

10 culture tips

1. Watch a traditional water puppet performance.
2. Savour a bowl of pho ga (chicken noodle soup) or pho bo (beef noodle soup) at a street side noodle stall. To complete the breakfast, enjoy a strong Vietnamese coffee with condensed milk.
3. Order tailor-made clothes from the local tailor shop (our recommendation of local tailors are listed under "Shopping").
4. Enjoy a cyclo ride through the Old Quarter of Hanoi, around Hue's Imperial Citadel, through Hoi An's Ancient Town, in Nha Trang, Phan Thiet or through the French Quarter of old Saigon.
5. Sleep out on the deck aboard a wooden junk in Halong Bay.
6. Rejuvenate during a relaxing two-hour traditional Vietnamese massage.
7. Experience a home stay in the ethnic minority villages in the north or in the Mekong Delta's riverside orchards.
8. Witness the full moon festivities in the ancient town of Hoi An.
9. Take a scenic boat along Hue's Perfume River, admiring the grandeur of the Royal Mausoleums.
10. Test your bargaining skills and set out for shopping at Saigon's Benh Thanh market.

10 do's

1. Avoid drinking tap water and ice cubes if you have a sensitive stomach.
2. When visiting a temple or pagoda, wear long trousers and dress respectfully.
3. Leave your valuables in the hotel safe deposit box before heading out into town, especially on a night out or when going to the beach.
4. When crossing the road, walk steadily and slowly in the same direction, always looking to the left and right. Do not run or make sudden movements.
5. Always ask permission first before taking photographs of people, especially in minority areas and border control zones.
6. Try not to lose face in public - hold your temper and put on the biggest smile you have.
7. Do not offer money to begging children or minority people. Donate or, even better, volunteer at a local charity instead. When travelling in remote areas, it is okay to offer small gifts, such as pens, paper, soap and other useful utensils.
8. Sample local food, but patronise only those food stalls which are busy with locals.
9. Try not to compare Vietnam to other Asian countries. Vietnam has its own identity, culture and history. The Vietnamese are extremely proud of their heritage.
10. Do not go naked or topless on beaches or in the water. Culturally, this is incredibly inappropriate and offensive.

airport tax

Airport departure tax for international and domestic flights is included in the airfare.

cancellation policy

1. Roundtrips & Overnight Packages

30 days or more prior start of service:	No charge
Between 29 days and 15 days prior start of service:	30% of package price
Between 14 days and 7 days prior start of service:	70% of package price
6 days or less prior start of service OR no show:	100% of package price

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2. Accommodation

Actual cancellation terms are subject to each individual hotel policy.

3. Transfers & Day Excursions

6 days or more prior start of service:	No charge
Between 5 days and 3 days prior start of service:	50% of price
2 days or less prior start of service OR no show:	100% of price

4. Groups

60 days or more prior start of service:	No charge
Between 59 days and 45 days prior start of service:	25% of package price
Between 44 days and 30 days prior start of service:	50% of package price
Between 29 days and 15 days prior start of service:	75% of package price
Between 14 days prior start of service or less:	100% of package price

Remark: based on a cancellation of the entire group movement.

Terms & Conditions:

Cancellation charges shall be calculated from the day the written notification is received by the company or agent as a percentage of the net total tour price as shown, plus any surcharges (e.g. ticketed air sectors and other penalties imposed by suppliers, such as hotels).

Certain hotels, lodges, chalets, rest-houses are subject to stricter and specific cancellation terms. Specific cancellation terms will be advise at a time of proposal.

Some type of transportation and experiences (e.g. a full day yacht charter or a specific language guide) can be subject to stricter and specific cancellation terms. Such cancellation terms will be advise at a time a proposal.

Cancellation of air arrangements will be subject to fees charged in accordance with the type of airfare used and airline tariff regulations.

Refunds will not be given for unused or cancelled services after the tour arrangements have commenced.

Cancellation terms and conditions are subject to individual inquiry and are based on the services requested.

climate

Vietnam stretches over 1,800 km from north to south and its topography varies from the coastal plain to mountain ranges; therefore, weather patterns in the principle cities are very different.

North: Winter lasts from November to April, with temperatures averaging 10 C – 16 C and during January – March fog and drizzle.

Summer begins in May and lasts until October, with an average temperature of 30 C, heavy rainfall and the occasional violent typhoon.

Centre: Central Vietnam experiences a transitional climate, with heavy rainfalls between November and December and dry, hot summer months.

South: Temperatures are fairly constant throughout the year; 25 C – 30 C. Seasons are determined by the rains – the dry season runs from November to April and the wet season from May to October. The hottest period is March and April. Typhoons are quite common

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in coastal areas between July and November.

Highland areas: In the hill resorts of Dalat (1,500 m), Buon Ma Thuot and Sapa, nights are cool throughout the year, and in the winter months, during October to March, it can be distinctly chilly with temperatures falling to 0 C, and even during the hottest months of March and April the temperature rarely exceeds 26 C.

clothing

Generally, we recommend bringing light loose-fitting cotton clothes for the warmer months and for Southern Vietnam. If travelling to the north some form of layering is required as Hanoi can experience wide temperature changes from one day to the next. During the winter months in the north and for travelling to the mountains it is imperative to bring warm clothing. An umbrella is definitely useful during the rainy periods. The formal style of clothing is not required. A sarong with its multi-uses is a very useful item to bring. Laundry facilities are widely available and quick. When visiting a temple or pagoda, you should wear long trousers and dress respectfully.

currency and exchange

Vietnam's unit of currency is the Vietnamese Đồng (abbreviated: "d" or VND). The Vietnamese Đồng is represented by the '₫' symbol. You can find notes in denominations of 200₫, 500₫, 1,000₫, 2,000₫, 5,000, ₫ 10,000₫, 20,000₫, 50,000₫, 100,000₫, 200,000₫, and 500,000₫.

Currency exchange counters are available at airports, banks, and official exchange centres.

ATMs are not hard to come by across the country: in the shopping malls, near restaurants, bars and convenience stores. To easily find your nearest ATM, you can visit [MasterCard's ATM locator](#) or [Visa's ATM locator](#). The majority of ATMs belong to local Vietcombank but you can also find many foreign banks' ATMs of ANZ, CitiBank and HSBC.

Most of the Vietnamese banks' ATMs have a 2 million VND limit per single withdrawal the city, and 4 million VND limit inside the city. The foreign banks have higher limits for one withdrawal.

Bank maximum withdrawals:

Citibank: between 5 and 8.5 million VND (depending on the location)

HSBC: 4.8 million VND

Commonwealth: 10 million VND

If your home bank also has transaction limits, check with them before you arrive in Vietnam.

customs regulations

All visitors to Vietnam must fill in declaration forms and show their luggage to customs officials on request.

Visitors can bring with them unlimited amounts of foreign currency, objects made of gold, silver, precious metals and gemstones or plated with silver or gold, all of which must be declared in detail on the customs forms. Commercial Video films and printed materials that are considered offensive are normally confiscated and sent to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism for inspection.

Import of the following goods is strictly prohibited: weapons, ammunition, explosives, military-technical equipment, drugs, toxic chemicals, debauched and reactionary products, firecrackers of all kinds, toys with negative impacts on the dignity education, social

security and safety, cigarettes beyond the stipulated quantity, etc.

Export of the following goods is strictly prohibited: weapons, ammunition, explosives, military-technical equipment, antiques, drugs, toxic chemicals, wild animals, rare and precious animals and plants, documents related to the national security, etc.

The following articles are exempt from duty

- For liquor: Liquor at 22° and above: 1.5 litres; Liquor below 22°: 2.0 litres; Alcoholic beverage: 3.0 litres.
 - For cigarettes and cigars: Cigarettes: 400 pieces; Cigar: 100 pieces; Tobacco: 500 g
 - For tea, coffee: Tea: 5kg; Coffee: 3kg
 - For clothes, personal belongings: With reasonable quantity in service of the trip's purpose
 - Articles other than those mentioned at items above (outside the list of goods banned from import or subject to conditional import): Total value does not exceed 5,000,000 VND.
- There is a declaration limit for foreign currency of USD 7,000.

domestic flights

Any flight in your itinerary is in economy class unless specified otherwise. Flight times quoted are local and subject to change.

Domestic flights require a check-in 1 hour prior to the flight departure.

Vietnam Airlines has frequent flight time changes and cancellations often occur at short notice even after confirmations for a flight have been received.

Carry-on luggage is limited to one piece plus a camera. All "carry-on" hand luggage must have luggage tags which are provided by the airlines when passengers check-in at the airports for their flights. Security regulations at airports are strict. Appropriate announcements may or may not be made for this procedure. In economy class air travel baggage allowance is 20kg per person. Excess baggage may be subject to overweight charges by the airline. Diethelm Travel Vietnam cannot be held responsible for any loss or damage to the passenger's belongings.

Please retain your luggage tag as you will be required to show this against your suitcase on arrival before being allowed to exit the airport.

drinking water

Never drink water from the hotel tap, no matter what category of hotel you are staying in. Bottled mineral water is available at all hotels throughout Vietnam. Do not have any ice in your drinks as this is often made from water that has not been purified.

electricity

The voltage supply in Vietnam is 220 volts AC, 50 cycles; Most sockets accommodate plugs with two round prongs. If you need adaptors, you can find them at any electrical shop. Power cuts and surges are not common but may happen from time to time depending on the location.

food and dining

Vietnam has abundant food supplies and an elaborate cuisine. Cooking is seen as an art and some Vietnamese dishes have achieved international fame, including such traditional dishes as noodle soup (pho), pork sausage (gio lua), spring rolls (nem ran), and fish balls

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(cha ca). In addition to Vietnamese food, the larger hotels also serve a wide variety of Continental and Chinese cuisine. In the smaller cities, where hotels only have one restaurant, ordering a-la-carte may involve a slight wait. Consequently, it is advised that if in a rush, you take advantage of the large and diverse buffets available at these hotels to minimize any delay.

Joining in a half or full-day cooking class is a fun and unique way to become more acquainted with Vietnamese cuisine. Please see our excursions in Hanoi, Hoi An and Ho Chi Minh City for detailed information about cooking classes.

Vietnam has some excellent and atmospheric restaurants. Please refer to our list of restaurant recommendations or contact your local tour guide for more suggestions.

general advice

Try to avoid travelling during Tet (Lunar New Year) as this is a family-orientated holiday where businesses and shops close for almost a week.

Hanoi – staying in the old town is recommended, but hotels are narrow and usually only have 1 window (either the front or back of the room). Front windows have a view, but can be noisy whereas the back windows often are within the hotel but quieter. Many elevators are narrow hence expect to wait. Smaller hotels have restaurants on top floors (elevator stops one floor below) so it involves walking up, but there are great views from the top.

An inescapable fact is the contact noise, mainly of motorcycles. A good tip is to escape into a café for some quiet relief at intervals to recharge your batteries. The Vietnamese are early risers and so traffic noise starts early around 5:00 hrs onwards and you may be woken up by the crackle of a loudspeaker as the Voice of Vietnam starts up with music and rhetoric. For light sleepers, ear-plugs are useful to bring!

Crossing the road is an art – the trick is to walk steadily and slowly across the road in the same direction and the motorcycles and bicycles will weave around you. Do not run or make sudden movements.

When hiring a motorcycle or jet-ski there is no insurance coverage and the hirer is personally liable for any damages or accidents. When exploring on your own, it is not advisable to take a motorbike taxi as these are often involved in accidents.

The country has been hurtled in a relatively short time from an underdeveloped country into its present dynamic state and so a flexible approach, humour and patience will ensure a more enjoyable holiday.

getting there

Vietnam has eleven International Airports: Hanoi / Noi Bai, Hai Phong/Cat Bi, Van Don, Hue /Phu Bai, Danang / Danang Airport, Chu Lai, Nha Trang / Cam Ranh, Dalat / Lien Khuong, Ho Chi Minh City / Tan Son Nhat, Can Tho / Can Tho Airport, Phu Quoc / Phu Quoc Airport.

There are numerous direct flights from and to Vietnam operated by various international airlines. International flights require a check-in from 02-03 hours prior to the flight departure. Please retain your luggage tag as you will be required to show this against your suitcase on arrival before being allowed to exit the airport.

health and safety

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Before you go

Before travelling to Vietnam, be sure to purchase insurance for your trip. Two months before you leave, you should also consult your doctor or local travel clinic for the latest information on health risks in Vietnam and to receive any vaccinations you may need.

Pregnant women should consult their doctors for specialised advice. Anti-malarial drugs and many diarrhoea treatments are not completely safe during pregnancy.

If you have a medical condition or allergy of 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 with:

DEET-based insect repellent

Paracetamol or ibuprofen for pain relief

Anti-itch ointment, *such as hydrocortisone*

Sunscreen

Antihistamine for allergy treatment, *such as Zyrtec, Benadryl*

Bacitracin for wound care, *such as Neosporin*

Diarrhea treatment, *such as Imodium*

Some medications can be difficult to find in Vietnam: be sure you travel with a full supply of any prescribed medicine you need.

Those visitors taking medicine for certain conditions such as diabetes or heart problems should make sure that they carry these medications in their hand luggage at all times in case the main luggage should be delayed.

The sun is strong throughout the year so proper care against sunburn and dehydration must be constantly taken. Vietnam is a tropical country so insect repellent is essential. It is recommended that all travellers take out comprehensive Personal Travel Insurance to cover personal expenses, in case of accident, illness, etc.

internet

Most Vietnamese cities have excellent Wi-Fi and free public Internet access is available in several tourist hubs, including Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Danang, Hue, Hanoi, and Halong Bay. Vietnam is well-wired and you will never have a problem finding a connection close by. Internet access is available at almost all hotels and free Wi-Fi is common in cafes, spas and restaurants.

Following are internet addresses with relevant information on Vietnam:

Vietnam Development Gateway: www.vietnamgateway.org

Ministry of Foreign Affairs: www.mofa.gov.vn/en

Vietnam News: www.vietnamnews.com.vn

Vietnam National Administration of Tourism: www.vietnamtourism.com

Vietnam Airlines: www.vietnamairlines.com

language

Vietnamese is the official language of Vietnam. Learning foreign languages, particularly English, is currently popular amongst young people in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Hue, Danang and other cities. Tourist guides are available for English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Chinese, Japanese and Russian speakers.

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Local time and working hours

Local time is GMT + 7 hours.

Governmental agencies work 8 hours a day from 8:00 hrs to 17:00 hrs (excluding one-hour lunch break). Working days are from Monday to Friday.

Banks in Vietnam open from 7:30 hours or 8:00 hours to 16:30 hours. Some banks are open on Saturday mornings from 8:00 hours to 23:30 hours. Sunday is closed.

Private shops are open from 8:00 hours or 8:30 hours to 21:00 hours or 23:00 hours. During the Lunar New Year shops may be closed for several days before and after as well as during the festive holidays, depending on recommendations made by a fortune teller.

passport and visa

Travellers to Vietnam are required to hold a passport valid for at least six (06) months beyond the completion of their visit and must contain a valid visa.

If tourist visas are to be obtained via Diethelm Travel Vietnam, the following personal data must be supplied to us at least 2 weeks before travel to Vietnam

Full name as per passport

Passport number, date of issue and expiry date

Date and place of birth

Occupation and nationality

City of where visa will be issued

Visas are usually issued by the Vietnamese Embassy in the passengers' home country (against the visa's approval number), which require the original passport, and two (02) photos and for at least three (03) full working days in order to issue a visa stamp.

Visa Exemption:

Vietnam offers visa exemptions ranging from 14 to 90 days to citizens of 24 countries holding valid ordinary passports. Duration of stay varies according to nationality.

- **Not more than 30 days:** for citizens of Asian Nationals such as Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand (except Myanmar & Cambodia).

- **Not more than 15 days:**

for citizens of Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Japan, South Korea, Russia and is valid until 31 December 2019.

for citizens of the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Spain, and Italy and is valid until 30 June 2021.

for citizens of Belarus and is valid until 30 June 2020.

-**Visa exemption for visitors travelling to Phu Quoc island:** Foreigners and Vietnamese people holding foreign passports are allowed to stay in Phu Quoc Island for no more than 30 days without a visa. In the case of foreigners who transit via an international gate of Vietnam (by air or sea) and then onwards Phu Quoc Island are also exempt from visa requirements.

To view visa exemptions for diplomatic and other passports, please visit this [site](#).

Vietnam Electronic Visa (e-Visa)

Vietnam's e-Visa is available to nationals of 46 countries: Azerbaijan, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Brunei, Canada,

Chile, China, Colombia, Czech Republic, Cuba, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Luxembourg, Myanmar, Mongolia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Panama, Peru, Poland, Philippines, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Spain, South Korea, Sweden, Timor Lester, Uruguay, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States of America, and Venezuela.

Please go to <https://evisa.xuatnhapcanh.gov.vn/web/guest/trang-chu-ttdt> for a full guide on how to apply for Vietnam's e-Visa.

The e-Visa takes three working days to process, costs \$25 USD, and is a single-entry visa, valid for 30 days. You can enter Vietnam on an e-Visa at any of the country's eight international airports, including Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Danang, as well as 14 land crossings and seven seaports.

Visa on arrival

A visa on arrival can only be obtained with a letter of approval. Diethelm Travel Vietnam can arrange this for you. If a Letter of Approval for a tourist visa is to be obtained via Diethelm Travel Vietnam, the following personal data must be supplied to us at least 2 (two) weeks before travel to Vietnam:

- Full name as per passport
- Passport number, date of issue and expiry date
- Date and place of birth
- Occupation and nationality
- City of where visa will be issued

Visas can also be obtained upon arrival at Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Danang airports, in which case the stamping fee will be quoted separately. Apart from the required details above we further need arrival/departure date and flight information. Diethelm Travel Vietnam will send a confirmation letter to show to airport staff at the departing airport, confirming that clients will get the visa on arrival. Visas can only be requested via Diethelm Travel Vietnam in connection with the booking of travel arrangements to Vietnam. The visa upon arrival requires two (02) passport photos. You will need to pay your visa stamp fee in USD or Vietnamese Dong on arrival at the airport.

post and communications

A regular international post service is available. Additionally, Express Mail Service (EMS) is available to more than 50 countries worldwide with a delivery time of 2 - 10 days.

Vietnam has high international telephone charges. It is important to check the exact amount with the hotel before making a call, as hotel surcharges are often imposed. VOIP calls which help reduce call charges (for most of international calls from any destination within Vietnam and for domestic calls between the main cities of the country) are now available as well pre-paid internet and mobile cards can be bought in the major cities.

postal services

The Vietnamese postal service is generally reliable, although packages can take longer to arrive than expected and are often held at the post office for pick-up. Mailboxes are uncommon. If you are sending postcards home, give them to your hotel to mail or send them directly from a post office.

religion

The major religious traditions in Vietnam are Buddhism (which fuses forms of Taoism and Confucianism), Christianity (Catholicism and Protestantism), Islam, Caodaism and the Hoa Hao sect.

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Buddhism

Buddhism was first introduced to Vietnam in the 2nd century and reached its peak during the Ly dynasty (11th century). It was then regarded as the official religion dominating court affairs. Buddhism was preached broadly among the population and enjoyed a profound influence on people's daily life. Its influence also left marks in various areas of traditional literature and architecture. As such, many pagodas and temples were built during this time. At the end of the 14th century, Buddhism began to show signs of decline. The ideological influence of Buddhism, however, remained very strong in social and cultural life. Presently, over 70% of the population of Vietnam is either Buddhist or strongly influenced by Buddhist practices.

Catholicism

Catholicism was introduced to Vietnam in the 17th century. At present the most densely-populated Catholic areas are Bui Chu-Phat Diem in the northern province of Ninh Binh and Ho Nai-Bien Hoa in Dong Nai Province to the South. About 10% of the population is considered Catholic.

Protestantism

Protestantism was introduced to Vietnam at about the same time as Catholicism. Protestantism, however, remains an obscure religion. At present most Protestants live in the Central Highlands. There still remains a Protestant church on Hang Da Street in Hanoi. The number of Protestants living in Vietnam is estimated at 400,000.

Islam

Islamic followers in Vietnam are primarily from the Cham ethnic minority group living in the central part of the central coast. The number of Islamic followers in Vietnam totals about 50,000.

Caodaism

Caodaism was first introduced to the country in 1926. Settlements of the Cao Dai followers in South Vietnam are located near the Church in Tay Ninh. The number of followers of this sect is estimated at 2 million.

Hoa Hao Sect

The Hoa Hao Sect was first introduced to Vietnam in 1939. More than 1 million Vietnamese are followers of this sect with most living in southwest Vietnam.

Mother Worship

Researchers describe the Vietnamese mother-worship cult as a primitive religion. Mother, Me in the Vietnamese language, is pronounced mau in Sino-script. The mother worship cult might be originated from the cult of the Goddess in ancient ages. In the Middle Ages, the Mother was worshipped in temples and palaces. Due to the fact that it is a worshipping custom and not a religion, the Mother worshipping cult has not been organised as Buddhism and Catholicism have. As a result, the different affiliations of the cult have yet to be consistent and different places still have different customs. The custom of Mother capital letter originated from the north. In the south, the religion has integrated the local goddesses such as Thien Y A Na (Hue) and Linh Son (Tay Ninh). In fact, the Mother worship cult was influenced by other religions, mainly Taoism.

restricted areas and overland border crossing

The road system in Vietnam is reasonable in the main urban cities. The drives through the countryside can be a wonderful sightseeing experience. However, it must be noted that the roads are narrow and some may be poorly paved when outside the main cities, and as a consequence, the drives can be rough and difficult at times. Driving at night should be avoided, whenever possible. Traffic drives on the right-hand side of the road. Drivers are very unlikely to speak any English.

The journey timings described in your itinerary are based on the usual amount of time a particular journey will take. However, please

appreciate that not all roads can be checked for their condition throughout the year.

Most cars used are manufactured locally by Toyota, Honda and Ford and are for the most part comfortable and ideally suited to local roads. Smoking is not permitted in any vehicle, under any conditions. There is ample opportunity to smoke during photographic, luncheon and sightseeing stops.

The border crossing into Vietnam is possible from China, Laos and Cambodia. Regulations for crossing overland borders can change at short notice. Tourists can pass borders at the following checkpoints:

Vietnam side /China side

Huu Nghi (Lang Son province) / Pinxiang (Guangxi province)
Lao Cai (Lao Cai province) / Hekou (Yunnan province)
Mong Cai (Quang Ninh province) / Dongxin (Guangxi province)

From Laos: Vietnam side / Laos side

Tay Trang (west of Dien Bien Phu valley) / Muang Mai - Phongsaly Province
Na Meo (Thanh Hoa province) / Nam Sooy - Huaphanh Province
Nam Can (Nghe An province) / Nam Khan - Xieng Khouang Province

Cau Treo (Ha Tinh province) / Nam Pao - Bolikhamxay Province

Cha Lo (Quang Binh province) / Naphao / Khammouane Province
Lao Bao (Quang Tri province) / Lao Bao - Savannakhet Province
Bo Y (Kon Tum province) / A Ta Pu - A Ta Pu Province

From Cambodia: Vietnam side / Cambodia side

Moc Bai (Tay Ninh province) / Bavet (Svay Reang province)
Tinh Bien (An Giang province) / Phnom Den (Takeo province)
Xa Mat (Tay Ninh province) / Trapeang Plong (Kampong Cham province)
Vinh Xuong - by Boat (Chau Doc province) / Kaom Samnoar (Kandal province)

safety and security

Vietnam is generally a safe country. However, some simple common sense precautions with possessions lessen the chances of becoming a victim to petty theft. Carry your handbag or rucksack to the front of you and be particularly aware that handbag snatches/thefts from motorbikes occur especially in the larger cities and crowds.

It is advised to keep luggage locked while travelling, whether it is stored in the hold of a car or bus, during flights or train journeys. Virtually all hotels have safe deposit boxes.

shopping

Foreign visitors to Vietnam have the opportunity to buy souvenirs made of rattan, gold, silver and stone. There is a diverse range of rice paper products, local arts and crafts like water puppet figurines and bamboo or lacquerware souvenirs. Woven tapestries, "tho cam"(brocade) handbags and other handicraft are produced by the traditional skills of the women of ethnic minorities in such rural

regions in the north as Sapa, Mai Chau and Dien Bien. When shopping please consider individual customs and import regulations of your own country as well as regulations regarding the protection of species.

sightseeing

Compared to some of its neighbours, Vietnam has fewer monuments and cultural sights and therefore the joy of seeing the country is discovering its people, lifestyle and cuisine. Exploring a small area on foot, cyclo or bicycle can be extremely rewarding and photogenic.

If you decide to leave the hotel and go out on your own, there are various means of transport that you may like to take such as taxis or "cyclos". If taking a taxi or "cyclo", insist on the meter being switched on before you begin your journey. Due to an effort to stop pollution, most "cyclos" are pedalled as opposed to the motor. It is suggested that you carry the name of your destination or hotel written in the local language in the event your driver does not understand English. The staff at your hotel can assist you in this regard.

The standards of tour guides in Vietnam can vary from the young dynamic and eager to embrace western ideas to the more rigid approach.

Please note that the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum in Hanoi is closed every Monday and Friday and for the full duration of two months in autumn, usually in October and November. Museums are closed on Mondays and partly on Fridays.

sim cards

Getting a local SIM card in Vietnam is fast and inexpensive. There are three major GSM network operators in Vietnam, and all have good coverage:

Viettel
Vinaphone
Mobifone

You can buy SIM cards right before the terminal exit at major airports, as well as from countless stores and small shops across the country. You will need to show your passport to register your SIM card. Prices for SMS messages and calls are extremely affordable within Vietnam. You can load your phone credit in increments from 20,000 VND to 100,000 VND on most networks.

Data-only SIM cards may cost 100,000 VND to 200,000 VND depending on the amount of data purchased. If you run out credit, you can easily buy more from mobile shops or grocery stores.

Here are a few numbers you may need while in Vietnam:

International Dialing Code: +84

Domestic Calls (within Vietnam): 0 + Area code + Telephone No.

International Calls (outside Vietnam): 00 + Country code + Area code + Telephone No.

some fast facts

Vietnam, officially the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, covers an area of 332,000 square kilometres of a mainland territory and shares common borders with China, Laos, and Cambodia. With a population of more than 90 million, it is the most densely populated country in Southeast Asia and likely to grow rapidly as 75% population is under 30 years old. The vast majority of the population is Vietnamese and other ethnic groups include Chinese, Muong, Thai, Meo, Khmer and Cham.

Vietnam's topography varies from the low, flat delta in the south and north to hilly, mountainous terrain in the centre, far north and northwest. Three-quarters of Vietnam is hilly or mountainous. One of the country's main attractions is its 3,444 km of coastline bordering the East Sea.

Hanoi is the capital with a population of 6.5 million, and Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) with a population of 7.5 million is the largest business centre of the country. Vietnam is a rapidly modernizing country thanks to its industrious population. Vietnam, once a forbidden country for tourists, now attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors (with numbers increasing) every year. Rich culture, strong tradition, and patriotic people characterize this fascinating country. Images abound, but to most people, Vietnam is the rumble of a million motorbikes, a patchwork of emerald-green rice paddies, throngs of women in conical hats, along the idyllic coastline and superb food!

tipping

Tipping is widely practised and expected; however, it should be given for good service.

Suggested tips

Porters: VND 10.000 - 20.000 per bag

Waiters in restaurants: 5-10% of the total bill

Taxi drivers: 10% of the total bill

Tour guides: VND 100.000 - 150.000 per person/per day

Drivers: VND 50.000 - 100.000 per person/per day

Doorman/Bellboy at hotels: VND 20.000 -40.000 per person/per day

Cyclo ride: VND 50.000 -100.000 per person/per trip

Boat trip in Mekong Delta, Tam Coc, Hue: VND 50.000 -100.000 per person/per trip

Halong Cruise/Mekong Cruise: VND 50.000 -100.000 per person/per trip

useful numbers

The following is a list of useful telephone numbers to have on hand when visiting Vietnam:

+84: International Dialing Code

101: Domestic Long Distance Telephone Service

1080: Social and Cultural Information

110: International Telephone Service

113: Police

114: Fire Brigade

115: Ambulance