



## USEFUL INFORMATION FOR TRIPS TO VIETNAM





## **AIRLINES**

International: See below under Arrival in Vietnam.

Domestic: 3 domestic airlines are currently operating in Vietnam: Vietnam Airlines, Jetstar-Pacific Airlines and Viet Jet Air. The last 2 are low-cost carriers (LCC). All airlines are using a mixture of Boeing and Airbus planes and Vietnamese as well as foreign pilots. Exo Travel uses Vietnam Airlines as first choice.

## **AIRPORT TAX**

There is a departure tax on all international flights from Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City but this tax is already included in the price of your all airplane tickets.

## **ARRIVAL IN VIETNAM**

### BY AIR

Consult your local travel agent for routings, fares and availability on flights to Vietnam. Discount websites and flight search engines may offer some good deals. Major airlines flying to Ho Chi Minh City or Hanoi include: Vietnam Airlines, Air France, United Airlines, Lufthansa, Thai Airways, Qatar Airways, Singapore Airlines, Malaysian Airlines, China Air, Hong Kong Air, Cebu Pacific, Emirates, Etihad and many more. Major airlines flying to Danang International Airport include Silk Air, Air Asia and Dragon Air.

Nha Trang's Cam Ranh Airport and Phu Quoc are now International airports used for some long-haul charter flights.

### BY LAND

Vietnam shares a border with China in the north (three border crossings), Laos in the west (five border crossings) and Cambodia in the south-west (three border crossings).

From China:

Trains from Beijing to Hanoi pass by Nanning and Pinxiang in China and enter Vietnam at Dong Dang (north of Lang Son). There is also a road crossing known as Huu Nghi in Lang Son province. Transport coming from Kunming crosses the border at Lao Cai, in northern Vietnam. From Guangzhou, you will cross the border at Mong Cai, a few hours drive from Halong and its spectacular Bay.

From Laos:

- South: Via Savannakhet and Sepon (Laos) to Lao Bao (Vietnam) and central provinces
- Central: Vientiane to Lak Sao (Laos) to Cau Treo (Vietnam) and the Ha Tinh Province
- Central: Xieng Khuang or Phonsavan to Nam Can (Vietnam) and the Nghe An Province
- North: Xam Neua Province (Laos) to Na Meo (Vietnam) and the Thanh Hoa Province
- North: Muang Khua Province (Laos) to Tay Trang border (Vietnam) and Dien Bien Phu

From Cambodia: If you travel from Phnom Penh by speedboat, you will enter Vietnam at Chau Doc, in the Mekong Delta area. If you arrive from Cambodia by road into Ho Chi Minh City, you will enter Vietnam at Moc Bai, which connects Vietnam's Tay Ninh Province with Cambodia's Svay Rieng Province. Border crossings at Prek Chak/Xaxia (close to Kep in Cambodia and Ha Tien in Vietnam) are now possible.



### **ARRIVAL FORMALITIES/VISA ON ARRIVAL**

In case you are obtaining your pre-arranged visa on arrival please proceed to the Visa counter and read the visa section below. If you do not need a visa on arrival, you should proceed direct to the immigration counter.

### **ATMs**

ATMs for withdrawing Vietnamese Dong are available in major airports, hotels, towns and capitals of provinces throughout Vietnam. Most ATMs have an English language version. Ask your tour guide for help when you need to locate an ATM.

### **CLOTHING**

Comfortable lightweight clothing in natural fabrics such as cotton is most suitable for travelling in Vietnam. The dress code is fairly casual as in most parts of the tropics but it is advisable to cover arms and legs in the evenings against biting insects. A lightweight raincoat and umbrella are a good idea in the rainy season and an umbrella can also offer useful shade from the sun.

Evenings in the north and the center can be quite chilly so bring a sweater and a good jacket especially from November to February. Visitors should not wear shorts, short skirts or other revealing clothing when visiting pagodas and monasteries. Shoes must be removed before entering some religious building or a private home. It is therefore useful to wear shoes without too many laces and which can easily be taken off.

### **CREDIT CARDS**

Most credit cards are accepted in Vietnam. VISA and MASTERCARD are the most widely accepted. JCB and AMERICAN EXPRESS are also accepted in some outlets. Not all hotels, commercial centers, shops and restaurants accept credit cards. Check with the cashier before making any purchases.

Bear in mind that in some places a surcharge usually applies for credit card purchases: this varies depending on which credit card is used but is normally in the range between 2% – 4%.

NOTE: Surcharges can change without prior notice. Check the percentage charged before you pay.

### **ELECTRICITY**

Vietnam mainly uses 220V but in some areas, 110V is also used. A mixture of flat and round 2-pin outlets are used throughout the country. It is recommended to bring a universal plug adaptor.

### **ENTERTAINMENT**

There are plenty of entertainment options in Vietnam and restaurants/bars and nightclubs open until late at night/early in the morning. A wide variety of restaurants are on offer with everything from Vietnamese, Asian, Italian, French cuisine, etc. to fast food.

### **FOOD**

The cuisine of Vietnam comes as a pleasant surprise to many visitors and is definitely a part of the Vietnam experience not to be missed. One of the characteristics of Vietnamese food is that it is always fresh being bought the same morning straight from the market. Food is usually prepared with a minimum of oil and served with the ubiquitous fish sauce called *nuoc mam*.



Typical Vietnamese dishes you can expect to try include *pho*, a type of rice noodle soup eaten for breakfast, *cha gio (nem* in northern dialect), deep-fried spring rolls and *goi ngo sen*, a delicious salad made with lotus stems, shrimps and peanuts. Due to the strong Buddhist influence in Vietnam, vegetarian food is widely available however more so in Southern Vietnam.

#### **HEALTH**

Whilst no vaccinations are compulsory for travel to Vietnam, except Yellow Fever of coming from an infected area, there may be some that are recommended. We therefore suggest that prospective travellers refer to their own government's Foreign Travel Advice website, and to seek the expert opinion of a qualified medical practitioner in their home country prior to travel. Some vaccination courses may need time to be completed and if you plan to take anti-malarial tablets, you usually need to start some time before arrival. Medical facilities are limited in Vietnam and it is essential to take out a good medical insurance policy before traveling in case evacuation is needed. We also recommend that you carry a first aid kit as well as any personal medical requirements (including a spare pair of glasses).

#### **HOURS OF BUSINESS**

Offices are usually open from Monday to Friday from 07:30 or 08:00 until 17:00 or 18:00 and often close for lunch between 11:30 and 13:30. Some offices also open Saturday morning. Shops open early and close any time between 18:00 and 22:00. Most shops are open 7 days a week.

#### **INTERNET**

Major hotels have Business Centers with PCs connected to the Internet and have wireless broadband access in room or public area. Vietnam has an exceptional amount of cafés and restaurants offering free WIFI connections, if having a meal or a drink internet fees are waived.

#### **LANGUAGE**

The national language of Vietnam is Vietnamese. In big cities and in places with many tourists, people will speak basic English. The younger generation will be more adept at speaking English, while the older generation still speaks some French. Because Vietnamese has six different tones, it is a difficult language for most foreigners to speak despite the fact that the Roman alphabet is used in modern Vietnamese. The same word can have six different meanings depending on the tone used to pronounce it. Russian and Chinese are also spoken by some people.

#### **MONEY**

The currency in Vietnam is the Vietnamese Dong (VND). US Dollars and Euros are accepted in some hotels, restaurants and shops. Please note that they are not normally allowed to collect foreign currency since 2012. Banks are open Monday to Friday from 08:00 to 05:00 and some on Saturday morning. In the major cities there are some exchange offices open long hours near places frequented by tourists and most hotels will change US Dollars and Euros at very reasonable rates.

Current exchange rate (Jan 2017) approx. 1 USD = 22,500 VND; 1 Euro = 23,800 VND

You receive a slightly better exchange rate for \$100 and \$50 notes than for smaller denominations.

Vietnamese Dongs come in the following forms:

Bank notes: 200; 500; 1,000; 2,000; 5,000; 10,000; 20,000; 50,000; 100,000; 200,000; 500,000.

Coins (not commonly used): 200; 500 (silver) and 1,000; 2,000; 5,000 (gold)



## **POSTAL MAIL**

Postcards are sold at all main tourist sites and stamps are available from post offices and some hotel reception desks. A postcard to Europe costs VND 9,000 (0.5 USD) to send and can take up to two weeks to reach the country of destination.

## **PUBLIC HOLIDAYS**

### **2017**

January 01	New Year's Day
Jan 27 – Feb 02	Tet or Vietnamese New Year. The actual dates vary from year to year according to the lunar calendar. Officially a three-day holiday but many businesses close down for a full week. This is the busiest time of the year for travelling in Vietnam and hotels, flights and trains are often full.
April 06	Hung King's Birthday
April 30	Reunification Day
May 1	International Labor Day
September 2	National Day

## **RELIGION**

Buddhism is the dominant religion in Vietnam usually combined with elements of Confucianism and Taoism. About 10% of the country's population is Catholic and there are also communities of Protestants and Muslims. Vietnam is also home to a unique religion called Cao Dai, a religious cocktail of all the world's major faiths.

## **SAFETY**

Vietnam is a safe country to visit. As a global rule, never leave your valuables unattended in the vehicles and always maintain eye contact and a firm grip on cameras and shoulder bags. In Saigon (HCMC) there has been a surge in drive-by snatching so keep a lookout around you and never stay close to the road's edge with a bag, gold chains or handling a phone or camera as these are the favorite objects

Avoid cyclos late at night and choose reliable metered taxi companies (they are really cheap and air-conditioned). Choose Mai Linh Taxi, Vinasun, Vina Taxi in Saigon (HCMC) and Hanoi Taxi and CP Taxi in Hanoi. Best to avoid other brands on the streets. Uber and Grab are available in Saigon and Hanoi.

## **SHOPPING**

Souvenirs to look out for in Vietnam include lacquer ware, silk, conical hats, woodcarvings, hill tribe fabrics and handicrafts, embroidery, marble, ceramics, silver jewelry, antique watches and paintings. Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi have the best choice when it comes to shopping but Hoi An in the center of Vietnam is also a very good place to hunt for bargains.

## **TELEPHONE**

If you have worldwide coverage, you can bring your own mobile phone and use it to make domestic or international calls. Check with your mobile phone provider for the costs before using it abroad - it may be expensive.

Most hotels now have IDD phones in rooms and it is possible to send faxes from hotels and post offices although these services are expensive. It may not always be possible to make international calls in remote areas.



#### **TIME**

Vietnam is GMT + 7 and does not operate daylight-saving system.

#### **TIPPING**

Tipping for good service is not expected but is always appreciated in a country where the average annual income is quite low compared to Europe for example. It is customary to tip tour guides and drivers at the end of a tour. Hotel and station porters should also be tipped. Do not let guide talk you into tipping more than you plan to. It is totally up to you who you tip, when and how much.

#### **TRANSPORTATION**

Vietnamese law does not allow foreigners to rent and drive a car. Traffic and roads conditions may be very different to what you are used to.

#### **TRAVELER CHECKS**

Banks such as CitiBank, ANZ Bank, HSBC and Vietcombank can change your Travelers Checks for VND or US Dollars but a commission applies (1% to 2%). Very few shops, hotels or restaurants accept Travelers Checks.

NOTE: Travelers Checks can be difficult to change outside of major cities.

#### **VISAS**

Most visitors to Vietnam require a visa to enter the country and all travelers must have a passport valid for 6 months after their planned exit from Vietnam.

Exceptions: Nationals from Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Russia traveling to Vietnam and staying for 15 days or less do not need to apply for entry visas, provided that their passport is valid for at least three months and they can show their return ticket. Those who wish to stay longer than 15 days will need to apply for a visa.

The Government of Vietnam has announced a 12 month Visa Exemption period for British, German, French, Spanish and Italian citizens, which will come into effect from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2016 and run until 30 June 2017. This unilateral visa exemption is being granted by Vietnamese Authorities to citizens from these countries in order to promote tourism in Vietnam.

The conditions for visa-free entry into Vietnam are as follows:

- Applicable to citizens holding a passport from the following countries: United Kingdom, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Kingdom of Spain, and the Italian Republic who meet all the conditions prescribed by the law of Vietnam
- This visa exemption is able to be applied for entries at all official international border checkpoints.
- Passport validity must have at least 06 months remaining from the date of exiting Vietnam
- Length of stay in Vietnam to not exceed 15 days from the date of entry and is for a single entry visa. If length of intended stay is more than 15 days then the traveller is not eligible for exemption and will still require a Vietnam Visa in the normal manner.



- Travellers wishing to enter Vietnam using this visa exemption will need to show their return air ticket. *We are presently seeking clarification of this point, and in the meantime we recommend that any clients who plan to exit Vietnam via a land border check-point or by a cruise should apply for a Vietnam Visa in advance.*

- For those who have visited Viet Nam before, this new entry date must be over 30 days since the previous exit in order to re-enter with visa exemption.

- This policy of visa exemption applies from the date 01 July 2016 to end of 30 June 2017 and will be considered for extension under the Provisions of the Law of Vietnam.

Tourists holding ASEAN passports do not need a visa for a visit up to 30 days. Philippines passport holders do not need a visa for a visit up to 21 days. Japanese and South Korean passport holders do not need a visa for a visit up to 15 days.

A tourist visa is normally a single entry visa, which means that if you exit Vietnam (for example for a side trip to Cambodia), you will require a new visa to re-enter (or apply for a Multiple Entry Visa)

The validity of a Tourist Visa is 30 days and normally a single entry visa is given unless a multiple entry is requested.

There are 2 ways to obtain a visa:

Case 1: Visa application in your country before departure

In case there is a Vietnamese Embassy or Consulate in your home town.

Apply directly at the Vietnamese embassy or consulate. The length of the process can vary.

In order to accelerate the process, bring the "Approval letter" done by us (see below) + your passport + 2 recent passport-sized photos and fill out the paperwork required. Your visa can then be delivered much faster. A visa stamping fee is charged locally. Fees vary from one country to another.

Note: A visa requested as a multi-entry at embassies abroad is often issued as a single entry; it is recommended to double-check your visa stamp in passport when collecting your passport. Multiple entry visas can also be arranged on arrival (Case 2).

Case 2: Pre-arranged "Visa on arrival" at International entry points

In case there is NO Vietnamese embassy or consulate in your home town.

Send us all passport details as required below and we will process a pre-approval here from Vietnam. Print out and bring the "Visa pick-up upon arrival approval letter" (see below) to the airline check-in counter. Without this letter airlines refuse you boarding.

On arrival in Vietnam, proceed to the Visa on Arrival counter at the airports. You will be asked to fill one more form, give 2 photos and pay USD 25 /person (Single entry 30 days) and USD 95/person (Multiple entry 6 months) in cash before the visa is stamped into your passport and before going through passport control.

Such a procedure is possible at the international airports in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon and Danang) and at the land border of Moc Bai (coming from Cambodia near Ho Cho Minh City – here you need the



**ORIGINAL** paper and a copy will not be accepted – please allow for extra time to have original sent to you by DHL).

Before departure, prepare some bank notes in US Dollars to pay the visa stamping fee on arrival.

For both cases mentioned above EXO Travel can facilitate the visa application procedure and obtain the necessary visa pre-approval from the Vietnamese Immigration Department in advance. We need the following details from all applicants:

- Full name as it appears in your passport
- Date of birth DD/MM/YY
- Gender
- Passport number
- Issue date and expiry date of your passport
- Place of issue (e.g. Paris, France)
- Case 1: Arrival date and flight number (e.g. 24th of March 2010 by Vietnam Airlines flight VN532) and Port of entry (e.g. Ho Chi Minh City, Tan Son Nhat airport)

We will send you in time the official document issued by the Vietnamese Immigration department. In Case 1 it is an “Approval letter”

The approval process usually takes 5 working days.

A processing fee is charged for this service.

In urgent cases (less than 5 days) an express surcharge will be charged.

A supplement for DHL fees will be charged in case you need the original document (land crossing Moc Bai from Cambodia to Vietnam)

NOTE: All the above information may change without prior notice. It remains the traveler’s responsibility to verify whether or not you are subject to a tourist visa for Vietnam.





## ELECTRONIC VISA

The electronic is now official to be applied from 1st February 2017 and will be tested for 2 years for 40 countries. The traveller is able to apply for a visa online through the electronic portal of the immigration services which are: [www.xuatnhapcanh.gov.vn](http://www.xuatnhapcanh.gov.vn) (in Vietnamese) or [www.immigration.gov.vn](http://www.immigration.gov.vn) (in English) instead of coming to the Vietnamese Embassy or Consulate abroad. Fees will be 25 USD/person and will be paid directly to the specified account.

\*Exo's note: These above 2 websites may not be accessible occasionally due to system glitch. In such case, please proceed via <https://evisa.xuatnhapcanh.gov.vn/>

The 40 countries included in the Vietnam e-Visa program:

1	Azerbaijan	11	Chile	21	Kazakhstan	31	France
2	Argentina	12	Colombia	22	Russia	32	Philippines
3	Armenia	13	Czech Republic	23	United Kingdom	33	Romania
4	Ireland	14	Cuba	24	Luxembourg	34	Spain
5	Poland	15	Denmark	25	Myanmar	35	Sweden
6	Belarus	16	Timor Leste	26	Mongolia	36	China
7	Bulgaria	17	United States	27	Japan	37	Uruguay
8	Brunei	18	Hungary	28	Panama	38	Venezuela
9	South Korea	19	Greece	29	Peru	39	Norway
10	Germany	20	Italy	30	Finland	40	Slovakia

Note: Australia, New Zealand and Canada are not in the list.

## WEATHER

There is good weather somewhere in Vietnam all year round! Vietnam stretches over 2000 km from North to South. The climate differs all year round from one region to another. Overall, the north of Vietnam experiences more marked seasons than the rest of the country with two distinct seasons: wet and dry.

The mainly dry winter lasts from December to March with average temperatures of 18-20°C but it can drop to as low 10's at times. Summer lasts from May to October and is hot and humid with temperatures around 30°C.

North and Central Vietnam can encounter tropical storms and typhoons from October to January. Hue, Danang and Hoi An in the center of the country, have very hot, dry weather from March to August with temperatures reaching the mid 30's Celsius, but can experience cool weather and some heavy rainfall between September and February. During these months, seas can be rough with high tides and beach swimming may not be possible.

The South, including Ho Chi Minh City and the Mekong Delta, benefits from sunshine and warm weather all year round. However, the rainy season lasts from May to November (with showers once or twice a day in general) and a dry season from December to April. The Central Highlands can be chilly.



Nha Trang has warm – sometimes hot - weather all year round, with a rainy season from the end of September until December.

Unless you intend to visit friends, relatives or your family, we do not recommend visiting Vietnam during the Lunar New Year, Tet holidays (Vietnamese New Year falls between late January and February). The Tet holiday is the most important period of the year for Vietnamese people who take time off to visit their families in the countryside. All hotels, buses, trains and flights are full, and there is almost no activity in the markets and shops. Some hotels and restaurants are under-staffed and in some cases the quality of the service may suffer. This period of reduced activity may last from a week before and a week after the Tet period. It is also impossible to get a “visa authorization letter” processed during this period.

NOTE: As a reminder, the peak season lasts from October to April. To avoid disappointment because hotel rooms or domestic flights are fully booked, reserve your travel arrangements early. Contact us to discuss your travel plans.

#### **WATER**

It is not advisable to drink tap water but bottled mineral water is safe and available everywhere. All hotels provide a complimentary bottle of local mineral water per person in the room. Ice cubes in drinks is generally OK in good standard hotels and restaurants but it is best to avoid it on street stalls or in country areas. Some minor stomach problems are always possible when travelling in exotic countries. Bring a supply of your usual anti-diarrhoea medicine.