



VIETNAM

Travel Guide



Welcome to Vietnam

Astonishingly exotic and utterly compelling, Vietnam is a country of breathtaking natural beauty with a unique heritage, where travel quickly becomes addictive.

Sensory Overload

Unforgettable experiences are everywhere in Vietnam. There's the sublime: gazing over a surreal seascape of limestone islands from the deck of a traditional junk in Halong Bay. The ridiculous: taking 10 minutes just to cross the street through a tsunami of motorbikes in Hanoi. The inspirational: exploring the world's most spectacular cave systems in Phong Nha-Ke Bang National Park. The comical: watching a moped loaded with honking pigs weave a wobbly route along a country lane. And the contemplative: witnessing a solitary grave in a cemetery of thousands of war victims

War, Peace & Progress

Forty years after the carnage and destruction of an epoch-defining conflict, Vietnam is resolutely a nation, not a war, in the eyes of the world. Self-confident and fast-developing, its progress is all-evident in the country's booming metropolises. Vietnam's allure is easy to appreciate (and something of a history lesson) as ancient, labyrinthine trading quarters of still-thriving craft industries are juxtaposed with grand colonial mansions from the French era, all overseen from the skybars of 21st-century glass-and-steel highrises.

A Culinary Superpower

The Thais may grumble, but in Southeast Asia nothing really comes close: Vietnamese food is that good. Incredibly subtle in its flavours and outstanding in its diversity, Vietnamese cooking is a fascinating draw for travellers myriad street-food tours and cooking schools are testament to this. Geography plays a crucial role, with Chinese flavours influencing the soups of the north, spices sparking up southern cuisine, and herbs and complex techniques typifying the central coastline, rightly renowned as Vietnam's epicurean epicentre. And up and down the country you can mingle with villagers, sample local dishes and sip rice wine in Vietnam's many regional markets.

Thrills & Chills

If you've got the bills, Vietnam's got the thrills and chills. Some require a little physical effort, such as motorbiking switchback after switchback up the jaw-dropping Hai Van Pass in central Vietnam. Others require even more sweat: kitesurfing the tropical oceanic waters off Mui Ne or hiking the evergreen hills around Bac Ha or Sapa. And when you're done with all that adrenaline stuff, there's plenty of horizontal 'me' time to relish. Vietnam has outstanding spas – from marble temples of treatments, to simple family-run massage salons with backpacker-friendly rates.

Vietnam is also home to 54 ethnic minority groups, including the Hmong, Dao, Tay, Thai, and Nùng, dwell in the highlands, which cover two-thirds of Vietnam's territory.



Need to Know

Currency

VND

Language

Vietnamese

Vietnam Visa

Complicated & fast-changing
Need help on Vietnam Visa?

[Get Vietnam Visa](#)

Time

Vietnam is +7 GMT/UTC

Important Numbers

Country Code: **84**

International

Access Code: **00**

Police: **113**

Emergency: **114**

Daily Costs

Comfortable room: **\$25 - 50**

Meal in a restaurant: **from \$8**

Ten-minute taxi ride: **\$4**

Arriving in Vietnam

1. Tan Son Nhat International Airport (Ho Chi Minh City a.k.a Saigon)
2. Noi Bai International Airport (Hanoi)
3. Da Nang International Airport
4. Cam Ranh International

[Airport Car Pickup](#): from \$25

[Airport Fast Track](#): from \$25

Getting Around

Train: Reasonably priced and comfortable enough in air conditioned carriages.

Plane: Cheap if you book ahead and the network is pretty comprehensive.

Car: Very useful for travelling at your own pace or for visiting regions with minimal public transport. Cars always come with a driver.

Bus: On the main highways services are very frequent, although it's not a particularly relaxing way to travel. In the sticks things deteriorate rapidly. Open-tour buses are very inexpensive and worth considering.

Motorbike: You can consider to use Grab or Uber or rent a bike, It's very free and self-advanture.

Cyclo: Exciting travel with cyclo to view-traveling

First Time Vietnam

Check List

- Check out the visa situation; you may need to apply in advance
- Make sure your passport is valid for at least six months past your arrival date
- Check your immunisation history
- Arrange appropriate travel insurance
- Pre-book internal flights and trains
- Inform your debit/credit card company

Top Tips for Your Trip

- Prepare yourself for the crazy driving: traffic can come at you every which way, and in the cities swarms of motorbikes reach biblical proportions. Try to keep calm and consider arranging a massage after a long journey.
- Be aware that Vietnam has more than its fair share of scams; most concern overcharging. Though very rare, there are some more serious dangers to also be aware of.
- In towns like Hue and Sapa, and beaches popular with tourists, expect plenty of hustle from street vendors, cyclo drivers and the like. Off the beaten track there's little or no hassle.
- Load your bargaining head before you arrive.

What to Wear

- There are no serious cultural concerns about wearing inappropriate clothing in Vietnam. In religious buildings and government offices or if attending a formal dinner, legs should be covered and sleeveless tops avoided.
- Yes, Vietnam is in the tropics, but visit anywhere north of Hoi An between October and March and it can be cool, so pack some layers (a fleece or two). The rest of the year, and in the south, flip-flops or sandals, a T-shirt and shorts are likely to be your daily uniform.

What to Pack

- Mosquito repellent with DEET
- Rain jacket
- Electrical adapter
- Torch (flashlight)
- Flip-flops or sandals
- Binoculars

Tipping

- Hotels Not expected. Leave a small gratuity for cleaning staff if you like.
- Restaurants Not expected; 5% to 10% in smart restaurants or if you're very satisfied. Locals don't tip.
- Guides A few dollars on day trips is sufficient, more for longer trips if the service is good.
- Taxis Not necessary, but a little extra is appreciated, especially at night.
- Bars Never expected.

First Time Vietnam



Tours

Vietnam can be a culture shock for many travellers. Taking a tour can really help you understand the nation better. Cities including Hanoi, Hoi An, Danang and Nha Trang have street food tours, while motorbike tours are also very popular.

Sleeping

Tourism is booming in Vietnam so it's usually best to book your accommodation a day or two in advance, or several weeks ahead in the high season (the Tet holiday, July to August, and around Christmas).

- Hotels Range from simple functional mini-hotels to luxurious resorts.
- Hostels Popular in the main tourism centres, but rare elsewhere.
- Guesthouses Usually family-run and less formal than hotels.

First Time Vietnam

Language

English is not widely spoken in Vietnam. In the tourist areas, most staff in hotels and restaurants will speak a little, but communication problems are very common. A few key phrases of Vietnamese go a long way.

Bargaining

Bargaining is essential in Vietnam, but not for everything. Sharpen your haggling skills when shopping in marketplaces and in some small shops and when arranging local transport like cyclos and motorbike taxi. Many hotels will also offer a discount if you ask for one. In restaurants, prices are fixed. Some bus drivers try to overcharge foreigners. Bargain if you're certain the fare is overpriced.

Etiquette

- **Meals** When dining with Vietnamese people, it's customary for the most senior diner to pay for everyone.
- **Homes** Remove your shoes when entering a private house.
- **Heads** Don't pat or touch an adult (or child) on the head.
- **Feet** Avoid pointing your feet at people or sacred objects.

Eating

It's rarely necessary to reserve a table in advance in Vietnam. Exceptions include national park restaurants and upmarket, select places in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

- **Local restaurants** Vietnamese restaurants tend to have purely functional decor and even look scruffy, but if they're busy the food will usually be fresh and delicious.
- **International restaurants** In tourist areas many restaurants serve up Western and Asian food. Often the local food is toned down and not that authentic.
- **Street food** Pavement kitchens offer cheap, incredibly tasty, local grub.
- **Cafes** May have a snack or two available, but rarely meals.



Destination Top 14

1 Hanoi Capital

Ancient but dynamic, the nation's capital hurtles toward modernity, cautiously embracing visitors. Sample Hanoi's heady mix of history and ambition by wandering the streets of the Old Quarter, sipping drip-coffee, slurping on a hearty bowl of bun rieu cua (hearty crab broth) and scoring souvenirs for next to nothing. When you're done, check out the crumbling decadence of the French Quarter then zip up to cosmopolitan Tay Ho for finer dining and the lowdown on Hanoi's burgeoning art scene.



2 Halong Bay

Halong Bay's stunning combination of karst limestone peaks and sheltered, shimmering seas is one of Vietnam's top tourist draws, but with more than 2000 different islands, there's plenty of superb scenery to go around. Definitely book an overnight cruise and make time for your own special moments on this World Heritage wonder. Rise early for an ethereal misty dawn, or pilot a kayak into grottoes and lagoons. If you're hankering for more karst action, move on to the less touristy but equally spectacular Lan Ha Bay.

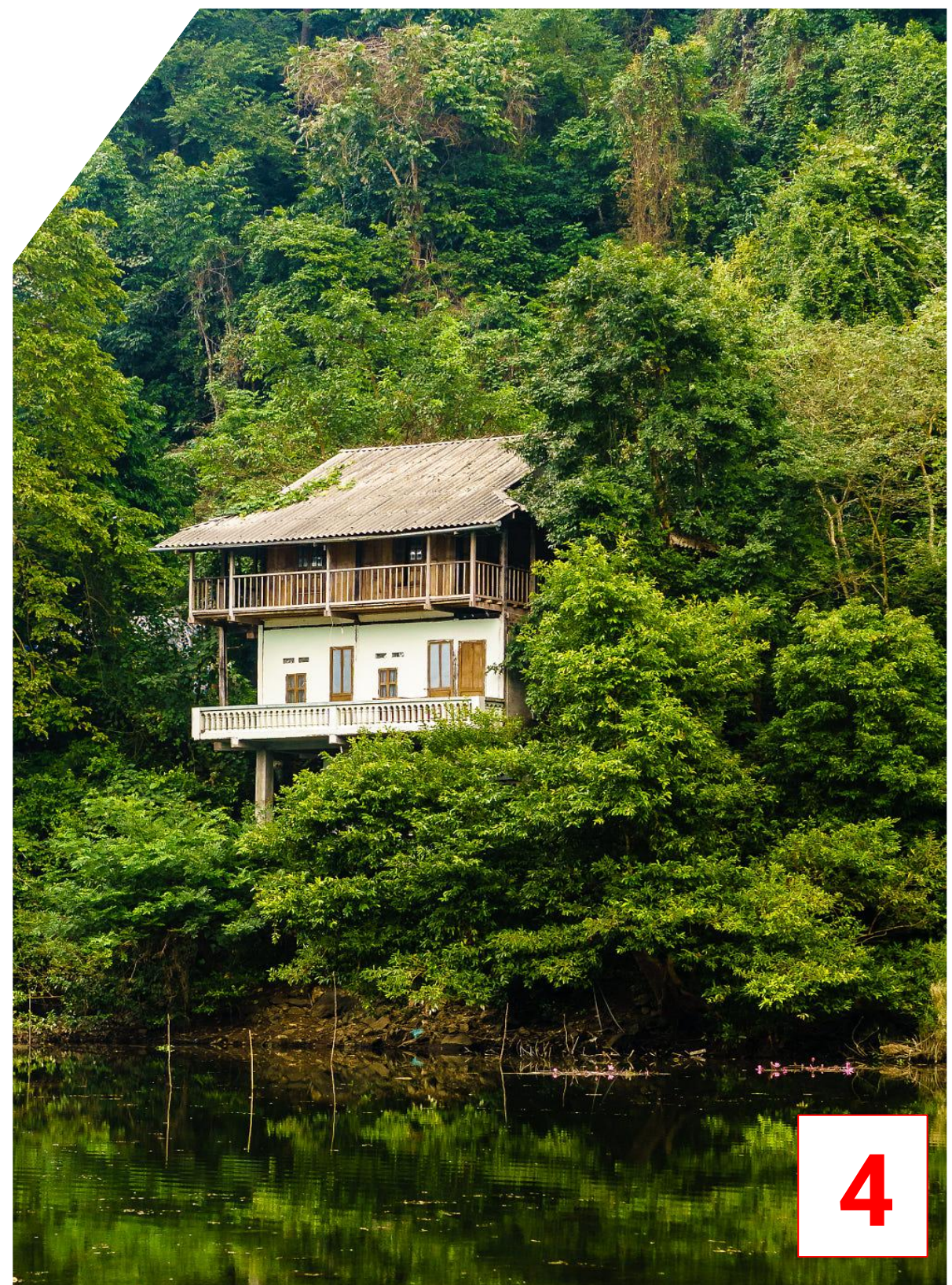
3 Sapa Trekking

Undulating rice terraces cascade down to valleys inhabited by Hmong, Red Dzao and Giay villages. Up above, the sinuous ridges of the Hoang Lien Mountains (dubbed the Tonkinese Alps by the French) touch the sky. Brushed with every shade of green in the palette, the countryside surrounding Sapa is a showcase of northern Vietnam's most superb rural vistas and a fascinating glimpse into the country's astounding cultural diversity. This is prime territory for digging out your walking boots and hitting the trails.



4 Ba Be National Park

Detour off the regular Vietnam tourist trail in Ba Be National Park, an essential destination for adventurous travellers, with towering limestone mountains, plunging valleys and ever green forests. Waterfalls, caves and lakes combine in a landscape that sustains over 550 different plants and hundreds of different bird and animal species. Explore Ba Be's natural spectacle by boat or on trekking and mountain-biking excursions, before relaxing and recharging in the rustic homestays and village guesthouses of the local Tay ethnic minority.





3

5 Extreme North

The extreme north of Vietnam is all about raw adventure travel. Ha Giang province is Vietnam's spectacular emerging destination for the intrepid, with dizzying ascents up the Quan Ba Pass (Heaven's Gate), towering karsts and granite outcrops, and jaw dropping vistas on the epic trip between Dong Van and Meo Vac. And with improved roads, new trekking routes, minority markets and a wider choice of guesthouses, Vietnam's final frontier now a Unesco listed geopark is really opening up



5

6 Phong Nha - Ke Bang National Park

With hills shrouded in rainforest and mountain rivers coursing through ravines, above ground the Phong Nha Ke Bang region is one of Vietnam's most spectacular national parks. Head underground for proof that this area should be part of any Vietnamese itinerary. A fortunate selection of travellers can experience Hang Son Doong, the world's largest cave, but more accessible are the ziplining and kayaking thrills of Hang Toi, and the ethereal beauty of Paradise Cave



6

7 Hue

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Hue is perhaps the easiest Vietnamese city to love and spend time in. Its situation on the banks of the Perfume River is sublime, its complex cuisine just as famous, and its streets are relatively traffic free. And that's without the majesty of the Hue Citadel, its royal residences and elegant temples, formidable walled defences and gateways to explore. On the city's fringes are some of Vietnam's most impressive pagodas and royal tombs, many in wonderful natural settings

8 Hoi An Ancient Town

Vietnam's most cosmopolitan and civilised town, this beautiful ancient port is bursting with gourmet restaurants, hip bars and cafes, quirky boutiques and expert tailors. Immerse yourself in history in the warren-like lanes of the Old Town, and tour the temples and pagodas. Dine like an emperor on a peasant's budget (and even learn how to cook like the locals). Then hit glorious An Bang Beach, wander along the riverside and bike the back roads. Yes, Hoi An has it all.



7



8

9 Dalat City - Little Paris

the queen of the southwest highlands and Dalat is has been popular with international tourists since the days of the French colonialists. Grand Gallic villas are dotted amid pine groves and the whole town is centred on a pretty lake, with numerous nearby waterfalls adding to its natural appeal. Dalat is also fast becoming one of Vietnam's key adventure sport hubs, with abseiling, canyoning, mountain biking, hiking and rafting all on offer. The temperate climate here will be quite a relief if you've been suffering in Saigon.



10 Cat Tien National Park

An accessible and impressive protected area, Cat Tien lies conveniently midway between Ho Chi Minh City and Dalat. It is set on a bend in the Dong Nai River, and there is something vaguely Apocalypse Now about arriving here. Popular activities include trekking, cycling and wildlife spotting: the Wild Gibbon Trek is a must. The park is also home to a primate centre, where gibbons and langurs are coaxed back into their natural environment.



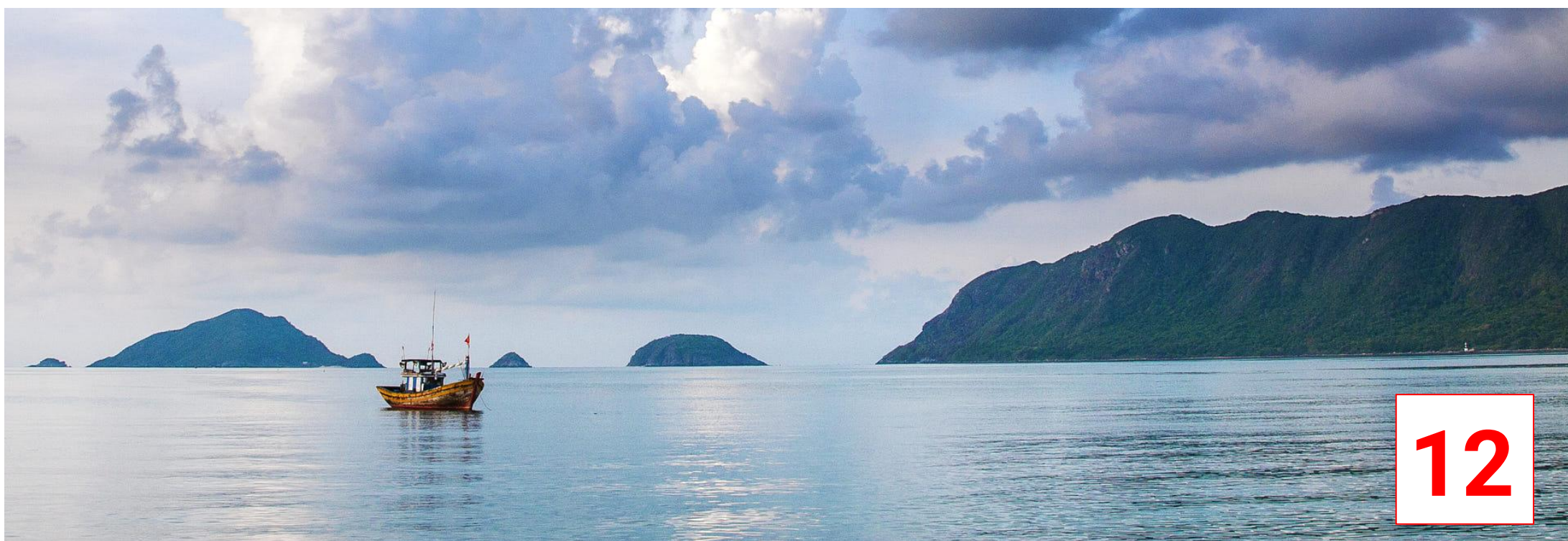
11 Mui Ne

Perhaps the adventure sport epicentre of Vietnam, the relaxed, prosperous beach resort of Mui Ne is a kite surfing capital with world-class wind and conditions, and excellent schools for professional training. For those who prefer dry land, sandboarding and golf are popular alternatives. The resort itself has more than 20km of palm-fringed beachfront that stretches invitingly along the shores of the South China Sea. From guesthouses to boutique resorts, boho bars to ne-value spas, Mui Ne has a broad appeal.



12 Con Dao Islands

The furious energy that characterises Vietnamese cities can be intoxicating, but when you need an urban detox, these idyllic tropical islands make the perfect escape. Once hell on earth for a generation of political prisoners, Con Dao is now a heavenly destination of remote beaches, pristine dive sites and diverse nature. It's a wonderful place to explore by bike in search of that dream beach, while the main settlement of Con Son is one of Vietnam's most charming towns



13 Ho Chi Minh City - Saigon

Increasingly International but still unmistakably Vietnamese, the former Saigon's visceral energy will delight big city devotees. HCMC doesn't inspire neutrality: you'll either be drawn into its thrilling vortex and hypnotised by the perpetual whirl of its orbiting motorbikes, or you'll find the whole experience overwhelming. Dive in and you'll be rewarded with a wealth of history, delicious food and a vibrant nightlife that sets the standard for Vietnam. The heat is always on in Saigon; loosen your collar and enjoy.



14 Phu Quoc Island

Lapped by azure waters and edged with the kind of white sand beaches that make sun seekers sink to their weak knees, Phu Quoc way down in the south of Vietnam is ideal for slipping into low gear, reaching for a seaside cocktail and toasting a blood-orange sun as it dips into the sea. And if you want to notch it up a tad, grab a motorbike and hit the red-dirt roads: the island's the size of Singapore.



14

16 Bac Son Valey



17 Ban Gioc Waterfall



18 Mekong Delta



Vietnam Region Map



Paracel, Spratly belong to Vietnam

Vietnam

When to Go

Climate & Region

- **Warm to hot summers, mild winters:** Northwestern, Northeastern, Red River Delta
- **Tropical climate, wet & dry seasons:** North Central Coast, South Central Coast, Central Highlands, Southeastern, Mekong River Delta

Time to Go

- **Mar–May & Sep–Nov:** Northwestern, Northeastern, Red River Delta.
- **Mar–Sep:** North Central Coast, South Central Coast, Central Highlands.
- **Nov–Feb:** Southeastern, Mekong River Delta.

High Season

(Jul & Aug)

- Prices increase by up to 50% by the coast; book hotels well in advance.
- All Vietnam, except the far north, is hot and humid, with the summer monsoon bringing downpours.

Shoulder

(Dec–Mar)

- During the Tet festival, the whole country is on the move and prices rise.
- North of Nha Trang can get cool weather.
- In the south, clear skies and sunshine are the norm.

Low Season

(Apr–Jun, Sep–Nov)

- Perhaps the best time to tour the whole nation.
- Typhoons can lash the central and northern coastline until November.

Time By Time

TOP EVENTS

- **Tet:** January–February
- **Hue Festival:** April (Biennial)
- **Wandering Souls Day:** August
- **Danang Fireworks Festival:** April
- **Buddha's Birth, Enlightenment and Death:** May

January

Winter temperatures can be bitterly cold in the far north, with snow possible. The further south you go, the milder the weather. Tet celebrations occur at the end of the month (or in February)

Dalat Flower Festival

Held early in the month, this is always a wonderful occasion, with huge elaborate displays. It's become an international event, with music and fashion shows and a wine festival.

February

North of Danang, chilly 'Chinese winds' usually mean grey, overcast conditions. Conversely, sunny hot days are the norm in the southern provinces.

Tet (Tet Nguyen Dan)

The Big One! Falling in late January or early February, Vietnamese Lunar New Year is like Christmas, New Year and birthdays all rolled into one. Travel is difficult at this time, as transport is booked up and many businesses close.

Quang Trung

Wrestling competitions, lion dances and human chess take place in Hanoi on the fifth day of the first lunar month at Dong Da Mound, site of the uprising against the Chinese led by Emperor Quang Trung (Nguyen Hue) in 1788.

March

Grey skies and cool temperatures can affect anywhere north of Hoi An, but towards the end of the month the thermometer starts to rise. Down south, the dry season is ending.

Buon Ma Thuot Coffee Festival

Caffeine cravers should make for the highlands during March, as Buon Ma Thuot plays host to an annual coffee festival. Growers, grinders, blenders and addicts rub shoulders in the city's main park, and local entertainment is provided.

Saigon Cyclo Challenge

On your marks...get pedalling. Ho Chi Minh City's fastest rickshaw drivers battle it out in their three-wheeled chariots to raise funds for charity. Takes place in mid-March every year.

April

Generally an excellent time to cover the nation, as the winter monsoon rains should have subsided and there are some excellent festivals. Flights are usually moderately priced (unless Easter falls in this month).

Holiday of the Dead (Thanh Minh)

It's time to honour the ancestors with a visit to graves of deceased relatives to tidy up and sweep tombstones. Offerings of flowers, food and paper are presented. It's held on the first three days of the third moon.



Hue Festival (Biennial)

Vietnam's biggest cultural event (www.huefestival.com) is held every two years, with events in 2016 and 2018. Most of the art, theatre, music, circus and dance performances are held inside Hue's Citadel.

Danang Fireworks Festival

Danang's riverside explodes with sound, light and colour during this spectacular event, which features competing pyrotechnic teams from the USA, China, Europe and Vietnam. Held in the last week of the month.

May

A fine time to tour the centre and north, with a good chance of clear skies and warm days. Sea temperatures are warming up nicely and it's a pretty quiet month for tourism.

Buddha's Birth, Enlightenment and Death (Phong Sinh)

A big celebration at Buddhist temples with street processions, and lanterns used to decorate pagodas. Complexes including Chua Bai Dinh near Ninh Binh and HCMC's Jade Emperor Pagoda host lavish celebrations. Fifteenth day of the fourth lunar month.

Nha Trang Sea Festival

Falls at the end of May (and the beginning of June) and includes a street festival, photography exhibitions, embroidery displays and kite-flying competitions.

June

A great time to tour Vietnam as it's just before the peak domestic season. Humidity can be punishing at this time of year, so plan to spend some time by the coast.

Summer Solstice Day

(Tet Doan Ngo)

Keep epidemics at bay with offerings to the spirits, ghosts and the God of Death on the fifth day of the fifth moon. Sticky rice wine (ruou nep) is consumed in industrial quantities.

August

The peak month for tourism with domestic and international tourists. Book flights and accommodation well ahead. Weather-wise it's hot, hot, hot.

Wandering Souls Day

(Trung Nguyen)

Second in the pecking order to Tet is this ancient Vietnamese tradition. Huge spreads of food are left out for lost spirits who, it's believed, wander the earth on this day. Held on the 15th day of the seventh moon.

Mid-Autumn Festival

This is a big event in Hoi An and Hanoi, when citizens celebrate the full moon, eat mooncakes and beat drums. The lion, unicorn and dragon dance processions are enacted, and children are fully involved in the celebrations.

September

Excellent time to tour the whole nation. The coastal resorts are less crowded and there are fewer people on the move. Temperatures and humidity levels drop.

Vietnam National Day

Big parades and events are held across Vietnam on September 2. Celebrated with a rally and fireworks at Ba Dinh Square, Hanoi (in front of Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum) and there are also boat races on Hoan Kiem lake.



October

A good time to visit the far north, with a strong chance of clear skies and mild temperatures. Winter winds and rain begin to affect the centre, but down south it's often dry.

Cham New Year (Kate)

This is celebrated at Po Klong Garai Cham Towers in Thap Cham on the seventh month of the Cham calendar. The festival commemorates ancestors, Cham national heroes and deities, such as the farmers' goddess Po Ino Nagar.

Khmer Oc Bom Boc Festival

The Mekong Delta's Khmer community celebrates on the 15th day of the 10th moon of the lunar calendar (late October or November) with colourful boat races at Ba Dong Beach in Tra Vinh province and on the Soc Trang River.

December

The month begins quietly, but from mid-December the popular tourist resorts get increasingly busy. Book well ahead to secure a room over the Christmas break. Steamy in the south, but can get chilly up north.

Christmas Day (Giang Sinh)

Not a national holiday, but is celebrated throughout Vietnam, particularly by the sizeable Catholic population. It's a special time to be in places such as Phat Diem and HCMC, where thousands attend midnight Mass.

Vietnam Visa for You



The (very complicated) visa situation has recently changed for many nationalities, and is fluid – always check the latest regulations.

Vietnam Visa Exemption

The following nationalities do not need Visa to arrive Vietnam:

Countries	Days
Myanmar, Brunei	14 days
UK, Italy, Germany, France, Spain, Belarus, Denmark, Finland, Japan, South Korea, Norway, Russia, Sweden	15 days
Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia Singapore	30 days

Note: Your passport must be valid for 6 months at least from the arrival date.

Visa On Arrival (VOA)

Definition: It is also called Vietnam Visa Online which is valid at 4 international airports only: Hochiminh, Hanoi, Danang and Camranh airports.

Procedure:

- 1st: Filling the application form online and pay Visa fee
- 2nd: Receiving the Vietnam Visa Approval Letter via email after 2 working days
- 3rd: Print the letter out and use it to get Visa stamp at Vietnam airport upon arrival

Visa Types and duration:

VOA is available for Tourist and Business Visa type which includes: 1 month single/multiple entry, 3 months single/multiple entry, 6 months multiple entry and 1 year multiple entry.

Where to apply?

<https://www.vietnam-visaonline.org>
for the official site of Vietnam Visa on Arrival

Vietnam Visa for You



Visa at the Vietnam Embassy/Consulate

Travellers can apply for Visa at Vietnam Embassy or Consulate in their living country. The processing time takes 5 to 7 working days.

Visa Extension

In case, you want to stay longer in Vietnam, you are able to extend your Visa in some Local Visa Agent.

Procedure:

Contact us directly via email visa@vietnam-visaonline.org with your passport scan including your Visa stamp and Visa sticker. Then we will confirm you the extension fee.

Processing time: 7 working days in normal case and 2 working days for Urgent case.

Note: Remember to contact us before your Visa is expired to avoid the penalty fee for overstaying.

Vietnam Electronic Visa for Border Crossing

From Feb 01st 2017, Vietnam Immigration Department has issued the electronic Visa (e-Visa) for foreigners who arrive Vietnam via landport, seaport or airport as well.

- Including 40 countries in over the world are able to get e-Visa
- The applicants are able to use Vietnam e-Visa to enter 28 ports.

For detail the list of countries and list of port that able for evisa you refer to our website: vietnam-visaonline.org

Visa types and duration: Tourist and Business Visa, 30 days single entry.

Where to apply?

	Government site	Our Service
Processing time	3 working days	2 working days
Visa Fee	\$25	\$44
Support	No support	Support 24/7



Eat & Drink Like a Local

Showcasing fresh and vibrant flavours, excellent street food and elegant restaurants in restored colonial architecture, Vietnam is packed with superb opportunities for eating and drinking. Cookery classes, market visits and walking tours make it easy to discover the country's culinary heritage...

Should Try



Coffee Time

Starbucks may have opened its branch here in 2013, but in Vietnam, coffee culture runs deep. Virtually every neighbourhood in every town (and most villages) will have a little cafe where locals go to destress from the office, the family or simply the *trà c* (most are located on quiet side streets with copious greenery to promote relaxation). Vietnamese coffee can be served hot or iced (a real treat in summer), either treacle-thick, or with milk (usually sweetened and condensed) for a double whammy caffeine sugar kick.

Bia Hoi

One of the great pleasures of traveling in Vietnam, bia hoi fresh draught beer brewed daily, without additives or preservatives, to be drunk within hours. Incredibly cheap and widely available, bia hoi is said to have been introduced to Hanoi by Czech brewers over 40 years ago. Every town has a bia hoi place, often with a street terrace, offering a very local experience. Park (or attempt to park) your rear on one of the tiny plastic stools and get stuck in. Snacks to eat are often sold too.



Regional Specialities

Travelling north to south is a Vietnamese journey that, geographically and gastronomically, begins in China and ends in Southeast Asia. Differences in history, culture and geography combine for many techniques, ingredients and tastes, all linked by the Vietnamese love for vibrant flavours, fresh herbs, noodles and seafood.

Northern Vietnam

Northern Vietnamese food bears the imprint of centuries of Chinese occupation. Comforting noodle dishes, generally mild flavours and rustic elegance are all hallmarks of the region's cuisine. Soy is used as frequently as fish sauce, vinegar adds sourness rather than lime juice or tamarind, chillies give way to black pepper, and long cooking times coax maximum flavour from unpretentious ingredients.

Bun Cha: This street favourite features barbecued sliced pork or pork patties served with thin rice vermicelli, fresh herbs and green vegetables, and a bowl of lightly sweetened nuoc mam (fish sauce) with coating slices of pickled vegetables. The Hanoi version combines sliced pork belly and pork patties formed from chopped pork shoulder.



Banh Cuon: These rolls are made from rice-flour batter that's poured onto a piece of muslin cloth stretched over a steamer; once firm, the noodle sheet is scattered with chopped pork, mushrooms and dried shrimp, then rolled up, sprinkled with crispy shallots, and served alongside a tangle of bean sprouts, slivered cucumber and chopped fresh herbs, with a saucer of nuoc cham (dipping sauce) for drizzling.

Pho Bo A northern culinary highlight is pho bo (beef noodle soup). A good pho hinges on the broth, which is made from beef bones boiled for hours with shallot, ginger, fish sauce, black cardamom, star anise and cassia. Hardcore northern pho lovers frown upon adding lime, basil, and bean sprouts to their bowls.

Central Vietnam

Positioned between culinary extremes, the food of central Vietnam combines moderation and balance – except where it concerns the locals' love of chilli. People cook from the land, transforming modest resources into fare fit for an emperor. Everything seems smaller; baguettes and herbs are miniature versions of their southern selves, while Hue's imperial cuisine showcases dainty, delicate dishes. One edible legacy of the royal court is easily found on the street: banh beo, delicate steamed cakes made from rice flour. The central Vietnamese like gutsy and spicy flavours, including briny shrimp sauce and spritely lemongrass.

Banh Khoai Banh Khoai These hearty, dessert-plate-sized crepes are made with rice-flour batter and cooked with oil in special long

handled pans. With a filling of shrimp, pork, egg and bean sprouts, they are encased with fresh herbs in lettuce, and then dunked in a sauce based on earthy fermented soybeans.

Bun Bo Hue

This punchy rice-noodle soup with beef and pork exemplifies the central Vietnamese proclivity for spicy food. Tinged yellow-orange by chillies and annatto, the broth is laden with lemongrass notes and anchored by savoury shrimp sauce (mam tom). Like most Vietnamese noodle soups, it's accompanied by herbs and leafy greens.

Com Hen

Rice is served with the flesh of tiny clams, their cooking broth, and garnishes including roasted rice crackers, crisp pork crackling, peanuts, sesame seeds, fresh herbs and vegetables. Adding broth and sauce to the other ingredients, the liquid components moisten, season and harmonise.

Generally Vietnamese eat three meals per day, beginning with a bowl of noodles or chao (rice porridge) for breakfast. Lunch is usually a social affair with workmates in a local restaurant or food stall, and dinner is a leisurely occasion shared with friends and family. Throughout the day, snacking opportunities abound in bigger cities.



Southern Vietnam

Southern cuisine emphasises the region's abundance and tends to be on the sweet side. Vendors at southern markets display lush, big leafed herbs, colourful fruits, and the freshest fish. Coconut milk infuses mild curries and lends richness to sweets. The southern love of fresh herbs, fruit and vegetables comes to the fore in refreshing goi (salads), of green papaya, grapefruit- like pomelo, or lotus stems.

Canh Chua Ca This soup is the Mekong Delta in a bowl: plentiful snakehead sh or cat sh; fruits like tomato and pineapple; and vegetables including bean sprouts, okra and bac ha (taro stem), all in a broth that's tart with tamarind and salty with nuoc mam, and nally topped with vivid green herbs and golden fried garlic.

Banh Mi This sandwich is a legacy of French and Chinese colonialism, but it's 100% Vietnamese. The baguette merely encases the lling, which might be a smearing of pâté or a few slices of silky sausage and a sprinkling of pepper. Mayonnaise moistens the bread and a sprinkling of soy sauce imparts umami (savoury) goodness.

Banh Xeo This giant crispy, chewy rice crepe is made in 12 or 14-inch skillets or woks and crammed with pork, shrimp, mung beans and bean sprouts. Take a portion and encase it in lettuce or mustard leaf, add some fresh herbs, then dunk it in nuoc cham.





TABLE ETIQUETTE

Have your bowl on a small plate, chopsticks and a soup spoon at the ready. Each place setting will include a small bowl at the top right-hand side for nuoc nam (sh sauce) and other dipping sauces. Don't dip your chopsticks into the central bowls of shared food, but use the communal serving spoons instead. Pick up your bowl with your left hand, bring it close to your mouth and use the chopsticks to manoeuvre the food. If you're eating noodles, lower your head till it hangs over the bowl and slurp away. If you're dining in a private home, it is polite for the host to offer more food than the guests can eat, and it's also polite for guests not to eat everything. Also, remember not to leave chopsticks standing in a V-shape in your bowl as this is a sign of death.

Itineraries



Language

General Information

Vietnamese, or tiếng Việt is the official language of Vietnam and spoken by about 85 million people worldwide, both in Vietnam and among migrant communities around the world. It belongs to the Mon-Khmer language family and has Muong (a hill-tribe language) as its closest relative.

Basics

<i>Hello.</i>	<i>Xin chào.</i>	<i>sin jòw</i>
<i>Goodbye.</i>	<i>Tạm biệt</i>	<i>daam bee</i>
<i>Yes.</i>	<i>Vâng</i>	<i>ụht vuhng</i>
<i>No.</i>	<i>Không</i>	<i>kawm</i>
<i>Please.</i>	<i>Làm ơn.</i>	<i>laam ern</i>
<i>Thank you</i>	<i>Xin lỗi.</i>	<i>kawm gó jee</i>
<i>You're welcome.</i>	<i>Không có chi.</i>	<i>gó jee sin lǎy</i>
<i>Excuse me./ Sorry.</i>	<i>Xin lỗi.</i>	<i>sin lǎy</i>
<i>How are you?</i>	<i>Có khỏe không?</i>	<i>gáw kwǎ kawm</i>
<i>Fine, thank you.</i>	<i>Có khỏe không?</i>	<i>kwǎ</i>
<i>And you?</i>	<i>Còn bạn thì sao?</i>	<i>gòn bạn tee sow</i>
<i>What's your name?</i>	<i>Tên bạn là gì?</i>	<i>den laa zee</i>
<i>My name is ...</i>	<i>Tên tôi là ...</i>	<i>den doy laa ...</i>
<i>Do you speak English?</i>	<i>Bạn có nói được bạn gó nóy đuhr·erk tiếng Anh không?</i>	<i>díng aang kawm</i>
<i>I (don't) understand.</i>	<i>Tôi (không) hiểu.</i>	<i>doy (kawm) hee·oo</i>

For in depth language information and handy phrases, check out Vietnamese Phrasebook. You'll find them in many shop or mobile application on your mobile.

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