

Welcome to Ho Chi Minh City



Photos by Ed Blow

Updated: February 23, 2010

EMERGENCY SERVICES AND USEFUL PHONE NUMBERS

Medical Clinic and Hospital

- ❖ Family Medical Practice
Diamond Plaza, 34 Le Duan Street, District 1
(Enter on Nguyen Van Chiem Street)
Tel: 3822-7848 www.vietnammedicalpractice.com
Open 24 hours a day.
Non-emergency urgent care and med-evacs. Ambulance available.

- ❖ International SOS
65 Nguyen Du St., District 1
Tel: 3823-6520 www.internationalsos.com
Open 24 hours a day.
Non-emergency urgent care and med-evacs. Ambulance available.

- ❖ Franco-Vietnam Hospital (FV)
6 Nguyen Luong Bang, Saigon South Parkway, District 7
Tel: 5411-3333 www.fvhospital.com
Open 24 hours a day.
Emergency room, out-patient and in-patient department. Ambulance available.

Dental Clinic

- ❖ West Coast Clinic
27 Nguyen Trung Truc, District 1
Tel: 849-8392-0072
International standards dental clinic offering cosmetic dentistry, laser dentistry, and teeth whitening.

- ❖ International SOS Dental Clinic
65 Nguyen Du St., District 1
Tel: 3823-6520 www.internationalsos.com
Expatriate dentists, also offers 24-hour emergency service.

Pharmacy

- ❖ Medicare (various locations)
254bis, Tran Hung Dao, District 1 (Tel: 3837-7318)
339 Hai Ba Trung, District 1 (Tel: 3829-7910)
Western style pharmacy, health and beauty chain with multiple locations. Carries a wide range of medicine, vitamins, supplements, herbal products, skincare, cosmetics, hair care and toiletries.

- ❖ Sapharco
197- 199 Dong Khoi, District 1 (Tel: 3829-0577)

Modern pharmacy selling imported and locally produced medicines, contraceptives, vitamins and more. Stocks a wider range of brands than most.

- ❖ Linh Dan
199 Ly Tu Trong, District 1 (Tel: 3829-7172)
Well respected pharmacy with knowledgeable English speaking owners.
- ❖ Thanh Tam
209 De Tham, District 1 (Tel: 3822-2304)
Western and locally produced medicines. Good English spoken.

Money and Banking Information

ATM's have a withdrawal transaction limit of 2 million VND (roughly US\$120). Withdraw this amount as many times as you want (up to your limit back home) but be aware your own bank will charge for each transaction.

ATM

- ❖ New World Hotel, 1st floor
- ❖ Caravelle Hotel
- ❖ Sheraton Saigon Hotel & Tower
- ❖ Saigon Center, Lobby entrance, 65 Le Loi, District 1
- ❖ Metropolitan Building (near Notre Dame, at corner of Dong Khoi and Nguyen Du Streets, HSBC Bank
- ❖ Tax Trade Center, Nguyen Hue Street
- ❖ HSBC ATM, Nguyen Hue Street (near People's Committee Building, next to HCMC tourist center at corner of Le Loi and Nguyen Hue Streets)
- ❖ Lobby of Diamond Plaza, 34 Le Duan, District 1

International Bank

- ❖ HSBC Bank - Metropolitan Building, 235 Dong Khoi, District 1 (Tel: 3829-2288)
- ❖ ANZ Bank - 11 Me Linh Square, District 1 (Tel: 3829-9319)
- ❖ Citibank - Sunwah Tower, 15/F, 115 Nguyen Hue, District 1 (Tel: 3824-2118)
- ❖ Bank of America - 1 Phung Khac Khoan, District 1 (Tel: 3839-5179)

Convenience Store

- ❖ Shop and Go (open 24 hour)
116 Cong Quynh, District 1 (Tel: 3837-7760) or
74A/1 Hai Ba Trung, District 1 (Tel: 3825-7548)
24-hour convenience store selling everything from chips, instant noodles and packaged sandwiches to magazine cosmetics, alcohol and cigarettes.
- ❖ Veggy's (2 locations)
29A Le Thanh Ton, District 1 (Tel: 3823-8526) or
Riverside Apartment Building, 53 Vo Truong Toan, Thao Dien Ward, District 2.
Huge walk-in fridge area stocking fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy products and a range of meats. Imported canned and dried foods, wines, beers, soft drinks, spirits and snacks also available.
- ❖ Diamond Plaza Supermarket, 3rd Floor, 34 Le Duan, District 1
- ❖ Parkson Plaza Supermarket, 4th Floor, 39-45 Le Thanh Ton, District 1
- ❖ Saigon Tax Center – 135 Nguyen Hue, District 1, 3rd floor
- ❖ Citymart Somerset: 21-23 Nguyen Thi Minh Khai, District 1

- ❖ AnPhu Supermarket in front of AnPhu Compound, 33 Thao Dien Ward, District 2

Taxi Service

- ❖ Mai Linh Taxi Tel: 3822-6666
- ❖ Taxi Vinasun Tel: 3827-2727
- ❖ Saigon Taxi Tel: 3842-4242
- ❖ Vina Taxi Tel: 3811- 1111

Airport

- ❖ Tan Son Nhat International Airport (Tel: 3844-3179)

Express Courier Service

- ❖ DHL Tel: 3844-6203
- ❖ FedEx Tel: 3823-4326
- ❖ UPS Tel: 3829-4321

Local Information and Emergency Numbers

- ❖ International Operator 110
- ❖ Police 113
- ❖ Fire 114
- ❖ Ambulance 115
- ❖ Directory Assistance 1080

HEALTH INFORMATION

Visitors who have come to a warm climate for the first time should realize that most of the debilitating conditions which gave the tropics an unenviable reputation in the past, now, according to WHO, have been more or less controlled. It is relatively easy to keep fit with the practice of normal hygienic and sanitary measures, and a genuine application of common sense.

Adequate rest and over exposure to the sun should be avoided. It is important to drink purified water and fruit juices to counterbalance the loss from perspiration and to avoid dehydration.

While maintenance of good physical health is important it is no less important to maintain emotional well being. New people and differing customs can magnify local frustration.

To save yourself and your family from minor medical difficulties during your adjustment to the new surroundings, there are several rules you should observe from the day you arrive:

- ❖ Do not drink water from the tap; drink only boiled water, hot tea, coffee or bottled drinks;
- ❖ Do not use ice cubes unless you are certain they were made from safe water;
- ❖ Avoid eating salads or raw vegetables in restaurants and from the street stalls; all vegetables and fruits should be peeled and/or soaked in a bleach solution before eating;
- ❖ Eat only freshly cooked and hot food.

There are many good restaurants in Vietnam where food usually is prepared safely. Early in your stay, you should stick to hot, freshly cooked food and avoid raw salads, custards, ice cream and cream. -filled pastries.

Medical Care

Medical care is substandard throughout the country including in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. There are three international clinics that provide adequate medical care on an out-patient basis in Vietnam: Family Medical Clinic, International SOS Clinic, and Franco-Vietnam (FV) Hospital. Adequate evacuation coverage for all travelers is a high priority. In the event of serious medical conditions patients are med-evac to Singapore or Bangkok.

Immunization Recommendations

The immunizations recommended for Vietnam include: Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Typhoid, Japanese B Encephalitis, Rabies, and Influenza including H1N1.

Malaria

Spread via mosquito bites. The risk (predominantly from *P. falciparum*) exists throughout the year in many rural areas. Highest risk areas are in the north along the border with China, highland and forested areas below 4,900 feet (1,500 meters) south of 18°N—notably the Central Highlands provinces of Dac Lak, Dac Nong, Gia Lai, and Kon Tum—Binh Phuoc province, and the western parts of the coastal provinces Quang Tri, Quang Nam, Ninh Thuan, and Khanh Hoa.

Medicines that protect against malaria in these areas include mefloquine (Lariam), doxycycline, or atovaquone/proguanil (Malarone). Primaquine may be used in special circumstances (G6PD testing is required). Recommend evening and nighttime insect precautions in risk areas.

Dengue

Also spread via mosquitoes. This is a major current health concern in rural and urban areas. Travelers are advised to practice daytime insect precautions.

The most effective insect repellent is DEET. Check labels of repellent for DEET. It is often written N, N-diethyl-m-toluamide, with a percentage concentration. For adults use 30%. Use very sparingly on children under 6, and not at all on children under 2 months old. It is generally agreed that DEET should not be applied more than once a day. DEET should not be used in a product that combines the repellent with a sunscreen. Sunscreens often are applied repeatedly because they can be washed off. DEET is not water-soluble and will last up to 8 hours. Repeated application may increase the potential toxic effects of DEET.

Vomiting and Diarrhea

One is at high risk no matter where you are situated in the country, including deluxe accommodations in major cities. Possible causes of illness include viral, bacterial, or parasitic. One should visit a health practitioner if symptoms last longer than 48 hours, or sooner if concurrent with fever or dehydration.

To minimize your risk of contracting a vomiting/diarrhea illness, wash your hands frequently (especially before eating), avoid eating or drinking beverages (especially ice) purchased from street vendors, avoid eating undercooked meat and seafood, avoid eating raw fruits and vegetables unless you peel them yourself.

Other

Blood and bodily fluid precautions (i.e. condom use) is a must in any country. However, be aware that approximately 10 percent of Vietnam's population is Hepatitis B carriers and 12 percent of sex workers are estimated to be HIV positive.

Tuberculosis is common in all developing countries. However, this country has a prevalence of over 100 cases per 100,000 population, the highest WHO risk category. All long-stay travelers (more than 3 months) should have pre-departure PPD skin test status

documented. Travelers should avoid crowded public places and public transportation whenever possible.

Schistosomiasis is present in the Mekong River, and is transmitted by larvae that penetrate intact skin. Avoid swimming in the river or its tributaries.

Avian influenza H5N1, excreted in large amounts in the droppings of infected birds, is endemic. Sporadic human cases acquired by direct contact with poultry are reported in this country. Although risk to travelers is minimal, avoid places where direct contact with birds and/or their secretions may occur, such as live animal markets and poultry farms. Well cooked chicken is safe to eat. Current influenza vaccines are not protective. Oseltamivir (Tamiflu) is effective.

The blood type of the general Asian populace is Rh positive; Rh negative blood may be difficult to obtain.

*******Important Information about Medical Insurance*******

Medicare generally does not cover health-care costs outside the United States, nor do many privately issued policies. If your own policy does not cover you outside the United States, consider buying supplemental medical insurance that includes med-evacs coverage. Remember that travel health insurance is different from a medical-assistance plan. In addition, make sure family and friends know to get proper medical coverage in case of medical emergency while they are in Vietnam.

WELCOME TO HO CHI MINH CITY

Time

GMT +7 hours
EST +12 hours

Electricity

220 Volts, 50 cycles

Overview

Vietnam is a rapidly developing country in the middle of a transformation from a centrally planned and essentially agrarian economy to a modern industrial market. Political control rests in the Communist Party.

Ho Chi Minh City is in perpetual motion. Motorcycles roar through the city's tree-lined boulevards, rickety old trucks shudder down narrow side streets, and vendors' pushcarts weave in and out of the clusters of people who sell goods along Saigon's congested sidewalks. Even during the torrential downpours of the rainy season, traffic hurries forward.

For visitors to Vietnam's largest city, the manic pace can be both invigorating and exhausting. For the millions of people who live here this energetic velocity is moving them closer to economic prosperity. This is a city of entrepreneurs—hair cutters transform a stool and a mounted mirror into a roadside barbershop, old women sell bonsai trees from the back of wooden box carts, and, at the first hint of rain, vendors whip out plastic ponchos to offer to unprepared motorcyclists. This ingenuity is paying off—Ho Chi Minh City has emerged as the nation's primary economic and industrial center. For those willing to keep up with Saigon's vigorous pace, a visit here can be a unique adventure.

Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) is Vietnam's largest city and river port, covering an area of 761 square miles on the Right Bank of the Saigon River, stretching from the shores of the South China Sea to within a couple miles of the Cambodian border. With a teeming population of seven plus million, it is also the economic capital and cultural trendsetter of Vietnam. There are 22 districts (15 urban and 7 rural) with 75% of the population in the urban districts. Only a few degrees above the Equator, the city has a tropical, monsoon climate with an average annual temperature of 83°F. April is the hottest month with an average temperature of 86°F. There are two seasons — rainy (from June to November) and dry (from December to April). Average number of rainy days annually is 159, with 90% of the rainfall occurring in the rainy season.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Annual
Mean Temperature	79	79	83	85	84	82	82	81	80	80	79	80	80
Avg. Daily Max Temp (F)	85	86	92	91	88	87	86	86	86	86	86	86	88

Avg. Daily Min Temp(F)	72	72	74	76	76	76	76	76	74	74	74	72	72
Relative Humidity (%)	51	40	52	57	63	65	69	70	71	68	63	57	80
Precipitation (Inches)	1	.5	1	2	9	14	13	11	14	11	5	2	76

History

Ho Chi Minh City was founded as a Khmer market town in the 14th century and was officially registered as a settlement in 1698. Due to its strategic location on the bank of what is now known as the Saigon River, the city evolved into an important commercial hub. In 1859, French troops invaded Vietnam and captured Saigon and several southern provinces. They then established a colony named Cochin China, and Saigon was designated the capital. Saigon was then developed in ways consistent with French tradition: wide, tree-lined boulevards were built, as were French-style villas, cathedrals and public buildings. The French withdrew following the Geneva Accords of 1954 which partitioned Vietnam into North and South, and Saigon served as the capital of the Republic of Vietnam throughout the “American War” until 1975, when Northern Vietnamese troops claimed the city and unified the country. Although many visitors and residents still refer to it as Saigon, the city officially renamed Ho Chi Minh City in 1975.

Business Hours

The Vietnamese are early risers, and by 6:00 a.m., many people are already up and about. Breakfast business hours accommodate this schedule; most businesses open between eight and nine in the morning and close late in the afternoon. Government offices are open at 8:00 a.m. and close at 4:30 p.m., and are closed for lunch between 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. Museums are often closed on Mondays.

Exchanging Money

The currency in Vietnam is the Vietnamese Dong (VND). Banknotes are available in the following denominations: VND 500000, 200000, 100000, 50000, 20000, 10000, 5000, 2000, 1000, 500, and 200. The current exchange rate is approximately 19,000VND to USD1.

U.S. Dollars	VND
\$1.00	18,000
\$5.00	90,000
\$10.00	180,000
\$50.00	900,000
\$100.00	1,800,000



The U.S. Dollar is the favored foreign currency. European, British, Australian, Japanese, Singaporean and Thai currency can usually be changed in larger cities; great difficulty may be encountered in trying to exchange any other currencies. An increasing number of outlets accept Visa and MasterCard. Check with your credit card company for details regarding merchant acceptability and other services which may be available. ATMs are available and most have a withdrawal transaction limit of 2 million VND (\$112). Travelers can withdraw this amount, as many times as they want, up to the limit back home, but be aware that your own bank will charge for each transaction. Banking hours are from 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Monday to Friday and 8:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Saturday.

Traffic Safety and Road Conditions

Traffic in Vietnam is chaotic. Traffic accident injuries are the leading cause of death, severe injury, and emergency evacuation of foreigners in Vietnam, and are the single greatest health risk that U.S. citizens will face in Vietnam.

Traffic moves on the right, although drivers frequently cross to the left to pass or turn, and motorcycles and bicycles often travel (illegally) against the flow of traffic. Horns are used constantly, often for no apparent reason. Streets in major cities are choked with motorcycles, cars, buses, trucks, bicycles, pedestrians, and cyclos. Sudden stops by motorcycles and bicycles make driving a particular hazard. Nationwide, drivers do not follow basic traffic principles, vehicles do not yield right of way, and there is little adherence to traffic laws or enforcement by traffic police. The number of traffic lights in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City is increasing, but red lights are often not obeyed. Most Vietnamese ride motorcycles and an entire family often ride on one motorcycle.

Motorcyclists and bicyclists are required to wear helmets. Passengers in cars or taxis should use seatbelts when available, but should be aware that Vietnamese vehicles often are not equipped with working seatbelts.

Road conditions are poor nationwide. Numerous tragic accidents have occurred due to poor road conditions that resulted in landslides, and American travelers have lost their lives in this way. Travelers should exercise extra caution in the countryside, as road conditions are particularly poor in rural areas.

Driving at night is especially dangerous and drivers should exercise extreme caution. Roads are poorly lit, and there are few road signs. Buses and trucks often travel at high speed with bright lights that are rarely dimmed. Some motor vehicles may not use lights at all, vehicles of all types often stop in the road without any illumination, and livestock are likely to be encountered.

Emergency roadside help is theoretically available nationwide by dialing 113 for police, 114 for fire brigade, and 115 for an ambulance. Efficiency of these services is well below U.S. standards, however, and locating a public telephone is often difficult or impossible. Trauma care is not widely available. Speed limits are routinely ignored. Pedestrians should be careful, as sidewalks are extremely congested and uneven, and drivers of bicycles, motorcycles and other vehicles routinely ignore traffic signals and traffic flows, and even drive on sidewalks. For safety, pedestrians should look carefully in both directions before crossing streets, even when using a marked crosswalk with a green “walk” light illuminated.

Health Issues and Medical Care

Medical facilities in Vietnam do not meet international standards, and frequently lack medicines and supplies. Medical personnel in Vietnam, particularly outside Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, may speak little or no English. Doctors and hospitals expect immediate cash payment for health services. International health clinics in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City can provide acceptable care for minor illnesses and injuries, but more serious problems will often require medical evacuation to Singapore or Bangkok. Emergency medical response services are generally unresponsive, unreliable, or completely unavailable.

Travelers should be cautious when drinking non-bottled water and in using ice cubes in drinks. Travelers may wish to drink only bottled or canned beverages, or beverages that have been boiled (such as hot tea and coffee).

Travelers to Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries affected by avian influenza are cautioned to avoid poultry farms, contact with animals in live food markets, and any surfaces that appear to be contaminated with feces from poultry or other animals.

Crime

Cities in Vietnam have the typical crime problems of many other large cities throughout the world. Pick-pocketing and other petty crimes occur regularly. Although violent crimes such as armed robbery are still relatively rare in Vietnam, perpetrators have grown increasingly bold and the U.S. Consulate General has received recent reports of knives and razors being used in attempted robberies in Ho Chi Minh City. Thieves congregate around hotels frequented by foreign tourists and business people, and assaults have been reported in outlying areas. The evolving nature of incidents warrants caution on the part of the U.S. traveler. Travelers are advised not to resist theft attempts, and to report them both to police and the U.S. Embassy in Hanoi or the U.S. Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City.

Motorcyclists, mostly carrying passengers, are known to grab bags, cameras and other valuables from pedestrians or passengers riding in “cyclos” (pedicabs) or on the back of

rented motorcycles. Serious injuries have resulted when thieves snatched purses or bags, which were strapped across their victims' bodies, leading to the victim being dragged along the ground by the thief's motorcycle.

Public Transportation

Metered taxis are inexpensive and plentiful in Vietnam's major cities. The staff of most hotels and restaurants will call a cab for you upon request. Meters start between 12,000 and 15,000 VND (\$0.70 - \$1.00). Cyclos (pedicabs) provide a cheap way to tour the city and they can be found at all main tourist destinations. Typical rates for cyclos are about 10,000 – 17,000 VND (about \$1.00) per hour, but you should agree on this price before getting in.

Tipping

Tipping is atypical in Vietnam. However, tipping 5- 10% to especially helpful service personnel is becoming increasingly common. Be aware that some hotels and restaurants add a 10% service charge to the bill.

Shopping Tips

Souvenir and handicraft shops are easily found in Vietnam. Especially good buys include lacquerware, ceramics, mother-of-pearl inlay, baskets, embroidery, jewelry, and paintings. Although antiques are widely available, they cannot be taken out of the country. If there is no price on the item, you want to purchase, be prepared to bargain. Bargaining is a common method of determining the price of items or services, and the discount you will receive depends on your attitude (keep smiling) and the length of time you're willing to spend negotiating.

Cultural Characteristics

Vietnamese life revolves around the family. This sense of family loyalty is closely aligned with the desire to create and maintain a communal spirit. The Vietnamese family unit (particularly in the rural areas) is patriarchal in nature with strong familial ties. It is not unusual to find three or four generations living in the same household.

Personal names are written with the family name first, middle name second, and the first name last. It is common practice to address people by their first names, e.g. a woman by the name of Nguyen Anh Tuyet would be addressed as "Miss Tuyet." It is customary to shake hands when being introduced. Exchanging name cards during business transactions is common in Vietnam.

It is not unusual to be asked questions that many Americans would find extremely personal, such as "How much do you earn?", "How old are you?", or "Why aren't you married?" If you would rather not answer these questions, just smile and change the subject.

For the Vietnamese, individual self-restraint is key to promoting social harmony. Public displays of emotion, such as shouting, arguing or gesturing wildly, are considered unacceptable.

Observing the following local customs will help keep you from embarrassing yourself with the Vietnamese. Crossing your index and middle finger (our way of wishing it were so) is considered to be a lewd gesture. Direct eye contact is seen as a sign of disrespect. Touching someone, especially on the head, is not welcomed. Motioning for someone to come with your palm up is considered rude. Crossing your arms or placing your hands on your hips are considered aggressive postures and should be avoided. Handing a pair of chopsticks or a toothpick to someone is considered bad luck. And, last but not least, the Vietnamese (like most other Asians) do not like to lose face. When they do not understand a request or question, they will still respond affirmatively so as not to “lose face.” Although they might disagree, they will nod affirmatively just to avoid confrontation. The Vietnamese are not prone to show their emotions in public. When in doubt, smile. A positive attitude will encourage a friendly and helpful response.

PLACES OF INTEREST

Reunification Hall (Formerly the Presidential Palace)

Entrance: 135 Nam Ky Khoi Nghia, District 1 (Tel: 3822-3652)

Open from 7:30 a.m. - 11:00 a.m., 1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

The Palace of the Governor-General of Indochina was built on this site in 1869. After the French withdrew in the 1950s, the building became the palace of South Vietnamese president. The overall structure of the building is in the shape of the Chinese character representing good fortune, and the front of the Hall resembles a series of bamboo canes. On April 30, 1975, Communist tanks smashed through the gates of the Presidential Palace, symbolically crushing the power of the South Vietnamese government. Inside, the Hall are shown the Presidential receiving room, conference rooms, the basement tunnels and war room, telecommunications center, and the residential quarters, as well as a back terrace complete with heliport.



City Hall

Le Thanh Ton Street at the northern end of Nguyen Hue Street.

This ornate yellow and white building, built by the French from 1901- 1908, was formerly known as the Hotel de Ville. It is now the headquarter of the Ho Chi Minh City's People's Committee and overlooks a square featuring a bronze statue of Ho Chi Minh. The building is not open to the public; however, its aesthetic appeal makes it a popular sight for visitors to take photographs.



Municipal Theater (a.k.a. The Opera House)

Located on Dong Khoi Street between the Caravelle and the Continental hotels.

Originally built at the turn of the century, the theater was the seat of South Vietnam's National Assembly. Today the theater seats 550 people and provides a varied program of events, including traditional theater, contemporary dance, and Tet holiday celebrations. The building was renovated and reopened as a cultural venue in 1998 in conjunction with Saigon's 300th anniversary celebration.



Notre Dame Cathedral

1 Paris Commune Park, District 1

This Catholic cathedral, designed by the French architect Bouvard, was built between 1877 and 1880 on what is believed to be the site of an ancient pagoda. The cathedral is built in a neo-Romanesque style with twin spires and is constructed of granite and red brick. Services are held here six times on Sunday and three times on weekdays; the 9:30 a.m. Sunday mass includes readings in English.



The Central Post Office

2 Paris Commune Park, District 1

Open from 6:30 a.m. - 9:30 p.m.

To the immediate right of the cathedral, this colonial post office was built in the 1880s. Inside are a large glass dome and long vaulted ceiling, as well as busts of French men of letters and maps of French Indochina.



Jade Pagoda (Phuoc Hai Tu)

73 Mai Thi Luu, Da Kao Ward, District 1

Open to visitors from 7:00 a.m. - 5:45 p.m.

Built in 1900 by the Cantonese community, this pagoda contains over 30 Taoist figures presided over by Ngoc Hoang, the Taoist Emperor of Jade. Chinese mothers come here to honor Quan Am Thi Kinh, the protector of mothers and children. Wooden panels hung in the Hall of Ten Hells illustrate the thousand tortures used to punish evildoers. Low pink walls surround the pagoda and a nearby pond is filled with turtles.



Xa Loi Pagoda

89 Ba Huyen Thanh Quan, District 3

Hours are 6:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m., 2:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.

This pagoda, built in 1956, was the headquarters of Buddhists who opposed the Diem regime. The glass vase on the central altar contains the heart of a monk who immolated himself in opposition to President Ngo Dinh Diem. The tower of the pagoda is believed to house a relic of the Lord Buddha.



Thien Hau Pagoda

710 Nguyen Trai, District 5

Hours are 6:00 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. daily.

This pagoda, built by the Cantonese congregation in the early 19th century, is the most important pagoda in Ho Chi Minh City and serves for prayers to the Buddha as well as to the Chinese deity Thien Hau Thanh Mau, the goddess of the sea and patron of the sailors. The pagoda is most richly ornamented.



Ho Chi Minh City Museum

65 Ly Tu Trong, District 1 (Tel: 3829-8250)

Open Tuesday to Sunday from 8:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m., 2:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.

This museum, formerly the Revolutionary Museum, is housed in a beautiful white neoclassical building that was once the Palace of the Governor of Cochin China. Later it became the office of the Imperial Delegate of the King's special envoy. Numerous photographs and exhibits illustrate Vietnam's conflicts with France and the United States. The museum's diorama of the Cu Chi Tunnels provides a fascinating insight into the intricate tunnel system. Other items on display include photographs of anti-colonial activists and military weapons.



Fine Arts Museum

97A Pho Duc Chinh, District (Tel: 3829-4441)

Open Tuesday to Sunday from 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

This picturesque cream-colored mansion houses a collection of classical, modern, and revolutionary artwork, as well as artifacts from the Oc-Eo civilization.



War Remnants Museum

28 Vo Van Tan, District 3

Open Tuesday to Sunday from 7:30 a.m. - 11:45am, 1:30 p.m. - 4:45 p.m.

The exhibits in this museum graphically depict wartime atrocities. On display are various weapons and implements of torture. In the yard outside of the museum are helicopters, tanks, and a French guillotine. One note of interest is that this site once housed the USIS offices.



History Museum

2 Nguyen Binh Khiem, District 1 (Tel: 3829-8146)

Open Tuesday to Sunday from 8:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

The Sino-French style History Museum, built in 1929 during the French colonial period, is just within the gates of the Ho Chi Minh City Zoo. A temple in honor of the Hung kings is located directly across from the Museum. Vietnamese historical texts point to the Hung kings as the founders of the Vietnamese nation. The Museum also houses the performance center for Vietnamese water puppet performances. Water puppets are a traditional Vietnamese art form involving complex puppetry and traditional Vietnamese music.



Military Campaign Museum

2 Le Duan, District 1 (Tel: 3822-9387)

Open daily except Saturday from 8:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.

This military museum is devoted to the North Vietnamese campaign to "liberate" the south. Inside are materials, maps, and artifacts related to the Viet Cong insurgency. On display outside the main building are U.S., Chinese, and Soviet war material, including a Cessna A-37 and an F-5E Tiger of the Republic of Vietnam Air Force.



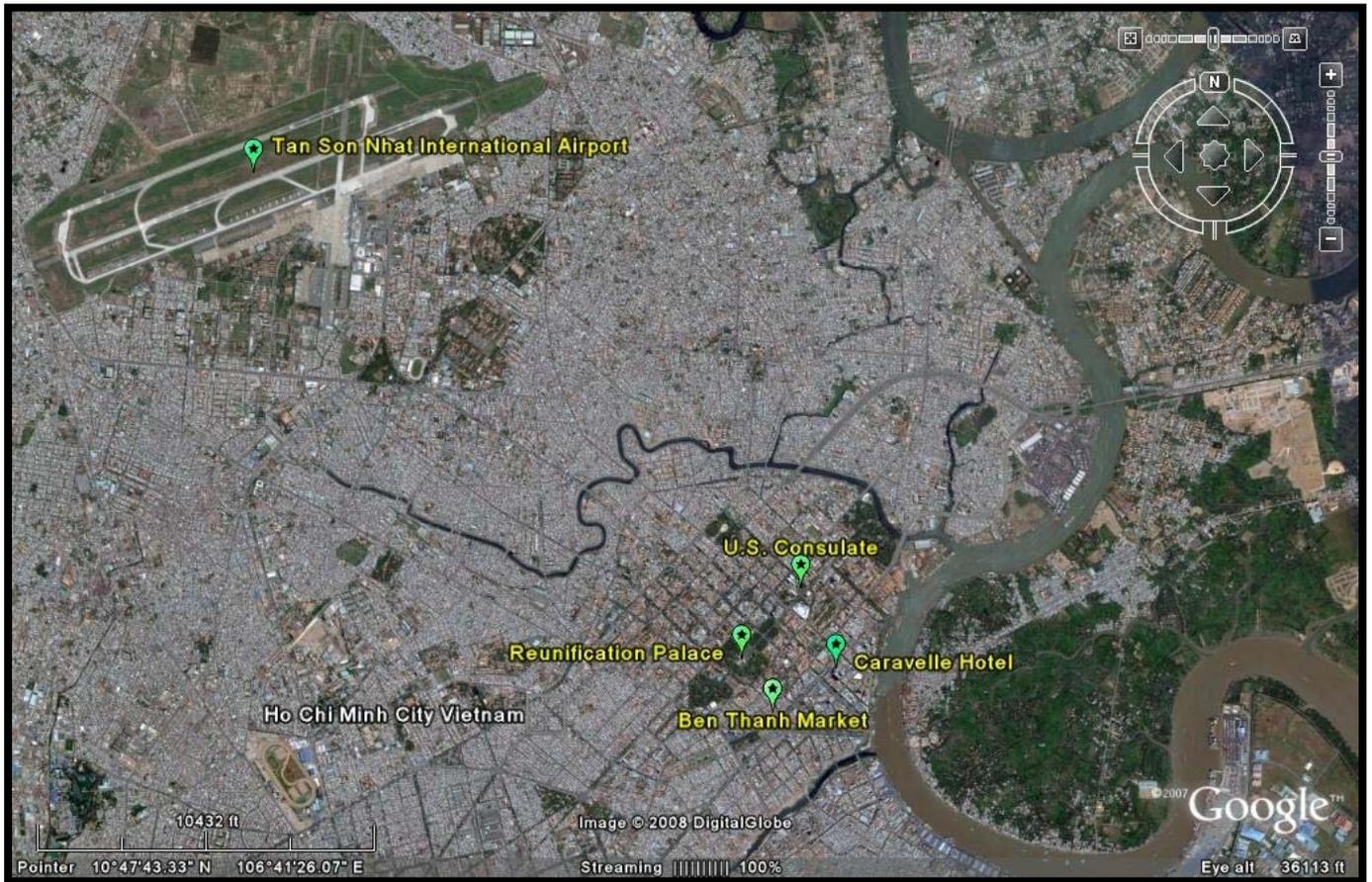
Armed Forces of the Southern Command Museum

247 Hoang Van Thu, Phu Nhuan District (Tel: 3842- 1304)

This museum located en-route to the airport is across the street from the Military Region 7 Headquarters. The building consists of a single story building with two large rooms. The museum's main exhibit is a memorial to the fallen soldiers of the Viet Cong now under the jurisdiction of Military Region 7. (Vietnam is divided into eight military regions. Military Region 7 has its headquarters in HCMC.)

In the adjacent wing are a collection of military uniforms, exhibits on the campaign plan to "liberate Saigon" and a gallery of photographs commemorating the Vietnamese women's role in aiding the Viet Cong insurgency. The museum also displays seized items from Republic of Vietnam military camps and the 3rd U.S. Marine Expeditionary Force. Outside the building are a collection of tanks and anti-aircraft weapons from the war.





Cu Chi Tunnels

Phu My Hung Ward, Cu Chi District

Located approximately 70km northwest of Ho Chi Minh City, the Cu Chi Tunnels are part of a vast network of underground tunnels that connected Saigon to the southern tip of the Ho Chi Minh Trail near the Cambodian border. The tunnels were built and used by the Viet Cong in order to stage surprise attacks and avoid capture by the U.S. Army. Hospitals, kitchens, sleeping quarters, and weapons storage centers were incorporated into this underground system.



Cao Dai Great Temple

Tay Ninh Province, Long Hoa Village

Services are held daily at 6:00 a.m., 12:00 p.m., 6:00 p.m. and 12:00 a.m.

Located approximately 100km northwest of Ho Chi Minh City, this impressive temple is the headquarters of the Cao Dai religion. Ngo Van Chieu began this sect in the 1920s by combining Buddhist, Confucian, Taoist, Christian, and Islamic beliefs into one unique religion. Today, Cao Daism has two million followers. At the Cao Dai Great Temple worshippers in blue, yellow and red robes worship the Supreme Being, represented by a giant eyeball.



TRAVEL SERVICES

Every major tourist agency has its headquarters or a branch in Saigon. They can book tours and travel throughout the city and the southern region, and usually countrywide as well.

Budget Rent-a-Car

www.budget.com.vn

Chauffeur driven and self-drive vehicle (for local license holders) from one of the world's best know car rental companies. With a kiosk in the Tan Son Nhat Airport and drivers trained in a range of driving, cultural and language skills, mileage-free car hire starts at \$60. Check their website for details.

iViVu

Suite 601, Satra House, 58 Dong Khoi, District 1

Tel: 3827-9170 www.ivivu.com

Comprehensive online travel agent specializing in flights, hotels and short international getaways out of Vietnam, with departure from either Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City. You can book online or by phone using their toll-free phone number. Travel partner with Buffalo Tours.

Buffalo Tours

Suite 601, Satra House, 58 Dong Khoi, District 1

Tel: 3827-9170 www.buffalotours.com

Award-winning pioneer of adventure travel in Vietnam offers many cultural tours in the rural areas, comprehensive country tours, as well as short getaways and city experiences such as the Saigon river dinner cruise. Also offers many voluntourism packages and can arrange for private car hire around Vietnam (driver included). Travel partner with iViVu.

Flight Center Vietnam

2 Huynh Thuc Khang, District 1

Tel: 3914-0180 www.flightcentervn.com

An associate partner of the Hogg Robinson Group, this professional English speaking agency has deservedly gained a strong reputation for efficiency and reliability, and cover the full range of services—flight and hotel bookings, visas, insurance and hire cars.

I Travel

175.22 Pham Ngu Lao, District 1

Tel: 3836-4876 www.itravel-online.com

Vietnam's newest travel agency offers impartial advice and great customer service. Acting as a magnet for the many excursions, I Travel does not offer the cheapest trips available, but focuses more on giving customers value for money. It also runs and operates its own trips throughout Vietnam, including Sapa treks which adhere to the positive impact tourism principles. Tour guides are carefully selected, well-trained and speak excellent English.

One Travel International

SE3- 1 My Khanh 3, Phu My Hung, District 7

Tel: 5412- 1168 www.1travelinternational.com

If you are having trouble deciding where to go for a getaway, or you are looking for travel bargains, this Saigon South-based agency can help. Apart from cheap flight tickets, they seem to have an unending string of good deals on resort packages inside Vietnam.

Exotissimo

20 Hai Ba Trung, District 1

Tel: 3827-2911

www.exotissimo.com

9 Dinh Tien Hoang, District 1, 4th floor,

Saigon Finance Center

Tel: 3825- 1723

Everything you could wish for under one roof from this thoroughly professional agency. An up market operation operating through Southeast Asia, which aims to bring you up close to the cultures of the area through personalized tours across the region, which may include insights into culinary customs, handicrafts and humanitarian initiatives. Excellent service.

Ann Tourist Company

58 Ton That Tung, Ben Thanh, District 1

Tel: 3925-3636 or 3833-2564

www.anntours.com

Ann Tourist has a great reputation that's well deserved. Ann's specializes in custom tours for individuals or small groups. They can be relatively expensive, but that's in comparison to the seat-in-coach cattle-drive tours. These guys will help you do virtually anything you want to in Vietnam. Ask for director Tony Nong.

Saigontourist

49 Le Thanh Ton St., District 1

Tel: 3824-4554

www.saigontourist.net

Saigontourist is a large government-run group, but it will get you where you want to go and is a far better choice than the budget cafes. They man-desks in the Majestic, Rex, and Sheraton hotels. They can arrange tours by private car, organize specialized larger group tours to places like the Cu Chi Tunnels and the Mekong Delta, or match you up with larger groups.

Budget Travel Agency

The Sinh Tourist

246-248 De Tham, District 1

Tel: 3836-7338

www.sinhcafevn.com or www.thesinhtourist.vn

24-26 Pho Duc Chinh, District 1

Tel: 3821-7421

Sinh Café is the best choice for inexpensive trips and tours. On paper, the tours seem exactly the same as others offered at private tour agents. They have computerized air booking and are quite efficient if usually overrun with the heavy volume of Western tourists.

Vietnamese Foods

Rice: To the Vietnamese people, rice is essential—even the shape of the country is described as two baskets of rice connected by a carrying pole. In Vietnam, most people eat rice three times a day.



Nuoc Nam: This fermented fish sauce is used to spice almost anything. Other popular condiments include chili and lemon juice.



Pho: Noodle soup spiced with fresh herbs and served with chicken, pork, or beef. This soup is sold everywhere and can be eaten for breakfast, lunch, or dinner.



Banh Xeo: Pancakes stuffed with prawn, pork, garlic, shallots, and bean sprouts and served with lettuce and a spicy sauce.



Goi Cuon: Transparent spring rolls made with rice paper wrapped around prawns and fresh vegetables.



Cha Gio: a.k.a. eggrolls, one of the most popular snacks in Vietnam: crisp, deep fried, rolled pancakes stuffed with noodles, pork, garlic, shallots and other ingredients.



RESTAURANTS

(Note: restaurants tend to up and move without any notice due to landlord issues, and such. If you find one day that your favorite restaurant has closed its doors, ask around and you will likely find it on another street.)

Vietnamese Restaurants

An Vien

178A Hai Ba Trung Street, District 1 (Tel: 3824-3877)

Vietnamese specialties, luxurious and elegant ambience, best collection of wine and paintings. Moderately priced.

Blue Ginger

37 Nam Ky Khoi Nghia, District 1 (Tel: 3829-8676)

Housed in a former journalists' club, marvelously decorated with excellent food, good service, and live music.

Lemongrass

4 Nguyen Thiep, District 1 (Tel: 3822-0496)

Located within walking distance of many hotels and shops, this intimate restaurant offers a long list of Vietnamese entrees. The set lunch menu is especially recommended.

Moderately priced.

Mandarin

11A Ngo Van Nam, District 1 (Tel: 3822-9783)

Excellent Vietnamese food served in one of Saigon's most beautiful settings. Fantastic service makes it worth the higher price. Moderate to expensive.

Maxim's Nam An

15- 17 Dong Khoi, District 1 (Tel: 3829-6676)

Maxim has a long history in Saigon. Décor in the style of a French colonial theatre but with traditional Vietnamese touches of the tables, plates, lanterns, and general decorations. Do not miss the house specialties, including the delicious Vietnamese pancake, and a deep-fried soft-shell crab that has received rave reviews. Moderate to expensive.

Nam Phan

64 Le Thanh Ton, District 1 (Tel: 3829-2757)

Fine dining Vietnamese-style courtesy of two sumptuously decorated colonial villas, a bamboo-clad walled courtyard and a menu spanning the three main regions of Vietnam. Specialties include abalone soup, bird's nest soup and raw fish salad

Pho 2000

1-3 Phan Cu Trinh Street, District 1 (Tel: 3822-2788)

Good Pho at a reasonable price. Offers vegetarian Pho, which is hard to find. Made famous by Bill Clinton's visit back in 2000.

Pho 24

134 Le Thanh Ton, District 1 (Tel: 3824-6395) and various locations

A chain of restaurants rather than a single venue. Offers traditional Pho noodle soup in beef and chicken varieties, as well as spring rolls and fruit smoothies. Look for a green storefront and red blinking light and you've found a Pho 24. Many locations open 24 hours. Inexpensive.

Quan An Ngon

160 Pasteur, District 1

One of Saigon's hottest local joints, and thanks to a nod in Conde Nast Traveler, tourists are flocking, too. Quan An Ngon unites the best street food in the city under one roof with amazing results. Every dish you can imagine is made fresh and served according to tradition. Inexpensive, good value.

Temple Club

29-31 Ton That Thiep, District 1 (Tel: 3829-9244)

This restaurant is decorated with beautiful reproductions of Vietnamese antiques. The food is good, but people go for the atmosphere. Moderately priced.

Tib

187 Hai Ba Trung, District 1 (Tel: 3829-7242)

Elegant and sophisticated, with tasteful décor, and menu carries photographs of the food so you can see what you're ordering. Menu concentrates on food from Hue, the former imperial capital.

Xu Saigon

71-75 Hai Ba Trung, District 1 (Tel: 3824-8468)

Vietnamese fusion cuisine in a trendy, modern space. Expat chefs design original dishes and bartenders serve creative mixed drinks and fine wine. Moderate to expensive.

International Cuisine

Brazilian/German /Spanish

Au Lac Do Brazil

238 Pasteur, District 3 (Tel: 3820-7157)

A Brazilian barbecue restaurant serving never-ending portions. The mixed grills, rodizio, and churrasco are mouth-wateringly good. Best washed down with a caipirinha or two.

Gartenstadt

34 Dong Khoi, District 1 (Tel: 3822-3623)

Offer German food with specialties such as pork knuckle and authentic German sausages prepared each day. Also the only restaurant to offer imported German draught beer.

La Habana

6 Cao Ba Quat, District 1 (Tel: 3829-5180)

La Habana is a restaurant and bar derived from both Spanish and Cuban influences. Tapas are a feature and the menu list over fifty kinds from quesadillas to meatballs.

Pacharan

97 Hai Ba Trung, District 1 (Tel: 3825-6024)

Authentically Spanish, not only the food but the chef as well. The tapas on offer run the gamut from cold to hot, meat-based to vegetarian. In addition to tapas, Pacharan roasted suckling pig and seafood mixed grill are both excellent as well as the juicy grilled fillet steak.

Chinese

Dragon Court

11- 13 Lam Son Square, District 1 (Tel: 3827-2577)

A vast, no frills eatery packs itself out with hungry locals enjoying the big portions of tasty dim sum and a host of other dishes. All the Chinese staples are here.

Hao Hao Hong Kong

139A-B Nguyen Trai, District 1 (Tel: 3925-7799)

Call in advance to book your duck at this superb eatery. First roll the crispy skin in pancakes, then have your meat prepare to your liking.

French

Au Parc

23 Han Thuyen, District 1 (Tel: 3829-2772)

Lavishly decorated brasserie, borrowing from Moroccan and French styles, is a popular lunchtime venue with expats. Specializes in Middle Eastern and North African food.

La Fourchette

9 Ngo Duc Ke, District 1 (Tel: 3829-8143)

This French bistro has been serving up traditional French food since before most of the city's other Gallic restaurants even thought about opening their doors, and it shows. The place is cozy, friendly surroundings, food and drink offerings that are reasonable priced and the food always come fresh. Real French food, great value.

Le Camargue

191 Hai Ba Trung, District 1 (Tel: 3520-4888)

A reputation for fine dining excellence in a colonial-style setting with high end modern French and Italian cuisine.

L'en Tete

1st Floor, 139 Nguyen Thai Binh, District 1 (Tel: 3821-4049)

One of Saigon's perennially popular French restaurants has a lush interior with cushy, red velvet covered chairs. The restaurant also functions as a gallery with paintings by local artists. The food is delicious and good value.

Le Toit Gourmand

3 ¼ Hoang Viet, P4, Q Tan Binh (Tel: 38117003)

Unique and fine French Cuisine, set menu set in quaint bistro style setting. Top chef, wine cellar, or bring your own for corkage fee. It is worth the drive for something different.

International

Boat House

40 Lily Road, APSC 36 Thao Dien Road, Dist. 2. (Tel: (84-8) 3744 6790). E-MAIL: info@boathouse.com.vn. Casual dining overlooking the Saigon River. A healthy selection of soups, salads and sandwiches while dinner concentrates on top-end beef (from Australia and America), seafood and pastas

The Deck

38 Nguyen U Di, An Phu, District 2, (Tel:3744-6632)

Offers fusion food like a tomato crab salad or marinated tuna fresh spring roll, focused around a wooden-plank deck that stretches onto the Saigon River.

Elbow Room

52 Pasteur Street, District 1, 3821-4327

Mediterranean and Western Cuisine, lovely atmosphere, top desserts.

Hard Rock Café

39 Le Duan Avenue in the Kumho Asiana Plaza (Tel: 6291-7595)

The same fun American fare now in this city.

Mekong Merchant

23 Thao Dien, District.2 (Tel: 3744-4713)

A favorite expat hangout, good food, special dinner menus, charming outdoor atmosphere.

The Refinery

74/7C Hai Ba Trung, District 1 (Tel: 3823-0509)

A beautiful, bistro-style venue in Saigon's old Opium Refinery. The food is a mix of Mediterranean and French styles, and the chef makes good use of local ingredients to ensure that everything is always fresh.

Indian

Alibaba

6 Nguyen Sieu, District 1 (Tel: 3823-3594)

North Indian dining scene with expansive selection of well-priced staples.

Ashoka

17/10 Le Thanh Ton, District 1 Tel: 3823- 1372 and

33 Tong Huu Dinh An Phu, in District 2 Tel: (84-8) 512 2177

Offers affordable and authentic Indian cuisine from buttered chicken to a dozen types of the delicious naan bread.

Saigon Indian

73 Mac Thi Bui, 1st Floor, District 1 (Tel: 3824-5671)

Popular venue with an enormous menu. Serves both southern and northern Indian dishes like tandoori, biryani, dosa and idly snacks, plus a wide range of vegetarian dishes.

Tandoor

74/6 Hai Ba Trung, District 1 (Tel: 3930-4839)

Traditional Indian cuisine, including a wide selection of vegetarian dishes.

Italian

Luna d'Autunno

102 Suong Nguyet Anh, District 1 (Tel: 3925-7672)

Villa setting with the most authentic Italian taste in town, with pizzas from a wood-fired oven, and a wide range of other dishes, plus 120 different Italian wines and 20 varieties of grappa.

Opera

1st floor Park Hyatt, District 1 2 Lam Son Square, 3824- 1234

Bistro style restaurant with homemade pasta, wood-fire pizza, with indoor or outdoor seating.

Pendolasco

87 Nguyen Hue St., District 1 (Tel: 3821-8181)

Classic Italian dishes served in both indoor and outdoor setting. It's the oldest Italian restaurant in Saigon.

Pomodoro

79 Hai Ba Trung, District 1 (Tel: 3823-8998)

A traditional Italian trattoria serving home-style Italian cuisine in an informal, family-oriented atmosphere

Japanese/Korean

K-Café

74/A4 Hai Ba Trung District 1

Serves excellent Japanese cuisine and the setting of the café resembles that of a Sushi bar equipped with all the modern facilities

Seoul House (Han Quoc)

37 Ngo Duc Ke, District 1 (Tel: 3829-4297)

The first Korean restaurant to grace Saigon, this two-floor eatery sports basic décor and a vast menu but remains one of the best venues of its ilk in town.

The Sushi Bar

2 Le Thanh Ton, District 1 (Tel: 3823-8042)

This brightly lit Japanese-style restaurant serves over 40 varieties of sushi all at reasonable prices.

Zen

20 Le Thanh Ton, District 1 (Tel: 3825-0782)

Located amidst the sea of Japanese restaurants on the Le Thanh Ton Street, Zen shows that there's more to Japanese food than spicy tuna rolls with yakitori station grilling up fantastic steak and quail's eggs.

Mediterranean

Byblos

11 Ngo Duc Ke St., District 1 (Tel: 84-8) 3825-7781

Delicious, authentic Lebanese food, the best in Saigon. Contains all the traditional favorites, a lovely atmosphere, and affordable.

Skewers

9A Thai Van Lung, District 1 (Tel: 3822-4798)

Mediterranean cuisine such as lamb skewers, pitas served in a chic, comfortable setting.

Warda

71/7 Mac Thi Bui, District 1 (Tel: 3823-3822)

Authentic Lebanese and Middle-Eastern cuisine serving everything from falafel and sambousah to lamb shank marinated in five spices.

Thai

Lac Thai

71/2 Mac Thi Bui, District 1 (Tel: 3823-7506)

An elegant restaurant hidden down an alleyway with art deco furniture on the ground and first floor and Thai-style dining in the attic. Authentic Thai cuisine prepared by two Thai chefs.

Sawasdee Saigon

102- 104 Le Lai, District 1 (Tel: 3925-7777)

The authentic Thai cuisine in town with friendly warming atmosphere.

Spice

27 Le Quy Don, District 3 (Tel: 3930-7873)

Serves good Asian seafood specialties plus good Thai and Vietnamese dishes.

Western

Al Fresco's

27 Dong Du, District 1 (Tel: 3822-7317) or 21 Mac Dinh Chi, District 1 (Tel: 3823-8427)

Theme restaurant boasting a range of Tex-Mex, Italian and Australian style BBQ dishes. Huge portions and tasty Australian ribs coupled with a good atmosphere and helpful staff.

Black Cat

13 Phan Van Dat, District 1 (Tel: 3829-2055) and in Parkland Apartments, District 2.

Western and Vietnamese style sandwiches, as well as spring rolls and rice dishes, bagels, cheesecake, cocktails, and the best hamburger in Saigon.

Mogambos

50 Pastuer St. District- 1 (Tel: 3825- 1311)

Specializes in American grain-fed steaks, hamburgers and salads, served in a pleasant atmosphere.

Texas Barbeque

15/1 Le Thanh Ton, District 1 (Tel: 3291-0478)

The flavor and feel of the wild, wild west is evoked in both the food and the décor at this popular eatery. The large dining space is perfect for big groups in search of atmosphere.

Vegetarian Restaurants

An Lac Chay

175/4 Pham Ngu Lao, District 1 (Tel: 3837-0760)

Specializing in vegetarian Italian, Mexican and Vietnamese dishes, all at very reasonable prices.

Hoa Dang

38 Huynh Khuong Ninh, District 1

All the traditional Vietnamese soups (pho, bun bo Hue, hotpots) can be found here in vegetarian versions along with an array of other meat-free dishes. Located on a small, chilled out street, this place makes a good stop for a refreshing fruit juice as well.

Tib Chay

170 Tran Quang Khai, District 1

A longtime favorite of HCMC vegetarians, Tib Chay offers sensational range of dishes featuring faux chicken, pork and beef that tastes as good as the real thing. Appealing décor and very reasonable prices.

Thai Nhan

491/10 Nguyen Dinh Chieu, District 3

Cozy setting and plenty of imitation meat to get your taste buds tingling.

Viet Chay

Vinh Nghiem Pagoda, 339 Nam Ky Khoi Nghia

An outdoor setting, monthly buffet, and low prices make this restaurant a good choice.

Family Friendly

Snap Café

32 Tran Ngoc Dien St., Thao Dien Ward, District 2, Tel: 08-7308-3332

Large child play structure, located near covered dining area. Perfect for breakfast or lunch with kids or afternoon coffees and play dates.

NIGHTLIFE

17 Saloon

17 Ton Duc, District 1 (Tel: 3824-6400)

American western movie-styled saloon with a lively atmosphere and nightly elevator-style live music including jazz, Latin, country, Spanish, and rock and roll performed by two Filipino bands.

Acoustic Café

6E1 Ngo Thoi Nhiem St., Ward 7, District 3,

Live rock music by house band or special guest performances, a weekend favorite; get there early to get a table.

Apocalypse Now

2C Thi Sach, District 1 (Tel: 3824- 1463)

Nightspot popular with local expats and tourists who like to dance and drink well into the night. Expect loud dance music and cheap beer.

Buddha Bar and Grill

7 Thao Dien, An Phu, District 2,

A Sports Bar, regular expat hangout, good burgers.

Blue Gecko

31 Ly Tu Trong, District 1 (Tel: 3823-0324)

Popular Aussie sports pub noted for its excellent cold pints of draught Foster's and a number of TV screens showing multiple sports.

Go2

187 De Tham, District 1 (Tel: 3832-2389)

Airy neon-clad bar with tables on the street and a large upstairs area set aside for a nightly DJ and live music on the weekends. Popular with tourists and expat residents.

Level 23

Sheraton Hotel, 23rd Floor, 88 Dong Khoi, District 1 (Tel: 3827-2828)

Classy and expensive cocktail bar at top of the Sheraton Hotel with best views of the city. Offers great live music, with good dance floor.

Lush

2 Ly Tu Trong, District 1 (Tel: 3824-2496)

A large and lavishly decorated bar that gets packed to the brim on weekends. Good DJs playing the latest in beat-based music, a buzzing atmosphere, expensive beer and wine. The only bar in Saigon that has managed to come close to bars in western cities.

O'Brien's

74/A2 Hai Ba Trung, District 1 (Tel: 3829-3198)

A large Celtic-style pub popular with media types that has an interior done in brickwork and wood, and an upstairs dining area.

Phatty's

46-48 Ton That Tiep, District 1., (Tel: 81-8 -3821 0705)

Good for breakfast, lunch or dinner, a sports bar with 5 widescreen TV's, all playing different games/sports when available. There is also a large pull-down screen for the "big game".

Q Bar

Opera House, 7 Lam Son Square, District 1 (Tel: 3823-3479)

Trendy bar hidden under the Opera House is a popular hangout for expats and upscale tourists. Extensive bar list, including a broad selection of exotic martinis, make this a great place to go late at night when most other bars have closed.

Rooftop Garden Bar

Rex Hotel, 141 Nguyen Hue, District 1 (Tel: 3829-3115)

This famous rooftop bar was once the gathering spot of American officers during the Vietnam War. Features caged birds, fairy-lit topiary, and a rotating crown advertising the Rex to onlookers below.

Rooftop Bar at Pacharan

97 Hai Ba Trung, District 1 (Tel: 3825-6024)

Hideously painted on the outside, this tapas restaurant and rooftop bar has a far different feel on the inside. It serves up superb Spanish fare with exclusively Spanish wines. The cocktails and sangria are addictive.

Saigon Saigon Bar

Caravelle Hotel, 9th Floor, 19 Lam Son Square, District 1 (Tel: 3823-4999)

Located at the top of Caravelle Hotel. Drink prices are rather high, but you get your money's worth with live music, good service, and great views of downtown Saigon.

Saxn'art Club

28 Le Loi, District 1 (Tel: 3822-8472)

Suave jazz venue, comfortable seating and great staff. Featuring well-known saxophonist Tran Manh Tuan with the house band. Music is a blend of contemporary jazz with Vietnamese influences.

Sheridan's Irish House

17/13 Le Thanh Ton, District 1 (Tel: 3823-0793)

Cozy Irish pub with authentic pub décor and pleasant atmosphere. Nightly live music from western and Vietnamese musicians with plenty of Irish tunes. One of the few places that serves Guinness.

Vasco's Bar

74/7D Hai Ba Trung, District 1 (Tel: 3824-2888)

Chic bar decked out in deep a red that gets packed to bursting point on weekends. Open for lunch and dinner, from 11am to midnight, Monday through Saturday, with live music on Fridays. Good food menu with excellent pizzas.

SHOPPING

Art Galleries

Apricot Gallery

50-52 Mac Thi Buoi, District 1 (Tel: 3822-7962)

Best current Vietnamese painters, expensive. Large canvases by a variety of Vietnamese artists, ranging from traditional to modern.

Galerie Quynh

65 De Tham, District 1 (Tel: 3836-8019)

Run by a Vietnamese-American lady, Quynh, who also organizes regular exhibitions. Galerie has cutting edge contemporary art by both Vietnamese and foreign artists. No decorative arts, it's all about intellectual stimulation and edgy stuff.

Mai's Gallery

16 Nguyen Hue, District 1 (Tel: 3824-4536)

An excellent, professional art gallery for visitors interested in learning about the Vietnamese arts scene. Gallery owner Ms. Do Thi Tuyet Mai also has a Mai's Gallery in New York City.

San Art

23 Ly Tu Trong, District 1 (Tel: 3824-8306)

An independent, non-profit, artist-run exhibition space focusing on contemporary art.

Spring Gallery

1A Le Thi Hong Gam, District 1 (Tel: 3821-6419)

Photographs of the changing faces of Saigon, taken by gallery owner Nguyen Van Thanh, are sold alongside original works by a number of Vietnamese artists in this spacious, airy gallery.

TuDo Gallery

53 Ho Tung Mau, District 1 (Tel: 3821-0966)

Hosting permanent exhibitions of works by the city's artists. TuDo deals in oils, silk paintings and lacquer ware. Over 1,000 pieces on show.

Clothing

La Bella

85-87 Pastuer St. District 1

3 floors with clothing, shoes and accessories.

Mauve

47 Mac Thi Buoi, District 1 (Tel: 3829-6492)

Clothing, shoes and jewelry, quality made, higher end prices

Song

76D Le Thanh Ton, District 1

Another expat favorite, quality organic clothing, higher prices.

Jewelry Shops

Alphana Jewelry

159 Dong Khoi, District 1 (Tel: 3829-7398)
Gold, silver, and precious stones for all budgets.

Antique Kelly

Saigon Tax Trade Center, 1st floor, 135 Nguyen Hue, District 1 (Tel: 3914-4892)
Selection of silver jewelry

Teresa Jewelry

147 Dong Khoi, District 1 (Tel: 3825-7052)
Gold, gemstones, made to order. Reasonable prices.

Therese Jewelry

9 Nguyen Thiep Street, District 1 (Tel: 3824-6011)
Upscale store selling gold, gemstones, readymade and made to order.

Trung Tam Thuong Mai Saigon

4-6 Nguyen Trung Truc, District 1
A big shopping mall filled to the brim with jewelry stalls—anything your neck, ear and wrists require can be found here, from the glitzy to the magnificent.

Accessories, Crafts, Souvenirs and Miscellaneous

Dong Koi Street

Nguyen Freres

2 Dong Khoi, District 1 (Tel: 098-380-3070)
Great store for retro/repro bric-a-brac, furniture, Buddhas, décor, handbags, accessories, gifts and souvenirs.

Authentique Interiors

6 Dong Khoi, District 1 (Tel: 3822- 1333)
Sprawling one-stop home shop and customized furniture stash with traditional chinoiserie or modern finishing. Furniture and furnishings readymade and made to order.

Saigon Kitsch and Gallery Dogma

29 A Dong Khoi, District 1
Two shops in one, Saigon Kitsch has colorful nick-knacks and Gallery Dogma deals in all things to do with Vietnamese propagandist art.

Saigon Crafts

71B Dong Khoi, District 1 (Tel: 3829-5758)
Traditional handicrafts, gifts and souvenirs. Retail, wholesale and export.

Ipa-Nima

77-79 Dong Khoi St., District 1 (3822-3277)

Original, beaded, embroidered arm-art (purses, wallets), plus funky shoes, Asian and European jewelry and dresses.

Khai Silk

107 Dong Khoi, District 1 (Tel: 3829- 1146)

Offers a wide range of fashionable silk garments, plus bags, scarves and gentlemen's ties.

Dong Du Street

Nga Art and Craft

49-57 Dong Du, District 1 (Tel: 3823-8356)

Award-winning shop specializing in traditional lacquerware, interior furnishing such as vases and table lamps, plus items made from wood, particularly rosewood.

Le Loi Street

XQ Saigon Embroidery Shop

70B Le Loi, District 1 (Tel: 3827-7305) or 26 Le Loi, District 1 (Tel: 3829-9866)

Embroidery is a traditional Vietnamese art form and handicraft. XQ Saigon Embroidery Shop has a large display of embroidered products with a workshop on the third floor.

Bao Nghi

4-6 Le Loi, District 1 (Tel: 3822-4320)

Hand-embroidered silk and linen and home décor products.

Saigon Tax Trade Center

3rd Floor, 135 Nguyen Hue, District 1 (intersection of Le Loi and Nguyen Hue)

A market place of traditional handicrafts from paintings to tea pots and lacquer boxes fills the top floor of this downtown mall. Prices are low and this is a great bet for browsing in search of gifts.

Le Thanh Ton Street

Ha Phuong Souvenir Shop

92C3-C4 Le Thanh Ton St., District 1 (Tel: 3824-5754)

Quality hand-embroidered linen and silk pieces, including table linens, bedding and children's clothing.

Kim Phuong

125 Le Thanh Ton, District 1 (Tel: 3827-7091)

Quality hand-embroidered linen and silk pieces, including table linens, bedding and children's clothing.

Tran Quoc Lan

97 Le Thanh Ton, District 1 (Tel: 3829-5453)

Will make shoes, belts and handbags to order.

Thi Sach Street

Catherine Denoual-Maison

15C Thi Sach, District 1 (Tel: 3823-9394)

Exclusive linens and cottons in neutrals with elegant, minimal embroidery. Cushions, runners, bedding, tableware, plus goodies for home.

Red Door Deco

20A Thi Sach, District 1 (Tel: 3825-8672)

Great small store for retro/repro bric-a-brac, furniture, Buddhas, décor and accessories. Designs can be made to order and shipping arranged.

Mac Thi Buoï Street

Asian Fish

34 Mac Thi Buoï, District 1 (Tel: 3829-9836)

Beautiful embroidered fabrics from minority tribes plus high-quality handicrafts at this pleasant Saigon outlet.

Em Em

38 Mac Thi Buoï, District 1 (Tel: 3829-4408)

Attractive little boutique specializing in local products such as tablemats, crockery, lamps, jewelry, chess sets, bags and many other random articles.

Others

Esthetic

2B Ngo Van Nam, District 1 (Tel: 3910- 1996)

Chic shop on two floors offering everything for the home including tables, sofas, beds and lamps. Also sells attractive antique furniture.

Verlim

41 Ho Tung Mau, District 1 (Tel: 3821- 1655)

Double-storey den of highly desirable very refined lacquer and ceramic lamps and French-deco meets the Orient furniture. Buy off the floor or get it custom-made and shipped.

Vietnam Quilts

64 Ngo Duc Ke, District 1 (Tel: 3914-2119)

This well-known quilt shop is an excellent place to buy gifts. The beautifully designed quilts are carefully made by poor women in rural areas, who are provided with a steady source of income. Customers can choose their own designs and material.

Shoe Street

Luu Van Lang, District 1

Just off Ben Thanh Market, has what seems like endless amounts of shoes to choose from.

Bookstores

Fahasa

40 Nguyen Hue, District 1 (Tel: 3822-5796)

185 Dong Khoi St. and other locations.

Large, busy and well-stocked bookstore on three levels. Good selection of books in English, French, and Chinese, along with the ubiquitous Vietnamese books. Great selection of postcards. They also sell art supplies and a good selection of toys.

Tri Books

158ED Dong Khoi, District 1 (Tel: 3827-2168)

Stocks a wide range of textbooks and English language reference books. Also sells some children's literature.

Xuan Thu Bookshop

185 Dong Khoi, District 1 (Tel: 3822-4670)

Caters predominantly to Vietnamese, but stocks some English material, maps and dictionaries.

Markets

Cho Ben Thanh

At the junction of Tran Hung Dao Street, Le Loi Street and Ham Nghi Street.

Saigon's quintessential market. Narrow stalls packed with everything, including fruit, fabric, cosmetics, clothing, jewelry, flowers, meat, fresh produce, and household items.

Cho An Dong

An Dong is very close to the intersection of Tran Phu Street and An Duong Vuong Street in Cholon. This is a good place to shop for clothing—both imported designs as well as Vietnamese ao dai. The basement is packed with small inexpensive restaurants.

Cho Dan Sinh

At 104 Yersin Street next to Phung So Tu Pagoda. Also known as the War Surplus Market, stall after stall sells everything from gas masks to mosquito nets. You can also find canteens duffle bags, ponchos and boots. It's also the best market for electronics and other types of imported machinery.

Shopping Malls

Diamond Plaza

34 Le Duan, District 1

A large, modern department store with luxury goods on the first three floors. Higher up are a small grocery store, movie theater and bowling alley.

Eden Mall

106 Nguyen Hue, District 1

Contains both exclusive and non-exclusive stores retailing jewelry, watches, clothing and souvenirs. Also has a good food court.

Hung Vuong Plaza

126 Hung Vuong, District 5

Housing four floors of Parkson department store, a Megastar cinema complex, offices and apartments, this is presently the largest mall in Vietnam.

Parkson Plaza

35-45 Le Thanh Ton, District 1

High-end department store carrying European brands. Top floor has a food court, buffet restaurant and bowling alley.

Saigon Center

65 Le Loi, District 1

Three story shopping center, sells everything for the well-to-do family. Many small children's toy and clothing stores.

Saigon Square

77-89 Nam Ky Khoi Nghia, District 1

Part market, part mall, Saigon Square has clothing, DVDs, watches, sunglasses, souvenirs, and fashion accessories.

Saigon Square (II)

Ton Duc Tan St.

Higher end version of original Saigon Square . A little more wiggle room between the stalls.

Saigon Tax Trade Center

135 Nguyen Hue, District 1 (intersection of Nguyen Hue and Le Loi)

Extensive shops selling everything from cosmetics to jewelry to knock-off handbags and sunglasses. Higher up you will find traditional Vietnamese souvenirs such as lacquerware, silk embroidery, and ceramic tea sets. An air-conditioned alternative to Ben Thanh market.

Zen Plaza

54-56 Nguyen Trai, District 1

Noticeable for its black and white checked exterior, on the first floor is a wide range of elegant clothing while on the fourth floor is an expansive shoe forum.

Salons and Spas

Bellissima Salon and Spa

65 Le Loi, Saigon Center (3rd floor).

A pampering day spa in a relaxing setting.

Dragon's Nest

186 Nguyen Van Huong, An Phu District 2 (Tel: 3744-2075)

Full range of spa treatments hair services, pool and restaurant.

Just Men

40 Ton That Thiep, District 1 (Tel: 3914- 1407)

Men-only salon offers everything for the modern metro sexual from haircuts to relaxing facial massage, deep tissue massage, or body scrub.

L'Apothiquaire

63 Le Thanh Ton Street, District 1 (Tel: 3822- 1218)

Traditional French Day Spa offers a range of beauty treatments such as the signature facials to hand and foot treatment and waxing.

Lady Saigon

242A Tran Hung Dao, District 1 (Tel: 3822- 1218)

A women-only budget option with excellent range of services covering waxing, facials, massage treatments and manicures.

Q Salon and Spa

31 Ly Tu Trong, District 1 (Tel: 3824- 1896)

Haircutting, coloring, manicure, pedicure, massage and treatment.

Royal Foot Massage

36 Mac Thi Bui, District 1 (Tel: 3823-0589)

Strong following of locals and long-term residents. The technique is simple but solid and very effective, and when you leave the place you will feel refreshed. This place offers excellent value for money.

Quynh

373 Hai Ba Trung, District 3 (Tel: 3820- 1281)

104A Xuan Thuy St. Thao Dien Ward, District 2 (Tel: 3512-4321)

Excellent little hair salon and beauty treatment center with a range of services from facials, ear candling, waxing and massage. The service is good and the low prices are great quality have earned this place a following of expat clients.

Senses Story Spa

54/1 Dong Du, District 1 (Tel: 282-31232)

154 Nguyen Dinh Chieu, District 3 (Tel: 382-50661)

Offers the full range of spa and hair services.

YKC Esthetics & Hair Spa

219 Dien Bien Phu, District 3 (Tel: 3829-2791)

Offers the full range of services from facials, body therapy, waxing, nails to cut, color and highlights. It's an expat favorite.

Tailors

Dung

221 Le Thanh Ton, District 1 (Tel: 3829-6778)

One of the most reliable and respected men's tailors in town with prices and production time to reflect the quality of the workmanship.

Kenly Silk

132 Le Thanh Ton, District 1 (Tel: 3824-5993)

Ready to wear and made to order silk clothing.

Qua Quyt

171 Le Thanh Ton, District 1 (Tel: 3827-5267)

Specializing in tailor made shoes, predominately women's high-heeled shoes. You choose the color and design. Shoe lovers will also find everything from sandals and peep-toes to slingbacks and boots under the Mandarina brand here.

Lam

158C Dong Khoi, District 1 (Tel: 3824-3830)

Good workmanship on men's suits. Prices are mid-range.

Tien

107A Bui Vien, District 1 (Tel: 090-377-8547)

Speaks English, makes everything. Tien gives good advice and will tell you if the style or fabric doesn't work.

Thuy Nga Design

7 Lam Son Square, District 1 (Tel: 3823-3478)

Conveniently located at the back of Opera House, this local boutique is a one stop shop for both men and women.

Mai of Saigon

101 Nam Ky Khoi Nghia, District 1 (Tel: 3827-4420)

Makes things that are in the shop or from a picture that you bring in. Prices are mid-range.

T&V Tailor

39 Dong Du, District 1 (Tel: 3824-4556)

Stylish tailor shop with pretty dresses and modern twists on men's shirts, the selection of fabric is endless. Prices are slightly higher than the average tailor in town.

Cao Vinh

69 Pasteur, District 1 (Tel: 3824-5645)

Tailored suits for men and women.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Socialist Republic of Vietnam

Geography

Area: 331,114 sq. km. (127,243 sq. mi.); equivalent in size to Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee combined.

Cities (2008): *Capital*--Hanoi (6.232 million); on August 1, 2008 the capital city's administrative borders were officially expanded to include Ha Tay Province and parts of Hoa Binh and Vinh Phuc. *Other cities*--Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon; 6.602 million), Haiphong (1.711 million), Danang (806,900), Can Tho (1.154 million).

Terrain: Varies from mountainous to coastal delta.

Climate: Tropical monsoon.



People

Nationality: *Noun and adjective*--Vietnamese (sing. and pl.).

Population (2007): 85.15 million; (2008 estimate): 86.1 million.

Annual growth rate (2007): 1.188%.

Ethnic groups (2003): 54 groups including Vietnamese (Kinh) (85.73%), Tay (1.97%), Thai (1.79%), Muong (1.52%), Khmer (1.37%), Chinese (1.13%), Nung (1.13%), Hmong (1.11%).

Religions (2007): Buddhism (14.38%), Catholic (6.9%), Cao Dai (2.8%), Protestantism (1.75%), Hoa Hao (1.5%), Islam (0.076%), Baha'i (0.007%), and other animist religions.

Languages: Vietnamese (official), English (increasingly favored as a second language), some French, Chinese, and other ethnic minority languages.

Education (2006): *Literacy*--90%.

Health (2007 estimate): *Birth rate*-- 16.63 births/1000 population. *Infant mortality rate*-- 17.4 /1000. *Life expectancy*--70.8 yrs. *Death rate*--6.56/1,000.

Government

Type: Communist Party-dominated constitutional republic.

Independence: September 2, 1945.

New constitution: April 15, 1992.

Branches: *Executive*--president (head of state and chair of National Defense and Security Council) and prime minister (heads cabinet of ministries and commissions). *Legislative*--National Assembly. *Judicial*--Supreme People's Court; Prosecutorial Supreme People's Procuracy.

Administrative subdivisions: 59 provinces, 5 municipalities (Can Tho, Hai Phong, Danang, Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh).

Political party: Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) with over 3 million members, formerly (1951-76) Vietnam Worker's Party, itself the successor of the Indochinese Communist Party founded in 1930.

Suffrage: Universal over 18.

Economy

GDP (2008): \$84.98 billion.

Real growth rate (2008): 6.23%.

Per capita income (2008): \$1,024.

Inflation rate (January 2009): 17.48% year-on-year.

External debt (2007): 27% of GDP, \$19.25 billion.

Natural resources: Coal, crude oil, zinc, copper, silver, gold, manganese, iron.

Agriculture, forestry, and fisheries (21.99% of GDP, 2008): *Principal products*--rice, maize, sweet potato, peanut, soya bean, cotton, coffee, cashews, plus extensive aquaculture of both fish and shellfish species. *Cultivated land*-- 12.2 million hectares. *Land use*--21% arable; 28% forest and woodland; 51% other.

Industry and construction (39.91% of GDP, 2008): *Principal types*--mining and quarrying, manufacturing, electricity, gas, water supply, cement, phosphate, and steel.

Services (38.10% of GDP, 2008): *Principal types*--tourism, wholesale and retail, repair of vehicles and personal goods, hotel and restaurant, transport storage, telecommunications.

Trade (2008): *Exports*--\$62.9 billion. *Principal exports*--crude oil, garments/textiles, footwear, fishery and seafood products, rice (second-largest exporter in world), wood products, coffee, rubber, handicrafts. *Major export partners*--U.S., EU, Japan, China, Australia, Singapore, Germany, and the United Kingdom. *Imports*--\$80.4 billion. *Principal imports*--machinery, oil and gas, iron and steel, garment materials, plastics. *Major import partners*--China, Japan, Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Thailand. *Exports to U.S.* (2008)--\$12.9 billion. *Imports from U.S.* (2008) \$2.8 billion.

PEOPLE

Originating in what is now southern China and northern Vietnam, the Vietnamese people pushed southward over 2 millennia to occupy the entire eastern seacoast of the Indochinese Peninsula. Vietnam has 54 ethnic groups; ethnic Vietnamese or Kinh constitute approximately 85% of Vietnam's population. The next largest groups are ethnic Tay and Thai, which account for 1.97% and 1.79% of Vietnam's population and are concentrated in the country's northern uplands.

With a population of more than 900,000, Vietnam's Chinese community is one of the most significant and wealthiest ethnic groups in Vietnam. Long important in the Vietnamese economy, Vietnamese of Chinese ancestry have been active in rice trading, milling, real estate, and banking in the south and shop keeping, stevedoring, and mining in the north. Restrictions on economic activity following reunification of the north and south in 1975 and a general deterioration in Vietnamese-Chinese relations caused increasing anxiety within the Chinese-Vietnamese community. As tensions between Vietnam and China reached their peak in 1978-79, culminating in a brief but bloody war in February-March 1979, some 450,000 ethnic Chinese left Vietnam by boat as refugees (many officially encouraged and assisted) or were expelled across the land border with China.

Other significant ethnic minority groups include central highland peoples (formerly termed Montagnards) such as the Gia Rai, Bana, Ede, Xo Dang, Gie Trieng, and the Khmer Krom (Cambodians), who are concentrated near the Cambodian border and at the mouth of the Mekong River. Taken collectively, these groups made up a majority of the population in much of Vietnam's central highlands until the 1960s and 1970s. They now compose a significant minority of 25% to 35% of the provinces in that region.

Vietnamese is the official language of the country. It is a tonal language with influences from Thai, Khmer, and Chinese. Since the early 20th century, the Vietnamese have used a Romanized script introduced by the French. Previously, Chinese characters and an indigenous phonetic script were both used.

HISTORY

Vietnam's identity has been shaped by long-running conflicts, both internally and with foreign forces. In 111 BC, China's Han dynasty conquered northern Vietnam's Red River Delta and the ancestors of today's Vietnamese. Chinese dynasties ruled Vietnam for the next 1,000 years, inculcating it with Confucian ideas and political culture, but also leaving a tradition of resistance to foreign occupation. In 939 AD, Vietnam achieved independence under a native dynasty. After 1471, when Vietnam conquered the Champa Kingdom in what is now central Vietnam, the Vietnamese moved gradually southward, finally reaching the agriculturally rich Mekong Delta, where they encountered previously settled communities of Cham and Cambodians. As Vietnam's Le dynasty declined, powerful northern and southern families, the Trinh and Nguyen, fought civil wars in the 17th and 18th centuries. A peasant revolt originating in the Tay Son region of central Vietnam defeated both the Nguyen and the Trinh and unified the country at the end of the 18th century, but was itself defeated by a surviving member of the Nguyen family, who founded the Nguyen dynasty as Emperor Gia Long in 1802.

French Rule and the Anti-Colonial Struggle

In 1858, the French began their conquest of Vietnam starting in the south. They annexed all of Vietnam in 1885, governing the territories of Annam, Tonkin, and Cochinchina, together with Cambodia and Laos, as part of French Indochina. The French allowed Vietnam's emperors to continue to reign, although not actually to rule. In the early 20th century, Vietnamese intellectuals, many of them French educated, organized nationalist and communist-nationalist anti-colonial movements.

Japan's military occupation of Vietnam during World War II further stirred nationalist sentiment, as well as antipathy toward the French Vichy colonial regime, which took its direction from the Japanese until the Japanese took direct control in March 1945. Vietnamese communists under Ho Chi Minh organized a coalition of anti-colonial groups, the Viet Minh, though many anti-communists refused to join. The Viet Minh took advantage of political uncertainty in the weeks following Japan's surrender to take control of Hanoi and much of northern Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh announced the independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam on September 2, 1945.

North and South Partition

France's determination to reassert colonial authority in Vietnam led to failed talks and, after armed hostilities broke out in Haiphong at the end of 1946, an 8-year guerrilla war between the communist-led Viet Minh on one side and the French and their anti-communist nationalist allies on the other. Following a humiliating defeat at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954, France and other parties, including Britain, China, the Soviet Union, the United States, and representatives of the Viet Minh and Bao Dai governments convened in Geneva, Switzerland for peace talks. On July 29, 1954, an Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Vietnam was signed between France and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The United States observed, but did not sign, the agreement. French colonial rule in Vietnam ended.

The 1954 Geneva agreement provided for a cease-fire between communist and anti-communist nationalist forces, the temporary division of Vietnam at approximately the 17th parallel, provisional northern (communist) and southern (noncommunist) zone governments, and the evacuation of anti-communist Vietnamese from northern to southern Vietnam. The agreement also called for an election to be held by July 1956 to bring the two provisional zones under a unified government. However, the South Vietnamese Government refused to accept this provision. On October 26, 1955, South Vietnam declared itself the Republic of Vietnam.

After 1954, North Vietnamese communist leaders consolidated their power and instituted a harsh agrarian reform and socialization program. During this period, some 450,000 Vietnamese, including a large number of Vietnamese Catholics, fled from the north to the south, while a much smaller number relocated north. In the late 1950s, North Vietnamese leaders reactivated the network of communist guerrillas that had remained behind in the south. These forces--commonly known as the Viet Cong--aided covertly by the north, started an armed campaign against officials and villagers who refused to support the communist reunification cause.

American Assistance to the South

In December 1961, at the request of South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem, President Kennedy sent U.S. military advisers to South Vietnam to help the government there deal with the Viet Cong campaign. In the wake of escalating political turmoil in the south after a November 1963 generals' coup against President Diem, which resulted in his death, the United States increased its military support for South Vietnam. In March 1965, President Johnson sent the first U.S. combat forces to Vietnam. The American military role peaked in 1969 with an in-country force of 534,000. The Viet Cong's surprise Tet Offensive in January 1968 deeply hurt both the Viet Cong infrastructure and American and South Vietnamese morale. In January 1969, the United States, governments of South and North Vietnam, and the Viet Cong met for the first plenary session of peace talks in Paris, France. These talks, which began with much hope, moved slowly. They finally concluded with the signing of a peace agreement, the Paris Accords, on January 27, 1973. As a result, the south was divided into a patchwork of zones controlled by the South Vietnamese Government and the Viet Cong. The United States withdrew its forces, although U.S. military advisers remained.

Reunification

In early 1975, North Vietnamese regular military forces began a major offensive in the south, inflicting great damage to the south's forces. The communists took Saigon on April

30, 1975, and announced their intention of reunifying the country. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam (north) absorbed the former Republic of Vietnam (south) to form the Socialist Republic of Vietnam on July 2, 1976.

After reunification, the government confiscated privately owned land and forced citizens into collectivized agricultural practices. Hundreds of thousands of former South Vietnamese government and military officials, as well as intellectuals previously opposed to the communist cause, were sent to re-education camps to study socialist doctrine, where they remained for periods ranging from months to several years.

Expectations that reunification of the country and its socialist transformation would be condoned by the international community were quickly dashed as the international community expressed concern over Vietnam's internal practices and foreign policy. Vietnam's 1978 invasion of Cambodia in particular, together with its increasingly tight alliance with the Soviet Union, appeared to confirm suspicions that Vietnam wanted to establish hegemony in Indochina.

Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia also heightened tensions that already existed between Vietnam and China. Beijing, which had long backed the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia, retaliated in early 1979 by initiating a brief, but bloody border war with Vietnam.

Vietnam's tensions with its neighbors, internal repression, and a stagnant economy contributed to a massive exodus from Vietnam. Fearing persecution, many Chinese in particular fled Vietnam by boat to nearby countries. Later, hundreds of thousands of other Vietnamese nationals fled as well, seeking temporary refuge in camps throughout Southeast Asia.

The continuing grave condition of the economy and the alienation from the international community became focal points of party debate. In 1986, at the Sixth Party Congress, there was an important easing of communist agrarian and commercial policies.

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS

A new state constitution was approved in April 1992, reaffirming the central role of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) in politics and society, and outlining government reorganization and increased economic freedom. Though Vietnam remains a one-party state, adherence to ideological orthodoxy has become less important than economic development as a national priority.

The most important powers within the Vietnamese Government--in addition to the Communist Party--are the executive agencies created by the 1992 constitution: the offices of the president and the prime minister. The Vietnamese President, presently Nguyen Minh Triet, functions as head of state but also serves as the nominal commander of the armed forces and chairman of the Council on National Defense and Security. The Prime Minister of Vietnam, presently Nguyen Tan Dung, heads a cabinet currently composed of five deputy prime ministers and the heads of 22 ministries and agencies, all confirmed by the National Assembly.

Notwithstanding the 1992 constitution's reaffirmation of the central role of the

Communist Party, the National Assembly, according to the constitution, is the highest representative body of the people and the only organization with legislative powers. It has a broad mandate to oversee all government functions. Once seen as little more than a rubber stamp, the National Assembly has become more vocal and assertive in exercising its authority over lawmaking, particularly in recent years. However, the National Assembly is still subject to party direction. More than 80% of the deputies in the National Assembly are party members. The assembly meets twice yearly for 7- 10 weeks each time; elections for members are held every 5 years, although its Standing Committee meets monthly and there are now over 100 "full-time" deputies who function on various committees. In 2007, the assembly introduced parliamentary "question time," in which cabinet ministers must answer often pointed questions from National Assembly members. There is a separate judicial branch, but it is still relatively weak. Overall, there are few lawyers and trial procedures are rudimentary.

The present 15-member Politburo, selected at the Tenth Party Congress in April 2006 and headed by Communist Party General Secretary Nong Duc Manh, determines government policy; its Secretariat, headed by Truong Tan Sang, oversees day-to-day policy implementation. In addition, the party's Central Military Commission, which is composed of select Politburo members and additional military leaders, determines military policy.

A Party Congress meets every 5 years to set the direction of the party and the government. The most recent Congress, the Tenth, met in April 2006 and comprised 1,176 delegates. The 160-member Central Committee (with an additional 21 alternate members), is elected by the Party Congress and usually meets at least twice a year. The most recent Central Committee Plenum met in January 2009.

ECONOMY

Following economic stagnation after reunification from 1975 to 1985, the 1986 Sixth Party Congress approved broad economic reforms (known as "Doi Moi" or renovation) that introduced market reforms, opened up the country for foreign investment, and dramatically improved Vietnam's business climate. Vietnam became one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, averaging around 8% annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth from 1990 to 1997 and 6.5% from 1998-2003. From 2004 to 2007, GDP grew over 8% annually. In 2008, Vietnam's GDP growth rate slowed to 6.2%. Viewed over time, foreign trade and foreign direct investment (FDI) have improved significantly. Average annual foreign investment commitment has risen sharply since foreign investment was authorized in 1988. In 2008, Vietnam attracted the highest level of FDI commitments since 1988, with \$60.3 billion in new licenses for FDI projects, 3.4 times higher than that of 2007 (\$17.8 billion). Actual FDI reached between \$8 billion and \$11 billion in 2008. From 1990 to 2005, agricultural production nearly doubled, transforming Vietnam from a net food importer to the world's second-largest exporter of rice. Altogether, exports in 2008 were a historic \$62.9 billion, but Vietnam's need for capital goods, construction materials, refined fuel, and primary material for exports meant that it ran a trade deficit of \$17.5 billion, approximately 20% of its GDP.

The shift away from a centrally planned economy to a more market-oriented economic model improved the quality of life for many Vietnamese. Per capita income rose from \$220 in 1994 to \$1,024 in 2008. Inflation in 2008 was 23% year-on-year, although it had slowed to 18% year-on-year in February 2009. The average Vietnamese savings rate is

about 30%. Urban unemployment has been rising in recent years, and both urban and rural underemployment, estimated to be between 25% and 35% during non-harvest periods, is significant.

The Vietnamese Government still holds a tight rein over major sectors of the economy through large state-owned enterprises and the banking system. The government has plans to reform key sectors and partially privatize state-owned enterprises, but implementation has been gradual and the state sector still accounts for approximately 36% of GDP. Greater emphasis on private sector development is critical for job creation.

The 2001 entry-into-force of the Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) between the U.S. and Vietnam was a significant milestone for Vietnam's economy and for normalization of U.S.-Vietnam relations. Bilateral trade between the United States and Vietnam has expanded dramatically, rising from \$2.91 billion in 2002 to \$15.7 billion in 2008. Implementation of the BTA, which includes provisions on trade in goods and services, enforcement of intellectual property rights, protection for investments, and transparency, fundamentally changed Vietnam's trade regime and helped it prepare to accede to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2007.

Vietnam was granted unconditional normal trade relations (NTR) status by the United States in December 2006. To meet the obligations of WTO membership, Vietnam revised nearly all of its trade and investment laws and guiding regulations and opened up large sectors of its economy to foreign investors and exporters.

A U.S.-Vietnam Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA), a bridge to future economic cooperation, was signed in 2007 during President Triet's visit to the United States. The first TIFA Council occurred in December 2007 in Washington, and there have been five TIFA meetings since then. During Prime Minister Dung's June 2008 visit, the United States and Vietnam committed to undertake Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) negotiations. The first round of BIT negotiations took place in December 2008 in Washington.

Agriculture and Industry

Besides rice, key exports are coffee, tea, rubber, and fisheries products. Agriculture's share of economic output has declined, falling as a share of GDP from 42% in 1989 to 20.3% in 2007, as production in other sectors of the economy has risen.

Paralleling its efforts to increase agricultural output, Vietnam's industrial production has grown. Industry and construction contributed 39.86% of GDP in 2008, up from 27.3% in 1985.

Vietnam has successfully increased exports of manufactured goods, especially labor-intensive manufactures, such as textiles and apparel and footwear. Subsidies have been cut. The government is also in the process of "equitizing" (e.g., transforming state enterprises into shareholding companies and distributing a portion of the shares to management, workers, and private foreign and domestic investors) a significant number of state enterprises. However, to date the government continues to maintain control of the largest and most important companies. Despite reforms, the state share of GDP has remained relatively constant since 2000, at 36%-40%.

Trade and Balance of Payments

To compensate for drastic cuts in Soviet-bloc support after 1989, Vietnam liberalized trade, devalued its exchange rate to increase exports, and embarked on a policy of regional and international economic re-integration. Vietnam has demonstrated its commitment to trade liberalization in recent years, and integration with the world economy has become one of the cornerstones of its reform program. Vietnam has locked in its intention to create a more competitive and open economy by committing to several comprehensive international trade agreements, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Free Trade Area (AFTA) and the U.S.-Vietnam Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA). Vietnam's accession to the World Trade Organization further integrated Vietnam into the global economy. In February 2009, Vietnam officially joined the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) as an “associate member.”

As a result of these reforms, exports expanded significantly, growing by as much as 20%-30% in some years. In 2008, exports accounted for 72% of GDP. Imports have also grown rapidly, and Vietnam has a significant trade deficit (\$17.5 billion in 2008). Vietnam's total external debt, amounting to 27% of GDP in 2007, was estimated at around \$19.3 billion.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

During the second Indochina war (1954-75), North Vietnam sought to balance relations with its two major allies, the Soviet Union and China. By 1975, tension began to grow as Beijing increasingly viewed Vietnam as a potential Soviet instrument to encircle China. Over the next four years, Beijing's increasing support for Cambodia's Khmer Rouge sparked Vietnamese suspicions of China's motives.

Vietnam. -China relations deteriorated significantly after Hanoi instituted a ban in March 1978 on private trade, mostly affecting Sino-Vietnamese. Following Vietnam's December 1978 invasion of Cambodia, China in February 1979 launched a month-long retaliatory incursion over Vietnam's northern border. Faced with severance of Chinese aid and strained international relations, Vietnam established even closer ties with the Soviet Union and its allies in the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon). Through the 1980s, Vietnam received nearly \$3 billion a year in economic and military aid from the Soviet Union and conducted most of its trade with that country and with other Comecon countries. However, Soviet and East bloc economic aid declined during the perestroika era and ceased completely after the breakup of the Soviet Union.

Vietnam did not begin to emerge from international isolation until it withdrew its troops from Cambodia in 1989. Within months of the 1991 Paris Agreements, Vietnam established diplomatic and economic relations with ASEAN as well as with most of the countries of Western Europe and Northeast Asia. China reestablished full diplomatic ties with Vietnam in 1991, and the two countries began joint efforts to demarcate their land and sea borders, expand trade and investment ties, and build political relations.

In the past decade, Vietnam has recognized the increasing importance of growing global economic interdependence and has made concerted efforts to adjust its foreign relations to reflect the evolving international economic and political situation in Southeast Asia. The country has begun to integrate itself into the regional and global economy by joining

international organizations. Vietnam has stepped up its efforts to attract foreign capital from the West and regularize relations with the world financial system. In the 1990s, following the lifting of the American veto on multilateral loans to the country, Vietnam became a member of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the Asian Development Bank. The country has expanded trade with its East Asian neighbors as well as with countries in Western Europe and North America. Of particular significance was Vietnam's acceptance into the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in July 1995. In recent years, Vietnam's influence in ASEAN has expanded significantly; the country will serve as Chairman of ASEAN from January 1, 2010. In addition, Vietnam joined the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC) in November 1998 and hosted the ASEAN summit in 2001 and APEC in 2006. In October 2007, Vietnam was elected for the first time to the United Nations Security Council, to serve a two-year term starting January 1, 2008.

While Vietnam has not experienced war since its withdrawal from Cambodia, tensions have periodically flared between Vietnam and China, primarily over their overlapping maritime claims in the South China Sea. Vietnam and China each assert claims to the Spratly and Paracel Islands, archipelagos in the potentially oil-rich area of the South China Sea. Malaysia, the Philippines, and Taiwan also claim all or part of the South China Sea. Over the years, conflicting claims have produced small-scale armed altercations in the area; in 1988, 70 Vietnamese sailors died in a confrontation with China in the Spratlies. China's assertion of "indisputable sovereignty" over the Spratly Islands and the entire South China Sea has elicited concern from Vietnam and its Southeast Asia neighbors. Tensions escalated in the latter half of 2007, as China pressured foreign oil companies, notably BP, to abandon their oil and gas exploration contracts with Vietnam in the South China Sea. Press reports in July 2008 also cited Chinese pressure on U.S. firm ExxonMobil to drop an exploration agreement with Vietnam in the same waters. Vietnamese students staged several anti-China demonstrations in response, prompting a warning from the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman that Hanoi's failure to quell the demonstrations was harming relations. By contrast, Vietnam has made significant progress with China in delineating its northern land border and the Gulf of Tonkin, pursuant to a Land Border Agreement signed in December 1999, and an Agreement on Borders in the Gulf of Tonkin signed in December 2000. The two sides completed demarcation of their land border in December 2008 and have reached understanding on maritime boundaries in the mouth of the Tonkin Gulf.

U.S.-VIETNAM RELATIONS

After a 20-year hiatus of severed ties, President Clinton announced the formal normalization of diplomatic relations with Vietnam on July 11, 1995. Subsequent to President Clinton's normalization announcement, in August 1995, both nations upgraded their Liaison Offices opened during January 1995 to embassy status. As diplomatic ties between the nations grew, the United States opened a consulate general in Ho Chi Minh City, and Vietnam opened a consulate general in San Francisco.

U.S. relations with Vietnam have become increasingly cooperative and broad-based in the years since political normalization. A series of bilateral summits have helped drive the improvement of ties, including President Bush's visit to Hanoi in November 2006, President Triet's visit to Washington in June 2007, and Prime Minister Dung's visit to Washington in June 2008. The two countries hold an annual dialogue on human rights,

resumed in 2006 after a two-year hiatus. They signed a Bilateral Trade Agreement in July 2000, which went into force in December 2001. In 2003, the two countries signed a Counternarcotics Letter of Agreement (amended in 2006), a Civil Aviation Agreement, and a textile agreement. In January 2007, Congress approved Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) for Vietnam. In October 2008, the U.S. and Vietnam held political-military talks and policy planning talks to consult on regional security and strategic issues. Bilateral diplomatic engagement expanded at ASEAN and APEC, and with Vietnam's January 2008 start of a two-year term on the UN Security Council.

Vietnam's suppression of political dissent continued to be the main issue of contention in relations with the U.S., drawing criticism from the administration and Congress. In spring 2007, Vietnam's government launched a crackdown on political dissidents, and in November the same year arrested a group of pro-democracy activists, including two Americans. By May 2008, all Americans had been released. In 2008, the Vietnamese Government tightened controls over the press and freedom of speech and convicted two journalists for their reporting on high-level corruption. An Internet blogger was also jailed after writing about corruption and protesting China's actions in the disputed Spratly and Paracel Islands. In contrast, Vietnam has continued to make significant progress on expanding religious freedom. In 2005, Vietnam passed comprehensive religious freedom legislation, outlawing forced renunciations and permitting the official recognition of new denominations. As a result, in November 2006, the Department of State lifted the designation of Vietnam as a "Country of Particular Concern," based on a determination that the country was no longer a serious violator of religious freedoms, as defined by the International Religious Freedom Act. This decision was reaffirmed by the Department of State in November 2007. The government's harassment of certain religious leaders for their political activism, including leaders of the outlawed United Buddhist Church of Vietnam, was an ongoing source of U.S. concern.

As of December 14, 2007, the U.S. Government listed 1,763 Americans unaccounted for in Southeast Asia, including 1,353 in Vietnam. Since 1973, 883 Americans have been accounted for, including 627 in Vietnam. Additionally, the Department of Defense has confirmed that of the 196 individuals who were "last known alive" (LKA), the U.S. Government has determined the fate of all but 31. The United States considers achieving the fullest possible accounting of Americans missing and unaccounted for in Indochina to be one of its highest priorities with Vietnam.

Since entry into force of the U.S.-Vietnam Bilateral Trade Agreement on December 10, 2001, increased trade between the U.S. and Vietnam, combined with large-scale U.S. investment in Vietnam, evidence the maturing U.S.-Vietnam economic relationship. In 2007, the United States exported \$1.9 billion of goods to Vietnam and imported \$10.6 billion of goods from Vietnam. Similarly, U.S. companies continue to invest directly in the Vietnamese economy. During 2006, the U.S. private sector committed \$444 million to Vietnam in foreign direct investment. Another sign of the expanding bilateral relationship is the signing of a Bilateral Air Transport Agreement in December 2003. Several U.S. carriers already have third-party code sharing agreements with Vietnam Airlines. Direct flights between Ho Chi Minh City and San Francisco began in December 2004. Vietnam and the United States also signed a Bilateral Maritime Agreement in March 2007 that opened the maritime transport and services industry of Vietnam to U.S. firms.

Cooperation in other areas, such as defense engagement, nonproliferation, and law enforcement, is also expanding steadily. Prime Minister Dung announced during his June 2008 visit to the U.S. that Vietnam plans to take part in peacekeeper training under the U.S.-funded, multinational Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI). In June 2008, Vietnam hosted a port call to Nha Trang by the hospital ship USNS Mercy, providing medical and dental treatment to over 11,000 Vietnamese patients. This followed Vietnam's hosting of visits by five U.S. Navy vessels in 2007, including a port call to Danang by the humanitarian supply ship USS Peleliu, whose personnel carried out numerous medical and engineering projects. Also in June 2008, Vietnamese observers took part for the second successive year in the multinational naval exercise Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT), organized by the U.S. Pacific Fleet.