

DESTINATION ASIA

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT FOR ASIA'S TRAVEL CONNOISSEURS



VIETNAM

COUNTRY FACT SHEET

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ABOUT VIETNAM

Although many westerners might still view Vietnam through the lens of history and war, in reality the country is an oasis of harmony and peace; offering captivating natural beauty and tranquil villages. Its highlands and rainforests continue to yield new species and offer an abundance of exotic wildlife. The tropical islands and beaches are among the finest in the Asia-Pacific region. Decades have passed since Vietnam was officially united and during this time the country has done a remarkable job of healing its wounds. Today, this stunningly beautiful land is an outstanding travel destination that offers something for everyone – be it history, cultural heritage, or exploring the country's abundant exotic fauna and flora.

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AIRPORTS

Most international travelers will arrive at Hanoi's Noi Bai Airport, Ho Chi Minh City's Tan Son Nhat Airport, or Da Nang Airport. Ho Chi Minh City's Tan Son Nhat Airport is located around 7-km northwest of the city center. Hanoi's Noi Bai Airport is located around 25-km north of the city's old quarter. Metered taxis are available at all airports. Destination Asia Vietnam provides efficient airport transfers with a professional tourist guide so that your arrival is totally stress free.

ARRIVAL/DEPARTURE INFORMATION

Most visitors to Vietnam require a visa to enter the country and all travelers must have a passport valid for six months after the date of their arrival in Vietnam and at least two blank pages.

From August 2023, Vietnam Visa exemption for up to 45 days is extended for citizens from:

1. Germany	4. Spain	7. Japan	10. Sweden
2. France	5. UK	8. South Korea	11. Norway
3. Italy	6. Russia	9. Denmark	12. Finland
			13. Belarus
			14. Kazakhstan

- E-visa option is available to nationals of all countries (previously to 80 countries only).
- With an e-visa, travelers can stay for up to 90 days (previously 30 days only).
- Travellers can apply online for single (25 USD) or multiple (50 USD) entries.
- The list of border gates (airports, land crossings, and seaports) that accept the e-visa has been expanded.
- Online platform accepts e-passports (mainly for Chinese citizens).

Non-nationals can access the e-visa web portal of the Vietnam Immigration Department at <https://www.immigration.gov.vn> or the National Public Service Portal of the Ministry of Public Security at <https://dichvucong.bocongan.gov.vn/bocongan/bothutuc/tthc?mat=26277> to apply.

Following the implementation of the new online platform for obtaining an e-visa, the Destination Asia team has gathered feedback from travelers and thoroughly tested the procedure. While it is indicated the process may take up to three working days to complete, we strongly encourage travelers to submit their applications at least seven working days before their planned arrival.

Please note the list of prerequisites to be fulfilled online can at times be confusing. Additionally, in the event of any erroneous information being entered on the website, authorities retain the right to deny entry into Vietnam without the possibility of a refund. Consequently, we highly recommend that travelers who have concerns about self-applying through the online system reach out to our team for comprehensive assistance and support. For a nominal surcharge, our office can manage the application on your behalf to secure any e-visas.

"All the above information may change without prior notice. It remains the traveler's responsibility to check visa requirements before traveling."

BUSINESS HOURS

Offices are usually open from Monday to Friday from 7.30-am or 8-am until 5-pm or 6-pm and often close for lunch between 11.30-am and 1.30-pm. Some offices also open on Saturday mornings. Shops open from 8-am or 9-am and close any time between 6-pm and 10-pm. Most shops are open seven days a week and many are open later on weekends.

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BANKS

Banks are open Monday to Friday, from 8-am to 5-pm, and some are open on Saturday morning. In the major cities, there are many exchange offices in areas frequented by tourists. ATMs are widespread in many major towns, but not as widespread in rural areas. Travelers' cheques are accepted in banks, money changers and some hotels although most travelers now use debit cards because of the increased frequency of ATMs. A commission charge applies. Most hotels will change major currencies such as US Dollars and Euros at very reasonable rates. An increasing number of outlets accept MasterCard and Visa, however, outside main towns and cities, it is wise to carry cash. The US Dollar is the most favored foreign currency. Australian, British, Japanese, Singaporean and Thai currency notes can usually be changed in the larger cities. Very few shops, hotels or restaurants accept Travelers Checks.

CLOTHING

As with other regional tropical countries, lightweight cotton clothing is the most comfortable clothing in Vietnam. A lightweight raincoat is a good idea in the rainy season. It is advisable to cover arms and legs in the evenings outside to protect against mosquito bites. An umbrella is also a good idea in both the hot and rainy seasons as it will offer protective shade from both the strong sun and the tropical downpours. Evenings in the north and the central regions can be quite chilly so bring a sweater and a good jacket especially from November to February. Visitors should not wear shorts, short skirts, singlet, or vest tops, or similar clothing when visiting pagodas and monasteries and shoes should be removed before entering a religious building or a private home.

CURRENCY

The currency in Vietnam is the Vietnamese Dong. Vietnamese Dongs come in the following forms: bank notes: 1,000; 2,000; 5,000; 10,000; 20,000; 50,000; 100,000; 200,000; 500,000.

CUSTOM ALLOWANCES

The following goods may be imported into Vietnam without incurring a customs duty:

- 400 cigarettes, or 100 cigars, or 500 gms of tobacco;
- 1.5 liters of alcohol over 22 per cent in volume, two liters of alcohol under 22 per cent in volume;
- A reasonable quantity of perfume and personal belongings.

ETIQUETTE (DOS AND DON'TS)

DOs IN VIETNAM

- Dress conservatively. Never wear shorts, dresses or skirts, or tops with low-neck lines and bare shoulders in temples.
- Avoid public displays of affection. Anything beyond holding hands may be frowned upon in a conservative society.
- Take your shoes off at the entrance to a Vietnamese home.
- When venturing out from your hotel, make sure you take a hotel business card with you. This will make your return in a taxi much easier.
- Always leave your excess cash, airline tickets, passports and valuables in the hotel's safety deposit box.
- When crossing the street, try and enlist the help of a local to cross the street. If this is not possible commit yourself and walk at an even pace with your eyes on the incoming traffic. Placing your hand in the air will also alert motorists to your presence.

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DON'TS IN VIETNAM

- Do not sit with your feet pointing towards people. When visiting someone's house, do not sit with the soles of your feet pointing towards the family altar.
- Do not sit until you are shown where to sit. The oldest person always sits down first.
- Do not show off; keep a low profile and a cool head, remain polite. Losing your temper in Vietnam means a "loss of face".
- Avoid behavior that causes embarrassment to another party, and hold back behavior that can be misconstrued as aggressive.
- Do not take video cameras into the ethnic minority villages. They are considered too intrusive by the local people.
- Do not take a photo of somebody without asking for their permission. Do not take pictures of anything to do with the military, which is considered a breach of national security.
- Do not give sweets to local children when trekking through ethnic minority villages. Many of these people do not have access to dental care.

ELECTRICITY

The standard household (hotel) electrical supply in Vietnam is 220 volt, 50 Hertz. Both flat and round two-pin outlets are used throughout the country. It is recommended to bring a universal plug adaptor.

ENTERTAINMENT AND NIGHTLIFE

Ho Chi Minh City has an abundance of bars and clubs ranging from simple beer bars to more sophisticated up-market nightclubs. Most of the nightlife is concentrated in District One. Hanoi's nightlife is much quieter in comparison and is concentrated in the Old Quarter and the Hoan Kiem Lake areas, however live music and sophisticated bars are becoming more numerous in the capital. For visitors seeking something more cultural, a visit to the water puppet theater at both main cities is a good choice. The bia hoi (draught beer pavement pubs) offer a down to earth, fun experience and the opportunity to mix with local people.

FOOD

One of the greatest delights in Vietnam is dining out and enjoying a cuisine that is rapidly gaining recognition on a global scale. Profoundly influenced by the national cuisines of France, China, and Thailand, Vietnamese cooking is highly innovative and makes extensive use of fresh herbs, including basil, coriander, lemon grass, parsley and lime. The national condiment is nuoc mam, a piquant fermented fish sauce that is served with every meal. Try a hearty and inexpensive bowl of steaming pho – a fragrant soup served with chicken or beef, noodles and crunchy bean sprouts. French colonial influence means superb crusty baguettes and sweet pastries as good as those served in France at a fraction of the price! Western food is widely available in the major tourism destinations.

HEALTH

International visitors are not required to show negative Covid test results anymore as of May 15 2022 until further notice, as the pandemic has been brought under control. However visitors should be inoculated against typhoid, cholera, hepatitis A and B, tetanus and polio. Malaria and Dengue Fever are present and it is advisable to take precautions especially if traveling off the established tourist trail. If you plan to take anti-malarial tablets, you usually need to start the course of tablets one week before arrival. Prior to travel we recommend seeking a qualified medical practitioner's advice about vaccinations and up to date precautionary medicine. All travellers should take out comprehensive travel insurance prior to travel that will cover any overseas medical costs, including medical evacuation. If you require a particular medication, ensure that you take an adequate supply as it may not be available locally.

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HOTEL INFORMATION

The standards of accommodation are excellent with categories to fit all budgets. The larger hotels offer a wide variety of restaurants, bars, swimming pools and other recreational facilities. Most of the staff at key positions (front office, reception, restaurants etc.,) speak excellent English but please be patient and show patience if you do not get what you want right away. During check-in you will be asked to complete a registration card. The hotel will also ask for an imprint of your credit card as a guarantee for extra services such as meals, drinks, etc. Ask the cashier to return this slip upon checkout. Please check that you receive meal coupons (where applicable) when given the room key. General check-in is from 2pm and check out time is 12.00 noon. If you require a late check-out (extra costs may apply) check with reception beforehand.

INSURANCE

It is advisable to take out a medical insurance policy before traveling as treatment will not be administered without proof of payment, or evidence of a comprehensive travel insurance policy. Do be careful if you hire a car or a motorbike and make sure the rental is covered by the appropriate motor insurance. Visitors will also have to furnish medical insurance including coverage for Covid-19 treatment worth at least \$10,000.

INTERNET

Major hotels throughout the country offer both Wi-Fi access and business centers with timed computer use. Cyber cafes are also plentiful and you can buy pre-paid international phone cards to make international calls.

LANGUAGE

The national language is Vietnamese. The Vietnamese language has six different tones and is a difficult language for most foreigners to speak despite the fact that the Roman alphabet is used. For example, one word can have six different meanings depending on the tone used to pronounce it. In the big cities and major tourism destinations, English is widely spoken.

PEOPLE

The population of Vietnam was 94.34 millions (2020), according to a recent survey. Some elements considered to be characteristic of the Vietnamese people include a deep respect for community, family values, and a devotion to study. As in most regional countries, they are welcoming to foreign visitors and keen to share their knowledge of their homeland.

PROTECTING CHILDREN

Destination Asia does not offer visits to orphanages and we advise travellers to not visit them if approached by children asking them to do so. Orphanage tourism is often conducted by unscrupulous business operators and does more harm rather than protecting children's rights and education standards. We believe the best way for tourists and travelers to support vulnerable children and their families is to support vocational training and community based initiatives, rather than visiting an orphanage directly. At the heart of our belief is prioritizing the protection of children and keeping families together.

Sexual exploitation of children is a devastating reality. It can happen in hotels, bars and restaurants for example. You may even be approached and offered sex with children. When you see such a situation, don't put yourself at risk. Call a child protection hotline, contact a local organization or the police, so immediate action can be taken to protect the child and investigate the situation.

Vietnam: Call 18001567

Child Helpline Vietnam: www.18001567.vn

For more information on how to protect children visit: <https://thinkchildsafe.org/>

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PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

Closure of tourist sites can occur at short notice on public holidays and our Destination Asia guides will give guests advice about this situation.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

It is a good idea to fly the longer hops along Vietnam's long mainland, such as from Hanoi to Hue; from Danang to Nha Trang; and from Nha Trang to Ho Chi Minh City. The Reunification Express runs the entire length of Vietnam's coast – from Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh – and takes more than 30 hours. Improved road travel is making the train less popular in most parts, except for the mountainous far north. There are a number of classes, from third-class hard seat; to air-conditioned cushioned seat; to sleeper. It is important to book train tickets a few weeks in advance, especially for weekend travel and in the summer. Destination Asia can help with arrangements. Taxis to get around the cities are plentiful and cheap. They can be flagged down on the street or arranged through hotels or restaurants.

RELIGION

Buddhism is the dominant religion in Vietnam usually combined with elements of Confucianism and Taoism. About 10 per cent of the country's population is Catholic and there are also communities of Protestants and Muslims. Vietnam is also home to a unique religion called Cao Dai – a religious cocktail of all the world's major faiths.

SAFETY

Serious or violent crimes against foreigners in Vietnam are rare, but travelers should remain vigilant for petty theft, especially in larger cities such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City and when travelling by bus or train. As a global rule, never leave belongings unattended and always maintain a firm grip on cameras and shoulder bags. In some tourist sites you may encounter some insistent souvenir sellers. A polite “No, thank you” usually will suffice. Leave your expensive valuables at home and always use hotel safety deposits boxes or in-room safes for valuables.

SHOPPING

The big cities Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi have the best choice when it comes to shopping. The best local buys include lacquerware, silk, conical hats, woodcarvings, hill tribe fabrics and handicrafts, embroidery, silver jewelry, wooden water puppets with ingenious mechanisms and ceramics. Clothes are particularly good value and tailors can make up items within 24 hours in many places. Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City have seen the arrival of up-market shopping malls that stock leading international and domestic brands.

STREET STALLS

Most towns and cities have one or more markets and these are always worth visiting for a cultural retail experience. Some bargaining is essential in most tourist transactions. Remember that in Asia “saving face” is important, so bargaining should be good-natured. In some cases you will be able to get a 30 per cent discount or more.

TELEPHONE

Most hotels have IDD phones but for a more inexpensive option head to the abundance of Internet cafes for cheaper phone rates and the sale of pre-paid international calling cards. It is best to buy a local sim card to avoid expensive roaming charges.

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TIME ZONE

Vietnam is GMT + 7 and does not operate a daylight-savings system.

TIPPING

Tipping for good service is not expected but is always appreciated. Tipping the guide and driver on your transfers and tours should depend on how satisfied you are with the excursion. Hotel porters should be tipped for carrying bags to the room. In other cases, it is totally up to the individual when and how much to tip.

WATER

It is not advisable to drink tap water but bottled mineral water is safe and available everywhere. All hotels provide a complimentary bottle of local mineral water, per person, in the room. Ice is generally okay in good standard hotels and restaurants but it is best to avoid them at street stalls or in upcountry areas. Some minor stomach problems are always possible when travelling in exotic countries. Bring a supply of your usual anti-diarrhoea medicine.

WEATHER

Because of its geographical shape (Vietnam stretches over 2,000 km from North to South) the climate varies greatly, with three distinct climatic zones. Tropical monsoons occur from October to April in the central region and from May to September in the north and south. It is almost totally dry throughout the rest of the year. It can get exceptionally hot, all year round, but the north has a cooler time between October and April. Temperatures around the country can reach up to 40C in the pinnacle of the hot and rainy season (May to September), but the northern highlands and the capital Hanoi can often seem cold in the winter months. The high season runs from September to March. Unless you intend to visit friends or relatives, we do not recommend visiting Vietnam during the Lunar New Year, Tet holidays (the Vietnamese New Year that falls between late January and February). The Tet holiday is the most important period of the year for Vietnamese people who take time off to visit their families in the countryside or take a vacation. All hotels, buses, trains and flights tend to get booked-up.

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EMERGENCY CONTACT NUMBERS

Police dial (area code) + 113; Emergency Medical Services dial (area code) + 115; Fire service dial (area code) + 114.

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