

Vietnam

PRE-DEPARTURE INFORMATION



JOURNEYS began arranging travel to Vietnam in 1992, and our Ann Arbor staff members have been visiting regularly ever since. Our travelers in Vietnam are always impressed with the friendliness of the people and the sincere welcome extended to visitors. Our thoughtful, articulate, English-speaking guides lead well-paced, active and adventurous trips. Active travelers can kayak or cruise in Halong Bay, trek through traditional villages of Hmong and Red Dao, or bicycle in the Mekong Delta. Connect to Vietnam by air from Bangkok, by train from Yunnan, China, or overland from Cambodia on JOURNEYS multi-country Indochina explorations.

GETTING READY FOR YOUR TRIP

Passports

- ❖ Passports are required of U.S. Citizens to enter
- ❖ Must be valid for at least 6 months after your trip – if not, apply or renew immediately
- ❖ Keep a copy of the picture page of your passport in a separate place while traveling
- ❖ Carry an extra passport photo in case you need to apply for a quick replacement

Visas

- ❖ Visas are required of U.S. citizens
- ❖ We recommend that you acquire your visa ahead of time, but no sooner than 3 months before of your departure date, since Vietnam visas must be used within 6 months of the date of issue
- ❖ The visa application process changes frequently, so it is best to contact the embassy in which you are applying or a visa service such as G3 Visas & Passports before sending in your application.
- ❖ Don't describe your occupation as a journalist, writer, photographer, "military" or government employee
- ❖ No visa is needed for entry into Thailand for stays of up to 30 days, if you are a U.S. Citizen
- ❖ Nationalities of other countries please inquire regarding visas

Health, Immunizations

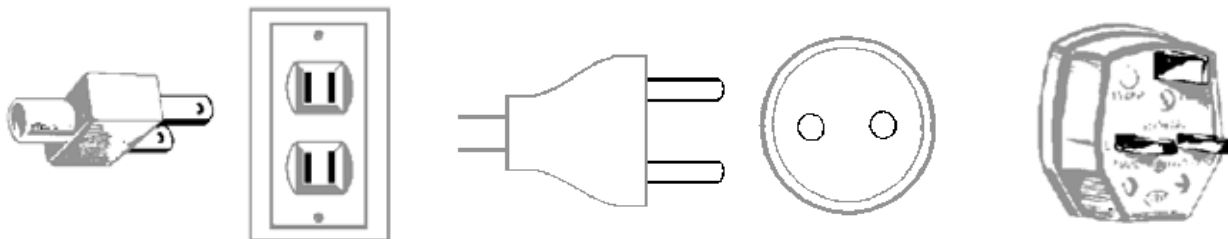
- ❖ Some immunizations are highly recommended, but none are required for entry
- ❖ Recommended standard immunizations include: polio, tetanus, typhoid, MMR, hepatitis A & B
- ❖ Malaria tablets may also be recommended for travel to areas where it is present
- ❖ A vaccination certificate for yellow fever is required for entry only if arriving from infected countries
- ❖ SEEK INDEPENDENT MEDICAL ADVICE from your physician or local travelers health service
- ❖ For the latest recommendations for immunizations or malaria prevention contact the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia: 800-311-3435, or visit their website: <http://www.cdc.gov/travel>
- ❖ Many universities have immunization clinics that can assist you

Time Difference

- ❖ In Vietnam the time zone is seven hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT +7)
- ❖ Vietnam does not follow Daylights Savings Time
- ❖ They are 15 hours ahead of Pacific Standard Time, and 12 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time
- ❖ If it is 9 PM in Hanoi, it is 9 AM in New York and 6 AM in Los Angeles, on the same day

Electricity

- ❖ Standard current is 220 volts, 50 Hz (though voltage may vary from 127-220)
- ❖ Most standard adapter/converter kits available in the U.S. will have the necessary plug configuration to fit the standard electric outlet
- ❖ Plugs require a 2-pin socket with flat blade or round pins, as shown at left & middle
- ❖ Rectangular blade plugs may be found in some newer hotels, shown at right



ARRIVAL

Entry

- ❖ You will be met upon arrival by your tour leader or representative and transferred to your hotel
- ❖ Contact information is sent with your Last Minute Reminders from JOURNEYS

Customs

- ❖ You may bring all luggage, personal possessions and goods in amounts sufficient for personal use only
- ❖ Visitors to Vietnam can bring with them unlimited amounts of foreign currency, but it must be declared in detail on their customs forms
- ❖ Travelers can take with them unlimited amounts of souvenirs bought with receipts

GETTING ALONG AS A VISITOR

Food & Restaurants

- ❖ Drink only bottled drinks, and avoid tap water, fountain drinks and ice cubes
- ❖ Eat only foods that are thoroughly cooked, and raw fruits and vegetables that you have peeled yourself
- ❖ Avoid fresh salads unless the vegetables are washed with purified water, and avoid dairy products that are unpasteurized or may not have been refrigerated properly
- ❖ Don't buy food from street vendors or stalls, and do not eat foods that are no longer hot
- ❖ Most restaurants are clean and trustworthy
- ❖ A wide variety of food offered in Vietnam can accommodate vegetarians

Money and Currency Exchange

- ❖ The currency is the Vietnamese dong (d, or VND)
- ❖ Vietnamese currency can be obtained freely from hotels, banks, local money changers and jewelry shops
- ❖ Officially, foreign currency must be changed into Vietnamese dong for shopping, but US Dollars are sometimes also accepted and you may see prices listed in USD in some shops.
- ❖ Traveler's checks can be very difficult to change, even at banks, so bring a sales slip/receipt
- ❖ It is a good idea to bring newer dated currency that has no rips, marks, folds, or holes
- ❖ Check the current exchange rates at <http://www.xe.net/ucc/>
- ❖ Credit cards are widely accepted in major cities and tourist centers, but may incur surcharges
- ❖ You may need to show your passport when using a credit card. Also, credit card companies are now charging a 3%+ surcharge on all foreign currency purchases (purchases of goods made outside of the US). Check with your credit card company before you travel as the charges change frequently without notice and vary with card and destination.
- ❖ We suggest bringing \$30-40 per day for items not included in cost of trip. However, if you enjoy shopping, we suggest bringing more
- ❖ Airport departure tax is approximately \$14 USD

Tipping

- ❖ A tip is always appreciated
- ❖ In urban settings where tipping is most common, you can sometimes expect 10% to be added to your restaurant or hotel bill, but this may not necessarily be paid to the service people. An additional 5% tip may be appropriate for excellent service
- ❖ \$1-2 tips are appropriate in baggage handling situations
- ❖ Tipping \$5 per person, per service, to people such as a boat captain or a helpful bellman is appropriate
- ❖ We suggest tipping your guide \$5-10 per person/per day and driver \$3-6 per person/per day (depending on the size of your group)
- ❖ Tip money should be in local currency
- ❖ Anytime you appreciate someone particularly informative or helpful, an extra tip is gratefully accepted.

Emergency Services

- ❖ Emergency services and care for major medical illnesses may be limited outside of major cities
- ❖ Prevention of injury is always the best policy
- ❖ Your guide will advise you in the case of urgent medical need during your tour

SPECIAL REMARKS

People

- ❖ You will find the people to be very friendly and welcoming
- ❖ It is best to ask permission before entering houses or taking portrait photos. If in doubt, ask the guide
- ❖ Note: shorts, tank tops and shoes are not permitted in religious centers

Time

- ❖ Relax and enjoy the easy-going rhythm of Southeast Asia
- ❖ Do not expect everything to happen on time; remember that in some places time is not as important as it is back home, and there is often little concern for punctuality
- ❖ Despite best efforts, departures and arrivals could be a little before or after the time given. This applies particularly to aircraft movements. Operating requirements, weather and terrain sometimes present problems, and on these occasions, to ensure your safety, flight times may vary

Restroom Facilities

- ❖ It is a very good idea to carry your own small supply of toilet paper. In cities where there are flush toilets you will usually find a wastebasket next to the toilet - most sewage systems can't handle paper. Most bathrooms will neither look nor smell as sanitary as those you are used to.

Safety

- ❖ Observe the same precautions taken at home
- ❖ Do not flaunt a bulging wallet, always lock unattended vehicles, do not leave baggage unattended in public
- ❖ Make use of security facilities provided for valuables in your accommodation
- ❖ In towns, the best place to carry your passport and money is in a pouch worn around the neck inside of the shirt or in a money belt around the waist
- ❖ It is highly recommended that you buy travel insurance that covers your baggage before you leave
- ❖ Don't take anything you can't afford to lose or can't replace

Shopping

- ❖ Popular souvenirs include: Silk & textiles, Laquerware, Ceramics, Handicrafts, Paintings and Antiques (beware of fakes, though there are strict regulations on the export of real antiques, and you may need an official export certificate to exit with anything that appears to be an antique)
- ❖ Bartering is the norm at street markets. Ask your guide for tips on local bartering. Don't push too hard - remember that what is only a few dollars to you may mean a great deal to the average seller or artisan. Never barter unless you intend to buy.

Climate

- ❖ Vietnam has two basic climates, sub-tropical in the south and temperate in the north, with two monsoon seasons according to locality
- ❖ The monsoon is a short, heavy rain that occurs nearly every day (not constant rain all day)
- ❖ The winter monsoon from October to March is fairly gentle and affects only the northern part of the country, which can be very chilly, but dry & warm in the south
- ❖ The wet season in the south is from May to November, but it is warm and humid in most of the country
- ❖ In the southern dry season, December to April, the last three months tend to be hot and humid.

Average Temperatures (°F) & Rainfall (IN)

Hanoi

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
High	70	70	73	82	90	91	91	90	88	84	79	72
Low	57	57	63	68	73	79	79	79	75	72	64	59
Rain	1	1	1.5	3	8	9	12.5	13	10	4	2	1

Danang

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
High	79	81	84	88	91	91	91	90	90	86	84	81
Low	63	64	66	72	75	77	77	77	75	72	68	64
Rain	1	.5	.5	.5	2	1.5	4	4.5	17	20	9	8

Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon)

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
High	90	91	93	95	91	90	88	88	88	88	88	88
Low	70	72	73	75	75	75	75	75	73	73	73	72
Rain	.5	.25	.5	2	8.5	13	12	10.5	13	10	5	2.5

Equipment & Packing

- ❖ A good goal is to fit everything into a single piece of checked luggage and a carry-on daypack
- ❖ We recommend a durable, water-resistant, soft duffel bag (for treks) or lightweight soft-sided suitcase as your checked luggage. Hard suitcases are not practical due to space limitations.
- ❖ A small backpack or hip-pack is ideal for carrying bottled water, camera, extra sunblock, etc, while on excursions where the terrain requires your hands to be free
- ❖ Choose a distinctive, easily identified bag, and use a JOURNEYS luggage tag for bag identification by staff, and your name and address should be also indelibly affixed inside the luggage.
- ❖ Casual clothing is appropriate at all times
- ❖ Lightweight & light colored clothes will help keep you cooler in the hot sun. Also keep in mind that synthetic fabrics dry faster than natural fibers like cotton, especially in humid areas, so you can pack less if you are able to wash and dry your clothes easily.
- ❖ Some hotels may have laundry services, but you will probably need to wash out some clothes en route
- ❖ Be aware of weight limits on checked luggage and pack accordingly
- ❖ You may want to bring an extra smaller, collapsible (lockable) duffel, to leave items in a city hotel while you are on an excursion or to use on your return for souvenirs



CLOTHING & EQUIPMENT SUGGESTIONS CHECKLIST

Pre-Departure Tasks

- Obtain or renew passport
- Buy travelers checks in low denominations
- Evaluate and obtain trip cancellation, baggage and medical insurance
- Consult with physician for immunizations and prescription medicine recommendations
- Break-in primary footwear
- Make final payment to JOURNEYS at least 60 days before trip departure

Clothing

- Comfortable athletic or walking shoes (washable)
- Sport sandals with Velcro strap or extra pair shoes
- Shorts
- Comfortable, lightweight pants
- Nicer pants or skirt (optional)
- Lightweight long-sleeve shirt, for warmth and/or protection from sun
- T-shirts, short sleeve shirts and/or tank tops
- Light weight jacket or windbreaker
- Heavy sweater or sweatshirt (for Northern or mountainous areas)
- Rain gear - poncho or jacket and pants
- Sun hat or cap with wide brim
- Bandana
- Swim suit
- Socks
- Sleepwear
- Under clothes

Personal Items

- Sunblock (waterproof, high SPF)
- Lipbalm with SPF
- Insect repellent with DEET content
- 2 spare passport photos (in case of lost passport)
- Wrist watch and/or travel clock
- Sunglasses (with strap, case)
- Extra eyeglasses/contacts
- Money belt or pouch for valuables
- Small flashlight with extra batteries
- Copies of all important documents
- Day pack (can also serve as an airline carry-on bag)
- Camera, memory cards, film, batteries, charger
- Underwater camera (disposable kind is very handy)
- Lead bag/containers to protect film in X-ray machines
- Lightweight binoculars
- Plug adapter (if needed)
- Soft duffel with shoulder strap or durable suitcase
- Luggage tags
- Ziploc-type bags for packing shampoo or other liquids
- Stuff sacks or plastic bags for organizing inside luggage (also useful for dirty laundry)
- Thread, needles, safety pins for minor repairs
- Small packable umbrella



- Flannel sleeping bag liner (for Treks)
- Towel & washcloth (for Treks)

Personal First Aid Kit

- Aspirin or other pain killer
- Cold relief tablets, antihistamine, cough drops
- Band-aids, gauze pads
- Antibiotics
- Prescription medicines
- Aloe gel or lotion in case of sunburn
- Anti-diarrhea medicine
- Antibiotic cream/ointment
- Supply of feminine hygiene items
- Motion sickness tablets
- Earplugs

Essential Items For Your Carry-On Bag

- Passport
- Air tickets
- Travelers checks, money and credit cards
- Insurance certificates
- Address and telephone number of emergency contact
- Prescription medicines
- Extra set of underclothes
- Toiletries in small leak-proof bottles
- Camera gear, film and other valuables

Optional Items

- Binoculars
- Address book, writing paper, or journal, pen/pencil
- Small washcloth
- Wet wipes/moist towelettes and Kleenex
- Favorite snack foods (pre-packaged)
- Pictures of your house and family
- Mask, snorkel, fins, wetsuit (if applicable)
- Map
- Silica bags for moisture (protect camera equipment)
- Video camera
- Phrase book

