



## TRAVEL TO VIETNAM

Airports are Noi Bai International Airport in Hanoi, Tan Son Nhat Airport in Ho Chi Minh City and Da Nang Airport in Da Nang. Fares are significantly lower for those flying to Ho Chi Minh City. Although flights are available from the capitals of most Southeast Asian countries as well as from Sydney and Melbourne, the best place is from Bangkok as [Vietnam visas](#) are easiest to obtain there but nowadays, tourists can get [Vietnam visa on arrival](#) online. For your easy reference, we have compiled a listing of airlines that offer special and discounted international airfares over the Internet

## TRAVEL WITHIN VIETNAM:

Car rentals are currently not in existence. Cabs, which are unmarked cars without meters, can typically be rented for the day for US\$30 to US\$40. The Vietnamese railway system runs from Ho Chi Minh City to Hanoi along the coast and links with Hai Phong and the regions further north. Odd-numbered trains travel South, and even-numbered trains travel north. The fastest trains take at least 36 hours from Ho Chi Minh City to Hanoi. Reservations should be made a day or more in advance. The major setback to the railways is that tourists are charged many times more than Vietnamese people in the form of an outrageously high surcharge. For long distance traveling, it is best to fly. The bus system runs almost everywhere within the country, with stations built around the country dividing the territory into regions. Buses tend to be slow and unreliable.

## DINING AND DRINKING

Vietnamese food varies from region to region. Cooking in the North is most like that of China. In the Central region, food is spicier. The South offers a large range of fruits, vegetables, herbs and spices. Almost 500 traditional dishes have been recorded! Rice and noodles are staple foods, served with nearly all meals. The most popular dishes are nema rán (spring rolls), bún thang (noodles with sliced pork, eggs, shredded chicken and shrimp), shellfish steamed with ginger and sea crabs fried with salt. Among common ingredients used are: shark fin, duck, pork paste, fish, spices, fruits, vegetables, crab meat, lobster and oysters. Imported beer is available in Vietnam, although a number of domestic beers are brewed. Rice wine is very popular, and there are many brands available. There is a variety of fruit wines such as apricot, orange or lemon. Soft drinks are processed from the many varieties of tropical fruits available. Water from the tap should be avoided, even though it has already been filtered and sterilized at 10°C. If you must drink it, boil the water first.

## FOOD SPECIALTIES

Com (boiled rice) is eaten at the main meals of the day (lunch and dinner). Rice is eaten together with a variety of different dishes and is made from different kinds of rice. Typically, fragrant rice is used, such as Tam Thom and Nang Huong. An ordinary meal may consist of boiled rice and the following: Mon an kho (meal without soup) consists of dishes of pork, fish, shrimp, and vegetable cooked in oil, as well as vegetables, pickles, etc. Mon canh (meal with soup) consists of a soup made with pork or spare-ribs, crab meat, and fish. In the past several years, people in urban centers have begun to go out for lunch at the food stalls on the street. Consequently,

there has been a proliferation of temporary food stalls along many sidewalks and public spaces in the cities. Some stalls are open until early in the morning to cater to regular customers. Around noon, owners can be seen arranging tables and benches along the pavement to form makeshift shop floors. After two or three hours, when there are no more customers, they begin to remove all of their wooden furniture, so that the place resumes its former appearance. A well served lunch for one is very inexpensive. Banh Chung (Sticky Rice Cake) are a Vietnamese traditional dish that must be part of Tet meals. As a matter of fact, every Vietnamese family must have sticky rice cakes among the offerings placed on the altar to their ancestors. Bang chung is made of glutinous rice, pork meat, and green beans paste wrapped in a square of bamboo leaves, giving the rice a green color after boiling. Gio Lua (Lean Pork Pie) is available in Vietnam only and has different names in the north and south. Foreigners as well as Vietnamese are fond of lean pork pie. Gio lua consists of pork meat wrapped in fresh banana leaves. The little bundles are then boiled. The most delicious part of lean pork pie is the top layer since it absorbs the flavor of the banana leaves. Pho (Noodles) is the most popular food among the Vietnamese population. Pho is commonly eaten for breakfast, although many people will have it for their lunch or dinner. Anyone feeling hungry in the small hours of the morning can also enjoy a bowl of hot and spicy pho to fill their empty stomachs. Like hot green tea which has its particular fragrance, pho also has its special taste and smell.

## COMMUNICATIONS

Telephone: International long-distance calls (direct): To make an international direct dial (IDC) call you must first dial the international prefix (00) followed by the country code, area code and the local number. In case you fail to contact the required number, dial 110 for the operator's help. Domestic long-distance calls: To place a domestic long-distance call you must first dial the national trunk prefix (0) followed by the area code and local number. If you fail to get the required number, dial 101 for the operator's help. International Dialing Access: Available at major tourist hotels and post offices. Country Code: 84, Hanoi city code: 024, Ho Chi Minh city code: 028. When calling from within the same city, delete the city code from the number. When calling to another city from within Vietnam, use the entire city code. When calling from outside Vietnam, delete the first digit (0) from the city code. Fax machines are quickly proliferating in Vietnam. public and registered fax machines are available in hotels, business and public offices. Useful Telephone numbers: Police 113, Fire brigade 114, Ambulance 115, Telephone directory 116, Time inquires 117, Telephone repair service 119, Domestic long-distance telephone service 101, International telephone service 110, Inquiries on socioeconomic, cultural information 108.

## USEFUL PHRASES

Greetings - Chào ông (bà)  
How are you? - Ông (bà) có khỏe không?  
Fine, thanks - Cảm ơn, rất tốt  
My name is ... - Tên tôi là ...  
I don't understand - Tôi không hiểu  
Restaruant - nhà hàng  
Telephone - điện thoại  
Hotel - khách sạn

## ENTERTAINMENT

Vietnam is not the place to go for the latest in nightspots, but a number of large hotels have nightclubs and dance halls. Bars are fairly easy to find, even in smaller hotels. Try asking the locals for the current popular spots.

## ELECTRIC POWER

Electric current in Vietnam is mostly 220 Volts, but 110 Volts system is still in use. Sockets are both round and flat types.

## WATER SUPPLY

Tap water in urban areas in Vietnam is chlorinated, but it is recommended that it should be boiled before drinking.

## CLOTHING

Relax clothes are recommended. In the South, light clothing is a must, but in highland areas (Da Lat, Sapa, Buon Me Thuot) warm clothing is appropriate at all times of the year.

## HEALTH & MEDICAL FACILITIES:

No vaccination is required. But visitors should receive inoculations against yellow fever, hepatitis B, cholera, polio, typhoid, tuberculosis and tetanus. It is also advised that your clients take malaria tablets. We recommend that you check with the US Center for Disease Control - Traveler's Health Center in advance of any trip. The best Vietnamese hospital in Hanoi and Saigon can deal well serious illnesses and have foreign staff. Major Hospital in Hanoi include Friendship Hospital, Viet-Duc Hospital, Bach Mai Hospital and International Department, Bach mai Hospital which is reserved for foreigners for medical examination and treatment. The Department is staffed with experienced experts, doctors and nurses who are able to treat serious cases. Major hospitals in HCMC include Cho Ray Hospital (This is a large hospital with more than 1,000 beds. On 10<sup>th</sup> floor, there are rooms reserved for foreign patients. The hospital is staffed by experienced professors and doctors. Most of them were trained abroad and they can speak English or French), Nhi Dong Hospital and Thong Nhat Hospital (This is a modern hospital which consists of five buildings situated at the junction of Ly Tu Trong Rd and Cach mang Thang Tam Rd, Tan Binh District.) In Ho Chi Minh City, there are thousands of pharmacies, and many private consultation rooms Equipped with modern medical instruments. Health insurance cards have been issued by the government. The card bearers can have medical checks and treatments in registered hospitals without paying any additional charges. As a general precautionary measure, we recommended that you take out health insurance before traveling overseas. You should consult with your medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether your policy applies overseas and if it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. Note that some insurers will only authorize payment for medical evacuations performed by companies with whom they have pre-existing agreements.

## FESTIVALS

Festivals have long been considered the traditional cultural activity of the Vietnamese people. They are attractive to all social classes and have become a necessary part of people's lives for many centuries. Festivals are the crystallization of cultural, spiritual, and physical activities that have been chosen, maintained, and

improved over many generations. Festivals are the living cultural museums of the way people live. Festivals are a place to enjoy and learn about the people's crafts. For example, the Master Pagoda Festival (Ha Tay) has puppet shows and the Hung Temple Festival (Vinh Phu) has the "Xoan" folk songs. The Phu Giay Festival has "Chau Van" folk songs. The Lim Festival has "Quan Ho" folk songs. The drum beats that are mixed with traditional musical songs and dances create a never-ending energy during the festivals. Festivals are also a place to enjoy interesting games. There are many festival contests such as wrestling, rowing, rice cooking, rope pulling, rope climbing, and chess playing. There are also competitions between trained animals such as cock fights, buffalo fights, and pigeon races. Festivals are an occasion to remember national heroes, the manifestation of religious freedom, and religious ceremonies. Festivals are also a place where different people can show their own customs and habits. Festival days are usually days where one can find social encounters, relationships, and love. Many loving relationships have originated from tournaments, competitions, or during a few lines of singing.

### FINE ARTS & CRAFTS

Vietnam is a country rich in handicraft products, thanks to the hardworking, dexterous, and creative qualities of the Vietnamese people. For a very long time, handicraft products have been a source of cultural pride and a source of income for the people. As the varieties of handicraft products are too numerous to be fully introduced, only a few typical items and their sources are mentioned here. Woven tapestries and the cam handbags are unique works from the skilled hands of the ethnic women living in the Northwest regions, such as Cao Bang. Embroidered articles and silk products are famous from the regions of Ha Dong, Nam Ha, Thai Binh and Hue. Wool tapestries from Hanoi and Hai Phong, and jute tapestries from Hung Yen, Hai Phong, Hanoi and Thai Binh, are much sought after. Ceramic and porcelain items have been produced in Vietnam for a long time. Ceramic and porcelain products glazed by traditional methods into beautiful art are well known in Bat Trang (Hanoi), Quang Ninh, and Hai Phong. Copperware is fabricated by the skillful hands of coppersmiths in Nam Ha, Ngu Xa (Hanoi), Dong Son (Thanh Hoa), and Long Tho. Jewelry products and metalwork are concentrated in Hanoi, Thai Binh and Hai Hung, while stonework is mainly produced in Da Nang (Five Element Mountain Region). Wood products and wood carvings can usually be found in Phu Xuyen (Ha Tay), Hai Phong, and Hue. There are thousands of types of handicraft products. Some of these handicrafts have been internationally recognized and popularized, such as lacquerware. While lacquer artists produce a limited number of paintings and sculptures, lacquer crafts have been part of Vietnamese life in many forms: vases, boxes, interior decorating items, jewelry, and office products. With about 2,000 years of history, Vietnamese lacquerware and other products made by a community of handicraft artists, have established a firm and growing position in the domestic and international markets.

### LANGUAGE

The Vietnamese language belongs to a language group which was established a long time ago in East Asia. Changes in material conditions over many centuries and the increasing demands of cultural life have influenced the Vietnamese language. While adopting many elements of the Chinese language, the Vietnamese people changed many Chinese words, gradually creating Han-Viet (Chinese-Vietnamese) which incorporated purely Vietnamese words. "Vietnamization" not only applied to

the Chinese language, but also to French and other language groups, creating a diverse vocabulary for the Vietnamese language. Vietnamese is the official language; French, Chinese, English, Khmer and tribal dialects (Mon-Khmer and Malayo-Polynesian) are also spoken.

## WRITING

In 1867, some colonial schools began to teach Quoc Ngu. It was not until early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that Quoc Ngu became widely used in the local primary educational system. The introduction of Quoc Ngu constituted a new step in the development of the Vietnamese language. While romanization received a reserved welcome in other Asian countries, it recorded extraordinary success in Vietnam, creating favorable conditions for cultural and intellectual development. When the multi-ethnic Vietnamese nation was taking shape, a great monarchy was established in the North, and it began a southward expansion. The Vietnamese nation underwent thousands of years of Northern domination. This was why Chinese was used for a long time as the official written language. Local mandarins of various levels were allowed to sit for examinations in the Northern Court (China), and were recruited into the administrative machinery of foreign invaders. Based on Chinese characters, the Vietnamese worked out a unique writing system of their own called Chu Nom. In Chu Nom, two Chinese characters were usually combined, one of which indicated the meaning of the Vietnamese word, while the other indicated pronunciation. Chu Nom was welcomed and widely used by the masses in their daily life, as well as in transcribing their national history and literature. According to researchers, Chu Nom probably originated around the end of the Northern domination period and early in the 10<sup>th</sup> century (the independence period). The oldest evidence of Chu Nom currently available is a stele in the Bao An Pagoda in Yen Lang, Vinh Phu province, dating back to 1209 AD (Ly Dynasty). It was not until the 13<sup>th</sup> century under the Tarn dynasty that Chu Nom was systematized and used in literature. Nguyen Thuyen (alias Han Thuyen) and Nguyen Si Co wrote poems in Chu Nom. Ho Quy Ly (1400 AD) made Chinese textbooks which translated the Vietnamese language using the Chu Nom writing system. He also used Chu Nom to write royal proclamations and ordinances. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Nguyen Trai, a national hero, used Chu Nom to write 250 poems in Quoc Am Thi Tap (Collection of Poems in the National Language). The Chu Nom literature continued to be developed from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards and totally dominated national literary circles. Ba Huyen Thanh Quan (the wife of the Chief of Thanh Quan district), Cao Ba Quat and Kieu Story of Nguyen Du, and the translation of Chinh Phu Ngam (Lament of a Wife Whose Husband has gone to war) by Doan Thi Diem were quite noteworthy poems. In conjunction with the development of the nation, the Vietnamese language was constantly developed and improved. Around the 17<sup>th</sup> century, western missionaries came to Vietnam and learned Vietnamese in order to disseminate Catholicism. They developed a romanized script to represent the Quoc Ngu (meaning national language) in order to translate prayer books and catechisms. A number of Portuguese and Italian missionaries used Quoc Ngu to compile catechisms and Portuguese-Vietnamese and Vietnamese-Portuguese dictionaries. Based on these works, Alexandre de Rhodes, a French Jesuit missionary, published the Vietnamese Portuguese-Latin dictionary which was a fundamental catechism in Rome from 1649-1651. After Alexandre de Rhodes, Quoc Ngu was further improved by foreign missionaries and Vietnamese scholars. In 1867, some colonial schools began to teach Quoc Ngu. It was not until early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that Quoc Ngu became widely used in the

local primary educational system. The introduction of Quoc Ngu constituted a new step in the development of the Vietnamese language. While romanization received a reserved welcome in other Asian countries, it recorded extraordinary success in Vietnam, creating favorable conditions for cultural and intellectual development. When the multi-ethnic Vietnamese nation was taking shape, a great monarchy was established in the North, and it began a southward expansion. The Vietnamese nation underwent thousands of years of Northern domination. This was why Chinese was used for a long time as the official written language. Local mandarins of various levels were allowed to sit for examinations in the Northern Court (China), and were recruited into the administrative machinery of foreign invaders. Based on Chinese characters, the Vietnamese worked out a unique writing system of their own called Chu Nom. In Chu Nom, two Chinese characters were usually combined, one of which indicated the meaning of the Vietnamese word, while the other indicated pronunciation. Chu Nom was welcomed and widely used by the masses in their daily life, as well as in transcribing their national history and literature. According to researchers, Chu Nom probably originated around the end of the Northern domination period and early in the 10th century (the independence period). The oldest evidence of Chu Nom currently available is a stele in the Bao An Pagoda in Yen Lang, Vinh Phu province, dating back to 1209 AD (Ly Dynasty). It was not until the 13th century under the Tarn dynasty that Chu Nom was systematized and used in literature. Nguyen Thuyen (alias Han Thuyen) and Nguyen Si Co wrote poems in Chu Nom. Ho Quy Ly (1400 AD) made Chinese textbooks which translated the Vietnamese language using the Chu Nom writing system. He also used Chu Nom to write royal proclamations and ordinances. In the 15th century, Nguyen Trai, a national hero, used Chu Nom to write 250 poems in Quoc Am Thi Tap (Collection of Poems in the National Language). The Chu Nom literature continued to be developed from the 16th century onwards and totally dominated national literary circles. Ba Huyen Thanh Quan (the wife of the Chief of Thanh Quan district), Cao Ba Quat and Kieu Story of Nguyen Du, and the translation of Chinh Phu Ngam (Lament of a Wife Whose Husband has gone to war) by Doan Thi Diem were quite noteworthy poems. In conjunction with the development of the nation, the Vietnamese language was constantly developed and improved. Around the 17<sup>th</sup> century, western missionaries came to Vietnam and learned Vietnamese in order to disseminate Catholicism. They developed a romanced script to represent the Quoc Ngu (meaning national language) in order to translate prayer books and catechisms. A number of Portuguese and Italian missionaries used Quoc Ngu to compile catechisms and Portuguese-Vietnamese and Vietnamese-Portuguese dictionaries. Based on these works, Alexandre de Rhodes, a French Jesuit missionary, published the Vietnamese Portuguese-Latin dictionary which was a fundamental catechism in Rome from 1649-1651. After Alexandre de Rhodes, Quoc Ngu was further improved by foreign missionaries and Vietnamese scholars.

Source: [www.dulichso.com](http://www.dulichso.com)