

Returning to Vietnam

Country Profile

Full name: Socialist Republic of Vietnam

Vietnam has one of south-east Asia's fastest-growing economies and is becoming a major manufacturing centre.

Population: 89.7 million (UN, 2012)

127th out of 186 countries on the UNDP's Human Development Index

Vietnam is divided into 63 administrative units, comprised of provinces and cities.

The website of the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism provides information on some of those areas

Capital: Hanoi

Major language: Vietnamese Major religion: Buddhism
Currency: Dong (VND)



Recent History

Vietnam is a one-party Communist state; it became unified in 1975 after three decades of war, when the armed forces of the Communist north seized the south. The ruling Communist Party has pursued economic reform, but maintains a monopoly on political power. Rights groups have highlighted the persecution of political dissidents, and religious and ethnic minorities.

The human rights advocacy group Amnesty International says in a 2011 report that “more than a dozen activists were convicted in faulty trials simply because they had peacefully voiced criticism of government policies”. A new wave of subversion trial began in 2013.

It is the second biggest supplier of clothes to the US. Elements of market forces and private enterprise were introduced into the economy from the late 1980s. A stock exchange opened in 2000 and the country joined the World Trade Organization in January 2007.

The rapid growth of the past two decades has raised living standards and lifted millions out of poverty. However, this growth has generated new and more complex development challenges, from urban poverty and environmental degradation, to rising income inequality.

The disparity in wealth between urban and rural Vietnam is wide. Basic public services such as health, education, and clean water are under serious stress, and the government is struggling to maintain adequate standards and ease of access for all citizens.

National Documentation

Hộ Khẩu (household registration book/residence registration book/family book)

This is the family registration system in Vietnam. It is a book that keeps the information of a family granted by Municipal/ Provincial People’s Committee, and is used in combination with the ID card, in order to verify the legal status of a person within the country.

Possession of a hộ khẩu is essential in order to legally reside in one’s home, legally hold a job, collect grain rations, attend a government-run school, receive public health care, travel, vote, or formally challenge administrative abuses.

Persons absent from their permanent place of residence for more than 6 months without registering their temporary absence and without plausible reasons shall have their names crossed out from the household registration book. When they return, they must re-apply for registration of their permanent residence. In order to

regain Hộ Khẩu, returning Vietnamese expatriates must produce one of the following documents:

- a Vietnamese passport or travel document which has a stamp verifying entry at the border gate;
- Proof of Vietnamese nationality granted by the Vietnam representative agencies overseas, accompanied by proof of the permission to return to Vietnam issued by the related authority;
- Certificate of Vietnamese nationality granted by the People's Committee of provinces and cities directly under central authority, accompanied by proof of the permission [to return to] Vietnam for permanent residence issued by the related authority.

ID card

All Vietnamese nationals over the age of 14 are required to obtain and carry the national identity card, the giấy chứng minh nhân dân.

A national identity card should be obtained at the police office local to the person's permanent residence. Identity cards are temporarily confiscated while a person is mentally ill, in prison, or confined to an educational or medical establishment.

ID cards must be replaced if they are:

- Expired
- Damaged and unusable
- Change of name
- Change of permanent residence to a new province or city
- Change in identification particulars

Lost cards must also be replaced.

To obtain a new ID card:

A new ID card is granted at the police office. The person must produce their residence registration book. They will have their photograph and fingerprints taken, and will need to fill in various forms.

To replace an ID card:

The person must produce:

- An application clearly stating the reasons for the change or re-granting of the identity card, with certification by the police of the ward, commune or district where the person's permanent residence is registered.
- Household registration book
- Evidence of change of name (if applicable)

Their photograph and fingerprints will be taken. They must complete the forms to

apply for the identity card, and return previous identity cards which are expired, damaged or have out-of-date information.

Travelling to Vietnam

If the FNO does not have a valid Vietnamese passport, travel documents will need to be arranged with the Embassy. An expired passport will make the process easier. If they do not have a passport or an expired passport they will need to provide supporting evidence such as:

- ID card
- Household registration book)
- Birth certificate
- Evidence of where they are from in Vietnam -Any other evidence of identity and background

The FRS/UKBA will then take fingerprints, bio-data and a photograph and will contact the embassy to organise travel documents. An interview is not normally necessary.

Source: Facilitated Return Scheme, telephone conversation 26/7/2013

Upon Arrival

Social services in Vietnam are few and far between. While there are some NGOs and community organisations in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (see directory below), the capacity of these to provide support to returnees is limited. It is important to seek out friends and family in Vietnam if at all possible.

The Red Cross offers a family tracing service which may be of assistance <http://www.redcross.org.uk/What-we-do/Finding-missing-family/International-family-tracing>

There is evidence that Vietnamese nationals imprisoned as a result of raids on cannabis factories may have been trafficked for their labour, or otherwise coerced into working as “gardeners” in the factories. Prisoners in this situation may be at risk of being re-trafficked on return, or face coercion if released into the community in the UK. The IOM runs a project in Vietnam to reintegrate and support victims of trafficking. The United Nations Inter-agency Project on Human Trafficking may also be able to give advice: www.no-trafficking.org

Housing

Emergency Accommodation

There are very few organisations in Vietnam which can help arrange emergency accommodation, and the capacity of those organisations that do provide help is

limited. If at all possible, a place to stay should be arranged before return to Vietnam. There are some organisations in Ho Chi Minh City which will provide accommodation to minors (see directory below).

Renting Accommodation

The best way to find accommodation is often through networks in Vietnam, so enlist the help of friends and family if you can.

It is usually cheaper to rent from a landlord direct, rather than to use an estate agent or property website. Look out for signs on the outside of the house saying “Nha cho thue” (house for rent), or “Phòng cho thuê” (room for rent). There may also be posters on lamp posts or in public areas. In the big cities, the cheapest accommodation will often be found by looking down alleyways, where there are fewer people to see the “for rent” signs.

If you do want to use a property website, the biggest is MuaBan - the online presence of a popular classified ads paper published daily or weekly.

Guide prices in Ho Chi Minh City (per month):

\$25-\$100 - small room with no private bathroom

\$100-\$125 - small furnished room for rent in District 1 with small bathroom

\$150 - comfortable furnished room with private bathroom in District 1.

From \$150 - One or two-storey unfurnished house outside District 1

Old, non-luxury highrise apartments start from about 5 million VND (\$250). For example:

- 1 bedroom apartment in D5, 10 minutes drive from downtown: 5 million
- 2 bedroom in brand new housing in the suburban districts: 7 million.
- 1 bedroom in an older midrise apartment complex 5 minutes from downtown: 6 million.

Transport

There are three international airports in Vietnam. Tan Son Nhat airport serves Ho Chi Min City (HCMC) and is Vietnam’s busiest international air hub. Hanoi’s Noi Bai airport is the destination of choice for those concentrating on northern Vietnam, while a handful of international flights also serve Danang airport.

Domestic

Vietnam has 86,327 km of roads and 3 219 km of railway, incorporating 5 railway routes. There are 16 domestic air travel routes. Main distances:

Hanoi - Hochiminh city : 1,738 km

Hanoi - Dien Bien Phu : 474 km

Hanoi - Haiphong : 102 km

Hanoi - Hue : 654 km

Bus travel

Many cities have several bus stations, and responsibilities are divided according to the location of the destination (whether it is north or south of the city) and the type of service being offered (local or long distance, express or nonexpress).

Short-distance buses, mostly minibuses, depart when full. Non-express buses and minibuses drop off and pick up as many passengers as possible along the route. Express buses go direct and are the fastest way to travel, although more expensive.

Reservations aren't required for most of the services between towns and cities, may be a good idea to purchase the ticket the day before if you want to depart at a specific time. Most major bus stations now have ticket offices with official prices clearly displayed. Always buy a ticket from the office, as bus drivers frequently overcharge.

Healthcare

Private medical clinics are available in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Vung Tau and Da Nang.

Medical facilities and care at most public hospitals, especially in areas outside Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City, are relatively low compared to the UK. Doctors and hospitals expect cash payment prior to providing medical services, including for emergency care. Ambulances charge a fee. You may not be picked up by ambulance or given emergency treatment unless you make it clear you are able to pay.

For those unable to pay for medical treatment, The Red Cross runs clinics providing free treatment:

Viet Nam Red Cross Society

Add: 82 Nguyen Du, Hanoi, Viet Nam

Tel: 84 438224030/38263703

Free clinic, Hanoi

Sunny Korea Clinic

Thon Luong Chau,

Xa Tien Duoc, Huyen Soc Son, Ha Noi, Viet Nam

Tel. 84-4-3595-2843, 2844, 2845,

Useful numbers

Police:113

Fire Brigade: 114 Hospital: 115

General Information: 1080

Education for Children

School system

The 1992 Vietnamese Constitution states that education is free and compulsory from the age of 6. The law was amended in 2005 to extend universal education to all 5-year-old children in pre-primary school.

The national education system consists of formal education and continuing education and includes the following levels:

- Pre-primary education with nursery and kindergartens;
- General education with primary education, lower secondary education, and upper secondary education; Professional education with professional secondary education and vocational training;
- Higher education with college, undergraduate, master and doctoral degrees.

Schools in the national educational system are organised in the following forms:

- Public schools: established and funded by the state
- People-founded schools: established and funded by the local community
- Private schools: established and funded by social organisations or individuals, without state funding.

Quality is one of Vietnamese education's major issues, affected by factors including a passive teaching method, a shortage of teaching staff, poor teaching materials, inadequate school infrastructure, and weak education management. However, efforts are being made to improve quality, including improvements to school infrastructure and the reduction of class sizes.

Education for Adults

The Amended Education Law 2005, instituted adult education as one of two key components of the national education system. The Vietnamese government is currently implementing a National Education for All Action Plan 2003-2015, designed to improve opportunities to access adult education. While adult education has expanded, government funding is limited and learners may need to self-fund. International NGOs (eg. Oxfam, Actionaid) listed in the international directory of

charities may also provide training opportunities. The table below summarises the types of adult education available, and the providers:

Programme	Providers	Area of learning	Target Group
Literacy programmes	Public: Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) Community/NGO: Women's Union Peasants' Union Association of Learning Promotion.	Literacy skills (reading, writing, calculating)	Illiterate adults and young people of 15 years and above
Equivalency Education Programmes	Public: MOET, Public formal schools	General education	Non-enrolled children, young people and adults, and those who have dropped out of education
Life-skill education programmes	Public: MOET and other Ministries Community/NGO: Mass organisations Fatherland Front, Women's Union, Youth Federation, Trade Union, Peasant's Association Private: businesses, employers, professional organisations (Gardening association, Bee raising association)	- Income generating skills - Health related skills - Population and family planning related skills	Anyone with adult-education needs

Economy and Employment

The Vietnamese economy is continuing to grow despite the recession. Exports are booming, and 20% of Vietnamese exports are now high-tech goods. Other important exports are petroleum, rice, coffee, clothing and fish. The majority of exports (66%) are produced by the foreign-invested sector.

The largest sector of employment in Vietnam is agriculture, forestry and fisheries, with employment of nearly 23 million in 2008. However, a structural shift in Vietnam's labour market is underway, with a move from relatively low productivity, labour-intensive agricultural jobs towards higher value-added, and more technology - and

capital-intensive industries and service sectors.

Vietnam is a lower middle income country; unemployment is low and it was below average for the Asian Pacific region. Nevertheless, poverty is high and the unemployment rate among young people in Vietnam is more than three times higher than the adult rate. Nearly half of the unemployed in the country are between 15 and 24 of age.

Recent estimates indicate that the informal sector could account for up to 20 per cent of GDP and 23.5 per cent of total employment. The impact of “informal employment”, a broader term which captures all of those workers with no social insurance regardless of whether they work in the formal or informal sector, is even larger, affecting up to 37 million people in Viet Nam, or around 82 per cent of the Vietnamese labour force.

Finding a Job

Looking for employment is a matter of asking around – jobs are rarely advertised. Make contact with as many friends and family as you can before returning to Vietnam.

Fluent English-speakers may be able to find work teaching in universities, in the budding private-language school sector, or as home tutors.

There are several organisations in Vietnam working on micro-finance projects to enable people to set up small businesses. Please see the international NGO directory below for more information.

Banking and Finance

Vietnam has both national and international banks. National banks include Vietcombank, Agribank, Vietin Bank and Sacombank. HSBC, Citibank and ANZ all have branches in Vietnam. ATMs are available in all of the big cities. Lists of nationwide ATMs are available in bank branches.

The basic requirements for opening a bank account are valid ID, and proof of address. A minimum deposit may also be required. For example, Citibank’s requirements for a Vietnamese national to open an account are:

Minimum deposit: VND 1 000 000 (\$50)

Primary ID includes ID card or passport

Secondary ID: ho khau (family book) or driver’s licence

Transport

Driving licences are mandatory for all drivers of motor vehicles and riders of motorcycles with a capacity of over 50cc. Under Vietnamese law, a helmet must be worn at all times when riding a motorcycle in Vietnam, including when travelling as a passenger.

Applications for a driving licence should be directed to:

Hanoi – Centre for Automotive Training and Mechanism, 83A Ly Thuang Kiet Street, 84 3 942 2715

HCMC – Office of Transportation, 63 Ly Tu Trang Street, District 1, 84 3822 3760

Public Transport

Train travel

The Vietnamese railway system is operated by Vietnam Railways and runs along the coast between HCMC and Hanoi and links the capital with Hai Phong and northern towns. Trains are more comfortable and safer than buses, but are slow (the quickest train journey between Hanoi and HCMC takes 30 hours, and local trains may travel as slowly as 15km/h). The fastest train service is provided by the Reunification Express, which runs between HCMC and Hanoi. Several Reunification Express trains depart from HCMC's Saigon station between 9am and 10.30pm every day. In the other direction, there are departures from Hanoi between 5am and 6.40pm daily.

The train schedules change frequently. The timetables for all trains are posted on the Vietnam Railway website and at major stations.

There are four main classes of train travel in Vietnam: hard seat, soft seat, hard sleeper and soft sleeper. Ticket prices vary depending on the train, and the fastest trains are naturally the most expensive.

The supply of train seats is frequently insufficient to meet demand. Reservations for all trips should be made at least one day in advance. For sleeping berths, it is wise to book several days before the date of departure. You'll need to bring identification when buying train tickets.

Local transport

Transport options in Hanoi and HCMC include buses, meter taxis, cyclos and motorbike taxis (xe om). City bus maps are available with information on routes around the city. Bicycle is also a popular and cheap way to travel around town. Short rides around town by cyclo should cost about 10, 000d. For a longer ride or a night ride, expect to pay double that or more. It pays to have the exact change when

taking a cyclo, as drivers may claim they don't have change. Cyclos are cheaper by time rather than distance.

The xe om is a motorbike that carries one passenger, like a two-wheeled taxi. Fares are comparable with those for a cyclo, but negotiate the price beforehand.

Major festivals

Laws and Customs

Tet Nguyen Dan (New Year) is Vietnam's biggest festival, celebrated throughout the country at Lunar New Year (between 19 January and 20 February).

Lesser holidays include May 1, the traditional socialist labour day, September 2, Vietnam's national day, King Hung celebration on April 12th, commemorating past kings, and Liberation Day on April 30th, marking the fall of Saigon in 1975.

Daily Life

Offices, museums and many shops open between 7am and 8am and close between 4pm and 5pm. Post offices keep longer hours and are generally open from 6.30am to 9pm. Banks are generally open from 8am to 11.30am and 1pm to 4pm during the week and 8am to 11.30am on Saturday.

Most government offices are open on Saturday until noon but are closed on Sunday. Most museums are closed on Monday while temples and pagodas are usually open every day from around 5am to 9pm.

Many of the small privately owned shops, restaurants and street stalls stay open seven days a week, often until late at night. Lunch is taken very seriously and virtually everything shuts down between noon and 1.30pm

Dangers

Health

If you have spent a long time outside of Vietnam it is wise to take precautions with food and water on return, to avoid stomach upsets and more serious illnesses such as Hepatitis A. It is advisable to boil all drinking water or drink bottled water with intact seals and to avoid ice cubes, raw and undercooked food and unpasteurised dairy products

There are unexploded landmines and ordinance in former battlefields. Look out for roads and paths which are marked as mine- free.

Political activity

Criticism of the government is likely to warrant severe penalties in Vietnam. The Vietnamese Government's human rights record is poor, and dissidents are treated

harshly.

Drug use

The approach taken by the Vietnamese government to drug-use is harsh. According to the Human Rights Watch World Report 2012:

People dependent on illegal drugs can be held in government detention centers where they are subjected to 'labor therapy' the mainstay of Vietnam's approach to drug treatment. In early 2011 there were 123 centers across the country holding some 40,000 people, including children as young as 12. Their detention is not subject to any form of due process or judicial oversight and routinely lasts for as long as four years.

Organisations	Contact	Services
ILO Vietnam	48-50 Nguyen Thai Hoc Street Hanoi, Viet Nam Tel: +84 4 3734 0907	
IOM Vietnam	Level 12A CMC Building Duy Tan Street Dich Vong Ward Cau Giay District Ha Noi, Viet Nam Tel: (+84) 43 736 6258	
Vietnamese Red Cross	82 Nguyen Du, Hanoi, Tel: (84)438224030/38263703	
Community and Family Services International	Headquarters: 2/F Torres Building 2442 Park Avenue Pasay City, Metro Manila Philippines Tel: 632.551.1977	Organisation based in the Philippines that runs projects in Vietnam, including resettling returnees
ActionAid Vietnam	Country Office: Room A 502, HEAC building 14-16 Ham Long, Hanoi Tel: +84 (4) 39439866	
Lin Centre for Community Development	Center for Community Development 180/47 Nguyen Huu Canh Ward 22, Binh Thanh Dist, Hochiminh City Tel: +84 (8) 35120092	

Sources:

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<http://wikitravel.org/en/Vietnam>
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