

About Vietnam

General information

Vietnam borders with China in the north, Laos and Cambodia in the West, and the South China Sea in the east. It lies in the center of South-East Asia. Vietnam's territory stretches from Lung Cu village (Ha Tuyen province) in the north to Rach Tau hamlet (Minh Hai province) in the south. It is an S-shaped peninsula, with thousands of off-shore islands and archipelagoes; the biggest of which are the Hoang Sa (Paracel) and Truong Sa (Spratly) Archipelagoes. Vietnam's mainland covers 331,689 square kilometers.

According to archaeological discoveries made at Do Mountain, it is believed that life in Vietnam began as far back as 300,000 years ago. Officially, the history of Vietnam stretches back 4,000 years when it was founded by the Hung Kings. It was then named Van Lang.

When speaking upon the history of Vietnam, it is important to note the large role played by the French in Vietnam. It began in 1858, when the French took over Danang in southern Vietnam. Over time, more and more territory was won over by the French. It wasn't until 1954, when the French surrendered to the Viet Minh, ending the French Indochina War, which the French colonial control in Vietnam ended.

The immediate image in the minds of most people at the mention of Vietnam is that of the war fought against the United States some twenty years ago. Most people think of the country only in terms of the American conflict in Indochina. The war ended nearly twenty years ago, and today, despite lingering signs of past American involvement, the situation in Vietnam is markedly different. People have finally begun to look at the country from another perspective, now that travelers and tourists from the West are being welcomed into what was once a forbidden country. It may take a bit more effort and tenacity to plan an excursion into Vietnam than it would for another Southeast Asian country, but Vietnam has much to offer in terms of culture and sights.

Weather conditions

The weather in the southern part of Vietnam is tropical. It is monsoonal in the north, bringing a hot, rainy season from mid-May to mid-September and a warm, dry season from mid-October to mid-March. Occasional typhoons from May to January bring extensive flooding to the middle regions of Vietnam.

People and culture

The vast majority of the population is Vietnamese with minute percentages of Chinese. The Viet culture originated on the delta of the Red River and the Ma River where the Viet people cultivated paddy fields. They led a simple farming life in small villages, usually living around a communal house. Today the people living in the countryside follow this lifestyle. The Viet people are influenced by Confucianism, in particular the principle of respect for their elders. In spite of the immense suffering of the Vietnamese and the somewhat ruined state of the country, they are generally warm and friendly, and surprisingly, the Vietnamese bear little if any resentment or bitterness toward Americans. Children in the streets will commonly greet visitors with the name Lien Xo, which means Russian, but they will easily be corrected if you respond, "Hello!" or "Good morning" and explain you are an American, European or

Australian, etc.

Ethnic Groups

The country is predominantly 85-90% Vietnamese, 3% Chinese, ethnic minorities include Muong, Thai, Meo, Khmer, Man, Cham, and other mountain tribes.

Languages

Vietnamese is the official language; French, Chinese, English, Khmer and tribal dialects (Mon-Khmer and Malayo-Polynesian) are also spoken.

Religion

Buddhist, Confucian, Taoist, Roman Catholic, indigenous beliefs, Islamic and Protestant.

Things to know

Population: About 90 Million People

Capital: Hanoi

Flag: The flag of Vietnam is red with a large yellow five-pointed star in the center.

Shop Hours: Shops run from 7 or 8am to 11 or 11:30pm. Some are open from 1 or 2pm to 4 or 5pm.

Bank Hours: Most banks are opened from 7am or 8am to 11am or 11:30am Some are open from 1pm or 2pm to 4pm or 5pm.

Holidays:

- January 1 - Solar New Year's Day
- February 3 - Anniversary of the Foundation of the Communist Party of Vietnam.
- January/February - Tet (Tet Nguyen Dan). The most important Vietnamese annual festival. This marks the new lunar year and the advent of spring. This is a three-day holiday, usually at the end of January or the beginning of February (according to the solar calendar).
- April 30th - Liberation Day, the day on which Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) fell to Hanoi in 1975. This holiday is commemorated nationwide.
- May 1 - May Day
- May 19 - Birthday of President Ho Chi Minh
- September 2 - National Day of Vietnam

Time: Vietnam is 11 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time and 14 hours ahead of Pacific Standard Time.

Visas: [Vietnam visa on arrival](#) and [Vietnam E-visa](#) are available at international airports (Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Da Nang)

Tipping: Tipping is not customary in Vietnam, but it is enormously appreciated. A 5-10% tip for a meal is a very small amount of money, but to the average Vietnamese, it could easily equal a day's wages. Avoid tipping too much, as it will set a precedent for others.

Restaurants: Government-run restaurants catering to tourists add a 10% service charge to the bill.

Porters: Porters, if they are available, can be tipped with American coins.

Hotel maids: Government-run hotels catering to tourists charge an automatic 10% service fee.

Taxis: Generous tips are not necessary. A small gratuity, however, is expected by cab drivers.

Dining and Drinking

Vietnamese food varies from region to region. Almost 500 traditional dishes have been recorded! Rice and noodles are staple foods, served with nearly all meals. The most popular dishes are Nem rán (spring rolls), Bún thang (noodles with sliced pork, eggs, shredded chicken and shrimp), shellfish steamed with ginger and sea crabs fried with salt. Among common ingredients used are: shark fin, duck, pork paste, fish, spices, fruits, vegetables, crab meat, lobster and oysters.

Imported beer is available in Vietnam, although a number of domestic beers are brewed. Rice wine is very popular, and there are many brands available. There is a variety of fruit wines such as apricot, orange or lemon. Soft drinks are processed from the many varieties of tropical fruits available. Water from the tap should be avoided, even though it has already been filtered and sterilized at 10°C. If you must drink it, boil the water first.

Entertainment

Vietnam is not the place to go for the latest in nightspots, but a number of large hotels have nightclubs and dance halls. Bars are fairly easy to find, even in smaller hotels. Try asking the locals for the current popular spots.