



# Travel Document

## **CONTENTS**

Introduction.....

Country and Climate.....

People and Language.....

Cultural Issues.....

Food.....

Currency & Money.....

Expenses Not Included.....

Changes to Arrangements.....

Time.....

Passports.....

Visas.....

Travel Insurance.....

General Health Details.....

Safety.....

Photography.....

Traffic.....

Shopping.....

Electricity & Telephone.....

Baggage.....

Clothing.....

Map.....

## **WELCOME**

Congratulations on selecting a Viet Value Travel tours and service

We have put this together for you as a way of preparing yourself for your forthcoming tour of Vietnam. We think that this is useful information that you should acquaint yourself with and suggest that you might use it as a basis for further investigation through books or the internet. If this generates any questions, please contact your travel agent or Viet Value Travel.

## **VIETNAM**

There is a lot more to Vietnam than the war of 1960-75. The Vietnamese have been fighting for centuries against invaders who wished to control the resources of the country and the past 35 years of peace and self-government has been a period of relative stability. While the Government is Socialist, it has realized that a controlled private capitalist system is the only way to grow the national economy. Because tourism is still fairly new, some infrastructure may not be quite to the standard you normally expect, so keep your sense of perspective. One thing you can be sure of though – friendly people.

## **THE COUNTRY AND CLIMATE**

Vietnam is not a large country; as an example the road distance from Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City is approximately 1,800 kilometers. Total land area is 329,566 square kilometers. Hanoi has four discernable seasons while HCM has a wet and a dry, the latter from November to February. The monsoon period is from May to October and the hottest months are June, July and October, though like most countries, this can vary. Temperatures range from as low as zero in the mountains to more than 35 degrees in Saigon and Hanoi. The terrain provides for a wide variety of scenery of seascapes, forests, mountains, lakes and agriculture from expanses of paddy to terraced fields. Rivers abound, and the Mekong Delta is the most prominent feature in the south. There is a map on the last page of this information pack.

## **PEOPLE AND LANGUAGE**

As a country which has been fought over for more than 2000 years, it is to be expected that the people of Vietnam come from a diverse range of ethnic groups, the largest being of Chinese origin and known as Kinh which make up about 90% of the population. The northern highlands are home to the Tay, and other minority groups are the Black and White Tai, Hmong, Gai and San Chi.

The written language has its origins in the Latin alphabet as does English, and has 26 letters – but not all the same as English as it does not use letters such as “Z” or “J”. The spoken language is a combination of Chinese, Thai and Mon-Khmer. The most common foreign languages are French, English and Russian and specialist tour guides range into German and Japanese.

## **CULTURAL ISSUES**

As previously mentioned, tourism is relatively new to Vietnam and many people have had only limited contact with Westerners. You will find that some will stare quite openly, but children are children the world over. As a general rule, Vietnamese are a friendly people, and not just the ones who are paid to be friendly. Entry to temples will generally require permission, and it is customary to remove your hat and shoes. Women must not wear shorts in temples. Don't encourage begging by handing out money. Wear modest clothing (avoid short shorts and plunging necklines) and nudity is not considered acceptable.

## **FOOD**

Without any doubt, the food in Vietnam is wonderful: fresh ingredients and a combination of French-influenced Western and Eastern cuisine. Hotel breakfasts will normally be a selection from a Vietnamese bread roll with butter and jam, juices or cordials and strong Vietnamese coffee, green or black tea, Vietnamese breakfast noodle soup (Pho) and fruit. There is often some western-style food available, particularly eggs.

Your tour leader will take you to restaurants as you move around the country where you will sample some of the more than five hundred traditional Vietnamese dishes; you will rarely eat the same thing twice in the 15 days. The food will be one of the highlights of your trip.

## **CURRENCY & MONEY**

The Vietnamese money is known as Dong: the exchange rate is around 15.5 dong to the US dollar. US currency is accepted throughout the country, and often prices will be quoted to you in USD rather than dong. Most currencies are accepted, but we suggest that you bring USD with you, either as cash or travelers' cheques as they can easily be changed to the local currency in the hotels, banks or at licensed money changers in the cities and towns. Small denominations (\$1, \$5 and \$10) are very useful to shop with and larger notes can be changed to the local currency. Notes are in denominations of 100, 200, 500, 1,000, 5,000, 10,000, 20,000, 50,000 and 100,000 dong. New notes are being introduced, designed in Australia and printed there on the same plasticized paper as the Australian notes. There are coins, but in such small denominations that you may never see them.

Major credit cards are accepted in many places in Hanoi and Saigon, though VISA presently has the best penetration. The ANZ bank has branches in both Hanoi and Saigon and some other major world banks have offices there. Cirrus-linked cards can be used to withdraw cash at banks.

Tipping is practiced in Vietnam. At the beginning of the tour, your team leader should tell you what to tip and when on a personal basis. Generally the tour leader will collect a tipping "kitty" at the start (about US\$40 per person) and deal with all tipping associated with the tour as a group.

## **EXPENSES NOT INCLUDED ( For Tour Bookings )**

You will note that on your itinerary that not all meals are included on all days. ( As per itinerary ) Meals in Vietnam are inexpensive outside of major hotels. Individual dishes can be expected to be around US\$2 each and soft drinks and local beer under US\$1. International wines are available but will far exceed the cost of the food.

Bottled water is essential in Vietnam. Not only must you NOT drink the tap water, you must maintain your fluid intake. It is recommended that you drink about two liters a day and this will be less than US\$1 a day.

Shopping, snacks and other drinks you must also budget for. Unless you intend to splurge, US\$500 each should be sufficient spending money. Remember that you can buy larger items and duty free items with your credit card, so balance that against your cash needs.

Like most countries today, Vietnam has a departure tax: US\$14 or the equivalent in dong.

The price of the tour includes:

- All transfers by private air conditioned buses
- Additional local support where required
- Your train and internal domestic air fares
- Sightseeing, entrance fees and permits
- Meals as per itinerary
- Accommodation, twin share with breakfast
- Tour leader/guide with English/Vietnamese

The price does not include:

- International air fares
- International departure tax
- Meals and drinks not included on the itinerary
- Personal travel insurance (compulsory)
- Personal expenses such as bar, telephone & laundry bills
- Tips
- Visa and visa fees

## **CHANGES TO ARRANGEMENTS**

Free transfer applies only to your arrival on Day 1 of the tour. If you have reasons why you wish to arrive earlier, you will need to make these arrangements yourself at extra expense. VVT can arrange this for you if you contact us.

VVT cannot be responsible for any voluntary changes to your travel arrangements; you need to make these yourself and pay any extra charges these changes incur.

## **TIME**

All Vietnam operates on the same time. Ask VVT or your travel agent the time difference between your departure point and Vietnam.

## **DOCUMENTATION**

### **PASSPORT**

Your passport will need at least six months validity after the end of the trip and have enough blank pages for visas and entry/departure stamps.

Each time you change hotels you will need to show your passport for visa registration. Passports will be collected by your tour leader for this purpose and they will remain at reception for your stay unless you need them for cashing travelers' cheques etc.

### **VISAS**

To obtain a Visa for entry into Vietnam, the Vietnamese Consulates in your country require a completed visa application (available from VVT, your travel agent and on-line) with a passport photo attached, the visa fee (in cash, bank cheque or money order) and return postage. If you can't appear in person, we suggest you post it in an overnight envelope with another, self-addressed, enclosed. Processing is usually 7 working days.

It is advisable to bring two spare passport photos with you as for certain reasons they may be required on arrival.

### **TRAVEL INSURANCE**

Personal Travel Insurance against cancellation, accident, illness, loss etc is a requirement of VVT. You need to advise us of the details of the policy you take out – Company, policy type and policy number.

### **GENERAL HEALTH DETAILS**

While our tours do not require a great deal of physical activity, you should be in good general health before undertaking international flying and a VVT tour; the fitter you are the better you will adjust to jet-lag and the local conditions.

There are a number of vaccinations which are recommended for travel in the region. We suggest that you contact your doctor for specific details of the current requirements. Malaria is a risk in some parts of Vietnam and you should also discuss anti-malarial requirements with the doctor; tablet courses usually need to be commenced two weeks before departure.

Your airline and doctor will give you advice on how best to deal with long-haul flying.

Ensure that you advise us of any on-going medical condition you have, any medication side-effects which you have experienced and any special dietary requirements.

## **SAFETY**

Vietnam is a safe country to travel in; the government has made it clear that tourists are to be well treated. You should, however, take the usual precautions when travelling with valuables. Do not leave them unguarded, keep them on you or locked in the hotel or room safe when these are provided.

## **PHOTOGRAPHY**

If you don't already have one, this might be the opportunity to purchase a digital camera duty free. Items like this are not available in Vietnam duty free, so buy at your departure or Singapore if you are flying with other than Vietnam Airlines.

A camera which will make an image of about 3 mega-pixels is more than adequate for snapshot photography and will help to keep the cost down. An optical zoom of at least 4x is recommended. An additional expense is a 128mb memory card as the included card will be too small for your holiday. Small camera shops throughout Vietnam will be able to inexpensively download your card to a CD so you can keep shooting.

## **TRAFFIC**

Road traffic is nothing like the west: to begin with, they drive on the right – most of the time. The first time you try and cross the road can be quite daunting, but you'll soon get the hang of it. If you wait for a gap, you'll never get across. Pick a moment to begin the crossing, and move at a steady, predictable pace. The drivers will avoid you, as long as you don't do anything unexpected. Be aware that some push bikes and motor bikes will ignore the few traffic lights and others will seem to be traveling "upstream" of the flow. Car and bike horns blow all day. All they mean is "I'm here – be aware of me; keep me in your thoughts when deciding what you are doing next." You'll begin to tune them out after a while.

## **SHOPPING**

Most things in Vietnam are inexpensive in comparison to western prices. Locally made items are well and beautifully made. Lacquer ware is common but the quality varies so look carefully. Wall plaques range from traditional designs to post-modern and well-executed copies of many famous paintings can be purchased. Products made from wood and fabrics, including silk, abound, and eggshell paintings can be particularly beautiful. Hats, caps and coolie hats are cheap souvenirs.

Outside of the government shops in Hanoi & HCM City, prices are not fixed and bargaining will reduce your outlay. Don't buy the first thing you see and don't pay the first asking price. Your tour guide will help you with places to buy particular items and with pricing.

## **ELECTRICITY & TELEPHONES**

Vietnam operates on 220V AC, quite within the range of chargeable items at 240V, so you can charge your mobile phone and camera etc without difficulty. The plug/outlet will be different from what your equipment has, so you will need an adaptor – the sort with a pair of cylindrical prongs. You can get these in duty free at the airport or other locations such as camping stores.

Most of us have mobile phones and if you arrange with your provider to have international roaming connected, you can have two-way connection with home. Check with your provider before you leave home just exactly what you will need to dial to contact a fixed or mobile phone.

## **BAGGAGE**

Because you are traveling in a group, you will be responsible to get your luggage from the transport to your room, so remember that all hotels you stay in may not have a lift. Take a daypack/backpack with your immediate needs each day you leave and return to your hotel.

## **CLOTHING**

Common sense should dictate what you bring, and the suggestions below are just that – suggestions.

First, you want to limit what you are carrying and note that you are limited by VVT to one bag per person in addition to your day/backpack.

Sandals are fine most of the time, but enclosed walking shoes are recommended and will certainly be required at times. Lightweight trousers such as those which allow the legs to be zipped off and become shorts are useful. Light cotton collared shirts or T-shirts (watch out for sunburn on the neck), and a hat rather than a cap complete the ensemble. For winter in the north and in the highlands, take a jacket and of course a poncho for wet weather. T-shirts, umbrellas, ponchos and sleeping bag inners (useful on the train) can be purchased inexpensively in Vietnam.

A few sealable plastic bags of varying sizes are useful to keep wet/dirty items and toiletry items in. A small torch and insect repellent/mosquito coils will come in handy, particularly at the home-stays.

Remember, you are in Vietnam for a holiday so have a relaxing and good time as you travel this wonderful country while you meet interesting and new people, both within your group and amongst the Vietnamese.

If you have any comments on how we can improve our service and tours, feel free to let us know.

## LANGUAGE

Vietnamese Lesson		
English	Vietnamese	Pronunciation
Hello	Xin chao	Seenchow
Thank you	Cam on	Cumon
Please	Lam on	Lam on
Sorry	Xin loi	Seeloy
Yes	Vang	Vom
No	Khong	Khom
I	Toi	Toy
You	Anh ( Chi)	Anh/chi
We	Chung toi	Chumtoi
Good/Bad	Tot/Khong tot	Tote/Khom tote
Very	Rat	Rat
How much	Bao nhieu	Bow nyew
Hotel	Khach san	Khack san
Restaurant	Nha hang	Nya hang
Toilet	Nha ve sinh	Nya vay sing
Tea	Tra/Che	Cha/chay
Coffee	Ca fe	Ka-fay
Ticket	Ve	Vay
Railway station	Nha ga	Gah
How much?	Bao nhieu	bough new?
Hot	Nong	Nom
Cold	Lanh	Lang
Water	Nuoc	nook
Beer	Bia	Beer
Excuse me	Xin loi	Sin loy
I don't understand	Toi khong biet	toy kom beet



Number:

1	Mot
2	Hai
3	Ba
4	Bon
5	Numb
6	Sow
7	Buy
8	Tum
9	Chin
10	moo-ee
11	moo-ee mot
12	moo-ee hai



**Happy Traveling With Viet Value Travel**

