



TRAILS OF INDOCHINA

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Southeast Asia & beyond*

Vietnam

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

(Updated Feb 2024)





A country of beautiful diversity, Vietnam offers soaring mountains, thousands of kilometres of unspoiled beaches and endlessly green fields of rice. Anchored by Hanoi in the north with its ancient history, and the modern, French-influenced metropolis of Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) in the south. Vietnam also boasts world-class beach destinations, including Nha Trang, Danang and the pearl-shaped island of Phu Quoc, all home to luxury designer resorts and private yacht charters. In between these hotspots are rural towns and idyllic landscapes where buffalo and farmers in conical hats work the fields of the Mekong Delta, junks drift through the morning mist on Halong Bay and cyclo drivers peddle along the narrow streets of Hoi An's Ancient Town. A pleasing mix of contrasts, Vietnam beguiles with the warmth, openness and positivity of its people, an abiding memory of an alluring country.

History

In 938 A.D. the Vietnamese gained independence from China's occupation of the Red River Delta, that started in the first century B.C. The Vietnamese managed to cling to their cultural identity during a thousand years of Chinese occupation says much about their tenacity—a lesson that has been re-taught in more recent times. From their cradle in the northern Red River Delta, the Viet moved south, absorbing the Kingdom of Champa in what is now central Vietnam in the 15th century. The official founding of Saigon (now renamed Ho Chi Minh City) took place only some three centuries ago.

French forces imposed colonial rule on Vietnam in 1883, starting an era of anti-colonial resistance that would span the next eight decades. Having fought the Japanese occupation of Vietnam during WWII, the Viet Minh, led by President Ho Chi Minh, declared the nation's independence when the War ended. The French rejected Vietnam's independence and tried to regain control, leading to a conflict that ended with the Viet Minh's astonishing victory at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu in May 1954.

The Geneva Accords of mid-1954 temporarily divided the country. When the southern regime refused to hold elections in 1956, Vietnam fell into a civil war. The United States, which supported the southern regime of Ngo Dinh Diem, sent its first combat troops to Vietnam in 1965. In 1973 the Americans withdrew; their former allies were forced to surrender on April 30th, 1975, at which time the nation was reunified under Communist rule.

A period of economic and political isolation from much of the capitalist world followed. In the late 1980s, the Vietnamese Government eased restrictions on foreigners wishing to travel and invest in Vietnam. Diplomatic relations with the United States were resumed in 1995. Vietnam was granted membership to the World Trade Organization in 2007 and has opened trade to a large number of countries since then. Hanoi celebrated its 1000-year anniversary in 2010, a major milestone for the city and a proud moment for the Vietnamese to celebrate.



People

Vietnam's cultural makeup is as diverse as its topography. The population of some 99 million (as of August 2022) is comprised 54 ethnic groups, the largest being the Kinh who make up 86% of the population. Kinh or Viet culture arose in Vietnam's northern Red River delta, where people's way of life revolved around the cultivation of wet rice. Other major ethnic groups include the Cham, founders of the Indianized Kingdom of Champa in what is now central Vietnam. The Cham people have retained their own religion, customs, and handicrafts, including the weaving of colourful brocade cloth. The best place to observe Vietnam's colorful ethnic groups is in the mountainous northeast. Highland markets draw people from dozens of ethnic groups including the H'mong, Dao and Thai, who continue to produce and wear traditional clothing decorated with embroidery, batik-prints, and beads. Having had minimal contact with the outside world, these people speak their own languages, observe their own religious festivals, and live much as they have done for generations.

Climate

In general, Vietnam has a tropical climate with average annual temperatures ranging from 22°C (72°F) to 30°C (86°F). There are two distinct seasons: wet and dry. Wet season runs from April to October, with most of the country affected by southwestern monsoons. Dry season runs from November to March, with high heat levels warming up the country. It is good to note that Vietnam's climate can vary depending on when and where you go. When the weather isn't ideal in one area, it may be great in another.

North (Hanoi, Halong Bay, Sapa, Cao Bang, Ha Giang)

The north is defined by four seasons with a cold winter and hot summer. The temperature can range from 5°C (41°F) in winter up to 35°C (95°F) in the summer. From April to October, it is generally warm and humid with an average temperature around 31°C (90 °F) and heaviest rainfall between July and August. The average temperature during the cold season (December to February) is 20°C (68°F). However, in the mountainous regions in the far north such as Sapa, the temperature can at times drop below zero (32°F). The loveliest time of the year to visit is from September to December when there's a good chance of clear skies and low humidity.

Central (Hue, Danang, Hoi An)

The average high temperature in the central region is 30°C (86°F). Heavy storms and highest amount of rainfall occurs from October to November and is prone to flooding. The best time to enjoy the beach weather and cultural sightseeing are between March to early October.

Central Highlands (Dalat, Buon Ma Thuot, Pleiku)

The central highland has a year-round temperate of 18°C to 21°C (64°F to 70°F).

South Central Coast (Nha Trang, Phan Thiet)

The South Central Coast has a year-round temperate of 21°C to 32°C (70°F to 90°F). Nha Trang's rainy season usually starts from September to December.



South (Ho Chi Minh City, Mekong Delta)

The south has a dry and rainy season. The rainy season is from May to November with the highest amount of rainfall from June to October. The average high temperature year round is 32°C (90°F). The rain usually comes in short, heavy showers, mostly in the afternoon and only lasts for an hour or so.

Southern Islands (Phu Quoc, Con Dao)

The dry season in Phu Quoc starts from late October to April, the most ideal time for sightseeing as well as sunbathing, swimming, or participating in water sports activities. From the end of May to the beginning of October, Phu Quoc enters the rainy season with usually heavy rainfalls, strong sea waves, constant wind and high humidity. Con Dao's rainy season lasts from May to November while the dry season with cool weather runs from December to April. Each season bestows the island typical characteristics which are suitable variety of activities. The sea is calmest from March to July which makes it ideal for sunbathing and water sports.

Religion

While the majority of Vietnamese do not follow any organised religion, most follow folk religions associated with ancestor worship and other beliefs. Buddhism and Catholicism are also practiced by significant portions of the Vietnamese population.

Time zone

Vietnam operates on UTC/GMT +7 hours. Vietnam does not observe daylight savings.

Country dial code

Vietnam's country code is + 84 followed by city code

Mobile Phones & SIM Card

Your guide can assist you in purchasing a local SIM card or cellular phone at any mobile phone shop. 'Top up' credit vouchers are available at most phone shops, particularly ones displaying the network logo, or local post offices. You can place international phone calls and send faxes at post offices and most hotels, although hotels often charge extra fees.

Internet

Wireless (Wi-Fi) Internet access is available in most hotels throughout Vietnam and free Wi-Fi is available in many restaurants, cafes, and public places. Be careful to not save your password or sensitive information on public computer terminals.

Electricity

Most of the electrical voltage in Vietnam is 220V, 50Hz. Round two-plug pins are more common although some places use flat pins or three-pronged pins. Adaptors are sold in local markets and usually available from your hotel. Protect your sensitive electronic equipment like laptops from power fluctuations by using a surge-protector.



NORTHERN REGION

Hanoi

Vietnam's capital city, Hanoi, is located in the country's north and is the second most populous city with approximately 8 million people. Compared to Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi is more traditional and refined. Today, it is best known for its thriving contemporary art scene and French architecture, which is visible by the many colonial villas scattered throughout the city. While it is rapidly developing, the city has retained many of its cultural traditions. Hanoi is also widely known for its vibrant "street culture" where daily activities, such as hair cutting and street-side eating, take place on cramped sidewalks.

Getting here: A 2hr flight from Ho Chi Minh City and 1hr flight from Danang & Hue.

Halong Bay

A visit to the north is not complete without experiencing the spectacular views of nearly 2,000 limestone karsts in Halong Bay. Declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO through many years, Halong Bay is a naturalist's dream. Sculpted into unique shapes by the wind and weather, the karsts hide deserted beaches, many magnificent caves, and hidden lagoons that may only be reached by crevices in the cliffs that are revealed at low tide. The best way to see Halong Bay is via overnight cruise. This gives you time to head into the caves and lagoons, as well as enjoy the peaceful morning start as the sun rises over the rugged surroundings.

Getting here: A 2hr30min drive from Hanoi via the new expressway. You'll transfer to Tuan Chau pier to board your selected cruise boat.

Ninh Binh

Commonly referred to as the 'Halong Bay on Land', Ninh Binh Province offers a world of cultural heritage to explore and was the recent setting of the blockbuster movie, Kong: Skull Island. Admire the views of majestic limestone cliffs as you are rowed on a small boat on a peaceful stream through mysterious caves and lush rice paddies. Covering an area of 3,500 hectares, Van Long Nature Reserve is the largest inland wetland of the Northern Delta. Rich in biodiversity, the nature reserve has an expansive flora and fauna ecosystem and a bird garden with more than 100 species. While in Ninh Binh, take a ride on a buffalo cart through the magnificent scenery to a beautiful pagoda, hop on a bike through sleepy villages, pass by emerald green paddies and winding rivers, or visit neighboring Cuc Phuong National Park.

Getting here: Ninh Binh is 97km (60mi) from Hanoi and takes 2hrs by car.



Hanoi



Halong



Ninh Binh

DESTINATION HIGHLIGHTS



Mai Chau

Surrounded by lush green hills and valleys. Mai Chau is home to several ethnic minority communities, including the Muong, White Thai and H'Mong. The area is easily accessible with stunning landscapes that are ideal for trekking, mountain biking, and photography. Village homestays in a traditional house on stilts are a popular way to experience the traditional culture and way of life of the ethnic peoples.

Getting here: Mai Chau is a 4hr drive from Hanoi, although the drive can be strenuous due to the mountainous roads, it does offer a good view of the countryside.

Sapa

Set high in Vietnam's northeast mountains, the hamlet of Sapa offers spectacular views of jagged mountain ridges, terraced rice paddies and green valleys inhabited by people of various ethnic minority groups including Red Dao and Black H'Mong. Congregating in Sapa's colorful markets, each group has its own distinctive style of vibrant dress. From early childhood, girls learn to grow and weave hemp, to dye cloth with indigo, to sew the family's clothes, and to decorate items with traditional embroidery motifs. Sapa's market is one of the main forms of income for the locals, bringing a thriving exchange of goods to local tourists who visit.

Getting here: One option is to take a 10hr overnight train from Hanoi to Lao Cai. Another option is to take a 5hr drive on the new highway from Hanoi to Lao Cai and then 1hr to Sapa town.

Ha Giang

Ha Giang, a town located on the east bank of Lo River in Northeastern Vietnam, is the capital of Ha Giang province. It has many high mountains, limestone formations and flowing springs. The province is characterised by rocky land, much of which is covered by forests. Aside from the Viet (or Kinh), other ethnic groups in Ha Giang include Tay, Dao, and H'mong. Some highlights are Quan Ba Valley, Dong Van Karsts plateau and Vuong Dynasty memorial house.

Getting here: Ha Giang is about 300km (186mi) from Hanoi and the drive takes anywhere from 6-7hrs depending on road conditions.



Mai Chau



Sapa



Ha Giang

DESTINATION HIGHLIGHTS



Cao Bang

A province in northeastern Vietnam, Cao Bang is home to many ethnic minority groups including the Tay, Nung, Dao and H'mong. A developing region, most of the Cao Bang's economy is centered on agriculture and forestry. However, the province has several points of historical interest, as well as many natural features such as the stunning Ban Gioc waterfall and Nguom Ngao grotto.

Getting here: Cao Bang is 280km (173mi) northeast of Hanoi and takes approximately 5hr30min by car.

Dien Bien Phu

Nestled in a valley near the Laos border, Dien Bien Phu remains an extremely remote part of Vietnam. Surrounded by steep heavily forested hills, Dien Bien Phu was the site of a decisive battle in 1954 between Viet Minh forces and the French. Ultimately, it was a result of the historic battle that took place here that forced the French government to abandon its attempts to resume colonial control of Indochina. In addition to its historical significance, Dien Bien Phu is home to 19 ethnic groups which makes it a fascinating area to explore traditional cultures and way of life of the mountain peoples.

Getting here: Dien Bien Phu is 459km (291mi) northwest of Hanoi and takes 10hr30min by car. Another option is 1hr flight from Hanoi or 2hr flight from Saigon.



Cao Bang



Dien Bien Phu



CENTRAL REGION

Hue

While imperial rule ended more than six decades ago, the central city of Hue still bears the marks of its royal past. From 1802 to 1945 Hue was home to 13 Nguyen emperors, whose palaces and tombs provide fascinating glimpses into the luxurious and secretive world of the court. During this period, the Imperial City was built according to the practices of Feng Shui that dictates the location and shape of spaces in harmony with both the physical and spiritual. Visitors may explore the red-lacquered pavilions of the Citadel, wander through ancient garden houses, or feast on delicacies once served in the royal palaces.

Getting here: Hue is a 1hr30min flight from Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. It is 100km (62mi) from Danang and takes 2hr by car via Hai Van Pass.

Danang

Danang is a popular beach destination with a stretch of luxury properties dotted along the 10km stretch of white sand beach. Located equidistance to two UNESCO Heritage cities of Hue and Hoi An, Danang is the perfect destination for a beach holiday and cultural exploration. The city is now attracting travellers from all over the world for the famed 'Golden Bridge' at Ba Na Hills, which is 25km (16mi) from Danang's city center and can be reached by road and cable car. Other attractions in Danang include the Cham Museum, housing the largest Cham artefacts in Southeast Asia, and Marble Mountain.

Getting here: Danang is a 1h flight from Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. The city is 100km (62mi) from Hue (2hr drive) and 30km (18mi) from Hoi An (a 45min drive).

Hoi An

Set near the coast in central Vietnam, from the 16th to 19th centuries the riverside town of Hoi An once drew merchants from as far as Japan, India, Indonesia and Europe who bought the area's silk, spices and porcelain. Hoi An still retains remnants of its trading days as evident in the bustling market and abundance of souvenir and tailor shops. What makes Hoi An remarkable today is that its Old Quarter has been beautifully preserved, with the streets still lined with old tile-roofed shop houses, shady pagodas and colourful communal halls, earning it the status as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Hoi An is surrounded by quaint countryside where you can observe the traditional way of life of farmers and fishermen.

Getting here: Hoi An is a 30min drive from Danang International Airport.



Hue



Danang



Hoi An

DESTINATION HIGHLIGHTS



Quy Nhon

Quy Nhon is a coastal city in the Binh Dinh province of central Vietnam and once served as the capital of the Kingdom of Champa in the 11th century and was an important US naval and military base during the Vietnam War. Today Quy Nhon is a port city with a population of a quarter of a million and is becoming better known for its pristine beaches. More luxury resorts and hotels have opened in recent years attracting more beach holiday makers to the destination.

Getting here: Quy Nhon is a 1hr10min flight from Ho Chi Minh City and 1hr40min flight from Hanoi. There is the Vietage luxury train from Danang to Quy Nhon which takes approximately 6hr.

Nha Trang

Located in central Vietnam, the sun-washed town of Nha Trang hugs a seven kilometre stretch of golden sand. This coastal town is the perfect place to get a mix of sun, surf and fresh seafood. Clear blue seas dotted with offshore islands offer excellent opportunities for diving, fishing and snorkeling, while the town itself is home to interesting sites including a massive white Buddha statue and a cluster of Cham towers built between the 7th and 12th centuries. Popular spa activities are the mineral mud baths and hot springs bathing which are available at several centers in Nha Trang and Cam Ranh.

Getting here: Nha Trang's international airport is in Cam Ranh which is a 45min flight from Ho Chi Minh City and 2hr from Hanoi. The airport transfer from Cam Ranh International Airport to Nha Trang city takes approximately 45min by car.

Phan Thiet

Located on an arm of the East Sea, Phan Thiet is a large fishing village best known locally for its fish sauce production. Phan Thiet is also a gateway to nearby beaches, which are popular for both local and tourists alike. Mui Ne, a nearby resort town, has 21 km (14mi) stretch of sandy beaches lined with hotels, resorts, restaurants, and nightclubs. Mui Ne is subject to onshore winds from the East Sea and is especially breezy from November to May, which may not be ideal for swimming but is popular for wind and kite surfing. Other attractions in the area include the white and red sand dunes, Po Sah Inu Cham tower tower, and Ocean Dune's Golf Club, a 6,746-yard par 72 course designed by Nick Faldo.

Getting here: Phan Thiet is a 2hr30min drive via highway or a 5hr train ride from Ho Chi Minh City.



Quy Nhon



Nha Trang



Phan Thiet



CENTRAL HIGHLANDS REGION

Buon Ma Thuot

Buon Ma Thuot is the capital city of Dak Lak province and most notably known for its coffee. Not surprising that the World Coffee Museum by Trung Nguyen Coffee is the main attraction here. The museum is professionally curated and offers insightful information on the history of coffee internationally and in Vietnam. Buon Ma Thuot is also known for its beautiful cascading waterfalls with Dray Nur and Dray Sap being the two most popular. The Ede people, or Montagnard as referred by the French, are the largest ethnic group in this area and provided critical support to US special forces during the Vietnam War.

Getting here: Buon Ma Thuot is a 45min flight from Ho Chi Minh, 1hr40min from Hanoi, 5h (200km/124mi) drive from Dalat or Nha Trang.

Da Lat

Set in Vietnam's picturesque Central Highlands, this former French hill station boasts cool mountain air and some of the best-preserved French colonial architecture in Indochina. Year-round, the temperature hovers around 20°C (68°F), making this a favourite destination for outdoor enthusiasts. Mountain bikers and hikers will delight in the area's trails, as well as in views of pine-covered hills, organic farms and lush tea and coffee plantations. Dalat hosts a flower festival every other year which normally takes place in mid-December for one week and features a flower exhibition and a flower parade around Xuan Huong lake.

Getting here: Dalat is a 45min flight or an 8hr drive from Ho Chi Minh City. From Hanoi, the flight takes 1hr40min and 1hr from Danang.



Buon Ma Thuot



Da Lat



SOUTHERN REGION

Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon)

Ho Chi Minh City, situated in the south of Vietnam, is a sprawling metropolis of approximately 9 million people. Formerly known as “Saigon” prior to 1975, today the city is Vietnam’s commercial center. The city’s dynamic energy is apparent in the bustling street scenes with thousands of people on motorbikes constantly on the move. Though Saigon has rapidly developed into a modern city with skyscrapers and shopping centers, there are still remnants of its past visible in the historic landmarks and beautiful French colonial buildings dotted throughout the city. The city boasts a thriving nightlife and a palpable energy. Saigon is also the jumping off point for day trips to the Cu Chi tunnels and Mekong Delta.

Getting here: A 2hr flight to Hanoi, 1hr flight to Danang/Hoi An and Hue.

Mekong Delta

The Mekong Delta covers an area of 40,500 sq km (15,600 sq mi) in southwestern Vietnam with 13 provinces including Tien Giang, An Giang, Ben Tre, Vinh Long, Can Tho, and Soc Trang. Life in Vietnam’s agrarian heartland continues much as it has done for centuries. Farmers cultivate paddy fields, tend their orchards of tropical fruit and fish in the rivers and canals that criss-cross this fertile plain. Offering an ideal opportunity to adopt the pace of local life, choose to slow down and cycle along the flat roads of the Delta, the region in southwestern Vietnam. You may also choose to visit a farmer’s home, try your hand at fruit picking or explore the myriad waterways on a typical small (but loud) boat as used by locals for their daily transportation.

Getting here: Depending on the destination, it can take anywhere from 1hr30min to 4hr drive from Ho Chi Minh City.



Ho Chi Minh City



Mekong Delta



ISLANDS

Con Dao Islands

Con Dao Islands are a group of 16 island archipelago in southeastern Vietnam. The island offers stunning virgin forest, deserted tropical beaches, unique sea life, forgotten prisons now consumed by jungle vegetation, and the possibility to experience a castaway lifestyle 180km (111mi) from the mainland. With the opportunity to visit unspoiled tropical islands before they become developed, the Con Dao Islands are an ideal place for nature lovers and beach enthusiasts looking for an untouched sliver of Southeast Asia.

Getting here: The airport is located on Con Son Island and is a 50min flight from Ho Chi Minh City and 1hr flight from Can Tho.

Phu Quoc Island

Shedding its image as an 'off-the-beaten-path' destination, Phu Quoc is quickly gaining status as a luxury beach destination, home to some of the biggest international hotel chains including JW Marriott, Intercontinental Hotels & Resorts, and Regent Hotels. Its pristine white sand beaches and colourful marine life are ideal for diving and snorkeling while its virgin forests attract nature enthusiasts. Phu Quoc is also known for its fresh seafood, pepper farms, and branded fish sauce productions.

Getting here: A 1hr flight from Ho Chi Minh City, 3hr from Hanoi, 2hr from Danang. There are now direct international flights from Phuket, Singapore and Seoul.



Con Dao Island



Phu Quoc Island



Vietnamese cuisine today is well-known across the globe having been made famous by Anthony Bourdain and many other food celebrities. Unlike Thai food, Vietnamese food is not spicy. The food is light and seasoned with herbs and spices which makes it palatable for most taste buds. Some popular Vietnamese food and drinks that have made recent headlines are Pho (noodle soup), Banh Mi (cold cut sandwich), and Café Phin (drip coffee). Beyond these internationally renown dishes, the main staple of Vietnamese food is rice and is accompanied with either meat or seafood dishes, vegetables (sauteed or boiled), and soup.

Noodle dishes both soup and dry are also a common everyday food consumed throughout the day. There are literally hundreds of different types of noodle soups, and each region has their own noodle specialty. In the north, it's Pho Bo or Ga (beef or chicken noodle soup), the central region it's Bun Bo (a spicy beef noodle soup from Hue) and Mi Quang (flat rice noodle with pork or chicken in a thick sauce), and in the south it's Hu Tieu (a chewy thin noodle soup with pork, shrimp, and quail eggs). In addition to the main dishes, there are also other types of snack foods, they include Cha Gio (fried spring rolls), Goi Cuon (summer rolls), Banh Cuon (steamed rice crepes with pork fillings).

Home to coffee and tea plantations in central Vietnam it's no surprise that the top two drinks in the country are coffee and tea. Vietnamese coffee ranks up there as one of the must-try drinks when visiting Vietnam. Café Sua (coffee with condensed milk) can be consumed hot or cold. When in a hot climate, an iced coffee is refreshing! Traditional tea drinking is more common in the north. Green tea, Oolong, and flower teas like jasmine and chrysanthemum, are popular types of tea. For the young generation, milk and boba tea is the preferred choice and though it originated in Taiwan, Vietnam has its own version.



SHOPPING



There's something for everyone when it comes to shopping in Vietnam. In big cities like Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, there are shopping malls and boutique shops selling ready to wear clothes and accessories. Souvenir shopping can be done at local markets and shops in most cities though we recommend Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, and Hoi An since there are more options to choose from.

In the Hanoi, traditional handicrafts such as ethnic textile weaving, Dong Ho wood block prints, lacquerware, Bat Trang ceramics are popular souvenirs. Hoi An is famous for its express tailoring where you can order a suit or any type of clothing with your choice of fabric and it will be done in 24 hours or less! There are also many shops specialising in leather shoes and handbags which also can be customised. You will commonly see the famous Hoi An lanterns which can be purchased as souvenirs. In Ho Chi Minh City, popular souvenirs are T-shirts and hats, handwoven natural fibre baskets and handbags, kitsch items like recycled rice bags made into tote and makeup bags.

Postcards and magnets can be found in bookstores and souvenir shops. Street vendors also sell some of these items. There is no fixed price when shopping in markets or from street vendors so you can choose to bargain or accept the offered price. Markups can range from 20-50%. Though some people may find haggling fun, the sellers' livelihood depends on these sales so be mindful of this when making a local purchase. If you are approached by a seller and do not wish to make a purchase, just politely say 'no'. If you continue to look interested, they will continue to bargain until a purchase is made.

If you choose to ship items home, we highly recommend that you buy shipping insurance and check the policy details. As shops are not responsible for damages incurred en route, it's better to be safe than sorry. Please ask your Tour Guide for assistance.

Trails of Indochina and our guides are not responsible for any misrepresented or faulty goods. We do not take responsibility for following up on merchandise that you choose to ship home. Our guides only make suggestions, not guarantees.





Gallery

Vietnam's cultural art scene is on the rise. Ranging from international and Vietnamese paintings, sculpture, lacquer, video and print work, galleries in Vietnam can be found to suit many interests. Galleries can be found throughout the country, through prominently in Hoi An, Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), Hanoi, and Nha Trang



Dining

Dining in Vietnam is an international affair. Both traditional Vietnamese and international cuisine can be found throughout the country. Local dishes include pho, banh mi, bun cha, and more. Street-side eating from local stalls is a common practice in Vietnam as well. International cuisine is also on offer around the country. To further enhance your meal, Vietnam's warm climate and beautiful landscape escalate the experience for meals.



Historic Sites

With a long history that dates back to a millennial, Vietnam has an intriguing historical past that dates back to royal dynasties and occupations by the Chinese, French, Japanese, and Americans. Throughout the country there are many historic sites providing a window into the history of this once-divided nation. Historic sites include the Reunification Palace, American War Museum, Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum, Hoan Kiem Lake, Vietnamese Museum of Ethnology,



Vietnam as a whole is an easily accessible country with many options for transportation. From hired cars and drivers, to train travel, cruising and flights, navigating Vietnam is very seamless.



Car

Vietnam is equipped with modern motor vehicles which range from four-seater cars to 36-seater buses. There are plenty of options for travellers to choose from luxury brands such as Mercedes and BMW to Toyota and Range Rovers. The best way to travel to different destinations in Vietnam is with a hired driver. Affordable and flexible, hiring a driver allows the flexibility to see what you are interested in at your leisure.



Train

Operated by national carrier Vietnam Railways, Vietnam's train service runs the length of the country. With four classes and trains outfitted with air-conditioning, Vietnam's overnight train offers views of the passing countryside from embarkation to destination. Luxury train travel is only available from Danang to Quy Nhon.



Cruising

Cruising in Vietnam is an ideal way to explore the waterways of the country. Overnight luxury cruises available on Halong Bay are a popular way to see the expansiveness of this World Heritage Site. Cruises are also available traveling between Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) and Cambodia along the renowned Mekong River. Day trips are available in Halong, Hoi An, Hue and other coastal areas.



Flights

Totalling more than 2,000 miles in length, air travel in Vietnam is an efficient and inexpensive way to navigate the country. Popular domestic airlines include Vietnam Airlines, VietJet, and Bamboo Airlines. There are also private chartered jets available for domestic travel.



Cultural Etiquette

- When visiting pagodas, temples or Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum in Hanoi, shorts and tank tops are unacceptable. Your knees and shoulders must be covered.
- Footwear and socks must be removed in pagodas. Shoes are usually removed upon entering private homes.
- Upon meeting someone new, people may simply nod to each other or may shake hands.
- Using both hands to shake someone's hand is a warm gesture of respect.
- Beckoning someone by crooking your finger is considered rude. The correct way to call someone over is to extend your hand with the palm down and flap your fingers towards your wrist.
- To ask for the bill in a restaurant or shop, extend one hand in front of you with the palm raised and pretend to write on your palm with the other hand.

Safety

- In general, Vietnam is very safe for travellers. Violent attacks are rare, although petty theft is a problem in big cities. Where possible, secure your valuables in the hotel safe. Remember to record your credit card information, just in case.
- Do not leave your wallet or mobile phone in the back pocket of your pants or anywhere else that's easily reached (like an outer zip-up compartment on a backpack). Be especially vigilant in markets and other crowded places like ports and train stations.
- Pick-pocketing and purse snatching are more of a problem in Ho Chi Minh City than smaller towns or cities. Some thieves approach on motorcycles, grab your belongings and race off before you've realized what's happened. If you ride in a cyclo (pedicab), it is advisable not to carry or wear things of personal value (i.e., jewellery, cash).
- Wearing a money belt or something that can be easily tucked away is considered safer.
- Use common sense and don't walk alone after dark. You're always better off avoiding cyclos or motorbike taxis at night. Ask your hotel or restaurant to call a reputable taxi firm.
- Traffic in Vietnam is chaotic. If you choose to ride a motorcycle, you must have an international driver's license and wear a helmet. Please note that you may not be covered by your insurance if you have an accident on a motorcycle, whether you are the driver or passenger.

RECOMMENDED READING



Vietnam is a country rich with historical treasures, beautiful landscapes and resilient people. Before you visit, we recommend some wonderful reading and informative movies to understand and learn more about this enchanting country.

Books

- *Vietnam: Journeys of Body, Mind, and Spirit* Laurel Kendall and Van Huy Nguyen
An informed and engaging journey into the social and ritual life of contemporary Vietnam.
- *Hitchhiking Vietnam* Karin Muller
The story of a 28-year-old single woman who left her career and comfortable life to hitchhike Vietnam while under the iron fist of communism.
- *Catfish and Mandala, A Two-Wheeled Voyage through the Landscape and Memory of Vietnam* Andrew X. Pham
The story of an American odyssey—a solo bicycle voyage around the Pacific Rim to Vietnam—made by a young Vietnamese-American man in pursuit of both his adopted homeland and his forsaken fatherland.
- *Sparring with Charlie: Motorbiking Down the Ho Chi Minh Trail* Christopher Hunt
A narrative about an American who navigated the 5,000 miles of the Ho Chi Minh Trail by motorbike. The story digs deep to understand the truth about Vietnam while capturing the colour and complexity of Vietnam today.
- *Vietnam, A History* Stanley Karnow
A comprehensive, fair-minded and enthralling account of one of this century's most controversial wars.
- *Vietnam Today: A Guide to a Nation at a Crossroads* Mark Ashwill and Thai Ngoc Diep
A first look at Vietnam in the twenty-first century, a nation undergoing rapid change and opening up to the world.





Vietnam is a country rich with historical treasures, beautiful landscapes and resilient people. Before you visit, we recommend some wonderful films to understand and learn more about this enchanting country.

In The War Years

 Girl from Hanoi (1974)

This film carefully describes life in Hanoi during 1972, when the U.S. Army used the Linebacker II tactic of bombing the North.

 We Want To Live (1950s)

A realistic depiction of the bloody land reform campaign in North Vietnam under Communist-dominated Viet Minh.

 The Quiet American (2002)

Illustration of the moral culpability in arranging terrorist actions aimed at the French colonial government and the Viet Minh.

 Indochine (1992)

French film set in colonial French Indochina during the 1930s to 1950s.

After The Reunification

 Good Morning Vietnam (1987)

In 1965, an unorthodox and irreverent DJ named Adrian Cronauer begins to shake up things when he is assigned to the U.S. Armed Services radio station in Vietnam.

 Hamburger Hill (1987)

American war film about the actual assault of the U.S. Army's 3rd Battalion, on a well-fortified position of the North Vietnamese Army on Ap Bia Mountain near the Laotian border.

 The Hanoi Hilton (1987)

A Vietnam War film, which focuses on the experiences of American prisoners of war who were held in the infamous Hoa Lo Prison in Hanoi during the 1960s and 1970s, as told from their perspectives.

Contemporary Movies

 Hanoi through Whose Eyes? (1987)

The image of Van Vuong, a blind guitarist born and raised in Hanoi

 Three Seasons (1999)

American Vietnamese language film shot in Vietnam about the past, present, and future of Ho Chi Minh City in the early days of Doi Moi.

CONTACT US



If you have any questions or encounter any issues, please contact us at our Vietnam office so we can provide an immediate solution.

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