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Vietnam Pre-departure Guide

Vietnam | Cambodia | Laos | Myanmar



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Socialist Republic of Vietnam



Population: 90.5 million
Capital City: Hanoi (6.5 million)
People: 53 ethnic minorities
Language: Vietnamese
Currency: Vietnam Dong (VND)
Time Zone: GMT +7 Hours
International Dialing Code: +84

Vietnam is a small majestic country, offering travellers an exciting mix of adventure and culture. The country's captivating natural wonders span from the mountainous north and the fertile plains of the Mekong Delta, to the spectacular coast-line of central Vietnam and the imperious Halong Bay. With an intriguing history spanning back over 4,000 years, including occupations from both the Chinese and French, strong cultural influences can be found in the architecture and cuisine.



General Information



❖ Passport and visa

Passports should be valid for **six months** from the date of entry into Vietnam. We recommend you make a photocopy of your passport and keep it somewhere separate, or scan it and keep it in an accessible email account. Visitors must have a visa before entering Vietnam. Vietnam Great Tours can arrange this for you. A visa on arrival can only be obtained with a letter of approval.

❖ Money

The official currency in Vietnam is the **Dong** (VND) which is a non-convertible currency. Visa and MasterCard are becoming more accepted in hotels, restaurants and large stores, especially in the bigger cities. ATM's are widely available throughout the country, and there are a number of international banks in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

❖ Post and telecommunications

The Vietnamese postal service is reliable and there are also courier services widely available. Do not put postcards into letter boxes; give them to your hotel to post or go to a post office.

Telephone connections to the rest of the world are widely available, however they aren't cheap. A Vietnamese SIM card is a less expensive way of calling other countries, however your phone will need to be

unlocked in order for it to work. For example, 200,000VND worth of Viettel credit (\$10) can last for up to 45 minutes to the UK.

Internet access is available in all major tourist places and you will find WiFi in most cafes in built up areas.

❖ Transportation

The traffic in Vietnam is busy, but slow. It may look like chaos but don't be frightened to cross the road. Simply make your way shaking your whole hand at waist height. You'll soon see other people doing the same.

Taxis are a popular way of getting around Hanoi but make sure you use a reputable company such as Mai Linh or Capital Taxis. A typical 10 minute journey should cost around 50,000 VND but prices tend to increase at night.

If you are in a built up area, a **cyclo** is a fun form of transport and should cost no more than 100,000 VND per journey.

Motorbike taxis: Travel by motorbike is not safe and under no circumstances is this sanctioned or recommended by Vietnam Great Tours. Please note that this form of transport is not usually covered by insurance. Please check the fine print of your travel insurance policy to be sure of your cover.



Health and Safety

❖Climate:

Vietnam has a diverse climate that varies significantly from region to region:

The North (Hanoi to Sapa)

- April to October: temperatures between 30-35°C with occasional bursts of heavy rain.
- December to March: temperatures between 10-15°C. February and March can be damp with drizzle and overcast skies.

The Centre (Hue to Nha Trang)

- Nha Trang: sunshine all year round apart from November and December when the area has heavy rain.
- Dalat: cooler than the coastal area, particularly from November to March.
- Da Nang and Hue: typhoons from mid October to mid December

The South (Ho Chi Minh City to Phan Thiet)

- May to October: hot and wet
- November to April: hot and humid

CITY	☀ TEMPERATURE (°C)						☁ RAINFALL VOLUME (mm)					
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Hanoi	16 18	17 26	20 44	23 90	27 188	29 240	29 288	28 318	27 265	25 130	21 43	18 23.5
Danang	22 101	22 31	24 12	27 18	29 47	30 42	30 99	28 117	26 447	24 530	22 221	21 208
Ho Chi Minh	26 14	27 4	28 10	29 50	28 218	28 312	27 293	27 270	27 327	27 266	26 117	26 48

Please note: The weather can be very unpredictable so it may be a good idea to carry an umbrella or raincoat with you. You can purchase these from supermarkets and general stores.

❖Health and wellbeing

Please be aware that your health can be at risk in Vietnam due to poor sanitation and lack of effective medical facilities. Rural areas may not have pharmacies and hospitals so make sure you travel with a full supply of any prescribed medicine you take. If you need medical assistance, we suggest The Family Medical Practice in both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Every traveller is responsible for his or her own health. First and foremost, make sure that you have travel insurance for your trip. You should also consult your doctor or local travel clinic for the latest information and advice on travelling to Vietnam before departure.

If you have a medical condition or allergy which requires particular attention, carry a doctor's letter with you that describes the nature of the condition and treatment needed. We also recommend you pack a medical kit,

including paracetamol and a diarrhoea remedy.

❖Vaccinations

Before travelling, please ensure you have adequate protection against disease. Contact your doctor for the latest medical advice on the vaccinations you need, no less than two months before your departure. Be aware that there is a malaria risk in rural parts of Vietnam.

❖Travel insurance (recommended)

Vietnam Great Tours does everything possible to ensure a safe and enjoyable trip. However, travel inevitably involves some risk and this should be recognised by holiday-makers. Travel insurance is a cost effective way of protecting yourself and your equipment should any problems occur such as cancelled trips, delays, medical emergencies, baggage loss or damage. It also gives you peace of mind. Please also make sure your travel insurance covers all activities planned on your trip.

Culture & Customs



❖Etiquette and cultural differences

Experiencing different cultures is one of the joys of travelling, and it is important that these differences are respected. Knowing a few important customs of the Vietnamese people will help make your visit more enjoyable:

- **Try not** to get angry. Showing any frustrations or annoyances by shouting or becoming abusive is extremely impolite and unlikely to achieve a positive outcome.
- **Pointing** your finger is seen as offensive. Try to gesture using your whole hand instead.
- **Refrain** from public displays of affection, they are considered offensive. It is extremely rare to see couples holding hands.
- **Wear** shorts to the knees and cover your shoulders, particularly at religious sites.
- **Always** remove your shoes when entering a temple or somebody's home.
- **Nude sunbathing** is considered completely inappropriate, even on beaches.
- **Remove** your hat when entering a religious site, addressing the elderly or encountering esteemed people such as monks.
- **It is improper** to pat children on the head.
- When using a toothpick, it is polite to cover your open mouth.
- **Don't** leave chopsticks sitting vertically in a rice bowl as it looks very similar to incense sticks that are burned for the dead.
- When passing something to another person, use both your hands together or just your right hand. **Never** use just your left hand.

❖Food and drink

Vietnamese food is fragrant, exciting and

healthy. Around the country, you will find a delicious variety on offer, influenced from France, Thailand and even India.

The most popular dish is called Pho and is often referred to as the “soul of the nation”. It's quite simply a noodle soup dish eaten every day, predominantly for breakfast. It is served in most Vietnamese restaurants and street food vendors. Don't be afraid to try the street food, there are plenty of options, including:

- Nem Ran or Cha Gio (fried spring roll)
- Banh Chung (sticky rice cake)
- Gio Lua (lean pork pie)
- Banh Cuon (rice flour steamed rolls)
- Banh My (pate and egg rolls)
- Mi voi thit bo/ga (noodles with beef/chicken)

It is not advisable to drink tap water in Vietnam. Bottled water is cheap and widely available.

❖Public holidays

- TET (Vietnamese New Year): generally takes place at the end of January or early February and lasts for three days.
- Liberation of Saigon: 30 April
- International Worker's Day: 1 May
- Hung King's memorial day: 10 March (lunar calendar)
- Vietnamese National Day: 2 September

TET Travel Recommendation: Vietnam Great Tours discourages travel over the TET period. Transport is often booked or expensive. Lots of places are closed including restaurants, shops and key tourist sites.



Helpful tips

❖ Donations and gift giving

Although there is poverty in certain areas of Vietnam, please read the following points about donations and gift giving.

- **Do not** give money to people begging, especially children. This reinforces the belief that begging is an acceptable way to make a living. If children make money from begging, their parents are less likely to send them to school. Children working on the streets are also vulnerable to abuse.
- However in many places, it is considered acceptable to give to money disabled people or the elderly.
- **Giving** money and goods to beggars can accentuate an unequal relationship between locals and visitors, with tourists being seen as purely money givers.
- **Do not** give sweets to children in villages that we visit.
- **Do not** feel that you necessarily have to give material things. Sometimes, giving your friendship, time and interest to locals can be the best gift of all.

❖ Tipping

Tipping is a personal matter and travellers are encouraged to tip any amount they feel is appropriate. For your convenience, we have included a suggested tipping guide below:

- **Bellboy:** \$1-\$2 per room
- **Chambermaid:** \$1 per day
- **Guides:** \$5-\$10 per day, per person (depending on group size and performance)
- **Drivers:** \$2-\$5 per day, per person (depending on group size and performance)
- **Restaurants:** in smart establishments, you may find that the tip is already included in the bill. In local restaurants, tips are not expected but you may wish to leave loose change on the table.

❖ Price guide

Things are generally cheap in Vietnam. Here is a rough guide of how much things cost in main cities. Bear in mind that outside of the cities, things will be much cheaper.

Food

- Street food: from 10,000 VND
- Restaurants: Western food: from 100,000 VND, Vietnamese dishes between 40,000 – 100,000 VND

Drinks

- Soft drinks: 8,000 – 15,000 VND,
- Beer: 8,000 – 20,000 VND
- Fruit juice: 30,000 VND
- Water: 10,000 VND
- Spirit and mixer: 60,000 VND

Other items

- Shorts/t-shirts: 80,000 – 200,000 (always haggle when buying clothes)
- DVDs: 15,000 – 30,000 VND
- SIM card – 50,000 VND
- Cheap phone – 200,000 – 300,000 VND

❖ Useful websites

The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice on travelling to Vietnam:

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/vietnam>

The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade advice on travelling to Vietnam:

<http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/vietnam/index.html>

Vietnam National Administration of Tourism:

<http://www.vietnamtourism.com/>



Pre-departure checklist



- ☐ Travel insurance
- ☐ Passport with at least six months validity from date of entry
- ☐ Photocopy of passport
- ☐ Visa
- ☐ Vaccinations
- ☐ Foreign currency (US\$) and/or ATM card
- ☐ All relevant tickets
- ☐ Reconfirmed flights
- ☐ Light weight clothing (summer months and the south)
- ☐ Warm clothing (mountainous regions and Hanoi in winter)
- ☐ Appropriate shoes for trekking, cycling or walking
- ☐ Insect repellent
- ☐ Medication
- ☐ First aid kit
- ☐ Adaptor – 220V, 50Hz; 2 pin plugs
- ☐ Small daypack (for day and overnight trips)
- ☐ Water bottle and helmet (for cycling trips)

Please note: Domestic airlines do impose restrictions on baggage at approx 20kg maximum, so travel lightly where possible. Train cabins around the country, and boat cabins in Halong Bay have limited space so consider this when packing.

Our very best wishes for your journey.

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