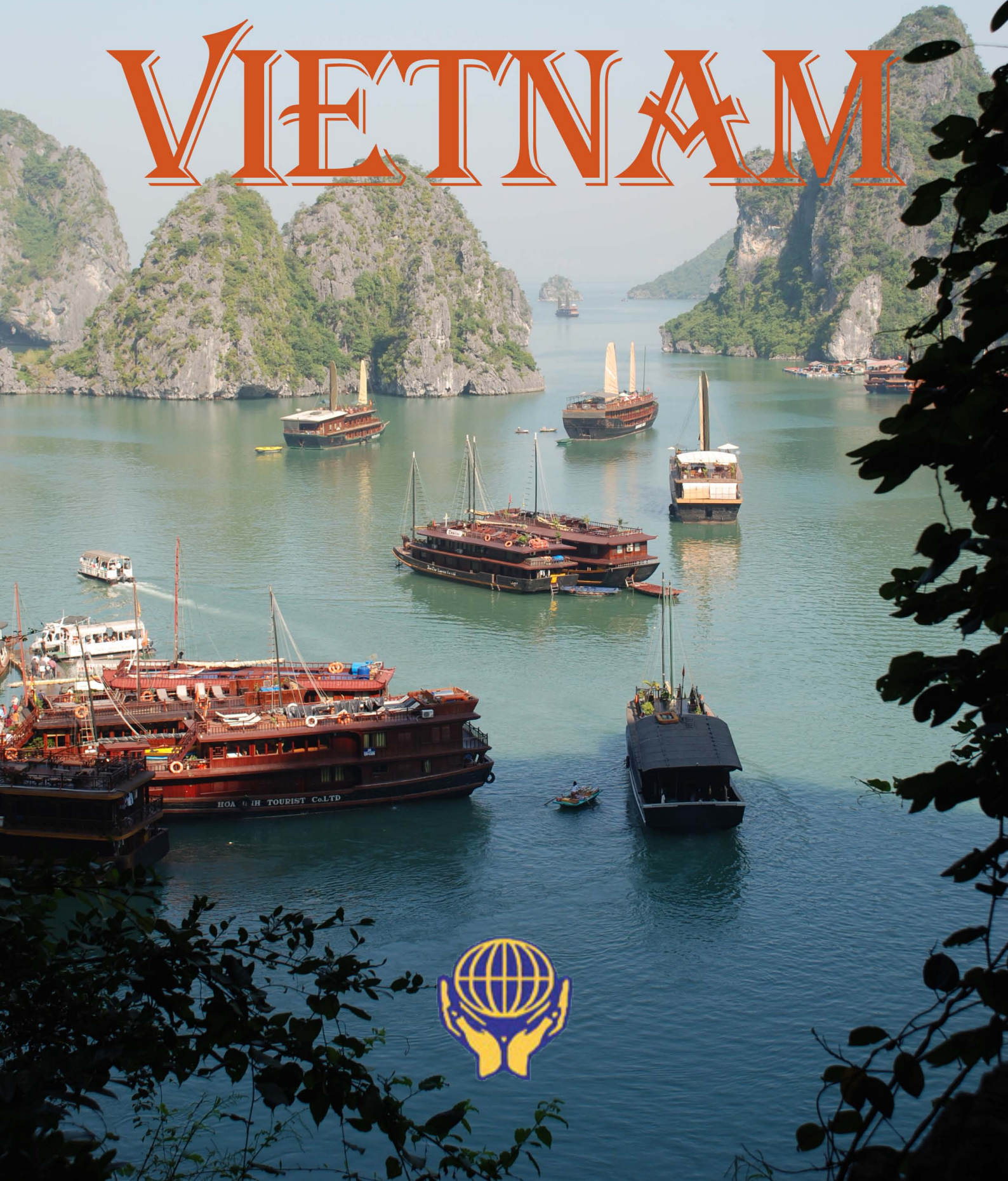


PROFILE OF

VIETNAM



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Foreword

This book has been compiled focusing on the various aspects about Vietnam that will be of use to those who would like to know more about the country and the people who live there.

I have purposely kept the information provided to what I would consider a basic overview of Vietnam, beginning with the recent modern history from when France took sovereignty over all of the country after the Sino-French War (1884-1885). Following on to the struggle for independence and recognition as an independent state from the end of the second world war with the continued interference by the USA to assist and support the French in their desire to reclaim sovereignty.

This eventually led to all out war with the USA and the political and military implications that go with the USA's governments established war on communism. Details of the events of this last and final conflict before the people of Vietnam eventually gain autonomy over their own country is given in the final chapter.

As well as an overview of the culture and cuisine of the Vietnamese people I have included some well known recipes that are popular everyday dishes that are served and enjoyed daily by the local inhabitants.

In the final section I have outlined a variety of knowledge that would be valuable to the prospective visitor to the country in planning their itinerary. This covers general visitor information on the most popular and attractive places to see and visit throughout the country.

Map of Vietnam

Vietnam, in Southeast Asia, stretches 1,600 kilometers (1,000 miles) north to south, but is only about 40 kilometers (25 miles) wide at its narrowest point near the country's center. The Red River delta lowlands in the north are separated from the huge Mekong Delta in the south by long, narrow coastal plains backed by the forested Annam highlands. Hanoi, the capital, is the main city on the Red River and Ho Chi Minh City, or Saigon, is the main city on the Mekong.

Topographically, Vietnam is a verdant tapestry of soaring mountains, fertile deltas, primeval forests inhabited by exotic fauna, sinuous rivers, mysterious caves, otherworldly rock formations, and heavenly waterfalls and beaches. Beyond nature, the curious and open-minded visitor will find in Vietnam a feast of culture and history.

Most of the main areas and popular places of interest are shown.

All international flights arrive and depart from ... Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh airports.

For domestic flights there are airports at the following locations shown on the map ...

Hanoi - Haiphong - Dien Bien Phu - Vinh - Hue - Danang - Qui Nhon - Nha Trang - Dalat - Ho Chi Minh and Phu Quoc Island.

Population

Today there are about 75 million people in Vietnam. Eighty percent of these are ethnic Vietnamese. The remaining twenty percent comprises of more than fifty separate ethnic groups. About seven million of these ethnic minorities are known as montagnards (French for mountain people), making their homes and livelihoods in the spectacular mountains of the north and central highlands they are known as the hill tribes people. There are many languages spoken in Vietnam with the main one being Vietnamese followed by the ethnic minority hill tribes languages, Chinese, English, French, and Russian.

Vietnam's basic economy consists of:

Industry: Food processing, garments, shoes, machine-building.

Agriculture: Paddy rice, corn, potatoes, rubber; poultry; fish.

Exports: Crude oil, marine products, rice, coffee, rubber.



Vietnam History

The Recent Modern History of Vietnam

Part 1-Overview

Vietnam was officially united in 1976 after many tumultuous years of occupation by foreign powers. Since the surrender of the USA and the eventual unification of the north and south of Vietnam time has done a remarkable job of healing its wounds. Today, this gracious and beautiful country is an outstanding travel destination.

The recent or modern history of Vietnam could be taken from when France took sovereignty over all of Vietnam after the Sino-French War (1884-1885). The French colonial government then divided the country into three different administrative territories. They named these territories: Tonkin (in the north), Annam (in the center), and Cochinchina (in the south). The majority of the Vietnamese regarded their country as a single land and fought for much of the next 90 years to achieve unification.

From the end of the Sino-French War and continuing on into the 20th century the Vietnamese people realised that they could not defeat France without modernization. Having been exposed to western philosophy, they aimed to establish a republic upon independence. The defeat of Russia by Japan in the Russo-Japanese War served as a perfect example of modernisation helping an Asian country defeat a powerful western empire.

Part 2-Modernisation

The first movement towards this aim of modernisation started in 1905 by Phan Bội Châu. Phan Bội Châu's plan was to send Vietnamese students to Japan to learn modern skills, so that in the future they could lead a successful armed revolt against the French. Phan Bội Châu started two organizations in Japan: Duy Tân Hội and Việt Nam Công Hiến Hội. Due to French diplomatic pressure, Japan later deported Phan Bội Châu to China.

The early part of the 20th century saw the growing in status of the Romanised Quốc Ngữ alphabet for the Vietnamese language. Vietnamese patriots realised the potential of Quốc Ngữ as a useful tool to reduce illiteracy and to educate the people. This was sadly suppressed as much as possible by the French and led to Vietnamese revolutionaries turning to radical paths planning armed resistance against the French. Many of these Vietnamese leaders were caught and executed by the guillotine.

Part 3-Communism

Marxism was also introduced into Vietnam with the emergence of three separate Communist parties; the Indochinese Communist Party, Annamese Communist Party and the Indochinese Communist Union. In 1930 the Communist International (Comintern) sent Nguyễn Ái Quốc (later Ho Chi Minh) to Hong Kong to coordinate the unification of the parties into the Vietnamese Communist Party with Trần Phú as the first Secretary General. Later the party changed its name to the Indochinese Communist Party as the Comintern. Nguyễn Ái Quốc was a leftist revolutionary living in France since 1911. He participated in founding the French Communist Party and in 1924 travelled to the Soviet Union to join the Comintern. Through the late 1920s, he acted as a Comintern agent to help build Communist movements in Southeast Asia. During the 1930s, the Vietnamese Communist Party was nearly wiped out under French suppression with the execution of top leaders such as Trần Phú, Lê Hồng Phong, and Nguyễn Văn Cừ.

Part 4-World War II

In 1940, during World War II, Japan invaded Indochina, keeping the Vichy French colonial administration in place as a Japanese puppet. In 1941 Hồ Chí Minh, formerly known as Nguyễn Ái Quốc, arrived in northern Vietnam to form the Việt Minh Front, short for Việt Nam Độc Lập Đồng Minh Hội. The Việt Minh Front was supposed to be an umbrella group for all parties fighting for Vietnam's independence, but was dominated by the Communist Party. The Việt Minh had only a small armed force to fight the Japanese and worked with the American Office of Strategic Services to collect intelligence on the Japanese.

In 1944-1945, millions of Vietnamese people starved to death in the Japanese occupation of Vietnam. In early 1945 due to a combination of poor weather conditions and Japanese exploitation, a famine broke out in the Tonkin area resulting with the death of between 1 and 2 million people.

In March 1945, the Japanese occupying forces ousted the French administration. Emperor Bảo Đại of the Nguyễn Dynasty was the 13th and last ruler of the Nguyễn Dynasty. From 1926 to 1945, he served as king (or emperor) of Annam, now the northern two-thirds of Vietnam. During this period, he was “protected” by France as Annam was part of French Indochina. Bảo Đại nominally declared Vietnam independent, but the Japanese remained in occupation.

Part 5-Creation of Vietnam's independance

Exploiting the administrative gap that the internment of the French had created, the Viet Minh in March 1945 urged the population to ransack rice warehouses and refuse to pay their taxes. Between 75 and 100 warehouses were raided. This rebellion against the effects of the famine and the authorities that were partially responsible for it bolstered the Viet Minh's popularity and they recruited many members during this period. When the Japanese surrendered to the Allies in August 1945 a power vacuum was created in Vietnam. Capitalising on this, the Việt Minh launched the "August Revolution" across the country to seize

government offices. Emperor Bảo Đại abdicated on August 25, 1945, ending the Nguyễn Dynasty. On September 2, 1945 Hồ Chí Minh declared Vietnam independent under the new name of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and held the position of Chairman (Chủ Tịch).

On this same day, Ho Chi Minh proclaims the independence of Vietnam by quoting from the text of the American Declaration of Independence which had been supplied to him by the OSS -- "We hold the truth that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, among them life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. This immortal statement is extracted from the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America in 1776. These are undeniable truths."

Ho declares himself president of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and pursues American recognition but is repeatedly ignored by President Harry Truman.

In October 35,000 French soldiers under the command of World War II General Jacques Philippe Leclerc arrive in South Vietnam to restore French rule. Viet Minh immediately begin a guerrilla campaign to harass them. The French then succeed in expelling the Viet Minh from Saigon.

Ho Chi Minh agrees to permit French troops to return to Hanoi temporarily in exchange for French recognition of his Democratic Republic of Vietnam. He spends four months in France attempting to negotiate full independence and unity for Vietnam, but fails to obtain any guarantee from the French. In a major affront to Ho Chi Minh, the French high commissioner for Indochina proclaims a separatist French-controlled government for South Vietnam (Republic of Chochinchina). After a series of violent clashes with Viet Minh, French forces bombard Haiphong harbour and occupy Hanoi, forcing Ho Chi Minh and his Viet Minh forces to retreat into the jungle.

On December 19, 1946 - In Hanoi, 30,000 Viet Minh launch their first large-scale attack against the French. Thus begins an eight year struggle known as the First Indochina War. "The resistance will be long and arduous, but our cause is just and we will surely triumph," declares Viet Minh military commander Vo Nguyen Giap. "If these [people] want a fight, they'll get it,"

French military commander Gen. Etienne Valluy states. A state of resistance continues with the occupying French and their installed Vietnamese Bao Dai as puppet head of state in South Vietnam. The United States and Britain recognize Bao Dai's French controlled South Vietnam government.

In 1950 the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union recognize Ho Chi Minh's Democratic Republic of Vietnam. China then begins sending military advisors and modern weapons to the Viet Minh including automatic weapons, mortars, howitzers, and trucks. Much of the equipment is American-made and had belonged to the Chinese Nationalists before their defeat by Mao. With the influx of new equipment and Chinese advisors, General Giap transforms his guerrilla fighters into conventional army units including five light infantry divisions and one heavy division. Viet Minh begin an offensive against French outposts in North Vietnam near the Chinese border.

United States military involvement in Vietnam begins as President Harry Truman authorizes \$15 million in military aid to the French. American military advisors will accompany the flow of U.S. tanks, planes, artillery and other supplies to Vietnam. Over the next four years, the U.S. will spend \$3 Billion on the French war and by 1954 will provide 80 percent of all war supplies used by the French.

In January of 1953 Dwight D. Eisenhower, former five-star Army general and Allied commander in Europe during World War II, is inaugurated as the 34th U.S. President. During his term, Eisenhower will greatly increase U.S. military aid to the French in Vietnam to prevent a Communist victory. U.S. military advisors will continue to accompany American supplies sent to Vietnam. To justify America's financial commitment, Eisenhower will cite a 'Domino Theory' in which a Communist victory in Vietnam would result in surrounding countries falling one after another like a "falling row of dominoes." The Domino Theory will be used by a succession of Presidents and their advisors to justify ever-deepening U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

The French under their new commander Gen. Henri Navarre begin Operation Castor, the construction of a series of entrenched outposts protecting a small air base in the isolated jungle valley at Dien Bien Phu in northwest Vietnam. Gen. Giap immediately begins massing Viet Minh troops and artillery in the area, sensing the potential for a decisive blow against the French. Giap's troops manually drag 200 heavy howitzers up rugged mountain sides to target the French air base. The French, aware of Giap's intentions, mass their own troops and artillery, preparing for a showdown, but have grossly underestimated Giap's strength. Outnumbering the French nearly five-to-one, 50,000 Viet Minh under Gen. Giap begin their assault against the fortified hills protecting the Dien Bien Phu air base. Giap's artillery pounds the French and shuts down the only runway, thus forcing the French to rely on risky parachute drops for re-supply. Giap's troops then take out their shovels and begin construction of a maze of tunnels and trenches, slowly inching their way toward the main French position and surrounding it.

The siege at Dien Bien Phu occurs as nearly 10,000 French soldiers are trapped by 45,000 Viet Minh. French troops soon run out of fresh water and medical supplies.

The French urgently appeal to Washington for help. The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff now consider three possible military options: sending American combat troops to the rescue; a massive conventional air strike by B-29 bombers; the use of tactical atomic weapons.

President Eisenhower dismisses the conventional air raid and the nuclear option after getting a strong negative response to such actions from America's chief ally, Britain. Eisenhower also decides against sending U.S. ground troops to rescue the French, citing the likelihood of high casualty rates in the jungles around Dien Bien Phu. No action is taken.

10,000 French soldiers surrender at Dien Bien Phu. By now, an estimated 8000 Viet Minh and 1500 French have died. The French survivors are marched for up to 60 days to prison camps 500 hundred miles away. Nearly half die during the march or in captivity. France proceeds to withdraw completely from Vietnam, ending a bitter eight year struggle against the Viet Minh in which 400,000 soldiers and civilians from all sides had perished.

On May 8th 1954 the Geneva Conference on Indochina begins, attended by the U.S., Britain, China, the Soviet Union, France, Vietnam (Viet Minh and representatives of Bao Dai), Cambodia and Laos, all meeting to negotiate a solution for Southeast Asia. The Geneva Accords divide Vietnam in half at the 17th parallel, with Ho Chi Minh's Communists ceded the North, while Bao Dai's regime is granted the South. The accords also provide for elections to be held in all of Vietnam within two years to reunify the country.

The U.S. opposes the unifying elections, fearing a likely victory by Ho Chi Minh.

Following the French departure from Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh returns after spending eight years hiding in the jungle and formally takes control of North Vietnam. In the South, Bao Dai has installed Ngo Dinh Diem as his prime minister. The U.S. now pins its hopes on anti-Communist Diem for a democratic South Vietnam. It is Diem, however, who predicts "another more deadly war" will erupt over the future of Vietnam. Diem, a Roman Catholic in an overwhelmingly Buddhist country, encourages Vietnamese Catholics living in Communist North Vietnam to flee south. Nearly one million leave. At the same time, some 90,000 Communists in the south go north, although nearly 10,000 Viet Minh fighters are instructed by Hanoi to quietly remain behind.

In January 1955 the first direct shipment of U.S. military aid to Saigon arrives. The U.S. also offers to train the fledgling South Vietnam Army. Bao Dai is ousted from power, defeated by Prime Minister Diem in a U.S.-backed plebiscite which was rigged. Diem is advised on consolidating power by U.S. Air Force Col. Edward G. Lansdale, who is attached to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The Republic of South Vietnam is proclaimed with Diem as its first president. In America, President Eisenhower pledges his support for the new government and offers military aid.

Diem assigns most high level government positions to close friends and family members including his younger brother Ngo Dinh Nhu who will be his chief advisor.

Diem's style of leadership, aloof and autocratic, will create future political problems for him despite the best efforts of his American advisors to popularize him via American-style political rallies and tours of the countryside.

Ho Chi Minh visits Moscow and agrees to accept Soviet aid.

In December 1955 the North Vietnam radical land reforms by the Communists result in land owners being hauled before "people's tribunals." Thousands are executed or sent to forced labour camps during this period of ideological cleansing by Ho Chi Minh. While in South Vietnam, President Diem rewards his Catholic supporters by giving them land seized from Buddhist peasants, arousing their anger and eroding his support among them. Diem also allows big land owners to retain their holdings, disappointing peasants hoping for land reform.

By July 1956 the deadline passes for the unifying elections set by the Geneva Conference. Diem, backed by the U.S., had refused to participate.

The Soviet Union proposes permanent division of Vietnam into North and South, with the two nations admitted separately to the United Nations. The U.S. rejects the proposal, unwilling to recognize Communist North Vietnam.

Diem pays a state visit to Washington where President Eisenhower labels him the "miracle man" of Asia and reaffirms U.S. commitment. "The cost of defending freedom, of defending America, must be paid in many forms and in many places...military as well as economic help is currently needed in Vietnam," Eisenhower states. Diem's government, however, with its main focus on security, spends little on schools, medical care or other badly needed social services in the countryside. Communist guerrillas and propagandists in the countryside capitalize on this by making simple promises of land reform and a better standard of living to gain popular support among peasants.

In 1958 the Viet Minh guerrillas begin a widespread campaign of terror in South Vietnam including bombings and assassinations. By year's end, over 400 South Vietnamese officials are killed. A coordinated command structure is formed by Communists in the Mekong Delta where 37 armed companies are being organized. The armed revolution begins as Ho Chi Minh declares a People's War to unite all of Vietnam under his leadership. His Politburo now orders a changeover to an all-out military struggle. Thus begins the Second Indochina War.

The North Vietnamese establish the Central Office of South Vietnam (COSVN) to oversee the coming war in the South. Construction of the Ho Chi Minh trail now begins. The trail will eventually expand into a 1500 mile-long network of jungle and mountain passes extending from North Vietnam's coast along Vietnam's western border through Laos, parts of Cambodia, funneling a constant stream of soldiers and supplies into the highlands of South Vietnam. In 1959, it takes six months to make the journey, by 1968 it will take only six weeks due to road improvements by North Vietnamese labourers, many of whom are women. In the 1970s a parallel fuel pipeline will be added.

July 1959 - 4000 Viet Minh guerrillas, originally born in the South, are sent from North Vietnam to infiltrate South Vietnam. Two U.S. military advisors, Maj. Dale Buis and Sgt. Chester Ovnand, are killed by Viet Minh guerrillas at Bien Hoa, South Vietnam. They are the first American deaths in the Second Indochina War which Americans will come to know simply as The Vietnam War. In April 1960 universal military conscription is imposed in North Vietnam. Tour of duty is indefinite.

In November a failed coup against President Diem by disgruntled South Vietnamese Army officers brings a harsh crackdown against all perceived 'enemies of the state.' Over 50,000 are arrested by police controlled by Diem's brother Nhu with many innocent civilians tortured then executed. This results in further erosion of popular support for Diem. Thousands who fear arrest flee to North Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh will later send many back to infiltrate South Vietnam as part of his People's Liberation Armed Forces. Called Viet Cong by Diem, meaning Communist Vietnamese, Ho's guerrillas blend into the countryside, indistinguishable from South Vietnamese, while working to undermine Diem's government. The National Liberation Front is established by Hanoi as its Communist political organisation for Viet Cong guerrillas in South Vietnam.

Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev pledges support for "wars of national liberation" throughout the world. His statement greatly encourages Communists in North Vietnam to escalate their armed struggle to unify Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh.

January 1961- John Fitzgerald Kennedy is inaugurated as the 35th U.S. President and declares "...we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to insure the survival and the success of liberty."

Privately, outgoing President Eisenhower tells him "I think you're going to have to send troops..." to Southeast Asia. The youthful Kennedy administration is inexperienced in matters regarding Southeast Asia. Kennedy's Secretary of Defense, 44-year old Robert McNamara, along with civilian planners recruited from the academic community, will play a crucial role in deciding White House strategy for Vietnam over the next several years. Under their leadership, the United States will wage a limited war to force a political settlement.

However, the U.S. will be opposed by an enemy dedicated to total military victory "...whatever the sacrifices, however long the struggle...until Vietnam is fully independent and reunified," as stated by Ho Chi Minh.

On the sixth anniversary of the Republic of South Vietnam, President Kennedy sends a letter to President Diem and pledges "the United States is determined to help Vietnam preserve its independence..." President Kennedy then sends additional military advisors along with American helicopter units to transport and direct South Vietnamese troops in battle, thus involving Americans in combat operations. Kennedy justifies the expanding U.S. military role as a means "...to prevent a Communist takeover of Vietnam which is in accordance with a policy our government has followed since 1954." The number of military advisors sent by Kennedy will eventually surpass 16,000.

Viet Cong guerrillas now control much of the countryside in South Vietnam and frequently ambush South Vietnamese troops. The cost to America of maintaining South Vietnam's sagging 200,000 man army and managing the overall conflict in Vietnam rises to a million dollars per day. Operation Sunrise begins the Strategic Hamlet resettlement program in which scattered rural populations in South Vietnam are uprooted from their ancestral farmlands and resettled into fortified villages defended by local militias. However, over 50 of the hamlets are soon infiltrated and easily taken over by Viet Cong who kill or intimidate village leaders. As a result, Diem orders bombing raids against suspected Viet Cong controlled hamlets. The air strikes by the South Vietnamese Air Force are supported by U.S. pilots, who also conduct some of the bombings. Civilian casualties erode popular support for Diem and result in growing peasant hostility toward America, which is largely blamed for the unpopular resettlement program as well as the bombings.

On July 23, 1962 - The Declaration on the Neutrality of Laos signed in Geneva by the U.S. and 13 other nations, prohibits U.S. invasion of portions of the Ho Chi Minh trail inside eastern Laos.

A Viet Cong victory in the Battle of Ap Bac makes front page news in America as 350 Viet Cong fighters defeat a large force of American equipped South Vietnamese troops attempting to seize a radio transmitter. Three American helicopter crew members are killed.

The South Vietnamese Army is run by officers personally chosen by President Diem, not for their competence, but for their loyalty to him. Diem has instructed his officers to avoid casualties. Their primary mission, he has told them, is to protect him from any coups in Saigon.

Buddhists riot in South Vietnam after they are denied the right to display religious flags during their celebration of Buddha's birthday. In Hue, South Vietnamese police and army troops shoot at Buddhist demonstrators, resulting in the deaths of one woman and eight children.

Political pressure now mounts on the Kennedy administration to disassociate itself from Diem's repressive, family-run government. "You are responsible for the present trouble because you back Diem and his government of ignoramuses," a leading Buddhist tells U.S. officials in Saigon. Buddhist demonstrations spread. Several Buddhist monks publicly burn themselves to death as an act of protest. The immolations are captured on film by news photographers and shock the American public as well as President Kennedy.

Diem responds to the deepening unrest by imposing martial law. South Vietnamese special forces, originally trained by the U.S. and now controlled by Diem's younger brother Nhu wage violent crackdowns against Buddhist sanctuaries in Saigon, Hue and other cities. Nhu's crackdowns spark widespread anti-Diem demonstrations. Meanwhile, during an American TV interview, Nhu's wife, the flamboyant Madame Nhu, coldly refers to the Buddhist immolations as a 'barbecue.' As the overall situation worsens, high level talks at the White House focus on the need to force Diem to reform.

South Vietnamese General Tran Van Don, a Buddhist, contacts the CIA in Saigon about the possibility of staging a coup against Diem. The rebel generals, led by Duong Van “Big” Minh, first ask for assurances that U.S. aid to South Vietnam will continue after Diem’s removal and that the U.S. will not interfere with the actual coup. This scenario suits the White House well, in that the generals will appear to acting on their own without any direct U.S. involvement. President Kennedy gives his approval. The CIA in Saigon then signals the conspirators that the United States will not interfere with the overthrow of President Diem.

In September during a TV news interview with Walter Cronkite, President Kennedy describes Diem as “out of touch with the people” and adds that South Vietnam’s government might regain popular support “with changes in policy and perhaps in personnel.” Also during the interview, Kennedy comments on America’s commitment to Vietnam “If we withdrew from Vietnam, the Communists would control Vietnam. Pretty soon, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Malaya, would go...”

In the early morning of November 2, 1963 one of Diem’s aides betrays his location to the generals. The hunt for Diem and Nhu now begins. At 6 am., Diem telephones the generals. Realizing the situation is hopeless, Diem and Nhu offer to surrender from inside a Catholic church. Diem and Nhu are then taken into custody by rebel officers and placed in the back of an armoured personnel carrier. While travelling to Saigon, the vehicle stops and Diem and Nhu are assassinated. At the White House, a meeting is interrupted with the news of Diem’s death. According to witnesses, President Kennedy’s face turns a ghostly shade of white and he immediately leaves the room. Later, the President records in his private diary, “I feel that we must bear a good deal of responsibility for it.”

Saigon celebrates the downfall of Diem’s regime. But the coup results in a power vacuum in which a series of military and civilian governments seize control of South Vietnam, a country that becomes totally dependent on the United States for its existence. Viet Cong use the unstable political situation to increase their hold over the rural population of South Vietnam to nearly 40 percent.

Three weeks later President John F. Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas. Lyndon B. Johnson is sworn in as the 36th U.S. President. He is the fourth President coping with Vietnam and will oversee massive escalation of the war while utilizing many of the same policy advisors who served Kennedy. In November 1963 - President Johnson declares he will not “lose Vietnam” during a meeting with Ambassador Lodge in Washington.

By year’s end, there are 16,300 American military advisors in South Vietnam which received \$500 million in U.S. aid during 1963.

On March 6th, 1964 - Defense Secretary McNamara visits South Vietnam and states that Gen. Khanh “has our admiration, our respect and our complete support...” and adds that, “We’ll stay for as long as it takes. We shall provide whatever help is required to win the battle against the Communist insurgents.”

Following his visit, McNamara advises President Johnson to increase military aid to shore up the sagging South Vietnamese army. McNamara and other Johnson policy makers now become focused on the need to prevent a Communist victory in South Vietnam, believing it would damage the credibility of the U.S. globally. The war in Vietnam thus becomes a test of U.S. resolve in fighting Communism with America's prestige and President Johnson's reputation on the line.

The cost to America of maintaining South Vietnam's army and managing the overall conflict in Vietnam now rises to two million dollars per day. Secret U.S.-backed bombing raids begin against the Ho Chi Minh trail inside Laos, conducted by mercenaries flying old American fighter planes. By the year's end, the number of American military advisors in South Vietnam is 23,000. There are now an estimated 170,000 Viet Cong/NVA fighters in the 'People's Revolutionary Army' which has begun waging coordinated battalion-sized attacks against South Vietnamese troops in villages around Saigon.

In January 1965 Lyndon B. Johnson takes the oath as president and declares, "We can never again stand aside, prideful in isolation. Terrific dangers and troubles that we once called "foreign" now constantly live among us..." Johnson aides, National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy and Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, send a memo to the President stating that America's limited military involvement in Vietnam is not succeeding, and that the U.S. has reached a 'fork in the road' in Vietnam and must either soon escalate or withdraw. President Johnson then approves Operation Flaming Dart, the bombing of a North Vietnamese army camp near Dong Hoi by U.S. Navy jets from the carrier Ranger. Johnson makes no speeches or public statements concerning his decision. Opinion polls taken in the U.S. shortly after the bombing indicate a 70 percent approval rating for the President and an 80 percent approval of U.S. military involvement in Vietnam. Johnson now agrees to a long-standing recommendation from his advisors for a sustained bombing campaign against North Vietnam.

In Hanoi, Soviet Prime Minister Kosygin is pressured by the North Vietnamese to provide unlimited military aid to counter the American "aggression." Kosygin gives in to their demands. As a result, sophisticated Soviet surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) begin arriving in Hanoi within weeks.

Operation Rolling Thunder begins as over 100 American fighter bombers attack targets in North Vietnam. Scheduled to last eight weeks, Rolling Thunder will instead go on for three years. The first U.S. air strikes also occur against the Ho Chi Minh trail. Throughout the war, the trail is heavily bombed by American jets with little actual success in halting the tremendous flow of soldiers and supplies from the North.

500 American jets will be lost attacking the trail. After each attack, bomb damage along the trail is repaired by female construction crews.

During the entire war, the U.S. will fly 3 million sorties and drop nearly 8 million tons of bombs, four times the tonnage dropped during all of World War II, in the largest display of firepower in the history of warfare. The majority of bombs are dropped in South Vietnam against Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army positions, resulting in 3 million civilian refugees due to the destruction of numerous villages. In North Vietnam, military targets include fuel depots and factories. The North Vietnamese react to the air strikes by decentralizing their factories and supply bases, thus minimizing their vulnerability to bomb damage.

President Johnson authorizes the use of Napalm, a petroleum based anti-personnel bomb that showers hundreds of explosive pellets upon impact.

At the White House, President Johnson authorizes sending two more Marine battalions and up to 20,000 logistical personnel to Vietnam. The President also authorizes American combat troops to conduct patrols to root out Viet Cong in the countryside. His decision to allow offensive operations is kept secret from the American press and public for two months. In Washington, 15,000 students gather to protest the U.S. bombing campaign. Student demonstrators will often refer to President Johnson, his advisors, the Pentagon, Washington bureaucrats, and weapons manufacturers, simply as “the Establishment.”

By May 13th the first bombing pause is announced by the U.S. in the hope that Hanoi will now negotiate. There will be six more pauses during the Rolling Thunder bombing campaign, all with same intention. However, each time, the North Vietnamese ignore the peace overtures and instead use the pause to repair air defences and send more troops and supplies into the South via the Ho Chi Minh trail. By the year’s end U.S. troop levels in Vietnam reached 184,300. An estimated 90,000 South Vietnamese soldiers deserted in 1965, while an estimated 35,000 soldiers from North Vietnam infiltrated the South via the Ho Chi Minh trail. Up to 50 percent of the countryside in South Vietnam is now under some degree of Viet Cong control.

In October 1968 - Operation Rolling Thunder ends as President Johnson announces a complete halt of U.S. bombing of North Vietnam in the hope of restarting the peace talks. Throughout the three and a half year bombing campaign, the U.S. dropped a million tons of bombs on North Vietnam, the equivalent of 800 tons per day, with little actual success in halting the flow of soldiers and supplies into the South or in damaging North Vietnamese morale. In fact, the opposite has occurred as the North Vietnamese have patriotically rallied around their Communist leaders as a result of the onslaught. By now, many towns south of Hanoi have been levelled with a U.S. estimate of 52,000 civilian deaths.

During Rolling Thunder, North Vietnam’s sophisticated, Soviet-supplied air defence system managed to shoot down 922 U.S. aircraft during 2380 sorties flown by B-52 bombers and over 300,000 sorties by U.S. Navy and Air Force fighter-bombers.

By year’s end, U.S. troop levels reached 495,000 with 30,000 American deaths to date. In 1968, over a thousand a month were killed. An estimated 150,000 soldiers from North Vietnam infiltrated the South via the Ho Chi Minh trail in 1968.

Although the U.S. conducted 200 air strikes each day against the trail in late 1968, up to 10,000 NVA supply trucks are en route at any given time.

On the 20th January 1969 - Richard M. Nixon is inaugurated as the 37th U.S. President and declares "...the greatest honour history can bestow is the title of peacemaker. This honour now beckons America..." He is the fifth President coping with Vietnam and had successfully campaigned on a pledge of "peace with honour."

The Viet Cong continue their assaults targets throughout South Vietnam and Saigon. President Nixon threatens to resume bombing North Vietnam in retaliation for Viet Cong offenses in the South and authorizes Operation Menu, the secret bombing of Cambodia by B-52s, targeting North Vietnamese supply sanctuaries located along the border of Vietnam.

The New York Times breaks the news of the secret bombing of Cambodia. As a result, Nixon orders FBI wiretaps on the telephones of four journalists, along with 13 government officials to determine the source of news leak.

The costly assault and its confused aftermath provokes a political outcry back in the U.S. that American lives are being wasted in Vietnam. One Senator labels the assault "senseless and irresponsible." It is the beginning of the end for America in Vietnam as Washington now orders MACV Commander Gen. Creighton Abrams to avoid such encounters in the future. 'Hamburger Hill' is the last major search and destroy mission by U.S. troops during the war. Small unit actions will now be used instead. A long period of decline in morale and discipline begins among American draftees serving in Vietnam involuntarily. Drug usage becomes rampant as nearly 50 percent experiment with marijuana, opium, or heroin which are easy to obtain on the streets of Saigon.

U.S. military hospitals later become deluged with drug related cases as drug abuse casualties far outnumber casualties of war.

During his first TV speech on Vietnam, President Nixon presents a peace plan in which America and North Vietnam would simultaneously pull out of South Vietnam over the next year. The offer is rejected by Hanoi. Through a French emissary President Nixon sends a secret letter to Ho Chi Minh urging him to settle the war, while at the same time threatening to resume bombing if peace talks remain stalled as of November 1. In August, Hanoi responds by repeating earlier demands for Viet Cong participation in a coalition government in South Vietnam. Viet Cong begin a new offensive attacking 150 targets throughout South Vietnam.

On the 2nd of September 1969 - Ho Chi Minh dies of a heart attack at age 79. He is succeeded by Le Duan, who publicly reads the last will of Ho Chi Minh urging the North Vietnamese to fight on "until the last Yankee has gone."

By the year's end, America's fighting strength in Vietnam has been reduced by 115,000 men. 40,024 Americans have now been killed in Vietnam. Over the next few years, the South Vietnamese Army will be boosted to over 500,000 men in accordance with 'Vietnamization' of the war in which they will take over the fighting from Americans.

In April 1970 President Nixon stuns Americans by announcing U.S. and South Vietnamese incursion into Cambodia "...not for the purpose of expanding the war into Cambodia but for the purpose of ending the war in Vietnam and winning the just peace we desire."

The announcement generates a tidal wave of protest by politicians, the press, students, professors, clergy members, business leaders, and many average Americans against Nixon and the Vietnam War. The incursion is in response to continuing Communist gains against Lon Nol's forces and is also intended to weaken overall NVA military strength as a prelude to U.S. departure from Vietnam.

On May the 1st the traditional Communist holiday. A combined force of 15,000 U.S. and South Vietnamese soldiers attack NVA supply bases inside Cambodia. However, throughout this offensive, NVA and Viet Cong carefully avoid large-scale battles and instead withdraw westward, further into Cambodia, leaving behind their base camps containing huge stores of weapons and ammunition.

Opinion polls indicate Nixon's approval rating among Americans has dropped to 50 percent, while approval of his Vietnam strategy has slipped to just 34 percent. Half of all Americans polled believe the war in Vietnam to be "morally wrong." President Nixon visits China and meets with Mao Zedong and Prime Minister Zhou Enlai to forge new diplomatic relations with the Communist nation. China pledges complete support for North Vietnam's struggle against the U.S.

From March-September 1972 - The Eastertide Offensive occurs as 200,000 North Vietnamese soldiers under the command of General Vo Nguyen Giap wage an all-out attempt to conquer South Vietnam. The offensive is a tremendous gamble by Giap and is undertaken as a result of U.S. troop withdrawal, the strength of the anti-war movement in America likely preventing a U.S. retaliatory response, and the poor performance of South Vietnam's Army during Operation Lam Son 719 in 1971. Giap's immediate strategy involves the capture of Quang Tri in the northern part of South Vietnam, Kontum in the mid section, and An Loc in the south. North Vietnam's Communist leaders also hope a successful offensive will harm Richard Nixon politically during this presidential election year in America, much as President Lyndon Johnson had suffered as a result of the 1968 Tet Offensive.

The Communists believe Nixon's removal would disrupt American aid to South Vietnam. In response to the ongoing NVA Eastertide Offensive, President Nixon announces Operation Linebacker I, the mining of North Vietnam's harbours along with intensified bombing of roads, bridges, and oil facilities.

The announcement brings international condemnation of the U.S. and ignites more anti-war protests in America.

During an air strike conducted by South Vietnamese pilots, Napalm bombs are accidentally dropped on South Vietnamese civilians, including children. Filmed footage and a still photo of a badly burned nude girl fleeing the destruction of her hamlet becomes yet another enduring image of the war.

President Nixon visits the Soviet Union and meets with Leonid Brezhnev to forge new diplomatic relations with the Communist nation. Nixon's visit causes great concern in Hanoi that their Soviet ally might be inclined to agree to an unfavourable settlement of the war to improve Soviet relations with the U.S.

On the 9th August 1974 Richard M. Nixon resigns the presidency as result of Watergate Scandal. Gerald R. Ford is sworn in as the 38th U.S. President, becoming the 6th President coping with Vietnam. The U.S. Congress appropriates only \$700 million for South Vietnam. This leaves the South Vietnamese Army under-funded and results in a decline of military readiness and morale. By March 1975 Da Nang falls as 100,000 South Vietnamese soldiers surrender after being abandoned by their commanding officers. NVA begin the 'Ho Chi Minh Campaign,' the final push toward Saigon.

A bitter, tearful President Thieu resigns during a 90 minute rambling TV speech to the people of South Vietnam. Thieu reads from the letter sent by Nixon in 1972 pledging "severe retaliatory action" if South Vietnam was threatened. Thieu condemns the Paris Peace Accords, Henry Kissinger and the U.S. "The United States has not respected its promises. It is inhumane. It is untrustworthy. It is irresponsible." He is then ushered into exile in Taiwan, aided by the CIA.

100,000 NVA soldiers advance on Saigon which is now overflowing with refugees. On this same day, President Ford gives a speech at Tulane University stating the conflict in Vietnam is "a war that is finished as far as America is concerned."

Saigon is encircled. 30,000 South Vietnamese soldiers are inside the city but are leaderless. NVA shell Tan Son Nhut air base in Saigon, killing two U.S. Marines at the compound gate. Conditions then deteriorate as South Vietnamese civilians loot the air base. President Ford now orders Operation Frequent Wind, the helicopter evacuation of 7000 Americans and South Vietnamese from Saigon, which begins with the radio broadcast of the song "White Christmas" as a pre-arranged code signal. At Tan Son Nhut, frantic civilians begin swarming the helicopters. The evacuation is then shifted to the walled-in American embassy, which is secured by U.S. Marines in full combat gear. But the scene there also deteriorates, as thousands of civilians attempt to get into the compound.

Three U.S. aircraft carriers stand by off the coast of Vietnam to handle incoming Americans and South Vietnamese refugees. Many South Vietnamese pilots also land on the carriers, flying American-made helicopters which are then pushed overboard to make room for more arrivals. Filmed footage of the \$250,000 choppers being tossed into the sea becomes an enduring image of the war's end.

At 8:35 am on April 30, 1975 - the last Americans, ten Marines from the embassy, depart Saigon, concluding the United States presence in Vietnam. North Vietnamese troops pour into Saigon and encounter little resistance. By 11 am the red and blue Viet Cong flag flies from the presidential palace. President Minh broadcasts a message of unconditional surrender. The war is over.

Vietnam's reunification begins under 'The Socialist Republic of Vietnam'.



Vietnamese Culture

The richness of the Vietnamese culture is expressed through the heritage of its origin. Spiritual life in Vietnam has several belief systems, including Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Tam Giao, which is a mixture of Taoism, and ancient Vietnamese and Chinese common beliefs.

As a language, Vietnamese is exceptionally flexible and lyrical, and poetry plays a strong role in both literature and the performing arts. Folk art, which flourished before French colonization, has experienced a resurgence in beautiful woodcuts, village painting, and block printing. Vietnamese lacquer art, another traditional medium, is commonly held to be the most original and sophisticated in the world. Music, dance, and puppetry, including the uniquely Vietnamese water puppetry, are also mainstays of the country's culture.

The most important festival of the year is Tet, a week-long event in late January or early February that celebrates the new lunar year and the advent of spring. Celebration consists of both raucous festivity (fireworks, drums, gongs) and quiet meditation. In addition to Tet, there are about twenty other traditional and religious festivals each year.

Vietnamese architecture expresses a graceful aesthetic of natural balance and harmony that is evident in any of the country's vast numbers of historic temples and monasteries.

The pre-eminent architectural form is the pagoda, a tower comprised of a series of stepped pyramidal structures and frequently adorned with lavish carvings and painted ornamentation. Generally speaking, the pagoda form symbolizes the human desire to bridge the gap between the constraints of earthly existence and the perfection of heavenly forces. Pagodas are found in every province of Vietnam. One of the most treasured is the Thien Mu Pagoda in Hue, founded in 1601 and completed more than two hundred years later. In North Vietnam, the pagodas that serve as the shrines and temples of the Son La mountains are especially worth visiting. In South Vietnam, the Giac Lam Pagoda of Ho Chi Minh City is considered to be the city's oldest and is notable as well for its many richly-carved jackwood statues.

Although rice is the foundation of the Vietnamese diet, the country's cuisine is anything but bland. Deeply influenced by the national cuisines of France, China, and Thailand, Vietnamese cooking is highly innovative and makes extensive use of fresh herbs, including lemon grass, basil, coriander, parsley, laksa leaf, lime, and chili. Soup is served at almost every meal, and snacks include spring rolls and rice pancakes. The national condiment is nuoc mam, a piquant fermented fish sauce served with every meal. Indigenous tropical fruits include bananas, pineapples, coconuts, lychees, melons, mandarin oranges, grapes, and exotic varieties like the three-seeded cherry and the green dragon fruit.

Traditional Clothes

There are 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam, each of which has unique and specific styles of clothing. Unlike the colorful dressing of ethnic people on the plateau, the traditional costumes of plainsman tend to be very simple and modest with different dressing styles in Northern and Southern Vietnam.

The main traditional materials come from natural fiber that appropriate for a tropical climate such as hemp, silk or cotton. The diversity and abundance of Vietnamese ethnic clothing cannot be completely dealt with in this article so we will only introduce the traditional clothing of plainsman.

In Northern Vietnam, the peasants prefer an upper garment and baggy cotton trousers that rolled up above the knees to keep from getting wet from the water and mud from the rice fields. Hence, they had a limited choice of similarly plain and simple clothes for every day use as well as being limited in the colors they were allowed to use. Therefore, men wear brown clothing with a piece of cloth wrapped around the head and their footwear consists of a pair of plain sandals. Whereas, women were in light brown-colored short shirts with long black skirts, their headgear consists of a black turban with a peak at the front. For a period, commoners were not allowed to wear clothes with dyes other than black, brown or white exception of special occasions such as festivals. For formal ceremonies, men would have two additional items, a long gown with slits on both side and a turban, usually in black or brown made of cotton or silk.

Peasants across the country also gradually came to wear silk pajama-like costumes, known as ao canh in the North and ao ba ba in the South. The ao ba ba simply consists of a pair of silk pants and a long-sleeved, button-down silk shirt. The shirt will be somewhat long and split at the sides of the waist, forming two flaps with two typically two pockets. That garment's simplicity and versatility has contributed to its popularity, as it can be worn while laboring or lounging by an overwhelming amount of the population, whether in rural or urban areas.

Ao Ba Ba



Ao Tu Than

Ao tu than or “4-part dress” is one example of an ancient dress widely worn by commoner women from as early as the 12th century on to the early 20th century, along with the ao yem bodice. As Vietnam expanded Southward and slightly different cultures began to emerge between the regions, ao tu than gradually became associated specifically with Northern women. It was developed through the introduction of the Chinese Hanfu clothing and considered one of the oldest enduring Vietnamese cultural relics. Looking the picture, you will see that unlike most modern colorful ao tu than, ancient Vietnamese preferred more muted colors.

The most popular and widely-recognized Vietnamese national costume is the ao dai, which is worn nowadays mostly by women on special occasions such as weddings and funerals. In fact, there is a similarity between ao dai and the Chinese Qipao which consisting of a long gown with a slit on both sides, worn over silk pants. It is elegant in style and comfortable to wear, and likely derived in the 18th century. Nowadays, white ao dai commonly can be seen with high school girls in Vietnam or some female office workers like receptionists, secretaries, tour guides...

For a very long time, the traditional Vietnamese styles are now gradually changed along with social development. Some traditional clothes have been lost, substituted with more modern interpretations, while business shirts and trousers have replaced traditional long sleeved shirts and wide trousers. Yet, traditional costumes still exist and efforts are increasingly being made to restore traditional festivals and entertainment which incorporate traditional costumes.

Ao Tu Than



Ao Dai

The beauty of women dressed in “Ao Dai” always leaves a deep impression on foreign visitors to Vietnam. Girl students dressed in white long robes take to streets on the way to schools or back home, or gracefully sail on their bikes along streets. Female secretaries in delicate pastels greet you at an office door and older ladies in deep shades of purple, green or blue cut a striking pose at a restaurant dinner. The “Ao Dai” appears to flatter every figure.

“Ao Dai” is made individually to fit each customer’s shape to create the most graceful look. Its body-hugging top flows over wide trousers that brush the floor. The pants should reach the soles of the feet and flow along the floor. Splits in the gown extend well above waist height and make it comfortable and easy to move in.

Comfort is always taken into account for fashions and beauty. Tailoring must ensure the wearer’s freedom of movements. Despite it is a long robe, “Ao Dai” must be cool to wear. Synthetic or silk fabrics are preferred as they do not crush and are quick drying, making the “Ao Dai” a practical uniform for daily wear.

The color is indicative of the wearer’s age and status. Young girls wear pure white, fully-lined outfits symbolizing their purity. Older but unmarried girls move into soft pastel shades. Only married women wear “Ao Dai” in strong, rich colors, usually over white or black pants. However, “Ao Dai” is rarely seen in places where manual work is practiced. The nineties saw a real resurgence of ao dai. It has become standard and common attire for girl students as well as female staff at offices and hotels. Traditionally, “Ao Dai” has become the most preferred dress on formal occasions.

Today, “Ao Dai” has been a bit modified. Its length is cut shorter usually just below the knee. Variations in the neck, between boat and mandarin style, are common. Color patterns are no longer rigidly controlled and accesses to new fabrics have generated some dazzling results. However, most visitors to Vietnam have highly appreciated local tailors’ skills when making Ao Dai. It is hard to think of a more elegant, demure and charming outfit, that suits Vietnamese women of different ages, than Ao Dai.

Ao Dai



Non La

According to historian Le Van Lan, Vietnamese girls and women have worn the conical hat for a long time. The ancestor of today's conical hat was carved on a Ngoc Lu kettledrum and Ao Thinh bronze jar 2,500 to 3000 years ago. "Though no one knows exactly when the hat was born, for a long time the conical hat has been considered the symbol of Vietnamese farmers and Vietnamese people.

The hat has a conical shape, made out of straw and is kept on the head by a silk cloth chin strap that keeps the hat from slipping out of the wearer's head. This traditional conical hat is particularly suitable for farmers in such a tropical country as Vietnam where fierce sunshine and hard rains take place as often as girls' sulking. It can be used as a basin or a bowl to contain water when they are thirsty, as a fan when they are hot, as a basket for a bunch of vegetables. Romantically, young couples veil their kisses behind this traditional conical hat during their dates.

The legend behind the hat is that, once upon a time, there was a very tall woman who often wore a magical kind of hat made from four round leaves knitted together with bamboo. Wherever this woman appeared, clouds passed and the weather became favorable. After teaching people to plant vegetables and trees for their living, she secretly passed and ascended to the heavens. Yet, she was honored as the Goddess of Human and ever since, they have made hats in the shape of hers to protect themselves from the sun and the rain.

Each region in Vietnam has a well-known conical hat - making village. The conical hat of the Tay group has a distinctively red color, whereas that in Thanh Hoa differs from others with a 20-hem frame. Hue's is thin and elegant, contrary to the thick ones from Binh Dinh.

Chuong village produces 7,000 to 8,000 conical hats per day and about three million hats per year for both domestic use and export. It seems that every family in Chuong village is making conical hats. According to statistics, 80 percent of the village's population earn their living by conical hat production. This small village which maintained its reputation for over three centuries belongs to Ha Tay Province and is only 40 kilometers on the west from Hanoi and is well worth a visit.



Black Thai Dress

Being the second largest ethnic group in Vietnam, the Thai's brocade is very well-known for its unique, colourful and durable motifs. In recent decades, Thai men have adopted the Kinh's style of dress, while Thai women retain their traditional clothes including short vests, long skirts, scarves and ornaments. The Black Thai are concentrated in Son La and southern Lai Chau Provinces whilst the White Thai are found predominantly in northern Lai Chau and Lao Cai provinces. The traditional costume of the Thai generally comprises a coloured blouse (often green, blue, pink or purple) with a distinctive row of silver buttons down the front, a long black skirt and usually an intricately embroidered and very distinctive black headscarf. Travelers will encounter many Thai people in Mai Chau village near Hoa Binh but they only wear their traditional costume when performing dances for tourists.



Traditional Music

Sao Truc (Vietnamese Bamboo Flute)

The Sao Truc is a simple instrument consisting of a length of fine bamboo pierced with finger holes, and has long been connected to Vietnamese cultural and spiritual life. Particularly popular in the countryside, it was traditionally played by resting farmers taking a break from working in the fields.

A vertically-held bamboo flute which is made from the base of a bamboo tree the Sao Truc is Vietnam's most well-known wind instrument and has long been attached to the cultural and spiritual life of Vietnamese people. Although placement of the holes and tuning of the



instrument is a very delicate process, the instrument itself basically a simple construction. It is this very fact which allows for very complex techniques in playing the instrument such as the use of breath with changes in the blowing angle for great or minute changes in sound quality, or partial-holding of finger holes to make delicate pitch changes.

When playing, flutists hold the instrument to the right side and place their mouth at the blowing hole. Sao Truc is usually

performed solo or in ensemble with other instruments in orchestras of Vietnamese popular opera Cheo, Van singing genre, and Royal Small Orchestra.

During the 1970s, well-known artists Dinh Tinh and Ngo Nam developed a new version of the Sao Truc by changing the 6-finger-hole flute into a 10-finger-hole flute, allowing performers to extend their register.

[Click Here](#)

**To listen to the
Sao Truc**

Dan Bau

The Dan Bau is a traditional one-string musical instrument.

Although having only one string, it can emit all the sounds in the pentatonic scale. The eight notes of Vietnamese music give modulations of greater amplitudes than those obtained by any other single-stringed instrument in the world. The Dan Bau is usually tuned to the note C. It uses harmonies (or overtones). When playing, the musician plucks the string while touching it lightly with the side of his hand at a point producing a harmony. However, because the flexible rod causes the tension of the string to vary, the pitch may be made to rise or fall, the note may be lengthened or shortened, and trills may be played. The technique involving the fingers of the left hand includes vibrating, pressing, alternate pressing and releasing. The Dan Bau may be played on a scale consisting of third-tones or even quartertones. The notes played by the Dan Bau are smooth, sweet, and captivating.

In recent years, Dan Bau is made very carefully to ensure aesthetic and sound quality. When played in public, it is often used with an electronic amplifier. Success has been achieved in amplifying the sound, causing an increase in volume and distance that the sound carries, while still preserving the quality of the sound. The instrument is played solo or to accompany a poetry recital. During recent years, it has taken a role in orchestral accompaniment to Cheo and Cai luong opera. The Dan Bau has been performed on major stages in foreign countries.

Playing the Dan Bau is simple but requires a great deal of precision. The little finger of the right hand gently taps the string at one of seven commonly used nodes while the other fingers pluck the string using a long plectrum. With the left hand, the player can push the flexible rod towards the instrument using the index finger to lower the pitch of the note, or the player can pull the rod away from the instrument with the thumb to raise the pitch of the note. This technique is used both to play notes not available at a node as well as to add vibrato to any note.



**To listen to the
Dan Bau**

[**Click Here**](#)

Religion

Vietnam has a diverse mix of religions such as Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Christianity and Muslim and some indigenous religions such as Caodaism.

Buddhism.

It is believed that Buddhism spread first from China to Vietnam's Red River Delta region in approximately the second century A.D., and then from India to the southern Mekong Delta area at some time between the third and the sixth centuries. The Chinese version, Mahayana Buddhism, became the faith of most Vietnamese, whereas the Indian version, Theravada (or Hinayana) Buddhism, was confined mostly to the southern delta region.

Vietnamese Buddhism continues to hold supreme in our own time. It is therefore easy to understand how great an influence the Buddha has had on the Vietnamese mind, and the generous contribution it has made to the moral and spiritual training of a people whose gentleness and simple outlook on life predisposed them to accept the Religion of Compassion.

Confucianism.

Confucianism can be considered as a social philosophy than just a normal religion. It has no church, no clergy and no bible. It advocates a code of social behavior that man ought to live in harmony with society and attain happiness in his individual life. Confucianism was introduced into Vietnam early during the Chinese rule and has maintained its influence since that time. In 1072, there was a temple dedicated to Confucius and his leading 72 disciples. Located in Hanoi, this temple was called the Temple of Literature. In Saigon, you can see at the Botanical Gardens a temple dedicated to Confucius called the Temple of Souvenirs. This is the site of Confucius' birthday celebration which is solemnly honored each year.

Caodaism.

Caodaism (Dao Cao Dai) is the third largest religion in Vietnam after Buddhism and Roman Catholicism. "Cao" means "high"; "Dai" means "palace". The word refers to the supreme palace where God reigns and also used as God's symbolic name. It originated in South Vietnam in the early twenties and was officially inaugurated in 1926. Caodaism is a religion which combines elements from many of the world's main religions, including Buddhism, Confucianism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Taoism.

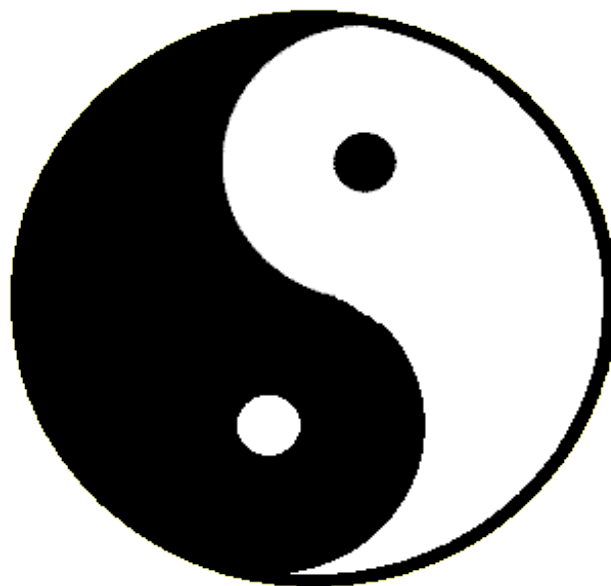
It is syncretistic in its doctrine by reconciling and bringing together the differing systems of belief, as in religion, ritual practice, organizational structure, divinities and philosophy.

Taoism.

Taoism is believed to be founded by Lao Tseu (Lao Tu), a Chinese contemporary of Confucius in about 500 B.C. The ideas and doctrines of his religion are explained in his book entitled Dao Duc Kinh (The Book of Morality).

He spent his life searching for a way that would avoid the constant feudal warfare and conflicts that disrupted society during his lifetime. Taoism, therefore, is the natural mode of behavior that encourages one to live purely and simply. It relies on a developing a harmony between Man, Nature and a Universal Order that would in turn promote good will and personal integrity. The ritual of Taoism in Vietnam today consists of religion-magical features, divining, worship of the spirits of nature, and so forth.

The Yin Yang is a common theme in Taoism, with black representing yin and white representing yang. The symbol was derived from astronomical observations which recorded the shadow of the sun throughout a full year. The two swirling shapes inside the symbol give the impression of change - the only constant factor in the universe. Since nothing in nature is purely black or white the symbol includes a small black spot in the white swirl, and a corresponding white spot in the black swirl.



Vietnamese Cuisine

Vietnamese food is one of the most varied and seductive on the planet – a delicious mix of the food of its colonial visitors and age-old flavours and techniques.

Vietnamese dishes are fresh, have a depth of flavour and have excellent health properties at the same time.

No Vietnamese food outside of Vietnam can equal in flavor or quality to that made in the country itself. In brief, Vietnamese cuisine varies from simple everyday meals to the most complex dishes designed for royalty. Reaching a balance between fresh herbs and meats as well as a selective use of spices to reach a fine taste, Vietnamese food can be considered one of the healthiest yet most divine cuisines worldwide.

The use of ingredients that are typically uncommon or taboo in most countries is one of the quintessential attributes that make Vietnamese cuisine unique. In some countries, unusual ingredients, most of the time, can only be found in exotic restaurants.

A common and inexpensive breakfast dish which can be found in any wet market, balut or hột vịt lộn is a fertilized duck egg with a nearly developed embryo inside which is boiled and eaten in the shell. It is typically served with fresh herbs: rau răm or Vietnamese coriander, salt, and pepper; lime juice is another popular additive, when available. A more unusual version of balut dish - Fetus quails (“trứng cút lộn”)- is a snack favored by many Vietnamese students. Paddy crab and paddy snail are the main ingredients in “bún riêu ốc” - a popular noodle dish - and in some everyday soup dishes (“canh”) and braised food (“món bung”). Family meals with silk worms (“nhộng”), banana flowers (“hoa chuối”), fermented fish and shrimp (“mắm cá, mắm tôm tép”) are not rare sights. Seasonal favorites include (“rươi”) or ragworm, which are made into many dishes such as fried “rươi” omelet (chả rươi), fermented “rươi” sauce (mắm rươi), steamed rươi (rươi hấp), stir-fried rươi with radish or bamboo shoot (rươi xào củ niễng măng tươi hay củ cải).

Vietnamese cuisine is also notable for its wide range of meat choices. Exotic meat such as dog meat, snake, soft-shell turtle, deer and domestic goat are widely sold in street-side restaurants and enjoyed with alcoholic beverages. A taboo in many Western countries, consumption of dog meat is a common sight throughout the country and is believed to raise the libido in men. Paddy mouse meat - barbecued, braised, stir or deep fried - is a rarer dish that can be found in many Vietnamese rural areas or even high-end city restaurants.

A typical Vietnamese meal (lunch or dinner) will include steamed rice; a soup dish to eat with rice, a meat or fish dish and a vegetarian dish (either stir fried or boiled).

Vietnamese do not eat in separate servings, but the food is placed in the middle. Each member of the family has a small bowl and chopsticks with which they take food from the table throughout the meal.

Pho Soup

Ingredients:

Brisket beef: 750g
Chicken bones: 500g
Vegetable oil: 250ml
2 Red onions - peeled and sliced
1 tsp salt
5 spring onions
3 Cloves of garlic - roughly sliced
2 Knobs of ginger - sliced
2 Cinnamon sticks
5 Star anise
3 tsp coriander seeds
1 -2 tbsp of fish sauce
1 tbsp grated palm sugar
1 Packet of rice noodles
Juice of 1 lime or lemon



Beef Pho Soup

This is a very simple soup and, if you wish, you can add fresh coriander, Vietnamese mint, bean sprouts and sliced chilli for a bit more flavour and texture.

Method:

Rinse beef and chicken bones in cold water. Put them together in a large pot and fill with 2 litres of cold water. Bring to the boil, skim the scum that rises to the surface and reduce heat to a steady simmer. Put the oil and sliced onions together in a wok or frying pan and cook over a medium heat, stirring often, for 10 minutes or so until golden brown. This will give the broth a beautiful brown colour and rich flavour, but be careful not to overcook, which would make it bitter. Drain the onions, discarding the oil, and spread them out on kitchen paper to absorb any excess oil. Now add to the stock the onions, salt, the dark green ends of the spring onions (reserve the white parts for later), the garlic, ginger, cinnamon, star anise and coriander seeds. Simmer for about 2 hours or until the brisket is very tender. Remove the brisket to a bowl and allow to cool slightly. Strain the soup into a clean saucepan and discard the rest of the ingredients. Flake the beef back into the pot of broth, discarding any fatty pieces. Now season the pho soup to your liking with the fish sauce and sugar. Cook the rice noodles in a pot of boiling salted water until tender and drain.

Serve:

Divide the noodles into individual bowls (If using fresh noodles, heat briefly in the microwave or steamer.) Pour over the soup, slice the remaining white parts of the spring onions and sprinkle over the soup. Finish with a squeeze of lime juice. Serves 6.

Fried Spring Rolls

Ingredients:

Onion: 200g (finely chopped)
Carrot: 150g (finely chopped)
Dry vermicelli: 30g
Earwood: 30g
Black mushroom: 30g
Minced pork: 300g
Crab meat: 500g
Eggs : 2
Pepper, sugar: 1/10 teaspoon
Chicken powder ¼ teaspoon
Cooking oil: 200ml
Fish Sauce: 1 teaspoon
Sugar: 1 teaspoon
Fresh Water: 3 teaspoons
Vinegar or fresh lime juice: 1 teaspoon
Fresh Chilli, garlic: 1 teaspoon
Square rice papper, Coconut milk.



Fried Spring Rolls

How to make:

Soak the dry vermicelli, earwood, black mushroom in water for 20 minutes. Then dry & finely chop. Put all the prepared ingredients into a large mixing bowl and mix them well. Place some of the above prepared ingredients on a sheet of rice paper before rolling it into rolls. Put cooking oil into a pan, bring to a high heat, put spring rolls in & turn occasionally until the color of the “nem” turns light brown.

Dipping Sauce:

Put fish sauce, sugar, lemon juice, garlic and chili in a large mixing bowl; add 2 spoonfuls of water in, then stir well.

Serve:

Serve hot with herbs & dipping sauce. Serves 4.

Dipping Sauce



Desserts

Vietnamese desserts are not always the prettiest-looking sweets, but they are very good. They are composed of ingredients different from Western desserts and might look unusual at first. A lot of traditional Vietnamese desserts are made from sticky rice or other starches like cassava.



Vietnamese sweet dishes are either dessert or appetiser. Basically, they are made from rice, sticky rice, a variety of beans, sugar, sauces and coconut milk.

Coconut and Sweet Tapioca Pudding with Bananas (Che Chuoi in Vietnamese)

Ingredients

Serves: 10

8 Vietnamese sweet bananas (chuối xiêm), peeled

2 tablespoons brown sugar

2/3 cup sugar

1/2 cup tapioca pearls (see tips)

1 quart water

1 quart coconut milk

2-1/2 tablespoons coconut cream

4 pandan leaves, knotted

1/8 teaspoon sea salt

1/4 cup dried tapioca shreds

Preparation:

Soak the tapioca pearls in water overnight or for at least an hour. The next day, drain the tapioca pearls and put aside.

Do the same for the tapioca shreds. Soak them in water for at least one hour, then drain. Place the bananas in a bowl. Sprinkle with brown sugar and put aside.

Bring the water to a boil. Add the tapioca pearls. Reduce the heat to medium-low and cook for about 20 minutes until the tapioca pearls are fluffed-up and translucent. Stir frequently. Drain the cooked tapioca pearls. The pearls should feel gummy but not too firm between your thumb and finger. Do not overcook, as the pearls will finish cooking in the coconut sauce. Put aside.

Same cooking method for the tapioca shreds: Bring the water to a boil in a different saucepan. Add the tapioca shreds. Reduce the heat to medium-low and cook for about 20 minutes until the tapioca shreds are transparent. Stir frequently to prevent the pieces from sticking to the bottom. Drain the cooked tapioca shreds. Do not overcook, as the tapioca shreds will finish cooking in the coconut sauce. Put aside.

In another saucepan, caramelize the sugar and when it becomes slightly golden, add water and bring to a boil until all the caramel sugar is dissolved. Add the coconut milk. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to a gentle simmer. Add the pandan leaves, coconut cream and sea salt. Mix well, then add the bananas.

Cook for about 5-6 minutes until the bananas are nicely coated with the coconut sauce. Add the tapioca pearls and tapioca shreds and cook for another 2-3 minutes. Gently stir. Be very careful not to break the bananas. Cover the saucepan. Let the dessert sit for at about 20-30 minutes. Remove and discard the pandan leaves.

Divide among 10 bowls. You can garnish with vanilla ice cream or a dollop of whipped cream and sprinkle some toasted sesame seeds or slightly crushed peanuts. Serve hot or at room temperature.



Che Chuoi

Travelling in Vietnam

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.

Most travellers to Vietnam who wish to see a substantial part of the country arrive in Hanoi, and after visiting the Northern area of Vietnam, make their way down the coast to Ho Chi Minh and the Mekong Delta.

The same can be done in reverse, arriving in Ho Chi Minh City and after visiting the South of Vietnam you can make your way up through Central Vietnam and the coastal areas to Hanoi.

Hanoi

Hanoi is the capital city of Vietnam and is located in the North of Vietnam where the visitor can enjoy a temperate climate. This area has four distinct seasons: Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter. These happen at the same times as Northern Hemisphere and European seasons, but Hanoi winters are milder and more pleasant than those of Northern Europe and a trip up into the cooler hills can provide a refreshing change if you are visiting us during the European summer. For Southern Hemisphere visitors the climate in Hanoi and the northern half of Vietnam is very comparable to that of Brisbane in Australia, only at the opposite time of the year.

Hanoi is an attractive city of many parks and large lakes such as Hoan Kiem with its Tortoise Tower. Cultural sites such as the Temple of Literature, Museum of Ethnology, and the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum complex with its own Museum and Ho Chi Minh's stilt house. Originating over one thousand years ago in Northern Vietnam the famous Hanoi Water Puppets are a delight for all age groups, their theatre lies at the north of Hoan Kiem lake. In the center of Hanoi is the French Old Quarter area, popular with many tourists this is part of the city's rich cultural heritage and is reminiscent of a 1930's provincial French town.

The rural area surrounding Hanoi has many places of interest such as Hoa Lu-Tam Coc with their breathtaking rock formations and caves set amongst the rice paddies, and Perfume Pagoda with its Buddhist shrines built into the limestone cliffs.



**Hanoi
Street Trader**



**Trun Quoc
Pagoda**



**Perfume Pagoda
Cave Shrine**

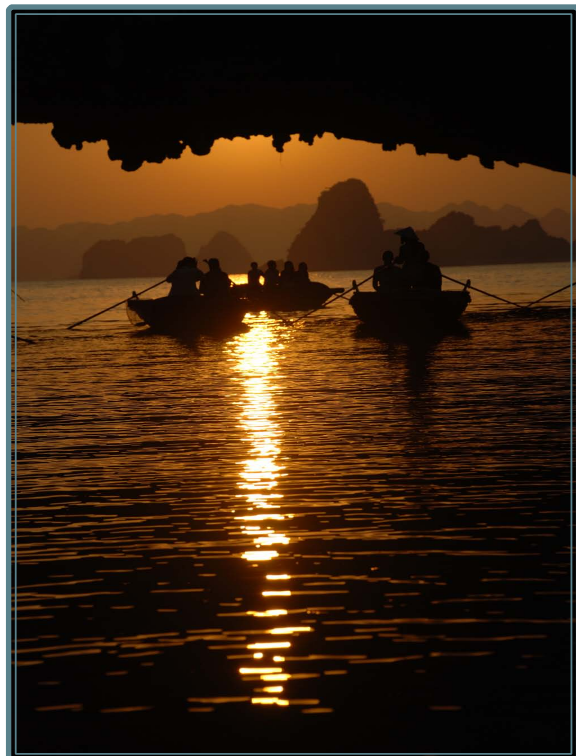
Halong Bay

This northern half of Vietnam holds many attractions for the visitor including the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Halong Bay. Covering an area of over 1500 sq km it is one of Vietnams treasures. Over 3000 islands rise up from the sparkling waters of the Gulf of Tonkin, many of which are home to beautiful coral laden beaches and grottoes. Depending on your interest in the activities that are available there are several options for you to choose from in the exploration of Halong Bay and Cat Ba Island National Park including kayaking, trekking, swimming and staying overnight on Cat Ba Island.



**Sung Sot
Cave**

**Halong Bay
Cave Boats**



Halong Bay Junks



Sapa

In the far north near the Chinese border lies the beautiful valley of Sapa. This is the far north's main attraction for travellers to Vietnam. The whole area has spectacular scenery and is home to a mix of many ethnic hill tribe cultures. There is an excellent market place in the town with local produce and handicrafts made by the local mountain people who venture down to trade their wares.

Trekking in Vietnam is becoming very popular and the Sapa valley is no exception. There are many trekking tours that vary from the short moderate walks which can be done quite easily on day trips from town, to the long and more vigorous hikes taking several days and staying overnight in the villages along the way.

Surrounding Sapa are the Hoang Lien Mountains, known by the French as the Tonkin Alps. These mountains include Mt Fansipan, which at 3143 metres is Vietnam's highest mountain. The peak of Mt Fansipan is generally accessible throughout the year, but don't underestimate its difficulty, you should have a good level of health and fitness.

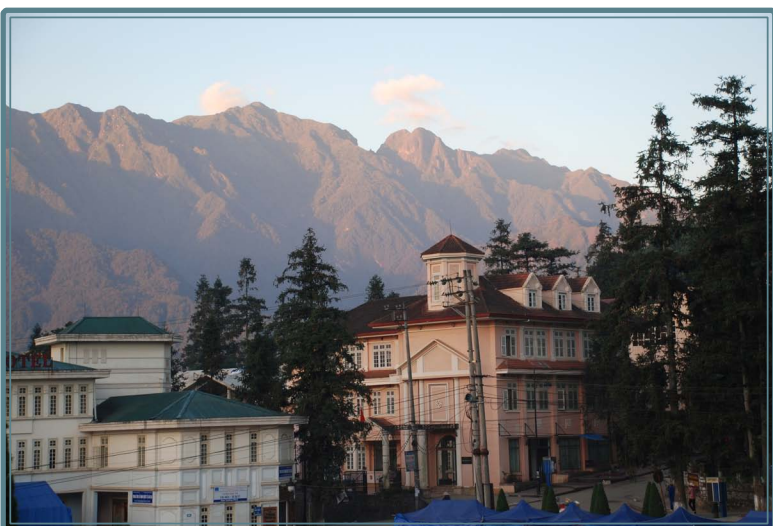


**Black H'mong
Hill Tribe Women**



Sapa Valley

**Paddy Rice Kids
North West**



Sapa Town

North West

Cultural expeditions into the north west areas of Vietnam are available for those wishing to experience the harsh mountainous terrain and the varied lifestyles of the Vietnamese people and ethnic minority groups who live in there.

A main attractions that draw visitors to the north west is the site of an old French penal colony where anticolonial revolutionaries were jailed. Although much of it was destroyed by the US warplanes offloading their unused ammunition during the Vietnam US war, it has been partially restored and along with the little museum makes for interesting viewing. The surrounding area of Son La is home to several Montagnards (Mountain people). The White Thai, Meo, Muong, and Black Thai people. A small display of their handcrafted wares can be seen in the local town market.

Dien Bien Phu is 35km as the crow flies from the Laos border, and is situated in the Muong Thanh Valley. For centuries it has been a major town on the transit route for traders between Myanmar, China and the north of Vietnam, but more recently in May of 1954 it became a place of special significance in the creation of a modern state of Vietnam. It was the site of a decisive battle that led to a 57 day siege of the French garrison and consequential end of the French colonial occupation.

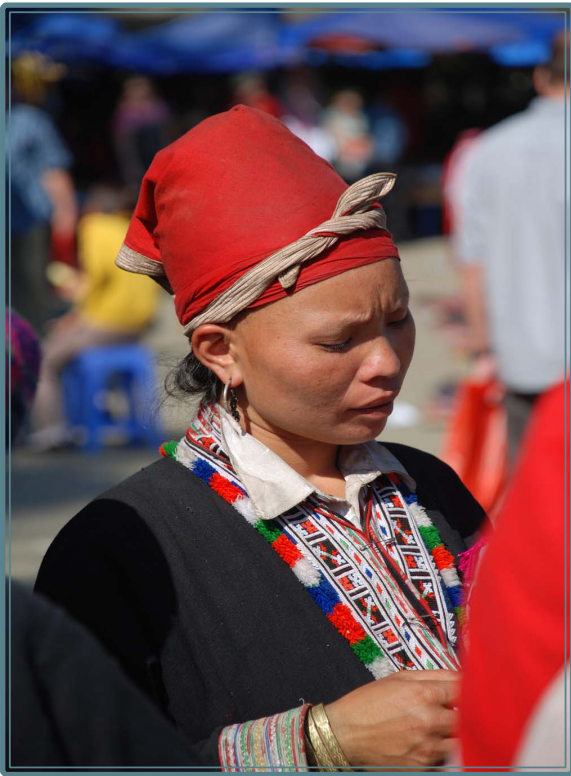
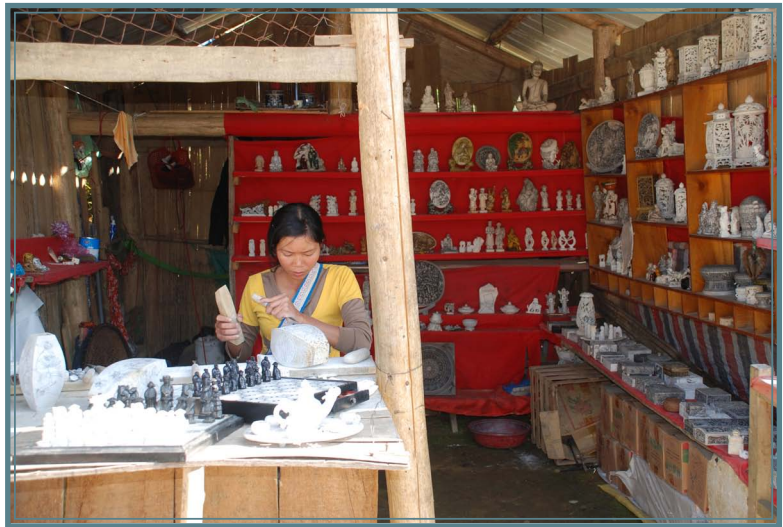
The history of Dien Bien Phu is the main attraction here and now being the capital of Lai Chau province the once small town is growing considerably. On the site of the battle there now stands Dien Bien Phu Museum where old French tanks and artillery can be seen along with the re-building of the bunker headquarters of the French commander Colonel Christian de Castries.

For those not so adventurous a popular destination only 4 hours drive from Hanoi is Mai Chau. A place to relax and enjoy the hospitality of the locals, or trek to some of the minority villages. Mai Chau is a beautiful large valley populated by the ethnic White Thai tribe whose villages and farms are spread throughout the area.



**Black H'mong
Girls - Sapa Valley**

Marble Sculpture Artisan - Sapa



Red Dao Hill Tribe - North West

North East

The North East mountainous region gives us the unique opportunity for exploration. It is the least travelled part of the north and often attracts the more hardy travellers to Vietnam desiring to experience some of this remote area. It offers breathtaking scenic views and interesting ethnic tribal minority groups.

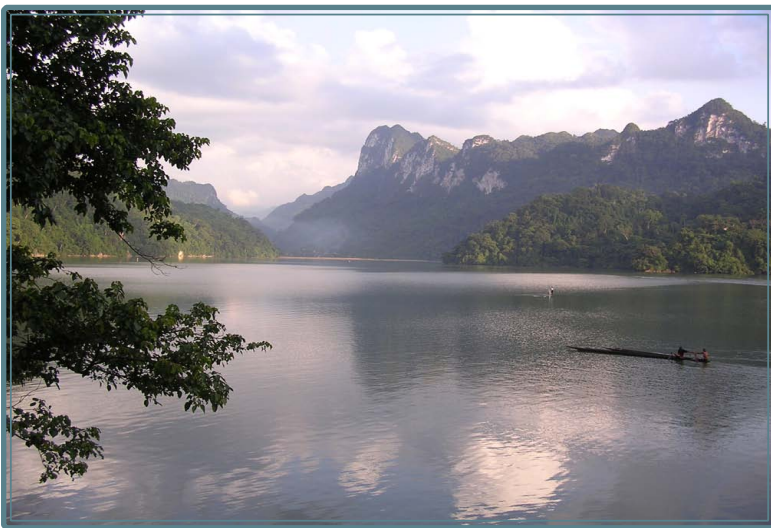
Ba Be lakes national park is home to the largest natural fresh water lake system in Vietnam. This beautiful region is a tropical rain forest area covering more than 23,000 hectares which includes waterfalls, rivers, deep valleys, lakes and caves.

The surrounding area is dotted with small village settlements inhabited by members of the ethnic hilltribe Tay people. All which make it a picturesque landscape.

In the far north east near Cao Bang there is the spectacular Ban Gioc waterfall that stretches for 300m and is placed directly on the border of Vietnam and China. There is an invisible line that runs through the center of the river which is carefully respected by the rafts and canoes from either side.

The road from Cao Bang to Lang Son winds its way through steep mountain passes and the views are truly spectacular. Lang Son province is populated by the Tho, Nung, Man and Dao Montagnards (Mountain people) most of whom continue to live their traditional way of life. Being a main trading post between Vietnam and China, Lang Son has two markets where many imported Chinese products can be purchased.

On the outskirts of town there are two large beautiful caves and the remains of a 16th century Mac Dynasty Citadel which is a quiet beautiful spot with stunning views across the country and the surrounding rice fields.



Ba Be Lakes

**Tay
Hill Tribe Girl**





Ban Gioc Waterfall

Hue

Traditionally the small quiet city of Hue has always been regarded as one of the educational centres of Vietnam. Founded as a Royal City in 1687 its rich cultural and religious history is the gateway to the treasures of Vietnams royal past.

The main attractions for the visitor are the splendid tombs of the Nguyen emperors.

These magnificent mausoleums are constructed along the banks of the Perfume River over a 16km stretch, and are easily accessible by boat from Hue.

The remains of the ancient Citadel has a perimeter of 10km, and within it lies the Imperial Enclosure which houses the Forbidden Purple City, the emperors private residence.

There are also many interesting Temples and Pagodas in Hue that are worth a visit.

Vietnam is renowned for its many culinary dishes from the different areas around the country. Hue is one of these places and is well regarded for its culinary delights. The unique taste of the food here is most appealing.

Hue Citadel



Tomb Soldiers Hue



Hoi An

The ancient town of Hoi An was one of the major trading centres of Southeast Asia in the 16th century and is now a living museum. Its narrow streets are bordered by splendid architecture reflecting the past cultural influences. There's plenty to do, you can take the cultural and heritage half day walk through the town and see the local artisans working their mediums such as ceramics, wood, paint and fabrics.

Listen to some traditional music or take some Vietnamese cooking classes.

You can go for a boat ride on the river or hire a bicycle or motorbike and go to the beach. Shopping is big here, and combined with the overwhelming charm of the town Hoi An is a shoppers paradise. Tailor made clothing is one of the traditional specialties here and there are plenty of fabrics and designs to choose from. They are also excellent at copying your own style or design if you have one. Wood carvings are also a local specialty, and can be found in the gorgeous old buildings along with the art galleries.

There are lots of hotels ranging from the budget backpacker style to the resort class complete with swimming pool and recreational facilities. All are within walking distance from the town and its many good restaurants.

A trip out to My Son the historic site of the ancient kingdom of Champa, set in a lush valley surrounded by hills and streams that run around and between the structures it is well worth a visit. My Son became a religious centre under King Bhadravarman in the late 4th century and was occupied until the 13th century, the longest period of development of any monument in Southeast Asia.



**Hoi An
Wood Carver**

**Riverside
Hoi An**



Nha Trang

Nha Trang is a rapidly developing beach resort town and is one of the most popular in Vietnam. The focus here is the beach and the clear turquoise water where nearly all of the activity happens. The beach service is excellent, with food, cold beer, massage therapies including beauty treatments and manicures, and a host of products and services to keep you entertained.

The clear waters around the coast make for some great snorkelling or scuba diving, and Nha Trang is Vietnam's premier place for this activity. There are 3 dive shops to choose from, a French one, a British one and a Vietnamese one. All of them are certified and you can hire all the necessary equipment. There are many islands surrounding the coast of Nha Trang and a boat trip out to visit some of them especially the little fishing villages is highly recommended. This can also be a good way to do some snorkeling without going on a dive boat. Nha Trang is a seafood haven which has a wide variety of species including abalone, lobster, prawns and scallops. There are some excellent eateries for you to try.

The evening entertainment can be spent at either a disco or one of the local bars, one being the Nha Trang Sailing Club an Aussie run open air beach bar. Or for the more traditional the Vien Dong hotel has nightly ethnic minority song and dance performances.



Nha Trang

**Nha Trang
Beach**



Mui Ne

Unlike Nha Trang Mui Ne is more relaxed and laid back and offers a peaceful change of pace. A quiet lovely stretch of white sand with swaying palm trees. Famous for its enormous sand dunes and rock formations, you can explore them by following the 'Fairy Spring' stream from the sea to its source which passes through these beautiful creations. Unlike Nha Trang there is no scuba diving here but from August through to December Surf's up, and for the windsurfing crew the winds blow from November to May with a reported minimum wind speed of 12 knots.

There is a water sports shop in Mui Ne that rents good quality surfboards, windsurfers and kite surfing boards, and will give you basic help and instruction. For further adventures in the area there is ecotourism and adventure sports trips such as trekking, canyoning and rock climbing. Or if you are a keen golfer then 10km away, about a 10-15 minute drive to the nearby town of Phan Thiet there is a professional 18 hole golf course.

There are many hotels and resorts in Mui Ne with varying prices to choose from. There are also some interesting restaurants that serve beautiful and cheap seafood dishes along with ‘special wild food’ such as pigeon, rabbit, deer, frog and wild boar. Mui Ne is only a small town and getting around is comfortably done by foot or you can rent a bicycle.



Mui Ne Fishing Boats

Mui Ne Beach



Dalat

The Southern Central highlands of Dalat provide us with a beautifully temperate climate. With its many waterfalls and lakes, and evergreen forests and park like environment, this area is one of the most delightful in all of Vietnam.

Dalat is the countrys most popular honeymoon spot and is home to many of Vietnams artists. One of the main local industries here is the growing of flowers. At the Dalat Flower Gardens the many beautiful varieties can be seen, these include fuchsias, orchids and hydrangeas which are sold all over Southern Vietnam. The best way to see the sites in and around Dalat if you don't have your own transport is either by tourist bus or by hiring a bicycle or motorbike. Another method which is becoming very popular is to hire one of Dalat's so called notorious Easy Riders. Taking a quote from a testimonial in the lonely planet guide book ... 'Travelling with the Easy Riders is a great way to explore the region, and having a friendly and articulate guide along can really help put things into perspective. You can usually find the Easy Riders hanging around the hotels in Dalat, but don't worry about looking they'll find you. All of them speak English and some can speak French and German. Most of the Easy Riders carry portable guestbooks containing raving testimonials from past clients.' The Easy Riders can be hired for fun day trips around Dalat and the outskirts. Longer and further trips around the highlands or down to the coast can also be arranged.

Pongour Waterfall Dalat



Dalat Landscape

Ho Chi Minh City

Formally known as Saigon and with a population of over 6 million people Ho Chi Minh is the vibrant economic centre of Southern Vietnam. The places and things that can be seen here are diverse and numerous and depend largely on the personal interest of the person. I have listed some of the most common.

There are many interesting Temples and Pagodas in and around the city area, the oldest being Giac Lam Pagoda which dates from 1744. In virtually original condition this Vietnamese Buddhist pagoda houses ten monks and incorporates aspects of Taoism and Confucianism.

The Cholon area of Ho Chi Minh city is also worth a visit. Here the streets are filled with some amazing sights and sounds and the rich aromas of the traditional herb shops. There are also many excellent Chinese and Vietnamese foods to sample. The Ben Thanh market is the most popular and probably the best one to visit. It is basically a huge series of individual markets all in one complex. The market itself and all the surrounding streets create a vibrant lively atmosphere. Virtually anything you want you can get here, a great place for shopping in Ho Chi Minh.

Ho Chi Minh has some excellent museums, the War Remnants Museum is the most popular with artillery and infantry pieces on display and a rare opportunity for people to hear the victims of US military action tell their own story.

You can visit the Cu Chi Tunnels, an amazing complex of underground tunnels used by the Viet Cong during the Vietnam war. The tunnel network stretched from the South Vietnamese capital to the Cambodian border. In the district of Cu Chi alone there was over 250km of tunnels. The network encompassed specially constructed living areas, weapons factories, hospitals and command centres. A large part has now been transformed into an open museum and is well worth a visit.



**Saigon
Town Hall**



**Ben Thanh
Market
Saigon**



**Cu Chi
Tunnels**



**Cao Dai Temple
Tay Ninh**

Mekong Delta

The lusciously green beautiful Mekong Delta is the most Southern region of Vietnam. Formed by sediment continually being deposited from the Mekong River the area is extremely rich and fertile. With almost half of the area under cultivation it produces enough rice to feed the whole country and create a surplus that is exported putting Vietnam as the second largest rice exporter in the world after Thailand. Other products produced here include sugar cane, tropical fruits and fish.

The closest city in the Mekong Delta from Ho Chi Minh city is My Tho. Boat trips are the highlight of a visit here. You can cruise down the maze of small canals taking in the pleasant rural outlook of the local villages, stopping on the way to visit places of interest such as a family run coconut candy workshop, a honey bee farm, or a beautiful orchid garden.

Vinh Long is a popular destination for visitors to the delta region and offers a variety of boat tours including overnight excursions. Attractions include cruising down the small canals and visiting the fruit orchards and the conical hat making workshops.

A trip out from Vinh Long to the bustling Cai Be Floating Market is an exciting shopping experience, cruising easily around the boats sampling the many exotic fruits and vegetables of the region.

Homestays at one of the Mekong Delta's rural properties can be arranged and is an unforgettable experience, giving you a unique insight into the day to day lives of the local people. Can Tho with a population of 330,000 is the largest city in the region and is the main business centre in the Mekong Delta. A vibrant and friendly city with many colourful floating markets dotted around the rivers and canals. These are the main attractions to the area, combined with a wider variety of small and large boats for hire and the capacity to negotiate economical trips. Can Tho also has a large range of the best accommodation available in the Mekong Delta, with many good budget priced hotels and guesthouses.



**Mekong Delta
Canals**



**Mekong Delta
Floating Market**

**Floating Market
Tropical Fruit Sellers**



General Information

Visa

You need a VISA to travel to Vietnam.

Visas can normally be issued at the airport on your arrival in Vietnam, but it is advisable to get them issued before to save delays at the airport and any unforeseen problems. This can normally be done at any travel agent in your locality.

Visa extensions for Vietnam and visas for ongoing travel destinations in Asia can be arranged at travel agents in Vietnam.

Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is highly recommended for travel in Vietnam.

World Nomads is a company that we have used personally for several years.

We have found their service, cover and prices very competitive. They also offer a Vietnamese language guide, and a range of free travel assistance including a travel destination guide and travel journals. <http://www.worldnomads.com>

Useful Resources

Weather in Vietnam - a daily updated website - click on Hanoi for our local weather before you travel. <http://www.wunderground.com>

Time zones in Vietnam and around the world - a good interactive time zone map with links from the free encyclopedia Wikipedia to information on Vietnam and cities around the globe. <http://www.myzebramap.com>

Currency Converter - this website can convert whatever currency you are interested in. <http://www.oanda.com/converter>

United Nations facts about Vietnam - UNDP offers basic facts about Vietnam, maps of the different areas and background information. <http://www.undp.org.vn>

Hanoi International Womens Club - an interesting and informative website created by expatriate women living in Vietnam. <http://www.hanoi-iwc.com>

Vietnamese Architecture - this site offers some insights into Asian historical architecture and displays some excellent images of historical sites throughout Vietnam, choose Vietnam from the menu. <http://www.orientalarchitecture.com>

Vietnam News & General Information - Nhan Dan - an English language Vietnamese newspaper that covers many interesting topics, and includes an excellent simple introduction to learning the Vietnamese language. <http://www.nhandan.org.vn/>

Vietnam Airlines - Hanoi and the north of Vietnam can be reached easily from any major International airports. <http://www.vietnamairlines.com>

Australian Embassy in Vietnam - an excellent source of information for travellers to Vietnam. <http://www.vietnam.embassy.gov.au>

“Travel Health Fact Sheet” for visitors to Vietnam.
Supplied by - <http://www.traveldoctor.com.au>

**Click the PDF icon
to open the
“Travel Health Fact Sheet”**

To view the video of the master Dan Bau player

‘Pham Duc Thanh’

click on the picture below

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to ‘The History Place’ who are dedicated to providing to all who enjoy history for some of the detailed factual information presented in this book.

[**http://www.historyplace.com**](http://www.historyplace.com)

”Travel Health Fact Sheet” for visitors to Vietnam supplied by the travel doctor.

[**http://www.traveldoctor.com.au**](http://www.traveldoctor.com.au)

Image of Ho Chi Minh on page 18 sourced from:

[**http://rolandotolentino.wordpress.com/2008/09/02/**](http://rolandotolentino.wordpress.com/2008/09/02/)

Image of Ao Ba Ba on page 20 sourced from:

[**http://www.vietnam-beauty.com/vietnamese-culture/**](http://www.vietnam-beauty.com/vietnamese-culture/)

Image of Ao Tu Than on page 21 sourced from:

[**http://www.vietnam-beauty.com/vietnamese-culture/**](http://www.vietnam-beauty.com/vietnamese-culture/)

Image of Ao Dai on page 22 sourced from:

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Video of Dan Bau player Pham Duc Thanh on page 53 sourced from:

[**http://www.phamducthanh.com/**](http://www.phamducthanh.com/)

