

# ALLURING

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## ASIA



DESTINATION

# VIETNAM

TRAVELER'S GUIDE



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*Thank you.*

## POPULATION

Vietnam has a population of slightly over 88 million who primarily reside along the coast and in the lowland provinces of the Red and Mekong river deltas.

## TIME

Vietnam is GMT plus 7

## VISAS

United States Citizens require a Visa. Your passport must be valid for at least 6 months from the date of arrival into Vietnam.

## INSURANCE

Because the standard of emergency treatment in Vietnam is not as high as in the West, it is advisable in addition to normal medical insurance, to take out a policy which covers evacuation.

## HISTORY

The origins of the Vietnamese people are shrouded in legend. Recent archaeological finds indicate that the earliest human habitation of northern Vietnam goes back about 500,000 years. Mesolithic and Neolithic cultures existed in northern Vietnam 10,000 years ago; these groups may have engaged in primitive agriculture as early as 7000 BC. The sophisticated Bronze Age Dong Son culture emerged around the 13th century BC.

From the 1st to the 6th centuries AD, the south of what is now Vietnam was part of the Indianised kingdom of Funan, which produced notably refined art and architecture. The Funanese constructed an elaborate system of canals which were used for both transportation and the irrigation of wet rice agriculture. One of the most extraordinary artifacts found at Oc-Eo was a gold Roman medallion dated 152 AD and bearing the likeness of Antoninus Pius.

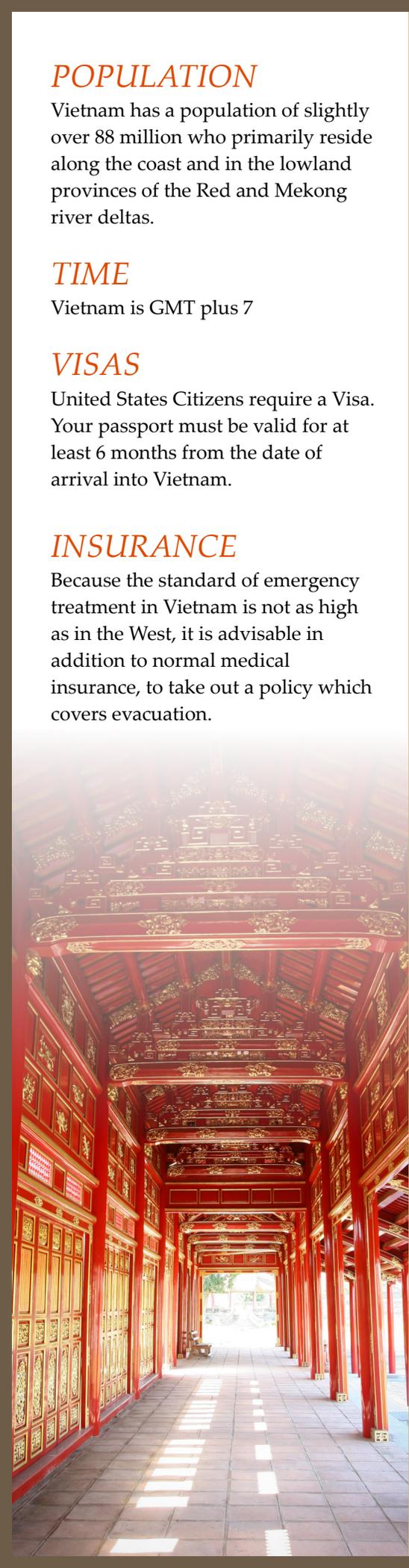
The Hindu kingdom of Champa appeared around present-day Danang in the late 2nd century. Like Funan, it became Indianised (eg. the Chams adopted Hinduism, employed Sanskrit as a sacred language and borrowed a great deal from Indian art) by lively commercial relations with India and through the immigration of Indian literati and priests.

### *CHINESE RULE (circa 200 BC to 938 AD)*

When the Chinese conquered the Red River Delta in the 2nd century BC, they found a feudally organized society based on hunting, fishing and slash-and-burn agriculture; these proto-Vietnamese also carried on trade with other peoples in the area. Over the next few centuries, significant numbers of Chinese settlers, officials and scholars moved to the Red River Delta, taking over large tracts of land. The Chinese tried to impose a centralized state system on the Vietnamese and to forcibly Sinicise their culture, but local rulers made use of the benefits of Chinese civilization to tenaciously resist these efforts.

The most famous act of resistance against the Chinese during this period was the Rebellion of the Trung Sisters (Hai Ba Trung). In 40 AD, the Chinese executed a high-ranking feudal lord. His widow and her sister, the Trung Sisters, rallied tribal chieftains, raised an army and led a revolt that compelled the Chinese governor to flee. The sisters then had themselves proclaimed queens of the newly independent Vietnamese entity. In 43 AD, however, the Chinese counterattacked and defeated the Vietnamese; rather than surrender, the Trung Sisters threw themselves into the Hat Giang River.

The early Vietnamese learned a great deal from the Chinese, including the use of the metal plough and domesticated beasts of burden and the construction of dikes and irrigation works. These innovations made possible the establishment of a culture based on rice growing, which remains the basis of the Vietnamese way of life to this day. As food



became more plentiful, the population grew, forcing the Vietnamese to seek new lands on which to grow rice.

During this era, Vietnam was a key port of call on the sea route between China and India. The Vietnamese were introduced to Confucianism and Taoism by Chinese scholars who came to Vietnam as administrators and refugees. Indians sailing eastward brought Theravada (Hinayana) Buddhism to the Red River Delta while, simultaneously, Chinese travelers introduced Mahayana Buddhism. Buddhist monks carried with them the scientific and medical knowledge of the civilizations of India and China; as a result, Vietnamese Buddhists soon counted among their own great doctors, botanists and scholars.

### *INDEPENDENCE FROM CHINA (10th Century)*

In the aftermath of the collapse of the Tang Dynasty in China in the early 10th century, the Vietnamese revolted against Chinese rule. In 938 AD. Ngo Quyen vanquished the Chinese armies at a battle on the Bach Dang River, ending 1000 years of Chinese rule.

### *LY DYNASTY (1010-1225)*

From the 11th to the 13th centuries, the independence of the Vietnamese Kingdom (Dai Viet) was consolidated under the emperors of the Ly Dynasty, founded by Ly Thai To. They reorganized the administrative system, founded the nation's first university (the Temple of Literature in Hanoi), promoted agriculture and built the first embankments for flood control along the Red River. Confucian

scholars fell out of official favor because of their close cultural links to China; at the same time, the early Ly monarchs, whose dynasty had come to power with Buddhist support, promoted Buddhism. The Confucian philosophy of government and society, emphasizing educational attainment, ritual performance and government authority, reasserted itself with the graduation of the first class from the Temple of Literature in 1075.

Following years of study which emphasized classical education, these scholars went into government service becoming what the West came to call mandarins. During the Ly Dynasty, the Chinese, Khmers and Chams repeatedly attacked Vietnam but were repelled, most notably under the renowned strategist and tactician Ly Thuong Kiet (1030-1105), a military mandarin of royal blood who is still revered as a national hero.

### *TRAN DYNASTY (1225-1400)*

After years of civil strife, the Tran Dynasty overthrew the Ly Dynasty. The Tran increased the land under cultivation to feed the growing population and improved the dikes on the Red River.

After the dreaded Mongol warrior Kublai Khan completed his conquest of China in the mid-13th century, he demanded the right to cross Vietnamese territory on his way to attack Champa. The Vietnamese refused this demand but the Mongols - 500,000 of them - came anyway. The outnumbered Vietnamese under Tran Hung Dao attacked the invaders and forced them back to China, but the Mongols returned, this time with 300,000 men. Tran Hung Dao then lured them deep into Vietnamese territory; at high tide he attacked the Mongol fleet as it sailed on the Bach Dang River, ordering a tactical retreat of his forces to lure the Mongols into staying and fighting. The battle continued for many hours until low tide, when a sudden Vietnamese counteroffensive forced the Mongol boats back, impaling them on steel-tipped bamboo stakes set in the river bed the night before. The entire fleet was captured or sunk.

When the Tran Dynasty was overthrown in 1400 by Ho Qui Ly, both the Tran loyalists and the Chams (who had sacked Hanoi in 1371) encouraged Chinese intervention. The Chinese readily complied with the request and took control of Vietnam in 1407, imposing



## *The Dynasties of Independent Vietnam:*

Ngo Dynasty	939-965
Dinh Dynasty	968-980
Early Le Dynasty	980-1009
Ly Dynasty	1010-1225
Tran Dynasty	1225-1400
Ho Dynasty	1400-1407
Post-Tran Dynasty	1407-1413
Chinese Rule	1414-1427
Later Le Dynasty	1428-1524
Mac Dynasty	1527-1592
Trinh Lords of the North	1539-1787
Nguyen Lords of the South	1558-1778
Tay Son Dynasty	1788-1802
Nguyen Dynasty	1802-1945



a regime characterized by heavy taxation and slave labor; Chinese culture and ways of doing things were forced on the population.

### *LATER LE DYNASTY (1428-1524)*

Le Loi was born into a large and prosperous family in the village of Lam Son in Thanh Hoa Province and earned a reputation for using his wealth to aid the poor. The ruling Chinese invited him to join the mandarin but he refused. In 1418, Le Loi began to organize what came to be known as the Lam Son Uprising, traveling around the countryside to rally the people against the Chinese. After his victory in 1428, Le Loi declared himself Emperor Ly Thai To, thus beginning the later Le Dynasty. To this day, Le Loi is revered as one of Vietnam's greatest national heroes.

The Latter Le Dynasty ruled until 1524 and, nominally, up to 1788. Le Loi and his successors instituted a vast program of agrarian reform and land redistribution. They also launched a campaign to take over Cham lands to the south. In the 15th century Laos was forced to recognize Vietnamese suzerainty.

Under the Le Dynasty, an attempt was made to break free of the cultural and intellectual domination of Chinese civilization. In the realms of law, religion and literature, indigenous traditions were brought to the fore. The Vietnamese language gained favor among scholars - who had previously disdained it, preferring Chinese - and a number of outstanding works of literature were produced. legal reforms gave women almost-equal rights in the domestic sphere, but two groups were excluded from full civil rights; slaves (many of them prisoners of war and, oddly, actors).

### *TRINH & NGUYEN LORDS*

Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, Vietnam was divided between the Trinh Lords, who ruled in the north under the titular kingship of the Later Le monarchs, and the Nguyen Lords, who controlled the south and also nominally recognized the Later Le Dynasty. The Trinh Lords repeatedly failed in attempts to take over areas under Nguyen control, in part because the Portuguese weaponry used by the Nguyen was far superior to the Dutch armaments supplied to the Trinh.

Buddhism enjoyed the patronage and support of both the Trinh and the Nguyen, and pagodas were built all over the country. But by this time Vietnamese Buddhism was no longer doctrinally pure, having become intermingled with animism, ancestor-worship and popularized Taoism.

## EARLY CONTACT WITH THE WEST

According to Chinese records, the first Vietnamese contact with Europeans took place in 166 AD when travelers from the Rome of Marcus Aurelius arrived in the Red River Delta.

The first Portuguese sailors landed in Danang in 1516; they were followed by Dominican missionaries 11 years later. During the next few decades the Portuguese began to trade with Vietnam, setting up a commercial colony alongside those of the Japanese and Chinese at Faifo (present-day Hoi An near Danang).

Franciscan missionaries from the Philippines settled in central Vietnam in 1580, followed in 1615 by the Jesuits, who had just been expelled from Japan. In 1637, the Dutch were authorized to set up trading posts in the north, and one of the Le Kings even took a Dutch woman as one of his six wives.

One of the most illustrious of the early missionaries was the brilliant French Jesuit Alexandre de Rhodes (1591-166). He is most recognized for his work in devising *quoc ngu*, the Latin-based phonetic alphabet in which Vietnamese is written to this day. Over the course of his long career, de Rhodes flitted back and forth between Hanoi, Macau, Rome and Paris, seeking support and funding for his missionary activities and battling both Portuguese colonial opposition and the intractable Vatican bureaucracy. In 1645, he was sentenced to death for illegally entering Vietnam to proselytize but was expelled instead' two of the priests with him were beheaded.

By the late 17th century most of the European merchants were gone; trade with Vietnam had not proved particularly profitable. But the missionaries remained, and the Catholic Church eventually had a greater impact on Vietnam than on any country in Asia except the Philippines, which was ruled by the Spanish for 400 years.

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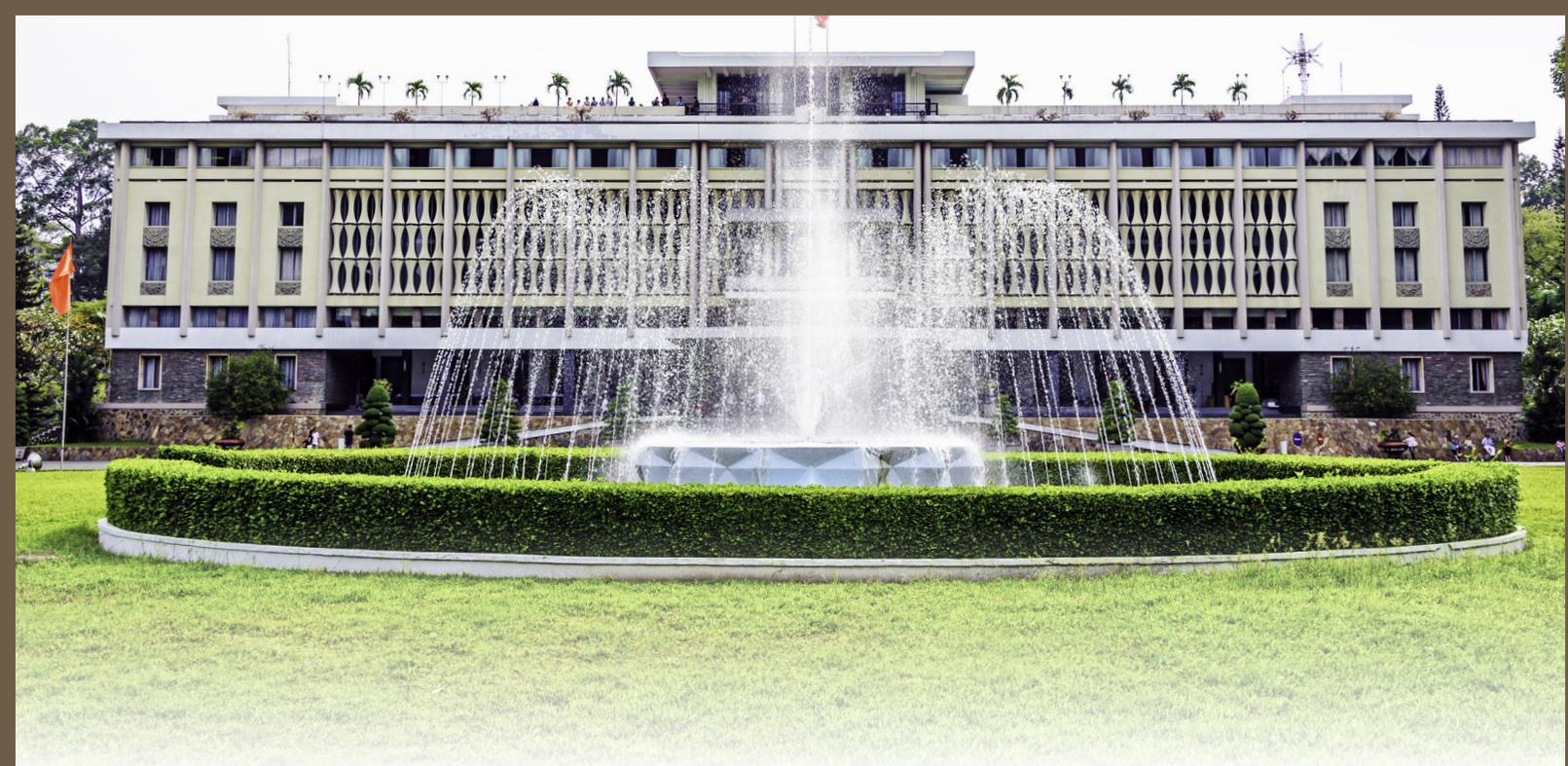


## TAY SON REBELLION (1771-1802)

In 1765, a rebellion against misgovernment broke out in the town of Tay Son near Qui Nhon. It was led by three brothers from a wealthy merchant family; Nguyen Nhac, Nguyen Hue and Nguyen Lu. By 1773, the Tay Son Rebels (as they came to be known) controlled the whole of central Vietnam, and in 1783 the captured Saigon and the rest of the south, killing the reigning prince and his family (as well as 10,000 Chinese residents of Cholon). Nguyen Lu became king of the south, and Nguyen Nhac became king of central Vietnam.

The Tay Son overthrew the Trinh lords in the north and proclaimed allegiance to the Later Le Dynasty. Taking advantage of the unstable situation, the Chinese sent 200,000 troops to Vietnam under the pretext of helping the emperor. In 1788, with popular sentiment on his side, one of the Tay Son brothers, Nguyen Hue, proclaimed himself Emperor Quang Trung and set out with his army to expel the Chinese

In the south, Nguyen Anh, whose forces were trained by Pigneau de Behaine's young French adventurers, gradually pushed back the Tay Son. In 1802, Nguyen Anh proclaimed himself Emperor Gia Long, thus beginning the Nguyen Dynasty. When he captured Hanoi, his victory was complete, and for the first time in two centuries, Vietnam was united. Hue became the new national capital.



### *NGUYEN DYNASTY (1802-1945)*

Gia Long (reigned 1802-19) initiated a policy of massive reassertion of Confucian values and institutions in order to consolidate the dynasty's shaky position of the elite. He also began a large scale program of public works (dikes, canals, roads, ports, bridges, land reclamation) to rehabilitate the country, which had been devastated by almost three decades of warfare. The Mandarin Road linking the national capital, Hue, to both Hanoi and Saigon was constructed during this period, as was a string of star-shaped citadels - built according to the principles of the French military architect Vauban - in provincial capitals. All these projects imposed a heavy burden on the population in the form of taxation, military conscription and corvee (forced labor).

Gia Long's son, Emperor Minh Mang (reigned 1820-40), worked to consolidate the state and establish a strong central government. Minh Mang was profoundly hostile to Catholicism, which he saw as a threat to the Confucian state, and he extended this antipathy to all Western influences. Seven missionaries and an unknown number of Vietnamese Catholics were executed in the 1830s. Serious uprisings broke out in both the north and south during this period, growing progressively more serious in the 1840s and 1850s. To make matters worse, the civil unrest in the deltas was accompanied by smallpox epidemics, tribal uprisings, drought, locusts and - most serious of all - repeated breaches in the Red River dikes, the result of government neglect.

Minh Mang was succeeded by Emperor Thieu Tri (reigned 1841-47), who expelled most of the foreign missionaries. He was followed by Emperor Tu Duc (reigned 1848-83), who continued to rule according to conservative Confucian precepts and in imitation of Qing practices in China. Both responded to rural unrest with repression.

### *FRENCH RULE (1859-1954)*

Ever since Pigneau de Behaine's patronage of Nguyen Anh in the late 18th century and his son Canh's appearance at Versailles in 1787, certain segments of French society had retained an active interest in Indochina. But it was not until the Revolution of 1848 and the advent of the Second Empire that there arose a coalition of interest - Catholic, commercial, patriotic, strategic and idealistic (fans of the mission civilisatrice) - with sufficient influence to initiate large-scale, long-term colonial efforts.

France's military activity in Vietnam began in 1847, when the French navy attacked Danang harbor in response to Thieu Tri's actions against Catholic missionaries. In 1858, a joint military force of 14 ships from France and the Spanish colony of the Philippines stormed Danang after the killing of several missionaries. As disease began to take a heavy toll and the expected support from Catholic Vietnamese failed to materialize, the force left a small garrison in Danang and followed

the monsoon winds southward, seizing Saigon in early 1859.

The French victory in the 1861 Battle of Ky Hoa (Chi Hoa) marked the beginning of the end of formal, organized Vietnamese military action against the French in the south and the rise of popular guerrilla resistance led by the local scholar-gentry, who had refused en masse to collaborate with the French administration. This resistance took the form of ambushing French river craft, denying food supplies to French bases and assassinating collaborators.

In 1862, Tu Duc signed a treaty that gave the French the three eastern provinces of Cochin China. In addition, missionaries were promised the freedom to proselytize everywhere in the country, several ports were opened to French and Spanish commerce, and Tu Duc undertook to pay a large indemnity. To raise the necessary cash he authorized the sale of Opium in the north and sold the monopoly to the Chinese.

Throughout the colonial period, the vast majority of Vietnamese retained a strong desire to have their national independence restored. Seething nationalist aspirations often broke out into open defiance of the French, which took forms ranging from the publishing of patriotic periodicals and books to an attempt to poison the French garrison in Hanoi.

## GOVERNMENT

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is governed through a highly centralized system dominated by the Vietnamese Communist Party. As the force controlling the system, the party exercises leadership in all matters. The government manages state affairs through a structure that parallels the party's apparatus, but it is incapable of acting without party direction. All key government positions are filled by party members. A new atmosphere of experimentation and reform came after the sixth national party congress held in December 1986. It was apparently reinforced by reforms initiated by the Soviet Union's new leadership, setting the stage for a period of self-examination, the elimination of corrupt party officials, and new economic policies.



## LANGUAGE

The Vietnamese language (kinh) is a fusion of Mon-Khmer, Tai and Chinese elements. From the monotonic Mon-Khmer languages, Vietnamese derived a significant percentage of its basic words. From the Tai languages, it adopted certain grammatical elements and tonality. Chinese gave Vietnamese most of its philosophical, literary, technical and governmental vocabulary as well as its traditional writing system. The most widely spoken foreign languages in Vietnam are Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin), English and French.

## COMMON PHRASES in KHMER

English	Vietnamese
Hello	Xin chao
How are you?	Khoe khong?
Thank you	Cam on
You're welcome	Khong sao dau
Goodbye	Tam biet
Please	Lam on
I'm sorry	Xin loi
What is your name?	Anh ten la gri?
English	Vietnamese
Yes	Vang
No	Khong
My name is _____.	Toi ten la
Where is the toilet?	Cau tieu o dau
How do I get to _____?	Lam sao toi den _____?
Water	Nuoc
How Much (money) Is?	Bahw nyee-oh thee-uhn

## CLIMATE

The climate in Vietnam differs greatly between North and South, though both regions experience monsoons. From November to April, the North is cool and dry, while May to October is hot and rainy. North of Nha Trang, the central coast has a similar climate with cool, wet weather between December and February in the winter monsoon season. The seasons tend to begin a bit later in the south, which is hot and humid all year round, particularly from February to May, while the rainy season lasts from May to November. The Central Highlands have a similar climate to the south, but is somewhat cooler and temperatures can reach freezing in winter. The temperature in Hanoi can range from 63°F (17°C) in January, to 84°F (20°C) in June.

Vietnam has a remarkably diverse climate because of its wide range of latitudes and altitudes. Although the entire country lies in the tropics and subtropics, local conditions vary from frosty winters in the far northern hills to the year-round sub-equatorial warmth of the Mekong Delta.

## AVERAGE TEMPERATURE & RAINFALL

Hanoi	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Rainfall(inches)	0.7	1.5	1.5	3.2	7.7	9.3	12.7	10.9	11.5	10.2	1.7	0.8
Min Temp (F)	55	57	63	70	73	79	79	79	75	72	64	59
Max Temp (F)	68	70	73	82	90	91	91	90	88	84	79	72

Ho Chi Minh	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Rainfall(inches)	0.2	0.5	0.5	3.6	7.2	11.2	9.5	10.9	11.5	10.2	4.8	1.5
Min Temp (F)	70	72	75	77	77	75	75	75	75	75	73	72
Max Temp (F)	90	91	93	95	91	90	88	90	88	88	88	88

Hoi An	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Rainfall(inches)	2.4	0.9	1.0	1.5	3.3	2.5	2.4	5.3	9.5	20.8	14.7	8.5
Min Temp (F)	66	68	70	74	76	78	78	69	76	74	71	68
Max Temp (F)	77	79	83	88	91	94	93	92	89	85	81	77



## *THE LAND*

Vietnam consists of 5 major geographical zones. In the far North are the Northern Highlands which ring the Red River Delta and form a natural barrier with China. The second region lies in the embrace of the hills of the North. This, the Red River Delta, claims to be the cultural and historical heart of the Vietnam. Hanoi lies at its core and it was here that the first truly independent Vietnamese polity was established in 939 AD by Ngo Quyen. The Annam Highlands, now known as the Truong Son Mountain Range, form an important cultural divide between the Indianized nations of the West and the Sinicized cultures of the East. To the east, the Annamite Chain falls off steeply, leaving only a narrow and fragmented band of lowland suitable for settlement - the central coastal strip. The Mekong Delta, the fifth region, is one of the great rice bowls of Asia producing nearly half of the country's rice, and over the years has been cut into a patchwork by the canals that have been dug to expand irrigation and rice cultivation.

Vietnam stretches over 1600 km along the eastern coast of the Indochinese Peninsula. Vietnam borders with Laos, China and Cambodia. Vietnam is often described as resembling a bamboo pole supporting a basket of rice on each end. The country is S-shaped, broad in the north and south and very narrow in the center, where at one point it is only 50 km wide.



## THE PEOPLE

An estimated 85% of the population is ethnic Vietnamese (Viet Kinh) who were Sinicized during the 1,000 years of Chinese rule but who have successfully maintained their cultural and ethnic identity. Ethno linguistic studies indicate that the Vietnamese are a mixture of migrants from southern China, Mon-Khmers, and Thais from the west, and Malayo-Indoensians who arrived over two millennia ago. Vietnam's 54 ethnic minority groups - called montagnards by the French - total roughly eight million people or about 13% of the national population. Most of these minorities dwell in the northern mountains near the China border and in the Central Highlands, which comprise about 75% of Vietnam's land area.

Many people of European, North American, Australian, and Asian (non-Vietnamese) origin are temporary residents in Vietnam as expatriate workers, through marriage and some are permanently settled there. Included in permanent settlers are Europeans of French descent, who are descendants of the colonial settlers. Most of them left after its independence.



Vietnam is a multi-ethnic country with over fifty distinct groups (54 are recognized by the Vietnamese government), each with its own language, lifestyle, and cultural heritage. Many of the local ethnic groups are known collectively in the West as Montagnard or Degar.

The largest ethnic groups are:  
Kinh (Viet) 86.2%,  
Tay 1.9%,  
Tai Ethnic 1.7%,  
Mường 1.5%,  
Khmer Krom (Khơ Me Crộm) 1.4%,  
Hoa 1.1%, Nùng 1.1%,  
Hmong 1%,  
others 4.1%

The Vietnamese term for ethnic group is người thiểu số or dân tộc thiểu số (literally "minority people").

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## CHANGING MONEY

Most major currencies can be exchanged at leading banks in Vietnam, but away from the tourist centres the US-dollar remains king.

Vietcombank is the most organised of the local banks for changing cash and can deal with euros, pounds and pretty much anything else you are packing. The US dollar exchange rate worsens the further you get from the tourist trail, so stock up on dong if you are heading into remote areas. In small towns it can be difficult to get change for the larger notes, so keep a stack of smaller bills handy.

It's a good idea to check that any big dollar bills you take do not have any small tears or look too tatty, as no-one will accept them in Vietnam.

You cannot legally take dong out of Vietnam but you can reconvert reasonable amounts of it into US dollars on departure. Most land border crossings now have some sort of official currency exchange, offering the best rates available in these remote parts of the country.

## CREDIT CARDS

Visa, MasterCard and JCB cards are now widely accepted in all major cities and many tourist centres. However, a 3% commission charge on every transaction is pretty common; check first, as some charge higher commissions than others. Some merchants also accept Amex, but the surcharge is typically 4%. Better hotels and restaurants do not usually slap on an additional charge.

If you wish to obtain a cash advance from Visa, MasterCard and JCB, this is possible at Vietcombank branches in most cities, as well as at some foreign banks in HCMC and Hanoi. Banks generally charge a 3% commission for this service. This is handy if you want to take out large sums, as the ATMs have low daily limits.



## CURRENCY

The monetary unit of Vietnam is the dong. The U.S. dollar is widely accepted throughout the country. Foreign currency should be converted at a Bank of Foreign Trade or authorized exchange counters. Visitors are advised to carry US\$ for cash for easy conversion nationwide. Outside Saigon and Hanoi, dong is the accepted form of currency and it can be difficult to exchange traveler's checks.

## TIPPING

Service charges of 10% are added to bills in most leading hotels and restaurants. Where it is not included, a tip of 10-15% of the bill would be appropriate.

### **Airport porter/hotel bellboy:**

\$1.00 - \$ 2.00 US per bag.

### **Your tour guide:**

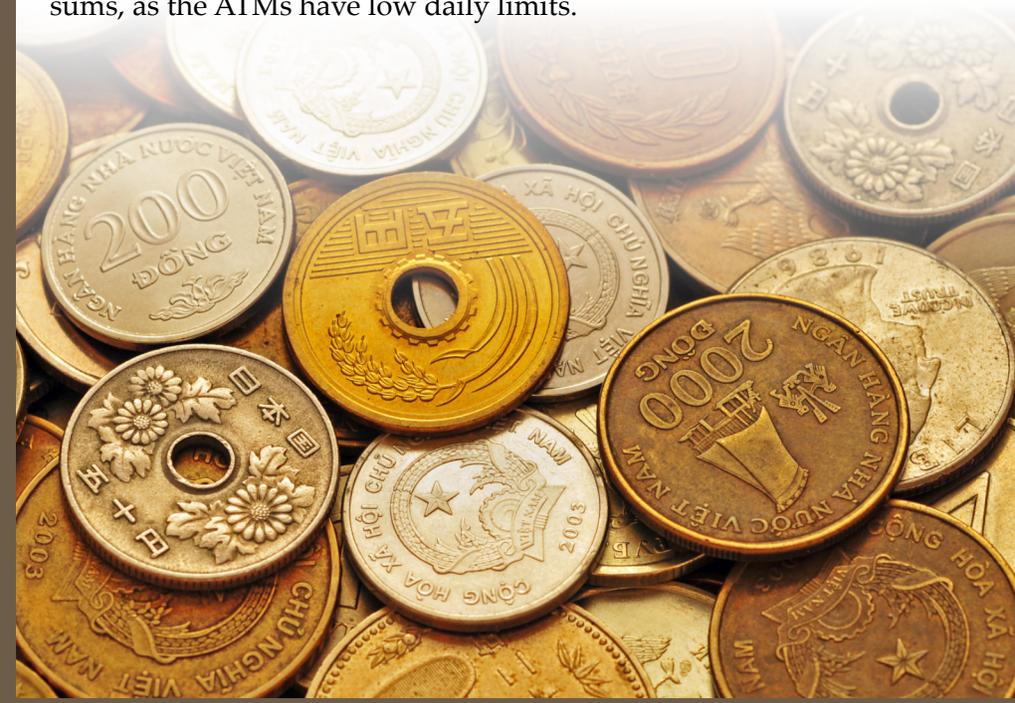
\$10.00 - \$ 12.00 US per person per day.

### **Driver/assistants:**

\$ 6.00 - \$ 7.00 US per person per day.

### **Overnight Halong Bay Cruises:**

It is customary to tip the crew \$ 25.00 per person per day.



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## TAXI

Anywhere in the world even a savvy traveler can be taken advantage of by a taxi driver and Vietnam is no exception. To avoid problems it is wise to never accept a ride with anyone who does not have a working meter and a displayed license. One way to have a good Taxi experience is to ask your hotel where to find a legitimate taxi. You may be able to get a business card of a reputable taxi driver that you can either call when needed or arrange to pick you up at a predetermined time and place.

## SAFETY & CRIME

Vietnam is an underdeveloped country with more than its fair share of beggars, pickpockets, and con-artists. Drive-by thieves on motorcycles and bag snatchers in trains are common. Vietnam is probably much safer than your hometown, but you must exercise caution.

## ETIQUETTE

As a general rule, Southeast Asians admire a calm and considered approach to all aspects of life. Open anger or shows of temper should be avoided. Causing another person to 'lose face' is not recommended and status- particularly in terms of age - should be accorded due respect. The traditional Vietnamese form of greeting is to press your hand together in front of your body and to bow slightly. These days, the Western custom of shaking hands has taken over, Name cards are very popular in Vietnam and exchanging business cards is an important part of even the smallest transaction or business contact.

- To avoid "cultural offenses", here are some tips:
- Do not give sweets to a group of shy children
- Do not leave a pair of chopsticks sticking vertically in a rice bowl. This looks similar to incense sticks which are burned for the dead.
- It's rude to let the bottoms of your feet point towards other people.
- When sitting on the floor, you should fold your legs into the lotus position so as to not be pointing your soles at others.
- Never point the bottoms of your feet towards anything sacred, such as figures of Buddha's.
- When sitting on a chair do not cross your legs.
- Always smile and be pleasant.
- Don't run around complaining about everything.
- If you want to criticize someone, do it in a joking manner to avoid confrontation.
- Expect delays.
- Never show anger.
- Don't be competitive. Treating your interaction as a cooperative enterprise works better
- Don't act as though you deserve service from anyone. If you do, it's likely that you will be delayed.
- Don't be too inquisitive about personal matters
- Sitting and sipping tea and the exchange of gifts (sharing cigarettes, for example) are an important prelude to any business interaction.

## PHOTOGRAPHS

It is polite to ask permission before taking photographs, Some people may take offense.



## COMMUNICATIONS

### Telephone

Country code: 84. Public telephones are available in post offices, hotels and shops displaying a telephone unit sign and at roadside kiosks. To call Vietnam from the USA/Canada dial 011 + 84 + Area Code + Phone Number.

### Mobile Telephone

Roaming agreements exist with most major international mobile phone companies. Coverage is good in towns and cities throughout the country, with sporadic coverage in rural areas.

### Internet

Internet is available in many areas of Vietnam; there are Internet cafes in many main towns and cities that have restricted access to internet sites critical of the government and one party system. Internet café owners are required to keep customer's personal information, including name, address, and identification numbers for 30 days.

### Post

Postal service takes a month, airmail services takes approximately 5-10 days. Express-mail service takes 5 days or less. Many hotels have a 'mail' drop. Post Offices or "Buu Diens" in Vietnamese are generally open 6:30am - 9:00pm, including weekends and public holidays. International postal rates are similar to those in European countries. Receiving a package from abroad can be difficult and time consuming due to the lengthy inspection process and could take weeks.

### Media

Vietnam's media are tightly controlled by the country's leadership. The industry has been opened up in the areas of distribution and advertising but not in editorial content and access to foreign news providers is limited. In general, the press report on corruption and inefficiency among officials, but they avoid criticism of the Communist Party.

## ELECTRICITY

110 and 220 volts AC. Voltage surges are common



## WHAT TO PACK

Dress is normally casual in Vietnam. You should pack according to the season and areas you will be visiting. An umbrella is useful, a good pair of walking shoes, a few pairs of light cotton baggy trousers (skirts or dresses), a few cotton blouses or tops, cotton socks and undergarments, 1 sweater, sunglasses, mosquito repellent and a hat to protect you from the sun. Public restrooms in Vietnam typically do not have toilet tissue so you may want to carry a small amount of tissue with you.

Due to restricted weight limits on all the Domestic flights (20kg or 44 pounds) it is recommended to travel light.

## HEALTH

Before visiting Vietnam, you may need to get the following vaccinations and medications for vaccine-preventable diseases and other diseases you might be at risk for at your destination: (Note: Your doctor or health-care provider will determine what you will need, depending on factors such as your health and immunization history, areas of the country you will be visiting, and planned activities.)

To have the most benefit, see a health-care provider at least 4–6 weeks before your trip to allow time for your vaccines to take effect and to start taking medicine to prevent malaria, if you need it.

## DRUGS

Illegal drugs - The rule here is simple - don't.

Prescription drugs - It is recommended to travel with prescriptions for any drugs you are required to travel with for your personal health.

## SHOPPING

Lacquer ware items, mother-of-pearl inlay, ceramics, colorful embroidered items (hangings, tablecloths, pillow cases, pajamas and robes), greeting cards with silk paintings on the front, wood-block prints, oil paintings, watercolors, blinds made of hanging bamboo beads, Chinese-style carpets, jewelry and leatherwork.

## CUSTOMS

Tourists are authorized to import the following duty free: 200 Cigarettes, 50 Cigars, 1 Liter of Liquor, Personal effects of a reasonable quantity, small gift items valued at no more than US \$50. There is a limit to the amount of cash that can be brought in. It is prohibited to bring into Vietnam weapons, explosives, and inflammable objects. Also prohibited are narcotics such as opium and cultural material unsuitable to Vietnamese society.

## Words of Wisdom-Buyer Beware

Bring your purchases home with you. Unless you are prepared to wait a prolonged period of time, do not have it shipped -- not even by air freight.

Do not purchase expensive goods of supposed high quality unless you are absolutely sure of what you are buying.

Unless you are an expert in gems, antiques, artifacts, etc., you should not assume that it is of the highest quality or value.

Always take the time to read the charge slips for credit card purchases before you sign them. This may seem obvious; but in the excitement of making a foreign purchase, travelers sometimes overlook this and are unpleasantly surprised when they return home and are billed by the credit card company. Taking a few moments to review the charge slip before signing it (and computing the exchange rate to be sure you are charged the right amount) can save you headaches later.

## BARTERING/BARGAINING

Most people from developed countries find these issues very difficult. There are no set rules, but the following information and advice may be helpful.

The prices for goods in supermarkets, pharmacies, restaurants, hotels, official transport, basic commodity shops and so on, are usually fixed. Those for fresh fruit, vegetables and flowers from street sellers, motorcycle taxis ('xe oms'), bicycle taxis ('cyclos'), souvenirs, clothes (especially in tourist areas), and goods bought from peddlers are usually variable. To barter effectively, laughter and good humour is an essential prerequisite. When an initial price is quoted, throw up your hands in exaggerated horror and offer between a third and a half. You can then negotiate towards a fair price. Walking away will usually determine whether the last offer really is the last. Please remember that many of the people you deal with will be poor, so driving them down to an unreasonably low price is unfair. On the other hand, paying an unrealistically high price will encourage the recipient to regard foreigners as easy targets and inflate prices even further. Postcards from postcard sellers are almost invariably overpriced - buy yours from a shop!

You may come across some remnants of an earlier dual-pricing system that is gradually being phased out. If so, it isn't local people trying to make a fast buck, but simply an official recognition of the considerable income gap between you and the average Vietnamese citizen. Here are the perfect bargaining experiences from Hitchhiking Vietnam:



## HOW you bargain

- Rule 1: SMILE. It's like the monster ride at the amusement park. If you're not having fun, get off.
- Rule 2: Don't bargain with the first person who approaches you (i.e., when looking for a taxi at the airport.) In general the further you go from the center of action, the cheaper the price.
- Rule 3: Don't be afraid to use walking away as a bargaining tool. You can always come back.
- Rule 4: Don't let pride get in the way of coming back (or Rule #3 is useless).
- Rule 5: If you really want something and the price isn't coming down, give in gracefully. (It's that pride thing again.)
- Rule 6: Don't always assume you're getting ripped off just because you're in a third-world country. Sometimes the price they're asking is the real one.
- Rule 7: Bargaining is a time/money tradeoff. If you're in a hurry, be prepared to pay for it.
- Rule 8: Ask (Vietnamese) fellow shoppers the price of an item before you begin bargaining.
- Rule 9: Always carry small bills. Otherwise all that work is likely to be for nothing.
- Rule 10: Always bargain in native currency. Conventional wisdom says anyone who has dollars can afford to spend them.
- Rule 11: If possible, keep going back to the same person until you've gotten to know him/her. Most third world countries have a name for this kind of relationship. The deal is that you offer your business on a regular basis and the seller responds by saving you their best tomatoes (fattest chickens, etc.).
- Caveat to Rule #11 Trust but verify.
- Rule 12: No matter what your parents told you, when you're bargaining it's perfectly okay to lie.

## WHEN you bargain

Almost anytime. In general you don't bargain in a restaurant if the price is listed on the menu. A lot of tourist shops also have price tags but it is often still acceptable to make an offer. If you don't negotiate a price before the service is rendered (i.e., a meal or a cyclo ride) then you are generally responsible for paying whatever is asked.

## WHY you bargain

You bargain to develop social relationships and to have fun. Saving yourself some money should be a secondary consideration.



## FOOD

One of the delights of visiting Vietnam is the amazing cuisine - there are said to be nearly 500 different traditional Vietnamese dishes - which is, in general, superbly prepared. The proper way to eat Vietnamese food is to take rice from the large shared dish and put it in your rice bowl. Using your chopsticks, take meat, fish or vegetables from the serving dishes and add them to your rice. Then, holding the rice bowl near your mouth, use your chopsticks to eat.

Vietnamese food is mostly nutritious and healthy. Cooking methods are confined to grilling, frying, boiling and steaming, as ovens are not used. The staple is rice, either as grain or flour. The cuisine varies according to the region. In the north, it is comparatively bland, with a strong Chinese influence. Food in the Hue area is spicier, with some French touches. In the south, dishes with hot spices proliferate. Each area has its own local specialities.

## PHO

They call it beef noodle soup, and such it is, but so much more. It is Vietnam in a bowl. Pronounced like 'fur' (but drop the 'r'), it is beef noodle soup raised to the nth degree. You can have pho everywhere in Vietnam, but it is almost a cult in Hanoi.

From the garnish tray, add a squeeze of lime juice. Add beansprouts to the soup, and a dash of chilli sauce and fish sauce. Lastly, sprinkle it with coriander leaves, or mint leaves, or basil. Or all of them. With your chopsticks, thrust deeply to the bottom of the bowl. Lift the noodles above the surface and let the dressings you've added subsume into the body of the work. Lay the noodles back to rest. In the next minute the flavours will marry. The more traditional beef variety of pho is called pho bo, while the chicken is pho ga.



## SOFT DRINKS

Vietnam has wide variety of soft drinks, ranging from 'Coke' and 'Pepsi' produced here under licence to locally produced fizzy drinks and 'energy-boosting' concoctions. Fruit juices are ubiquitous, 'nuoc chanh' (water, lemon juice and sugar) being very popular. Fresh orange juice and other sweet fruits are sometimes served with added sugar or salt – watch the person making it and stop them if necessary. Also very popular with visitors are fruit 'shakes': chopped fruit with ice, water and milk frothed up in a blender.

## TEA

Vietnamese tea is mainly green, sometimes with flavourings, and drunk without milk or sugar from small handle-less cups. This is the drink traditionally offered to people visiting families, friends, offices, shops and so on. Black tea is also popular, but drunk without milk. If you want a traditional cup of tea with milk, stick to the tourist areas - elsewhere you're likely to end up with lukewarm water with a tea bag and condensed milk.

## WATER

Drink only bottled water or boiled water.

## *ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES*

The range of alcoholic drinks in Vietnam is limited. Apart from expensive imported wines and spirits, most drinks available are domestically produced variations on rice wine, or lager-type beer. Rice wine is drunk neat, often direct from the fermentation jar via a bamboo straw, or distilled into a spirit, usually mislabelled as 'vodka'. The wine is also used as a base for the addition of plants, barks or animals. These are usually drunk for their 'medicinal' purposes – snake wine is very popular with men who believe it enhances virility.

In the north, 'medicinal' wines and spirits can be found easily - definitely worth a tasting session. In Hanoi, there is a restaurant that specialises in fruit wines and liqueurs from the hill tribe villages - our staff will be pleased to escort you and help you to return to your hotel.

Beer comes as variations of locally-brewed French-style lager, and as 'bia hoi'. Also known as 'fresh beer', bia hoi is relatively low in alcohol, produced daily, and served ice-cold. It's cheap, ubiquitous and delicious on a hot day!



## *MON CUON (RICE ROLLS)*

Rice rolls are produced everywhere in Vietnam, with the most well-known being goi cuon, but the variety that are made in Hanoi, banh cuon, have their own special characteristics. The wrappings of banh cuon are as thin as a sheet of paper, appearing as edible alabaster, soft yet offering something to the teeth. Ingredients may include grilled pork, fried bean curd, or vegetables. If you're really lucky, they'll add a drop of coleopterous essence (a highly aromatic secretion from the gland of a type of beetle).

## *NORTHERN SPECIALTIES*

The basic tenets of the north's cookery are more closely aligned with China than that of other local regions. Fewer spices are available than in the south, but the people couldn't do without black pepper. They use a superior grade that is mild, yet intensely aromatic, and with a sweetness that is unique to this land. Equally important are the sweet and pungent herbs – basil, mint, coriander, spring onions, and several other tasty leaves.

## *BUN CHA*

Bun cha is pressed pork served on a bed of cold rice noodles and dressed with a few herbs. The meat is always cut from a piece of well-marbled pork. It is marinated in a mixture of sweet, hot, sour and salty, and the resulting product tastes like none of its constituent flavours, yet more than the sum of its parts.

## *SNAIL DISHES*

In Hanoi there is a type of snail living in ponds and lakes that grows to the size of a golfball, has a streaked colour, and, while chewy, is very tasty. They are called 'oc'. Bun oc are boiled snails dipped in nuoc cham, placed in a bowl of rice vermicelli and snail consommé poured over. You can also get bun oc in many seafood restaurants. Oc ngoi are minced snails mixed with onion, garlic and mushroom; rolled in ginger leaves and stuffed in the shell of the snail; then stewed. Pull the ginger leaf out and the rest comes along. Oc hap bia are snails are steamed in beer. Try also oc xao ca vo (shelled stir-fried snails), oc cuon cha (rolled snail), bun oc kho (dried noodle and snails).

## *LAU (HOT POT)*

The lau (hot pot) comes from China. It is a turban-shaped pan containing stock in the middle of which is a charcoal stove (now alcohol fuel is used). The stock is kept simmering throughout the meal. The lau is placed in the middle of the table, around which is a variety of foods, including rice vermicelli, pig's heart, liver and kidneys, goat meat, eel, onion and vegetables. The less adventurous might opt for shellfish, river fish or chicken. Put as much food as you'd like to eat into the pot, give it a stir, and in about five minutes you're ready for dinner. Keep replenishing the pot as you go. It's rather like fondue, and just as convivial and fun. Depending on the ingredients used, it might be called lau de (goat meat), lau luon (eel meat) or lau thap cam (with many different kinds of meat).

## *SOUTHERN SPECIALTIES*

The south grows a greater variety of tropical and temperate fruits and vegetables, and more varieties of spice. Southerners also use more sugar in their recipes, even the savoury ones. Dining in the south is very much a hands-on experience. You will be presented with a plate of fresh lettuce and herbs. Take a little of the cooked food and place it in the centre of a lettuce leaf, add some of the herbs, and wrap the lettuce around the food and dip it into whatever sauce is close at hand.

## *BANH XEO*

Bánh xèo is a large crepe filled with goodies. The Vietnamese make it with rice flour and coconut milk, and fill it with meat and shellfish, as well as vegetables. Bánh xèo is often referred to in English as a Vietnamese 'pancake'. We think this is an unsatisfactory translation, but there seems to be nothing we can do about it.

## *Claypot (noi dat) CLAYPOT (NOI DAT)*

Claypot cookery is very southern, and very satisfying. Claypots are usually small, often unglazed, with a lid, and look little different from a flowerpot with a lid. They were originally used by farmers and fishermen who had little to cook, few pots to cook in, and little fuel for the fire.



## *COFFEE*

Vietnamese coffee is mostly grown in the Central Highlands. Robusta is the usual variety served in Vietnamese establishments – black, thick, and very strong. The minority of Vietnamese people who drink coffee usually mix it with condensed milk – definitely an acquired taste for most foreign visitors. In the cities, smoother Arabica coffee and fresh milk is becoming popular.

For Vietnamese coffee look for the sign 'Trung Nguyen' - they are franchised cafés, very common throughout Vietnam. For Western-style coffee, visit the tourist areas.

A curious, and expensive, variety is 'Weasel Coffee'. Arabica beans are fed to a weasel. They pass through the animal's digestive system, are excreted whole, collected, and processed. The passage of the beans through the creature's intestines is supposed to create a more mellow flavour.



## CULTURE & THE ARTS

### MUSIC

Classical music is performed in the Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh Conservatories of Music. Western types of classical music were introduced into the country little more than half a century ago. Since then, many Vietnamese performers have won great honors at international competitions.

Traditional music has been enjoyed for a considerable time. Bamboo flutes, for example, have been found in ancient tombs dating back 22,300 years. A flute made out of terra-cotta was discovered at Dong Son in Thanh Hoa Province. Bronze drums made by master casters in the Dongson culture, between 500 and 200 BC, have been unearthed in Thanh Hoa province. Some of the most famous drums historically, the Ngoc Lu and Hoang Ha bronze drums, are 2,700 years old. Dan da, lithophones made from sonorous rhyolite stones, have been discovered in Bac Ai in the Central Highlands, dating back to 3,000-4,000 years ago.

Though heavily influenced by the Chinese and, in the south, the Indianised Cham and Khmer musical traditions, Vietnamese music have a high degree of originality in style and instrumentation. The traditional system of writing down music and the five-note (pentatonic) scale are of Chinese origin. Vietnamese choral music is unique in that the melody must correspond to the tones: it cannot be rising during a word that has a falling tone. There are three broad categories of music:

- Folk, which includes children's songs, love songs, work songs, festival songs, lullabies, lamentation and funeral songs. It is usually sung without instrumental accompaniment.
- Classical (or 'learned music'), which is rather rigid and formal. It was performed at the imperial court and for the entertainment of the mandarin elite. A traditional orchestra consists of 40 musicians. There are two main types of classical chamber music: Hat A Dao (from the north) and Ca Hue (from central Vietnam).
- Theater, which includes singing, dancing and instrumentation.

### WATER PUPPETRY, ROI NUOC

This is unique to Vietnam. It is a very old artistic creation of the inhabitants of the Red River Delta. One of the earliest records of the art appears in the Dai Viet su ky toan thu, the complete history of Vietnam written in 1021. After reaching a high performance standard in the Ly Dynasty (1010-1024), it became extremely popular during the Tran Dynasty (1225-1258). Water puppet shows are tremendously entertaining, unique and unbelievably skillful.

### DANCE

Any visitor to Vietnam will soon become aware of the importance of traditional dances. They are not only performed during special festivals but in many parts of the country are enjoyed by ordinary peasants, particularly after a successful harvest. During the Tran and Ly Dynasties, dance troupes would perform for the emperor on state occasions. These days many forms of dance are connected with religious ritual, sometimes they are even performed during burial ceremonies. In Binh Tri Trien Province, the local wiseman, colorfully clad in a yellow and red costume and wearing a highly decorative silver helmet, will dance on the grave of a villager before the burial.



## ART SCULPTURES

Sculptures in bronze have been unearthed, near Than Hoa, which belong to the Dong Son ear (between 500 and 200 BC). The most magnificent are the rain drums which are elaborately carved with scenes depicting primitive ceremonies such as praying for a good harvest, for the first rains to fall, and for floods to subside. Exquisite engravings seen on the famous Ngoc Lu drum from this period show scenes from village festivals which occurred during the days of the Hung Kings.

## POTTERY

The earliest pottery has been unearthed from early Neolithic (Hoa Binh culture) and late Neolithic (Bac Son culture) sites. Early pottery was made from earth and animal wastes and had a very simple artistic design. The appearance of the potter's wheel during the Bronze Age led to the evolution of a great variety of shapes. The appearance of brown stoneware during the years when Vietnam was dominated by China (1st-10th century) meant that designs from this period, seen in Vietnamese museums, show a distinct Chinese influence. White and blue ceramics appeared after the 14th century, many finely decorated with careful hand drawings. By the 15th century, immaculately glazed animal figures in green and yellow (e.g. horses, cranes and tortoises) appeared. Contemporary designs have become more elaborate and feature floral motifs such as lotus, jasmine, chrysanthemums, animal figures such as doves, nightingales, peacocks and storks, together with rivers, mountains, lakes and scenes from festivals and everyday life.

## MOTHER-OF-PEARL INLAY

One of the most original arts of Vietnam is inlaying with mother-of-pearl. This has been practiced for over 1,000 years. One of the most famous inlayers in Vietnam was Truong Cong Than, known as the patron saint of craftsmen, who came from the village of Chuyen My in Ha Son Binh. During his days as a general during the Ly Dynasty he used to glue pieces of mollusk shell onto wood to create pictures.

## EMBROIDERY

Embroidery first appeared in Vietnam in Thuong Tin District, Ha Son Binh. One of the best remembered specialists in this art was Tran Quoc Khai, a native of Quat Dong commune in the 17th century. She produced beautiful designs in lace, relief and gold thread depicting animals, landscapes, festivals etc.

## PAINTING

Sixteenth century painters were known for their delicacy of design. Many Le Dynasty artists excelled at landscapes. Over the centuries painting on silk has been popularized. Vietnamese art has a lively personality of its own. Many art schools have been founded in Hanoi, Hue and Saigon; exhibitions are regularly staged throughout the country. Many renowned Vietnamese painters show resistance struggles as one of their main themes.



## TRADITIONAL PAINTING

Painting done of frame-mounted silk dates from the 13th century. Silk-painting was at one time the preserve of scholar-calligraphers, who also painted scenes from nature. Before the advent of photography, realistic portraits for use in ancestor-worship were produced.

MODERN - During this century, Vietnamese painting has been influenced by Western trends. Much of the recent work done in Vietnam has had political rather than aesthetic or artistic motives.

## LACQUER WARE (*Son Mai*)

The art of making lacquer ware is said to have been introduced into Vietnam after Emperor Le Thanh Ton (1443-1459) sent an emissary to the Chinese court to investigate the process. Lacquer is a resin from the son tree (Thus succedanea or *R. vernicifera*) which is then applied in numerous coats (usually eleven) to wood (traditionally teak), leather, metal or porcelain. Prior to lacquering, the article must be sanded and coated with a fixative. The final coat is highly polished with coal powder. The piece may then be decorated with an incised design, painted, or inset with mother-of-pearl.

## RELIGION

Four great philosophies and religions have shaped the spiritual life of the Vietnamese people: Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and Christianity. Over the centuries, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism have fused with popular Chinese beliefs and ancient Vietnamese animism to form what is known collectively as the 'Triple Religion' or Tam Giao.

If asked their religion the Vietnamese are likely to say that they are Buddhist, but when it comes to family or civic duties they are likely to follow Confucianism while turning to Taoist conceptions in understanding the nature of the cosmos.

Religion in Vietnam is a confusing affair. It tends to be a rough amalgamation of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, with a sprinkling of animism, astrology, and local superstition thrown in for good measure. No church or organization wields any profound nation-wide influence, thanks in large part to governmental suppression, and observance is mostly an individual or family affair. The constitution guarantees freedom of religion, albeit with the unsettling caveat that religion may not be used "to violate state laws or policies," which has translated to arbitrary restrictions on organized religious practice. Today, religious persecution is uncommon, except in the central highlands, and particularly the provinces of k L k and Gia Lai, where minority Protestants are still harassed by local police.

Vietnam's home-grown "triple religion" derives from Mahayana Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, but the extent to which each informs one's spiritual lifestyle varies wildly from person to person.

## BUDDHISM

Most adherents of the Triple Religion classify themselves as Buddhists, but some refer to themselves as non-religious, though they all make offerings at Buddhist pagodas and engage in ancestor worship. Buddhism was born in the 6th century BC with the

# ALLURING ASIA

## CATHOLICISM

The Roman Catholic Church enjoys official recognition by the Vietnamese government and roughly six million followers (about 8% of the population). It was introduced to Vietnam by the French in the 17th century, and though the Church's members were harassed by the Communist government after reunification, Catholicism was finally accepted as "a positive force" in recent government statements.

Demographically, the balance remains skewed to the south, where Catholics fled to after the country split in 1954, although Hà Nội and Hanoi are witnessing a mild Catholic renaissance of sorts.



enlightenment of Prince Siddhartha "the Buddha" Gautama, a prince-turned-ascetic-turned-sage. Buddhists seek to attain nirvana, the state of enlightenment wherein one is free of all desire and pain. This can only be achieved by following the Eightfold Path—Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. Tough luck, lefties.

Mahayana ("Great Vehicle") Buddhism is Vietnam's favorite flavor; the older Theravada ("Way of the Elders") school, popular in the rest of Southeast Asia, is practiced mainly in the Mekong Delta by ethnic Khmer. Mahayana, unlike Theravada, teaches that anyone, not just the clergy, can attain nirvana.

## TAOISM

On a basic level, Taoism is a means of understanding the role of man in the natural and metaphysical order, relating everything to the all-powerful Dao ("the Way"). Simplicity, balance, and the unified nature of everything are hallmarks of the Taoist philosophy. It also propounds the harmony between yin (stillness/contraction) and yang (movement/dilation). The indigenous spirits and demons of ancient Vietnamese spirituality are accounted for in the triple religion via Taoist cosmology. Consequently, Taoism was the subject of government censure after 1975 and until recently, as socialist Vietnam cracked down on what it perceived as antiquated superstition.

## CONFUCIANISM

Where Taoism and Buddhism have clear religious characteristics, Confucianism inhabits a more secular, philosophical area of Vietnamese popular thought. Confucius, born in 551 BC south of latter-day Beijing, stressed the importance of sacred rituals and hierarchies of respect: sons should obey fathers, wives should obey husbands, and subjects should obey rulers. Social harmony is more important than the needs of the individual, and filial piety, everyone's favorite Confucian catchphrase, is of great significance. The individual is judged by his self-cultivation, benevolence, and loyalty, and noble birth does not ensure noble worth. The importance assigned to family resonates deeply within the

Vietnamese psyche, and is an essential component of Vietnamese culture—even for those who don't practice the Triple Religion. Hòa Hào. Established in 1939 by Huỳnh Phú Sổ, Hòa Hào ("Harmony") Buddhism is extremely low-profile; official estimates place its following at anywhere between 1.5 and three million. This quiet religion has no clergy and rejects most ceremony, emphasizing spiritual over material wealth. Value is placed on individual acts of worship and service to others, as manifest in the Four Debts of Gratitude—one's allegiance to family, homeland, mankind, and the Buddha. Not until 1999 did the government give official sanction to one branch of Hòa Hào; the rest are still seen as dissident political groups. The religion's devotees are concentrated in the Mekong Delta, where Huỳnh Phú Sổ did the majority of his teaching.

### *CAO AI*

Cao Đài ("High Palace"), another Mekong Delta creation, was founded in 1926, seven years after founder Ngô Văn Chí was visited by an enormous floating eye (see "Someone to Watch Over You, &rdquo). In Cao Đài iconology, the eye is the symbol of the Supreme Being; among the religion's recognized prophets are the Buddha, Jesus Christ, and Muhammad. According to the nearly two million Cao Đàiists, all religions share the same origin and recognize the same Supreme Being in some way. The purpose of Cao Đài as a whole is to unite all worshippers by demonstrating their fundamental sameness, while each practitioner's goal is to unite him or herself with the Supreme Being.



### *PROTESTANTISM*

Protestants are the most persecuted religious group in Vietnam. Some have been summarily hunted down and executed, their churches torn down and their leaders beaten or sent to prison. Though repression has slackened somewhat, reports of harassment persist, and the government has restricted travel to the Central Highlands, preventing outsiders from getting accurate confirmation of either persecution or the state's reassurances to the contrary.

### *OTHER MINOR RELIGIONS*

Vietnam's 65,000 Muslims tend to be comprised of ethnic Chăm and immigrant communities; many Chăm practice Bani Islam, which is made distinctive by a 20-page Qur'an and prayers to Chăm and Hindu divinities. Roughly 50,000 Hindus, mostly ethnic Chăm and Indian-Vietnamese, reside along the southern central coast and in HCMC. Baha'i and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints are both mainly confined to expat communities in the cities of HCMC and Hà Nội.

