1. **City overview:**

Formerly known as Saigon, Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) is the largest city in Vietnam and serves as the country’s main financial hub. Sitting on the Sài Gòn River and at the foot of the Mekong Delta, HCMC is a major economic, trade, cultural and research center in Vietnam. The city is expanding rapidly, with a projected population of 13 million by 2015. The city’s main business districts are located in District 1, notably along Đồng Khởi street and Nguyễn Huệ boulevard.

Most incidents involving foreigners travelers are limited to non-violent petty crime. While the city is not typically affected by earthquakes, Ho Chi Minh City experiences tropical storms and associated flooding and landslides during the rainy season that runs from May to November.

Policy Emergency: 113 (English operators unlikely)

Fire: 114

Ambulance Emergency: 115

HCMC Police Department: +84 83838 7342 and +84 83920 7196

1. **Arrival:**

**International Airport:** HCMC’s Tân Sơn Nhất International Airport (SGN/VVTS) is one of the busiest airports in Vietnam and the main gateway to its southern provinces. Tân Sơn Nhất International Airport maintains safety records that meet standards set by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). The airport’s central location limits expansion options and authorities have announced plans to construct a new airport, Long Thanh International Airport, for international routes.

HCMC airport is the main hub of Vietnam Airlines (a member of SkyTeam) and is served by a number of reputable international carries.

Address: International Airport Tan Son Nhat, 58 Truong Son, Ward 2, Tan Binh District, HCMC

Tel: +84 83848 5383

Fax: +84 83844 5127

Operator: Airports Corporation of Vietnam

**Tân Sơn Nhất Airport by bus:**

A cheap bus service (No.152) links the airport to the main station. Note that the service is likely to be overcrowded and vehicles lack air-conditioning. Pickpocketing is a problem.

**Tân Sơn Nhất Airport by taxi:**

Taxis are abundant outside of the airport terminal but should be used with caution as scams are common. Travelers are advised to use Vinasun Taxi or Mai Linh Taxi, the latter operates a counter inside the terminal, as these are less likely to use tampered meters.

**Visas:**

Visas are required for all travelers, with the exception of citizens of ASEAN member states, Japan, South Korea, Chile, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland. Visas be applied for electrically and issued upon arrival. Ensure that you have USD for payment of visa fee upon arrival as overcharging is common for alternative currencies. Upon arrival, stand close to the visa approval desk and ensure that your form is not continuously being shuffled to the bottom of the pile as visa requests are typically processed at random.

1. Getting Around:

Driving

* Road Conditions: Roads in HCMC are generally under-developed and paved-surface infrastructure is practically non-existent in rural areas.
* Uniformed Road Traffic Flow: Left-hand traffic (LHT).
* Speed Limits (General): 110kph (68mph) on highways and 50kph (31mph) in urban areas.
* Foreign Driver’s Licenses: A Vietnamese driver’s license is required and can be obtained from HCMC Department of Public Works and Transportation (Tel: +84 83829 0451 or 0452).
* Note: Many foreign firms advised against self-drive due to high risk of accidents.

Pedestrians:

Ho Chi Minh City’s chaotic traffic conditions, characterized by the prevalence of motorcycles, rampant flouting of traffic rules, a lack of open sidewalks and limited traffic controls pose an inherent risk for pedestrians. Police struggle to control the growing number of vehicles, with only 800 traffic enforcement officers on duty in a city of nearly 10 million inhabitants. HCMC’s road network can be confusing to unfamiliar travelers. Consult with your host to determine the closest universally recognizable landmark to your residence and make sure you know the route to and from this marker fairly well.

Public Transport:

Public Transportation in Vietnam generally does not meet western safety and maintenance standards. The use of taxis from reputable operators or the rental of a vehicle with a driver are generally the recommended modes of transport. Travelers are strongly advised against using “motorbike taxis”, especially after dark.

Taxis:

Taxis are readily available and generally safe, although the absence of regulations has led to rampant meter tampering. Travelers should only use vehicles operated by Vinasun Taxi (+84 838 272727) or Mai Linh Taxi (+84 838 232323). If using taxis by other operators, consider negotiating a fare. If the meter appears to be running too fast, immediately ask the driver to stop and leave the vehicle.

Buses:

Safety standards on long-distance buses have improved considerably over the past decade and several modern services link Ho Chi Minh City to other major cities.

Boats/Ferries:

A number of ferries operate in and around Ho Chi Minh City. Most of these are in poor repair and prone to overloading.

Trains:

A reasonably safe train network links HCMC to most northern Vietnamese urban centers.

Vehicle Rental:

Rental cars available from most major international car rental companies such as Luxor, Avis and Hertz.

Safe – Drive:

Ho Chi Minh City’s road system is undeveloped and traffic conditions are chaotic. A large number of motorcycles and mopeds, whose drivers rarely abide to road rules, further exacerbate driving conditions. Accidents are frequent and often result in injury, especially for individuals on motorcycles or mopeds.

**Safety:**

While violent crime targeting the expatriate community or foreign travelers remains rare, Ho Chi Minh has experienced a well – publicized surge in violent crime over the past year. Pickpocketing, bad snatching and petty theft are widespread and often target foreigners for their perceived wealth and vulnerability. The city has no designed no – go areas.

Petty Theft: Petty crime is relatively common across Ho Chi Minh City, notably in crowded markets frequented by foreigners. Higher crime rates have been reported after dark in the following areas: Binh Chanh district market, district 4 area, Vo Van Kiet highway, especially around the bridge Rach Cay, Nguyen Van Linh, Binh Dien, Ong Lon (Binh Chan district, close to the Phu My Hung) as well as along the Ben Van Don and Vo Van Kiet streets. Ensure wallets and purses are well hidden and secure. Consider using money belt and do not carry bags on one shoulders.

Bag-snatching, particularly by criminals on motorcycles, is a problem and may result in injury if the victim becomes entangled in their bags. Women are the preferred target. Cyclos (three-wheeled bicycle taxi) are particular targets for theft, as their construction (which means that passengers are semi-reclined) makes it hard for visitors to see and to hold on to their valuables. It is advisable to use taxis where possible, especially after dark.

Violent crime: violent crime remains relatively rare and foreign nationals are unlikely to be targeted. Nonetheless, violent altercations and robberies are not uncommon in popular entertainment districts, notably in the Pham Ngu Lao, Dong Khoi, Dong Du and Hai Ba Trung areas. In addition, gangs involved in robberies, drug trafficking and prostitution are known to operate in the Tan Binh district’s Gia Dinh park and Hoang Van Thu park areas; Binh Tan district’s Binh Hung Hoa ward and Van Thanh market areas; as well as 23rd September Park (District 1), Hoa Binh park, Le Thi Rieng park (District 10), Phu Lam park (District 6) and pose an inherent threat to travelers.

Organized crime: While several foreign and local organized crime syndicates operate in HCMC, their operations and activities are unlikely to affect foreign travelers.

Kidnap: Kidnappings are virtually unheard of in HCMC and foreigners are unlikely to be targeted.

Privacy Concern: Authorities are known to monitor hotel rooms, telephone communications and the movements and activities of executive travelers may be subject to surveillance. All possessions kept in hotel rooms, apartments or work place may be searched. Exercise caution when discussing sensitive information.

Police: Ho Chi Minh City’s police force is generally poorly equipped and under trained. Authorities lack credible emergency response capabilities. Despite improvements, corruption remains a problem among rank-and-file police officers. Requests for incentives or compensations to speed up investigations are common.

Natural Hazards: Ho Chi Minh City experiences tropical storms during the rainy season that runs from May to November. Landslides have been known to accompany typhoons and tropical storms as the heavy rain saturates muddy hillsides. In a recent study, local officials registered more than 100 flood-prone areas, including in the Go Vap, Thu Duc, Binh Chanh, 7 and 12 districts.

Civil Unrest, Demonstrations, Protests: Foreigners should avoid lingering near protests and should refrain from discussing local politics in public spaces, as expatriates and travelers have been arrested for criticizing the communist regime.

Terrorism: Vietnam has a Low Risk terrorism rating. The threat from domestic terrorist attacks is low and there is little reason to believe that the state will be targeted by international terrorist organizations.

Women: While female travelers are rarely victims of sexual harassment, they are regularly targeted by criminals due to their perceived vulnerability. Avoid travelling alone, especially after dark.

**Health:**

Medical facilities in Ho Chi Minh City are improving but remain limited, with only a handful of private clinics meeting western standards. While medical facilities are adequate to treat minor injuries, evacuations may be necessary for more complex procedures. Consider purchasing comprehensive travel health insurance with an evacuation contingency. Ensure that you have accessible funds to cover the cost of medical treatment.

Emergency response times are slow and often ambulances do not have sophisticated medical equipment or trained responders.

Local Hospitals/Clinics:

* International SOS Vietnam – 167 Nam Ky Khoi Nghia St, District 3, HCMC; Tel: +84 83829 - 8424 (24 hour)
* HCMC Family Practice- 4 Le Duan Street, District 1, HCMC; Tel: +84 83822 – 7848
* FV Hospital – Nguyen Luong Bang Street, District 7, HCMC; Tel: +84 85411- 3333 (Appointment)

Calendar:

February (varies) – Vietnamese New Year orTet

30 April – Liberation Day

1 May – Labor Day

2 September – National Day

Tips:

* Make a list of items you want to take with you. This way you won’t forget any important stuff and rule out unnecessary stuff which makes your luggage too heavy.
* Don’t postpone an interesting travel plan so long that you never do it. They will matter more when you grow old and look back at your life than having the latest smartphone or redecorating your house every year.
* Walk as if you had a purpose, even you are not sure where you’re going. Hesitant body language attracts the attention of criminals and you are more likely to become a victim.
* Don’t announce on social networks that you are travelling or your house can be broken into while you’re away.
* Don’t ask at the hotel about restaurant recommendations. The staff is often paid to recommend certain locations. It is better to ask a local where he/she would take the lunch.
* If locals seem unfriendly, try to be the one who initiates contact by saying hello in the local language and smiling. Many people can be more helpful than you think.
* Don’t put all your eggs in one basket don’t keep all your money in one place. Keep your money in various places and have at least two bank cards, also kept in separate places.
* When travelling to a remote place, make a research on the Internet on local scams first. When you have no idea about them, you can easily become the victim of crooks.
* Don’t over plan your travel in advance. It is perfectly fine to draw a few landmarks on the map, but leave space for the unpredictable, too.
* If you are taking medicines, pack some extra pills in case of delay. Keep them in your carry – on bag in case your luggage gets lost.
* Avoid displaying large amounts of money when paying for something.
* Never keep your wallet in the back pocket. This is a valuable piece of advice, even if you rae at home and not in a holiday.
* Cope with jet lag by following a few simple tips; try to get used to the new time zone before leaving, avoid beverages which dehydrate your body during flights (Alcohol, coffee, tea), eat light in the first few days and remember to stretch and so some simple exercises during long flights.
* Don’t trust sellers who pressure you and don’t allow you enough time to think about the purchase.
* Find out about the tipping etiquette of the place you are travelling to. You can save money by not over tipping, and save face by making sure you leave enough!
* Don’t rely just on technology for going around. Having a real map can get you out of trouble when your phone has a low battery or the application you are using crashes.
* Don’t give money to beggars. If you want to do something good, donate to a local charity.
* Dress your kids in bright colors so you don’t lose them in crowded places.
* Avoid foods which cause bloating before flying, such as fast-food, alcohol and soda.
* Don’t pack things you know you can buy at your destination.