



## **VIETNAM CUSTOMS AND MORE**

### **Tea**

Upon meeting a person either in a business environment or at home it is customary to invite the guest for a cup of tea; to decline such an invitation is tantamount to an insult for if one does have time for tea then one has time for little else. Drink the tea and chat.

### **Visiting Pagodas**

It is abhorrent to the Vietnamese to visit the inside of a pagoda with one's shoes on; this shows the greatest disrespect; shoes should be deposited at the door. It is further unthinkable to depart the pagoda without making an offering in the collection box; any sum will do. It is this box by which the pagoda supports itself. Likewise, visiting a pagoda or church in shorts, a t-shirt or a sleeveless shirt shows the greatest disrespect.

### **Service**

There is a sense of the individual which appears in the slow service, not so much because of the customer but because of the value with which the individual is held in Vietnamese society. There is also the sense of grace and serenity. As much as one could listen to the complete silence of a Chinese women washing dishes one could hear the service of the Vietnamese. It is something to be savored and enjoyed.

### **Smiling**

In the event of anger or embarrassment smiles hide the situation. If you become angry and receive smiles in return know that the best face is being put upon an already regretful situation. Deprecating an individual in front of others will cause a loss of face and obviate any chance for the resolution of a dispute.

### **Showing Anger**

Showing anger is a sign of immaturity, a lack of grace and a strong indication of an unworthy upbringing. Dignity and face are maintained by demonstrating adult control over one's actions.

### **Respect of Age**

Age in Vietnam is highly respected; deference is always shown to one's elder. Anyone who is five-years older than you is your "elder," even if you are 70 and he is 75.

### **Handshakes and Greetings**

A gentle handshake is the appropriate manner of greeting; a firm handshake is considered disrespectful. When meeting people, especially older people, it is polite to remove one's hat and to indicate a bow; to not do so is considered rude.

### **Body Posture**

Crossing one's legs when sitting is considered impolite as the soles of one's feet facing other people, or a sacred monument such as a statue of Buddha, is disrespectful.

#### Displays of Affection

Public displays of affection are considered extremely impolite.

#### Women in Society

Women in Vietnamese society are not docile, nor subservient, nor meek. The role of women in Vietnamese society is equal to that of men. But polite women never drink nor smoke; to do so indicates that one is probably a prostitute.

#### Family

Family is at the vortex of every Vietnamese; to not have a family, or a small one, is considered pitiful. To be unmarried beyond the age of 30 for a man or 25 for a woman is considered very unlucky. Divorce is rare. You will be pitied if you are single.

#### Arriving

International airports are Noi Bai International airport in Hanoi, Tan Son Nhat airport in Ho Chi Minh City and Da Nang airport in Da Nang. You can get [Vietnam visa on arrival](#) at the airports if you have applied an approval letter online through any Vietnamese travel company.

You will be given a two-part customs form to fill out before your arrival. Upon landing, follow the signs to immigration, where you may pick up your luggage. Afterwards, you will head to the customs counter to present your passport, [Vietnam visa](#) and customs form. They will take the customs form and return you a yellow receipt. Keep it! You need it for departure.

### **HEALTH AND SAFETY**

#### Common Health Problems

##### Water

Hydration is a concern in the tropics; the rates of water loss exceed those which most people are accustomed to in the northern hemispheres. Particular attention should to be paid to hydrating your body through above the average consumption of water. Bottled water is readily available throughout Vietnam and we strongly recommend that you carry a bottle with you and drink it.

##### Sunburn

The sun in the tropics is not the sun in the northern hemispheres. Particular attention needs to be paid protecting your skin: bring and use sunscreen lotions. Even if you are not on the beaches, wear a hat and protect your arms and exposed skin with sunscreen if you are exposed to excessive hours in the sun.

##### Diarrhea

Diarrhea can be caused by simply a change of diet; it can also be caused by intestinal parasites or bacteria which are acquired by drinking non-boiled water or by eating vegetables which have been washed with non-boiled water such as lettuce and tomatoes; it can also be caused by drinking drinks with ice which was produced with non-boiled water.

You can expect diarrhea as a normal result of changing diet, but if you suspect that the diarrhea is not the result of a change in diet or is ongoing for more than several hours, you should do something about it for dehydration is the major problem associated with diarrhea.

Either use medications which you bring with you (none of which I have found to be effective) or consider over the counter medications from a Vietnamese pharmacy. Diarrhea is a typical Vietnamese healthcare problem and all pharmacies in Vietnam sell pharmaceuticals which eliminate nearly all cases of it. My personal experience has been that within of hours of taking over the counter medication one is on the upswing and within 12-hours one is nearly restored.

### Heat Exhaustion

The least common health care problem in Vietnam with visitors to Vietnam is Heat Exhaustion. Proper hydration and not being a fool by walking, hiking or unduly exercising in the afternoon peak heat of the day, is the solution. Siestas in Mexico and the Mediterranean countries are for a reason: to stay out of the heat of the sun. So too in Vietnam.

### Health Concerns

#### Avian Flu

Avian Flu has been and still is a concern of many who are planning holidays to Southeast Asia. A U.S. Department of State Avian Flu Fact Sheet is published below providing excellent information on this topic.

Influenza, or simply "flu," is a yearly and ongoing problem for North Americans. Each year in the United States thousands of people die from flu, and this is not avian flu, but the annual flu's which appear in the winter months and are transmitted by human-to-human transmissions. The flu is a serious matter: the flu of 1917 killed millions of people worldwide... these annual strains of flu have the ability to metamorphosis quickly and into many different forms, and all are potentially deadly. With avian flu deaths world-wide, numbering in the few hundreds over a two-year plus period, the threat pallor's in comparison to annual flu deaths in North America, gunshot wounds and highway automobile accidents. What sets avian flu apart from the normal reoccurring annual flu's is that its transmission is believed to be almost entirely from animal-to-human contact, not human-to-human contact. Therefore, a number of specific precautions, outlined in the article below, are advised to further diminish the threat.

Like HIV/Aids, avian flu will probably be with us for a very long time, however one's chances of contacting the avian flu are minute.

#### U.S. Department of State Avian Flu Fact Sheet

Editor's Note: The following is a U.S. Department of State Fact Sheet published by the U.S. Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City on 8 April 2005.

"This Fact Sheet alerts Americans to the occurrence of Influenza A H5N1 (avian influenza) in Asia. A number of countries have reported avian influenza, commonly referred to as "bird flu." "The H5N1 strain of influenza can cause sever disease in poultry. In addition, Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam have reported a number of bird-to-human transmissions of the avian flu. The vast majority of human cases have resulted from direct contact with poultry, and there is only limited evidence to suggest human-to-human transmission. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the Department are concerned about the

potential for sustained human-to-human transmission of this highly dangerous flu strain, and we are working closely with other partners in an effort to address this outbreak.

"At this time, CDC and the WHO have not issued any travel warnings for avian flu-infected areas. However, CDC advises travelers to countries in Asia with documented H5N1 outbreaks to avoid poultry farms, contact with animals in live food markets, and any surfaces that appear to be contaminated with feces from poultry or other animals. CDC advises travelers to clean their hands often with soap and water or waterless alcohol-based hand-rubs to help prevent transmission. In addition, as a precaution, all foods from poultry, including eggs, should be thoroughly cooked. CDC further advises travelers with a febrile respiratory illness returning from countries affected by H5N1 influenza virus to seek prompt medical attention.

"The WHO does not at present conclude that any processed poultry products (whole refrigerated or frozen carcasses and products derived from these) or eggs pose a risk to public health.

"A specific vaccine for humans that is effective against avian influenza has not been developed, however the CDC has suggested that the anti-viral medication oseltamivir (brand name-Tamiflu) may be effective against avian influenza. Tamiflu has not yet been adequately tested for this purpose, so this recommendation is based on limited data. Based on this recommendation, the Department of State has decided to pre-position limited supplies of the drug Tamiflu at its Embassies and Consulates in the Southeast Asian Region for eligible US Government employees and their families serving abroad.

"Tamiflu may not be readily available overseas and the State Department encourages American citizens traveling or living abroad that are interested in obtaining this medication to consult with their physician.

## **VIETNAM MONEY GUIDE**

### **Banking Hours**

Normal banking hours are from 8:00 to 11:30 am and from 1:00 to 4:00 pm Monday through Friday and 8:00 to 11:30 am on Saturday. A few banks in the major metropolitan areas will remain open during lunch hour and on Saturday afternoons and Sundays. Currency is also readily exchanged at official exchange counters at hotels and other retail establishments; the exchange rates are nearly identical to the bank rates.

### **Convertible Currencies**

All major currencies including the sterling, the Yen, the Canadian dollar, the Euro and the U.S. dollar are convertible. The preferred currency is the U.S. dollar. Please note bills which are defaced, torn or simply old are often declined; be sure and bring fresh new bills.

### **Re-conversion upon Departure**

It is illegal to take VND out of the country. Small amounts of VND can be redeemed upon departure at airport kiosks; large amounts require the initial transaction documents.

## Vietnamese Dong

The currency of Vietnam is the "Dong" issued in the following denominations:

500d

1000d

2000d

5000d

10,000d

20,000d

50,000d

100,000d

500,000d.

## Recommended Currency for Spending

Vietnamese Dong. Spending in other currencies, including the USD, often results in "rounding off" to your disadvantage.

## Exchange Rates

Please go to <http://www.oanda.com> for current Dong exchange rates. At the moment of this printing 1USD = 23,500d, and 1 EUR = 26,000d.

## Black Market

It is strongly advised that you exchange your currency only at official currency exchanges; black market rates are less than the official exchange rate.

## Credit Cards

Major credit cards (Visa, Master Charge and to a lesser extent American Express) are finally beginning to find wider usage in Vietnam as more and more establishments accept them; in major cities nearly all major and mid-level hotels, restaurants and major tourist shops now accept credit cards. Except for the higher end hotels most establishments charge a three-percent transaction fee; some establishments charge a five-percent surcharge.

## ATM Machines

ATM machines have arrived in Vietnam. Vietcombank has an expanding network of ATM machines in the major cities of which many are open for 24-hours. The machines currently accept only Visa and Master Charge. The maximum daily withdrawal is two-million VND per transaction with a Vietnam 20,000 VND service charge which is in addition to your bank's charges. A four-digit PIN number is required. Foreign banks are also entering the ATM market. Larger cash advances require a visit to the teller.

## Traveler's Checks

Traveler's checks denominated in most major currencies are accepted in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City but USD is the preferred currency. Traveler's checks issued by Visa, MasterCharge and American Express are the most widely accepted. Outside of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City it is often difficult to redeem traveler's checks. The purchase receipt and the traveler's check numbers should be kept separately from the traveler's checks in the event of loss. A redemption fee of up to four-percent is charged. Passport ID is required for redemption.

Source: [Đặt khách sạn](#)