



**NATIONAL
PROFILE
VIETNAM**



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GENERAL INFORMATION

Vietnam is in South-East Asia. The name of the country has almost become synonymous with the Vietnam War. For the Vietnamese, it is called the American War. The history of the country goes back a lot further than 'the war that wasn't won', as the Americans euphemistically call it. Vietnam is actually a country with a long history and ancient traditions. It has many historic sights and old temples.



Ha Long Bay – Natural World Heritage site in Vietnam

Vietnam is approximately 331,688 km² (128,065 sq miles) in area (not including Hoang Sa and Truong Sa islands), larger than Italy and almost the size of Germany. Vietnam has a 3400 - kilometers coastline and mountainous terrain covers 75% of the country. There are two large and fertile river deltas where most of the population live, the Red River in the North and the Mekong River in the south. The mountainous north and central regions are sparsely populated. Vietnam shares land borders with Cambodia (609 miles/982 km), China (794 miles/1,281 km) and Laos (964 miles/1,555 km).

Vietnam's former capital, Hue, was relocated to Hanoi after the reunification of the country. The old centre of Hanoi is still almost intact. Ho Chi Minh City in the south, formerly known as Saigon (and still referred to as Saigon in spoken language), is the country's commercial centre.

Ha Long Bay in the north, which means, "descending dragon," is clearly Vietnam's most beautiful region. With over 3,000 oddly shaped limestone islets, the natural beauty of the grottoes is captivating. The city of Hue, the ancient capital of the Annamese, is another highlight. Much of the city was badly damaged during the war. It is located about halfway between Hanoi and HoChi Minh City. For nature lovers a visit to northwest Vietnam (Sa Pa) is a must.

CLIMATE

Vietnam has a very diverse climate because its land mass stretches over many degrees of longitude and its terrain varies from low lying coastal plains to 4000-meter mountain peaks. It understandably varied from bitterly cold to blisteringly hot, and a whole lot in between.

The North: Cold season is between November and April with average temperatures of plus 16°C - it is often wet and chilly. In the summer, between May and October, the average temperature is about 30°C and sometimes it can reach up to 40°C.



Hoan Kiem Lake in Hanoi

Central Vietnam: The climate varies from the coastal plain to the central highlands. This region tends to be warmer and more humid than the south in the middle of the year and cooler during the dry season from November to March.

The South: The temperature in the south is fairly consistent all year round, ranging between 25 - 30°C. The dry season is from November to April and the wet season from May to October.

From July to November, strong and unpredictable typhoons can hit some of the coastal regions of Vietnam, sometimes with devastating impacts.

HISTORY

In 111 BC, ancestors of the present-day Vietnamese inhabiting part of what is now southern China and northern Vietnam were conquered by forces of China's Han dynasty. Chinese rule lasted more than 1000 years (until 939 AD) when the Vietnamese ousted their conquerors and began a southward expansion that, by the mid-18th century, reached the Gulf of Siam.

Despite their military achievements the Vietnamese continued to suffer from internal political divisions. Throughout most of the 17th and 18th centuries, contending families in the north and south struggled to control the powerless kings of the Le dynasty. During this period, Vietnam was effectively divided near the 17th parallel, just a few kilometres above the demarcation line established at the 1954 Geneva conference.

French Rule

Vietnam was reunited following a devastating civil war in the 18th century but soon fell prey to the expansion of European colonialism. The French conquest of Vietnam began in 1858 with an attack on what is now the city of Da Nang. France imposed control gradually, meeting heavy resistance and only becoming incorporated into the French empire when Emperor Tu Duc was forced to sign a treaty in 1884.

Fiercely nationalistic, the Vietnamese never truly accepted the imposition of French rule. By 1930, the Vietnamese Nationalist Party had staged the first significant armed uprising against the French but its virtual destruction in the ensuing French repression left the leadership of the anti-colonial movement to those more adept at underground organization and survival - the communists.



In that same year the recently formed Indochina Communist Party (ICP) took the lead in setting up short-lived "soviets" in the Nghe An and Ha Tinh Provinces in northern Vietnam, an action that identified the ICP with peasant unrest. The ICP was formed in Hong Kong in 1930 from the amalgamation of the Vietnamese and the nascent Lao and Khmer communist groups and it received its instructions from the Moscow-based Communist International (Comintern).

Communist Movement

The Vietnamese communist movement began in Paris in 1920 when Ho Chi Minh, using the pseudonym Nguyen Ai Quoc, became a charter member of the French Communist Party. Two years later Ho went to Moscow to study Marxist doctrine and then proceeded to Canton as a Comintern representative. While in China he formed the Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth League setting the stage for the formation of the Indochina Communist Party in 1930. French repression of nationalists and communists forced some of the insurgents underground and others escaped to China. Other dissidents were imprisoned, some emerging later to play important roles in the anti-colonial movement.



Ho Chi Minh was abroad at that time but was imprisoned later in Hong Kong by the British. He was released in 1933, and in 1936, a new French government released his compatriots who at the outset of World War II fled to China. There they were joined by Ho who organized the Viet Minh - purportedly a coalition of all anti-French Vietnamese groups. Official Vietnamese publications stated that the Viet Minh was founded and led by the ICP.

Because a Vichy French administration in Vietnam during World War II cooperated with occupying Japanese forces, the Viet Minh's anti-French activity was also directed against the Japanese, and for a short period, there was cooperation between the Viet Minh and Allied forces. When the French were ousted by the Japanese in March 1945,

the Viet Minh began to move into the countryside from their base areas in the mountains of northern Vietnam. By the time allied troops--Chinese in the north and British in the south--arrived to accept the surrender of Japanese troops, the Viet Minh leaders had already announced the formation of a Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and, on September 2, 1945, proclaimed Vietnam's independence.

Deep divisions between Vietnamese communist and non-communist nationalists soon began to surface. However, especially in the south and with the arrival of Allied forces later in September, the DRV was forced to begin negotiations with the French on their future relationship. The difficult negotiations broke down in December 1946, and fighting began with a Viet Minh attack on the French in Hanoi.

Civil War

A prolonged three-way struggle ensued among the Vietnamese communists (led by Ho Chi Minh), the French and the Vietnamese nationalists (nominally led by Emperor Bao Dai). The communists sought to portray their struggle as a national uprising; the French attempted to re-establish their control; and the non-communist nationalists, many of whom chose to fight alongside the French against the communists, wanted neither French nor communist domination. Ho Chi Minh's Viet Minh forces fought a highly successful guerrilla campaign and eventually controlled much of rural Vietnam. The French military disaster at Dien Bien Phu in May 1954 and the conference at Geneva where France signed the Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities in Vietnam on July 20, 1954, marked the end of the 8-year war and of French colonial rule in Indochina.



1954 Cease-Fire Agreement and Partition

The 1954 cease-fire agreement negotiated in Geneva provided for provisional division of the country at approximately the 17th parallel; a 300-day period for free movement of population between the two "zones" established thereby; and the establishment of an International Control Commission--representatives of Canada, India and Poland--to supervise its execution. The cease-fire agreements also referred to "general elections" that would "bring about the unification" of the two zones of Vietnam. The agreement was not accepted by the Bao Dai government, which agreed however to respect the cease-fire.

Following the partition of Vietnam under the terms of the Geneva agreements there was considerable confusion in the south. Although Bao Dai had appointed a well-known nationalist figure Ngo Dinh Diem as Prime Minister, Diem initially had to administer a country plagued by a ruined economy and by a political life fragmented by rivalries of religious sects and political factions. He also had the problem of coping with 850 000 refugees from the north. The communist leaders in Hanoi expected the Diem government to collapse and come under their control. Nevertheless, during his early years in office, Diem was able to consolidate his political position, eliminating the private armies of the religious sects and with substantial U.S. military, and economic aid built a national army and administration and made significant progress towards reconstructing the economy.

Meanwhile, the communist leaders consolidated their power in North Vietnam and instituted a harsh "agrarian reform" program. In the late 1950s, they reactivated the network of communists who had stayed in the south (the Viet Cong) with hidden stocks of arms, reinfilitrated trained guerrillas who had been regrouped in the north after 1954 and began a campaign of terror against officials and villagers who refused to support the communist cause. The communists also exploited grievances created by mistakes of the Diem government as well as age-old shortcomings of Vietnamese society such as poverty and land shortages.

By 1963, the North Vietnamese communists had made significant progress in building an apparatus in South Vietnam. Nevertheless, in 1964, Hanoi decided that the Viet Cong (VC) cadres and their supporters were not sufficient to take advantage of the political confusion following the overthrow of Diem in November 1963. Hanoi ordered regular troops of the North Vietnamese army (People's Army of Vietnam--PAVN) into South Vietnam first as "fillers" in VC units then in regular formations. The first regimental units were dispatched in the fall of 1964. By 1968, PAVN forces were bearing the brunt of combat on the communist side.

U.S. Assistance

In December 1961, President Diem requested assistance from the United States. President Kennedy sent U.S. military advisers to South Vietnam to help the government deal with aggression from the North. In March 1965, President Johnson sent Marine units to the Da Nang area to defend U.S. installations. In July 1965, he decided to commit up to 125 000 U.S. combat troops to Vietnam. By the spring of 1969, the United States had reached its greatest troop strength--543 000--in Vietnam.

The U.S. bombing of North Vietnam, which began in March 1965, was partially halted in 1968. U.S. and North Vietnamese negotiators met in Paris on May 15, 1968, to discuss terms for a complete halt and to arrange for a conference of all "interested parties" in the Vietnam War including the Government of the Republic of Vietnam (GVN) and the National Liberation Front. President Johnson ordered all bombing of the North to be stopped on November 1, 1968, and the four parties met for their first plenary session on January 25, 1969.



The Paris meetings, which began with so much hope, moved slowly. Beginning in June 1969, the United States began a troop withdrawal program concurrent with the assumption by GVN armed forces of a larger role in the defence of their country. While the United States withdrew from ground combat by 1971, it still provided air and sea support to the South Vietnamese until the signing of the cease-fire agreements. The peace agreement was concluded on January 27, 1973.

After the 1973 Peace Agreement

While Hanoi continued to proclaim its support of the peace agreement, it illegally sent thousands of tons of materiel into South Vietnam including sophisticated offensive weaponry. Tens of thousands of PAVN troops infiltrated South Vietnam to join the 160 000 there at the time of the cease-fire. Numerous attacks were carried out against installations, lines of communication, economic facilities and occasionally population centres.

At the beginning of 1975, the North Vietnamese began a major offensive in the South that succeeded in breaking through the central highland's defenses. After taking over provincial capitals in that area a combination of forces from the demilitarized zone and the highlands routed South Vietnamese defenders. Pressure from the highlands and from the Cambodian border region led to a general GVN military collapse which in turn resulted in the fall of Saigon itself by the end of April. Faced with the threat of a takeover by a communist regime, tens of thousands of Vietnamese fled the country.

Reunification

For the first few months after the war, separate governments were maintained in the northern and southern parts of the country. However, in mid-November 1975, the decision to reunify the country was announced despite the vast social and economic differences remaining between the two sections. Elections were held in April 1976 for the National Assembly which was convened the following June. The assembly ratified the reunification of the country and, on July 2, renamed it the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV). It also appointed a committee to draft anew constitution for the entire country. The party Central Committee approved the constitution in September 1980. New National Assembly elections were held in April 1981.

The fourth congress of the Vietnam Worker's Party held December 4 – 20, 1976, selected a new party leadership and established major national policies. It re-elected Secretary General Le Duan, who had led the party since Ho Chi Minh's death in 1969. In addition, the fourth party congress voted to enlarge the Politburo and the full Central Committee by about 60%. While many of the new members were young and had technical and administrative expertise, top positions went to established leaders from the north, assuring connections with the past. Similarly, the fifth party Congress (1982) maintained continuity by reconfirming the top leadership despite its age while expanding the Central Committee to bring in new members who were younger and had more economic experience.

In 1986, the death of Secretary General Le Duan as well as alarm over the economy's downward spiral set the stage for the watershed sixth party congress (December 1986). Spearheaded by Nguyen Van Linh who was named the new party leader, the congress endorsed the need for sweeping economic reform and "renovation" of the party as well as a policy of "openness" that resembled some policies being promoted in the U.S.S.R. While reaffirming Vietnam's alliance with the Soviet Union the congress softened Hanoi's anti-Beijing posture and called for more attention to developing relations with non-communist nations. The balance of power in the leadership shifted to the "reformers with the remaining conservatives" arguing for a slower pace. Economic reforms were deepened in 1989 and a stabilization campaign to control rampant inflation was implemented.



As communism came under attack in Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union and China in the late 1980s, Vietnam tightened domestic political controls, cracking down on political dissidents before the seventh party congress in June 1991. The congress itself introduced significant leadership changes while avoiding specifics on the details of economic reform or swinging power significantly to the side of either advocates of economic and political liberalization or to orthodox communists. However, given a certain amount of stress over the collapse of Vietnam's communist allies, senior figures in the security apparatus gained representation. Seven members of the 12-man ruling Politburo including Secretary General Nguyen Van Linh were dropped from their posts. (Linh was replaced by Do Muoi, the Prime Minister whose old position was given to Vo Van Kiet, a liberal southerner.) Limited political reforms appeared on the agenda but did not threaten the political primacy of the Communist Party in Vietnamese society. However, plans for internal democratisation of the Party were agreed upon. On economic issues, the congress was instead focusing on questions of party ideology in the face of the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe. The removal of Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach, who had opposed closer ties with China, signaled Vietnam's willingness to improve relations with its northern neighbour.

A new constitution was approved in April 1992, reaffirming the role of the Communist Party as the leading force of state and society but also promulgating government reorganization and increasing economic freedom. At the midterm Party conference in January 1994, four new members were appointed to the Politburo, tipping the balance of political power toward those who favoured more rapid and thoroughgoing economic reform. In late 1997, a new President, Prime Minister and party General Secretary were named. There were changes in the Politburo as well. In the 1990s, though Vietnam remains a one-party state, adherence to ideological orthodoxy has become less important than economic development as a national priority.

ECONOMY

After the reunification in 1975, economic development in Vietnam faltered as the nation grappled with the aftermath of 40 years of struggling for independence. In the late 1980s, the Government initiated a fundamental economic and social renovation (known as Doi Moi). The gradual rapprochement with the US and the Western World has yielded economic benefits for Vietnam with the



per capita income rising to US\$ 300 from \$200 over the past five years.



The local currency is the Dong. Credit cards and traveller cheques are becoming more widely accepted at hotels, restaurants and tourist centres. The US dollar is widely accepted throughout the country. The economy is based on money that is filtered into the country through sources outside the country. Millions of USD are sent back every year to family members to supplement their income.

In recent years, Vietnam has developed and moved from the group of poorest countries to a low average income country. The growth rate of GDP per year during the period 2001 – 2010 at 7.2% GDP per capita in 2010 is estimated at \$ 1,200. The spending power of the public has noticeably increased. The reason lies in the high prices for property. In the capital of Hanoi, property prices can be as high as those in Tokyo or New York City. This has amazed many people because the average income per capita of this city is around US \$2,000 per annum. The booming prices have given poor landowners the opportunity to sell their homes for inflated prices.



Tourism has become an increasingly important industry in Vietnam. In 2010, this number reached 5,049,855 arrivals, increasing 34.8% over the same period in 2009. Expatriate Vietnamese are an important source of financial and capital investment.

POLITICS

Politics in Vietnam take place in a framework of a single-party socialist republic. A new state constitution was approved in April 1992, reaffirming the central role of the Communist Party of Vietnam in politics and society, and outlining government reorganization and increased market reforms in the economy. 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, functions as head of state but also serves as the nominal commander of the armed forces and chairman of the Council on National Defence and Security. The Prime Minister of Vietnam is head of a cabinet currently composed of three deputy prime ministers and of 26 ministries and commissions, 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. Over the years, the National Assembly has become more vocal and assertive in exercising its authority over law-making. However, the National Assembly is still subject to party direction. About 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. There is a separate judicial branch, but it is relatively weak. Overall, there are few lawyers and trial procedures are rudimentary.

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is governed through a highly centralized system dominated by the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), which was formerly the Vietnamese Labour Party (1951 - 1976). The Socialist Republic of Vietnam exists today as a communist state.

The Communist Party holds the real power in Vietnam. The Communist Party leadership recommends candidates for the posts of president and prime minister. 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 Eleventh National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam opened on January 12th, 2011, and concluded on January 19th, 2011, was attended by 1,377 delegates. The 160-member Central Committee, which was elected by the Party Congress, usually meets at least twice a year.

The president is elected by the National Assembly from among its members for a five-year term. The prime minister is appointed by the president from among the members of the National Assembly; deputy prime ministers are appointed by the prime minister. The Cabinet is appointed by the president on the proposal of the prime minister and ratification of the National Assembly.

CULTURE



Over thousands of years, the culture of Vietnam has been strongly influenced by neighboring China, Indonesia, India and its former colonizer, France. Due to Vietnam's long association with China, Vietnamese culture remains strongly Confucian with its emphasis on familial duty. Education is highly valued. Historically, passing the imperial Mandarin exams was the only means for Vietnamese people to socially advance themselves.

In the socialist era, the cultural life of Vietnam has been deeply influenced by government-controlled media and the cultural influences of socialist programs. For many decades, foreign cultural influences were shunned and emphasis placed on appreciating and sharing the culture of communist nations such as the Soviet Union, China, Cuba and others. Since the 1990s, Vietnam has seen a greater exposure to Southeast Asian, European and American culture and media.

The traditional uniform is called "Ao Dai" and is worn on special occasions such as weddings, Lunar New Year celebrations or festivals. Ao Dai was once worn by both genders but today it is worn mainly by females.

Vietnamese cuisine is very healthy and flavourful, using very little oil and many vegetables. The main dishes are often based on rice, soy sauce, and fish sauce. Its characteristic flavours are sweet (sugar), spicy (Serrano peppers), sour (lime), umami (fish sauce), and flavoured by a variety of mint, basil, and other herbs.



Vietnamese food

Vietnamese music is slightly different according to three regions: North, Central, and South. Northern classical music is Vietnam's oldest and is traditionally more formal. Vietnamese classical music can be traced to the Mongol invasions, when the Vietnamese captured a Chinese

opera troupe. Central classical music shows the influences of Champa culture with its melancholic melodies. Southern music exudes a lively laissez-faire attitude.

Football is the most popular sport in Vietnam. Sports and games such as badminton, tennis, ping-pong and chess are also popular with large segments of the population. Baseball, introduced during American presence in Vietnam, has also gained some popularity. The (expatriate Vietnamese) community forms a prominent part of Vietnamese cultural life, introducing Western sports, films, music and other cultural activities in the nation.



LANGUAGE

The official language is Vietnamese, which is a mixture of Mon-Khmer, Thai and Chinese (Cantonese). Much vocabulary has been borrowed from Chinese, and it was originally written based on the Chinese writing system. The Vietnamese writing system in use today is an adapted version of the Latin alphabet, with additional diacritics for tones and certain letters.

Older people are often able to speak some French because many were educated during the colonial period while the younger generation are more likely to have English as a second language. Some people who worked or studied in the former Soviet Union and East Germany speak German and Russian.

RELIGION



With its many cultures, Vietnam has a variety of religions. Originally, Vietnam's three main religions were Taoism, Mahayana Buddhism and Confucianism, with Buddhism being introduced first. Although Buddhism and Taoism were popular with the people, Confucianism became the recognized religion.

In modern Vietnam, Mahayana Buddhism has the largest following, although many are considered to be marginal followers. There has been an increase in the number of monks and nuns that join the monasteries, especially since 1989, when religious restrictions were lifted. When Christianity was brought

into Vietnam, and after its incredible success, Buddhism was restructured. Now Christianity (Catholicism) has its second largest following for Southeast Asia in Vietnam, second probably to only the Philippines. There was a time of religious persecution, due to the overwhelming success and conversion rate of Christianity. Missionaries were forbidden.

Even though Vietnam is a Communist country, the constitution allows for religious freedom, although

religions that are believed to be a threat to national security are suppressed.

YOUTH

Vietnam's youth culture is dynamic and spectacular in many ways: It is a marketplace going through seismic shifts, modernization, and vast cultural changes. Young people in Vietnam are experiencing new ideas and influences and adopting and morphing new trends faster than any other culture as consumerism continues to flourish.

Moreover, most young people focus on studying and have achieved a number of international awards for their outstanding studying and research results. Apart from that, many of them are willing to take initiatives and take risks to develop their own business.

In addition, the young generation of Vietnam is also very active in local voluntary movement. Every year, a wide range of activities and programs are organized by local youth to help people in need, particularly the communities in mountainous and rural areas.



Building houses



Playing with disadvantaged children

(Blue shirt is the uniform of voluntary youth)

Based on these positive characteristics of Vietnamese youth, Volunteers for Peace runs a club for Vietnamese volunteers to help them learn and improve their skills in a multicultural environment. Many of them have become the local supporters and friends of international volunteers. This is obviously the first step to bring Vietnam closer to the world as well as to enhance the mutual understanding between people from different cultures and backgrounds, thus jointly reducing conflict and promoting peace.

ABOUT VOLUNTEERS FOR PEACE VIETNAM (VPV)

Volunteers For Peace Vietnam (VPV), or ICYE Vietnam, is a non-profit, voluntary organization established in Vietnam in 2005 with the aim to promote international voluntary service as a mean of cultural and educational exchange among people, for peace, friendship and understanding and as an approach to address social problems.

VPV hosts international volunteers from different countries and places them in suitable projects depending on the interest of the volunteers and the needs of local communities. VPV also brings the opportunities for Vietnamese to join voluntary projects around the world. By joining our programs, volunteers will experience inter-cultural living and working environment and have a chance to help those in need.

VPV offers programs for individual volunteers and group volunteers, for duration from 2 week to 1 year. Our projects cover areas of education, childcare, environment and community development, public health and medical support, cultural heritage preservation and youth action.

ABOUT ICYE AND VPV

As the result of collaborative agreements established between the ICYE Federation and VPV (June) in the initial phase of cooperation VPV will be mainly receiving volunteers through:

- Short-term volunteer exchange – less than six months
- Long-term volunteer exchange – from 6 to 12 months

VPV's Short-term Individual Host Placement descriptions already feature on the ICYE STePs web site, and at a later stage VPV wishes to also send young Vietnamese abroad through ICYE. VPV has hosted quite a few long-term volunteers from ICYE Germany (ICJA), ICYE UK, ICYE France, ICYE Austria, ICYE Finland and ICYE Switzerland since August 2007. In 2016, VPV is happy to welcome the first long-term volunteer from ICYE Columbia. VPV has also received a number of short-term volunteers from ICYE Austria, ICYE Denmark, ICYE France, ICYE Iceland, ICYE Japan, ICYE UK, and ICYE Switzerland.

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROGRAMS

Short-term volunteer exchange – STePs (below six months):

Main elements:

- Pick up from Noi Bai international airport in Hanoi
- Board and lodging in VPV Dormitory
- 3-Day Orientation
 - Presentation of aims and structure of VPV
 - Short introduction about Vietnam and local area
 - Practical Information and Arrangements
 - 2-3 hours of basic Vietnamese
 - Sightseeing and exposure tour in Hanoi
 - Placement(s) Orientation and Visit to Host Placement(s)
- 1- day Final Evaluation
- On-going support to volunteers and host placements

Starting dates: Every Wednesday, excluding national holidays (exception can be made upon request and consideration).

Long-term volunteer exchange (from 6 to 12 months)

Main elements:

- Pick up/ drop off from/ at Noi Bai international airport in Hanoi
- Food & Lodging (VPV's dormitory or project site)
- Local Transportation to the Volunteer Site if needed
- 5-day Orientation, 30 Hours Language Course, 3-day Mid-year Camp, and 2-day Final Evaluation
- Support and Supervision during the program

IMPORTANT NOTE: Sending organizations should provide VPV with the following information, **at least one month prior to volunteer's arrival:**

- Volunteer's application fully filled in and with picture
- Placement priority list
- Duration of volunteering period from/to
- Confirmed arrival schedule, clearly indicating day and time of arrival, flight number.
- C.V., passport copy, police check and related degrees (if any) for visa application. (Please refer to "Visa application process" mentioned below for more details).

TYPES OF PROJECTS/ HOST PLACEMENTS

VPV offers the following projects/host placements for both short-term and long-term volunteers:

1. Education project (Teaching English/ French)

Volunteers will teach English/French at a local Vietnamese educational institution, from primary level until tertiary level. Many Vietnamese schools lack teachers with sufficient English competencies to extend the



students' English beyond basic writing and speaking skills. Volunteers help to improve the children's vocabulary and pronunciation, assist local teachers in managing their classes, organize games and other activities in the classroom, and help to improve the children's listening and speaking skills.

Working hours will vary depending on the school where the volunteer is placed and will average around three to six hours per day. Please note, volunteers do not need to be qualified or experienced teachers to participate in this kind of project; however, in some certain placements, teaching experience is necessary.



Besides the normal work at local schools, volunteers are welcome to join communication English/French classes for local children and students that we organize once or twice a year (usually in summer time). In this project, volunteers can learn and develop their teaching experiences through working independently, designing lessons and creating their own activities in the class.

2. Social work (Caring for orphans or children with challenges)

Although Vietnam has now been living in peace for many years, effects from war continue to haunt not only the adult population of this beautiful country but also its children. Volunteers have the opportunity to work in institutions caring for orphans or children with challenges and young people affected by Agent Orange or in schools, hospitals and community clinics looking after children with mental challenges. Work is somewhat varied dependent on the institution where the volunteer is placed, however typical examples of jobs and tasks can include assisting local staff in providing rehabilitation exercises and therapist treatments for children, playing with children and entertaining/educating them with games, music, arts and other exercises, helping to develop fundraising initiatives to ensure ongoing funding for these institutions and teaching English to local staff.

In reality, what volunteers can do depends very much on volunteers' initiatives, motivations and pro-activeness. Different volunteers will have different experiences, even in the same project. Therefore, it is advisable that volunteers should not have too high and fixed expectations of volunteering. Be flexible and open-minded, be active and creative, together with goodwill and a warm heart, you will make the best of your time here.



Learning about colors



Teaching sign language to a deaf kid



Playing with blocks



Learning with flash cards

3. Community Development (Working with local NGOs/ Social enterprises)

Working with a local NGO/social enterprise can be a rewarding and valuable experience for anyone who would like to appreciate how volunteering projects are organized, managed, and supervised. There are many small, locally run NGOs (non-governmental organizations) or newly set up social enterprises in Vietnam. They contribute to the cause of development and peace in both urban and rural areas. These organizations, especially local NGOs, being typically new, are often in shortage of funds, human resources and experience. There is thus a need to build up their capacity through different approaches. A motivated and resourceful international volunteer in the office would help improve their communication skills, working competencies, and assist in creating a bridge between local NGOs and new partners worldwide.

There are currently placements in local NGOs in the following sectors: community development, sustainable development and traditional culture conservation. Typical work can include writing proposals and reports, improving staffs' English language proficiency and communication skills, assisting with fundraising initiatives and networking with international partners. It is worth noting that volunteers' roles might vary depending on the type of organization they will be working with.

ACCOMMODATION

Volunteers will stay in a volunteer house, which is equipped with wifi internet, fridge, washing machine, air conditioner, provided meals as well as cooking equipment and a common area. Bunk-



Welcome on board!



Team discussion



Farewell...

beds, fans, sheets, pillows, mosquito nets & blankets are provided. Bathrooms are shared on each

floor with shower (hot and cold water) and toilet; please bring your own towel and other personal toiletries.

Volunteer house in Hanoi



Common room



Kitchen



Bathroom

VISA APPLICATION PROCESS

(Update 2023):

For long term volunteers, there are 2 options:

Option 1: Visa run every 3 months (see below explanation in visas for STEPs).

Option 2: Straight long term visa arranged by local project. For this, visa preparation needs to be finished at least 3 months in advance and only available for some projects. Visa preparation includes: High school certificate; Certificate of Health; Passport; Resume.

For STEPs volunteers, at the moment, many nationalities can just need an e-visa for which you can apply online on Vietnam Immigration Department website and takes up to 5-10 working days normally. The e-visas allow access for up to 90 days. You can request for single entry visa or multiple entry visa when applying online. Once the evisa is issued, when you arrive, you just need to show the evisa at the ports. Here is link to apply for e-visa: https://evisa.xuatnhapcanh.gov.vn/en_US/web/guest/khai-thi-thuc-dien-tu/cap-thi-thuc-dien-tu

VOLUNTEERS JOINING FOR MORE THAN 90 DAYS: With the evisa mentioned above, you can only have access until 90 days. After that, if your stay is more than 90 days, visa run is needed which means you will need to fly to outside (can be to a neighboring country) and re-enter Vietnam. Therefore, one month before your e-visa expires, you need to re-apply online.

The e-visa fee will depend on your visa type:

- \$25/single-entry visa
- \$50/multiple-entry visa

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Injections and Medicines

There are no major dangerous tropical illnesses in Hanoi and nearby provinces. That doesn't mean you can't get sick, and it also doesn't mean that you shouldn't take any precautions. Follow the advice from World Health Organization (www.who.int). You should bring along your specialized medications if you have them and some medicines along that help against mosquito bites, upset stomach, etc.

Currency, Exchanging Money and Safety

The national currency is the Vietnam Dong (VND).

The current exchange rate is about 24,00 VND for 1 USD and 26,000 VND for 1 Euro. ATMs accepting international DEBIT and CREDIT cards are widely available throughout Vietnam. Internationally accepted cheques can be exchanged for cash in foreign banks in Hanoi, but the exchange rate could be undesirable. Euro and USD can be exchanged widely at banks and exchange bureaus.

Since accommodation and food are being included you may not need much cash; therefore, do not carry it around, except for what you need. Vietnam is safe, but obviously everybody will notice you as a foreigner. Be careful in taxis and on buses; like in any country, we can never know for sure.

Clothes

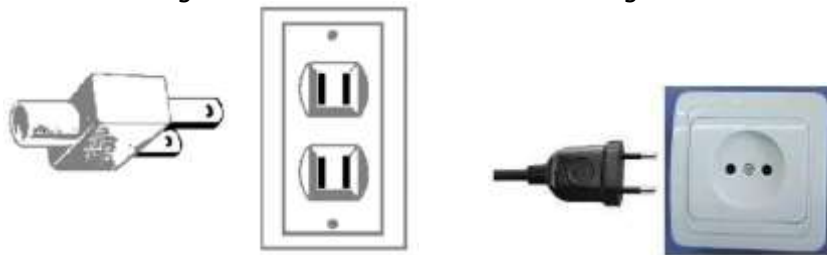
Although Vietnamese's dress code is quite informal, you are supposed to wear light and dress a little on the conservative side; so, no shorts during the working hours.

Laundry

Near the volunteer house there are a couple of laundry shops that volunteers can use which are very convenient and not too expensive, around EUR1/kilo.

Vietnam Wall Plugs and Adapters

Vietnam power points are a combination of the Japanese 2 blade adapter (left photo) and the European 2 pin plugs (right photo). An adapter that fits either one of these two plug systems will be fine, as both are found throughout the accommodation and buildings in Vietnam.



What to bring

Whilst the following items are available in Vietnam, the quality is not always of a highest standard, or easy to find or cheap. Obviously not all of the following suggestions will be relevant to you but these are a few ideas of things you may wish to bring:

- Sun cream. The stuff here may contain whitening cream.
- Antiseptic cream for infections. They don't come with the medical kit.
- Sanitary towels & tampons. They're expensive here.
- A mobile phone if you already have one. You can buy a Vietnam SIM card for around \$15 USD which will allow you to make local calls or receive international calls and grant you internet access.
- Shoes/ Sandals/ Slippers. Both Vietnamese men and women have small feet, so you may have trouble buying shoes. Consider what shoes you think you really will need to wear during the year. A pair of walking boots, sneakers, work shoes and sandals would be a good start. Another useful type would be some flip-flops or thongs to wear whilst in the house.
- Large sized underwear (especially large sized bras and panties for women, large sized socks and briefs for men because it's not easy to find them here).
- A set of shoulders and knees covered clothes – this is the dress code for work and some formal places.
- A set of smart clothes. Not essential but it is likely you will meet your host organization or attend some official functions in your few weeks so it's good to come prepared rather than spending your first few days at the tailor!
- Books. English novels are readily available. Field related books are rare. Best to bring them with you. There are a few libraries in Hanoi, which generally have a poor selection of English language books. If you have books for children, or books for English teaching, please bring them along for your job or as your gift to the schools or children.
- Food – Although the local supermarket has many international favourites, it's always a good idea to bring your own essentials.
- All personal medication. Most medication is cheaply available here; however, we advise bringing a few months' supply for anything you take regularly.
- Warm clothes- summer in Hanoi is hot and steamy but winter is freezing. If your stay is between November and March you should think about bringing thermals, woollen beanies, gloves.
- If you have one, please **BRING YOUR LAPTOP, ESPECIALLY IF YOU ARE WORKING FOR LOCAL NGO PROJECTS** as computer availability may well be limited.
- And finally, earplugs! Cities in Vietnam are quite noisy, and if you are not used to the noise, earplugs would help. However, please be aware that it's not easy to find them here, thus it's better to bring some with you in case you need them.



HOLIDAYS

National holidays

On national holidays, people don't have to come to work, and there may be celebrations in some places.

1. **New Year Day**, January 1st.
2. **TET HOLIDAY** (Traditional New Year) according to Lunar Calendar. The dates may vary in terms of the widely-used Gregorian calendar – which this can be found online. In 2023, Tet holiday will be between January 20th and 26th, 2023. In 2024, Tet holiday will be between February 9th and 15th.

This is the biggest festival in the year for Vietnamese people. This is time for families to gather and remember their ancestry. People also visit pagodas to pray for health and luck for the coming year. Officially, people get about 1 week holiday during this occasion. But Tet atmosphere may come 1 or 2 weeks before and remain for quite a while. Thus, the work rhythm before and after Tet holiday is rather slow. Volunteers who stay in the country during this occasion are encouraged to spend the holiday travelling or with a host family to learn more about this tradition.

3. **Hung King's Day**, March 10th according to Lunar Calendar. In 2023, it will fall on April 29th.

In 2024, it will fall on April 18th.

This is the day to remember Hung King, the first king of the country. In this day, people often go to Hung King Temple in Phu Tho province, about 80km to the Northwest of Hanoi to pray.

4. **Liberation Day** or **Reunification Day**, April 30th

On April 30th, 1975, Northern and Southern Vietnam were united.

5. **International Labour Day**, May 1st

6. **National Day/ Independence Day**, Sep 2nd

On September 2nd, 1945, Ho Chi Minh, the first president of Vietnam, read the Declaration of Independence, opening the new development phase of the country.

Other special days

On these days, there will be some kind of celebration, but people still go to work as usual.

1. International Children's Day, June 1st
2. Mid-Autumn Festival, August 15th according to Lunar Calendar
3. Women's Day, October 20th
4. Teachers' Day, November 20th (schools are closed for ceremony)
5. International Day for People with HIV, December 1st

6. International Day for People with Disabilities, December 3rd
7. International Volunteers' Day, December 5th
8. Christmas Day, December 25th.

In teaching projects, there would be the day for Opening Ceremony of the New school year/Student's Welcome Day and Closing school year Ceremony. This could vary depending on each school.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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**THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR INTEREST IN
OUR PROGRAMS!
WELCOME TO JOIN US!**