

vietnam fact file



vietnamese embassy in uk	Website: www.vietnamembassy.org.uk Address: Address:12-14 Victoria Road, London, W8 5RD. Telephone: 020 7937 1912 Facsimile: 020 937 6108
british/consulate in vietnam	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
tourist authority of vietnam	Address: 80 Quan Su, Ha Noi Telephone: 822 4714
area	329,566sq km (slightly larger than Italy)
population	81,624,716 (Oct 2004)
capital	Ha Noi
language	Vietnamese (official), English (increasingly favoured as a second language), some French, Chinese, and Khmer; mountain area languages (Mon-Khmer and Malayo-Polynesian)
tipping	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.
bank opening hours	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.
post office hours	Monday – Friday 8am – 4.30pm Saturday mornings to 12pm.
office opening hours	Usually 7.30- 11.30am and 1.30- 4.30pm on weekdays, and sometimes Saturday mornings. Larger shops tend to open for longer hours.
time (+/- GMT)	Six or seven hours ahead of GMT depending on the time of year in the UK.
electricity	220V 50Hz. Outlets vary! They are normally round, two pin, or flat two pin.
public holidays	Jan 1, Vietnamese Tet -late January early Feb for 5 days, April 30, May 1, May 19, September 2, Dec 25
telephone	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 expeditions at a cost of £3 per minute.
e-mail	E-mail and Internet access is widespread in all major towns and is relatively inexpensive.
postal	Vietnam has a slow but reliable postal service with a range of international services.
currency	The basic unit of currency is the Vietnamese Dong. As of August 2009, there are 29,196VND to the Pound. For up to date exchange rates, please visit www.xe.com . American Express travellers cheques are regarded with suspicion. Thomas Cook is preferred. Dollars cash in small denominations are very useful.
exchange money	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.
credit cards	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.
travellers cheque	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.

passport/visa

You must hold a full ten-year passport with at least six months to run from the end of your expedition, 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. 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. Remember that the airport departure tax is not included in your ticket. 12USD is payable on departure from Saigon using international flights. Dong is accepted as an alternative. No other currency is accepted. 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. Check with your doctor or nurse about suitable antimalarial tablets. Also see Health notes.

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 expedition 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!