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VIETNAM



PRE-FIELD BRIEFING PACKET

VIETNAM

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ABOUT THIS PACKET

This packet has been created to serve as a resource for the VIETNAM Medical and Dental Team.

This packet is information about the country and can be read at your leisure or on the airplane. The first section of this booklet is specific to the areas we will be working near (however, not the actual clinic locations) and contains information you may want to know before the trip.

The contents herein are not for distributional purposes and are intended for the use of the team and their families. Sources of the information all come from public record and documentation. You may access any of the information and more updates directly from the World Wide Web and other public sources.



BACKGROUND

The conquest of Vietnam by France began in 1858 and was completed by 1884. It became part of French Indochina in 1887. Vietnam declared independence after World War II, but France continued to rule until its 1954 defeat by communist forces under Ho Chi MINH. Under the Geneva Accords of 1954, Vietnam was divided into the communist North and anti-communist South. US economic and military aid to South Vietnam grew through the 1960s in an attempt to bolster the government, but US armed forces were withdrawn following a cease-fire agreement in 1973. Two years later, North Vietnamese forces overran the South reuniting the country under communist rule. Despite the return of peace, for over a decade the country experienced little economic growth because of conservative leadership policies, the persecution and mass exodus of individuals - many of them successful South Vietnamese merchants - and growing international isolation. However, since the enactment of Vietnam's "doi moi" (renovation) policy in 1986, Vietnamese authorities have committed to increased economic liberalization and enacted structural reforms needed to modernize the economy and to produce more competitive, export-driven industries. The communist leaders maintain tight control on political expression but have demonstrated some modest steps toward better protection of human rights. The country continues to experience small-scale protests, the vast majority connected to either land-use issues, calls for increased political space, or the lack of equitable mechanisms for resolving disputes. The small-scale protests in the urban areas are often organized by human rights activists, but many occur in rural areas and involve various ethnic minorities such as the Montagnards of the Central Highlands, H'mong in the Northwest Highlands, and the Khmer Krom in the southern delta region.



EXTENDING YOUR STAY?

What to see in VIETNAM

Vietnam has still a way to go before being a world-renowned destination. However, it still has its share of activities. These range from stunning Ha Long Bay to beautifully quaint Hoi An to Ho Chi Minh's mausoleum.

The Cu Chi tunnels represent the sheer grit and 'can-do' attitude of the Vietnamese while a visit to the War Remnants Museum brings home the horrible reality of war. On the more positive side, the marvelous Hue Monuments, along with the My Son Sanctuary will awaken your spiritual side. Explore the best of Vietnam.

1. Ha Long Bay is a beautiful natural wonder in northern Vietnam near the Chinese border. The Bay is dotted with 1,600 limestone islands and islets and covers an area of over 1,500 sqkm. This extraordinary area was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1994. For many tourists, this place is like something right out of a movie. The fact is that Halong Bay features a wide range of biodiversity, while the surrealistic scenery has indeed featured in endless movies. The best way to get to Halong City is by car, minibus or bus from Hanoi which is only 170km away. If budget is not a problem, an hour-long helicopter transfer is also available.



2. Thien Mu Pagoda (Hue): With seven stories, the Thien Mu Pagoda in Hue is the tallest pagoda in Vietnam. The pagoda overlooks the Perfume River and is regarded as the unofficial symbol of the former imperial capital. The temple was built in 1601 during the rule of the Nguyễn Lords. The initial temple was very simply constructed, but over time it was redeveloped and expanded with more intricate features.



3. Hoan Kiem Lake (Hanoi): Located in the historical center of Hanoi, Hoan Kiem Lake is one of the major scenic spots in the city and serves as the locals' favorite leisure spot. Hoan Kiem means "returned sword", and the name comes from a legend in which King Le Loi was given a magical sword by the gods, which he used to drive out the invading Chinese. Later he returned the sword to the Golden Turtle God in the lake.



4. This fishing-village-turned-tourist-attraction is situated on the coast of the South China Sea. Hoi An has been an international port from the 16th century although the serious shipping business has long since moved to the city of Da Nang. The heart of the city is still the Old Town, full of winding lanes and Chinese-styled shops. It is sometimes called the “Venice of Vietnam” because of the narrow canals that cut through part of the town.



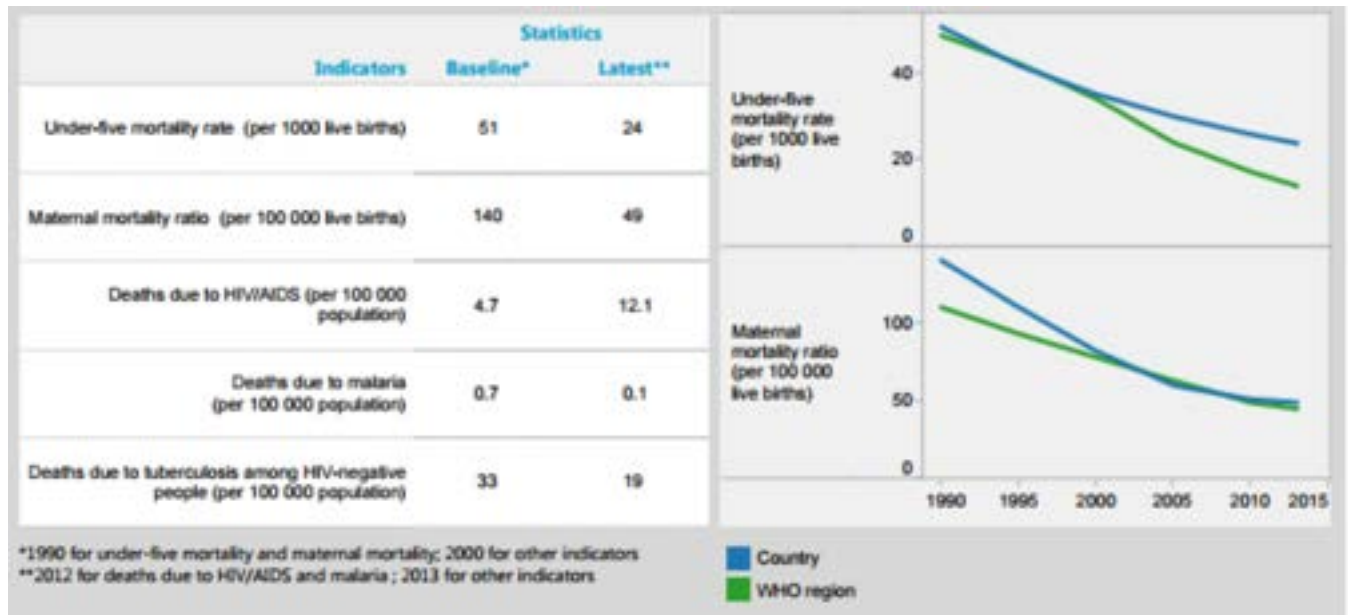
5. Mekong Delta: The Mekong Delta is the region in southern Vietnam where the Mekong River approaches and empties into the sea. It is a very rich and lush area,



covered with rice fields, that produces about half of the total of Vietnam’s agricultural output. Subsequently, life in the Mekong Delta revolves much around the river, and all the villages are often accessible by river rather than by road.

HEALTH OVERVIEW

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS



BASIC STATISTICS

Basic statistics

Indicators	Statistics	Year
Population (thousands)	91680	2013
Population aged under 15 (%)	23	2013
Population aged over 60 (%)	10	2013
Median age (years)	30	2013
Population living in urban areas (%)	32	2013
Total fertility rate (per woman)	1.7	2013
Number of live births (thousands)	1424.0	2013
Number of deaths (thousands)	527.9	2013
Birth registration coverage (%)	95	2011
Cause-of-death registration coverage (%)	...	
Gross national income per capita (PPP int \$)	5030	2013
WHO region	Western Pacific	2013
World Bank income classification	Lower middle	2013

... Data from 2007 onwards not available.

Source:
Country statistics and global health estimates
by WHO and UN partners

For more information visit the Global Health Observatory
(<http://www.who.int/gho/en/>)

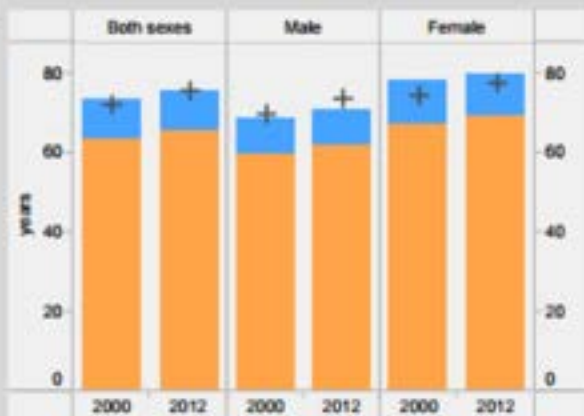
Last updated: January 2015

Life expectancy (years), 2012

		Country	WHO region	World Bank income group
Life expectancy	At birth	76	76	66
	At age 60	22	21	17
Healthy life expectancy	At birth	66	68	57

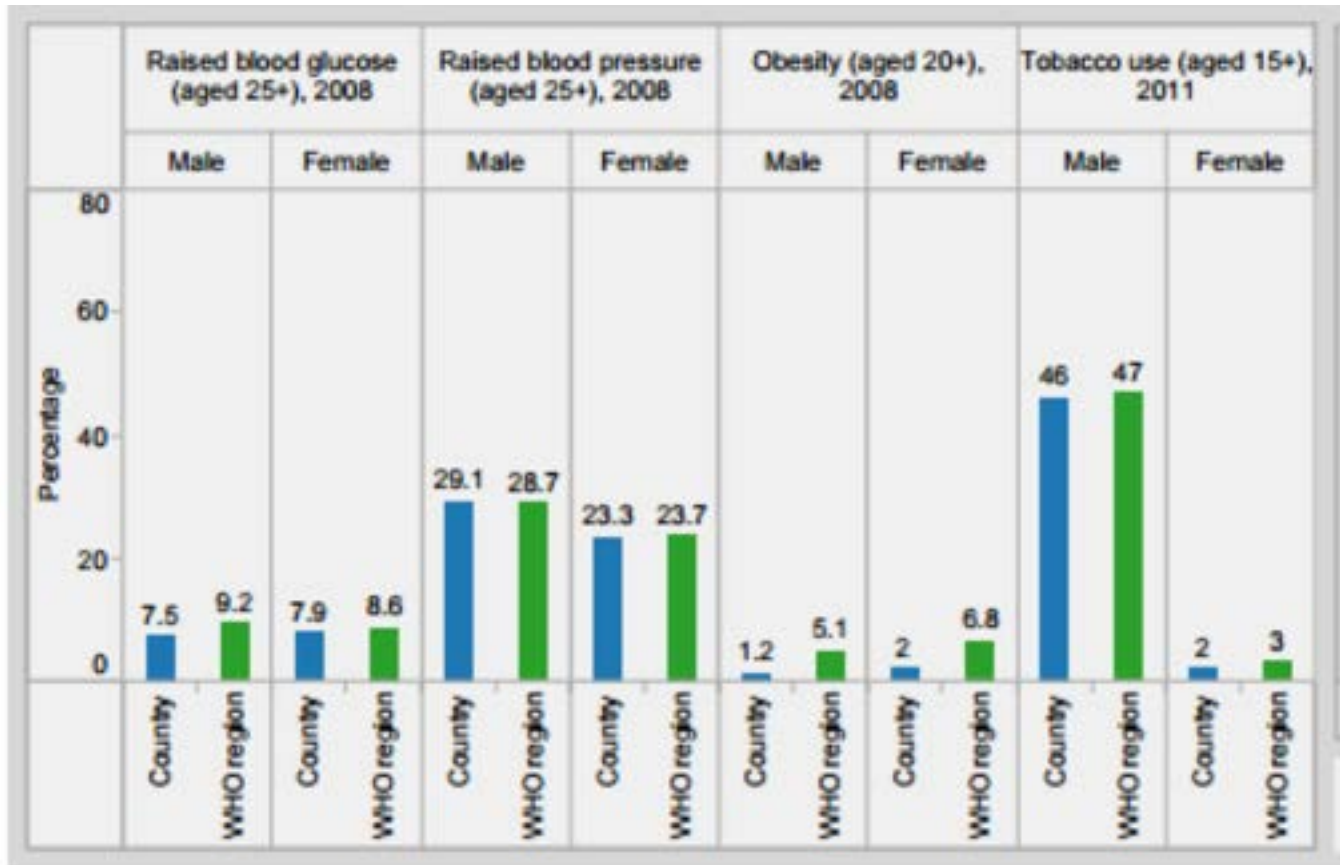
Life expectancy at birth for both sexes increased by 2 year(s) over the period of 2000-2012; the WHO region average increased by 4 year(s) in the same period.

In 2012, healthy expectancy in both sexes was 10 year(s) lower than overall life expectancy at birth. This lost healthy life expectancy represents 10 equivalent year(s) of full health lost through years lived with morbidity and disability.

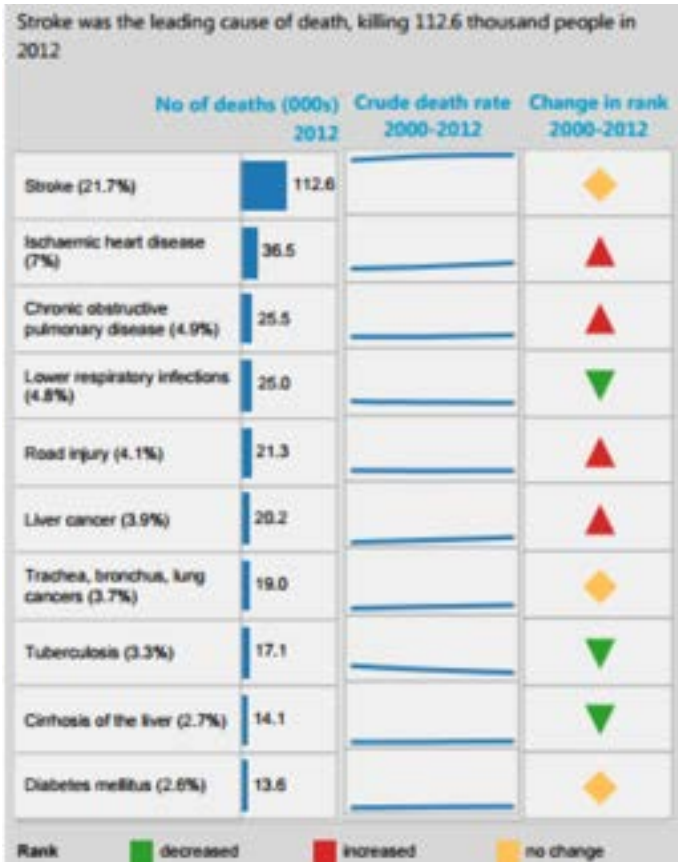


■ WHO regional life expectancy at birth
■ Healthy life expectancy at birth
■ Lost healthy life expectancy

ADULT RISK FACTORS



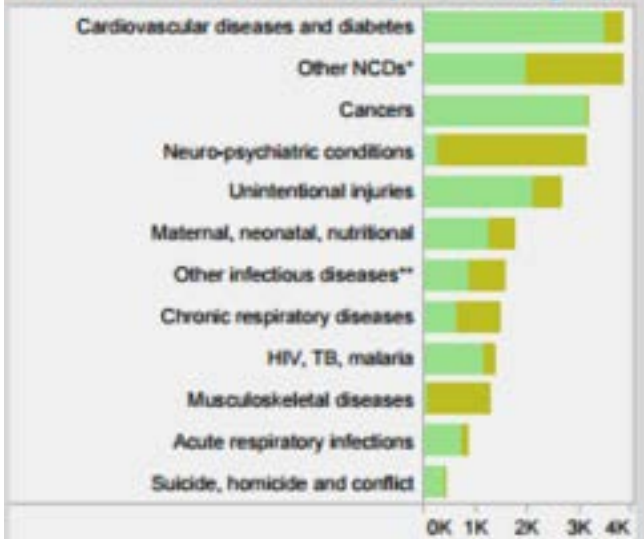
TOP 10 CAUSES OF DEATH



BURDEN OF DISEASE

Disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) are the sum of years of life lost due to premature mortality (YLL) and years of healthy life lost due to disability (YLD).

DALYs, YLL and YLD (thousands) by broad cause group



*Other noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) including non-malignant neoplasms; endocrine, blood and immune disorders; sense organ, digestive, genitourinary, and skin diseases; oral conditions; and congenital anomalies.

** Infectious diseases other than acute respiratory diseases, HIV, TB and malaria.

YLL YLD

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

HISTORY

A Vietnamese legend tells that the Vietnamese people of various tribes were born outside the womb following the marriage of Lạc Long Quân (Dragon Chief) and Âu Cơ (the Fairy). However, most Vietnamese historians consider the Dong Son civilization that covered much of Southeast Asia to be the beginning of Vietnam's history.

The Dong Son culture was a prehistoric Bronze age culture that was centered at the Red River Valley, but also flourished in other parts of the Indo-Malayan Archipelago from about 1000 B.C.E. to 1 B.C.E. The Dong Son people were skilled at cultivating rice, keeping water buffalo and pigs, fishing and sailing with long dug-out canoes. They also were skilled bronze casters, as can be seen in the famous Dong Son drums, which have been found widely in Southeast Asia. The Dong Son culture is linked to the Tibeto-Burman culture, the Dai culture in Yunnan and Laos, the Mon-Khmer cultures and the Tran-ninh's Plain of Jars plateau.



In 208 B.C.E., a Qin Dynasty general named Zhao Tuo established a state called Nam Việt which encompassed southern China and the Red River Delta. The historical significance of the original Nam Việt remains controversial because some historians consider it a Chinese occupation while others believe it was an independent era. For most of the period from 111 B.C.E. to the early tenth century C.E., Vietnam was under the rule of successive Chinese dynasties. Sporadic independence movements were attempted, but were quickly suppressed by Chinese forces.

In 939 C.E., the Vietnamese defeated Chinese forces at the Battle of Bach Dang River and gained independence, ending ten centuries of Chinese control. They gained complete autonomy a century later.

During the rule of the Tran Dynasty, Dai Viet defeated three Mongol invasions by the Yuan Dynasty. Incidentally, the final battle in which Vietnamese general Tran Hung Dao defeated most of Mongolian forces was held again at Bach Dang in 1288, like his ancestors nearly 300 years before.

Feudalism in Vietnam reached its zenith in the Le Dynasty of the fifteenth century, especially during the reign of Emperor Le Thanh Tong. Between the eleventh century and eighteenth centuries, the Vietnamese expanded south. They eventually conquered the kingdom of Champa and much of the Khmer Empire.

Vietnam's independence ended in the mid-nineteenth century, when the country was colonized by the French Empire. The French administration enacted significant political and cultural changes. A Western-style system of modern education was developed, and Christianity was introduced. Developing a plantation economy to promote the exports of tobacco, indigo, tea, and coffee, the French largely ignored increasing calls for self-government and civil rights. A nationalist political movement soon emerged, and its young leader, Ho Chi Minh, led its call for independence to the League of Nations. However, the French maintained control of their colonies until World War II, when the



Japanese invaded Indochina. The Japanese exploited the natural resources of Vietnam for military campaigns into Burma, the Malay Peninsula, and India.

In the final years of the war, a nationalist insurgency emerged under Ho Chi Minh, committed to independence and communism. After the defeat of Japan, nationalist forces fought French colonial forces in the First Indochina War that lasted from 1945 to 1954. The French were defeated at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu and shortly afterward withdrew from the country. The Geneva Conference of 1954 divided the country at the seventeenth parallel into North and South Vietnam.

The United States opposed the division of the country and any alliance of communist-held North Vietnam to the Soviet Union or the People's Republic of China. Disagreements soon emerged over the organizing of elections and reunification, and the U.S. began increasing its contribution of military advisers even as Soviet-supplied arms and munitions strengthened communist forces. An alleged attack on U.S. ships in the Gulf of Tonkin on August 4, 1964, triggered a U.S. military assault on North Vietnamese military installations, launching the Vietnam War, that would escalate to the deployment of more than 500,000 troops into South Vietnam.

U.S. forces were soon embroiled in a vicious guerrilla war with the Viet Cong, the South Vietnamese communist insurgent militia. North Vietnamese forces unsuccessfully attempted to overrun the South during the 1968 Tet Offensive and the war soon spread into neighboring Laos and Cambodia. Under President Richard Nixon, the U.S. began transferring combat roles to the South Vietnamese military in a process known as "Vietnamization." The effort had mixed results, but with U.S. support the South Vietnamese were able to temporarily hold their own.

The Paris Peace Accords, on January 27, 1973, formally recognized the sovereignty of both sides. Under the terms of the accords, all American combat troops were withdrawn by March 29, 1973. Limited fighting continued, but all major fighting ended until the North once again invaded in strength and overpowered the South on April 30, 1975. One of the main impediments to furthering "Vietnamization" was the cutting off of all military funding to Vietnam by the US Congress and, perhaps more importantly, the resignation from office of Richard Nixon in August 1974. Nixon had attached his presidency to a pledge of "peace with honor." Seven and a half months after his resignation, Cambodia was taken over by the Khmer Rouge and South Vietnam fell to communists just two weeks later. Vietnamese citizens, as many as one and a half million known as the Vietnamese boat people, began to flee, but the United Nations estimated that perhaps one third died at sea.

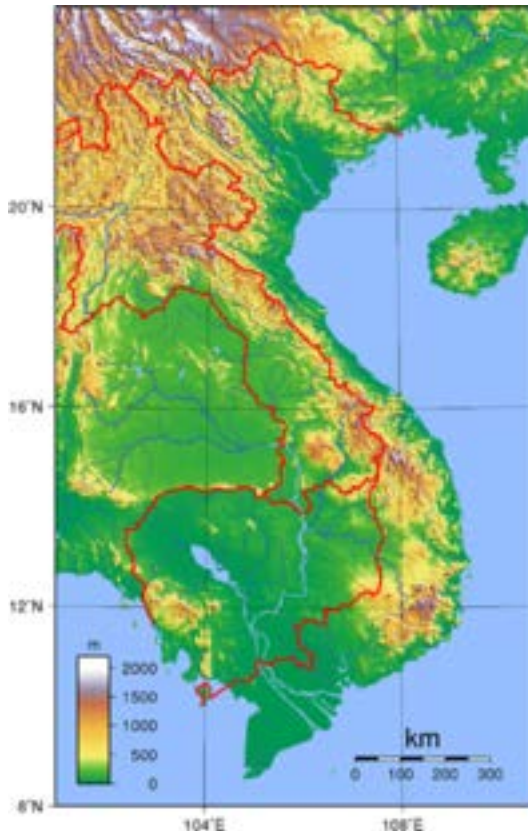


South Vietnam briefly became the Republic of South Vietnam, a puppet state under military occupation by North Vietnam, before being officially reunited with the North under Communist rule as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam on July 2, 1976. Upon taking control, the Vietnamese communists banned other political parties, arrested suspects believed to have collaborated with the US, and embarked on a mass campaign of collectivization of farms and factories. Reconstruction of the war-ravaged country was slow, and serious humanitarian and economic problems confronted the communist regime. In 1978, the Vietnamese Army invaded Cambodia to remove their erstwhile allies, the Khmer Rouge, from power. This action worsened relations with China, which launched a brief

incursion into northern Vietnam in 1979. This conflict caused Vietnam to rely even more heavily on Soviet economic and military aid.

In a historic shift in 1986, the Communist Party of Vietnam implemented free-market reforms known as Doi Moi ("Renovation"). With the authority of the state remaining unchallenged, private ownership of farms and companies, deregulation and foreign investment were encouraged. The economy of Vietnam has achieved rapid growth in agricultural and industrial production, construction and housing, exports and foreign investment. However, the power of the Communist Party of Vietnam over all aspects of government remains firm. In 1995 the United States restored diplomatic relations with Vietnam.

GEOGRAPHY



Vietnam covers an area of approximately 128,066 square miles (331,688 square kilometers), slightly bigger than New Mexico. Extending 1025 miles (1650km) north to south, the country is only 31 miles (50km) across at its narrowest point.

The topography consists of hills and densely forested mountains, with level land covering no more than 20 percent. Mountains account for 40 percent of the area, with smaller hills accounting for 40 percent and tropical forests for 42 percent. The northern part of the country consists mostly of highlands and the Red River Delta.

Phan Xi Păng, located in Lào Cai province, is the highest mountain in Vietnam at 10,312 feet (3143 meters).

The south is divided into coastal lowlands, the Annamite Chain (running northwest to southeast along the border with Laos), and extensive forests. Made up of five relatively flat plateaus of basaltic soils, the highlands account for 16 percent of the country's arable land and 22 percent of its total forested land.

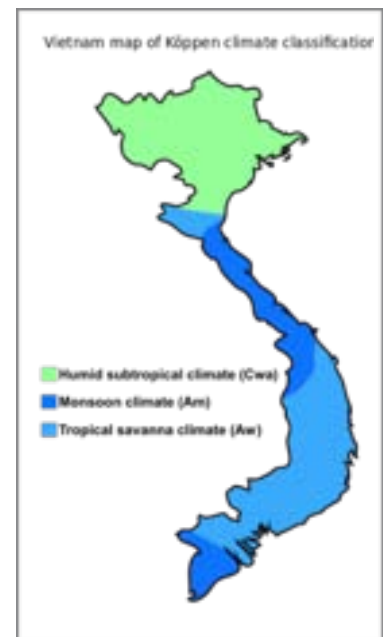
The delta of the Red River (also known as the Sông Hồng), is a flat, triangular region of 1158 square miles (3000 square kilometers). It is smaller but more intensely developed and more densely populated than the Mekong River Delta. Once an inlet of the Gulf of Tonkin, it has been filled in by alluvial deposits from rivers over tens of thousands of years, and it advances over 300 feet (one hundred meters) into the Gulf annually. The Mekong delta, covering about 15,400 square miles (40,000 square

kilometers), is a low-level plain not more than 10 feet (three meters) above sea level and criss-crossed by a maze of canals and rivers. The delta advances 200 to 260 feet (60 to 80 meters) into the sea every year, as a result of sediment carried by the Mekong River.

CLIMATE AND WEATHER

Vietnam has a tropical monsoon climate, with humidity averaging 84 percent throughout the year. However, because of differences in latitude and topographical relief, the climate varies considerably from place to place. During the winter or dry season, extending from November to April, the monsoon winds blow from the northeast along the China coast and across the Gulf of Tonkin.

Temperatures range from a low of 41°F (5°C) in December and January, to more than 98°F (37°C) in April, the hottest month. Seasonal divisions are more marked in the northern half of the country.



DEMOGRAPHICS

The 2005 census estimated the population of Vietnam at 85.2 million.

The Vietnamese people originated in the area that is now southern China and northern Vietnam. They pushed southward over two millennia to occupy the entire eastern seacoast of the Indochina Peninsula, or a little less than half of current-day Vietnam. Ethnic Vietnamese, or Viet (known officially as Kinh), who make up 86 percent of the population, live in the lowlands and speak the Vietnamese language. A homogeneous social group, the

Kinh exert influence on national life through their control of political and economic affairs and their role as purveyors of the dominant culture.



The government recognizes 54 ethnic groups. Ethnic minorities inhabit the least fertile lands, representing the majority of the country. The Muong, a closely related ethnic of the Kinh, the third largest minority group with an estimated population of 1.2 million, are found mostly in the highlands that cover two-thirds of the national territory.

Vietnam's approximately one million ethnic Chinese, concentrated in southern Vietnam, constitute the second-largest minority group. Vietnamese of Chinese ancestry have been active in rice trading, milling, real estate, and banking in the south and shop-keeping, stevedoring, and mining in the north. Restrictions on economic activity following reunification in 1975 and the deterioration of relations with China reverberated through the Chinese-Vietnamese community. In 1978-1979, some 450,000 ethnic Chinese left by boat as refugees or were expelled across the land border with China. However in recent years, the government has encouraged overseas Hoa to return and invest.

The Khmer Krom are found in the delta of the Mekong River, in the south of Vietnam, where they are the majority of the rural population in many areas. They live in what was previously a part of Cambodia that Vietnam conquered in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Official Vietnamese figures put the Khmer Krom at 1.3 million people.

The central highland peoples, commonly termed Degar or Montagnards (mountain people) comprise two main ethnolinguistic groups: Malayo-Polynesian and Mon-Khmer. About 30 groups of various cultures and dialects are spread over the highland territory. Other minority groups include the Cham, remnants of the once-mighty Champa Kingdom, conquered by the Vietnamese in the fifteenth century, the Hmong, and Thai.

Mahayana Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism have strongly influenced the religious and cultural life of the people, although according to the 1999 census, 80.8 percent of Vietnamese people reportedly belong to 'no religion'. French colonists introduced Christianity. There remains a substantial following of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism amongst the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao communities. The largest Protestant churches are the Evangelical Church of Vietnam and the Montagnard Evangelical Church. Membership of Sunni and Bashi Islam is usually found in the ethnic Cham minority; there are also a few ethnic Vietnamese adherents of Islam in the southwest. The government has been criticized for its religion violations.

The socialist government does not recognize private land ownership, but since the early 1990s, the government has granted individuals long-term leaseholds, a trend reinforced with the passage of the 1998 Land Law. Control over land is contentious. The growth of a market economy has made land valuable. Cases of corrupt officials selling land-use rights or seizing land for personal use have been reported. Ambiguities in the law and the lack of clear legal processes make land disputes difficult to resolve.

Vietnamese revolutionary policies endorse gender equality, but the traditional pattern remains with women running the households, which entails cooking, cleaning, going to market, and caring for children, and men working in business, politics or government, or administration. Men also occupy the most prestigious religious roles of Buddhist monk or Catholic priest.

Almost all Vietnamese marry, usually in their late teens or early twenties. Arranged marriage and polygamy are illegal. Vietnamese prefer to marry someone of equal status, though it is better for the husband to be of slightly higher status. Divorce rates have increased, especially in urban areas. Many women are reluctant to divorce because remarriage is difficult.

The domestic unit commonly has two or three generations living together in one home. Residence is organized around the male line, and the eldest male exercises authority. Sons stay in the parent's home, and their brides move in with them. The eldest son will usually remain in the home.



Regarding languages, 86.2 percent of the population speak Vietnamese, part of the Austro-Asiatic language family. Vietnamese writing used Chinese characters until the thirteenth century, when the Vietnamese developed their own set of characters called Chu Nom. The celebrated epic *The Tale of Kieu* by Nguyen Du was written in Chu Nom. During the French colonial period, Quoc Ngu, several Portuguese missionaries romanized the Vietnamese alphabet, which brought literacy to the masses. The Vietnamese alphabet in use today is an adapted version of the Latin alphabet, with additional diacritics for tones and certain letters.

Other languages spoken by minority groups are: Tai, Muong, Khmer, Chinese, Nùng, and Hmong language. The French language, a legacy of colonial rule, is still spoken by some older Vietnamese as a second language. Russian—and to a lesser extent Czech or Polish—is often known among those whose families had ties with the Soviet bloc. Chinese, Japanese, and English have become the most popular foreign languages, with English study being obligatory in most schools.

Most people are poor. Wealth, particularly in urban areas where some individuals often with links to business or the government, have become wealthy, has stratified society. The possession of a motorcycle, a mobile phone, refrigerators, televisions, video players, gold jewelry, and imported luxury goods, such as clothing or liquor, symbolizes wealth. The poor ride bicycles, wear old tattered clothing, and live in traditional thatched homes.



Agriculture's share of economic output has declined from 42 percent of GDP in 1989 to 26 percent in 1999, as production in other sectors of the economy has risen. Urban unemployment has been rising steadily due to high numbers of migration from the countryside to the cities, while rural unemployment is already at critical levels. Other measures taken to facilitate Vietnam's transition to a more market-oriented economy include updating its intellectual property legislation. Vietnam was accepted into the World Trade Organization in 2006.

Vietnam's modern transport network was developed under French rule for the purpose of harvesting raw materials, and was reconstructed after the Vietnam War. The railways are the most popular form of transport. Bicycles, motorcycles, and public bus services remain the dominant form of road transport in Vietnam's cities, towns,

and villages. Traffic congestion is a serious problem in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City with the booming numbers of automobiles. There are also more than 10,500 miles (17,000 kilometers) of navigable waterways. The nation has seven ports at Cam Ranh, Da Nang, Hai Phong, Ho Chi Minh City, Hong Gai, Qui Nhon, and Nha Trang.

EDUCATION

The educational system of Vietnam is represented by a broad government-controlled network of schools, universities and colleges. It has 5 classifications: kindergarten; primary, intermediate, secondary, and higher education.



Pre-primary or kindergarten accepts children with age of 18 months to 5 years. it is not compulsory and is generally popular in major cities such as Ha Noi, Ho Chi Minh, Da Nang, Hai Phong, Can Tho, and Vung Tau. Primary education is the normal starting level for most Vietnamese and is required for every student. It admits children of age 6 and lasts for 5 years. After finishing the 5th grade, students needed to pass the Elementary Graduation Examination. Intermediate education consists of grade 6 to 9 and graduating students are required to pass the Intermediate Graduation Examination (IGE). The secondary education or high school is from grade 10 to 12 and students must attend a graduation test given by the Province's education service. The test is generally has 6 subjects, 3 of which are always included – foreign language, mathematics, and literature.

All students aspiring to go to college or a university must pass the University Entrance Examination (UEE). In 2004, the government projected that almost 1 million Vietnamese students took the exam. Usually students take 3 exams, each lasts for 3 hours for the fixed group of subjects (Group A – Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry | Group B – Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry | Group C – Literature, History, Geography | Group D – Literature, Foreign Language, Mathematics). The Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam reported there are approximately 30 non-public universities in the country.

CULTURE

Rural customs and traditions remain big influences in Vietnam's culture; almost 75% of the country's population still lives in rural areas. In rural Vietnam, family relationship plays a very important role. Like most Eastern cultures, Vietnamese value the roles of family and clan. Every clan has its patriarch, clan altar, and death celebrations attended by the whole clan. It is still typical today to see 3 or 4 generations living under one house in rural Vietnam.

Vietnamese Buddhism, one of the 3 religions in the so-called Tam Giáo, is the highly accepted among the commoners. Also many Vietnamese are greatly influenced by the practice of ancestor worship and native animism.

Vietnamese food is one of most popular in the world. It is very diverse and most of the time categorized into 3 groups; each representing to the country's main regions – north, central, south. Its distinctive flavors are sweet, spicy, sour and flavored with an array of basil and mint. Vietnamese cuisines generally use little oil and a lot of vegetables; mostly based on rice, soy sauce, and fish sauce. Noodles and noodle soups are also very popular in different regions of the country. Like their cuisines, music also varies in the 3 regions. The northern classical music is the oldest and usually more formal music in Vietnam. Central music is characterized by melancholic melodies and has influences from Champa culture. The southern music radiates a sparkling laissez-faire attitude.



The Vietnamese celebrates numerous modern and traditional holidays. The Lunar New Year (Tết) and the Mid-autumn lantern festival (Tết Trung Thu) are the 2 most important and extensively celebrated traditional holidays. Tết is the biggest holiday of the year and it falls on the first 3 days of the lunar calendar. But the long celebrations are held on the weeks before and after the 3 days, which is usually between late January and late February.

RELIGION



Vietnamese people don't call themselves as religious people but they act as one. Mostly they go to religious temples and worship on their beliefs. Their government ruled that they can follow one or more religions or none. The government also declared that they can practice religion freely and should not use it to violate the law. Six of their religions are recognized by the state; 3 were established in the early centuries; and one is a religious sect.

The 10 religions in the country of Vietnam are Mahayana Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism (also known as Taoism), Roman Catholic, Cao Dai (pronounced as cow die), Hoa Hao (pronounced as wah how), Protestantism, Islam, Hinduism, Theravada Buddhism. The most common people in Vietnam are into Buddhism. Almost 80% of Vietnamese are practicing this religion including all its sects. Mahayana Buddhism came from China and spread through out the Vietnam's Red River Delta at around 300 BC. While Theravada Buddhism that hailed from India arrived into the southern Mekong Delta region around 300-600 AD. On the other hand, Christianity entered the country in 16th century through the catholic missionaries. The influence of Christianity was later strengthened when Vietnam was under the French colony. Cao Dai and Hao Hao were founded during the 19th century in the Mekong River. Hao Hao is closely related to Buddhism while Cao Dai is a Buddhism that has the principles of Confucianism, Daoism, and Christianity. Like other countries in Asia, religions are very sacred to the Vietnamese.

POVERTY

As in many other developing countries, hunger and poverty in Vietnam has existed for a significant amount of time. Until the 1980s, most of the Vietnamese population still lived under the poverty line. However, thanks to the political and economic reform in 1986 and the government's commitment, the status of poverty and hunger in Vietnam has been significantly improved. From one of the poorest countries in the World with per capita income below US \$100 per year, Vietnam is now a middle income country with per capita income of US \$1,910 by the end of 2013. Thereby, the poverty rate decreases gradually from 58 percent in 1993 to 28.9 percent in 2002, 14.5 percent in 2008 and 12 percent in 2011. About 28 million people are estimated to have been lifted out of poverty over approximately two decades. The 2014 Global Hunger Index (GHI) Report ranked Vietnam 15th amongst 81 nations suffering from hunger, with a GHI of 7.5 compared with 27.7 in 1990 (country with extremely alarming (GHI \geq 30), alarming (GHI between 20.0 and 29.9) or serious (GHI between 10.0 and 19.9) hunger situation. Achievements in poverty reduction and hunger eradication have been highly appreciated by the international community and viewed overall as successful in furthering economic development. However, Vietnam still has many tasks ahead in fighting against poverty reduction and hunger eradication, particularly for vulnerable groups such as ethnic minorities, and the disabled.



SURVIVAL GUIDE

ETIQUETTE

The People

- A long struggle for independence has given the Vietnamese a deep sense of national pride. Vietnamese value their independence and history and are offended by people who ignore or violate either. Most Vietnamese have an interest in all things American. They believe all past hostilities were part of the natural defense of their national territory. Families are very strong and help each other in all needs.

Meeting and Greeting

- The Vietnamese generally shake hands both when greeting and when saying good-bye. Shake with both hands, and bow your head slightly to show respect. Bow to the elderly who do not extend their hand. Vietnamese women are more inclined to bow their head slightly than to shake hands.
- When greeting someone, say "xin chao" (seen chow) + given name + title. The Vietnamese are delighted if a Westerner can properly say "xin chao" (because Vietnamese is a tonal language, "xin chao" can have six different meanings, only one of which is "Hello").

Body Language

- Summoning someone with a curled index finger, as is done in the West, is only done by the boss. To beckon someone, extend your arm, palm down, and move your fingers in a scratching motion. Only beckon someone who has a "lower" status than you.
- Men and women do not show affection in public. However, members of the same sex may hold hands while walking.
- Always use both hands when passing an object to another person.
- Touching children on the head is only done by parents, grandparents, etc.

Corporate Culture

- Business cards are usually exchanged when meeting for the first time. Give and receive a business card with both hands.
- The Vietnamese are generally quite punctual and expect foreigners to be the same. That said, the Vietnamese can be very flexible and accommodating when situations occur that are beyond the control of one of the parties involved (for example, a washed-out street, traffic jam, etc.).
- Few Vietnamese speak English well. An interpreter is usually necessary.
- A foreigner doing business in Vietnam will have to deal with government officials. You may have to go through the same slow procedure dozens of times to obtain the necessary permits to operate a foreign-owned company in Vietnam. Continual, direct contact with the ministry officials responsible for granting or approving your permits and licenses is very important. Difficulties may arise when one official refuses to honor an agreement concluded by another official.
- Most decisions are made by committee in Vietnam. Individual connections are not as important as in many other Asian countries, because no one holds absolute power to make a decision. You can not rely on one person in a particular organization to safeguard your interests.
- The Vietnamese willingness to avoid unpleasantness can sometimes lead to great misunderstandings. "Yes" may not mean "yes." When the Vietnamese say "No problem," you can take it to mean "Yes, there is a problem." Double and even triple-check all commitments, and then monitor them closely.
- Your local partner in Vietnam is very important and should be chosen very carefully.
- Corruption is widespread. All manners of payoffs, kickbacks and "gifts" are quite common. Be aware that corruption will not only affect your costs, but also may contribute to unexpected delays in delivery and the processing of licenses.

Dining and Entertainment

- A small dish or shaker of white crystal on the table is more likely to be monosodium glutamate (MSG) than sugar or salt.
- The Vietnamese style of dining is chopsticks and rice bowls. Hold your rice bowl in your hand; it is considered lazy to eat from a rice bowl that is on the table.
- The host may serve guests, but will usually just invite everyone to begin helping themselves. Food is placed on dishes in the center of the table from which each person helps him/herself.
- An offer of tea at a reception or meeting is a ritual form of hospitality and should not be refused.

Dress

- The Vietnamese dress very well.
- For business, men should wear conservative but casual suits and ties.
- Women should wear a conservative dress or a businesslike blouse and pants.
- Gifts
 - Flowers are normally given only by men to women.
 - Always wrap a gift in colorful paper.
 - When visiting a Vietnamese home, bring a gift for the hostess. A gift for children or an elderly parent is also appreciated.
 - Give items useful for daily activity, like designer soaps, cosmetics, lamps or framed pictures for the home.
 - Don't give handkerchiefs (symbols of a sad farewell). Most Asians consider the Western habit of using a cloth handkerchief and then returning it to your pocket to be barbaric.
 - In business, give whiskey. Giving a gift in an office setting may be misinterpreted as a bribe. Try to save your business gift giving until you are invited to your colleague's home.

Helpful Hints

- Walk quickly, and avoid eye contact on the street.
- Refer to Ho Chi Minh City as Saigon. Local people prefer Saigon to Ho Chi Minh City, which was imposed by the government in Hanoi.

Especially for Women

- In the major cities, little sexual discrimination exists, and Vietnamese women receive equal pay for equal work. In the country, men are still boss.
- Western women should dress conservatively in Vietnam. Women who wear heavy makeup and revealing clothing are viewed as prostitutes.
- When dining with a Vietnamese man, a western businesswoman should arrange to eat in a public place and should insist upon hosting. If the Vietnamese man hosts, the Western woman is obliged to reciprocate with a meal of equal value.

LANGUAGE

The official state or national language of Vietnam is Vietnamese (or in Vietnam, Tiếng Việt), a tonal Mon–Khmer language which is spoken by the majority of the country’s citizens. In the early history of the language, Vietnamese writing used Chinese characters; however in the mid-13th century, the Vietnamese people developed their own set of characters, referred to as Chữ nôm.

Vietnamese is closely associated with Cambodia's official language, Khmer. In the Vietnamese language, with each syllable there are six different tones that can be used—tones that change the definition of most words—making it difficult for foreigners/non-native speakers to pick up, much less master, the language. In written form, Vietnamese now uses the Roman alphabet and accent marks to show tones. This system of writing, called Quốc ngữ, became widely popular and brought literacy to the Vietnamese masses during the French colonial period. The aforementioned alphabet was developed in the 17th century by the Jesuit priest Alexandre de Rhodes and several other Catholic missionaries as a way to translate the scriptures. Eventually this system, particularly after World War I, replaced the one using Chinese characters (Chu nom), which had been the unofficial written form used for centuries.

In addition to Vietnamese, there are several other minority languages spoken in the country of Vietnam—languages that are either the mother-tongue or second language of a wide section of the country’s population. These minority languages include:

- Tày
- Mường
- Cham
- Khmer
- Nùng
- H'Mông
- Chinese



The Montagnard people of Vietnam’s Central Highlands also speak a number of distinct languages, and a number of sign languages have recently developed in the larger cities.

Vietnam was once a colony of France, and as such, the French language, a legacy of that colonial rule, is spoken as a second language by many of Vietnam’s educated populace. It is especially prevalent among the older generation and those educated in the former South Vietnam, where it was a principal language in administration, education and commerce; Vietnam remains a full member of the Francophonie, and education has revived some interest in the language.

In addition to the languages highlighted above—and to a much lesser extent—the Russian, German, Czech and Polish languages are also spoken among some Vietnamese whose families once had ties with the Soviet bloc during the Cold War.

In recent years, as Vietnam's contacts with Western nations have increased, English has become more popular as a second language in the country. The study of English is now compulsory in most Vietnamese schools, either alongside, or in many cases, in lieu of French, which was once mandatory under French rule. Japanese, Chinese and Korean have also grown in popularity as Vietnam's links with other East Asian nations have strengthened.

English	tiếng việt (Quốc Ngữ)	啗越 (字喃)
Welcome	Hoan nghênh Được tiếp đãi ân cần	歡迎 得接待恩勤
Hello (General greeting)	Chào anh (>m) Chào chị (>f)	嘲英 嘲姊
Hello (on phone)	Á-lô!	亞盧!
How are you?	Anh khỏe không? (>m) Chị khỏe không? (>f)	英劫空? 姊劫空?
Reply to 'How are you?'	Khoẻ, cảm ơn. Bạn thì sao?	劫, 感恩。伴時吵?
Long time no see	Lâu quá không gặp	數過空返
What's your name?	Bạn tên gì?	伴銑咦?
My name is ...	Tôi tên là ...	碎銑羅...
Where are you from?	Ông từ đâu đến?	翁自兜到?
I'm from ...	Tôi đến từ...	碎到自...
Pleased to meet you	Hân hạnh gặp ông	欣幸返翁
Good morning (Morning greeting)	Chào buổi sáng	嘲睨爗
Good afternoon (Afternoon greeting)	Xin chào	吁嘲
Good evening (Evening greeting)	Chào buổi tối	嘲睨曠
Good night	Chúc ngủ ngon	祝旯睛
Goodbye (Parting phrases)	Chào anh (>m) Chào chị (>f) Tạm biệt	嘲英 嘲姊 暫別
Good luck	Chúc may mắn!	祝褻敏!
Cheers! (Toasts used when drinking)	Chúc sức khoẻ!	祝飾劫!
Bon appetit / Have a nice meal	Ăn ngon nhé Chúc ngon miệng	☐旯☐ 祝旯品
Bon voyage / Have a good journey	Lên đường bình an	葷塘平安
I understand	Tôi hiểu	碎曉

English	tiếng việt (Quốc Ngữ)	啗越 (啗喃)
I don't understand	Tôi không hiểu	碎空曉
Please say that again	Bạn có thể nhắc lại được không ?	
Please speak more slowly	Làm ơn nói chậm hơn	𠄎恩呐蹠欣
Please write it down	Làm ơn viết xuống	𠄎恩日𠄎
Do you speak Vietnamese?	Bạn có nói tiếng Việt không?	伴喃呐啗越空?
Yes, a little (reply to 'Do you speak ...?')	Có, chỉ một chút	喃, 只爻焄
How do you say ... in Vietnamese?	Bạn nói ... thế nào trong tiếng Việt? Câu này..... Tiếng Việt thì nói thế nào?	伴呐...勢鬧𠄎啗越?
Excuse me	Xin lỗi	吁𠄎
How much is this?	Cái này giá bao nhiêu?	𠄎呢價包饒?
Sorry	Xin lỗi	吁𠄎
Thank you	Cảm ơn ông (>m) Cảm ơn bà (>f) Xin cảm ơn	感恩翁 感恩婆 吁感恩
Reply to thank you	Không có gì	空喃𠄎
Where's the toilet?	Cầu tiêu ở đâu?	棊消糞兜?
I miss you	Tôi nhớ bạn Anh nhớ em (m>f) Em nhớ anh (f>m)	
I love you	Em yêu anh (>m) Anh yêu em (>f)	俺爰英 英爰俺
Leave me alone!	Để cho tôi yên! Hãy để tôi yên!	抵朱碎安! 嘻抵碎安!
Help!	Cứu với! Cứu tôi với	救損!
Fire!	Cháy!	焔!
Stop!	Ngừng lại!	凝吏!
Call the police!	Xin gọi cảnh sát!	吁噲警察!
Christmas and New Year greetings	Chúc Giáng Sinh Vui Vẻ và Chúc Năm Mới Tốt Lành	祝降生愜𠄎 吧祝辭𠄎辭𠄎
Birthday greetings	Chúc mừng sinh nhật	祝𠄎生日!

SAFETY

Vietnam is a relatively safe country for visitors, including women traveling alone. In fact, given the country's recent history, many tourists, particularly Americans, are pleasantly surprised at the warm reception that foreign travelers receive. That said, petty crime is on the rise – though it's still relatively small-scale and shouldn't be a problem if you take common-sense precautions. Generally, the hassles you'll encounter will be the milder sort of coping with pushy vendors and over-enthusiastic touts and beggars.

Petty crime



As a tourist, you're an obvious target for thieves (who may include your fellow travelers): carry your passport, travelers' cheques and other valuables in a concealed money belt. Don't leave anything important lying about in your room: use a safe, if you have one. A cable lock, or padlock and chain, comes in handy for doors and windows in cheap hotels, and is useful for securing your pack on trains and buses. It's not a bad idea to keep \$100 or so separate from the rest of your cash, along with insurance policy details and photocopies of important documents, such as the relevant pages of your passport including your visa stamp.

At street level it's best not to be ostentatious: forego eye-catching jewelry and flashy watches, try to be discreet when taking out your cash, and be particularly wary in crowds and on public transport. If your pack is on the top of the bus, make sure it's attached securely (usually everything is tied down with ropes) and keep an eye on it during the most vulnerable times – before departure, at meal stops and on arrival at your destination. On trains, either cable-lock your pack or put it under the bottom bench-seat, out of public view. The odd instance has been reported of travelers being drugged and then robbed, so it's best not to accept food or drink from anyone you don't know and trust. Bear in mind that when walking or riding in a cyclo you are vulnerable to moped-borne snatch-thieves; don't wear cameras or expensive sunglasses hanging round your neck and keep a firm grip on your bags. If you do become a target, however, it's best to let go rather than risk being pulled into the traffic and suffering serious injury.

The place you are most likely to encounter street crime is in Ho Chi Minh City, which has a fairly bad reputation for bag-snatchers, pickpockets and con artists. Be wary of innocent-looking kids and grannies who may be acting as decoys for thieves – especially in the bar districts and other popular tourist hangouts. It's best to avoid taking a cyclo at night, and you'd be unwise to walk alone at any time outside Districts One and Three.

Petty crime, much of it drug- and prostitution-related, is also a problem in Nha Trang, where you should watch your belongings at all times on the beach. Again, be wary of taking a cyclo after dark and women should avoid walking alone at night. Single males, on the other hand, are a particular target for “taxi girls”, many of whom also double as thieves.

It's important not to get paranoid, however: crime levels in Vietnam are still a long way behind those of Western countries, and violent crime against tourists is extremely rare.

If you do have anything stolen, you'll need to go to the nearest police station to make a report in order to claim on your insurance. Try to recruit an English-speaker to come along with you – someone at your hotel should be able to help.

“Social evils” and serious crime

Since liberalization and doi moi, Vietnamese society has seen an increase in prostitution, drugs – including hard drugs – and more serious crimes. These so-called “social evils” are viewed as a direct consequence of reduced controls on society and ensuing Westernization. The police have imposed midnight closing on bars and clubs for several years now, mainly because of drugs, but also to curb general rowdiness, although you'll always find the occasional bar that somehow manages to keep serving, particularly around De Tham in Ho Chi Minh City. That apart, the campaign against social evils should have little effect on most foreign tourists.

Single Western males tend to get solicited by prostitutes in cheap provincial and seaside hotels, though more commonly by women cruising on motorbikes. Quite apart from any higher moral considerations, bear in mind that AIDS is a serious problem in Vietnam, though the epidemic has shown signs of stabilizing.

Finally, having anything to do with drugs in Vietnam is extremely unwise. At night there's a fair amount of drug selling on the streets of Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, Nha Trang and even Sa Pa, and it's not unknown for dealers to turn buyers in to the police. Fines and jail sentences are imposed for lesser offences, while the death penalty is regularly imposed for possessing, trading or smuggling larger quantities.

Military and political hazards

Not surprisingly, the Vietnamese authorities are sensitive about military installations and strategic areas – including border regions, military camps (of which there are many), bridges, airports, naval dockyards and even train stations. Anyone taking photographs in the vicinity of such sites risks having the memory card removed from their camera or being fined.

Unexploded ordnance from past conflicts still poses a threat in some areas: the problem is most acute in the Demilitarized Zone, where each year a number of local farmers, scrap-metal scavengers or children are killed or injured. Wherever you are, stick to well-trodden paths and never touch any shells or half-buried chunks of metal.

Beggars, hassle and scams

Given the number of disabled, war-wounded and unemployed in Vietnam, there are surprisingly few beggars around. Most people are actually trying hard to earn a living somehow, and many day-tours include a visit to a factory that employs disabled workers to produce handicrafts or local products.

At many tourist spots, you may well be swamped by a gaggle of children or teenagers selling cold drinks, fruit and chewing gum. Although they can sometimes be a bit overwhelming, as often as not they're just out to practise their English and be entertained for a while. They may even turn out to be excellent guides, in which case it's only fair that you buy something from them in return.

A common scam among taxi drivers is to tell new arrivals in a town that the hotel they ask for is closed or has moved or changed its name. Instead, they head for a hotel that pays them commission. This may work out fine (new hotels often use this method to become known), but more often than not it's a substandard hotel and you will in any case pay over the odds since the room rate will include the driver's commission. To avoid being ripped off, always insist on being taken to the exact address of your chosen hotel, at least just to check the story.

Another common complaint is that organized tours don't live up to what was promised. There are more people on the tour than stated, for example, or the room doesn't have air-conditioning, or the guide's English is limited. If it's a group tour and you've paid up front, unfortunately there's very little you can do beyond complaining to the agent on your return; you may be lucky and get some form of compensation, but it's very unlikely. As always, you tend to get what you pay for, so avoid signing up for dirt-cheap tours.

Women travelers

Vietnam is generally a safe country for women to travel around alone. Most Vietnamese will simply be curious as to why you are on your own and the chances of encountering any threatening behaviour are extremely rare. That said, it pays to take the normal precautions, especially late at night when there are few people on the streets and you should avoid taking a cyclo by yourself; use a taxi instead – metered taxis are generally considered safest.

Most Vietnamese women dress modestly, keeping covered from top to toe, unless their profession requires them to show off their assets. It helps to dress modestly too and to avoid wearing skimpy shorts and vests, which are considered by some men an invitation to paid sex. Topless sunbathing, even beside a hotel pool, is a complete no-no.

Currency



Dông (VND; symbol đ). Notes are in denominations of đ500,000, 200,000, 100,000, 50,000, 20,000, 10,000, 5,000, 2,000, 1,000 and 500. Coins are in denominations of đ5,000, 2,000, 1,000 and 500.

Credit cards:

An increasing number of outlets accept MasterCard and Visa. However, outside main towns and cities, it is wise to carry cash. There are ATMs in many major towns, but not in rural areas.

ATM:

There are plenty of ATMs in major towns, but they can be scarce in rural areas. ATMs issue Đông, and the single withdrawal limit varies, depending on the bank, ranging from ₫2,000,000 to much larger amounts.

Travelers cheques:

Travelers' cheques are accepted in banks, money changers and some hotels although most travellers now use debit cards because of the increased number of ATMs. It is best to take US Dollar travellers' cheques to avoid additional exchange rate charges and expect to pay a high commission.

Banking hours:

Varies from bank to bank but generally Mon-Fri 0830-1600; some may close for lunch. Many banks are also open on Saturday morning; all banks are closed on Sunday.

CURRENT CONVERSION RATE OF 11 APRIL, 2016




<http://www.exchange-rates.org/converter/USD/VND/1>

The screenshot shows a currency converter interface with a green header that reads "Currency Converter Results". The main content area displays the conversion: "1.0000 USD" is equal to "22,289.62 VND". Below this, it specifies "US Dollar (USD)" and "Vietnamese Dong (VND)". Further down, it provides the inverse rates: "1 USD = 22,289.62 VND" and "1 VND = 0.0000448639 USD". At the bottom left, there is a link for "Another Conversion? >" and at the bottom right, the date and time "4/11/2016 8:49 PM" are shown.

IMR RECOMMENDATIONS ON PERSONAL FUNDS

- Please bring the amount that you are comfortable spending on gifts or small personal articles, including snacks.
- To determine if the currency of the country you are visiting is traded in the United States, please visit www.travelex.com. Travelex has offices in all major airports and cities and you may change money before the trip for a small fee.
 - Trading in the United States is the easiest way for you to trade money.
- If the currency is not traded in the United States, you will usually be able to trade in the airport upon arrival or the team leader will arrange to change money for the team once during the trip. We do not guarantee that you will be able to change money in small towns or during clinic.
- You must bring currency newer than 2006 and in perfect condition - no tears, folds, old bills.
- New bills are preferred by the international banks, as are denominations larger than \$20. The best rate is obtained trading \$100 bills.
- If you are joining us from another country, please check the trading rules of your home currency.
- Credit cards may not be accepted outside of major cities, hotels, and large restaurants.
- IMR does not pay for alcohol. If you intend to purchase alcohol, you are required to obtain and pay with a separate bill. Please have local currency for these transactions.

Time in Vietnam

 <p>Time zone</p> <p>ICT (Indochina Time) UTC/GMT +7 hours</p>	 <p>No DST</p> <p>No Daylight Saving Time in 2016</p>	 <p>Difference</p> <p>11 hours ahead of New York</p>
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EMBASSY INFORMATION

U.S. Embassy Hanoi

170 Ngoc Khanh
Ba Dinh District
Hanoi, Vietnam
Telephone: +(84) (4) 3850-5000
Emergency After-Hours Telephone:
+(84) (4) 3850-5000 or (04) 3850-5000/3850-5105
Fax: +(84) (4) 3850-5010
acshanoi@state.gov

U.S. Consulate General Ho Chi Minh City

4 Le Duan, District 1
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
Telephone: +(84) (8) 3520-4200
Emergency After-Hours Telephone: +(84) (8)
3520-4200
Fax: +(84) (8) 3520-4244
Inquiries: [http://hochiminh.usconsulate.gov/
contact_acs.html](http://hochiminh.usconsulate.gov/contact_acs.html)

WEBSITES

The following websites provide information on the country you are visiting. IMR highly recommends and encourages you to view these sites prior to departure. They are frequently updated and are a tremendous resource:

- ❖ Embassy of the United States for VIETNAM: acshanoi@state.gov
- ❖ State Department Travel Warnings: <https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/country/vietnam.html>
- ❖ CIA publication: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/vm.html>
- ❖ Travel Health online: <http://www.tripprep.com/>
- ❖ World Health Organization: <http://www.who.int/>
- ❖ Center for Disease Control: <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/>
- ❖ CDC Travel Medicine for VIETNAM: <http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/vietnam>
- ❖ CNN Weather Report: <http://www.cnn.com/WEATHER>
- ❖ UNICEF Statistics: http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/vietnam_statistics.html
- ❖ Lonely Planet: <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/vietnam>
- ❖ Wikipedia_VIETNAM: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam>