

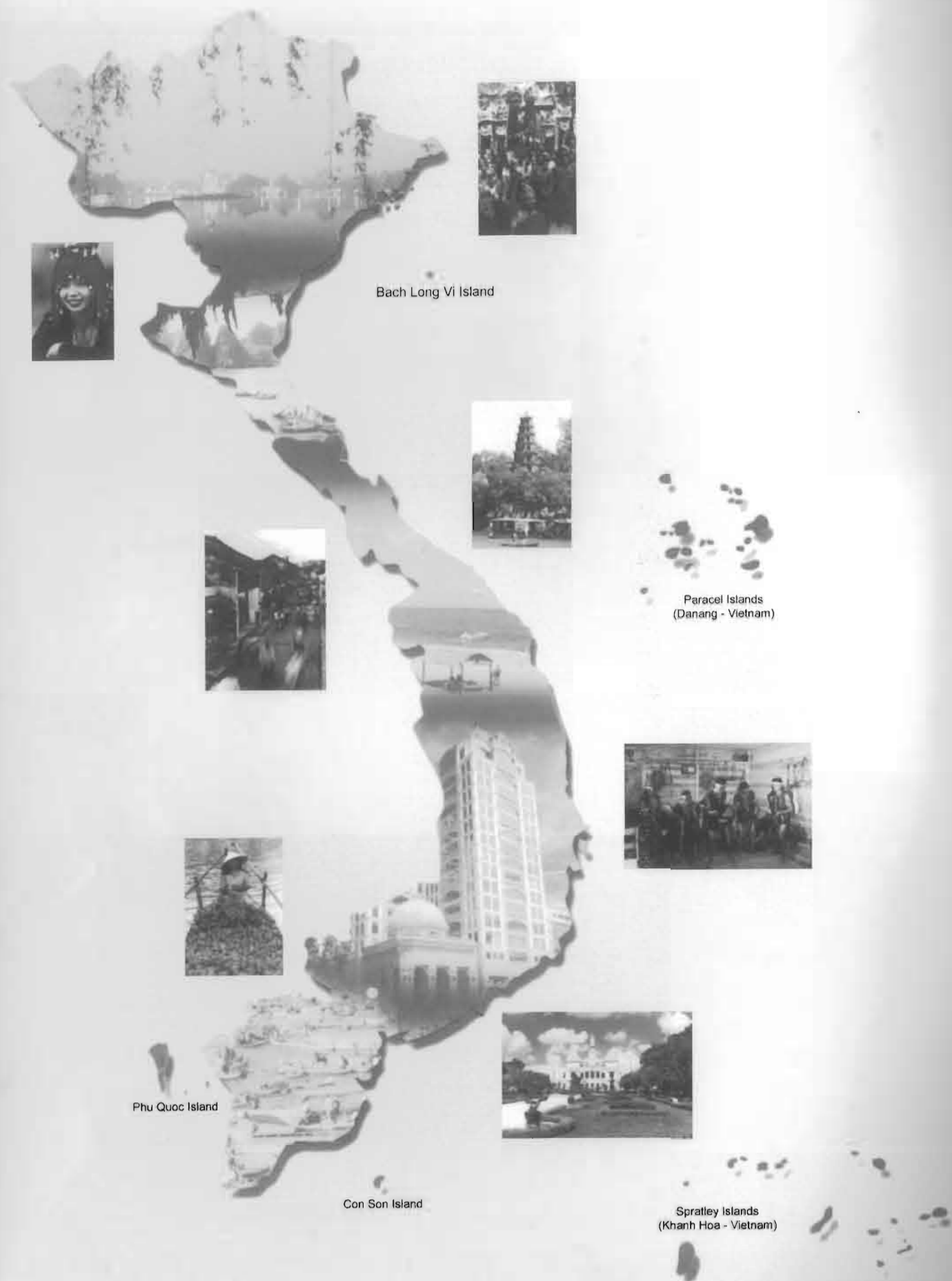
VIETNAM A DESTINATION FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

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My Son Cham Towers, Quang Nam Province



Halong Bay, Quang Ninh Province



Fish sauce making
in Phan Thiet

Geography

Vietnam is among the most beautiful countries in Asia. It lies between China at the north border, Laos and Cambodia at the west borders, and the East Sea and Pacific Ocean at the east and south border. It occupies a very central position in the middle of Southeast Asia and constitutes a bridge linking Southeast Asia's mainland together. Vietnam's territory stretches from Lung Cu Village (Ha Giang Province) in the north to Rach Tau Village (Ca Mau Province) in the south. The country's total length is 1,650km from the northernmost point to the southernmost. Besides, it has thousands of offshore islands, the biggest of which are the Hoang Sa (Paracel) and Truong Sa (Spratley) Archipelagos. Vietnam's mainland covers 329,241 sq km. Its coastline is 3,260km long and its inland borderline stretches on 4,510km.

Climate

Vietnam lies in the East Asian monsoon zone and its tropical climate is determined by two monsoons. The rainy season lasts from May to October and the dry season lasts from November to April. The average temperature in the north is around 13°C to 17°C with occasional drizzling rains, during the winter, and it ranges from 27°C to 34°C during the summer. In the south of Vietnam, the climate undergoes less variation with an average annual temperature of about 27°C in Ho Chi Minh City.

Topography

Three quarters of Vietnam's territory consists of mountainous regions. Vietnam has two major deltas (the Red River Delta and the Mekong Delta), and four distinctive mountainous zones with unique features.

People

The Vietnamese population exceeds 76.5 million (according to 1999 census) and is made up of 54 ethnic groups. The largest group is the Viet, or Kinh, accounting for 80% of the whole population. They generally concentrate in the lowlands, while other minorities live in the highlands and the mountains.

Religion

There is no official religion in Vietnam, but Buddhism is relatively popular. Besides, most Vietnamese worship their ancestors. There are religions more specific to the southern regions of the country such as the Caodai Sect, the Hoa Hao Sect, and Islam. Some of the Catholic churches and Buddhist pagodas constitute interesting tourist attractions.



Grave house in the Central Highlands

VIETNAM



One pillar Pagoda in Hanoi



President Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum



Drum performance at the Temple of Literature, Hanoi

Economy

Vietnam is basically an agricultural country. Rice is the main culture, but additional crops include potato, manioc, and soybean. From 1980 to 1985, the Vietnamese economy experienced a serious crisis. To face this situation, the Sixth Vietnamese Communist Party Congress (1986) defined the *Doi Moi* politic, which marked an historical turning point in the edification and developing process of the country.

After more than 15 years of economic reform, Vietnam has obtained major successes and significant improvements. The economical structure experienced a lot of changes. The rate of the economic growth has increased and several essential standards have been reached. The young industry is prospering. Vietnam's tourism is developing as well, according to the country's huge potential. Emphasis is now put on scientific activities and the production needs are readjusted to fit this new model of economy, controlled by the state and with a socialist orientation. One of the contributing factors to the economic development of Vietnam in recent years is the Law on Foreign Investment. Vietnam is now carrying out an open-door policy to join the international market and become an industrialised and modernised country before the year 2020.



My Thuan Bridge in Tien Giang Province



Dragon dance

History

Vietnam is a nation with thousand years of a glorious history. Archaeological artefacts of the Phung Nguyen, Dong Dau, Go Mun, and Dong Son cultures, especially the Ngoc Lu bronze drums have proved that Vietnam sheltered a developed civilisation even before Christ (Dong Son culture). Besides, the vestiges of the historic period of the Hung Kings have revealed that Vietnam was one of the first countries to be formed.

Vietnam's history can be divided into three main periods:

- Northern Kingdom's domination (208 BC-939 AD): This period lasted 1,000 years and was one of the fiercest period of hardship experienced by the different tribal people in Vietnam's history.
- National construction and defence for independence (939-1945): This period was a brilliant era of national revival and development. It was marked by the glorious victory of the Vietnamese people against the aggressors.
- National independence and socialism (1945 until nowadays): The revolution succeeded in August 1945 under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnamese Communist Party. The country proclaimed its independence on September 2, a date that later became Vietnam's National Day. During the following 30 years, the Vietnamese people continued to resist and protect their independence. Vietnam has been unified since the great victory over the Americans in spring 1975. The Socialist Republic of Vietnam was proclaimed, with Hanoi as its capital.

Culture

The Vietnamese culture, endowed with a long and rich heritage, is deeply stamped with national pride. Famous ancient cultures included the Nui Do culture, followed by the Son Vi culture, founded over 10,000 years ago, then by the Hoa Binh-Bac Son culture and the flourishing Dong Son culture, which was closely related to the Red River and wet rice civilisation (in the North); the Sa Huynh culture, related to the Cham people (in the Centre); and the Oc Eo culture of Phu Nam State (in the South).

Despite of all historical contingencies, there are still thousands of preserved historic and cultural sites over Vietnam, from which nearly 3,000 have been listed as national heritage sites. These relics are concentrated mainly in Hanoi and Hue. For example, the relics of the Hung Kings in Phong Chau (Phu Tho Province) date back to the period of the formation of the country. There are also the Co Loa Citadel of the Au Lac State, the ancient capital of Hoa Lu, and the My Son Cham Towers in the Central region.

Vietnam has its own language and writing. The national identity is made up of the 54 ethnic minorities living together in the country. This diversity has produced a lot of traditional arts which have been developing for thousands of years. Specific features of Vietnam are likewise reflected in other cultural tokens such as legends, festivals, traditional theatre (Cheo, Tuong, Cai Luong, Quan Ho), water puppetry, music, dances and customs (funerals and weddings, habit of chewing betel and areca, etc.).



Sap dance



Quan Ho singing in Lim Festival, Bac Ninh Province



Young girls in the Far North

Traditional Arts

Cheo (popular opera)

Cheo, or popular opera, originates from the Red River Delta. The most typical form of popular opera is clowning, in which the clowns make the audience burst out in tears one minute and laugh heartily the next.

Tuong (classical opera)

Tuong started in the 17th century and became very popular in the 18th century. *Tuong* stages royal and imaginative characters and it is more commonly performed in the Central and Southern provinces.

Cai Luong (reformed opera)

In this stage performance, the characters' thoughts are often expressed in songs. "Ca Cai Luong" means that singing plays an important role in the performance. *Cai Luong* is commonly performed in the Mekong River Delta.

Water puppet show

This original form of art originates from rural festivals in Vietnam. The ponds and lakes of the villages become lively stages for water puppet shows. All puppets are handled by hand and a live musical band accompanies their movements on the water.

Quan Ho Folk Songs

Quan Ho folk songs originate from the province of Bac Ninh, north of Hanoi, where traditional village festivals are held every year. These songs are performed by groups of young men and women, who sing alternately in outdoors settings, such as the yard of a communal house, a pagoda on a hill, or a rowboat.



Tuong performance



Water puppets



Le Mat Village Festival, Hanoi



Traditional hat dance



Marriage proposal in the Central Highlands

Traditional Festivals

Festivals

Participating in Vietnamese festivals is the best way to experience the culture and tradition of the country. These festivals are an expression of a truly distinct culture accessible and close to all. The following dates are all based on the Vietnamese lunar calendar.

The 1st lunar month:

- 1st day: Traditional New Year (often falls between late January and early February).
- 4th-5th day: Traditional wrestling in Lieu Doi Village, in Ha Nam Province.
- 5th day: Dong Da Victory Festival in memory of King Quang Trung who defeated Chinese invaders (Hanoi).
- 6th day: Co Loa Festival in memory of King An Duong Vuong who built the oyster-shell-shaped citadel in Dong Anh, Hanoi.
- 12th day: Cau Ngu Festival, in Huong Hai Commune, in Thua Thien Hue Province.
- 13th day: Lim Folk Song Festival in Bac Ninh Province.

The 2nd lunar month:

- 6th day: Dong Nhan Temple Festival in memory of two heroines, Trung Trac and Trung Nhi (Hanoi).
- 10th day: Chu Dong Tu Temple Festival (Hung Yen Province) in memory of Saint Chu Dong Tu and his two wives, who cured people and developed the agriculture.
- 15th day: Ba Den's Festival in Tay Ninh.
- 19th day: Quan The Am Festival, a Buddhist festival celebrating the birth anniversary of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara (Danang).



Huong Pagoda Festival in Ha Tay Province



Vinh Nghiem Pagoda in Ho Chi Minh City

The 3rd lunar month

- 6th day: Tay Phuong Pagoda Pilgrimage (Ha Tay Province).
- 7th day: Thay Pagoda Pilgrimage (Ha Tay Province).
- 8th day: Phu Day Festival in memory of Princess Lieu Hanh – one of the four immortal persons in the souls of Vietnamese (Nam Dinh).
- 8th to 10th day: Truong Yen Festival in several temples of Ninh Binh Province.
- 10th day: Hung Kings' Festival in memory of the first kings of Vietnam (Phu Tho).
- 20th to 23rd day: Po Nagar Festival in Nha Trang, in Khanh Hoa Province.
- 23rd day: Le Mat Village Festival in Gia Lam (Hanoi).

Spring Festival

From 1st to the 3rd lunar month:

- Perfume Pagoda (Chua Huong) Pilgrimage Festival (Ha Tay Province)

From the 1st to the 3rd lunar month:

- Yen Tu Festival, in Quang Ninh Province.
- 2nd lunar month: Hon Chen Temple Festival (Hue) dedicated to Thien Y Ana Thanh Mau.
- 2nd or 3rd lunar month: Elephant Race Festival in Buon Don, in Dak Lak Province.

The 4th lunar month

- 8th day: Giong Festival, in memory of the mythical hero of Giong village (Gia Lam, Hanoi).
- 10th day: Trang Temple Festival, in Haiphong.
- 24th to 27th day: Ba Chua Xu Temple Festival on Sam Mountain, in An Giang Province.

The 7th lunar month

- 1st day: (according to the Cham calendar) Kate Festival, celebrated by the Cham in Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan Province.
- 30th day: Le Van Duyet Festival in Ho Chi Minh City.

The 8th lunar month

- 15th day: Mid-Autumn Festival.
- 16th to 20th day: Festival in Kiep Bac in memory of national hero Tran Hung Dao in Hai Duong Province.
- 16th to 20th day: Festival held in Con Son in memory of Nguyen Trai, also a national hero (Hai Duong Province).
- 20th day: Tran Temple Festival in memory of the Tran Kings and national hero General Tran Hung Dao (Nam Dinh Province).
- Lam Kinh Festival in Thanh Hoa Province.

The 9th lunar month

- 13th day: Keo Pagoda Pilgrimage in Thai Binh Province.

The 10th lunar month

- 15th day: Lantern Festival celebrated by the Khmer population in the south-west of Vietnam, in honour of the moon in Soc Trang Province.

The 11th lunar month

- 28th day: Nguyen Binh Khiem Festival, in Haiphong.

The 12th lunar month

- 15th day: Ca Ong Festival in Khanh Hoa Province.
- 26th to 27th day: Dau Festival in Ha Tay Province.

Fine Arts and Handicrafts

Fine Arts

Dong Ho painting: Annually, the Ho village's population makes paintings for the New Year. This type of folk painting reflects the population's utmost wishes for peace, happiness and prosperity.

Silk paintings: For this sophisticated style of painting, silk is used as a canvas. Paint or natural ink is used for drawing.

Lacquerware painting: Even though lacquer was used a long time before, it became part of the fine arts as a painting discipline in Vietnam at the beginning of the 20th century, thanks to talented artists. It is still very popular today.

Ceramics: Different regions have various kinds of ceramics. The traditional ceramics come from Bat Trang, a village outside of Hanoi. The quality and artistry of the handmade drawings are superb.

Handicraft

Vietnamese art and craft articles have been displayed in many international fairs. Articles made of lacquer, rattan, bamboo, and palm, are quite popular. Vietnamese are also experts in making articles out of wood, animal hide and horns, tortoise and oyster shells. Other items such as embroidered articles, objects inlaid with mother-of-pearl, ceramics, gold and silver jewels, and paintings are also very popular. These can be purchased in shops or enterprises.



Dong Ho painting



Drying out silk cloth in Van Phuc Village, Ha Tay Province



A mask Shop



Chuong conical hats in Ha Tay Province



An artisan fashioning folk toys

Hanoi and Around

Hanoi is the capital of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, as well as the cultural, political, economic and commercial centre of the whole country. The city was first named Thang Long ("Soaring Dragon") by King Ly Thai To in 1010. Hanoi has been the capital of Vietnam ever since, except for one short period of time.

Hanoi still preserves almost 600 pagodas and temples, as well as numerous busy streets with an old architecture. So, despite the addition of very modern buildings, the city keeps its poetical features, with streets lined with long rows of secular trees, large parks covering dozens of hectares and numerous lakes.

In Hanoi, tourists can visit Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum, the One-Pillar Pagoda, the Co Loa Citadel, the Temple of Literature-Quoc Tu Giam (the first university in Vietnam), the Quan Su Pagoda (Ambassadors' Pagoda) considered as the official learning centre of Buddhism, Thong Nhat Park and Thu Le Park, Hoan Kiem Lake and West Lake. Tourists can also make themselves acquainted with Vietnamese culture by visiting the History Museum, the Revolutionary Museum, the Army Museum, and the Museum of Fine Arts. Tourists can also visit some other interesting places close to Hanoi: Tay Pagoda and Tay Phuong Pagoda located in Ha Tay Province as well as Tam Coc - Bich Dong in Ninh Binh Province, and so much more.

Some places of interest around Hanoi

Ha Tay: Huong, Thay, and Tay Phuong Pagodas, as well as Dong Mo Golf Course

Phu Tho: Hung Temple, Ao Chau Pond

Vinh Phuc: Tam Dao Resort, Dai Lai Lake

Bac Ninh: Dau Pagoda, Dinh Bang Communal House, and Tho Ha Ceramic Village

Bac Giang: Suoi Mo Waterfall, Khuon Than Tourist Area.

Hung Yen: Hien Ancient Street

Hai Duong: Con Son Historical Area, Kiep Bac Temple

Ha Nam: Ngu Dong Son Grottoes, Ba Danh Pagoda, Long Doi Pagoda

Nam Dinh: Pho Minh Temples, Phu Day Relics, Tran Kings Temple

Thai Binh: Keo Pagoda, Bach Thuan Garden, Dong Chau Beach

Ninh Binh: Tam Coc - Bich Dong, Phat Diem Church, Dinh - Le Temples

Hoa Binh: Mai Chau Valley, Kim Boi Hot Springs



Thuy Dinh Pavilion in Thay Pagoda, Ha Tay Province



The Huc Bridge at Hoan Kiem Lake, Hanoi



Ho Tay Water Park, Hanoi



Hoa Lu in Ninh Binh Province



Phu Day Festival in Nam Dinh Province

Halong - Haiphong - Cat Ba



A resort in Halong, Quang Ninh Province



Do Son Town, Haiphong



Cat Ba Island, Haiphong



Halong Bay, Quang Ninh Province



Bo Nau Grotto in Halong Bay

Halong Bay: Listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site, the bay is one of the most magnificent places of interest in Vietnam. Belonging to Quang Ninh Province, approximately 180km from Hanoi, it covers an area of 1,500 sq. km with thousands of islands and grottoes rising from the clear, emerald waters of the Bac Bo Gulf. One can spend a day trip on a boat contemplating this enchanting landscape and bathing in the sea. In the year 2000, Halong Bay has been recognised as a World Heritage for the second time for its geological value.

Haiphong: Located 102km from Hanoi, Haiphong is the second biggest port of Vietnam. It is another industrial and commercial hub in the north after Hanoi. From Haiphong, tourists can take a boat trip to the islands of Cat Ba or to Halong Bay.

Cat Ba: Cat Ba Archipelago is a very popular tourist area, 80km from Haiphong. The archipelago includes 366 islets offering many beautiful beaches and unusually shaped grottoes. Cat Ba Island is the largest island of the archipelago. Tourists can explore primeval forests and grottoes or just relax on the beach.

Some places of interest

Quang Ninh: Thien Cung, Dau Go, Trinh Nu Grottoes, Halong City, Cua Ong Pagoda, Yen Tu Mountain.

Haiphong: Do Son Beach, Du Hang Pagoda, Hang Kenh Communal House.

Cat Ba: Cat Co Beach, Cat Ba Island and National Park.

HUE - HOI AN - MY SON

World Heritage Sites

Hue: Vietnam's ancient imperial capital has been recently recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. Hue is famous for its imperial architectural treasures that include the royal citadel, palaces, tombs, pagodas and shrines, all located in astonishing natural landscapes on both sides of the Huong River.

From Hue, tourists can take sightseeing tours to the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the underground tunnels of Vinh Moc located at the 17th parallel, among other historical sites.

Hoi An: Located 30km south of Danang by the Thu Bon River, the town was known as Faifo to early Western merchants. It was a major trading centre in Southeast Asia between the 16th and 17th centuries (later supplanted by Danang), welcoming Dutch, Portuguese, Italian, Chinese, Japanese and merchant vessels from the Far East.

In the town, several streets have been kept relatively intact. All the houses were made of wood, and decorated with horizontal lacquered boards and vertical parallel panels engraved with Chinese characters. Pillars were engraved with ornamental designs. Hoi An has been recognised by UNESCO as a World Cultural Heritage Site.



Khai Dinh's Tomb in Hue



An ancient street in Hoi An Town



My Son Cham Towers in Quang Nam Province



Hue's Citadel



Roofs of Hoi An, Quang Nam Province

My Son: My Son Site lies in a valley located approximately 10km west of Tra Kieu, 70km south west of Danang. It features several temples, among which is the largest temple of the Champa Kingdom, and more than 70 structures of different architectural styles. They were built of brick and stone between the 7th and the 14th centuries. My Son has been compared with other famous sites of Southeast Asia such as Angkor, Borobudur, Pagan.

The main temples are devoted to Indian Gods, like Shiva, who were the protectors of the Cham Kings. People also worship the spirit of Bhadresvara, who founded the first dynasty of Emperors of the Amavarati region. Along with Hoi An, My Son have been declared by UNESCO as a World Cultural Heritage Site.

Some places of interest

Hue: Hue Citadel, Thien Mu Pagoda, Hon Chen Temple, Perfume River, seven Royal Tombs of the Nguyen Dynasty, Lang Co Fishing Village.

Hoi An: Old streets and pagodas, Cua Dai Beach.

My Son: Cham Towers, Chien Dan Tower, Tra Kieu Citadel.

NHA TRANG - DALAT



Dalat



Xuan Huong Lake in Dalat

Some places of interest

Nha Trang: Po Nagar Towers, Hon Chong Promontory, Nha Trang Beach, Long Son Pagoda, Tri Nguyen Aquarium, Pasteur Institute, Van Phong Bay, and Oceanographic Institute.

Dalat: Xuan Huong Lake, Bao Dai King's Palace, Valley of Love, Prenn Waterfall, Linh Son Pagoda, Kohos Tribe Village, Dalat Market, and Dalat Flower Park.

Nha Trang: The southern central coast offers the most beautiful beaches in Vietnam. The turquoise waters around Nha Trang are clean and transparent, so it is a great place for fishing, snorkelling, and scuba diving.

While in Nha Trang, tourists should visit the Po Nagar Cham Towers, which originally consisted of eight towers built between the 7th and 12th centuries and from which only four remain. Tourists may also admire the Hon Chong Promontory, a scenic collection of granite rocks that jut out over the East Sea. Another pleasant trip is a boat cruise to the offshore islands.

Dalat: Dalat, in the Lam Dong Province, is a romantic city located on a plateau 1,500m above sea level. Due to its relatively high altitude, Dalat benefits from a cool climate all the year round, with an annual average temperature of 18°C. Dalat displays very beautiful natural landscapes with several waterfalls, a wide variety of gardens, and numerous lakes and forests.



On the beach in Nha Trang



Hon Chong promontory in Nha Trang

Vung Tau - Con Dao

Vung Tau: This scenic bay, outlined by a small curved peninsula, lies 125km south-east of Ho Chi Minh City. Vung Tau is a popular weekend getaway that can be reached by hydrofoil from Ho Chi Minh City. Vung Tau offers attractive beaches and delicious seafood.

Con Dao: Con Dao is an archipelago comprising 16 islets, about 180km offshore Vung Tau City. In the past, the largest island was home to a prison. Nowadays, it has a great tourism potential with several historical sights, scenic spots and nice beaches.

Some places of interest

Vung Tau: Beaches, Thich Ca Phat Dai, Niet Ban Tinh Xa, Bach Dinh, Binh Chau Hot Springs, Quan The Am Bo Tat Pagoda, Dinh Co Landscape

Con Dao: Con Dao National Park, Hon Ba Peak, Hon Cau, Hon Tre, Hang Duong Cemetery, Con Dao Prison.



A pristine beach of Con Dao Island

Ha Tien - Phu Quoc



Father and Son Rocks in Ha Tien, Kien Giang Province



Round boats in Phu Quoc, Kien Giang Province

Ha Tien: Ha Tien is located in the province of Kien Giang, 93km from Rach Gia. The scenic beauties of Ha Tien are different from place to place offering very attractive wild landscapes. Ha Tien is also endowed with famous beautiful beaches: Mui Nai Beach, Bai Duong Beach, and more. It is said that Ha Tien is a beautiful and romantic tourist area.

Phu Quoc: The island of Phu Quoc is well known for its jade-related richness and for its idyllic location. The holidaymakers can bathe in the sea, rivers, and streams. They can also do some treks in the mountains or in the forests and explore caves. Phu Quoc Island possesses all the ideal features to fulfil tourists' needs.

Some places of interest

Ha Tien: Dong Ho, Thach Dong, Hang Pagoda, Phu Tu Island, Tien Cave, Mo So Cave, and several beaches like Mui Nai, Bai Duong.

Phu Quoc: Bai Truong, Bai Dau, Ghenh Rau Beaches, Hon Tre, Tho Chau Archipelago, Hai Tac Archipelago, Doi Cave, Chanh Stream.

Ho Chi Minh City and Around



Thong Nhat Conference Hall in Ho Chi Minh City

Ho Chi Minh City, formerly called Saigon, lies between the Mekong River Delta and eastern Nam Bo, the south-eastern part of the country. Over the past centuries, Saigon was known as an important trading centre for Chinese, Japanese, and Western merchants, who travelled upstream the Saigon River to Pho Island. Saigon was then praised as the "Pearl of the Far East".

Ho Chi Minh City is now the biggest city in Vietnam. Its population is of approximately five million people. It is not only a commercial centre, but also a scientific, technological, industrial, and tourist one. The city comprises many large hotels offering a wide variety of services.

Tourists will enjoy visiting the Nha Rong Wharf, the Reunification Hall, the War Museum, Cu Chi tunnels (200km network of tunnels), Giac Lam Pagoda (the oldest pagoda in the city), Giac Vien Pagoda located next to the Dam Sen Lake, the Jade Emperor Pagoda built in 1900 by the Cantonese Congregation, Notre Dame Cathedral, which was built between 1877 and 1883 in neo-Romanesque style, as well as many other sights and tourist attractions.

Some places of interest around Ho Chi Minh City

Tay Ninh: Cao Dai Temple, Ba Den Mountain

Dong Nai: Long An Lake, Cat Tien National Park, Long Hai Beach.



Nha Rong Wharf in Ho Chi Minh City



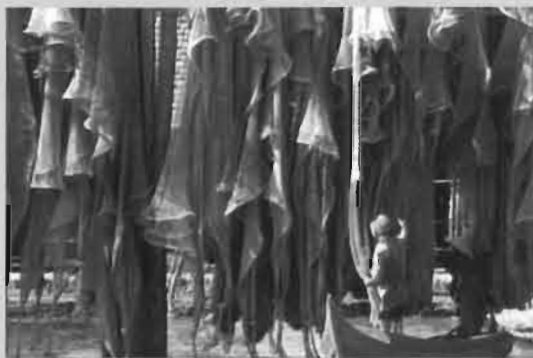
Cu Chi Tunnels in Cu Chi District, near Ho Chi Minh City



Cao Dai Temple in Tay Ninh Province



Ben Thanh Market, Ho Chi Minh City



Drying Fishing-nets in the Mekong Delta

From Ho Chi Minh City, tourists can visit the Mekong Delta, which is criss-crossed by a dense network of canals, is fertile and excellent for the cultivation of rice and growing fruit trees. The Mekong River Delta is much appreciated by those interested in ecological tourism.

Mekong Delta: Ton Thanh Pagoda (Long An), Phung Island (Ben Tre), Ninh Kieu Wharf (Can Tho), Thoi Son Island (Tien Giang), Cai Be Floating Market (Tien Giang), Vinh Trang Pagoda (Tien Giang), Tomb of President Ho Chi Minh's Father (Dong Thap), Thap Muoi Stork Sanctuary (Dong Thap), Tam Nong Crane reserve (Dong Thap), Orchards (Dong Thap), Sam Mountain (An Giang), Tay An Pagoda (An Giang), Tomb of Thoai Ngoc Hau (An Giang), Phu Quoc Island (Kien Giang), Ha Tien (Kien Giang), Dong Ho (Kien Giang), Tourism Garden (Vinh Long), Ba Om Pond (Tra Vinh), Ba Dong Beach (Tra Vinh), Doi Pagoda (Soc Trang), U Minh Forest (Ca Mau), Bac Lieu Bird Sanctuary (Bac Lieu).



Sa Dec Flower Garden, Dong Thap Province

Mekong Delta



Tam Nong Crane reserve in Dong Thap Province



A canal in the Mekong Delta



Flowers in Sa Dec, Dong Thap Province



Floating Market in Mekong Delta

Vietnamese Cuisine - Fruits - Flowers



Peach flowers

Cuisine

Visitors often notice that Vietnamese food is very healthy. It is mainly based on rice and noodles. The palatable recipes are handed from generation to generation. Delicious bowls of noodle soup with vegetables and meat (pho), fresh rice pancakes (banh cuon) with a tasty sauce, hot grilled chopped fish accompanied by a small cup of rice wine, snails with ginger, green sticky rice (com) in lotus leaves... All these specialities that give you a taste of Vietnam!



Flowers for Tet Holiday



Yellow apricot flowers



Green rice (Com) cake



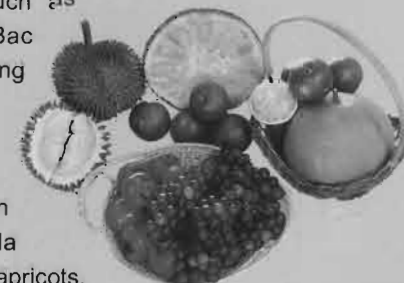
Hue's imperial cuisine

Fruits and Vegetables

Vietnam is located in a tropical zone, with abundant rainfalls and a high level of humidity. This results in a diversified ecological and agricultural area producing manifold fruits and vegetables, which are rich in flavours and colours. Vietnam counts over 130 species of fruit-trees. The tropical zone trees produce bananas, coconuts, mangoes, papayas, litchis, longans, and oranges. The temperate zone trees produce apricots, plums, peaches, pears, and more.

There are some well known fruits coming from different parts of the country such as

Sapa peaches, Bac Ha plums, Trung Khanh chestnuts, Doan Hung pomelos, Bo Ha oranges, Hung Yen longans, Thanh Ha litchis, Huong Tich apricots, Ninh Thuan cashews and Thap Cham grapes.



Tropical fruits

Visas

Most visitors to Vietnam need a visa to enter the country (except for citizens of countries that signed an agreement of visa exemption with Vietnam). For now, tourist visas can only be obtained in Vietnamese embassies, consulates abroad, or at the first point of entry to Vietnam. To secure a visa to Vietnam, the applicant is requested to submit: the original passport, 2 copies of the application forms, 2 passport-sized photos, and visa fee.

Tourist visa: They are generally valid for thirty days

Visa extension: Travel agencies offer this service.

Customs

On arrival in Vietnam, the customs inspection is usually pretty fast now.

When entering Vietnam visitors will be asked to fill out a form declaring all electronic equipment, jewellery, camera equipment and other valuables (except for the persons exempted by Vietnamese law). Amounts of money exceeding US\$3,000 must also be declared on the customs forms upon arrival. Visitors cannot bring more than 1,000g of gold into Vietnam.

When leaving Vietnam, quantities exceeding 300g of gold must be declared unless the holder has permission from the Director of the State Bank. The exportation of antiques is restricted by Vietnamese law.



Terraced fields in the Far North



Northwestern minority girl

Discover Vietnam

General Information

Vietnam time: GMT plus 7 hours

Office Hours

All Government offices are open from 7.30 am to 4.30 pm (with a one-hour lunch break) from Monday to Friday.

In local regions, offices are open from 7.00 am to 11.00 am and from 1.00 pm to 5.00 pm. Banks are open from 7.30 or 8.00 am to 3.30 pm and are closed on Friday afternoon, Saturday and Sunday.

Private shops are usually open from 8.00 or 8.30 am to 9.00 or 10.00 pm.

Holidays

There are 5 Vietnamese holidays every year for a total of 8 days.

- January 1: New Year's Day (One-day holiday)
- April 30: Saigon Liberation Day (One-day holiday)
- May 1: International Labour Day (One-day holiday)
- September 2: National Day of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (One-day holiday)

Vietnamese Traditional Lunar New Year Festival, or Tet Nguyen Dan (four-day holiday): This holiday begins on the eve and lasts over the first three days of the Lunar New Year, generally at the end of January or beginning of February

Currency

The national currency is Vietnamese dong (VND). Notes are available in denominations of 100,000 VND, 50,000 VND, 20,000 VND, 10,000 VND, 5,000 VND, 2,000 VND, 1,000 VND, 500 VND, 200 VND, 100 VND. There are three kinds of treasury notes worth 500,000 VND, 1,000,000 VND, and 5,000,000 VND.

Throughout the country, American dollars are widely accepted. However, the bills must be relatively new with no marking or tear. Traveller's cheques are easily exchanged in banks. Credit cards are becoming popular, especially in the major hotels and restaurants of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

Telephone, Facsimile, E-mail

The international phone code for Vietnam is 84. It is possible to make international calls or sent faxes from a post-office or major hotels. E-mail and Internet are available in most urban areas throughout the country. Domestic long-distance calls are made by dialing 0, followed by the area code and number. It is very easy to phone inside Vietnam. Most hotels will allow local phone calls free of charge.

Language

Vietnamese is the official language of Vietnam. Learning foreign languages, particularly English and French, is now in vogue among young people. Tourist guides speaking English, French, Russian, Chinese, and Japanese are often available.

Tourist seasons

In the North, the best tourist season lasts from November to April. During this period, the weather is cooler and drier. There are several ritual ceremonies and folk festivals to celebrate the arrival of spring. The Lunar New Year festival (Vietnamese traditional Tet) in Hanoi will allow tourists to enjoy the atmosphere of Tet, of the good and flower markets. Tourists visiting Vietnam during this season are recommended to bring along warm clothes.

In the South, the temperature is warm all year round. The average temperature is approximately 27°C. Therefore tourists need thin garments, sunglasses, and hats.

Electricity and water supply

Voltage system: 220 volt.

Tap water is already filtered and sterilised, but it should be boiled before drinking.

Accommodation

There are a wide variety of accommodations for visitors to choose from. Most hotels in big cities meet international standards.

Transportation

Visitors can travel over Vietnam through various provinces and town either by air, by road, or by train. Domestic flights are available everyday. The train between Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi stops at different stations and provides an exciting and unforgettable trip. The air-conditioned express trains take 32 hours to cover the distance. Cabs, motorcycles, and bicycles can easily be rented all over the country. The cyclo, a three-wheeled vehicle, is perfect for those who wish to move slowly and enjoy a city tour.

Airport - Airport tax

+ Airports

- International Airports: Noi Bai (Hanoi), Tan Son Nhat (Ho Chi Minh City), and Danang airports.

- Domestic Airports: Gia Lam (Hanoi), Cat Bi (Haiphong), Dien Bien (Lai Chau), Na San (Son La), Vinh (Nghe An), Phu Bai (Hue), Pleiku (Gia Lai), Phu Cat (Qui Nhon), Nha Trang (Khanh Hoa), Buon Ma Thuot (Daklak), Lien Khuong (Dalat), Phu Quoc, Rach Gia (Kien Giang).

+ Airport tax

- International flights: US\$10-12, children under 2 years old are exempted.

- Domestic flights: 25,000 VND and 15,000 VND or may be included in the price of ticket.



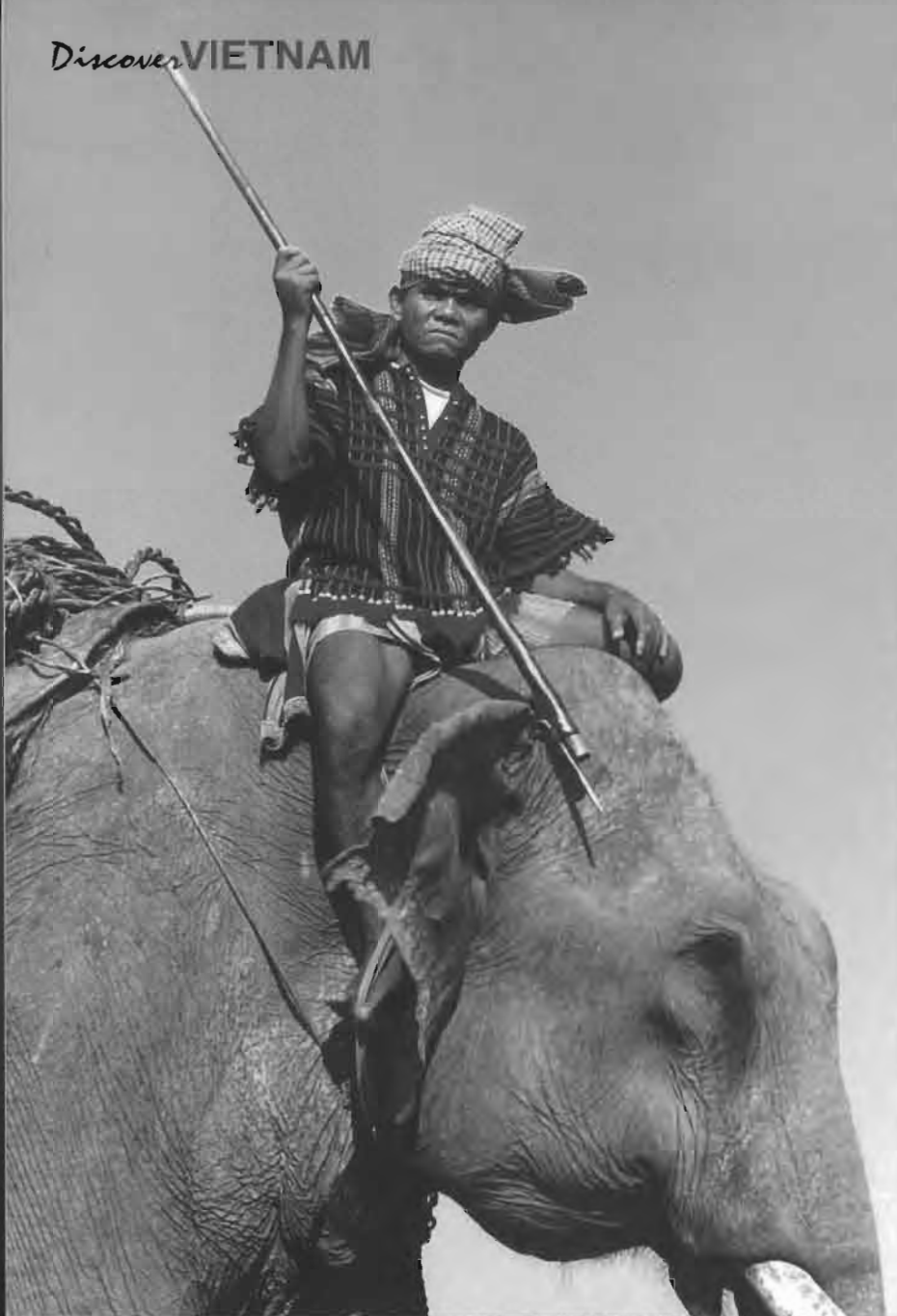
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