

VIETNAM



LIAISON OFFICE
WASHINGTON, DC



June 30, 1995

**Ambassador Le Van Bang
Chief of the Liaison Office**

Dear friends,

On behalf of the staff at the Liaison Office of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, I would like to welcome you to visit our office and work with us to promote the understanding and friendship between our two peoples.

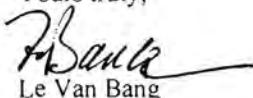
Vietnam is a country with 74 million hardworking people, an abundance of natural resources, and a great location in the heart of rapid economic growth in Southeast Asia. Vietnam is playing an increasingly major role in keeping peace and promoting economic growth and cultural development in Asia.

The United States and Vietnam have a lot in common. We cherish friendship and cooperation. We also desire strong business ties and cultural relations.

We want to help you learn more about Vietnam. Please read this booklet and do not hesitate to ask us more about our country. We are happy to help you.

Thank you for your interest and cooperation

Yours truly,


Le Van Bang

Vietnam

Vietnam is a very fascinating and diverse country that has much to offer its own people as well as those from different parts of the world. Situated on the other side of the earth from the United States, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam is a country, that to many people, seems worlds away. Through this booklet we invite you to tour Vietnam to learn more about its people and culture.

With abundant human and natural resources, and a strategic location in the heart of Asia's booming economies, Vietnam is well positioned to become an economic force and important country in the region. The implementation of the *doi moi* (renovation) policy in 1986 began the country's transition toward a market-oriented and multi-sector economy. Economic reform in the late 1980s has been followed by legal, structural and regulatory reforms aimed at supporting the transformation toward a market-based system. These ongoing multi-faceted reforms, and the demonstrated willingness of decision makers at all levels of government to support a successful transformation, will lead to continued high rates of economic growth and improved standards of living for our people.

Geography

Vietnam is located along the eastern coast of the Indochinese peninsula and is approximately 650 miles due west of the Philippines. Bordering China, Laos, and Cambodia, Vietnam's land area of 127,000 square miles makes it roughly the same size as New Mexico. Vietnam is an S-

shaped country, with the capital of Hanoi located on the banks of the Red River in northern Vietnam. The country's other major city, Ho Chi Minh City, is an expanding commercial center located in southern Vietnam.

Climate

Due to variations in latitude and topography, the climate in Vietnam varies widely. In northern Vietnam, the wintery season begins in November and lasts through April. Weather is characterized by cool temperatures (in the 40s and 50s) and occasional drizzle. Summers in Hanoi (May-October) are quite hot and rainy, with temperatures in the 80s and 90s. Southern Vietnam is more tropical with less variation in temperature than the north. The rainy season lasts from May through November and the average humidity during the year is 80 percent.

Population/language

Vietnam has 74 million people, making it the 13th most populous country in the world. Three out of every four persons live in rural areas and work in agriculture. The population of Hanoi is about 3.5 million and that of Ho Chi Minh City is 5 million.

The national language, Vietnamese, is spoken throughout the country, with variations in pronunciation and dialect existing between the northern, southern, and central regions. Although Vietnam is still in an early stage of development, the literacy rate is an exceptional 88 percent. English is taught to most school-age children and is commonly spoken in the service and tourism sectors.



Vietnam and US diplomats meet in Washington, DC in March, 1995. Included in picture: Le Van Bang, Chief of Vietnam Liaison Office, 3rd from left; Le Mai, Deputy Foreign Minister, 4th from left; and Winston Lord, US Assistant Secretary of State, 5th from left.

History

Vietnam has a rich history spanning several millennia. Early history shows the Vietnamese people settled in the Red River Delta and developed a feudal society. In the 2nd century BC, the Chinese conquered Vietnam, beginning 1000 years of northern influence. In the year 938 AD, Ngo Quyen defeated the Chinese at a battle on the Bach Dang River, beginning an era of almost 1000 years of independence, until the arrival of Western colonialism in 1858.

On 2 September, 1945 President Ho Chi Minh read a Declaration of Independence, establishing the Democratic Republic of Vietnam as a free and independent state. This was followed by two wars of independence. On 2 July, 1976 Vietnam was reunified and renamed the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

Government

The government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam consists of three branches. The Legislative Branch of the government consists of the National Assembly, the people's supreme authority and highest representative organization. The National Assembly consists of 400 members elected throughout the country every five years. Independent (non-Party) candidates may run for the election to the National Assembly. The National Assembly meets twice a year at the convocation of its Standing Committee. The National Assembly elects its chairman and members of its Standing Committee.

The Executive Branch is headed by a President, elected by the National Assembly. The President serves as head of state and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, representing Vietnam in domestic and foreign affairs. The National Assembly also elects the Prime Minister, who heads the Office of Government. The members of the Cabinet are proposed by the Prime Minister, and ratified by the National Assembly. The National Assembly also elects the Chief Justice of the Supreme People's Court, Vietnam's Judiciary Branch.

The 1992 Constitution guarantees that all citizens are equal before the law. Citizens rights under the Constitution include the right to education and health care, the right and duty of labor, the right to build homes, and freedom to do business. Citizens have freedom of movement, and have the right to enjoy freedom of the press, to inform and hold meetings, establish associations, and demonstrate as stipulated by law.

Economy

In an effort to improve Vietnam's economic condition, in 1986 the country's leadership began an ambitious economic renovation program, called "doi moi." These reforms included changes in domestic and foreign economic policy. The main focus of the reforms was, and remains, transformation from a centrally planned system to one that is market-based. The promotion of a multi-sector economy, price liberalization, devaluation and unification of the currency, restructuring of state enterprises, foreign investment encouragement, and foreign trade promotion have produced real improvements in efficiency and output.

In 1994, Vietnam's GDP grew at a rate of 8.8%, making it one of the fastest growing economies in the world. After experiencing hyper-inflation in the 1980s, the inflation rate was brought down to 5.2% in 1993, and 14.4% in 1994. The government has targeted single-digit inflation for 1995 and expects GDP growth rates of 9-10% for the next several years. International financial institutions, including the World Bank, agree with Vietnam's optimistic prospects and have pledged to lend Vietnam 500 million dollars per year. Japan is Vietnam's largest aid donor, with aid of 700 million dollars in 1995.

Many sectors are experiencing rapid growth and development. The oil and natural gas, and manufacturing sectors are receiving large amounts of foreign investment and the dividend flow is just beginning. Vietnam is among the world leaders in fish and sea product exports, and has potential for increases in coal, rubber, coffee, tea, foodstuffs, forest products and a host of other input and finished good exports. The tourism sector is also experiencing rapid growth, with the number and quality of hotels and tourist services continually increasing.

With Vietnam's development process picking up steam, opportunities in physical infrastructure, construction, telecommunications, services (insurance, shipping, legal, accounting) and other areas are virtually wide open. With a population of 74 million and increases in real income, Vietnam is also a great potential consumer market for foreign and domestically produced goods.



International relations

Since Vietnam adopted its "open door" policy in 1986, Vietnam has expanded its foreign relations and is now well established in the international community. Vietnam now enjoys full diplomatic relations with 160 countries around the world. Vietnam joined the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1976 and the United Nations in 1977. Vietnam signed the Bali Treaty of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1992 and achieved full member status in 1995. Vietnam became an observer to the GATT Treaty in the summer of 1994 and plans to become a member of the new World Trade Organization (WTO). Vietnam also expects to join the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Organization.

Vietnam-US relations

The United States and Vietnam have been working cooperatively toward resolving their differences on the road to full diplomatic and economic relations. In 1991, the United States established an office in Hanoi to address the issue of American servicemen missing since the war and the two countries have increased their cooperation on this issue. In February 1994 the United States lifted its trade embargo against Vietnam and announced the establishment of liaison offices, which was achieved in January 1995.

Since the lifting of the embargo, economic contacts have steadily increased. Two-way trade between the United States and Vietnam totalled \$230 million in 1994. As of April 1995, the United States had 33 licensed investment projects worth 525 million dollars, ranking 8th on the list of foreign investing countries. Vietnam is expected to gain Most-Favored Nation (MFN) trade status in the near future.

Vietnam Liaison Office in the USA

The Vietnam Liaison Office, located in Washington, DC, serves as Vietnam's official presence in the United States. The office has a number of important functions, including representing Vietnam in political and economic relations with the United States government, and social and cultural exchanges with the United States.

The office also issues visas to persons planning to travel to Vietnam and provides assistance to Vietnamese nationals in the United States.

United States government presence in Vietnam

The United States government has an official Liaison Office open in Hanoi. The address of the office is 7 Lang Ha, Hanoi. The telephone number is: 844-450-445; and the fax number is: 844-350-484

Travel information

It is necessary to have a valid passport and **visa before you enter Vietnam**. For information on obtaining visas, refer to the visa section of this brochure or contact the Liaison Office of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in Washington, D.C.. Travel to Vietnam has become easy to arrange and carry out. Many international air carriers serve Vietnam through their respective regional Asian hubs. Although foreign travel to Vietnam has increased in recent years, it is still quite easy to find adequate accommodations during your stay in the country. Hotels and guest houses provide clean, safe, western-style accommodations at reasonable prices. During peak travel periods, most notably the Tet Lunar New Year (exact date varies), it may be more difficult to book air transportation and lodging.

Travel within Vietnam can be quick and easy or slow and leisurely. Vietnam Airlines, the country's flag carrier, serves all major and many of the smaller cities in Vietnam. Modern American and European aircraft are used on most flights. Travel by rail within Vietnam is a relatively easy and inexpensive way to see the country. Train travel, however, takes much longer than air travel and track conditions can cause variations in travel time. Air-conditioned taxicabs operate in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, and cars are available for hire in major cities.

Business resources

With Vietnam's transition toward a market-based economy, many resources have become available to support business activities and foreign travellers.

Major credit cards, including Visa, Mastercard and American Express, are accepted at many locations throughout the country. Travellers' cheques denominated in US dollars can be exchanged for Vietnamese *dong* (approximate rate US\$1 = 11,000 *dong*) at banks and hotels. American banks, including Citibank and Bank of America, have branch locations in Vietnam.

International telecommunications links, including direct telephone and facsimile connections, can be established from hotels and private residences. Access to the Internet and electronic mail is available on a more limited basis.



Visa information

The Liaison Office can process all types of visas, including diplomatic, official, business and press visas. Applicants for these types of visas are requested to write to the Liaison Office describing the purpose of the trip, and include the names of the agencies, departments, companies and/or people that the applicant wishes to meet in Vietnam. Applicants applying for a press visa are requested to provide the Liaison Office with a list of equipment that the applicant is planning to bring along.

Each applicant should complete the application form and follow the instructions indicated in the procedures section below. On receiving notice of visa approval from Vietnam, the Liaison Office will issue the visa to the applicant. For further information, please call (202) 861-0737, or fax to (202) 861-0917.

Vietnamese-Americans who wish to visit their relatives in Vietnam can apply for and obtain visas at the Vietnam Liaison Office. The processing time for a visa for a first-time visitor normally takes from two to three (2 - 3) weeks. This type of visa is valid for up to three (3) months. For subsequent visits, the Liaison Office can issue visas without additional approval from Vietnam, provided that the applicant made a previous application through the Liaison Office within the past three (3) years, and that the applicant has honored the laws of Vietnam. Applicants can request assistance from the Liaison Office to communicate with the relevant agencies in Vietnam for expeditious treatment for visa approvals. The fee for communications of this type is \$5.00.

Tourist visas for Vietnam can only be issued after the Liaison Office receives approval directly from Vietnam, or through a travel agency.

Persons interested in exploring business opportunities in Vietnam are welcome to call the Liaison Office for more information, or contact: The State Committee for Cooperation and Investment, 56 Quoc Tu Giam Street, Hanoi, Vietnam. Tel: 844-254-927; Fax: 844-259-271, or the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 33 Ba Trieu Street, Hanoi, Vietnam. Tel: 844-266-355; Fax: 844-256-446.

Each applicant is requested to complete two application forms (available from the Liaison Office). The application forms should be accompanied with three passport photos, a copy of invitation from Vietnam, and a photocopy of the applicant's passport.

Upon receiving visa approval from the relevant agency in Vietnam, visa processing takes from two to seven days.

Visa fees:

\$ 25.00 for each single entry visa for foreigners
\$ 20.00 for each single entry visa for overseas Vietnamese
\$ 40.00 for each double entry visa
\$ 50.00 for each three-month multiple entry visa
\$ 70.00 for each six-month multiple entry visa
\$100.00 for each multiple entry visa more than six months
\$ 10.00 for each visa extension/endorsement

Payment should be made by check or money order (cash is acceptable, but not preferred).

Vietnam Informational Pamphlet

The Liaison Office would like to thank the **Indochina Project** -- a program of the **Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation**, and the **Center for Educational Exchange with Vietnam** -- an affiliate of the **American Council of Learned Societies**, for their assistance and contribution to this pamphlet.

We welcome feedback and suggestions which can be helpful to further pamphlets we plan to produce.





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