



XIN CHAO

WELCOME TO VIETNAM!

Vietnam is one of the most compelling destinations in Southeast Asia. Geologically shaped as a dragon, this country is charming, exotic and brimming with adventure. In the north, you will discover the picturesque Ha Long Bay, the timeless charm of Hanoi and the unique cultural experiences of Sapa and Ha Giang. In central Vietnam, you will find the surprising Hoi An and the beautiful architecture of Hue. Sandy beaches with year round sunshine and crystal clear water stretch all the way southward through Nha Trang, MuiNe and Phu Quoc. The pristine water, endless rice fields and the buzz of markets along the Mekong Delta are sure to capture your heart!





GEOGRAPHY

Located in the southeastern extremity of the Indochinese peninsula and spread over an area of about 331,210 km², Vietnam shares ocean borders with the Gulf of Tonkin, the Gulf of Thailand, and the South China Sea, as well as land borders with China, Laos and Cambodia. What makes Vietnam's geography so remarkable is its S-shaped coastline that runs for an amazing 3,260 km.

The geography of Vietnam is varied, ranging from rugged mountains to marshy fertile flatlands. Towards the south you'll find the Gulf of Thailand, while in the north there is the densely populated Red River Delta. Along Vietnam's northern border with China, mountains extend up to 3,143 m at Fansipan, the highest point in Vietnam.

The country's landscape is very diverse; tropical lowlands, hills, densely forested highlands and deltas are some of the major geographical features of Vietnam. The Red River Delta is a triangular region covering 3,000 km² and is more densely populated than the Mekong River Delta. The Red River itself is the second largest river in Vietnam. No more than 3m above sea level (and in many places just 1m above sea level) the entire delta region is subject to frequent flooding.

PEOPLE

Most people in Vietnam are ethnic Vietnamese (Kinh), although there is a sizeable ethnic Chinese community in Ho Chi Minh City – most of who are descended from migrants from Guangdong province, and are hence bilingual in Cantonese (or other Chinese dialects) and Vietnamese. There are also numerous other ethnic groups who occupy the mountainous parts of the country, such as the Hmong, Muong and Dao people. There is also an ethnic minority in the lowlands near the border with Cambodia known as the Khmer Krom.

In terms of religion, nearly 75% of the country identify as following "Vietnamese folk religion" (the ethnic religion of Vietnamese people, historically structured by the doctrines of Confucianism and Taoism. This is not an organized religious system, but a set of local worship traditions) or are atheist. Buddhism, mostly of the Mahayana school, is the single largest organized religion in Vietnam, with around 12% of Vietnamese people identifying themselves as Buddhist. Catholicism is the second largest organized religion (7%), followed by the local Cao Dai religion (5%). Other Christian denominations, Islam, and local religions also share small followings throughout the southern and central areas.

FAST FACTS

OFFICIAL NAME

Socialist Republic of Vietnam

CAPITAL CITY

Hanoi

BOUNDARIES

Cambodia, China and Laos

CURRENCY

Dong

OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

Vietnamese

POPULATION

98 million

TOTAL AREA

331,210 km²

CULTURE

Due to its long history as a tributary state of China, as well as several periods of Chinese occupation, the Vietnamese culture is heavily influenced by that of Southern China and therefore Confucianism forms the basis of Vietnamese society. The Vietnamese language also contains many loan words from Chinese, although the two languages are unrelated.

Nevertheless, Vietnamese culture remains distinct from Chinese culture, as it has also absorbed cultural elements from neighboring Hindu civilizations such as the Champa and the Khmer empires. The French colonization has also left a lasting impact on Vietnamese society, with baguettes (banh-mi) and coffee remaining popular among locals.

HISTORY

Vietnam's more recent history is one of war, colonization and rebellion. Occupied by China no fewer than four times, the Vietnamese managed to fight off the invaders on each occasion. Even during the periods in history when Vietnam was independent, it was mostly a tributary state to China until French colonization. The last emperors of Vietnam were the Nguyen Dynasty, who ruled from their capital at Hue from 1802 to 1945. A succession crisis after the fall of Tu Duc (the fourth emperor of the Nguyen Dynasty) allowed France to colonize Vietnam after 1884. Both the Chinese occupation and French colonization have left a lasting impact on Vietnamese culture.

After a brief Japanese occupation in World War II, the Communist Viet Minh – under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh – continued the insurgency against the French, with the last Nguyen Dynasty emperor, Bao Dai, abdicating in 1945 and a proclamation of independence following soon after. The majority of French had left by 1945, but in 1946 they returned to continue the fight until their decisive defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. The Geneva Conference partitioned the country into two at 17th parallel; this resulted in a Communist-led north (Democratic Republic of Vietnam), while Ngo Dinh Diem declared himself President of the State of Vietnam in the south.

US economic and military aid to South Vietnam grew through the 1960s in an attempt to bolster the southern Vietnam government, escalating into the dispatch of American troops in 1966 and what became known as the Vietnam War – although the Vietnamese refer to it as the American War. This war (1955-1975) was officially fought between North Vietnam and the government of South Vietnam. The North Vietnamese army was supported by the Soviet Union, China, and other communist allies; the South Vietnamese army was supported by the United States, South Korea, Australia, Thailand and other anti-communist allies.

What was supposed to be a quick and decisive action soon deteriorated into a long and drawn-out war; US armed forces were only withdrawn following a cease-fire agreement in 1973. Two years later, on April 30, 1975, a North Vietnamese tank drove into the South's Presidential Palace in Ho Chi Minh City (then Saigon) and the war ended.

It is estimated that between 1 million and 3.8 million Vietnamese and over 55,000 Americans were killed. The American Vietnamese war was only one of many that the Vietnamese have fought, but it was the most brutal in its history. Over two thirds of the current population was born after 1975 (post-war). American tourists will receive a particularly friendly welcome in Vietnam, as many young Vietnamese in some ways worship the American culture.



VIETNAM DESTINATIONS

It would be our pleasure to provide you with information about the entire country, but in order to cover everything we'd need a book. Therefore, we've stuck to the country's most important and developed destinations. If you wish to receive details on one of the country's other beautiful destinations, please contact our office in Ho Chi Minh City.



HANOI

Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam and also its second largest city, is a fascinating blend of East and West, with Chinese influence from centuries of dominance, and French design from its colonial past. It is largely unspoiled by modern architecture of the 1970s and 80s, and is now going through a modernization that is making it a rising star in Southeast Asia.

Throughout the thousand years of its eventful history, marked by destruction, wars and natural calamities, Hanoi still preserves many ancient architectural works including the Old Quarter and over 600 pagodas and temples. Famous sites include the One Pillar Pagoda (built in 1049), the Temple of Literature (built in 1070), Hanoi Citadel, Hanoi Opera House and President Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum.

Hanoi is also home to 18 beautiful lakes such as Hoan Kiem Lake, West Lake, and Truc Bach Lake, which are the lungs of the city with their surrounding gardens and trees providing a vital source of energy.

Many traditional handicrafts are also practiced in Hanoi, including bronze molding, silver carving, lacquer, and embroidery. Hanoi has many famous traditional professional handicraft villages, such as Bat Trang pottery village, Ngu Xa bronze casting village, Yen Thai glossy silk and many more.

HA LONG BAY

Ha Long Bay is located in Quang Ninh province, Vietnam. The bay features thousands of limestone karsts and isles in various sizes and shapes. Viewed from above, Ha Long Bay looks like an extremely vivid drawing, whilst sailing on the bay itself is a scenic passage through a valley of towering cliffs. Ha Long Bay is a masterpiece of nature where amazing rock formations create unusual shapes like a museum of natural sculptures. Thousands of islands emerge from the sea to create a vivid, breathtaking picture like you might expect to see on a postcard.

Islands in Ha Long Bay are named according to their shapes and forms, for example Human Head Island, Sail Island and Fighting Cock Island. These unusual stone islands are home to various breathtaking caves, such as Thien Cung, Dau Go, Sung Sot, and others. These are truly magnificent natural palaces containing huge stalactites hanging in midair and stalagmites growing majestically upwards.

Ha Long's sea always offers a beautiful blue, smooth and still surface, perfect for a day's sailing and exploring the islands!

SAPA

The Sapa district is famous for both its rugged scenery and its rich cultural diversity. Sapa is an incredibly picturesque town that lies in the Hoang Lien Son mountain range near the Chinese border in northwestern Vietnam, known as the “Tonkin Alps”. Sapa and its surrounding region is host to many hill tribes, as well as rice terraces, lush vegetation, and Fansipan, the highest peak in Vietnam. The scenery of the Sapa region really reflects the relationship between the tribes and nature. This is seen especially in the paddy fields covering the rolling lower slopes of the Hoang Lien Mountains; this impressive physical landscape is a result of the work of the elements over thousands of years, wearing away the underlying rock.

Approaching the town, the very first thing tourists may find is the detached wooden mansions and villas perched on top or on the side of the hills, behind thick pine forests, hidden by morning fog. Charming old and new villas with red roofs appear here and there amongst the green rows of Pomu trees (a type of conifer). The tribes living in Sapa produce a range of unique products made from materials gathered from the region; these include handicrafts, and also delicacies such as smoked meat, “thang co”, “cai meo”, san lung wine and corn wine.

HOI AN

Hoi An Old Town is located 30 km south of Danang City, and 60 km northeast of Tam Ky. Due to its central location on the east coast of South East Asia, Hoi An used to be an international trade center in the 16th and 17th centuries. It was the busiest trading port in the Dang Trong region of Vietnam during the reign of Nguyen, as merchants from many countries – such as Japan, China, Portugal, Spain, Holland, etc. – often stopped over to exchange and purchase commodities. In the historical progress of establishment and development, Hoi An was known by foreign merchants as Faifo, Haisfo and Hoai Pho. Archeological relics and early records of architectural dwellings tell us that Hoi An also was an important meeting place of many cultures, such as Champa, Vietnamese, Portuguese, Japanese and Chinese, and has been a great impact on Vietnamese and Chinese civilization.

The region features a coast of 7 km with many nice beaches that are favorable for tourism development. Hoi An also has a large fishing industry, as well as plentiful industries in other sea products. About 15km from the Cua Dai beach you’ll find the Cham archipelago (of 1,591 ha) where there are many famous sea swallow (bird) nests, as well as excellent natural environments suitable for the promotion of eco-tourism.



HUE

Established as the capital of unified Vietnam in 1802, Hue was not only the political but also the cultural and religious center under the Nguyen dynasty until 1945. The city is located between the hills on both sides of the Song Huong, also known as the ‘Perfume River’.

Hue is well known for its historic monuments, which earned it a place as one of UNESCO’s World Heritage Sites in 1993. The seat of the Nguyen emperors was the Citadel, which occupies a large, walled area on the north side of the Perfume River. The citadel harbored the so-called Purple Forbidden City. Today, little of the Forbidden City remains, though reconstruction efforts are in progress to maintain it as a historic tourist attraction.

Along the Perfume River from Hue a myriad of other monuments are to be found, including the tombs of several emperors (for example Minh Mang, Khai Dinh and Tu Duc). Also notable is the Thien Mu Pagoda, the largest pagoda in Hue and the official symbol of the city.

A number of French-style buildings can be found along the southern bank of the Perfume River. Among them are Quoc Hoc High School, the oldest high school in Vietnam, and Hai Ba Trung High School.

On 3 Le Truc Street, the Hue Royal Antiquities Museum maintains a very interesting collection of various artifacts from the city.



HO CHI MINH CITY

Ho Chi Minh City, formerly named Saigon, is Vietnam's largest city. A relatively young city, Ho Chi Minh's history is only 300 years old. Today Ho Chi Minh is very much the heart of the Vietnamese business world and its entrepreneurs. That being said, the city still retains its connections to the past, particularly in Cho Lon, Ho Chi Minh's Chinatown. Here dozens of elegant temples and pagodas can be found. The French also left their mark with some fine colonial-era buildings such as the Notre Dame Cathedral and the Central Post Office.



BEACHES IN VIETNAM

If you're after a holiday that includes a beach break, there are numerous options in Vietnam. Vietnamese people like to visit the beaches during the weekend. Just 90 minutes away by speedboat from Ho Chi Minh City is Vung Tau. Many Vietnamese like to spend 1 or 2 nights here on the weekend.

Next to Vung Tau, Vietnam has got more options to choose from:

Phu Quoc is an island located in southern Vietnam. It is a beautiful, quiet area with deep blue sea. Relax on the white sand beach and explore the island by yourself. For a little adventure, go scuba diving!

Also to the south of the country is **Nha Trang**. You can stay in a luxury resort on an island nearby, or enjoy the main beach with access to this developed city. Scuba diving is also available here.

Mui Ne is the perfect beach for kite surfing, and at Con Dao Island you can enjoy a beach break in a luxury resort and combine it with a Con Dao National Park excursion. Whether you want a relaxing beach break or an adventure-filled holiday, Vietnam's beaches have something for everyone!

KHIRI PREFERRED HOTELS

Sofitel Metropole Hotel,
Hanoi

The Nam Hai,
Hoi An

Six Senses,
Con Dao

Topas Ecolodge,
Sapa

Hotel Des Arts,
Ho Chi Minh



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