



2008 PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION GUIDE TO VIETNAM

Thank you for choosing Jetabout Asia Vacations for your journey into Vietnam.

We're sure you'll find the country as beautiful, captivating and intriguing as we do. To assist with your travel arrangements, we have prepared the following pre-departure information. Please read this carefully before your travel to Vietnam and be mindful of some of our suggestions while you are on the road.

On the following pages you will find useful travel facts, background information and our suggestions to make your journey the best it can be. From details on currency and visas to suggested reading and responsible travel tips, we've covered it for you in this pre-departure guide. Please note that things change rapidly in our destinations, so you should use this document as a guide containing information which is subject to change.

What to Expect

Vietnam is a nation of captivating diversity. From north to south you will find 'authentic' Asia - the fertile plains of the Mekong Delta, majestic mountains in the north, classical pagodas and temples, bustling cities and street markets, and the faded elegance of the French colonial era. You will also encounter a nation rich in culture, tradition and history, and people with a refreshing warmth and friendliness unequalled in Southeast Asia; a people who have put the war torn past behind them and are clearly focused on a brighter future.

The travel industry in Vietnam is growing at a rapid pace. While the freshness and novelty of travel within Vietnam is still evident, major cities now offer facilities and services at Western standards. Traveling in the more remote areas of Vietnam will, however, involve travel on bumpy roads, in noisy trains, and overnight stays in clean but basic accommodation.

Whilst traveling through Vietnam please also be prepared for possible changes to tour travel plans. Flight and train schedule changes throughout Vietnam are common and are a reality of traveling through this part of the world.

Money

The official unit of currency in Vietnam is the dong. Approximate exchange rates at the time of printing are:

1USD equals 16,000 dong

1CAD equals 15,000 dong

You are able to bring your home currency in cash or travelers checks (CAD or USD). All international currency, with the exception of US dollars, must be changed into the local currency, the Vietnamese dong. You can pay for goods and services in US dollars or dong, however you will get better value for your money if you use local currency. Most hotels change traveler's checks (with a 1% to 2% commission) and cash at reasonable rates. Credit cards (Visa or MasterCard are the most commonly accepted) can be used in a number shops and restaurants in Ho Chi Minh City, Hue, Hoi An and Hanoi, however they are not always widely accepted outside these cities. Cash advances can be obtained using these cards at the major banks and ATM's in all major cities. Please note if traveling to remote areas of Vietnam it is advisable to carry dong or USD cash.

Climate

Vietnam spans several climatic zones, resulting in substantial weather condition variations between the north and the south. Average temperatures year round range from 20 to 35 degrees Celsius so there is no particularly good or bad time to visit Vietnam.

In southern Vietnam tropical conditions prevail, and there are two seasons - the wet season lasts from May to November and the dry season from December to April. The wet is characterized by high humidity levels and a refreshing afternoon downpour. Humidity in the south during the months of June and July ranges between 75% and 85%. The hottest months are from March to May.

Central Vietnam is usually dry from May to October and wet from December to February.

October and November may experience unstable weather conditions and flooding.

Northern Vietnam also experiences two seasons though conditions can change dramatically throughout the day. The winter months from November to April are usually cold and humid.

The months of December and January can be particularly cool with temperatures as low as 8 degrees Celsius. Temperatures can drop to 0 degrees Celsius in Sapa (in the highlands near the Chinese border) in winter. Summer, from May to October, can be quite hot and wet with regular downpours and occasional typhoons. The hottest months are July and August in Hanoi.

Food

Vietnamese cuisine is diverse and tasty and one of the many highlights of a visit to the country. Most food presented is well cooked, however some optional dishes may be served cold.

Travelers should note that raw, cold food presents a higher risk of stomach upset than well cooked food. Breakfast is included each day on our tours and is usually a mix of buffet and continental style. Lunch should cost around \$US4-10 and dinner approximately \$US6-20, depending on the restaurant. Drinking local tap water is not recommended, even in hotels. Bottled water is readily available throughout Vietnam.

Before You Leave

The Essentials

There are a few things you need to ensure are sorted before departing for your holiday in Asia. Here's some information on your essential pre-departure preparation.

Passport

Ensure you have an eligible passport with extra blank pages for visas, valid for at least six-months from the end of your holiday, and several passport photos.

Visa Requirements

To enter Vietnam you will require a passport (with at least 6 months remaining validity) and a tourist visa. This visa must be obtained prior to arrival. A combined entry/exit and baggage declaration form will be issued to you prior to arrival and one section of this must be retained until your departure from Vietnam.

Please ensure this paper is kept in a safe place while you are in Vietnam. It is your responsibility to ensure all visa and entry requirements are met prior to your arrival in Vietnam.

Please Note: All Vietnam visas are **SINGLE ENTRY** - unless you have specifically requested **MULTIPLE ENTRY** and this is stamped into your passport. Please ensure you have a multiple entry visa if you are entering Vietnam twice. The status of a tourist visa cannot be changed from **SINGLE ENTRY** to **MULTIPLE ENTRY** once a client has arrived in Vietnam.

Airline Tickets

It is your responsibility to reconfirm your airline tickets; some airlines in Asia will not honor your ticket if you haven't rung to reconfirm each individual sector. Ensure you keep your tickets in a safe place whilst traveling.

Travel Insurance

Local medical facilities across developing Asia are often unable to provide the full range of medical services that are available in developed countries, making evacuation a requirement in many non-life threatening medical emergencies. The costs of evacuation as well as international standard care are extremely high. In the most serious emergencies, travelers may not be positioned to authorize payment for an appropriate medical response that is urgently required. This may delay or prevent the provision of critical and possibly life-saving medical attention. It is a condition of travel on Small Group Journeys that all travelers are adequately covered by travel insurance prior to arrival. Insurance should cover personal accident and medical expenses, evacuation and repatriation, baggage loss, and cancellation or curtailment of holiday. Insurance details must be supplied to us at the time of booking, and where they are not provided we reserve the right to cancel bookings and apply charges as per our cancellation policy (in the Conditions of Reservation section of our brochure and on our website). Travelers will be asked to present their insurance details upon arrival in Asia as part of a registration process, and in the event that possession of insurance is unable to be confirmed, in the interests of the traveler and fellow travelers, Travel Indochina reserves the right to prevent participation in the journey. In such instances, we will assist with onward travel arrangements, however full cancellation penalties will apply.

Note that travel insurance 'attached' to credit cards is often limited in scope (eg. not covering serious medical, repatriation or evacuation expenses) and in any case is usually effective only if travel arrangements have been purchased with the card. Please note also that government regulations in Asia do not always require or enforce the possession of liability insurance by hotels, transport and other suppliers.

Even when insurance is in place, it can be for very limited coverage only. Travel Indochina does its best to work with suppliers who possess liability insurance, however it is not always possible to find and contract with such suppliers.

Travelers who book private touring arrangements with Travel Indochina will also be asked to provide insurance details at the commencement of touring, as part of a tour registration process.

Health & Fitness

Travelers to Indochina should take precautions as they would elsewhere in Asia. In remote areas medical facilities can be particularly basic. Some of the diseases known to exist in Indochina include malaria, hepatitis A & B, typhoid, tuberculosis, Japanese encephalitis, dengue fever, diphtheria, tetanus, polio, rabies and HIV/AIDS. We recommend you take adequate preventative measures to minimize your risk of exposure to these health risks. We are a travel company and we are not qualified to provide detailed medical information appropriate to your individual needs; it is recommended you consult with your local doctor or a specialist travel medical centre for current health information on vaccinations and medicines for your trip at least one month prior to departure.

We suggest you bring:

- Aspirin or (for pain or fever)
- Antihistamine (for allergies and itches)
- Cold & flu tablets
- Anti diarrhea medication
- Nausea medication
- Rehydration sachets
- Insect repellent
- Antiseptic & bandages
- Sunscreen & lip balm
- Antibiotics (discuss with your doctor)

As part of our registration process at the start of any trip with Travel Indochina, you will be asked to declare any serious pre-existing medical conditions or allergies.

Time to Pack

Standard-sized bags (preferably soft bags), backpacks or soft cases only are permitted on our journeys. Your baggage should be clearly labeled and kept to a reasonable minimum. Luggage limits on airlines are strictly enforced and space on vehicles and trains is limited. Many flights booked through Travel Indochina (domestic and international) have a luggage limit of 20 kilograms (44 pounds) per person. You may be required to carry your own luggage at times where porters are not available - you should be capable of carrying your own bags on and off trains, and up and down stairs. If you are doing lots of shopping during your travels, it may be necessary for you to forward any excess to the city where your tour concludes, or ship purchases directly home. Keeping the amount of luggage you carry in check will ensure your safety and comfort, and the safety and comfort of your fellow travelers. Porterage is not included in the cost of your journey; please ensure you pay porters around \$1USD per person for carrying your luggage. Should you wish to avoid such payments, please carry and take responsibility for your luggage. Comfortable, casual clothing made of cotton is best in tropical and semi-tropical climates, and packing one set of smart casual clothes is advisable. Laundry services are available throughout Vietnam, although laundry costs in some city hotels can be expensive. We suggest you bring:

- Flat walking shoes & sandals
- Hat & sunglasses
- Swimming attire
- Money belt
- Lightweight waterproof coat or umbrella
- Basic first aid kit (see below)
- Alarm clock
- Small torch (flashlight)
- Power adapter
- Women's sanitary products
- Slide film or any specialized camera equipment (print film is available in main towns)
- Ear plugs
- Day pack - for carrying items on touring days
- Jumper/coat/thermals - if visiting in winter or mountainous high altitude areas

Electricity

The electric current in Vietnam operates mostly on 220 volts but occasionally you will find 110 volt sockets. Electric plug types vary throughout the country, however the two-rounded pin standard Asian plug is usable in most parts of the country.

On the Ground

Safety & Security

Vietnam is generally a safe country; however petty street crime is on the rise as tourist numbers increase. In Ho Chi Minh City we recommend that as little jewellery as possible is worn and that when on the street your spending money is kept close to your body in a secure place. We further recommended that you take taxis rather than cyclos at night. Taxis are metered and inexpensive. Carry a hotel card so that you can show your taxi driver where you want to go. You should leave valuables in hotel safety deposit boxes at all times and carry photocopies of your passport, credit card numbers, and airline tickets, and keep a record of your encashed traveler's checks. These papers should be kept in a safe place separate from the originals.

Photography

Print film is widely available and of good quality at \$US3 to \$US4 per roll. Vietnam has good, fast, and inexpensive film processing facilities. Slide films and Hi8/V8 video cassettes are not widely available outside Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. X-ray machines at airports are film safe.

Swimming

Swimming at the many beaches and bays in Vietnam is usually safe. On occasion jellyfish can be found in the waters around Vietnam, the most likely time of year they are present is during the months of June through to August in the north, and during the months of August and September in the south. Swimming can still be enjoyed during these months, however please be aware and exercise some caution.

Maps & Guides

Travel Indochina has put together destination-specific City Maps & Guides for many of our favorite destinations in Vietnam. These guides provide up-to-date information on local sights, an excellent range of quality restaurants and shops, and contact information for our offices, airlines and emergency information. You will receive these on arrival, where available.

Respecting Local Customs

Service levels in Indochina are more relaxed than those in more established travel destinations; it is best to treat this as a cultural nuance and to enjoy the ride. People are generally honest

and eager to please; however, miscommunication can often occur due to language and cultural barriers. Showing anger is never a good idea in Vietnam; it will not assist you in achieving your goal and will cause you to 'lose face.' Exercising patience, tolerance and good humor is therefore essential. Remember, you are the visitor – local customs is not only polite, but will also lead to a more rewarding travel experience for you.

Tipping

Tipping is an expected, though not compulsory, component of our holidays. If you are happy with the services provided by your guides, drivers and leaders, a tip is appropriate. While tipping may or may not be customary to your culture at home, it is an entrenched feature in the tourism industry across Asia. On Small Group Journeys, a suggested guideline is \$2USD - \$3USD per day, per person, to each your local guide, driver and tour leader if you are satisfied with their services. On independent holidays we suggest \$3USD - \$5USD per day, per person, to each your local guide and driver as a guideline. Should you be dissatisfied with the services provided, please let us know.

Massage Centers

Vietnam is renowned for its massage techniques and the quality and value for money of these services. Unfortunately, many massage parlors (even in otherwise reputable hotels) are also linked to the paid-sex industry. We advise you to check carefully before using massage services in Asia.

Shopping

Vietnam is fast becoming known as a "shopper's paradise". Ceramics, lacquer ware, bamboo, silk and embroidery are just some of the many good buys. Many travelers also have clothes tailored due to the low prices - standards vary. A few guidelines to follow when shopping:

- Except in department stores, bargaining is the norm. To get the best price you will have to haggle hard.
- Export of certain antiques is not permitted. Make sure you are aware of relevant regulations before purchasing.
- Fake reproductions are common. Make sure you know what you are buying, especially in the case of antiques.

Local Time

Vietnam is:

- 7hrs ahead of GMT
- 3hrs behind Australian Eastern Standard Time
- 5hrs behind New Zealand
- 12hrs ahead of Canada Eastern Time
- 15hrs ahead of Canada Pacific Time
- 12hrs ahead of US Eastern Time
- 15 hrs ahead of US Pacific Time

Important dates

01 Jan 2008 - International New Year's Day:

Banks and public offices will be closed, as will some businesses. Road traffic will likely be heavy in the evening in Ho Chi Minh City.

6 Feb 2008 - Lunar New Year's Eve:

Road traffic is likely to be heavy in the evening in Ho Chi Minh City.

- Compulsory dinner charge levied by the Victoria in Sapa, Hoi An, Phan Thiet, Can Tho and Chau Doc at USD 30.00/pax.

- Compulsory dinner charge levied by the Majestic Hotel in Saigon at USD76.00/pax

7 Feb - 11 Feb - 2008 - Lunar New Year:

Banks and public offices will be closed, as will most businesses. Re-unification Palace will be closed on New Year's Eve. Cao Dai Temples (including the temple in Tay Ninh) will be closed 6 days before the Lunar New Year. Floating Markets in the Mekong Delta will not operate. Factories will not operate.

15 Apr 2008 - Anniversary of Hung Kings:

Public holiday. Banks and public offices will be closed, as will some businesses. Road traffic is likely to be heavy in the evening in Ho Chi Minh City.

30 Apr 2008 - Independence Day:

Public holiday. Banks and public offices will be closed, as will some businesses. Road traffic is likely to be heavy in the evening in Ho Chi Minh City.

01 May 2008 - Labor Day:

Banks and public offices will be closed, as will some businesses. Road traffic is likely to be heavy in the evening in Ho Chi Minh City.

02 Sep 2008 - National Day:

Banks and public offices will be closed, as will some businesses. Road traffic is likely to be heavy in the evening in Ho Chi Minh City.

24 Dec 2008 - Christmas Eve:

Not a public holiday.

- Compulsory dinner charge levied by the Victoria in Sapa, Hoi An, Phan Thiet, Can Tho and Chau Doc at USD 55.00/pax.

- Compulsory dinner charge levied by the Novotel Ocean Dunes in Phan Thiet at USD 69.00/pax

- Compulsory dinner charge levied by the Hoi An Hotel in Hoi An at USD 20.00/pax.

- Compulsory dinner charge levied by the Hoi An Beach Resort in Hoi An at USD 25.00/pax.

- Compulsory dinner charge levied by the Life Heritage Resort Hoi An at USD 35.00/pax.

- Compulsory dinner charge levied by the Ana Mandara Resort Nha Trang at USD 80.00/pax.

- Compulsory dinner charge levied by the La Residence Hotel and Spa Hue TBA.

- Compulsory dinner charge levied by the Majestic Hotel in Saigon at USD89.00++/pax

31 Dec 2008 - International New Year's Eve:

Not a public holiday. Road traffic will likely be heavy in the evening in Ho Chi Minh City.

- Compulsory dinner charge levied by the Victoria in Sapa, Hoi An, Phan Thiet, Can Tho and Chau Doc at USD 65.00/pax.

- Compulsory dinner charge levied by the Novotel Ocean Dunes in Phan Thiet at USD 89.00/pax.

- Compulsory dinner charge levied by the Hoi An Hotel in Hoi An at USD 25.00/pax.

- Compulsory dinner charge levied by the Hoi An Beach Resort in Hoi An at USD 30.00/pax.

- Compulsory dinner charge levied by the Life Heritage Resort Hoi An at USD 40.00/pax.

- Compulsory dinner charge levied by the Ana Mandara Resort Nha Trang at USD 80.00/pax.

- Compulsory dinner charge levied by the La Residence Hotel and Spa Hue TBA.
- Compulsory dinner charge levied by the Majestic Hotel in Saigon at USD89.00++/pax

Language

The Vietnamese language is derived from Latin characters with a range of tones. English is widely spoken throughout the country, especially in tourist areas.

GROUND OPERATOR CONTACT DETAILS

The ground operator taking you through this fascinating part of the world is **Travel Indochina**. Travel Indochina has been running tours to Asia since 1993, and offers unique, innovative and exciting itineraries that allow you to experience the best a destination has to offer as well as giving you plenty of free time to explore.

TRAVEL INDOCHINA (VIETNAM)

Suite 1308, Me Linh Point Tower

2 Ngo Duc Ke St, District 1

Ho Chi Minh City

Vietnam

Tel: +84 8 8227390 (from outside Vietnam)

Fax: +84 8 8227395 (from outside Vietnam)

Email: travelsupport@travelindochina.com

Mobile: 0903 724206 or 0903 743680 or, if in Hanoi, 0904 037 889