



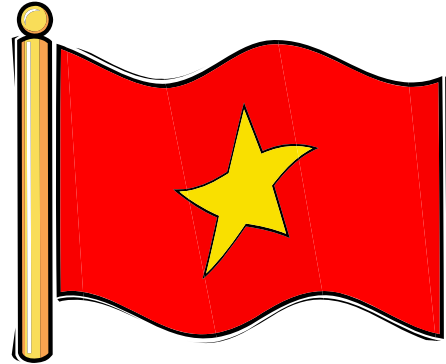
Inspirational travel

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VIETNAM PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION (please only print this if necessary, think before you print!)

Country Profile

Official Name: The Socialist Republic of Vietnam
Population: 84 million
Capital City: Hanoi, population 6.5 million (2008)
People: Viet (Kinh), 53 difference ethnic minorities include: Muong, Tay, Khmer, Mong, Dao, Kadai, Han, Tang.
Language: Vietnamese
Currency: Vietnam dong (VND)
Growth: 7,6% from 2006 to 2008
Major Industries: Agriculture, Industry and Service
Time Zone: GMT +7 hours
Electricity: 220V, 50 Hz; 2 pin plugs
Weights and Measurements: Metric
International Dialing Code: +84



Before Departure Check list



- Travel Insurance
- Valid Passport and Visa
- Inoculations
- Foreign currency or ATM card (preferably 2 in separate locations)
- Tickets
- Photocopy of passport either scanned into email account or separate from the original.

Travel Insurance (compulsory)

Buffalo Tours Vietnam will do everything possible to ensure a safe and enjoyable trip.

However, certain risks are involved and should be recognized by participants. Thus, we highly recommend the purchase of short-term travel insurance for our adventures. Travel Insurance is a cost effective way to protect yourself and your equipment in the event of problems due to -Canceled Trips, Delays, Medical Problems, Baggage Loss or Damage.

You can buy travel insurance very easily and cheaply online, we recommend www.worldnomads.com



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Visas/passports

1. Passports must be valid for 6 months after final departure date
2. Visitors must obtain visa approval prior to entry. Buffalo Tours can arrange visas at reduced cost for visitors who book one of our tours. The procedure is as follows:
 - Passport details and arrival and departure dates are faxed to Buffalo Tours not later than 14 days before passengers' departure to Vietnam.
 - Buffalo Tours submits details to the Immigration Department.
 - The Immigration Department emails the approval letter to Buffalo Tours who then forwards it to the client.
 - The client then brings this along with them at arrival

Note: Visitors cannot obtain a visa on arrival and must have either an approved letter or a valid visa on arrival.

Immunizations

Before traveling to Vietnam it is important for the visitor to have the right protection against diseases and to understand fully what type of vaccinations that will be needed according to the regions he/she will be visiting. For general protection for visitors to Vietnam, it is important to have the following vaccinations:

- Hepatitis A and B
- Tetanus
- Typhoid

Suggested Packing List

- Personal clothing items, toiletries, medication
- Sunhat
- Sarong (to cover your shoulders should you enter temples or pagodas)
- Sunscreen
- Insect repellent
- Light weight clothing for the summer months
- Warm clothing for winter in Hanoi and in mountainous areas
- Camera with film (you can easily buy extra memory cards)
- Adapter for plugs and chargers for camera/phone/l pod etc
- Small daypack for day trips and overnight trip to Halong Bay
- Appropriate shoes for trekking, cycling or walking in caves (Halong Bay)
- Sleeping sheet for train travel (can also be bought in Vietnam for 3 dollars)
- Ear plugs and sleep mask (for train journeys)
- Water bottle and helmet (for cycling trips only)





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Please note: Domestic airlines do impose restrictions on baggage at approx 20kg maximum, so travel lightly where possible. Also the trains cabins and boat cabins in Halong Bay have limited space so consider this when packing. Soft luggage is recommended where possible.

Money



The official currency is Dong. The Dong is non-convertible and at the time of writing trades at approximately 17,500 to USD1. The US dollar, preferably crisp clean bills, is widely accepted among major shops and restaurants. Travelers cheques can be cashed at authorized foreign exchange outlets and banks and require presentation of passport, in rural areas its impossible to change these. There is normally a 2 to 5 percent transaction fee for cashing Travelers cheques. Visa and Master card are becoming more accepted in many of the bigger hotels and restaurants, especially in the larger cities.

Make sure that the Vietnamese notes you receive are not torn, this is because many shops and restaurants will not accept them, if you receive a torn note as them to change it. Also try not to change too much money at one time, as you will end up with a large wad of notes. The largest denomination is currently 500,000 dong (approx. US\$ 33). The government introduced new 500,000 and 50,000 notes made from plastic (like Australian dollars), rather than the regular paper notes. In 2004 Vietnam introduced coins for smaller transactions. These are in the form of 200; 1,000 and 5,000 Dong. Other paper denominations include 2,000; 5,000; 10,000 and 20,000. Most are clearly identifiable by color.

There are a number of international banks operating in both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City with 24hour cash withdrawal facilities, including ANZ Bank in Hanoi and the HSBC in Ho Chi Minh City. Here cash can be withdrawn on Visa and Master cards as well as other cards such as Cirrus.

Please note that the Vietnamese Dong is non-convertible outside Vietnam. Change it before you leave!

Arriving in Vietnam



Visitors must complete an arrival card. This should be submitted together with passport and visa to the Immigration Department officials, as well as the Customs officers.

The Exit portion will be torn off and returned to the visitor, who should retain this for presentation upon departure.

If you have not arranged a Buffalo Tours representative to meet you at the airport, here's what you should do:

In Saigon:



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Tan Son Nhat airport is about 7km northwest of the city center. The best way to get into the city is to take a taxi. Pick a metered taxi outside the terminal and the journey should cost between US\$7 and US\$10.

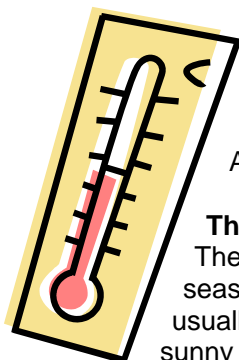
In Hanoi:

Hanoi's Noi Bai airport is approximately 35km north of the city. Do not accept a taxi from any touts and go to the Noi Bai Taxi rank outside the arrivals on the left, a taxi fare is set at about VND220,000 per 4 seater and will take you anywhere in central Hanoi. You pay the driver in VND or USD cash on arrival at your hotel.

We have airport representatives working at both airports and can be seen in Buffalo Tours uniform.

More about Vietnam

Climate



Vietnam's elongated shape includes tropical and subtropical zone and is responsible for the varied climate in the country. Generally speaking the best time to travel in Vietnam is when there is a reduced chance of rain; that is during April/May and October/November.

The South (from Ho Chi Minh City to Phan Thiet)

The south is hot year round and has two seasons: one wet the other dry. The wet season lasts from May to October and you can expect daily downpours. These are usually brief and easy to predict. The dry season from November to April is generally sunny and humid.

The Center (from Nha Trang to Hue)

For most of the year Nha Trang is bathed in beautiful sunshine but between November and December the area has heavy rain. Dalat, at an altitude of 1,500m is cooler than the coastal area, particularly from November through to March. Danang and Hue both experience typhoon activity from mid October to mid December when the climate becomes cooler, more overcast and wet.

The North (from Hanoi to Sapa)

Summer in the north lasts from May to October where temperatures range between 30-35 degrees Celsius with the occasional burst of heavy rain. The temperature varies from 10-15 degrees in winter (December to March). February and March can be damp with drizzle and overcast skies.



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WEATHER CHART

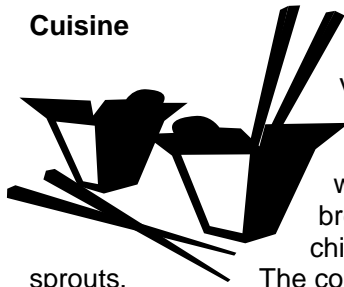
Month	Hanoi		Danang		Ho Chi Minh City	
	Average Temp	Rain (mm)	Average Temp	Rain (mm)	Average Temp	Rain (mm)
JAN	12/30	26	17/25	21	21/32	26
FEB	13/21	26	18/26	22	22/32	10
MAR	16/23	60	20/28	23	23/33	15
APR	20/28	110	23/30	75	25/35	50
MAY	25/32	220	25/35	200	25/35	200
JUNE	28/33	280	29/36	280	24/33	325
JULY	28/33	350	29/36	300	24/33	300
AUG	28/33	340	25/34	280	24/33	275
SEPT	28/33	280	23/30	260	24/33	325
OCT	23/28	160	23/28	260	23/32	225
NOV	18/27	80	21/28	80	23/32	100
DEC	15/21	10	20/27	40	22/32	50

Safety

Vietnam was recently voted one of the safest destinations in the world. Women and independent travelers have found it relatively hassle-free and easy to travel throughout the country. Incidents of petty theft and bag snatching are more widespread in Ho Chi Minh City and to a lesser extent Hanoi. As with anywhere in the world, do keep your bags zipped up and close to you at all times and do not carry all your money on you at once, keep some locked up in your hotel safe.



Cuisine



Vietnam is a culinary delight! A typical Vietnamese meal consists of rice or noodles with soup, a stir-fry, and another main dish and is eaten on a communal basis. The dishes are usually not spicy and are accompanied with chili sauce, fish sauce and soy sauce. The traditional Vietnamese breakfast is Pho – a large bowl of rice noodles flavored with sliced beef or chicken and fragrant broth and garnished with fresh coriander and bean sprouts. The countries 3 main regions, the North, the Center and the South each have distinct cuisine. Generally the North is best known for its noodle soups and meat and seafood stir-fries. The central region especially around Hue has some of the most elaborate dishes. In the south, where there is a greater abundance of spices the food tends to be a little hotter. With over 3,000km of coastline the seafood here is both delicious and varied. Crabs prawns, crayfish and squid are in plentiful supply, not to mention hundreds of varieties of fish.



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Clothing



Light, comfortable, easy to launder clothing is recommended. The temperature during winter months in Hanoi and the rainy season in the central region can be cool; a sweater or light jacket can be handy. Good walking shoes and sandals that can be easily removed are recommended, especially when entering temples and people's homes. When entering temples please try to cover knees and shoulders as a mark of respect.

Responsible Tourism

Please read our separate Responsible Tourism Guidelines before you arrive in Asia. We want to ensure that all our clients travel as responsibly as possible to ensure the future of is sustainable

People

The majority of the population is comprised of the Viet or Kinh (85%) people who speak the tonal Vietnamese. The minority population is made up of over 50 ethnic hill tribe people who mainly live in the central and northern mountainous areas of the country. The best-known hill tribes are the Tay, Hmong, Zao, White and Black Thai (both mainly from the north), and the Hoa. Each hill tribe has its own unique customs and dialect and some are able to speak Vietnamese.



Language



Vietnamese, the official language, is a tonal language that can be compared to Cambodia's official language, Khmer. With each syllable, there are six different tones that can be used, which change the definition and it often makes it difficult for foreigners to pick up the language. There are other languages spoken as well such as Chinese, Khmer, Cham and other languages spoken by tribes inhabiting the mountainous regions. Although there are some similarities to Southeast Asian languages, such as Chinese, Vietnamese is thought to be a separate language group, although a member of the Austro-Asiatic language family. In written form, Vietnamese uses the Roman alphabet and accent marks to show tones. This system of writing called Quoc Ngu, was created by Catholic missionaries in the 17th century to translate the scriptures. Eventually this system, particularly after World War I, replaced one using Chinese characters (chu nom), which had been the unofficial written form used for centuries.

Public holidays

The most important and widely celebrated public holiday of the year is Tet, the Lunar New Year, which coincides with the cycle of the moon. This public holiday usually takes place in late January or early February and lasts officially for three days, although many businesses are closed the entire week.





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Other important public holidays include the Liberation of Saigon (April 30), International Worker's Day (May 1), Ho Chi Minh's birthday (May 19), and Vietnamese National Day (September 2).

The Vietnamese Lunar New Year

There is no more colorful time to be in Vietnam than during the days leading up to Tet Nguyen Dan, the most important festival of the year for Vietnam's Kinh ethnic majority.

Since the first day of lunar year is thought to set tone for the next 12 month, everyone strives to plan the perfect Tet. In Hanoi, the narrow lanes of the Old Quarter buzz with activity. Everyone is in a rush to get a haircut, buy new clothes, spruce up their homes, visit friends, settle outstanding debts, and stock up on traditional Tet delicacies. Businesses hang festive red banners which read "Chuc mung nam moi"(Happy New Year) and city streets are festooned with colored light. Stalls spring up all over town to sell nothing but cone -shaped kumquat bushes. Others sell flowering peach trees, symbols of life and good fortune which people bring in to their homes to celebrate the coming of spring. As vendors pour into the city with peach trees strapped to their bicycles, the streets look like moving pink forests In the south, people bring yellow mai (apricot) branches into their homes and place a coconut, a papaya, a mango and a custard apple on the family altar. Spoken in the southern dialect, the names of these fruit form a prayer for success and fulfillment.

Three crucial meetings are said to take place on Tet. The first meeting is between three family deities: Tien su, the deity responsible for introducing the family to its traditional career; Tho Cong, who oversees the land where the family lives; and Tao Quan, the Kitchen God, who cares for the family's food. The second meeting takes place between the dead and the living. People place offerings of food and drinks on their ancestral altars, light incense, and invite their ancestors to join the family's Tet celebrations. The third meeting involves the immediate family. On New Year's Eve, family members gather for a dinner of traditional food like banh chung (a square cake made of sticky rice stuffed with beans and pork), mang (a soup of boiled bamboo shoots and fried pork) and xoi gac (orange sticky rice). This is followed by a visit to the local pagoda and perhaps an outing to see the town's fireworks.

Post and Telecommunication



The Vietnamese postal system offers you most telecommunications services. You could find herein some special services such as: EMS (Express Mail Service), DHL Worldwide Express, UPS, Freight Forwarders. Do not put postcards into letter boxes, either give them to your hotel to post or to post offices.

Email & Internet:

Thanks to the technology, E-mail and Internet services are available in most hotels and posts in Vietnam. Other places where you could find the same services are in the Internet Cafes (~95% are using ADSL) located in many streets of the major cities. Normally the post will charge you from 3000 VND to 6000 VND per hour for internet service (about 0.19 to 0.38USD) but it could be more in the hotels.



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Telephone Booth & Telephone Card:

Using a telephone booth is an easy way for you to call home. You can find telephone booths at post offices or in the street of major cities. Telephone cards are on sales at GPO, shops, restaurants, book stores. However, it is getting more popular and cheaper to make phone calls over the Internet. These days many Internet Cafes offer you this option.

International calls:

Costs for direct dialed international calls are still high. However, you can make a phone call to talk with your relatives in your country with half of the cost with 178 or 171 services. With these services, cost is about 0.60USD per minute to most of countries in the world. How to dial it? Very easy: Dial 171 (or 178) + 00 + country code + city code + number

Kindly note if you use this service from your hotel's telephone, the charge might be a little higher as the hotel will put some service charges over it. Again, making international phone calls by Internet is another relatively cheap option.

Mobile phone:

In Vietnam, GSM (Global System for Mobile communications) is presently operated by three main suppliers: VINAPHONE, MOBIFONE and Viettel. Your mobile phone could be used here by roaming service. These suppliers offer also VINA and MOBI Pre-Paid Card services. The best way for you to use a mobile phone in the country is to buy a pre-paid SIM card for your mobile phone. You can also rent a mobile phone at your hotel or at a Mobile Phone Service Center in the street.

Time

Vietnam lies in the same time zone with Thailand, meaning seven hours ahead of GMT/UTC. So close to the equator, Vietnam has no daylight saving time (summer time).

Business hours



Most Vietnamese are early risers, so businesses and shops open early. Government offices are open from Monday through Friday from 7:30am to 4:30pm. Most businesses are open Monday through Saturday from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm.

Banks are open Monday to Friday from 8:00 am to 3:30 pm and on Saturdays from 8:00 am to 1:00 pm. Lunch time is usually between 11:30 am to 1:30 pm.

Many businesses, shops, and all government offices are closed during this lunch period. Shops are open from about 8:00 am to 9:00 pm, with some open longer.

Tips

Tipping is a personal matter, and passengers are encouraged to tip an amount they find appropriate. For your convenience we've included a tipping guide below for your travels in Vietnam. Please note however that these amounts are only suggestions, we encourage our passengers to reward guides based on their performance. Meals (restaurants): in smart restaurants you may find that the tip is already included, in local and not so smart ones it's not expected to tip but you may wish to leave loose change on the table.





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Tips for guides and drivers are completely at your discretion, but here are some guidelines:

- Meals (restaurants): the average amount is \$1
- Tips for guides and drivers are completely at your discretion, but here are some guidelines: \$1,5 to \$3 per day per person for guides (depending on group size), \$1 per day per person for drivers
- Bellboy: the average amount is \$1
- Chambermaid: the average amount is \$1 per day

For larger groups and adventure trips you may want to increase this. But please remember that it's totally up to you, these are guidelines only

Tips for the staff of cruises (ie Halong Bay) and all inclusive lodges are generally pooled - one "pot" for the staff excluding guides - \$10 per day (based on 2 – 4 people).

Bellboy: it's up to you; the average amount is US\$0.5/bag or luggage.

Chambermaid: again it's up to you; the average amount is US\$ 1.0/day.

Departure airport taxes

Any ticket issued after November 2006 includes departure tax.

And Finally...



We at Buffalo Tours do our best to facilitate your adventure by arranging all of the services that free you to get the most out of your experience. However, every traveller has his or her own idea and expectations of how the adventure will be. Bearing this in mind and considering our own experiences, we offer the suggestions below to ensure that your adventure meets and hopefully exceeds your expectations. Please also read our enclosed guidelines on Responsible Tourism so that that joy of cultural diversity unique to travelling is a beneficial experience for both yourself and the communities that you visit.

- Take responsibility for your adventure - do not assume your interests are shared by everyone else. If you have any special interests (weavings, archaeology, religious art, jewellery, etc.) or wish to do some particular activities (mountain biking, kayaking etc.) let our guides or the hotel staffs know ahead of time. They will do their best to help you find what you want.
- Read up on Vietnam before you visit, you are sure to get more out of the experience if you have some familiarity with the history and culture of the country.
- Most information provided by the guides is to give you a general understanding of what and where you are touring. Don't be shy! Ask questions if you want more specific information.
- Try to learn some Vietnamese before you arrive! The more you know the more fun you will have. However, please note that not speaking Vietnamese will not impede you from having a



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great time. English is widely spoken, but you will certainly get a great reaction and have deeper interaction with local people if you can muster up a few Vietnamese phrases.

- If you need something or have a problem, please let someone know. Our drivers, operators, guides and hotel staff are there to assist you.
- Where possible try to support locally owned businesses, hotels and restaurants. In particular try to buy from traditional artisans.
- While bargaining is part of the shopping culture in Asia, be realistic!
- Bring a book, journal, postcards or playing cards with you to occupy yourself when waiting.
- Remember the adage: "Take only photos, leave only footprints", but be sensitive with the photos and footprints!
- Smile! It will get you much further than a lost temper ever will.
- Finally... slow down, chill out and relax! This is your holiday! Enjoy it!