

# vietnam fact file



<b>viet embassy in uk</b>	Website: <a href="http://www.vietnambassy.org.uk">www.vietnambassy.org.uk</a> Address: Address:12-14 Victoria Road, London, W8 5RD. Telephone: 020 7937 1912 Facsimile: 020 937 6108
<b>british/consulate in vietnam</b>	British Embassy Address: Central Building, 31 Hai Ba Trung Str. Ha Noi Telephone: 936 0500 Facsimile: 936 0561 Consulate Address: 25 Le Duan, D1, Ho Chi Minh City Telephone: 823 2604 Facsimile: 822 1971
<b>tourist authority of vietnam</b>	Address: 80 Quan Su, Ha Noi Telephone: 822 4714
<b>area</b>	329,566sq km (slightly larger than Italy)
<b>population</b>	81,624,716 ( Oct 2004)
<b>capital</b>	Ha Noi
<b>language</b>	Vietnamese (official), English (increasingly favoured as a second language), some French, Chinese, and Khmer; mountain area languages (Mon-Khmer and Malayo-Polynesian)
<b>tipping</b>	It is customary though not compulsory to tip tour guides and drivers at the end of a tour. Hotel and station porters should also be tipped a small amount for their troubles. Do not tip usually at restaurants.
<b>bank opening hours</b>	Banks are open Monday - Friday and some are open on Saturday morning. In the major cities there are Bureau de Changes and most hotels will exchange dollars. There are some ATM machines in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Nha Trang.
<b>post office hours</b>	Monday – Friday 8am – 4.30pm Saturday mornings to 12pm.
<b>office opening hours</b>	Usually 7.30- 11.30am and 1.30- 4.30pm on weekdays, and sometimes Saturday mornings. Larger shops tend to open for longer hours.
<b>time (+/- GMT)</b>	Six or seven hours ahead of GMT depending on the time of year in the UK.
<b>electricity</b>	220V 50Hz. Outlets vary! They are normally round, two pin, or flat two pin.
<b>public holidays</b>	Jan 1, Vietnamese Tet -late January early Feb for 5 days, April 30, May 1, May 19, September 2, Dec 25
<b>telephone</b>	International calls are very expensive, around \$3 - \$5 per minute. The best places to call abroad are from internet cafes. Many hotels offer international calls from the room, though this is yet more expensive. Please also check with your mobile phone provider if your network & contract enable you to have coverage in Vietnam. Charity Challenge also has an emergency Satellite Phone available on all challenges at a cost of £3 per minute.
<b>e-mail</b>	E-mail and Internet access is widespread in all major towns and is relatively inexpensive.
<b>postal</b>	Vietnam has a slow but reliable postal service with a range of international services.
<b>currency</b>	The basic unit of currency is the Vietnamese Dong. There are 30,854.78VND to the Pound. For up to date currency exchange, go to <a href="http://www.xe.com">www.xe.com</a> . American Express travellers' cheques are regarded with suspicion. Thomas Cook is preferred. Dollars cash in small denominations are very useful.
<b>exchange money</b>	Exchange money in-country. The banks and legal moneychangers offer the best rates. US Dollars are the most readily accepted currency although you should have little problem exchanging Sterling in major towns and cities.
<b>credit cards</b>	Visacard and Mastercard are now accepted in many hotels and shops, but the preferred currency is dollars cash. Visa and MasterCard credit-card holders can get cash advances in some banks. ATMs are available in provincial capitals; please check with your bank the specific charges applied to your account. Many hotels, shops and restaurants will accept credit cards.
<b>travellers cheque</b>	Travellers' cheques are a useful alternative to cash although cash is preferable. Travellers cheques can be exchanged at banks and some exchange bureaus but can be difficult outside of the major cities.
<b>passport/visa</b>	You must hold a full ten-year passport with at least six months to run from the end of your challenge, and at least one blank page for your visa and entry/exit stamps. All nationalities must obtain a visa

for entering Vietnam. We will provide you with a visa application form or you can download one from the embassy website – [www.vietnamembassy.org.uk](http://www.vietnamembassy.org.uk). The visa processing time is normally seven days and costs approx. £38; the embassy is open 9.30-12.30 Mon-Fri except Public Holidays. On entering Vietnam all visitors must complete an entry/exit form including a customs declaration white/yellow colour. It is important that the bottom copy (yellow sheet) of this form is kept safe with your passport while in Vietnam and is presented to customs and immigration officials on departure. Take care of your passport at all times. Report any loss to the nearest police station. Ensure that your passport is stamped on arrival, especially if you cross over a land border. Enter next of kin details into the back of your passport.

## **vaccination and health**

Nomad Travel Stores Medical Centre recommended the following vaccinations: Polio, Tetanus, Typhoid, Diphtheria, and Hepatitis A. Vietnam is also a malarial area. Nomad suggests taking advice from your GP about: Hepatitis B and Rabies. Malaria precautions are essential in rural border areas with Laos, Cambodia and China all year round. The risk is minimal in major cities, the Red River delta and the coastal plains of Nha Trang. Avoid mosquito bites by covering up with clothing such as long sleeves and long trousers especially after sunset, using insect repellents on exposed skin and, when necessary, sleeping under a mosquito net. Also see Health notes. *\*Requirements change and these are recommendations only\**

## **hospitals/pharmacies**

There are many clinics and private hospitals in Saigon and Hanoi. Each provincial capital has a main hospital, but facilities can be basic.

## **water**

Do not drink tap water unless it has been boiled or filtered. Bottled water is cheap and readily available. Always use bottled water for cleaning teeth. Also see Health notes.

## **shopping**

You will be able to obtain many bargains in Vietnam, notably textiles, clothing, jewellery, lacquerware, and other crafts. You may be able to obtain some interesting hill-tribe crafts in Saigon and Hanoi. In Saigon and elsewhere you will come across an array of fake and pirated goods such as CDs and DVDs, some of it legal, some of it good value. Generally you will be able to obtain anything that you would require at home.

## **climate**

Vietnam has a tropical climate and is relatively hot and humid all year round. It has a dry hot season from December until April and a rainy season from May through to November. See the Q&A for your chosen challenge for more information.

## **geography**

Vietnam is in SouthEastern Asia, bordering the Gulf of Thailand, Gulf of Tonkin, and South China Sea, alongside China, Laos, and Cambodia

The terrain is low flat delta in South and North; Central highlands; hilly, mountainous in Far North and Northwest.

The country extends 1,650 km north to south, and is only 50 km across at its narrowest point

## **the people**

Ethnicity: 52 different ethnic groups: Vietnamese 85%-90%, Chinese, Hmong, Thai, Khmer, Cham, many mountain peoples, Dao, Tai, Mong, Nung, etc.

Religion: Buddhist, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, Christian (predominantly Roman Catholic, some Protestant), indigenous beliefs, Muslim.

Literacy definition: age 15 and over who can read and write total population: 94% male: 95.8% female: 92.3% (2003 est.)

## **culture/customs**

With its blend of Confucianism and Buddhism, Vietnamese society tends to be both conservative and fairly tolerant. Although you will rarely be remonstrated with for your dress or behaviour, by following a few simple rules, you can minimize the risk of causing offence. Be particularly sensitive to cultural differences in rural areas where people are less used to foreigners. As in most Asian countries, it's not done to display anger, and it certainly won't help things get done more quickly.

## **do's & don'ts**

- Do not wear shorts and sleeveless shirts when visiting pagodas, temples and other religious sites.
- Do dress moderately if you are a woman – revealing too much flesh is regarded as offensive.
- Do be prepared to remove your shoes when entering a pagoda or someone's home – ask or watch what other people do.
- Don't touch children on the head and, unlike in the West, it's best to ignore a young baby rather than praise it, since it's believed that this attracts the attention of jealous spirits who will cause the baby to fall ill.
- Don't cross your fingers for good luck - the gesture is considered obscene by Vietnamese.
- Don't point your finger at people. The locals believe it sends them negative energy.
- Don't let the soles of your feet face any sacred monument, such as a statue of Buddha.
- Don't wander off well-trodden paths. You could encounter forgotten land mines and un-detonated munitions. Never touch a leftover grenade or mine!

# cambodia fact file



<b>cambodian embassy in uk</b>	Website: <a href="http://www.cambodianembassy.org.uk">www.cambodianembassy.org.uk</a> Address: Royal Embassy of Cambodia, 64 Brondesbury Park, Willesden Green, London NW6 7AT Telephone: 020 7483 9063 Facsimile: 020 7483 9061
<b>british embassy in cambodia</b>	E-mail: <a href="mailto:briitem@online.com.kh">briitem@online.com.kh</a> Address: N. 27-29, Botum Soryavong (Street 75), Phnom Penh 12 201 Telephone: (+855) 23 427 124 / 428 295 / 428 153 Facsimile: (+855) 23 427 125
<b>area</b>	181,035 square kilometres
<b>population</b>	13.12 million (Oct 2004)
<b>capital</b>	Phnom Penh
<b>language</b>	Cambodia's national language is called Khmer and unlike the other languages of the region is not a tonal language. The written script originated in southern India. As in other former French colonies the educated older generation often speak very good French while the younger generation prefer English. Outside the major centres of Phnom Penh and Siem Reap most people speak only Khmer. Again English is preferred as a second language by the younger generation.
<b> tipping</b>	Tippping for good service is not expected but is always appreciated in these developing nations. It is customary, though not compulsory, to tip tour guides and drivers at the end of a tour. Hotel and station porters should also be tipped in USD\$.
<b>bank opening hours</b>	Generally Banks are open Monday to Friday Mon - Fri 08.00 – 15.00 and Saturday morning, closing for lunch between 10:30 and 14:00. It is best to use banks in Ho Chi Minh City & Phnom Penn. There are ATMs in Cambodia. Credit cards are accepted at a limited number of hotels and restaurants in Phnom Penh and larger cities.
<b>post office hours</b>	The only one to rely on is in the capital; Address: Corner 13th/102nd Street, Phnom Penh. Open 07.00-17.00 Cambodia has a slow but reliable postal service with a range of international services. Post cards can be bought at all the main tourist sites and stamps are available from post offices and some hotel reception desks.
<b>office opening hours</b>	Offices are usually open from Monday to Friday from 07.30 or 08.00 until 17.00 or 18.00 and often close for lunch between 12.00 and 14.00. Shops open early and close any time between 18.00 and 22.00. Most shops are open 7 days a week.
<b>time (+/- GMT)</b>	Six or seven hours ahead of GMT depending on the time of year in the UK.
<b>electricity</b>	220V 50Hz. Outlets vary! They are normally round, two pin, or flat two pin.
<b>public holidays</b>	June 1 - Children's Day, June 18 - Queen's birthday, Sep 24 - Constitution Day, Oct 6-7 - Pchoum Benh's Day, Oct 23 - Paris Peace accords, Nov 1 - King Sihanouk's Birthday, Nov 9 - Independence Day, Nov 3 to mid-month - Water Festival, Dec 10 - Human Rights Day.
<b>telephone</b>	Most hotels now have IDD phones in rooms and it is possible to send faxes from hotels and post offices although be warned these services are expensive. Away from the major cities it may not always be possible to make international calls. Please check with your mobile phone provider if your network & contract enable you to have coverage in Cambodia. Charity Challenge also has an emergency Satellite Phone available on all challenges at a cost of £3 per minute.
<b>e mail</b>	E-mail and Internet access is becoming widespread in all major towns and is relatively inexpensive.
<b>currency</b>	The currency of Cambodia is called the Riel. There is no need to change your currency into riels however as in common with most Asian countries, US Dollars are accepted in many places and are used to pay for airline tickets, airport taxes, visa fees, hotel and restaurant bills. Riel is useful for paying for small amounts such as water but you cannot change any Dollars to Riel on arrival at the airport, so hang on to your small change when you make your first purchase!
<b>exchange money</b>	Bring US Dollars in small denominations. They are the de facto currency in Cambodia so it really isn't necessary to change this into Riel when you arrive. Riel may be given as change on occasion and is worth using as small tips or to buy stamps etc. In the major cities there are bureaux de change and most hotels will change US Dollars although for other currencies it is usually necessary to visit a bank.
<b>credit cards</b>	Credit cards are not widely accepted. There are no ATMs; but it is possible to get cash on Visa Card. Use the right bank and you can get 2% commission as you would for T/Cs. Otherwise you

could pay though the nose. Visa Card and Mastercard are now accepted in many hotels, restaurants and shops in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap. However, as in Vietnam, US Dollars cash are still the most reliable form of money to carry.

## travellers cheque

Traveller's cheques are a useful alternative to cash. Traveller's cheques can be exchanged at banks and some hotels but can be difficult to change outside of the major cities.

## passport/visa

UK citizens require a visa to enter Cambodia but this will be arranged locally. You must hold a full ten-year passport with at least six months to run from the end of your challenge, and at least two blank pages for your visas and entry/exit stamps. All nationalities must obtain a visa for entering Cambodia. It costs US\$20 and allows a stay of up to 30 days and one entry only, you must pay in USD cash. You will need 2 passport photos and your guides will advise you of the simple procedure in Vietnam. If you are a British national and plan to stay for an extended period in Cambodia you are strongly advised to register with the British Embassy in Phnom Penh upon arrival. You can register online at [www.britishembassy.gov.uk/cambodia](http://www.britishembassy.gov.uk/cambodia)

## vaccination and health

Nomad Travel Stores Medical Centre recommended hepatitis A, typhoid; diphtheria. Vaccines sometimes advised: Japanese B encephalitis, rabies, tuberculosis, hepatitis B, poliomyelitis. Yellow fever certificate required only if entering from an infected area (not UK). Please check with your GP for the very latest recommendations.

Malaria is present in most of the region and it is advisable to take precautions especially if travelling off the beaten track. This includes wearing long sleeved shirts, long trousers and socks at dawn/dusk. Also see Health notes.

## hospitals/pharmacies

There are many clinics and private hospitals in the capital. Each provincial capital has a main hospital, but facilities can be very basic. If you do require medical attention please keep all receipts to aid any future insurance claims and information on any medication administered. Also see Travel Tips / Insurance notes.

## shopping

The two main centres of Phnom Penh and Siem Reap are the best places to look for souvenirs. A uniquely Cambodian souvenir that many visitors like to take home is the checked scarf made of cotton or silk called the krama.

## water

It is not advisable to drink tap water in Cambodia but bottled mineral water is safe and available everywhere. Ice in drinks is generally OK in good standard hotels and restaurants but it is best to avoid it on street stalls or in country areas. Also see Health notes.

## climate

Cambodia has two monsoons, the southwest monsoon from May to October brings heavy rains and the northwest monsoon from November to April spreads dry weather throughout the country. Temperatures vary from around 24°C to 35°C with the coolest period between November and January and the hottest from February to April. See the Q&A for your chosen challenge for more information.

## geography

Cambodia is bounded on the west by Thailand, on the north by Laos, on the east by Vietnam and to the south by the Gulf of Thailand. It's about half the size of Vietnam or Italy. Topographically, the country is dominated by the mighty Mekong River, which cuts a swathe through the country from north to south; the fish-filled Tonlé Sap (Great Lake); the Elephant and Cardamom mountains in the southwest; the Dangrek Mountains along the Thai border; and the Eastern Highlands in the northeast. Most Cambodians live on the fertile central plains of the Mekong - Tonlé basin.

## the people

90% of Khmer, 5% Vietnamese, 1% Chinese, 4% other ethnics.

## culture/customs

Cambodian society tends to be both conservative and fairly tolerant. Although you will rarely be remonstrated with for your dress or behaviour, by following a few simple rules, you can minimize the risk of causing offence. Be particularly sensitive to cultural differences in rural areas where people are less used to foreigners. As in most Asian countries, it's not done to display anger, and it certainly won't help things get done more quickly. When cycling it is best for women to wear a short-sleeved t-shirt at the least. When bathing in rural areas modesty should be applied to dress.

## do's & don'ts

- Do observe the "No Touch" signs at Angkor Wat. Many tourists ignore the signs, and some of the temples are starting to feel the stress of human hands.
- Do pay attention to scams at Angkor Wat. There are many souvenir vendors with tales to tell of why you should donate money to them. Mostly these are scams. Be savvy.
- Do be prepared to be shocked at the number of amputees in Cambodia. Land mines have taken a terrible toll on Cambodians who have one of the highest rates of amputation in the world.
- Do be security conscious. Avoid unlit streets at night. Carry only the minimum amount of cash when sightseeing. **Do not walk the streets at night in Phnom Penn**, please use a rickshaw/ taxi. Be careful not to leave expensive items or cash lying around your hotel room.
- Do keep away from large gatherings, demonstrations and political meetings. Avoid expressing forcible opinions on Cambodian politics or culture.
- Do take heed of all advice given by your guides locally. If you follow their instructions you are at no risk of encountering unexploded mines on our routes – you can expect pot-holed roads and straying cattle though!
- Do not get involved with drugs. You could face massive fines, long prison sentences in grim conditions. We cannot get you out of prison.
- Be aware that standards maintained by emergency services are poor in comparison to the UK. Often a service is provided only on evidence of ability to pay, such as cash or credit card.