

Vietnamese in US struggle as inflation hits 40-year high

By **Dang Khoa** March 4, 2022 | 08:17 am GMT+7

Vietnamese-Americans are buying groceries at cheaper stores and switching to lower-priced phone plans among others as they try to adapt to the spiraling inflation in their country.

Christine Nguyen, who lives in Virginia, has abandoned her usual practice of having lunch at nearby eateries with colleagues and instead carries it from home.

The change was forced on the 33-year-old graphic designer since inflation has pushed up the prices of essential goods such as food, transport and utilities.

"Times are tough right now," she says.

A sandwich and a small drink that used to cost around \$7 are now over \$9.

"I've been carpooling with my husband on his way to work to save money on gas".

She has also been reducing unnecessary purchases and eating out. From once a week she and her husband have now cut it to once a month.

Many Vietnamese have also been forced to pick up side jobs.

The U.S. Labor Department said last month inflation was higher than expected at 7.5 percent, the highest rate in 40 years.

It said food, electricity and shelter were the largest contributors to the increase, which has been caused by soaring demand and a lack of supply due to the impact of Covid-19 on global trade.





Shoppers inside a food store in Virginia in February 2022. Photo courtesy of Christine

"Grocery prices are sky-high, and I cannot buy as many things as I used to," Trang Nguyen, a student at George Washington University, says while browsing food shelves at a grocery store in Washington, D.C.

"Previously with \$100 I could buy chicken, beef, milk, vegetables, and fruits for more than a week. Now I have to spend up to \$150".

She says she has to reduce meat consumption "because its prices have been soaring for months".

Since the pandemic began in early 2020 beef, pork and chicken prices have risen by 26, 19, and 15 percent, according to EconoFact, a nonpartisan economic publication.

Inflation is inflicting financial pain on millions of U.S. households, with almost half reporting some form of hardship due to the higher prices, according to a survey by Gallup, an American analytics and advisory company, in December 2021.

Advertising

It found 45 percent saying they experienced severe or moderate hardship.

Trang says with a sigh: "My rent went up last year, so I had to find a cheaper place. My current landlord told me last week she will hike the rent starting this summer".

Higher grocery prices are forcing many to alter their shopping habits and look for the best deals and so-called hard discounters.



Nguyen Thi Hai Van, 43, who works in a nail salon in Orange County, California, says her family has felt the pinch of higher food costs.

To allow her to continue buying other essential items, beef has gone off the shopping list. She also buys less fresh fruit and milk is reserved for her children.

"I have to substitute meat for less expensive proteins like eggs, nuts and beans," she says.

She also explores various supermarkets, corner stores and open-air markets to find the cheapest deals, something she was not in the habit of doing. She has also started shopping more at dollar stores, which sell a wide range of goods typically at one dollar or less.

According to *NBC News*, many American shoppers even in the higher income brackets are starting to abandon their regular grocery stores in favor of dollar stores.

Christine says she has been "walking away" from name brands and switched to cheaper alternatives.

"Now I favor going to discount stores, and avoid buying fresh fruits and vegetables".

Nhat Anh, an accountant working for a shipping company in Irvine, California, says she was "shocked" to see gasoline at nearly \$5 per gallon.

"It used to cost me just \$45 to fill up my tank. Now I have to spend around \$60. If the gas price keeps climbing, I might have to switch to electric cars eventually".



An aircraft flies over a sign displaying current gas prices as it approaches to land in San Diego, California, U.S., February 28, 2022. Photo by Reuters



The 31-year-old too has reduced eating out and some of her other leisure activities to compensate for the higher spending on gas.

She has canceled her gym membership (\$49/month) and subscription to Spotify (\$9.99) and Disney Plus (\$7.99).

"Now I only have Netflix to entertain myself at home".

Van is considering switching to a cheaper phone service provider.

"I'm not going to buy anything luxurious. Everything is more expensive".

While some families can still manage with some rejigging of household budgets, others have to pick up side jobs to augment their income.

Vu Minh Quan, who earns around \$18 an hour as a cashier at a supermarket in Washington D.C., says he struggles to make ends meet after his house rent rose from \$1,200 a month to \$1,500.

"After paying bills and rent, it is lucky that my family of four has enough money to buy food. The amount is becoming even less now as prices are going up".

He is also struggling with spiraling debts after having "no other choice" but to rely on credit cards to stay afloat.

To pay back the card debts and keep putting food on the table, the family's sole breadwinner has been doing a second job as a cleaner at a Vietnamese restaurant in Virginia.

With their savings disappearing rapidly, some people have postponed plans to travel or buy a new house or car.

Christine has given up a plan to save enough for a down payment on a townhouse in Virginia.

"Saving money is now a challenge amid the inflation".

She adds that she has canceled a planned trip to Vietnam this summer after her savings ran out.



Share on Facebook



Share on Twitter

