietnam War (1954- 1975)

The pro-Hanoi Viet Cong began a guerrilla campaign in the late 1950s to overthrow Diệm's government. In the North, the communist government launched a land reform program and executed between 50,000 and 172,000 people in campaigns against wealthy farmers and landowners, amid broader purges. In 1960 and 1962, the Soviet Union and North Vietnam signed treaties providing for further Soviet military support. In the South, Diệm went about crushing political and religious opposition, imprisoning or executing tens of thousands.

In 1963, Buddhist discontent with Diệm's regime erupted into mass demonstrations, leading to a violent government crackdown. This led to the collapse of Diệm's relationship with the United States, and ultimately to the 1963 coup in which Diệm and Nhu were assassinated. The Diệm era was followed by more than a dozen successive military governments, before the pairing of Air Marshal Nguyễn Cao Kỳ and General Nguyễn Văn Thiệu took control in mid-1965. Thiệu gradually outmaneuvered Kỳ and cemented his grip on power in fraudulent elections in 1967 and 1971. Under this political instability, the communists began to gain ground.

To support South Vietnam's struggle against the communist insurgency, the United States began increasing its contribution of military advisers, using the 1964 Tonkin Gulf incident as a pretext for such intervention. US forces became involved in ground combat operations in 1965, and at their peak they numbered more than 500,000.^{[62][63]} The US also engaged in a sustained aerial bombing campaign. Meanwhile, China and the Soviet Union provided North Vietnam with significant material aid and 15,000 combat advisers. Communist forces supplying the Viet Cong carried supplies along the Ho Chi Minh trail, which passed through Laos.

The communists attacked South Vietnamese targets during the 1968 Tet Offensive. Although the campaign failed militarily, it shocked the American establishment, and turned US public opinion against the war. Facing an increasing casualty count, rising domestic opposition to the war, and growing international condemnation, the US began withdrawing from ground combat roles in the early 1970s. This process also entailed an unsuccessful effort to strengthen and stabilize South Vietnam.

Following the Paris Peace Accords of 27 January 1973, all American combat troops were withdrawn by 29 March 1973. In December 1974, North Vietnam captured the province of Phước Long and started a full-scale offensive, culminating in the Fall of Saigon on 30 April 1975.^[70] South Vietnam was briefly ruled by a provisional government while under military occupation by North Vietnam. On 2 July 1976, North and South Vietnam were merged to form the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.^[1] The war left Vietnam devastated, with the total death toll standing at between 800,000 and 3.1 million

Weather

Vietnam's elongated shape stretching from the tropics to the subtropics zone accounts for the varied climate in the country. Vietnam is a year round destination, when one part of Vietnam is cloudy and rainy, there are other parts of the country that can be sunny and warm

North Vietnam enjoys 4 seasons, meanwhile Central and South have 2, rain and dry seasons. Heat and humidity are typical weather of Vietnam.

Weather is often a determinant factor in travel planning. Since Vietnam covers several climatic zones, the weather can change significantly traveling north to south. The chart below provides average daily minimum/maximum temperatures in degrees Celsius and average rainfall in millimeters. Please refer to this chart and our suggested packing list later in this document when deciding what to pack for your trip.

Clothing

Light, comfortable, easy to launder clothing is recommended. Winter months in Hanoi and rainy season in the central region can get cool so a sweater or light jacket will come

in handy. Good walking shoes and sandals that can be easily removed are recommended especially when visiting temples and people's homes. Ensure you have suitable clothing packed for visiting temples and pagodas that you can cover up with. E.g. Shirts and long pants. No dresses, shorts, singlets, string tops or revealing clothing should be worn to temples and pagodas.

What to Pack

Vietnam is generally a casual country by western standards although people do like to dress in their Sunday best whenever the opportunity arises therefore simple and casual clothes are appropriate for almost any occasion.

The year round heat and humidity in the south, especially Ho Chi Min City makes lightweight quick dry clothing the most appropriate. The north and central highlands get cool enough for sweaters or light jackets for much of the year but the northern highlands will require cold weather clothes in the winter.

If you are not participating in any trekking tours sandals and lightweight shoes are sufficient. If trekking is included in your itinerary you will need trekking boots.

Food/Cuisine

The cuisine of Vietnam is excellent. Rice and noodle dishes are the staple of Vietnamese food and are garnished with aromatic lemon grass and/or fresh coriander. Fish, chicken, and/or pork dishes along with cooked vegetables and rice form a typical meal. Asian and European food are available throughout the country.

Drinks

Drinking tap water or ice is not recommended. Bottled water is readily available but remember to check the seal for possible tampering. You should be drinking a minimum of 1.5 liters of water per day. This should increase as the temperature increases or you are engaging in physical activities.

Vietnamese coffee is usually very strong and has a punctuated mockup aroma and flavors. It is usually served in a small glass or cup with a drip filter and additional hot water in a thermos. As the filter empties you top it up from the thermos until you have the required amount of coffee. Condensed milk is added as a whitener and sweetener as it is usually not possible to find fresh milk away for the main cities.

Beer is available just about everywhere. Most places stock a selection of local and some imported brands. Draught beer comes in two varieties, Beer Hoi or Beer Tuoi. Beer Hoi is draught beer found on the street stalls and poured straight from the keg. Vietnamese quite often add ice to their beer when drinking. Beer Tuoi is found in the bars and restaurants and is chilled and served under pressure from the keg in a more conventional method.

8 charms of Vietnam

With 15 years of experience in the travel industry, Pham Ha (founder and CEO of Luxury Travel Ltd) suggests what Vietnam has to offer and which sets Vietnam apart from other destinations in the region.

1. Thrills, 2. Wilderness, 3. Heritage, 4. Festival, 5. Pristine, 6. Enjoyment, 7. Scenery, 8. Essence

1. Thrills:

The thrills on offer are endless and span a wide range, including: hiking, trekking, biking, kayaking, climbing, rafting, snorkeling, scuba diving, fishing, hot air ballooning, camping, yachting and more. Some of the locations where these activities can be enjoyed include: Sapa, Halong Bay, Cu Lao Cham, the Central Highlands, the Mekong Delta, Phan Thiet, Con Dao, the Phu Quoc Islands and many more.

2. Wilderness and Nature:

The wilderness amazes, from the green beauty of the national parks, reserves and ramsars to the mountains, waterfalls, rivers, lakes and grottoes. Halong Bay is a true natural wonder of the world. Discover the natural allure of Vietnam by indulging in a wide array of accommodations, tour packages and attractions at places such as Mai Chau,

Sapa, Ha Giang, Ba Be, Halong Bay, Phong Nha Ke Bang, the Central Highlands, Nam Cat Tien and many more.

3. Heritage

With its long history and unique way of life, Vietnam has a rich heritage. There are many interesting and diverse sites to be found around the country. In fact, Vietnam boasts 7 world natural and cultural heritage sites, not to mention many intangible heritages. World Heritage Site List: My Son Sanctuary Hoi An Ancient Town Complex of Hue Monuments Central Sector of the Imperial Citadel of Thang Long - Ha Noi Ho Dynasty Citadel Phong Nha - Ke Bang National Park Ha Long Bay Other traditional elements of Vietnamese heritage: Quan Ho Bac Ninh folk songs The Space of Gong Culture in the Central Highlands of Vietnam Nha Nhac Vietnamese court music Ca Tru singing

4. Festivals:

Many colorful festivals can be enjoyed year round. The time after Tet Nguyen Dan (Vietnamese Lunar New Year) is especially exciting. Festivals include the Perfume Pagoda, Hung King, Kate, Lim and Giay Festivals, just to name a few.

5. Pristine:

Many pristine islands and beaches are to be found in this tropical country. Vietnam has 3620 km of coastline, with beautiful white sand beaches and world class resorts. Of these, you should not miss the stunning sand and clear waters of My Khe, Cua Dai, Nha Trang, Ninh Van Bay, Quy Nhon, Mui Ne, Vung Tau, Phu Quoc and the Con Dao Islands.

6. Enjoyment:

Holidaymakers have the choice of new and trendy boutique hotels, spas, golfing, cruises, shopping centres, restaurants and nightlife. With new luxury hotels and world class golf courses having recently opened or set to open soon, and the introduction of luxury train journeys, exclusive cruises and upscale private tours spanning the length of the country, Vietnam is fast emerging as an exciting destination in Asia.

7. Scenery:

Spectacular scenery and a diverse landscape exist from North to South. Mountains, forests, nature reserves, rivers, beaches, and islands are all here to be enjoyed. Verdant patchworks of rice paddies and pointed lampshade-style hats are just a small part of what there is to be seen in this formerly war ravaged country. Visitors will see more than the economic repression often portrayed on worldwide television and in newspapers. There is also natural beauty, a harmonious array of ethnic cultures, imperial monuments, timeless traditional villages, idyllic sea resorts and dynamic cities.

8. Essence:

Vietnam boasts scores of traditions, lifestyles and religions. The friendly and hospitable population has been influenced by the cultures of China, France and America, and this is reflected in the country's lifestyle, architecture, cuisine and art. Vietnam is a True Asian Charm.

Environment

Vietnam borders Cambodia , Laos and China and stretches over 1650km along the eastern coast of the Indochinese Peninsula . The country's two main cultivated areas are the Red River Delta (15,000 sq. km) in the north and the Mekong Delta (40,000 sq. km) in the south. Three-quarters of the country is mountainous and hilly; the highest peak is the 3.143m high Fansipan in northwest Vietnam .

Vietnam is made up of equatorial lowlands, high, temperate plateaus and alpine peaks. Although Vietnam 's wildlife is rich, it is in precipitous decline because of the destruction of habitats and illegal hunting. Less than 20% of the country remains forested, and what remains is under threat from slash and burn agriculture and excessive harvesting. Fauna includes elephants, rhinoceros, tiger, leopard, black bear, snub-nosed monkey, crocodile and turtle.

Vietnam has more than 10 national parks: The more popular ones being Cat Ba , Ba Be Lake and Cuc Phuong national parks in the north; Bach Ma National Park in the center; and Nam Cat Tien National Park in the south. In an attempt to prevent an ecological and hydrological catastrophe, the government has plans to set aside tens of thousand of sq. km of forest and to create 87 national parks and nature reserves.

Although Vietnam lies in the inter-tropical zone, local conditions vary from frosty winter in the far northern hills to the year-round subequatorial warmth of the Mekong Delta. At sea level, the mean annual temperature is about 27 degrees C in the south, falling to about 21 degrees C in the far north.

People

The majority of the population is comprised of the Viet or Kinh (87%) people who speak the Vietnamese language. The minority population is made up of 54 ethnic hill tribe people who mainly live in the extreme south, central and northern mountainous areas of the country. The best-known hill tribes are the Tã y, Hmong, Zao, White and Black Thai, Muong (both mainly from the north), and the Hoa, Khmer in the South. Each hill tribe has its own unique customs and dialect and some are able to speak official Vietnamese language.

Language

Vietnamese, the national language is tonal and monosyllabic, which means the meanings of the word change according to the pitch they are pronounced at. The accents and some words are quite distinct among the three regions of North, Central, and South. Today, English, French and Chinese have replaced Russian as the most studied and spoken languages.

Holidays

The most important and widely celebrated public holiday of the year is Tet , the Lunar Chinese New Year , which coincides with the cycle of the moon. This public holiday usually takes place in late January or early February and lasts officially for three days although many businesses are closed the entire week. Other important public holidays include Saigon Liberation day (30 April), International Worker's Day (May 1), and Vietnamese National Day (September 2).

Money

The official currency, the dong and is non-convertible. There are coins 200, 1.000, 5.000 used in the local currency and the notes come in denominations of 100, 200, 500, 1.000, 2.000, 5.000, 10.000, 20.000, 50.000 (2 notes), 100.000 (2notes) and 500.000 dong notes. The US dollar, preferably crisp clean bills, is widely accepted among major shops and restaurants. Travelers checks can be cashed at authorized foreign exchange outlets and banks, and require presentation of passport. There is normally a 2 to 5 percent transaction fee for cashing travelers checks. Visa and MasterCard are accepted in some of the bigger hotels and restaurants. Prices are usually quoted in USD so if you are paying in Dong check the exchange rate first. ATM machines are available at major cities: Hanoi , Halong, Haiphong , Hue , Danang, Nha Trang and Saigon .

Health Requirement

No vaccinations are officially required by the Vietnamese authorities, however immunization against cholera, hepatitis, typhoid, tetanus, polio and Japanese encephalitis is advised. Please consult your doctors for further medical advice. You should carry a basic medical kit that includes anti diarrhoea tablets and re-hydration salts. Medical standards outside Hanoi and Saigon are lower than those found in western countries.

Communication and business Hours

Vietnam is 7 hours ahead of GMT and does not observe daylight saving time.

Phones

Communication fees in Vietnam are quite high but impeccable. You can use pre-paid card phone services for your hand phone, the sim card costs around 15 US\$. Prepaid card costs 100,000, 300.000 and 500.000 VND.

The best International rates are from the post offices that have a pay per call service and a fax service. The central post offices in Hanoi , Saigon and Hue also accept calling cards from various international telecommunications companies. It is not possible to make collect calls from Vietnam .

Internet

Internet and e-mail services are readily available in most major places throughout the country. Some hotels will have this service available and there are many Internet cafes in the major areas. The speed of your connection will vary however depending on the time of day. Average charge for Internet usage is around 4.000 VND per hour in cyber cafe internet. Several hotels for business travelers in Hanoi and Saigon are equipped internet with high speed access in business center and in room guest.

Trading Hours

Government offices and banks are open Monday to Friday. The banks close at 3:30 p.m. If you need to visit a government office do not do it during lunch periods. These usually last 1 to 2 hours. Post offices are open 7 days a week.

Most shops will be open until around 9 p.m. Snacks and bars will close around midnight however there a few new nightclubs in Hanoi and Saigon that stay open into the wee hours.

Shopping

Souvenirs to look out for in Vietnam include lacquer ware, silk, conical hats, woodcarvings, hill tribe fabrics and handicrafts, embroidery, marble, ceramics, silver jewelry, antique watches and paintings. Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi have the best choice when it comes to shopping but Hoi An in the Centre of Vietnam is also a very good place to hunt for bargains.

Electricity

The national electricity system is 220 volts. Connections are either a round two-pin plug or a flat two-pin plug. Beware if you are using electrical appliances and laptop computers, as there are power surges and frequent power cuts.

Tipping

Tipping for good service is not expected but is always appreciated in these developing nations. It is customary, though not compulsory, to tip tour guides and drivers at the end of a tour. Hotel and station porters should also be tipped.

Etiquette

Vietnamese people are very gracious, polite and generous and will make every effort to have foreign guests feel comfortable. Most cafes and restaurants will have knives and forks as well as chopsticks for example. In the city's and country towns alike do not be surprised to be invited home to meet someone's family you have just met, these are the experiences that will enrich your visit to Vietnam.

From the workers simple outfits in the rice fields to western style business suits in the city, the Vietnamese are conservative in their dress. Visitors wearing shorts are tolerated, unless you enter a culturally sensitive area such as a temple or pagoda. Keep in mind that, although tolerant, people may be judgmental.

Unfortunately you can not expect hospitality at every turn and you may still experience some problems with petty theft and pick pockets. This is more prevalent in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) and Nha Trang. In other areas, especially in the north, reports of these activities are extremely minimal. It is not something to be paranoid about but be aware of your surroundings. Below is a list of do's and don'ts to help you avoid some of the social taboos during your visit. Take heed of these pointers and you will be rewarded with a culturally and socially enriching experience.

Photography

Taking photographs of anything to do with the military, airports, police etc. is prohibited. When taking photographs of local people, especially the older folk it is polite to ask their permission first and respect their wishes.