

# Vietnam

**Vietnam** (Vietnamese: Việt Nam) is a country in [Southeast Asia](#) with great food and a wealth of natural and cultural attractions. Despite the turmoil of the [Vietnam War](#) (called the *American War* in Vietnam), Vietnam has emerged from the ashes since the 1990s and is undergoing rapid economic development, driven by its young and industrious population. It remains less developed as a tourist destination than [Thailand](#).

## Regions

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### **Northern Vietnam**

The cradle of the Vietnamese civilization. Harbors some of the most magnificent views of Vietnam, as well as the capital city, along with the chance to visit indigenous hill peoples.

### **Central Coast**

The ancient city of Hue was the home of the Vietnamese emperors from 1802—1945, and Hoi An is one of the nicest old seacoast towns in Vietnam.

### **Central Highlands**

Lush forest-covered hills featuring indigenous peoples and the occasional elephant.

### **Southern Vietnam**

The economic engine of Vietnam, built around Ho Chi Minh City but also covering the lush and little-visited Mekong Delta, the rice basket of Vietnam.

## Cities

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- **1 [Hanoi](#)** (*Hà Nội*) — Vietnam's capital, a historic city with a wealth of cultural and historical sites

- **2 Ho Chi Minh City** (*Thành Phố Hồ Chí Minh*) — Vietnam's largest and most cosmopolitan city, formerly known as Saigon (*Sài Gòn*) when it was the main commercial center of colonial Vietnam and then capital of South Vietnam
- **3 Da Nang** (*Đà Nẵng*) — The largest city in central Vietnam
- **4 Dalat** (*Đà Lạt*) — A French colonial hill station in the highlands
- **5 Haiphong** (*Hải Phòng*) — The "port city", a major port in north Vietnam
- **6 Hoi An** (*Hội An*) — A well-preserved ancient port, near the ruins of My Son
- **7 Hue** (*Huế*) — The former home of Vietnam's emperors
- **8 Nha Trang** — A burgeoning beach resort
- **9 Vinh** — The major city in north-central Vietnam with very nice Cua Lo Beach

## Other destinations

- **Con Dao** — Islands off the Mekong Delta
- **Cu Chi** — The site of the Cu Chi Tunnels
- **Cuc Phuong National Park** — Home to some of Asia's rarest wildlife and the Muong hill people
- **The DMZ** — The ruins of old American military bases, spectacular mountain scenery and rugged jungles
- **Ha Long Bay** — Famous for its unearthly scenery
- **Ninh Binh** — Ha Long Bay-like karst scenery along the river
- **Phu Quoc** — An island just off the coast of Cambodia, known for its beaches, fish sauce and seafood
- **Sa Pa** — A region to meet native indigenous people in the hills by the Chinese border
- **Phong Nha Caves** — A World Heritage cave system in Quang Binh province.



Map of Vietnam with regions colour-coded

## Understand

Vietnam, originally a dynasty until 1945, has been a socialist state under an authoritarian system since reunification in 1976. The country has about 100 million inhabitants and provides a staggering variety of forest landscapes and a complex cultural history.

## History

*See also: Indochina Wars*

Vietnam's history is one of war, colonization and rebellion. Occupied by China no fewer than four times, the Vietnamese managed to fight off the invaders just as often. Even during the periods in history when Vietnam was independent, it was mostly a tributary state to Imperial China until the French colonization. Vietnam's last emperors were the **Nguyễn Dynasty**, who ruled from their capital at Hue from 1802 to 1945, although France exploited the succession crisis after the death of Tự Đức to *de facto* colonise Vietnam after 1884. Both the Chinese occupation and French colonization have left a lasting impact on Vietnamese culture, with Confucianism forming the basis of Vietnamese social etiquette, and the French influencing Vietnamese cuisine.

After a brief Japanese occupation in World War II (see Pacific War), the Communist **Viet Minh** under the leadership of **Hồ Chí Minh** continued the war of independence against the French. The last Emperor Bao Dai abdicated in 1945 with a proclamation of independence following soon after. The majority of French had left by 1945, but in 1946 they returned to continue the fight until their decisive defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. The Geneva Conference partitioned the country into two at the 17th parallel, with a communist-led North supported by the Soviet Union, and **Ngô Đình Diệm** establishing a capitalist regime and declaring himself President of the Republic of Vietnam in the South, supported by the United States.

Shortly after the partition of the country, the Viet Minh government pursued a campaign of land and economic reforms in North Vietnam that saw thousands of landowners and businesspeople killed and their property confiscated by the state. Alongside these reforms, persecution of Catholics and those suspected of being "too influenced" by Western culture resulted in the **Operation Passage to Freedom**, in which over a million North Vietnamese fled to the south with assistance from the U.S. and French governments. The resulting migration caused a massive brain drain that resulted in economic stagnation and the North Vietnamese state becoming reliant on the Soviet Union and China for aid throughout the state's existence.

While South Vietnam experienced significant economic growth and improvements in standards of living through trade with the capitalist world, it too was plagued by numerous domestic problems, including corruption, nepotism and electoral fraud. Diệm, who was a Roman Catholic, enacted laws that discriminated against the Buddhist majority, which led to the Buddhist monk **Thích Quảng Đức** self-immolating in protest at a busy intersection in Saigon in 1963. U.S. economic and military aid to South Vietnam grew during the 1960s in an attempt to bolster the South Vietnamese government. This escalated




<b>Capital</b>	<u>Hanoi</u>
<b>Currency</b>	Vietnamese đồng (VND)
<b>Population</b>	96.2 million (2019)
<b>Electricity</b>	220 volt / 50 hertz (NEMA 1-15, Europlug, BS 1363, Schuko)
<b>Country code</b>	+84
<b>Time zone</b>	UTC+07:00, Asia/Ho_Chi_Minh
<b>Emergencies</b>	113 (police), 115 (emergency medical services), 114 (fire department)
<b>Driving side</b>	right

[edit on Wikidata](#)

into the dispatch of 500,000 American troops in 1966 and what became known as the **Vietnam War** in the West (the Vietnamese refer to it as the **American War**). What was supposed to be a quick and decisive action soon degenerated into a quagmire, and U.S. armed forces withdrew following a cease-fire agreement in 1973. Two years later, on April 30, 1975, a North Vietnamese tank drove into the South's Presidential Palace in Saigon and the war ended. An estimated 3 million Vietnamese and over 55,000 Americans were killed. Vietnam's war against the United States was one of many that they have fought, but it was the most brutal in its history. Most of the nation's population was born after 1975. American tourists will receive a particularly friendly welcome in Vietnam, as many young Vietnamese are admirers of American culture. (See Indochina Wars for more on these conflicts.)

After reunifying the country, the communist government proceeded to root out the remaining capitalist elements in the south. Many business owners were killed while others, known as the boat people, became refugees and attempted to escape to Western countries, resulting in the establishment of Vietnamese communities in many countries, including the United States, Australia and Canada. The ethnic Chinese, long resented by the ethnic Vietnamese for their perceived economic clout, were particularly hard-hit by the purges.



The tank that ended the war, Ho Chi Minh City 

Following the collapse of the state-run economy, the government implemented market-oriented reforms and introduced capitalist elements in 1986 with a policy known as **đổi mới**. This policy has proved highly successful, as it spurred impressive economic growth and infrastructure development. Discriminatory laws against the remaining ethnic Chinese were repealed, and many have used their business acumen to contribute greatly to the revitalisation of the Vietnamese economy, also regaining some of their previous economic dominance in the process. Relations with the United States have thawed considerably, with formal defence ties having been re-established in 2016. Some former refugees or their descendants, most of whom were raised and educated in the West, have returned to Vietnam to take advantage of new economic opportunities. Today, Vietnam is widely considered to be one of the rising stars of Asia with a young population and vibrant economy.

## Politics

The **Socialist Republic of Vietnam** (Cộng hòa xã hội chủ nghĩa Việt Nam) is a one-party authoritarian state, with the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam as the supreme leader, the president as the head of state and the prime minister as the head of government. The Vietnamese legislature is the unicameral **National Assembly**, from which the prime minister is selected. In practice, the president's position is only ceremonial, with the prime minister wielding the most authority in government.

## Economy

Economic reconstruction of the reunited country has proven difficult. After the failures of the state-run economy started to become apparent, the country launched a program of **đổi mới** (renovation), introducing elements of capitalism. The policy has proved highly successful, with Vietnam recording near 10% growth yearly (except for a brief interruption during the Asian economic crisis of 1997). The

economy is much stronger than those of neighboring Cambodia and Laos. Like most Communist countries around the world, there is a fine balance between allowing foreign investors and opening up the market.

There used to be extreme restrictions on foreigners owning property or attempting to sell. However, a property regulation announced in 2015 allows foreigners to own and lease apartments in Vietnam.

It is very difficult for them to trade without negotiating 'fees'. Business can be done via local partnerships with all the attendant risks.

Power and services is another issue. There are often rolling blackouts at times when there is not enough electricity. For this reason, many shops have portable generators.

According to government estimates, Vietnam saw 12.9 million tourist arrivals in 2017. Just 5% of visitors to Vietnam return for another holiday, compared to Thailand's whopping 50% return rate.

## People

Most people in Vietnam are ethnic **Vietnamese** (Kinh), though there are many minority groups who tend to live in the highlands or big cities. The three biggest minorities are the Tay people, Thais and Muong. Others include the Khmers and Hmong. There is a sizable ethnic Chinese community in Ho Chi Minh City, most of whom are descended from migrants from Guangdong province and are hence bilingual in Cantonese, Teochew or other Chinese dialects and Vietnamese. The Chams, who live in the southern coastal areas of the country, represent the bulk of Muslims in Vietnam.

**Buddhism**, mostly of the Mahayana school, is the largest religion in Vietnam, with over 80% of Vietnamese people practising it to one degree or another, albeit usually syncretised with Taoism, Confucianism and Vietnamese folk religion. Christianity (mostly Roman Catholicism) is the second largest religion at 11%, followed by the local Cao Dai religion. Islam, Hinduism and local religions also share small followings throughout the southern and central areas.

## Culture

Due to its long history as a tributary state of China, as well as several periods of Chinese occupations, Vietnamese culture is strongly influenced by that of southern China, with Confucianism forming the basis of Vietnamese social etiquette. The Vietnamese language also contains many loan words from Chinese, though the two languages are unrelated. Buddhism remains the single largest religion in Vietnam. As in China, but unlike its Southeast Asian neighbors, the dominant school of Buddhism in Vietnam is the Mahayana School.

Nevertheless, Vietnamese culture remains distinct from Chinese culture as it has also absorbed cultural elements from neighboring Hindu civilizations such as the Champa and the Khmer empires.



The country is famous for its food, and Phở is considered Vietnam's national dish.



The French colonization also left a lasting impact on Vietnamese society, perhaps symbolised best by the Vietnamese fondness for baguettes and coffee. Southern and Central Vietnam, especially along the coast, have a much stronger Western influence, as compared to the North.

The division of Vietnam during what is locally called the American War has also resulted in cultural differences between northern and southern Vietnam that can be seen today. To this day, northern Vietnamese have a tendency to be more ideological, while southern Vietnamese tend to be more business-minded.

Vietnam is known for several traditional arts, with perhaps the most famous being **water puppetry**. In modern times, Vietnam has also jumped on the *cirque nouveau* bandwagon, with AO Show from Ho Chi Minh City perhaps being the best known example. Vietnam is also home to a vibrant pop music scene, with South Korean pop being the biggest influence on modern Vietnamese pop music.

## Climate

Vietnam is large enough to have several distinct climate zones.

- The south has three somewhat distinct seasons: hot and dry from Mar-Apr; rainy from May-Nov; and cool and dry from Dec-Feb. April is the hottest month, with mid-day temperatures of 33°C (91°F) or more most days. During the rainy season, downpours can happen every afternoon, and occasional street flooding occurs. Temperatures range from stifling hot before a rainstorm to pleasantly cool afterwards. Mosquitoes are most numerous in the rainy season. Dec-Feb is the most pleasant time to visit, with cool evenings down to around 20°C (68°F).
- The north has four distinct seasons, with a comparatively chilly winter (temperatures can dip below 15°C/59°F in Hanoi), a hot and rainy summer and pleasant spring (Mar-Apr) and autumn (Oct-Dec) seasons. However, in the Highlands both extremes are amplified, with occasional snow in the winter and temperatures hitting 40°C (104°F) in the summer.
- In the central regions the Hai Van pass separates two different weather patterns of the north starting in Langco (which is hotter in summer and cooler in winter) from the milder conditions south starting in Da Nang. Northeast monsoon conditions Sep-Feb often have strong winds, large sea swells and rain. This is a miserable and difficult time to travel through Central Vietnam by motorbike. Normally summers are hot and dry.



Van Long Nature Reserve in Ninh Binh

## Read

- *Catfish and Mandala: A Two-Wheeled Voyage Through the Landscape and Memory of Vietnam* by Andrew X. Pham (2000).
- *The Quiet American* by Graham Greene (1955). Set in 1950s Saigon. A love triangle with a historical backdrop. 2 film adaptations: 1958 & 2002.

- *The Lover* by Marguerite Duras (1984) (original title: *L'amant*). Film adaptation: 1992 starring Jane March, directed by Jean-Jacques Annaud.

## Watch

- *Indochine* (French, 1992), with Catherine Deneuve, directed by Régis Wargnier. Set in 1930s French Indochina. A good storyline with some interesting insights on the history and politics of the time. Set around Saigon.
- *Cyclo* (Vietnamese, 1995). Set in Saigon, a dive into the murky violence and poverty of 1990s Saigon.

## Holidays

By far the largest holiday is **Tết** — the Lunar New Year — which takes place between late January and March. In the period leading up to Tết, the country is abuzz with preparations. Guys on motorbikes rush around delivering potted tangerine trees and flowering bushes, the traditional household decorations. People get a little bit stressed out and the elbows get sharper, especially in big cities, where the usual hectic level of traffic becomes almost homicidal. Then a few days before Tết the pace begins to slow down, as thousands of city residents depart for their ancestral hometowns in the provinces. Finally on the first day of the new year an abrupt transformation occurs: the streets become quiet, almost deserted. Nearly all shops and restaurants close for three days, (the exception being a few that cater especially to foreign visitors; and hotels operate as usual.)

In the major cities, streets are decorated with lights and public festivities are organized which attract many thousands of residents. But for Vietnamese, Tết is mostly a private, family celebration. On the eve of the new year, families gather together and exchange good wishes (from more junior to more senior) and gifts of "lucky money" (from more senior to more junior). In the first three days of the year, the daytime hours are devoted to visiting: houses of relatives on the first day, closest friends and important colleagues on the second day, and everyone else on the third day. Many people also visit pagodas. The evening hours are spent drinking and gambling (men) or chatting, playing, singing karaoke, and enjoying traditional snacks and sweets (for women and children.)

Visiting Vietnam during Tết has good points and bad points. On the minus side: modes of transport are jammed just before the holiday as many Vietnamese travel to their home towns; hotels fill up, especially in smaller towns; and your choice of shopping and dining is severely limited in the first days of the new year (with a few places closed for up to two weeks). On the plus side, you can observe the preparations and enjoy the public festivities; pagodas are especially active; no admission is charged to those museums and historical sites that stay open; and the foreigner-oriented travel industry of backpacker buses and resort hotels chugs along as usual. Visitors also stand a chance of being invited to join the festivities,

### Lunar New Year dates

The year of the *Dragon* began on 4 Feb 2024 at 16:25, and the Lunar New Year was on 10 Feb 2024

- The year of the *Snake* will begin on 3 Feb 2025 at 22:10, and the Lunar New Year will be on 29 January 2025
- The year of the *Horse* will begin on 4 Feb 2026 at 4:02, and the Lunar New Year will be on 17 Feb 2026

Contrary to popular belief, the change of the zodiac does not occur on the first day of the Lunar New Year, but instead occurs on Li Chun (立春 *lì chūn*), the traditional Chinese start of spring.

especially if you have some local connections or manage to make some Vietnamese friends during your stay. When visiting during Tết, it's wise to get settled somewhere at least two days before the new year, and don't try to move again until a couple of days after.

Lesser holidays include 1 May, the traditional socialist labor day, 2 September, Vietnam's national day, King Hung celebration on 10 March of Lunar Calendar, commemorating past kings, and Reunification Day on 30 April, marking the fall of Saigon in 1975. Around those times, trains and planes tend to be sold out, and accommodation at the beach or in Dalat are hard to find. Best to book far in advance.

## See also

- [Vietnamese phrasebook](#)
- [Driving in Vietnam](#)
- [Trekking in Vietnam](#)
- [Vietnam by motorcycle](#)
- [Vietnamese cuisine](#)

## Tourist information

- [Vietnam Travel \(https://vietnam.travel/\)](https://vietnam.travel/) website

## Talk

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*See also: [Vietnamese phrasebook](#)*

The official language of Vietnam is **Vietnamese** (*Tiếng Việt*). Vietnamese is a tonal language that uses a change in pitch to inflect different meanings, and this can make it difficult to master. Travellers may still be surprised to learn that the basic grammar is pretty simple. Verbs are static regardless of the past or future and parts of speech are pretty straightforward. The major difficulties lie in the pronunciation of the various tones and some of the sounds. Vietnamese is an Austroasiatic language that is related to Khmer, though the two languages are not mutually intelligible.

Vietnamese consists of 5 main dialects: the northern dialect spoken around Hanoi, the north-central dialect spoken around Vinh, the central dialect spoken around Hue, the south-central dialect spoken around Phu Yen and the southern dialect spoken around Ho Chi Minh City.

While the Hanoi dialect is the prestige dialect and widely used in broadcasting, there is no legally-defined standard dialect of Vietnamese. Northerners often think that the southern dialect is for "hai lúa" (country folk) and will always recommend that you stick to the northern dialect, but the choice of dialect should depend on where you plan to stay. If you are working in [Ho Chi Minh City](#), the main economic centre of Vietnam, the southern dialect is what you will hear every day. The southern dialect is also more prevalent among Vietnamese communities in the West due to the southern origin of most of the Vietnam War refugees.

Vietnamese uses the Latin alphabet (with heavy use of diacritics), and the spelling accurately reflects the pronunciation. However, the pronunciation of the letters is often different from that in English.



Although Chinese characters are no longer used to write Vietnamese, the Vietnamese lexicon continues to be heavily influenced by the Chinese language. Some words are loanwords from Chinese like "hotel" (khách sạn), "children" (nhi đồng), "communist party" (đảng cộng sản); some are formed based on Chinese roots (characters), like "representative" (đại diện) or "bird flu" (cúm gà). Any knowledge of the Chinese language will make it much easier to learn Vietnamese. Chinese characters are sometimes still used for ceremonial purposes, such as in Buddhist and Taoist temples, but in general most Vietnamese are unable to read them. Vietnamese is also full of French and English loanwords. Nowadays, some English words are used directly in Vietnamese: camera, clip, internet, jeans, PC, sandwich, selfie, radar, show, smartphone, tablet, TV, etc.

Although the Vietnamese people appreciate any effort to learn their language, most seldom experience foreign accents. Consequently, learners may find it frustrating that no one can understand what they try to say. Staff in hotels and children tend to have a more tolerant ear for foreign accents and it is not unheard of for children to effectively help translate your badly pronounced Vietnamese into authentic Vietnamese for adults.

Ho Chi Minh City is home to a sizeable ethnic Chinese community, many of whom speak Cantonese. The more remote parts of the country are also home to many ethnic minorities who speak various languages belonging to the Mon-Khmer, Tai-Kadai and Austronesian language families.

Most younger Vietnamese learn **English** in school, but proficiency is generally poor. However, most hotel and airline staff will know enough English to communicate. Younger upper and middle class Vietnamese generally have a basic grasp of English. Some road directional signs are bilingual in Vietnamese and English. Vietnamese people are much more adept at using 'Translate' Apps on phones than in neighbouring countries and will readily use these as means of communicating in English as well as other languages.

As a result of its colonial legacy, **French** is still spoken and taught in the country. Educated senior citizens comprise a significant share of French speakers, but those working in certain fields such as medicine and law may also use French as a working language. Nevertheless, English has supplanted French as the main first foreign language among much of the younger generations.

Russian is also spoken by some Vietnamese who have studied, worked, or done business in the USSR or Russia.

In the big cities, some of the big international luxury hotel chains will have staff who can speak other foreign languages such as Mandarin, Japanese, or Korean. At the more popular tourist sites, such as Hanoi's Temple of Literature, guides conduct tours in a number of foreign languages, including German, French, Spanish, Mandarin, Korean or Japanese.

## Get in

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### Entry requirements

#### Visa-free entry

As of 2023/2024, visitors from the following countries, with their passport validity being at least 6 months from the date of entry, do not require a visa and can stay for the following number of days:

- 14 days: Brunei, Myanmar
- 21 days: Philippines
- 30 days: Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Cambodia
- 45 days: Belarus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Norway, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Russia, the United Kingdom (valid until 14 March 2025)
- 90 days: Chile, Panama

No specific waiting time is necessary between exit and re-entry on visa-free or visa-based visits to Vietnam. The visa-free period is calculated anew for every entry.

Further visa-free entries into Vietnam include:

- Any foreigner on a permanent or temporary residence permit.
- Any foreigner travelling in a border economic zone (e.g. Ha Tien) for no more than 15 days, or in a special administrative and economic zone or a coastal economic zone like Phu Quoc island, off of the southwestern coast, for no more than 30 days. In order to boost tourism, the Vietnamese government has made these changes for Phu Quoc. Phu Quoc International Airport (PQC<sup>IATA</sup>) receives some direct flights from European airports such as Stockholm-Arlanda operated by Thomson (<http://www.thomson.co.uk/flight/>), and flights from destinations in Asia. Also, those flying through Ho Chi Minh City (transit) or arriving by boat will not need to apply for a visa beforehand. Those wishing to travel elsewhere afterwards can apply for a proper Vietnamese visa at the local immigration office.
- Any foreign citizen of Vietnamese origin, who can apply for visa exemption that allows multiple entry for 3 months at a time which is valid for the duration of the passport.

In all other cases a **visa** in advance is required to visit Vietnam — see below. The previous visa-on-arrival scheme has been terminated.

## E-Visa

Visitors from many countries (<https://evisa.xuatnhapcanh.gov.vn/documents/20181/117155/Vietnam-Evisa-nation-list.pdf/21e0f88f-d8a0-48b8-bfdb-a0f82b0853e2>), including most Western ones, are eligible for an electronic visa (e-Visa), which you apply for through the **official online portal** (<https://evisa.xuatnhapcanh.gov.vn/trang-chu-ttdt>) and print out yourself after approval (twice). It costs US\$25 (single-entry) or US\$50 (multiple-entry), and is valid 15 to 90 days, depending on your nationality and type of visa. It is normally processed in 3 working days after application fee has been paid. In case of the application to be further verified by Vietnam Immigration Department, the process time is between 3 and 15 working days.



Cua Tung Beach

Don't forget to pay, which is a separate step after confirming your application, otherwise your visa application will be on hold! Also, the automatic email confirmation is not reliable and you have to check for yourself online whether you have received the visa. You must print out *two paper copies* of your visa once it is approved. You will need to submit one copy to the immigration officer when entering the country, and submit the other one to the immigration officer when leaving. You may also need to show it when checking in for your flight.

E-Visas are *valid at major airports and seaports, and most but not all land crossings*, e.g. not at the Oyadav–Lê Thanh crossing between Banlung (Cambodia) and Pleiku (Vietnam). A full list of valid crossings (<https://evisa.xuatnhapcanh.gov.vn/documents/20181/117155/List-of-evisa-port.pdf/c774e24b-1ab8-4fb6-9ac1-dcdfaccecf8e>) is available on the e-Visa website, though many of them use obscure local names that can be difficult to find on maps.

In theory, entry and exit from the country should be from the same airport, seaport, or land crossing as stipulated on the e-Visa form, but in reality this is usually not enforced on the way out. However, you *must* enter on the date and at the place stipulated on the visa; you will be denied entry if you arrive on the wrong date or at the wrong port of entry. You will also be denied entry if there are typos in vital data on your eVisa such as your name or birth date.

Multiple entry and extended duration, are available with additional documents and information required.

## **Regular visa**

Those not eligible for an eVisa can apply for a regular visa at most Vietnamese embassies and consulates abroad. The cost of applying depends on your nationality and the embassy or consulate you are applying at, but it will generally cost at least double the price of the eVisa. Check with the Vietnamese embassy or consulate in your country of residence, or the country you are in, for details. Embassies are (oddly) reluctant to announce fees on their websites, as the relatively high visa costs are a tourism deterrent, but nevertheless a source of revenue. Email or, even better, call them to get up-to-date information on prices. Or if you are in the same city, walk in and ask in person.

A regular visa may be required for people eligible for e-Visa, in case you want to enter at a remote border crossing that isn't included in the e-Visa system.

If your country does not have a Vietnamese embassy or consulate, a popular alternative would be to apply at the Vietnamese diplomatic missions in Bangkok, Sihanoukville or Phnom Penh. As of 2019, one of the reportedly cheapest places to get a visa are the Vietnamese embassy and consulates in Cambodia, starting at US\$40 for a one-month, single entry visa. You may be able to apply for a visa and get it back later the same day; for example, at the Vietnamese embassy in Phnom Penh. Make sure to inquire about the details, since if you don't complete the application before a certain time of day, you will need to wait until the next day to pick up the visa and your passport.

## **Dual citizens**

If you are a citizen of two foreign countries, you may be entering Vietnam on a different passport (Country A) than the one you have used to leave the previous country on your itinerary (Country B's passport) (e.g. because Country A's passport has a Vietnamese visa or offers a visa-free entry to Vietnam, while Country B's passport has a visa for the previous visited country). In this case, the Vietnamese immigration inspector will likely want to see the exit stamp and/or visa in your Country B passport as well. He may suggest putting the Vietnamese entry stamp into Country B passport as well, so that all your stamps would be in one place. *Don't* take him up on his offer; make sure that the Vietnamese entry stamp goes into the passport that either has the Vietnamese visa, or offers visa-free entry to Vietnam. Otherwise, you risk having problems when leaving Vietnam; the border control officers at your attempted exit point may declare your entry stamp "invalid" and send you back to your original point of entry to have the error corrected.

## By plane

Vietnam's main international airports are located at **Hanoi** (**HAN**<sup>IATA</sup>) and **Ho Chi Minh City** (**SGN**<sup>IATA</sup>). Both airports are served by numerous flights from major cities in East Asia and Southeast Asia, with some intercontinental services to Australia, Europe and the United States.

International airports at **Da Nang**, **Vinh**, **Nha Trang** and **Phu Quoc** receive flights from neighboring Asian countries. As Da Nang is closer to the historical sites of Central Vietnam than the two main airports, it can make a convenient entry point for those who wish to visit those sites.

The national carrier is **Vietnam Airlines** (<http://www.vietnamairlines.com>), which operates flights into Vietnam's two largest cities from various cities in Australia, Asia and Europe. Vietnam Airlines serves most capital cities of Southeast Asian countries. The largest low cost carrier is **Vietjet Air** (<http://www.vietjetair.com>) which flies to regional destinations including Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Hong Kong, New Delhi, Seoul, Singapore and Yangon.



Temple ruins at My Son.

## By train

There is a nightly sleeper train between Nanning in China and Hanoi, taking 12 hours, including a tedious 2+2 hours at the border — see Hanoi#Get in for details. Through service are also available from Beijing, but travellers will need to change railway coaches at Nanning.

The old metre-gauge Kunming-Hanoi line has closed, and the simplest work-around is to take the high-speed train from Kunming to Nanning to join the overnight train to Hanoi. Another option is to travel to Hekou North Station in China, walk across the border from Hekou to Lao Cai, then take a Vietnamese train from Lao Cai to Hanoi. Both sides have several trains a day, so a daytime train from Kunming to Hekou can be matched with an overnight train from Lao Cai to Hanoi.

There are no railway links between Vietnam and Laos or Cambodia.

## By road

### Cambodia

See also: Phnom Penh#Vietnam

See also: Cambodia#Vietnam

**Regarding bribes**; this is still a problem as of 2023, however most people encounter no issues when entering Vietnam by land. Certain border crossings, like the *Bavet–Moc Bai crossing* between Phnom Penh and Ho Chi Minh City, are known for demanding a 100,000–200,000 dong bribe from some people for giving the entry (but also exit) stamp — a claim is that this only applies to e-Visa. If you are one of the unlucky ones, try negotiating it down to 50,000 dong or be bold, put the 50,000 dong into your passport, walk up to the border officer desk in the VIP line, and hand over your passport. Check the reviews of the relevant border checkpoint on Google Maps to understand the situation and how to react.

When travelling by bus, most likely the bus company will take care of the border formalities in exchange for a "service fee", so as to not to get stuck at the border. Any potential bribe will already be included in this service fee.

The main crossing with Cambodia is the already above mentioned **Bavet–Moc Bai crossing** on the Phnom Penh–Ho Chi Minh City road. Buses between the two cities cost US\$22–25 and take around 6–7 hr. Passengers are usually taken to a duty free shop for lunch while staff process them through immigration.

The **Phnom Den–Tinh Bien crossing** just north of Chau Doc. There is no regular boat service from Chau Doc onward towards Ho Chi Minh City or even other parts of the Mekong Delta, but you have to go by road.

Close to the coast is the **Xa Xia–Prek Chak (Ha Tien) crossing**. The Vietnamese consulate in Sihanoukville issues 30-day tourist visas on a same-day basis. Buses run between Sihanoukville and Phnom Penh, and Ha Tien and even Phu Quoc in Vietnam.

The **Tro Peang Plong–Xa Mat crossing** on the Kampong Cham–Ho Chi Minh City road is not well served by public transportation.

The **Oyadav–Lê Thanh crossing** connects Banlung in North Eastern Cambodia and Pleiku in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. Vietnam e-Visas are *not* accepted for entering Vietnam at this border crossing. So, only visa-free nationalities or people with a traditional visa from an embassy/consulate can enter. The Vietnamese entry checkpoint closes to foreigners at 17:30.

## China

There are three border crossings between China and Vietnam that can be used by foreigners:

- Dongxing - Mong Cai (*by road; onward travel Mong Cai to Ha Long by sea or by road*)
- Hekou - Lao Cai (*by road and/or rail, but no international passenger train services*)
- Youyi Guan - Huu Nghi Quan (Friendship Pass - *by road and/or rail*)

## Laos

There are six border crossings between Laos and Vietnam that can be used by foreigners (from north to south):

- Tay Trang (Dien Bien province, Vietnam) - Sobboun (Phongsali province, Laos)
- Na Mao (Thanh Hoa province, Vietnam) - Namsoi (Houaphanh province, Laos)
- Nam Can (Vietnam) - Namkan (Xiangkhouang province, Laos)
- Kaew Neua - Cau Treo (Keo Nua Pass)
- Lao Bao (Vietnam) - Dansavan (Laos)
- Ngoc Hoi (Kon Tum province, Vietnam) - Bo Y (Attapeu province, Laos)

Be wary of catching local buses from Laos to Vietnam. Not only are they often crammed with cargo (coal and live chickens, often underfoot) but many buses run in the middle of the night, stopping for several hours in order to wait for the border to open at 07:00. Whilst waiting, you will be herded off the bus (for several hours) where you will be approached by pushy locals offering assistance in getting a Laos exit stamp in exchange for money (usually US\$5+). If you bargain hard (tiring, at 04:00) you can get the



figure down to about US\$2. The men will take your passports, which can be disconcerting, but they do provide the service they promise. It is unclear whether you can just wait for the border officials to do this. There is also a VIP bus from Savannakhet.

By boat

See also: [Phnom Penh#By boat](#)  
See also: [Southern Vietnam#By tour](#)

Boats (4–5 hr) from Phnom Penh to Chau Doc run once a day — see [Phnom Penh#By boat](#). They use the so called **Song Tien landport** border crossing on the banks of the Mekong River.

This journey between Phnom Penh and Ho Chi Minh City can also be stretched into a 2-nights/3-days **Mekong Delta tour** and provides a more insightful journey between the two cities, starting from about US\$60–100. However, the only times on a boat with these tours will be the Phnom Penh–Chau Doc bit, a floating market morning boat tour from any of the overnight towns along the way, and the short [Ben Tre–My Tho](#) boat ride — the rest is by bus. For an actual boat tour of the Mekong Delta it will probably require several hundreds if not a thousand US dollars.

Get around

By train

Trains are undoubtedly the most comfortable and an exciting way to travel overland in Vietnam.

Due to the steady increase of tourist bus prices, trains are now an inexpensive alternative to buses. While a night in a sleeper carriage is still more expensive than a sleeper bus, seat carriage prices are very competitive.

Destinations

There is one major train line in Vietnam, the 1,723 km (1,071 mi) trunk between Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC), on which the **Reunification Express** runs. HCMC to Hanoi is more than 30 hours, and overnight hops between major destinations are usually possible, if not entirely convenient. It is a good way to see the countryside and meet upper-middle class locals, but unless you are travelling in a sleeper car it is no more comfortable than buses.



The Vietnamese are experts at transporting huge piles of goods on (motor)bikes.

A digital screen displaying a complex railway timetable. The text is in Vietnamese, with a prominent header in red. The screen is filled with multiple columns of text, likely representing train numbers, destinations, departure times, and arrival times. The display is mounted on a wall, and a power outlet is visible to the right.

Vietnam North-South Railway Timetable (effective from 26-01-2024 to 26-02-2024)

In addition, there are shorter routes from Hanoi leading northwest and northeast, with international crossings into China. One of the most popular of the shorter routes is the overnight train from Hanoi to Lao Cai (with a bus service from Lao Cai to the tourist destination of Sapa).

## Seats and carriages

Air conditioned soft or hard sleeper berths are recommended for overnight trains. Otherwise air-conditioned soft seats are sufficiently comfortable to travel in them during the day. If you are sensitive to cigarette smoke try to book a seat closer to the middle of the carriage as people smoke in the areas at the end of the carriages and the doors are often left open.

At least in the sleeper carriages, there are hot and cold water dispensers and paper cups — tea or instant coffee may be a great idea. Toilets in the seater carriages can be squatting ones, whereas toilets in the sleeper carriages are regular ones. So, if possible, head to one of the sleeper carriages if the passage is not locked. There is always a sink separate from the toilet with water to wash your hands, but only the sleeper carriages may have soap and a dryer.

When buying a ticket, also check the sleeper carriages for availability. During day travel, some sleeper berths are priced almost as cheap as seats, the upper berth sometimes even cheaper. Note that the train personnel in Vietnam seems to enforce the bed selection and people are not sitting together on the lower seat during the day like in India. In the worst case, you will have to stay in sleeping position the whole trip, during the day. However, on the lower berth(s), two friends or on your own, with one or two pillows in your back, is a great way to chill and watch the landscapes fly by. If the seater carriage is fully booked, be assured, so will be the sleeper soon. So, you will most likely have to stick to the selected berth, even if your side of the cabin was empty when you booked it. (In the 6-berth carriage, for more head space put the middle berth up half way and use the foot rest to keep it in that position.)

## Tickets

In high season, purchasing as early as possible is a good idea. However, you can simply check the ticket situation online by checking near-future trains (in the next couple of days) to understand how early you need to book.

Booking online is possible through the **official Vietnamese Railways website (<https://dsvn.vn/>)**, which has an English version and accepts payments by international bank cards. The process is straight forward and works flawlessly — you will receive an e-ticket for download with a QR code in the end. Printing the e-ticket is not necessary if you got the QR code, but most larger railway stations will have a ticket printing machine anyways, just in case.

Prices fluctuate a little, by 5% or so, but booking early except for assuring a seat is not necessary. Prices for holiday periods are generally higher.

There are commercial websites to book your train ticket with, like **Baolau (<https://www.baolau.com/>)** or **12go.Asia (<https://12go.asia/>)**. However, if the Vietnamese Railway website is working, there is no real reason to do so. Also, while they will assure you a seat on the train, they might lie about the type of seat, especially if the train is getting full. It happened to tourists in the past that they booked a regular seat but ended up with a sleeper berth, having to lie down the whole journey during daytime. It is best therefore to book directly, which will also ensure you the best price.

Booking at the train station itself is generally safe, but beware of scams by station staff. Prepare a piece of paper with the destination with date, time, no. of passengers and seat class, and, most importantly, know the price.

*(It is unclear whether the following information is still relevant as of 2023.)* Popular berths and routes are often bought out by tour companies and travel agents well before the departure time. Being told the train is sold out at a station ticket window or popular tour company office does not mean there are no tickets available; they have simply been bought by another reseller. Unsold tickets can often be bought last minute from people hanging around at the station. A train is rarely sold out for real, as the railway company will add cars when demand is high. Commissions on these tickets will drop away as the departure time draws nearer. As of July 2018 tickets (now termed "boarding passes") do indicate the class of ticket, making scams with falsely promised seat classes less of an issue, although buying your ticket directly online or from the train station remains the best option.

## By bus

**Public buses** travel between the cities' bus stations. In bigger places, you often have to use local transport to get into the city centre from there. Buses are generally in reasonable shape, and you have the chance to interact with locals.

Every major city will have a centralised bus station, and most of the major companies will have ticket offices at the stations. Bus stations are generally well organised, safe and easy enough to navigate even if you don't speak Vietnamese.



Public bus (1964)



As a foreigner, you are likely to get overcharged on local buses, where you pay a conductor during the journey. Find out what the right fare is by looking up the price (it is displayed somewhere, often next to the front door on the outside of the bus; take a photo if you can), or by talking to one of the local travellers. Give the right amount and be prepared to argue your case. Nowadays however, many conductors will issue tickets, making it harder or less interesting for them to overcharge you.

**Long-distance buses** connect most cities in Vietnam. Most depart early in the morning to accommodate traffic and late afternoon rains, or run overnight. Average road speeds are typically quite slow, even when travelling between cities. For example, a 276 km (172 mi) journey from the Mekong Delta to Ho Chi Minh City by bus will likely take about 8 hours.

So called **open tour buses** are run by a multitude of tour companies. They cater especially to tourists, including door-to-door service to your desired hostel. You can break the journey at any point and continue on a bus of the same company any time later, or simply buy tickets just for the stage you're willing to cover next. If you are not planning to make more than 3-4 stops, it might be cheaper to buy separate tickets as you go. Buses without the journey break option are just called **deluxe** or **inter-provincial buses**.

There are **seater buses** available, especially during the day, **sleeper buses**, where instead of a seat, you get an angled-flat bunk bed that you can sleep on, and more expensive **VIP sleeper bus**, in which you get a wider bunk bed, your own cubicle for more privacy, and a personal TV system similar to those in

aeroplanes.

Most ho(s)tels and guesthouses can book buses for you. However, they will try to book a more expensive option, because their commission is bigger then. So, you are better off to shop around at travel agents and bus companies directly, as prices will vary considerably on any given ticket or bus company — some buses (even sleeper) are as cheap as a seater railway carriage, e.g. FUTA Bus (<https://futabus.vn/>) or Son Tung Bus (<https://xechatluongcaosontung.vn/>) (Hue and south). Booking with the bus company directly may net you a commission-free fare, but most companies have fixed pricing policies, which can only be circumvented through a travel agent.



A sleeper bus interior

If you are **traveling with a bicycle**, negotiate the extra fee with the driver rather than the ticket counter before buying your ticket. The bicycle fee should be no more than 10% of the ticket price.

## Cope

Stop-offs are often at souvenir shops to give the bus company an extra income. You do not have to buy anything, but they always have toilets and drinks and water available for purchase. The estimated time for a bus trip will not be accurate and may be an additional couple of hours sometimes, due to the number of stop offs. Collecting the passengers at the start of the journey can also take quite a while too. Always be at least half an hour early to catch the bus. Try not to drink too much water, as rest stops, especially for overnight buses, may be just somewhere where there are a lot of bushes.



A sleeper bus at night

Vietnamese buses are made for Vietnamese people; bigger Westerners will be uncomfortable, especially on overnight buses. Also, many Vietnamese are not used to travelling on long-haul buses, and will sometimes get sick — not very pleasant if you are stuck on an overnight bus with several Vietnamese throwing up behind you.

Even if you are sometimes bus-sick, it is advisable to book a seat at the middle rather than at the front of the bus. First, you will avoid viewing directly the short-sighted risks the driver is taking on the way. Second, you will somewhat escape the loud noise of non-stop honking (each time the bus passes another vehicle, that is about every 10 seconds).

Although the bus company will usually be happy to collect you at your hotel or guest house, boarding at the company office will guarantee a choice of seats and you will avoid getting stuck at the back or unable to sit next to your travelling companions. The offices are generally located in or near the tourist area of town, and a short walk might make your trip that much more pleasant.

The long haul bus companies operate from north to south and back on the only main road (QL1). If you take a bus going further than your destination, the bus will drop you off at the most convenient crossroad for it and not as you may have expected at the bus terminal of your destination. For Hué, this crossroad is

13 km from the city centre; for Nha Trang 10 km. At these crossroads, you will find taxis or motorbike taxis to get you to your ho(s)tel.

## Stay safe

A scam that you may encounter is that after arriving at your location, the guides will ask you whether you have booked a hotel. Even though you haven't, say that you have and prepare the name of a hotel. If you say you have not booked one, they will charter a taxi for you and probably drop you at a hotel which they can collect commission. If you decide not to stay, things may get a little ugly, as they will demand that you pay the taxi fare, which they may quote as several times the actual fare for a ten-minute ride.

Be very careful of your possessions on the overnight bus, as people (including bus employees) have been known to look through passenger's bags and take expensive items like electronics and sell them on for profit. Do not fall asleep with your headphones in your ear, as the chances are your phone will be nowhere to be found in the morning. Get a padlock for your hand luggage and lock everything up in there before you go to sleep.

## By plane

Flights are the fastest way to traverse this long country. Flights between Hanoi and HCMC last only about 2 hours and start at €30–40.

There are many airports connecting with Hanoi and HCMC (north to south).

### Northern Vietnam:

- Điện Biên Phủ Airport (**DIN**<sup>IATA</sup>) near Dien Bien Phu
- Van Don International Airport (**VDO**<sup>IATA</sup>) near Cai Rong
- Cat Bi International Airport (**HPH**<sup>IATA</sup>) near Hai Phong, including international connections with South Korea and China

### Central Coast:

- Vinh Airport (**VII**<sup>IATA</sup>) near Vinh
- Dong Hoi Airport (**VDH**<sup>IATA</sup>) near Dong Hoi
- Phu Bai International Airport (**HUI**<sup>IATA</sup>) near Hue
- Da Nang International Airport (**DAD**<sup>IATA</sup>) near Da Nang, including international connections with South Korea, China, Malaysia, Cambodia, Singapore, Taiwan, and Japan
- Chu Lai Airport (**VCL**<sup>IATA</sup>) near Quảng Ngãi
- Phù Cát Airport (**UIH**<sup>IATA</sup>) near Quy Nhon
- Tuy Hoa Airport (**TBB**<sup>IATA</sup>)
- Cam Ranh International Airport (**CXR**<sup>IATA</sup>) near Nha Trang, including international connections with South Korea, China, Malaysia, Thailand

### Central Highlands:

- Pleiku Airport (**PXU**<sup>IATA</sup>) near Pleiku
- Buon Ma Thuot Airport (**BMV**<sup>IATA</sup>) near Buon Ma Thuot



- Lien Khuong Airport (**DLI**<sup>IATA</sup>) near Da Lat, including domestic connections to Da Nang, Vinh and Hue

### **Southern Vietnam:**

- Rach Gia Airport (**VKG**<sup>IATA</sup>) near Rach Gia
- Can Tho International Airport (**VCA**<sup>IATA</sup>) near Can Tho
- Con Dao Airport (**VCS**<sup>IATA</sup>) on Con Dao
- Phú Quốc International Airport (**PQC**<sup>IATA</sup>) on Phú Quốc

Some airports are further away from the next major city or sight. Make sure to know how to get away from the airport without shedding another 500,000 dong for a taxi.

The full-service domestic airlines are flag carrier **Vietnam Airlines** (<http://www.vietnamairlines.com/>) operating some shorter flights, as well as privately owned **Bamboo Airways** (<http://bamboairways.com/>). The main budget airlines are **Pacific Airlines** (<https://www.pacificairlines.com.vn/>) and **VietJet Air** (<http://www.vietjetair.com/>).

## **By bicycle**

Adventurous travellers may wish to see Vietnam by cycling. Several adventure travel tours provide package tours with equipment. Most of the population get around on two wheels, so it's an excellent way to get closer to the people as well as off the beaten path.

Bicycles can be rented cheaply in many cities and are often a great way of covering larger distances. Good spots for cycling are Dalat, Hoi An, Hue and Ninh Binh. On the other hand, attempting to cycle in Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) is virtually suicide without proper experience of traffic rules (or lack thereof, 'proper experience' in this case means understanding that everyone around you could potentially change direction without signalling and at any moment). A general 'rule of thumb' when on a bicycle or motorbike is 'expect the unexpected'. It's like a school of fish traffic situation.

In cities like HCMC and Hanoi, parking bicycles on pedestrian areas is not allowed and you will have to go to a pay parking lot: 2,000 dong per bike, 5,000 dong for a motorbike.

## **By motorbike**

*Main article: Vietnam by motorcycle*

“ One of the great joys of life is riding a scooter through Vietnam, to be part of this mysterious, thrilling, beautiful choreography. ”

—Anthony Bourdain

Some choose to traverse the entire country this way while most are satisfied with a few local day trips — also see below. If you are not an experienced motorbike rider you should reconsider



A roadside sign with a Zen message



starting to ride here. Riding in the big cities is not advisable unless you are an experienced rider with a very cool head. Traffic is intense and chaotic; "right of way" is a nearly unknown concept.

In small towns and beach resorts where traffic is light, e.g. Pho Quoc, it's a delightful way to get around and see the sights, and much cheaper than taxis if you make several stops or travel any distance. Roads are usually decent, though it's advisable not to ride too fast and always keep an eye on the road for the occasional pothole.

Two main categories of motorbike are available for rent: scooters (automatic transmission); and four-speed motorbikes.

Most places you would want to stop have **parking** attendants who will issue you a numbered tag and watch over your bike.

If you are in Vietnam during the **rainy season**, make sure to buy a poncho or a raincoat before you start. They are available for as little as 10,000 dong. However, the traffic doesn't stop, it just becomes more chaotic. If you are hesitant or have not driven in such conditions before, it might be prudent to park and wait.

Beware of thieves: always keep your motorbike in sight or parked with an attendant. Look for rows of neatly-parked motorbikes or signs that say *giu xe*.

It is illegal for foreigners to ride a motorbike in Vietnam without a **temporary Vietnamese motorbike licence**, or an **International Driving Permit** with a valid home country motorbike licence. Nevertheless, many foreigners ride without a valid licence. Make sure to check with your travel insurance company to see if you are even covered to ride.

**Crossing the border** into Cambodia with a Vietnamese license plate seems no issue as of Dec 2023.

## By taxi

Nowadays, the taxi and **motorbike taxi** market is dominated by the **ride-hailing service Grab** (<https://www.grab.com/vn/en/transport/>) (Android (<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.grabtaxi.passenger>), iOS (<https://apps.apple.com/vn/app/grab-%C4%91%E1%BA%B7t-xe-giao-%C4%91%E1%B%93-%C4%83n/id647268330>)), which took over Uber's former South-east Asian operations, including that of Vietnam. This means that the price and destination are set upfront and cash is not required; while cash is accepted, the driver may not have enough change should you hand them a large note, so preparing the exact amount is preferred. Depending on the route taken and time, prices will be slightly higher than for a taxi in most cases, but will sometimes be even cheaper. Outside of large cities, Grab arranges taxi rides according to metered rates, which are still paid through the app.

Even if you don't use Grab for booking, the app will help you to get a feeling for the rough price ranges for rides in case you hail a taxi or motorbike taxi directly along the street. **Note** that there are cases where the Grab driver can charge additional money, e.g. in case he used a larger vehicle. Find out about those cases from Vietnamese people or the TOS so not to be surprised when it happens expecting some kind of a scam.

As of 2023, **Xanh SM** (<https://www.xanhsm.com/>) is pushing persistently into the taxi aka ride-hailing market with its **EV fleet** of cars and motorbikes. According to industry insiders they are supposed to overtake Grab in 2024 on the car side. They often have specials to attract people, so it is a good idea to also download this app (for Android (<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.gsm.customer>) or iOS (<https://apps.apple.com/vn/app/xanh-sm-%C4%91%E1%BA%B7t-xe-%C4%91%E1%BB%87n/id6446425595>)) and price-compare against Grab, especially for larger distances and prices.

### By metered taxi

Regular taxis are still operating in places where ride-hailing may not be immediately available, like airports, railway stations, or around hotels. The smaller the taxi the lower the flag fall: so a small compact saloon or equivalent will have a flag fall of 5,000 dong, a mid range saloon 9,000 dong and an SUV 11,000 dong. The flag fall fare is for a shorter distance the smaller the car so the 5,000 dong flag fall takes you 500 m, whilst the 11,000 dong will last for 850 m so on journeys longer than 1 km the size of the vehicle makes no difference (somewhat complicated but after a few rides you will understand how the system works). In the evening these flag falls may rise by 1,000 dong.

Few drivers speak more than a few words of English, so staff at your hotel write down the names of your travel destinations in Vietnamese to show the driver. Another option is to show them the destination in Google Maps on your phone. In that case, most drivers prefer to view the complete route instead of just the destination and may even end up using your phone for navigation. It helps to carry one of your hotel's business cards so you can return to the hotel without too much fuss.

In the more touristy destinations such as Sapa and Cat Ba, it is much more difficult to get drivers to use their meters than in the big cities and beach centres. Be prepared to walk away if the driver refuses to use the meter.

Beware of common **taxi scams**, such as drivers refusing to use the meter and quoting ridiculous fares, or rigged meters than jump at ridiculous rates. However, as long as the meter starts automatically after the vehicle has been rolling for a few metres or the driver switches it on manually, you shouldn't be scammed. To minimise your chances of falling for a scam, try to learn to recognise the reputable large taxi companies — see city articles.

Carry small change and notes for paying fares, since drivers often are or pretend to be short on change.

Many drivers have a good command of the geography of their city and the nearest most passengers will come to being scammed is that the driver may select a slightly longer route than is strictly necessary. Keeping Google Maps open during your journey often prevents this issue.

### By xe ôm

Motorbike taxis (*xe ôm*, literally "hugging vehicle") are a cheap and reasonable mode of transport for Vietnamese as well as tourists — provided you avoid getting scammed. It's generally not a good idea to grab a random one off the street, as you are much more likely to get scammed as a foreigner. Instead, use one of the before mentioned ride hailing apps if available or use them for negotiating the price, as you are much less likely to get scammed that way. About 10,000 dong should suffice for a 10-minute trip, which should get you anywhere within the city centre. Longer trips to outlying areas should cost about 20,000-30,000 dong.

All riders are now required to wear helmets, a rule that is strongly enforced. Make sure the driver supplies you with a helmet. If he doesn't, find another one, as you'll be the one stung for the fine.

Drivers rarely speak English. As with most things, a tourist will often be quoted an above-market price initially, and you need to be firm, anything over 10,000 dong is a reason to walk away. Occasionally drivers will demand more than the negotiated price at the end, so it's best to have exact change handy. Then you can pay the agreed amount and walk away, end of discussion.

In some cases they will take you wherever they want (tourist attractions or shops you didn't request to go) and sometimes they will wait for you to come back (even if you don't want them to wait) and will ask you for more money for having been waiting. Even if you speak some Vietnamese, this is not useful, since they will cheat you anyway or they will act as if they don't understand even if they do. Again, be firm and walk away.

## By cyclo

Not really an alternative to (motorbike) taxis, but an interesting way to see the city, **cyclo** pedicabs still roam the streets of Vietnam's cities and towns, especially the ones with many tourists. They are especially common in scenic smaller, less busy cities like Hue, where it's pleasant to cruise slowly along taking in the sights. Though the ride will be slow, hot and sometimes dangerous, you will generally need to pay *more* than for a motorbike for the equivalent distance. On the plus side, some drivers (particularly in the South) are very friendly and happy to give you a running commentary on the sights. Cyclos are slowly being supplanted by motorbikes though.



Cyclo in Hue

Cyclo drivers are notoriously mercenary and will always ask for a high price to start with. Sometimes they will also demand more than the agreed price at the end. Japanese tourists, especially women, are most often targeted with this scam since they are more responsive to the threat that the driver will call the police and make trouble for them if they don't pay as demanded. A reasonable price is about 20,000 dong for up to 2 km (1.2 mi), and if the driver disagrees, simply walk away — you won't get far before that driver or another takes your offer.

Prices for a sightseeing circuit with intermediate stops are more complex to negotiate and more subject to conflict at the end. If you plan to stop somewhere for any length of time, it's best to settle up with the driver, make no promises, and start fresh later. Some drivers start with a very low rate to get you into their cycle and then if required to wait for you or otherwise vary the agreed price, bring out a typed up price list of their "standard rates" which are inflated beyond belief. If even slightly unsure ask the driver show you his list of charges. Then negotiate from that point or walk away.

To avoid trouble, it's also best to have exact change for the amount you agreed to pay, so if the driver tries to revise the deal, you can just lay your cash on the seat and leave.

## By boat

You will be missing a big part of Vietnamese life if you do not spend some time on a boat. Do be careful though because many boats, although seaworthy, are not designed to first world standards. An example is the ferry from Phu Quoc to the mainland. This ferry has one tiny entrance for all passengers to board. When full, which it usually is, there are approximately 200 people on board. In the event of an accident, the chance of everyone getting out of the boat fast enough would be very small. The idea of an emergency exit does not exist there.



A ferry on the Perfume River.

Tour boats can be chartered for around US\$20 for a day's tour; but beware of safety issues if you charter a boat, make sure the boat is registered for carrying tourists and has enough life jackets and other safety equipment on board. Or you can book a tour through a tour company; but in Vietnam most Tour Agents charge whatever markup they want and therefore the tourist is often paying margins of 30-40% and the boat owner and operator (of anything from a van to a boat etc.) are paid very little of the total amount.



Tomb of Khai Dinh, Hue

Ha Long Bay is a famous destination for one- to three-day boat trips among its scenic limestone islands. The problem is that all the boats seem to visit the same places - and with high prices, poor quality boats and service real value is hard to come by. Many boats have a US\$10 corkage fee, and forbid BYO alcohol, while on-board alcohol and seafood is about the same price as in Europe in some places. If there is rain, mist or low cloud, you may not see much. Try to pick a clear day.

Dozens of small family-operated boats ply the river in Hue taking visitors to the imperial tombs southwest of the city. This journey is long because the boats are slow, taking about 4 hours or so to make the journey in one direction.

Snorkel, fishing or lunch trips are available from Nha Trang, Hoi An, and Phu Quoc to nearby islands. In Central Vietnam northeast monsoon season limits many sea boat tours during the months Sep-Feb; other parts of Vietnam seem less affected.

A 90-minute hydrofoil boat operates from HCMC to the seaside resort of Vung Tau for about 250,000 dong each way, the fastest way to reach the beach from the city.

## By car

*Main article: Driving in Vietnam*

Traffic moves on the **right** in Vietnam.

The concept of renting a car to drive yourself is almost non-existent, and when Vietnamese speak of renting a car, they always mean hiring a car with a driver. (After a short time on local roads with their crazy traffic, you will be glad you left the driving to somebody used to it.) Vehicles for rent are widely available. Tourists can hire vehicles through hotels and tour agents found in every tourist area.



International car brands have started to surface, offering chauffeur-driven services. Few drivers speak any English, so make sure you tell the hotel or agent exactly where you want to go, and have that communicated to the driver.

## On foot

Traffic is made up of a staggering number of motorbikes and, since import duty was reduced when Vietnam's joined the World Trade Organization, an increasing number of private cars. However it's exceptionally rare to see a motorbike of more than 150cc, and the traffic rarely gets above 20–30 km/hr in central areas.

When crossing roads stay aware, and walk slowly and confidently. Motorbike riders are exceptionally good and will simply move to avoid you, just don't make any sudden erratic moves. Just look for a gap or seam in the traffic, and begin a slow, but steady movement. If you hear a beep coming your way it's likely a motorbike rider is about to enter your personal space. Be alert and prepared to stop putting your foot forward until he passes.

Always look both ways — don't assume traffic only comes from one direction. Give oncoming vehicles ample time to see and avoid you. **Never move hastily** between rows of waiting cars, often motorbike drivers will use the space between car rows to drive and they won't see you coming, since the cars block their sight.

Adherence to traffic signals is not guaranteed. Drivers tend to use "best judgment". Just remember though that vehicles can always turn right at any time (regardless of lights). Motorbikes often drive in the wrong direction to take a short cut, even against the traffic flow. Crossing roads therefore maybe a challenge for Westerners used to traffic laws and traffic lights.

For **navigation** make sure to have good (offline) maps and GPS with you. For reliable maps, GPS navigation, comprehensive map information, consult OpenStreetMap (<https://www.openstreetmap.org/relation/49915>), which is also used by this travel guide and by many mobile Apps like OsmAnd (<https://osmand.net/>) or Mapy.cz (<https://en.mapy.cz/>).

## See

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Vietnam will show you sides of Asia that you've dreamed of. Lush rice fields at the bottom of stunningly gorgeous highlands, colourful water markets on the streams of the Mekong Delta and the endless bustling city life of Hanoi, where anything from school children to fridges and huge piles of vegetables are transported on the back of countless motorcycles. Although Vietnam's huge cities are rapidly transforming into modern Asian metropolises, traditional culture is never far away.

## Architecture

Numerous ancient buildings remain and are actively maintained in Communist Vietnam, like the old town of Hoi An, but so are the buildings of Communist history, like the Independence Palace in Ho Chi Minh City. Also, the colonial history provides for many architectural delicacies.



A provincial road (Yen Bai Provincial Route 163) in good condition, with a milestone (80 km from Yen Bai City)

Furthermore, **Christianity in Vietnam**.   seemed to have played a big role in the presence of the numerous churches that can be found all around the country. Even though just barely 10% of the Vietnamese are Christians, churches can be found in many towns and cities, providing for some interesting and almost surreal pictures when in an often flat landscape suddenly a sometimes Gothic, but often fully white or beige church rises in the middle of the town or from between the lush green background.

## City life

Head to **Hoi An** with its **Venice-like canals** and beautiful old town for some top sightseeing. Enjoy the old **port**, wander through its endless winding alleys and take a pick from its countless **fine restaurants** and shops, or relax on the beach. Once a fishermen's village, this town's now well-protected by preservation laws and has turned into a major hot spot for visitors. **Hanoi** is of course the summit of Asian city life. It's an incredible myriad of ancient traditions, old and modern architecture, sounds, smells, bustling commerce and famously crazy traffic. It's chaotic and enchanting at once - a great place to discover both ancient and contemporary Vietnam. Most sights are in the **Old Quarter**, including the famous **Hoan Kiem Lake** and the beautiful **Bach Ma Temple**. Spend a day or two in **Ho Chi Minh City**, or Saigon, the country's largest city. Nowhere are contrasts between old and new more ubiquitous and alive than here, where you'll find ancient pagodas and traditional street life at the feet of giant skyscrapers. Top sights include the **Reunification Palace** and **Giac Lam Pagoda**. Also well worth visiting is the former imperial town of **Hue**, with its beautiful **Citadel** and the **Tombs of the Emperors** along the **Perfume River**. The largest beach city is **Nha Trang** which spreads out along the beach but also has an interesting city-scape.



Hoi An street life



## Landscapes and nature

Few countries are blessed with landscapes as captivating as those of Vietnam. For many, the country's awe-inspiring limestone scenery, perfect beaches, islands, mountain ranges, rice fields and lakes are its greatest treasures. One of Vietnam's top attractions, **Ha Long Bay**, boasts thousands of limestone pillars and islands topped with dense jungle vegetation. Among the bustling port life, you'll find floating fishermen's villages, caves, and island lakes. Neighboring **Lan Ha Bay** is as spectacular, but less busy. Head to **Sa Pa** and the Muong Hoa valley to get take in the views of local rice fields against a background of bamboo forests. Also in the north is **Tam Coc** near **Ninh Binh**. This area is famous for its karst scenery, rice fields, and caves and is best explored by hired boat.



Typical rice terraces



**Phu Quoc**, off the Cambodian coast, is the largest island in the country. Its delightful palm-lined beaches and tropical forests can compete with any in the world. Most famous in the south is of course the **Mekong Delta**. Here, the Mekong River empties into the South China Sea via a maze of smaller streams. It's a lush, green region and the source of half of Vietnam's agricultural produce. It offers scenic views of

the rivers and rice fields as far as the eye can see. Here, natural landscapes and culture go hand in hand as life revolves around the water. The Mekong streams are a major means of transportation and host **floating markets**.

Some best picks in terms of natural wonders can be found in the country's national parks. **Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is famous for its natural caves and grottos, with underground rivers and cave beaches as well as stunning stalagmites and stalactites. For wildlife, try **Cuc Phuong National Park**.

## Museums

For better insight in Vietnam's ancient traditions, culture and history, visit one of the many museums, some with truly excellent collections. The **War Remnants Museum** in Ho Chi Minh City will leave a lasting impression, particularly the chilling collection of war photography. Although not exactly neutral in tone, there are English labels. The **HCMC Museum** is in a building worth seeing on its own, and gives a nice overview of the city's history. For a broader history collection, try the fine **History Museum**, which has artefacts from several Vietnamese cultures on display. In Hanoi, the **Vietnam Museum of Ethnology** is an excellent place to dive into the life of the country's tribal people. In the centre of town is the **Fine Arts Museum** has all kinds of arts on display, from high-quality wood and stone carvings to fabulous ceramics and textiles. Descriptions in English. For something completely different try the **Robert Taylor Museum of Worldwide Arms** in Vung Tau. This is one mans fascinating collection of arms and uniforms collected from around the world.

## Do

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**Trekking Vietnam** is an ideal way to enjoy and experience beautiful nature of Vietnam, from the yellow farmers' terraces in harvesting season of the north (Sa Pa), to the off-the-beaten-path Central Highlands, or the frenetic activity of the Mekong Delta in the south.

**Chinese chess** (*cờ tướng*) is a popular game in Vietnam, and you will often notice the elderly having games in the public parks. If you know how to play, this can be an opportunity to befriend the locals. A uniquely Vietnamese tradition pertaining to Chinese chess is human chess (*cờ người*), typically played at temple and village festivals during *Tết*. As the name suggests, the pieces are played by humans dressed in traditional Vietnamese costumes, usually with 16 teenage boys on one side and 16 teenage girls on the other, and a choreographed traditional martial arts fight between the two pieces always ensues whenever a piece is captured.

**Retreats, spas, meditation and yoga** are popular in Vietnam, with Hoi An in particular becoming a hub for like-minded individuals.

## Motorbiking

*Main article: Vietnam by motorcycle*

Epitomized in an episode of “Top Gear” riding a motorbike in Vietnam has become a goal for many people visiting the country. While riding in Vietnam can be dangerous, it can also be a life-changing experience. You see things from the seat of a motorbike that you don't see while travelling in different

type of vehicle.

Motorbiking is popular with locals and tourists alike. Given that motorbikes are the main mode of transport in Vietnam, they can give a particularly authentic view of travelling through the country. **Renting or buying** a bike is possible in many cities.

Major roads between cities tend to be narrow despite being major, and full of tour buses hell-bent on speed, passing slow trucks where maybe they shouldn't have tried, and leaving not much room at the edge for motorbikes. But there are many good roads and beautiful sights to be seen with the freedom of your own motorbike.

**Motorbike tours** are the newest addition to the motorbike hype in Vietnam. Three basic concepts exist for that:

1. On the most simple "tour", your luggage is taken care of and you ride the distance, e.g. Hoi An to Hue by motorbike and visit all the sights on the way. Price-wise this comes up to the same as a bus ride for the same distance, which is why many people choose this interesting alternative.
2. On **motorbike adventure tours**, you are guided on multi-day drives to remote regions of the country. Most tours include accommodation, petrol, helmets, drivers and entry tickets to local places of interest. Guides usually speak good English or French and offer customised tours if desired.
3. **Motorbike sightseeing tours** are similar but have a more local range specific to one city or area and can focus on food, shopping or sightseeing.

## Buy

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### Money

The national currency is the **dong** (*đồng*), sometimes denoted by the symbol "₫" (ISO code: **VND**). Prices are usually shown without a currency notation, e.g. as "100.000", "100k" or "100K", and in speech it's common to drop the thousands completely. Wikivoyage articles will use *dong* to denote the currency.

Notes are available in denominations of 1,000, 2,000, 5,000, 10,000, 20,000, 50,000, 100,000, 200,000 and 500,000 dong. Smaller bills and coins in denominations up to 5,000 dong also exist, but are rarely seen. While they are legal tender, they are difficult to get rid of if you end up with some.

### ATMs

ATMs are common and can be found in most cities and every tourist destination. They will accept a selection of credit and debit cards, including Visa, MasterCard, Maestro or Cirrus and several other systems. Many ATMs charge a fee per withdrawal, but a few are free. Withdrawal maximums are a problem of the past and withdrawing 5–10 mn dong is not an issue anymore.

The ATMs of the following banks have **no withdrawal fee**:

- **TP Bank** (<https://tpb.vn>). (updated Nov 2023)
- **VP Bank** (<http://www.vpbank.com.vn/>). (updated Dec 2023)

- **ACB** (<https://acb.com.vn/>). European Visa (unclear whether "Union" or continent) and JCB cards **only**. (updated Nov 2023)
- **HDBank** (<https://hdbank.com.vn/>). Visa cards *only*. (updated Dec 2023)
- **EXIMBANK** (<http://www.eximbank.com.vn>). (updated Dec 2023)

The ATMs of the following banks have the listed **fee per withdrawal**:

- **Agribank** (<http://www.agribank.com.vn>). 22,000 dong. (updated Mar 2020)
- **ABBank** (<https://abbank.vn/>). 20,000 dong. (updated Jan 2018)
- **ANZ Bank** (<http://www.anz.com/vietnam/en/Personal/>). 40,000 dong. (updated Jan 2018)
- **BIDV Bank** (<http://www.bidv.com.vn>). 50,000 dong plus 5,000 dong VAT. (updated Mar 2016)
- **DongA Bank** (<http://www.dongabank.com.vn>). 20,000 dong. (updated Jan 2018)
- **HSBC** (<http://www.hsbc.com.vn>), [direct@hsbc.com.vn](mailto:direct@hsbc.com.vn) (<mailto:direct@hsbc.com.vn>). 100,000 dong. (updated Aug 2016)
- **Techcombank** (<https://www.techcombank.com.vn>). 66,000 dong. (updated Jan 2018)
- **VIB** (<https://vib.com.vn>). 50,000 dong (and they don't warn about it!).
- **Vietcombank** (<http://www.vietcombank.com.vn/>). 1.5% fee. (updated Feb 2020)
- **Vietinbank** (<http://www.vietinbank.vn>). 55,000 dong. (updated Jun 2016)
- **Sacombank** (<https://www.sacombank.com.vn>). 1.5% fee. (updated Feb 2020)

## Credit cards

Credit cards are now accepted more and more around the country, especially where there is a lot of tourists present. Credit card purchases are required by law to be charged in dong.

A train ticket is easily payable with a credit card through the official government website for example.

## Cashless payment

Vietnamese seem to love cashless payment, and even the tiniest shop will have a QR code to submit the payment. It is unclear however whether foreigners can use this payment method.

## Exchange rates for Vietnamese đồng

As of January 2024:

- US\$1 ≈ 24,428 dong
- €1 ≈ 26,781 dong
- UK£1 ≈ 31,038 dong
- AU\$1 ≈ 16,402 dong
- Japanese ¥100 ≈ 16,905 dong
- Chinese ¥1 ≈ 3,428 dong
- SG\$1 ≈ 18,389 dong
- Thai ฿10 ≈ 7,081 dong

Exchange rates fluctuate. Current rates for these and other currencies are available from XE.com (<https://www.xe.com/currency/vnd-vietnamese-dong>)



A TP Bank ATM





At least the cashless payment hype is not yet at a stage where you will have problems paying with cash, like in India for instance.

## Money exchange

If you choose to carry cash, **jewellery shops and gold shops** offer the best rates for all major and hard currencies (EUR, USD, AUD, SGD, GBP, etc.) and least bureaucracy. Weirdly their rates are sometimes even better than the official Interbank rate at XE.com, but generally they are very close and the procedure is straightforward. There is no form filling or passport required. Most don't advertise their service, just ask. This is vaguely illegal, but enforcement is minimal. The best place in many cities in Vietnam to find gold shops that will transact currency exchange is to head for the central food/clothing market. Try to bring the largest denomination banknotes possible (e.g. \$100 for U.S. dollars, £50 for pound sterling) in as pristine a condition as possible, as you will usually get a better rate that way.

Unofficial exchange agents like **hotels and travel agencies** often have a considerable markup over the official Interbank exchange rate, and sometimes they have different rates for different services. Also, US\$50 and US\$100 notes get a higher exchange rate than notes of lower denominations. Official exchange counters however, e.g. at the airport or in the city centre, have quite competitive buy and sell rates with markups as low as 1–2%, depending on the currency.

When **leaving Vietnam**, on most land borders connecting to Cambodia, China and Laos there are freelance money changers to take care of your financial leftovers, but be assured they will get the better of you if you don't know the going rate. In Hanoi airport, there are no money changers after you clear immigration, so exchange your dong before you enter the departure hall unless you plan to shop.

It is difficult to find or exchange dong outside Vietnam, with some notable exceptions such as Singapore or Bangkok — if you are not heading to either of those places, you should get rid of any leftovers before leaving the country.

## Banking

**Traveller cheques** of well-known companies are accepted, but usually a small fee is charged. Fees might also be the only thing that would keep you from getting **cash advances** on Visa- or MasterCard at most banks. Through both ways you can also get hold of U.S. dollars, though there will be even higher fees. There are mentions in some popular travel books about Vietcombank not charging any commission fees to cash American Express travellers cheques. However, this is no longer true.

There are branches of **money transfer** companies like Western Union, but this is always one of the more expensive ways to get money. However, it's better for larger amounts. A US\$800 transfer costs US\$5 from America and the exchange rate is quite good. You may also transfer US dollars to

## Acceptance of other currency

Prices are sometimes advertised in U.S. dollars, but payment is almost always expected in **dong only**, especially outside major tourist destinations. It is easier to bargain with dong, especially since dollar prices are already rounded. If paying with dollars, bills in less than perfect condition may be rejected. US\$2 bills (especially those printed in the 1970s) are considered lucky in Vietnam and are worth more than US\$2. They make a good tip/gift, and many Vietnamese will keep them in their wallet for luck.

## Tipping

Tipping is not expected in Vietnam with the exception of bellhops in high-end hotels, and the Vietnamese themselves don't do it, though tips will not be refused if offered. Some establishments which are used to serving Western tourists have come to expect tips, though it is still perfectly acceptable not to tip. In any case, the price quoted to you is often many times what locals will pay, so tipping can be considered unnecessary in most circumstances. To avoid paying an involuntary tip when a taxi driver claims he doesn't have small change always try to carry small denominations.

## Shopping

### Tax refund

Foreign visitors may claim a VAT refund (<http://www.vietnamtourism.com/en/index.php/useful/items/2852>) provided they make the purchase at a participating shop, and leave the country through specific ports of exit.

### Price discrimination

As you travel about, you will find there are clusters of shops all selling similar goods, such as 20 sewing machine shops together, then 30 hardware shops all together, 200 motorcycle repair shops in the same block. Prices are competitive.

However, overcharging has long been an issue in Vietnam tourism, and it is an issue both for foreigners and for Vietnamese people whose accents identify them as being from another region. It can happen anywhere on anything from a hotel room, a ride in a taxi, coffee, a meal, clothing, or basic grocery stuff. Your coffee suddenly becomes 100% more expensive and a restaurant may present you an English menu with inflated prices. A friendly local who spent 30 minutes talking with you may also feel like overcharging you on anything.

Vietnamese hold a diverse view on this issue, and the practice also varies somewhat from region to region, but in general it is more common in Vietnam than other neighboring countries to see it socially acceptable to overcharge foreigners. They may argue inflated prices are still cheap and they may blame the cheap cost of living which attracts a lot of backpackers with bare-bone budgets. According to this school of thought, if tourists complain about it, it's because they are stingy. Rich tourists should not have a problem being overcharged.

### What does it cost? Some non-touristy prices as of Nov 2023.

- Single "old" bananas: 2,000 dong/pc
- Set of 12–15 mini bananas: 15,000/pc
- Mango: 25–50,000 dong/kg
- Mangosteen: 60,000 dong/kg
- Dragon fruit: 20–50,000 dong/kg
- Coconut: 10-15,000 dong/pc
- Tangerines: 30–50,000 dong/kg
- Green oranges: 15–35,000 dong/kg
- Passion fruit: 15–25,000 dong/kg
- Rambutan / Longan / Lychee: 30–45,000 dong/kg
- Guava: 20,000 dong/kg
- Rose apple: 20–30,000 dong/kg
- Papaya: 10–25,000 dong/kg
- Watermelon: 22,000 dong/kg
- Honig/Gaja melon: 50,000 dong/kg
- Local pomelo: 10–15,000 dong/pc
- Green grapefruit: 80,000 dong/kg (often in foil)
- Red apples: 80–100,000 dong/kg (some supermarkets might have 50% specials)
- Pears: 90,000 dong/kg
- Local pears: 25–50,000 dong/kg
- Bamboo shoots: 60,000 dong/kg
- Eggs: 3–4,500 dong/pc

In general, in the south, while vendors have no qualms overcharging an ignorant foreigner, they will generally allow you to bargain prices down to the local price if you know what it is and insist on it. On the other hand, vendors in the north tend to hold more strongly onto the belief that foreigners should be overcharged, and they will usually refuse to sell items to you unless you agree to pay the grossly inflated foreigner price.

The good news is that standard prices are much more common than in the early 1990s. You will absolutely spoil your trip if you assume that everyone is cheating you. Just try to be smart. In a restaurant, learn some names of common dishes in Vietnamese, insist that you need to read the Vietnamese menu, and compare it. If owners argue that the portion of dishes in the English menu is different, it's definitely a scam so move to another place. Learn some Vietnamese numbers and try to see how much a local pays a vendor. The old bargaining tactic of proposing a price, if you are sure that it is a fair and appropriate price that a local would get, and walking away often does the trick, if you are willing to actually walk away.

Prices of fruits can vary considerably, depending on the vendor (location), season, and international trade situation — if China closes its border to a certain fruit, suddenly all will have to be sold on the local market within a short amount of time.

- Bánh Mi (sandwich): 12–25,000 dong
- Noodle soup (meat/fish): 20–35,000/40–50,000 dong
- Rice, vegetables, meat dish (*Cơm ...*): 30–70,000 dong
- Beer (0.33L can): 10–13,000 dong
- Soft/energy drinks: 10–13,000 dong
- Vietnamese coffee (*Cà Phê*): 15–20,000 dong
- Hostels: 100–250,000 dong (e.g. Dong Hoi vs. Hanoi)

## Supermarkets

Shopping in supermarkets is much less common in Vietnam than in Europe and North America, or even in China or Thailand. Most grocery shopping for local still happens in traditional street markets.

Nevertheless, there exist supermarkets and convenience stores in most places, and they are constantly becoming more. Foreign companies are pushing into the market, like the Thai supermarket chain Big C, which also sells clothing items and household goods. Other supermarket chains are OK!, WinMart, Circle K, Family Mart, and Bách Hóa XANH — the latter, mostly available in the south and probably the most inexpensive one, popular for its evening fruit, meat and fish specials —, besides many smaller and privately run convenience stores.

Traditional street and covered markets are still thriving though, especially for produces — much as they do in Thailand for example. Supermarkets are generally more expensive when it comes to produces, but can be cheaper for packaged products and beverages.

## Costs

Vietnam is cheap by Western standards. A month's stay can be as cheap as €300–350 using basic rooms (100–140,000 dong), local food (100–150,000 dong) and public transportation (50,000 dong).

## Eat

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See also: [Vietnamese cuisine](#)

Food is at the very core of Vietnamese culture: every significant holiday on the Vietnamese cultural calendar, all the important milestones in a Vietnamese person's life, and indeed, most of the important day-to-day social events and interactions - food plays a central role in each. Special dishes are prepared and served with great care for every birth, marriage and death, and the anniversaries of ancestors' deaths. More business deals are struck over dinner tables than over boardroom tables, and when friends get together, they eat together. Preparing food and eating together remains the focus of family life.

Yelp and Tripadvisor are not widely used by locals in Vietnam, and reviews on those directories are usually posted by tourists. **Foody** ([https://www.foody.vn/\\_\\_get/common/changelanguage?code=en](https://www.foody.vn/__get/common/changelanguage?code=en)) is the go-to restaurant rating directory for the Vietnamese, and also functions as a food delivery and restaurant reservation app. While the interface is available in English, the downside is that almost all reviews are in Vietnamese.

Vietnamese cuisine varies from region to region, with many regions having their own specialties. Generally, **northern Vietnamese** cuisine is known for being subtle, **central Vietnamese** cuisine is known for being spicy, while **southern Vietnamese** cuisine is known for being sweet. There is also distinctive Vietnamese-Chinese cuisine to be found in Ho Chi Minh City's Chinatown.

At the same time, the Vietnamese are surprisingly modest about their cuisine. (An old proverb/joke says that "a fortunate man has a French house, a Japanese wife, and a Chinese chef.") High-end restaurants tend to serve "Asian-fusion" cuisine, with elements of Thai, Japanese, Chinese, and occasionally French mixed in. The most authentic Vietnamese food is found at street side "restaurants" (A collection of plastic outdoor furniture placed on the footpath), with most walk-in restaurants being mainly for tourists. Distinct regional styles exist: northern, central, and southern, each with unique dishes. Central style is perhaps the most celebrated, with dishes such as mi quang (wheat noodles with herbs, pork, and shrimp), banh canh cua (crab soup with thick rice noodles) and bun bo Hue (beef soup with herbs and noodles).

Many Vietnamese dishes are flavoured with **fish sauce** (*nước mắm*), which smells and tastes like anchovies (quite salty and fishy) straight from the bottle, but blends into food very well. (Try taking home a bottle of fish sauce, and using it instead of salt in almost any savoury dish: you may be pleasantly surprised with the results.) Fish sauce is also mixed with lime juice, sugar, water, and spices to form a tasty dip/condiment called *nước chấm*, served on the table with most meals. Vegetables, herbs and spices, notably **Vietnamese coriander** or cilantro (*rau mùi* or *rau ngò*), mint (*rau răm*) and basil (*rau húng*), accompany almost every dish and help make Vietnamese food much lighter and more aromatic than the cuisine of its neighboring countries, especially China.

Vietnam's national dish is **phở** (pronounced like the *fu-* in *funny*, but with tone), a broth soup with beef, pork, chicken or seafood and rice noodles (a form of rice linguine or fettuccine). In the south, phở is normally served with plates of fresh herbs (usually including Asian basil), cut limes, hot chilies and scalded bean sprouts which you can add according to your taste, along with chili paste, chili sauce, and



Gỏi cuốn fresh spring rolls, cao lầu noodles (a specialty of Hoi An), nước mắm dipping sauce and local beer



Bánh mì: French baguette stuffed with pâté, herbs and pickles

sweet soybean sauce, while in the north, it is usually served only with fried *quẩy* fritters and chilli sauce on the side. *Phở bò*, the classic form of phở, is made with beef broth that is often simmered for many hours and may include one or more types of beef (skirt, flank, tripe, etc.). *Phở gà* is the same idea, but with chicken broth and chicken meat, so is *Phở thịt lợn* with pork, *Phở tôm* with shrimp, *Phở cá* with fish, and *Phở chay* with tofu and vegetable stock. Phở is the original Vietnamese fast food, which locals grab for a quick meal. Most phở places specialize in phở and can serve you a bowl as fast as you could get a Big Mac. It's available at any time of the day, but locals eat most often *Phở chay* for breakfast. Famous phở restaurants can be found in Hanoi. The phở served at roadside stalls or informal restaurants tend to be cheaper and taste better than those served in fancier restaurants.

Street side eateries in Vietnam typically advertise *phở* and *cơm*. Though *cơm* literally means rice, the sign means the restaurant serves a plate of rice accompanied with fish or meat and vegetables. *Cơm* is used to indicate eating in general, even when rice is not served (i.e., *An cơm chưa?* - Have you eaten yet). Though they may look sketchy, street side eateries are generally safe so long as you eat at places popular among the locals and avoid undercooked food. Many street food stalls do not display their prices; those outside tourist areas usually charge foreigners honestly, but ask for the price before you order to be sure.

In rural and regional areas it is usually safest to eat the locally grown types of food as these are usually bought each day from the market. It is not uncommon that after you have ordered your meal a young child of the family will be seen running out the back towards the nearest market to purchase the items.

Most restaurants/cafes in Vietnam will have a bewildering variety of food available. It is very common for menus to be up to 10-15 pages. These will include all types of Vietnamese food, plus some token Western food, possibly some Chinese-style ribs and maybe a pad Thai as well. It is generally best to stick with the specialty of the area as this food will be the freshest and also the best-prepared. As in other South East Asian countries, the menu is often more an indication of what a restaurant *can* cook and not all items may be available at any given time.

In restaurants it is common practice for the wait staff to place a plastic packet (stamped with the restaurant's name) containing a moist towelette on your table. They are not free. They cost 2,000–4,000 dong. If you open it, you will be charged for it. Also, peanuts or other nuts will be offered to you while you are browsing the menu. Those are not free, either. If you eat any, you will be charged.

**Coffee, baguettes, and pastries** were originally introduced by the French colonisers, but all three have been localised and remain popular. More on *cà phê* below, but coffee shops that also serve light fare can be found in almost every village and on many street corners in the bigger cities. *Bánh mì* are freshly baked baguettes, most commonly filled with grilled meats or liver or pork pâté plus fresh herbs and vegetables as *bánh mì thịt*, but there are countless variations filled with egg, beef, meatballs, pork skin etc. They are delicious and should be enjoyed at least once during a visit, and can easily be found from the *bánh mì* carts that are ubiquitous on the streets of Vietnam.

Vietnamese waters are in danger of collapse from over-fishing. Nevertheless, for the moment if you like **seafood**, you may find bliss in Vietnam. The ultimate seafood experience may be travelling to a seaside village or beach resort area in the south to try the local seafood restaurants that serve shrimp, crab, and locally-caught fish. Follow the locals to a good restaurant. The food will still be swimming when you order it, it will be well-prepared, very affordable by Western standards, and served in friendly surroundings often with spectacular views.

Most restaurants' hours are 10:00-22:00, although places serving breakfast-type items like noodles will open and close earlier. In 24-hour restaurants, there will be two prices. Prices are normal from 06:00 to 22:00, then doubled from 22:00 to 06:00. For example, rice usually costs 10,000 dong, but if you order after 22:00, the price will be 20,000 dong. This policy is government-mandated, to discourage people from eating late. Some dishes are not served after 22:00.

Cuisines other than Vietnamese, as well as fast foods, are increasingly available in the larger cities in the South and Central regions, less so in the North. Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Thai, Lao and other Asian restaurants are commonplace and Italian, French, German, Mexican, Russian, Ukrainian and Armenian restaurants can be found in most large cities in the South and Centre, as well as British, Irish and Australian food in bars and pubs. There is usually at least one Indian restaurant in most large towns and cities all over the country, many offering excellent quality food. Increasingly more affluent Vietnamese are sampling the different cuisines now available in their country so the chances of eating in a tourist ghetto are diminishing.

## Dietary restrictions

**Vegetarian** food is quite easy to find anywhere in Vietnam due in large part to the Mahayana Buddhist influence, and all Vietnamese Buddhist monks are required to be vegetarian. Vegetarian eateries range from upscale restaurants to cheap and basic street stalls. Any Vietnamese dish with meat can be made vegetarian with the addition of fake meats. Besides the Buddhist influence of two vegetarian days a month, Cao Dai people eat vegetarian for 16 days. Look for any signs with the word **chay** as a suffix, like *cơm chay* for vegetarian rice dishes, *phở chay* for vegetarian pho, or *bánh mì chay* for vegetarian sandwiches. The words *quán chay* and *nhà hàng chay* literally translate as "vegetarian restaurant". It is also helpful to remember the phrase "*ăn chay*", essentially meaning "I am a vegetarian". Even if you are not a vegetarian, a visit to a Vietnamese vegetarian restaurant will add a few new flavours that you won't find elsewhere. Also vegetarian food tends to be cheap which can help eke out the most hardened meat eaters budget. Be careful at regular stalls and restaurants though, as even dishes that seem vegetarian on the surface can sometimes make use of non-vegetarian seasonings such as fish sauce. As Vietnamese food traditionally does not use dairy products, vegetarian food in Vietnam is usually safe for **vegans**, but be careful to make sure it does not contain eggs.

**Halal** food is rare in Vietnam due to the small size of the Muslim community. Halal restaurants are mostly concentrated in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, many of which are operated by immigrants from South Asia, Indonesia or Malaysia. The Mekong Delta and Ho Chi Minh City are also home to Muslim Cham communities, some of whom operate food stalls serving halal versions of Vietnamese street dishes for their respective communities. **Kosher** food is nearly unknown; if you keep kosher, contact Chabad Vietnam (<https://www.jewishvietnam.com/>) well in advance of your trip for assistance.

## Drink

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Drinking in a Vietnamese bar is a great experience. One of the interesting things is that during the day, it is almost impossible to see a bar anywhere. Once the sun goes down though, dozens appear on the streets out of nowhere.



Watch out for ice in drinks. Factory-made ice is generally safe, but anything else can be suspect. Factory ice has a hollow, cylindrical shape. Avoid irregular chunks of ice as it may be unclean.

## Beer

The main brews are light lagers with a strength of 4.5–4.9%. In supermarkets a 0.33L can of beer starts at 10,000 dong. Some cheap beers in plastic bottles (0.9L) can be had for 15–18,000 dong. "Saigon" in a 0.45L glass bottle starts at 11,000 dong, but sometimes a deposit of 3,000 dong is added. A beer in a bar starts at around 20,000 dong.

The most popular beer (draught, bottle or can) among the southern Vietnamese is **Saigon Do (Red Saigon)**. For the northern Vietnamese **Bia Hanoi** (Hanoi beer) is the most popular brand, whereas central Vietnamese prefer **Bière Larue** from Da Nang or **Bia Huda** from Hue. **333**, pronounced "ba-ba-ba" is a local brand, but it's somewhat bland; for a bit more flavour, look for **Bia Saigon** in the green bottle and a bigger bottle than Bia Saigon Special. Bia Saigon is also available as little stronger export version. Locally brewed foreign brands like Tiger and Heineken are also common.

The craft beer revolution has well and truly reached Vietnam and bottled IPAs, brown beers and stouts are available in the major cities. Ho Chi Minh boasts an increasing number of brew-pubs and microbreweries. These brews are available at a fraction of the price they cost in Thailand or Singapore.


Beer in Vietnam is usually served in glasses filled with (and is thus drunk with) ice. This means that the cans or bottles of beer need not be chilled. If you are drinking with Vietnamese people, it is considered polite to top up their beer/ice before re-filling your own drink. It is also considered necessary to drink when a toast is proposed: "mot, hai, ba, do" ("one, two, three, cheers"). Saying "Trăm Phần Trăm" (100% 100) implies you will empty your glass.

## Coffee

**Vietnamese (iced) coffee** (*Cà Phê*). 15–25,000 dong. 🇻🇳 🌐 is one of the most famous drinks in Vietnam (and around the world), popular among locals and tourists alike. Vietnamese coffee beans are fried, not roasted, giving them a very distinctive taste.

Coffee is usually served black (**Cà Phê Đen (Đá)**) or with sweetened condensed milk (**Cà Phê Sữa (Đá)**) — usually over ice (**Đá**). Ask for (**Cà Phê**) **Nóng** if you want your coffee hot without ice. Some people may add extra water with the hot version (see picture) to make the coffee less strong — the ice version gets less strong automatically. Also, locals tend to drink their *Cà Phê Đen* incredibly strong with up to 4 teaspoons of sugar. If you want black coffee without sugar, say so.



*Cà Phê Sữa Nóng* (with extra water) 

However, the slow dripping coffee through the metal filter seems distinct for tourist frequented places. Normal Vietnamese don't take or have the time to prepare nor wait that long. Hence, in less touristy places you will have a hard time finding the slow-filter version, they often won't have these filters and just serve already prepared coffee, often with the condensed milk already in the glass. If you want the milk separately, say so.

Take-away coffee (*Cà Phê Mang Đi*) with ice in a plastic cup and straw along the street can already be had for 10–12,000 dong.

In Hanoi, **Cà Phê Trứng** (egg coffee) is a local speciality.

A late addition to the coffee culture of Vietnam and often served for take-away are **Cà Phê Muối** (salted coffee) and **Cà Phê Cốt Dừa** (coconut coffee), basically a *Cà Phê Sữa Đá* topped with a cool mountain of salty whipped cream or sweet fluffy coconut slush, respectively. These are especially popular with the younger generation, but also tourists enjoy them.

## Soft drinks

- **Coconut water** directly from the coconut is popular all around the country. After drinking the water, let the seller open the coconut, ask for a spoon, and enjoy the sometimes jelly-ish inner coconut meat. (If the coconut is too mature, the meat will be very hard and you are out of luck using the spoon, but the seller will know.)
- **Nước Mía**, or **sugar cane juice**, is served from distinctive metal carts with a crank-powered sugar cane stalk crushers that release the juice.
- **Sinh Tố** is another fabulous thirst quencher, a selection of sliced fresh fruit in a big glass, combined with crushed ice, sweetened condensed milk and coconut milk. You can also have it blended in a mixer. You could place any fruit-type after the word **sinh tố**, e.g., **sinh tố bơ** (avocado smoothie) or **sinh tố dừa** (pineapple smoothie). If you prefer to have orange juice, you won't use the word **sinh tố** but **nước** (literally: water) or **nước cam** if you would like to have an orange juice. Juices are usually without condensed milk or coconut milk.
- **Chè Thái** (Thai tea), **Trà Trái Cây** (fruit tea), or **Trà Sữa** (milk tea) are tea-based (*chè*, *trà*) dessert mix drinks made with various jellies, assorted tropical fruits, crushed ice, and (condensed) milk — kind of an advanced bubble tea, refreshing and colorful with a variety of textures, but it can be quite sweet if you don't watch it. Various word combinations exist to denominate this kind of drink.



A fancy Cà Phê Muối



A coconut ready for drinking

## Wine and liquor

Vietnamese "rượu đế" or rice alcohol (*rượu* means liquor or wine [not beer]) is served in tiny porcelain cups often with candied fruit or pickles. It's commonly served to male guests and visitors. Vietnamese women don't drink much alcohol, well at least in public. It's not recommended for tourists.

Dating back to French colonial times, Vietnam adopted a tradition of viticulture. Dalat is its centre, and you can get **red and white wine**. There is a better range and better quality red wines than whites as reds seem to appeal more to the Asian palate. Most restaurant wine is Australian and you will be charged Australian prices as well, making wine comparatively expensive compared to drinking beer or spirits.

Vietnamese wine has hit the mass market and is available by the glass or bottle in many restaurants. The quality ranges from the just-about-drinkable Vang Dalat Classic to the more than palatable Vang Dalat Premium. In supermarkets a bottle of Classic can be bought for around 80,000 dong whilst Premium is around 120,000. In restaurants a bottle of Classic costs 120,000–150,000 dong. Premium is less widely available in restaurants and where it is costs around 200,000 dong a bottle.

Imported wines, mainly Australian, French and Chilean are also available in supermarkets and in mid range and high end restaurants at far more expensive prices.


Rice spirits and local vodka is cheap in Vietnam by Western standards. Local vodkas cost about US\$2-4 for a 0.75L bottle. Russian champagne is also common. When at Nha Trang, look for the all-you-can-drink boat trips for around US\$10-15 for an all-day trip and party with on-board band.

## Sleep

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Lodging is not an issue in Vietnam, even if you are travelling on a tight budget. Accommodation in Vietnam ranges from 100,000-dong dorm accommodation in hostels to world-class resorts, both in large cities and in popular coastal and rural destinations. Even backpacking hostels and budget hotels are far cleaner and nicer than in neighboring countries (Cambodia, Thailand, Laos). And even cheap hotels that charge as little as 250,000 dong for a double room are often very clean and equipped with towels, clean white sheets, soap, disposable toothbrushes and so on.



Night in Hanoi, over Hoan Kiem Lake 

Service in many of the very inexpensive hotels is quite good (since the rate that a person pays per night could equal a typical Vietnamese national's weekly pay), although daily cleaning and modern amenities like television may not be provided. In hotels costing a few dollars more (300,000+ dong, more in Hanoi) you can expect an en-suite bath, telephone, AC and television. As with hotels elsewhere in the world, mini-refrigerators in Vietnamese hotels are often stocked with drinks and snacks, but these can be horribly overpriced. You are much better off buying such items on the street. Adequate plumbing can be a problem in some hotels, but the standard is constantly improving.

It is a legal requirement that all hotels register the details of foreign guests with the local police. For this reason they will always ask for your passport when you check in. The process usually only takes a few minutes, after which they will return your passport. However, because non-payment by guests is by no means unknown, some hotels retain passports until check-out. If a place looks dodgy, then ask that they register you while you wait and take your passport with you afterwards. Few people have had a problem with this as it is routine across the country. You might find it helpful to carry some photocopies of your passport (personal data page and visa) which you can hand over to the hotel.

Hotels can be noisy, particularly when local families are staying. Vietnamese is one of the world's more vocal languages, and local tourists are happy to give full vent to it from 06:00 onward with scant regard for fellow guests. There are also a number of other sounds to be aware of when staying in Vietnamese hotels. Vietnam is a country under construction and the chance of the hotel being next to or very close to a building site is high. Also rooms in many small boutique hotels, guesthouses and home-stays are built fronting a central atrium or stairwell and the activities of the reception, common area and kitchen

contribute more noises. Finally, there are the room-maids who start work soon after dawn and seem to think that you should be awake by then and consequently feel free to chat with each other at a loud volume and send and receive messages on mobile phones and walkie-talkies. If you are a light sleeper, bring a supply of earplugs.

## Learn

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If you want to meet local people, stop by a school. In Ho Chi Minh City, visit the American Language School, where you'll be welcomed enthusiastically and invited to go into a class and say hi. You'll feel like a rock star. The Vietnamese love to meet new people, and teachers welcome the opportunity for their students to meet foreigners.

An excellent novel set in modern-day Vietnam is *Dragon House* by John Shors. It's the story of two Americans who travel to Vietnam to open a centre to house and educate Vietnamese street children.

Former BBC reporter in Hanoi, Bill Hayton, has written a good introduction to most aspects of life in Vietnam, the economy, politics, social life, etc. It's called *Vietnam, Rising Dragon*, published in 2010.

Vietnam also has numerous universities for people who wish to pursue higher education. The most prestigious among them is **Vietnam National University, Hanoi** (<https://vnu.edu.vn/eng/>), originally founded by the French as *Université Indochinoise* in 1906. Other notable universities include **Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City** (<https://vnuhcm.edu.vn/lang/en>) and **Hanoi University of Science and Technology** (<https://www.hust.edu.vn/en/>)

## Work

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You can volunteer as an English teacher through many volunteer organisations. However, if you have a TEFL/TESOL qualification and a degree then it's very easy to find paid teaching work. Without qualifications it's also possible to find work, but it takes more patience to find a job, and often there are concessions to make with payment, school location and working hours (weekends). Most teaching jobs will pay US\$15-20 an hour. There are also many you-pay-to-volunteer organisations which allow you to help local communities, such as Love Volunteers (<http://www.lovevolunteers.org/programs/childcare-volunteers-vietnam-community-work-volunteers-vietnam>), I to I (<http://www.i-to-i.com/teach-english-abroad/vietnam.html>) and Global Volunteers (<http://www.globalvolunteers.org/vietnam/default.asp>). (But you must avoid some organized fraud. Ex: V4D, VTYD, RAKI, VVN...) Vietnam also has a booming **tech startup** scene, so opportunities may be available for people with expertise in computer science or other closely-related fields.

Legally, a work permit is required to work in Vietnam, although many foreigners do not bother, especially if the intention is to work for only a short period of time. Visa extensions are generally easy to obtain (your school will have to do this for you) although the immigration department will eventually insist on you obtaining a work permit before any more visas are issued. If your aim is to remain for a longer term, then it is possible to obtain a work permit although your school will need to do this for you. To apply, your employer will be required to submit the following: A contract and application letter from your school; a full, medical health check (done locally); a criminal record check (the criteria for this varies from province to province, some requiring a check from your home country, others, a check done solely

in Vietnam); a copy of your TESOL/CELTA/TEFL and degree certificates; your 'registration of stay' form; a copy of your passport/visa. Sometimes, you may be asked to pay a small fee although the better schools will generally offer to do this for you. Work permits are valid for 3 years and are renewable for a period of up to 12 years.

Once you have a work permit, it is then a relatively simple process to apply for a temporary residence permit, which will alleviate your visa worries. The validity and procedure for renewal is the same as a work permit.

## Stay safe

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**Note:** Illegal drugs are often tampered with or spiked and can be much stronger than in Europe.

Vietnam treats **drug offences** extremely severely. The *death penalty is mandatory* for those convicted of possessing more than 15 g of heroin, 30 g of morphine, 30 g of cocaine, 500 g of cannabis, 200 g of cannabis resin or 1.2 kg of opium. Unauthorised consumption can result in up to 10 years in prison, a heavy fine, or both. You can be charged for unauthorised consumption as long as traces of illicit drugs are found in your system, even if they were consumed outside the country. You can be charged for trafficking as long as drugs are found in bags that are in your possession or in your room, so be vigilant of your possessions.

### Travel advisories

Canada (<https://travel.gc.ca/destinations/vietnam>) · United Kingdom (<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/vietnam/local-laws-and-customs>)

*(Information last updated 04 Sep 2020)*

Vietnam has made a huge leap forward in terms of economic development and tourism, and many of the most feared annoyances are minor concerns. Vietnam is still a poor country, though. Tourists are considered money mules, and milking them is no crime. Nevertheless, outside of tourist hotspots, crime and scams against foreigners are rare.

## Unexploded ordnance

As a legacy of the Indochina Wars, much of Vietnam's countryside is still littered with unexploded bombs and landmines, and many locals are still killed or maimed by them. Be very careful about going off the beaten path in rural areas, and ideally do not do so unless you have a guide who knows the area well.

## Crime

Vietnam is a relatively safe place for tourists, and especially when travelling in groups. It will also depend on your nationality whether you may encounter issues — large western men are much more intimidating than smaller Japanese women, see cyclo scam.

Tourist areas are hotspots of petty crime. Violent crime towards foreigners is uncommon, but pickpockets and motorbike snatching are not uncommon in larger cities. Thieves on motorbikes snatch bags, mobile phones, cameras, and jewellery from pedestrians and other motorbike drivers. Don't wear your bag on



your shoulder when riding a motorbike. Don't place it in the motorbike basket. When walking along a road, keep your bag on your inboard shoulder. If your bag is snatched, don't resist to the point of being dragged onto the roadway.

Reports of thefts from hotel rooms, including upmarket hotels, have been heard occasionally. Do not assume that your hotel room strongbox is inviolable.

Avoid fights and arguments with locals. Westerners may be bigger than Vietnamese, but if you're dealing with 5 or more Vietnamese guys then you're in serious trouble. Yelling is highly insulting to Vietnamese and may prompt a violent response. Vietnamese in general are placid and kind. As a visitor, you should respect local laws and customs. Altercations can be avoided easily by showing courtesy and tolerating cultural differences. Be on your best behaviour when drinking with Vietnamese men.

## Corruption

The international monitoring group Transparency International has rated Vietnam as one of the most corrupt nations in Asia. Locals are convinced that the police are not to be trusted.

Motorcycle drivers may be stopped for a variety of reasons such as random checks of paperwork and licences and will fine foreigners around US\$20 for each offence (the average traffic fine for locals is around US\$5-10). Be polite but resolute, and stand your ground. Traffic officers are required to write traffic violations in their notebook and must give you a receipt for your fine which must then be paid at the station (not to the officer). For some offences (especially missing paperwork relevant to the vehicle you are riding), officers have the right to confiscate and impound your bike. If you have a phone, you could threaten to call your embassy and he may back down, although in most cases, it is often best to prevent any further escalation of the situation by paying the fine.

You generally won't encounter any problems with the police in more remote or rural areas because officers are likely to have a very poor command of the English language. The larger cities and areas that are frequented by tourists have more police who are proficient in communicating with tourists.

Immigration officers at land borders are known to demand bribes to stamp you in or out of the country. Refusing to pay the bribe will usually mean you are denied entry or not allowed to leave. The reputable bus companies will often charge a "border crossing fee" for their international routes, staff usually process you through immigration while you wait on the bus, and any bribes are included as part of that fee.

Most government offices will also require a small "gratuity" before processing paperwork. This is most commonly encountered when trying to obtain permits of residence for private accommodation, work or residence permits.

## Prostitution



The infamous "Hanoi Hilton" prison is nowadays a museum



Despite its seeming abundance, prostitution is illegal in Vietnam. The age of consent is 18. Vietnamese penal law levies penalties of up to 20 years in prison for sexually exploiting women or children, and several other countries have laws that allow them to prosecute their own citizens who travel abroad to engage in sex with children.

Under Vietnamese law, it is illegal for a foreigner to take a Vietnamese national to a hotel room. While this law is rarely enforced, you could find yourself in even deeper water if you report a crime disclosing that you shared a room with a Vietnamese national.

HIV/AIDS is prevalent in Vietnam, and many people go untreated due to the taboo nature of the disease. There is also a danger of theft when taking any unfamiliar woman back to a hotel or guest house. The tale of a man waking up to find his wallet, mobile phone or laptop missing is all too common. Stories also abound of Westerners being drugged while in a hotel room or being led to a dark, quiet place where they are relieved of their possessions by criminal gangs.

## Scams

Most scams in Vietnam involve transportation, hotel prices, or the two-menu system practised by some restaurants.

## Taxis

If you don't know what a reasonable fare is, it is generally a bad idea to agree on a price in advance. Rule of thumb to detect scammers: if the taxi doesn't have the fare charges written, or drivers name and photo on the dashboard, immediately ask the taxi to stop and get out. It is a definite scam.

As always, it is advisable to walk a hundred meters away from any tourist deposit point (bus arrival, train station etc.), as many taxi waiting here are either scammers or pay a commission to the cartel.

Many taxi drivers in Saigon and Hanoi try to overcharge newly arrived gullible travellers. When leaving the airport, the taxi driver may insist that you pay the airport toll. He might not be very forthcoming with the price, and if you give him cash, he will pay the toll and pocket the rest. The toll is 10,000 dong (July 2018) and having the correct money will avoid you getting fleeced. The toll is quoted along with the fare written on the dashboard of the taxi. You can confidently say "airport toll only 10,000 dong" and refuse to pay anything else such as parking (unless there were more toll roads in between).

Ask your hotel or hostel to arrange taxi services for you. This will ensure that you get a flat quoted rate as well as a trusted driver. Many hotels will be happy to arrange pick up and drop off from airports if you ask. Nevertheless, this can be more expensive than if you arrange it directly yourself, because the hotel will always try to cut into the deal, earning a little extra.

In several other cities of Vietnam, such as Dalat, Hoi An, Nha Trang, etc., do *not* travel by meter from the airport. The airports are as far as 30–40 km from these places and meter will cost you from 500,000–650,000 dong. However, you can either take a bus from the airport to city centre, or pre-negotiate a rate with the taxi for 200,000–300,000 dong. Pay attention to sides of taxis. Usually a rate for the airport is written on the door. Around town in these cities, metered taxis generally work fine.

If you ever get caught in a big taxi scam (such as rigged meter), you should get out of the vehicle and retrieve your belongings as if everything was all right, *then* refuse to pay the demanded price and threaten to call the police. Usually they will accept a more reasonable fare, but be prepared to face the driver's anger, so it is better to do this with a few witnesses around.

## **Taxi and cyclo drivers**

Taxi and cyclo drivers may claim that they don't have change when accepting payment for an agreed-upon fare. The best way to handle this is to either carry smaller bills or be ready to stand your ground. Generally, the driver is only trying to get an extra dollar or so by rounding the fare up, but to prevent this scam from becoming more popular it is advised to stay calm and firm about the price.

When you meet an over friendly cyclo driver who says, "never mind how much you would pay" or "you can pay whatever you like at the end of the trip". He may try to show you his book of comments from international tourists. This kind of driver has to be a scammer. If you still want to use his service you should make it clear about the agreed price and don't pay more than that. Just be clear what you are willing to pay. The cyclo drivers are just trying to make a living.

## **Hotels**

Hotel owners may tell you that the room price is 200,000 dong. However, when checking out, they may insist that the price is US\$20, charging you almost double. Another trick is to tell customers that a room is a few dollars, but following day they will say that price was for a fan room only and it's another price for an air-con room. These days, legitimate hotel owners seem to be aware of these scams and are usually willing to help by writing down how much the room is per person per day (in U.S. dollars or dong), if it has air-con or not. Staff of legitimate hotels also never ask for payment from a guest when they check in. Watch out if they insist that you should pay when you check out but refuse to write down the price on paper. Otherwise, just book online with one of the common reservations websites, which will guarantee you the right price, and leave a review if something goes wrong.

As of 2019 most of the dollar versus dong scams have ended as almost all hotels now quote in dong and accept dong. Keep your dollar stash hidden and deal only in dong. Also as of 2019 quite a few low- to mid-range hotels do require payment upfront and as long as you get an official receipt there is nothing to worry about in this.

## **Restaurants**

Some restaurants are known to have two menus, one for local people and another one for foreigners. The only way to deal with it is to learn a few Vietnamese phrases and insist that you should be shown only the Vietnamese menu. If they hesitate to show you the local menu, walk away. This scam is very unusual.

## **Hostels**

Some hostels in Vietnam will want you to leave your passport at the reception, insisting even. This is not a legitimate business practice. Never leave your passport as collateral for anything.

## **Copycats**

Besides accommodation and transport, another big scam in Vietnam involves copycat tour companies and restaurants. Anytime a company gets famous, copycats will pop out. A very famous example is the dozens of Sinh Cafes (bus company), which popped up. The real company has since changed its name to TheSinhTourist.

## Fake monks

Buddhism in Vietnam generally follows the Mahayana school, meaning that the monks are required to be vegetarian and generally do not go on alms rounds. Instead, the monks either grow their own food or buy their food using temple donations. Monks do not sell religious items (shops selling religious items are staffed by laypersons, not by monks) or ask people for donations. Instead, donations are to be placed in temple donation boxes. It is entirely up to an individual to decide whether or not they wish to donate, and how much they wish to donate, and genuine temples will never use high-pressure tactics to solicit donations. "Monks" who approach tourists for donations are imposters.

## Traffic

The first discovery for many tourists who just arrive in Vietnam is that they need to learn how to cross a road all over again. You may see a tourist standing on the road for five minutes without knowing how to cross it. Traffic in Vietnam can be a nightmare. Back home, you may never witness the moment of crash, seeing injured victims lying on the road, or hearing a BANG sound. Staying in Vietnam for more than a month, you will have fair chance of experiencing all these.

Roads are packed. Some intersections in main cities such as Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City have traffic lights patrolled by police; most are either non-functional or ignored.

Crossing roads is an art in most of Vietnam, and there are no stop signals that will actually be followed by drivers. The art of crossing the road is fortunately very simple, though scary:

1. There are some traffic lights and pedestrian crossings but they are by no means everywhere.
2. If it is night time, and you are wearing dark clothes you should cross in a bright area or shine a torch towards the traffic
3. If there is a bus, car or taxi, wait until it and its motorcycle entourage passes, as vehicles will not stop for pedestrians
4. Ensure **you, your fellow travellers and every piece of your luggage** form an almost perfect line parallel with the traffic
5. There is no 'ideal' time to start although you could pick a time with a little less traffic
6. Step a little forward, a little more, and you will see motorcycle drivers to slow down a bit, or go to another way. Make your pace and path predictable to other drivers, don't change your speed or direction suddenly, and move forward until you arrive at your destination. Be aware that motorcycle drivers will swerve to avoid you *but might swerve into your path*.



Traffic in Vietnam cities is notoriously daunting.



Sơn La province landscapes.

7. The simplest and best way to cross streets is to make yourself known and be steady. This means spread your arms out and walk at a steady pace. The locals will route around you. They are extremely good drivers and will avoid hitting you; just be sure to walk at a steady pace.
8. Cars, buses and trucks can do you far more damage than motorcycles where the odds are much or even. Wait for anything with four or more wheels to pass and then take on the motorcycles.

The simplest way, if available, is to follow a local, stand next to them on the opposite side of the traffic (if you get hit, he will get it first) and he will give you the best chance of crossing a road.

If you are injured, don't expect the local people to help, even by calling an ambulance, because it is not free. Make sure you tell the local clearly that you will pay the ambulance fee. Hospitals will also not admit you until you prove that you can pay the bill.

Highways are risky, with an average of 30 deaths a day, and some locals will not even venture on them if not in a big vehicle (car or bus). Taking a bicycle or motorbike on highways is an adventure for risk takers, but definitely not for a family with children. Having said that, Vietnamese roads are no more dangerous than elsewhere in South East Asia.

## **Nightlife**

- Petty crime in nightclubs is not unknown. Don't escalate an incident: avoid quarrelling with local people as drunks can be violent.
- Clubs are full of working girls trawling for clients. They may also be looking for wallets and mobile phones.
- Walking very late alone on the streets in the tourist areas is safe, but avoid unfamiliar women engaging you in conversation. They may try to touch you, sweet talk you, and then pick your pocket.
- Don't ask taxi drivers to recommend nightspots. Most taxi drivers earn commissions from bars and lounges to bring in foreign tourists. When you walk into one of these places, they will quote reasonable prices, but when you receive the tab, it may include extravagant charges. Do your homework beforehand, tell the taxi driver where you want to go, and insist on going to where you want to go despite their remonstrations. Most nightspots are reputable. Going to those with a mostly foreign clientele is a good practice.

## **Wildlife**

Little wildlife remains, let alone anything dangerous to humans. Venomous snakes, such as cobras, may still be common in rural areas, but virtually everything else has either become extinct or exists in such small numbers that the chances of even seeing one are remote. Tigers may exist in very small numbers in remote areas, but this is unconfirmed.

## **LGBT travellers**

Vietnam is generally a safe destination for LGBT travellers, and there are no laws against homosexuality in Vietnam. Transgender persons are allowed to change their legal gender after undergoing sex reassignment surgery. That being said, same-sex relationships are not recognised by the government, and the Vietnamese can be rather conservative, meaning that LGBT individuals can often be subject to some degree of prejudice. Fortunately, anti-LGBT violence is extremely rare.

## Politics

Insulting national heroes such as Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap is *illegal* in Vietnam, and many foreigners have been jailed for doing so.

## Stay healthy

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**Tropical diseases** such as malaria, dengue fever and Japanese encephalitis are endemic in rural Vietnam. Malaria isn't as much a concern in the bigger cities such as Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, but always remember to take liquid mosquito repellent with you. It may be very useful, especially in the countryside and crowded neighborhoods.

**Street food**, including blended ice drinks, and food in restaurants is mostly safe to be consumed due to much improved hygiene. Vietnamese are very clean people, there are bins everywhere and interiors/floors are mostly tiled. Use common sense and follow the tips under the Traveller's diarrhea article and you will be fine.

**Tap water** is not safe to drink.

**Contact lens solution** is seldomly sold by pharmacies. You will have to find a specialised lens store or an optometrist to get it.

## Healthcare

Vietnamese hospitals are generally not up to Western standards. Hospitals are often short of medicines and other supplies, and waiting times can be long, even in acute cases. Outside Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Da Nang, few doctors speak English. Private clinics in Vietnam, run by foreigners, are therefore recommended as the first port of call. These clinics have both Vietnamese and foreign doctors. In general, hospitals will only accept your case if you can demonstrate the ability to pay for their services.

There are private hospitals in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Da Nang that cater mainly to Western expatriates and provide excellent healthcare, with staff members who are able to speak English and French, though you would be paying a steep premium for their services. **Vinmec International Hospital** (<https://www.vinmec.com/en/>) is a chain of expatriate-oriented private hospitals with locations in several of Vietnam's larger cities.

Private hospitals in Hanoi recommended for travellers to Hanoi include Hanoi French Hospital, International SOS Clinic Central Building, Hanoi Family Medical Practice.

In Ho Chi Minh City, hospitals recommended for travellers include Franco-Vietnamese Hospital, City International Hospital, Columbia Asia Gia Dinh International Clinic, Columbia Asia Saigon International Clinic, HCMC Family Medical Practice Diamond Plaza, International SOS Clinic Hannam Building,

Hoan My Medical Corporation chain.

If you fall seriously ill while travelling, it is advisable to seek treatment in nearby Southeast Asian countries if possible. In serious cases, doctors may even order the patient to be flown to Singapore or Thailand for treatment. When travelling to Vietnam, it is very important to take out comprehensive travel insurance. Please read the terms and conditions of your travel insurance carefully.

In tourist destinations, you can ask for medical services at hotel reception desks or from your tour operator. In many cases, you may have to pay cash in advance to see a doctor. In larger cities, payment can usually be made by debit card. Keep receipts for insurance purposes.

The emergency number for ambulances in Vietnam is 115, but the emergency number usually does not serve in English. Public ambulances can be slow to arrive, so it is usually best to take a taxi, for example. If you call an ambulance, be prepared for a long waiting time. Paramedics do not usually speak English and ambulances are poorly equipped. In large cities, hospitals also have private ambulances, which are usually more efficient than public ambulance services.

In large cities such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, there are a number of good quality pharmacies. Most private hospitals and clinics also have a pharmacy. Pharmacies are usually well-stocked and most medicines can be bought without a prescription.

Pharmacies in Vietnam are not strictly regulated. If you buy medicines from a pharmacy other than a hospital pharmacy, it is a good idea to check the expiry date of the medicine packs you buy. The packaging, the contents of the packs and any instructions for use should be checked carefully.

## Respect

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In traditional Vietnamese culture, elders are treated with great deference and respect. While expectations are more relaxed when foreigners are involved, it's a good idea to show politeness, respect and restraint towards those who look older than you.

It's common to be stared at by locals in some regions, especially in the rural areas outside of big cities, and in the central and northern parts of the country. Southerners are usually more used to foreigners. Wherever you are, though, expect some probing questions whenever a conversation starts: How old are you? Are you married? Do you have children? While these might seem nosy in the West, they're perfectly normal, good-natured questions here that help people determine how they should address you. The best thing to do is just play along. You probably don't know much about their culture; it's only fair that locals wouldn't know much about yours.

### Naming conventions

Vietnamese people generally follow East Asian naming traditions, with a family name followed by a given name. However, unlike in other East Asian cultures, the family name is almost never used when addressing an individual, and the default form of address would be to use a title followed by the second given name. Titles are a complicated business in Vietnamese, which vary based on gender and seniority relative to you; see the [Vietnamese phrasebook](#) for a discussion on Vietnamese titles you can use when addressing others. For



An Asian woman travelling with a non-Asian man often attracts a more undesirable kind of attention. Probably due to memories of the sexual escapades of GIs during the American War, people will often assume she is an escort or prostitute, and she may be insulted or harassed, even if she has no relationship to the man. These prejudices have lessened somewhat, but they are still present. As of April 2019 these prejudices have almost completely disappeared for 'respectable looking Asian women' and the nearest they will get to a problem is that almost all locals will assume they are Vietnamese and seek to circumvent the English speaking foreigner by speaking Vietnamese to Thai/Chinese/Singaporean/Australian-never-been-to-

instance, the former prime minister of Vietnam, Nguyen Xuan Phuc, has the family name Nguyen, and the given name Xuan Phuc. However, according to Vietnamese custom, he is *never* addressed as Mr Nguyen, and people would address him as Mr Phuc in English even in the most formal situations.

Vietnam before-but-looks Asian, wives or girlfriends. The Vietnamese themselves generally do not engage in public displays of affection, even among married couples, as it is considered to be disrespectful, so it is advisable for couples to show restraint while in public.

Vietnamese people tend to be dressed modestly and conservatively, though somewhat less so at bars and nightclubs in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, where young locals can sometimes be spotted in sexy outfits. But generally, you should try to cover your shoulders and knees, as doing so will earn you a lot more respect from the locals.

**Saving face** is very important in Vietnamese culture. You should generally avoid pointing out the mistakes of others no matter how minor they might be in order to avoid causing major embarrassment.

As in many other Asian countries, you are expected to **remove your shoes** before entering people's homes.

When handing out and receiving business cards, always be sure to do it with **both hands**, as using only one hand is considered to be very disrespectful.

## Politics

Relations with China are a sensitive issue best not discussed with locals. Tensions boil over periodically over territorial disputes in the South China Sea, called the "East Sea" (*Biển Đông*) in Vietnam — using the former may offend locals by suggesting that you support China's claims. Possession of maps showing the nine-dash line is likely to elicit negative reactions from Vietnamese; this has also resulted in certain foreign movies and television series such as the 2019 animated film *Abominable* and the 2023 *Barbie* movie being banned in Vietnam.

However, China is Vietnam's largest trading partner and source of international tourists, and individual visitors from mainland China should not face any major issues so long as they avoid political discussions. This animosity towards China also generally does not extend to ethnic Chinese from other countries.

## The American War

The most surprising thing about the topic of the Vietnam War (the American or Reunification War, as it is called in Vietnam) is that most Vietnamese do not bear any animosity against visitors from the countries that participated, and in the South many Vietnamese (especially older Vietnamese involved in the conflict or with relatives in the war) appreciate or at least respect the previous American-led or French-led military efforts against the North. Two-thirds of the population were born after the war and are quite positive towards the West. Some attractions present an anti-American viewpoint on the war, whilst many are surprisingly restrained.

Be sensitive if you must discuss past conflicts. Well over 3 million Vietnamese died, and it is best to avoid any conversations that could be taken as an insult to the sacrifices made by both sides during the wars. Do not assume that all Vietnamese think alike as some Vietnamese in the South are still bitter about having lost against the North.

Souvenir shops in Vietnam sell lots of T-shirts with the red flag and portraits of "Uncle Ho." Many overseas Vietnamese, particularly in the United States, Canada and Australia, are highly critical of the government of Vietnam, so you may want to consider this before wearing communist paraphernalia in their communities back home. A less controversial purchase if you are American, Canadian or Australian would be a *nón lá* (straw hat) instead.

## Religion

Although the official census claims most Vietnamese are non-religious, you wouldn't know it to see them. Whether they attend services or not, most Vietnamese are in fact strong believers, incorporating a variety of religious traditions, beliefs and rituals into their daily lives.

As in neighboring Southeast Asian countries, the most influential and widespread religion in Vietnam is Buddhism. Buddhism in Vietnam generally follows the Mahayana school, which is widespread in China, unlike the neighboring Southeast Asian countries which follow the Theravada school. This means that monks are required to be vegetarian, and pious individuals seeking a particular blessing will often forgo meat as well. Unlike in other Southeast Asian countries, it is not customary for monks to collect foodstuffs in the streets. Instead, they will either buy their food using temple donations, or grow their own food. Monks who hang out in tourist areas requesting donations are bogus. Similar to China and neighboring countries, Swastikas are commonly seen in Buddhist temples as a religious symbol; they are positive signs representing sacredness and blessing, and have no connection to Nazism or anti-Semitism.



Miếu Nhị Phủ temple in Ho Chi Minh City

Also, and more than in neighboring countries, Vietnam has a sizable proportion of Christians (11%; 9% Catholic, 2% Protestant). Christianity is especially prominent in major cities, where at least a few churches can be found. It is common for strangers and acquaintances to ask you to come to their church, although offence will not usually be taken if you decline.

Much like the Chinese and other Southeast Asians, Vietnamese people place a strong emphasis on spirits and ancestor worship. You'll see at least one shrine in every Vietnamese home and place of business, where occupants burn incense to honor or placate certain spirits. These are often decorated with statuettes

or pictures of sacred figures: for devout Buddhists, this might be Buddha or Bodhisattva; for Roman Catholics, a crucifix or the Virgin Mary; for "non-religious" people, depictions of various traditional deities or spirits. If you see someone's photograph featured on a shrine, it's most often that of a family member who's passed away. Burning joss sticks (sticks of incense) for the spirits of departed family members is generally a token of respect.

Many temples require you to remove your shoes before you enter the temple buildings. As a general rule, you should always enter using the right gate and exit using the left gate (facing inward); the middle gate is traditionally reserved for the emperor and deities. Do not step on a raised doorway threshold when entering or exiting the temple; always step over it. Also be sure to dress conservatively when visiting temples; do not wear sleeveless shirts, and make sure your knees are covered.

Vietnamese are generally quite superstitious when it comes to death and the spirit world, and there are certain taboos you'll want to avoid. Some of these include:

- *Placing chopsticks upright in the middle of a bowl of rice*: Bowls of rice are arranged in this way next to the body of the deceased at funerals, so it reminds people of funerals. If you eat your rice with a spoon, place the spoon face down in the bowl, never face up.
- *Taking photos of an odd-numbered group*: The superstition goes that the person in the middle of a group will be singled out by evil spirits. Photos of even-numbered groups (2, 4, 6, or 8 people, and so on) are fine.
- *Sitting with your back facing a family shrine*: Considered disrespectful to the shrine, and to the spirits of the deceased.
- *Climbing onto altars to pose for photographs with the statues*: Considered very disrespectful to the deities being venerated.

## Cope

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### Electricity

Electricity is delivered at 200 V, 50 Hz in Vietnam. Most Vietnamese sockets are compatible with the 2-pin American Type A, and the 2-pin European Type C, E and F plugs. Some sockets are also compatible with the 3-pin American Type B plugs.

## Connect

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### Telephone

Land-line numbers in Hanoi and HCMC have a sequence of eight numbers, others have seven.

- Vietnam international code: +84
- Hanoi area code : (24)
- Ho Chi Minh area code : (28)

### VoIP calls

Telephone bills are 30% to 40% cheaper if dialed with 171 or 178 services.

- Domestic call : 171 (178) + 0 + Area code + Number.
- International call : 171 (178) + 00 + Country code + Area code + Number.

Since hotels and guesthouses often charge higher for telephone calls, try to find a post office or any reliable public service.

## Mobile phones

Mobile numbers in Vietnam must always be dialed with all 9 or 10 digits (including a "0" prefixing the "1nn" or "9nn" within Vietnam), no matter where they are being called from. The **1nn** or **9nn** is a mobile prefix, not an "area code", as such and the second and sometimes third digits (the *nn* part) denotes the original mobile network assigned. As is the case with most mobile numbers, they can also be called within or outside Vietnam using the international format.

There are many mobile networks with different codes:

- Mobifone (<https://www.mobifone.vn/>): 90, 93, 70, 76, 77, 78, 79
- Vietnamobile (<https://www.vietnamobile.com.vn/>): 92, 56, 58
- Viettel (<https://vietteltelecom.vn/>): 98, 97, 96, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38
- Vinaphone (<https://vinaphone.com.vn/>): 91, 94, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85

Prepaid account charges vary from 890–1,600 dong per minute. Recharge cards are available in denominations of 10,000, 20,000, 50,000, 100,000, 200,000 and 500,000 dong.

## Useful numbers

- Police 113
- Fire Brigade 114
- Hospital 115
- Time 117
- General Information 1080

## Internet

- **SIM cards** from all the main providers: Viettel, Vinaphone, Mobifone and Vietnam Mobile can be purchased on arrival in Ho Chi Minh or Hanoi. 100,000 dong buys 9 GB of data valid for 30 days, which is enough as long as you don't watch too many videos on your phone. If you intend to use your phone a lot, 30 GB data for 30 days costs around 330,000 dong. Providers offer phone packages as well, but for most tourists Facebook/Skype/Line calls are enough to keep in touch with friends and family, and your hotel can usually call taxis and bus companies, tourist informations, and any other place.
- **Wi-Fi** is now widespread in Vietnam and most hotels, restaurants and bars in the main tourist centres have free Wi-Fi. Ask for the password when you make your purchase. Sometimes the password is printed on the receipt or advertised near the counter. Otherwise, public plazas, most airports and many larger railway stations will also have Wi-Fi — wherever people or tourists frequent the place. Some Internet cafes are still available in



Phone wires in Da Nang



tourist spots and rates are fairly cheap, ranging from 2,000-10,000 dong per hour. Connection speeds are high, especially in the big cities.

- **Internet censorship** is applied to a very small number of Internet services. Most foreign news sites like the BBC and CNN, as well as social media web-sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are usually freely accessible in Vietnam, though they may be temporarily blocked during politically sensitive periods. It may be wise to use a VPN service, which seem to work with most Wi-Fis in Vietnam.

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