

elevate™ destinations

VIETNAM

COUNTRY GUIDE



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PURPOSE OF THE COUNTRY GUIDE

Welcome to the beautiful country of Vietnam! In this document, you will find a plethora of information that will be useful during your journey. The information listed in this guide includes cultural guidelines, communication tips and tricks, health and safety recommendations, and so much more! Please note that all information specific to your trip, such as inclusions and exclusions, staff contact numbers, flight recommendations, etc. is listed in your Online Trip Portal. For any questions unanswered by either the country guide or the online portal, please don't hesitate to reach out to an Elevate Destinations staff member. We hope that this document is helpful and that you are getting excited about your journey to Vietnam!

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Passport

Travelers to Vietnam should ensure that the validity of their passports extends at least 6 months beyond your trip departure date and should have at least 2 blank pages in their passport for the entry and exit stamps, or more if you are visiting several countries on this trip. The last 2 amendment pages are unacceptable for visas and immigration stamps.

Note that you will need to renew your passport if you are out of visa pages, as the State Department no longer provides additional pages. If you need to renew your passport, please do so as soon as possible. We recommend travelers scan a copy of their passport and email it to themselves. This way you always have a copy if something happens to it while traveling.

Visa

A visa to visit Vietnam is required for U.S. Citizens and most nationalities. You can apply for an e-visa which will allow you to have a single entry with the validity of 30 days. Please note however, that you cannot change your arrival port of entry after approval.

Click [here](#) to apply for your e-visa. You will need the following to apply:

- Passport
- Passport size photo
- \$25 USD

If you'd like assistance applying for your visa, we recommend [A1 Passport & Visa Services](#) for their excellent customer service. To do so, please email them at info@a1passportvisa.com and let them know you are working with Elevate Destinations on your travel arrangements.

Travel Insurance

Elevate Destinations requires that all travelers purchase medical insurance that covers Covid-related expenses while in Vietnam.

Elevate Destinations highly recommends travelers purchase Cancel for Any Reason level of coverage insurance. Please note that all Cancel for Any Reason insurance policies are time sensitive and require purchase within 1 to 21 days of making a payment for your trip. Elevate Destinations recommends that travelers evaluate the insurance options available for their needs and inquire with providers about “cancel for any reason” insurance.

Below are two insurance brokers that Elevate Destinations recommends. However, travelers are welcome to purchase travel insurance from any vendor of their choosing.

- [Yonder Travel Insurance](#)
Email: hello@insureyonder.com
Phone Number: 855-358-6433 (M-F 8:30-5:00 CT)
- [Trawick International](#)
Email: info@trawickinternational.com
Phone number: (888) 301-9289 anytime.

Immunizations

Prior to travel, Elevate Destinations strongly recommends that you look into recommended immunizations for your time in Vietnam.

The following information are recommendations and not medical advisements. Please be sure to check [the CDC Website for Vietnam](#) for updated information about vaccinations and health concerns, and check with your medical provider or travel clinic about your individual requirements.

In addition to being up-to-date on routine vaccinations 4-6 weeks before travel, the CDC recommends that most travelers be vaccinated for Hepatitis A and Typhoid. The CDC also recommends some travelers to be vaccinated for Japanese Encephalitis, Hepatitis B, Rabies, and to take prescription medication before, during and after your trip to prevent Malaria.

Given that we are not a licensed Health Care provider, we cannot advise travelers on which immunizations they may need. We recommend that all travelers do the following:

- a) Consult with a travel clinic or your personal physician regarding immunizations and other precautions you may need to take in order to participate in this journey. You will need to do this well in advance of your trip as some vaccinations require time to take effect, and you may need to allow time between a series of shots.
- b) Visit the [CDC Website for Vietnam](#) to view recommended vaccines and medicines, travel health notices for the region, and other tips for staying healthy and safe.

Other Health Considerations

This will be an amazing journey, but as with all travel, a spirit of adventure and a degree of flexibility will enhance your enjoyment of this program. This will be a moderately active program, with considerable walking on some days and a number of travel days with early departures and activities scheduled throughout the day.

We recommend a medium level of physical fitness, as some of the drives may be long, with sections of bumpy roads. For the most satisfying experience, and in fairness to your fellow travelers, please note that this trip requires the following:

- Ability to walk at least one mile without difficulty
- Ability to spend extended periods of time on your feet
- Ability to climb sets of stairs without assistance
- Ability to keep pace with an active group of travelers and to be on time for all scheduled activities
- Ability to ride comfortably in a vehicle for extended periods of time
- Additionally, plan to carry along an adequate supply of any prescribed medications you may require while traveling. Prescription medicines should always be carried in your hand luggage (not in checked baggage) in their original, labeled containers only.

Safety Recommendations

Your guide will give you current briefings on safety while in-country, but here are some basic ground rules for safety while traveling:

- Keep all valuables in the hotel safe or in a locked suitcase
- Avoid flashing money. Be mindful of your belongings at all times. Keep bags in front of you in crowds, and on your lap when at restaurants
- Pay attention: avoid walking around with your smartphone in hand
- Be vigilant when crossing roads
- Stick with the group
- Always make sure that others know of your whereabouts and movements
- Avoid street protests or large gatherings
- Do not wear expensive or sentimental valuable jewelry while traveling
- Let your guide know if you have any safety concerns

Communications

The country code for Vietnam is +84

- To call numbers from U.S. to Vietnam, dial:
 - 011 - 84 - area code - phone number for land lines
 - 011 - 84 - 1 - area code - phone number for mobile phones

Wifi: At most accommodations you will have in Vietnam, wifi will be available. Speed, bandwidth, and availability will likely be less reliable than you are used to. Oftentimes, the connection is stronger in the lobby of hotels than in individual rooms.

International Calls: If you are in Vietnam and calling a US number from a local landline, dial:
00 - 1 - 10 digit number.

Staying connected: Here are the most common methods for making local/international calls:

1. **Smart Phone Apps:** Apps such as WhatsApp (when Wifi is available). We recommend that travelers download and create a WhatsApp account prior to their travel.
2. **International Package:** Setting up international coverage from your cell phone provider for the duration of your trip is often the simplest option and the best to avoid roaming charges.
3. **Local phone / SIM card:** SIM cards are recommended for international travelers as making calls within the Caribbean as international calls can get expensive. Please be aware of any requirements your phone has in order to accept the local SIM cards (i.e. size of SIM card, jailbroken, etc). Please let your guide know if you would like assistance purchasing a local phone.
4. **Call from hotel:** Please be advised that some hotels impose a surcharge that can be more than double the cost of international calls. Be sure to check the hotel policy before placing an international call from a hotel.

Essential Travel Documents

In case of emergency, it is advisable to make photocopies of your important documents and travel with a copy and leave a copy with relatives or friends at home. Also, email a scanned copy to yourself or take a screenshot or photo of the document and save it in an "Important Travel Documents" folder in your photo app on your phone.

These are the documents you should have printed and with you during your travel:

- Passport; both the original and a photocopy
- Covid Vaccination Card (not required, but recommended as entry protocols could change suddenly)
- eVisa confirmation
- International flight itinerary or e-tickets
- Address and phone numbers of the hotels where you are staying
- Emergency Contact List - provided by Elevate Destinations
- Medical insurance policy details and 24-hour emergency number
- Details of relatives/friends and your primary care physician to be contacted in an emergency

Money

The local currency in Vietnam is the Vietnamese Dong (VND, ₫).

For extra personal costs and shopping, bringing USD \$30-\$40 per day is a good rule of thumb.

Vietnamese currency has 9 banknotes: ₫100, ₫200, ₫500, ₫1,000, ₫2,000, ₫5,000, ₫10,000, ₫20,000 and ₫500,000. The Vietnamese currency has 4 coin denominations: ₫200, ₫500, ₫1,000 and ₫2,000. The letter “k” often represents a thousand, such as 50k which equals 50,000 VND, 100k which equals 100,000 VND, and 500k which equals 500,000 VND.

The small amount of local currency you may need during your stay in Vietnam can be obtained at authorized facilities (such as ATMs, hotels, and banks).

Cash & Exchanging Money: Vietnam is a primary cash economy, so you will need to have cash in the local currency throughout your journey. The local currency is recommended for most places, especially smaller stores and markets and for tipping. Ask for smaller bills when getting cash or change as some smaller vendors may not carry change for bigger bills.

- **Important Note:** You will need your passport to exchange money at a bank

If you exchange money, do so only at authorized outlets such as banks and hotels, and exchange only what you think you will spend in-country. Reconversion on departure may be difficult. Coins cannot be reconverted. To see what the current exchange rate is, check online at <https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/>.

We recommend bringing \$200 - \$300 in USD cash in case of emergency and for personal spending. If you bring USD, your bills should be:

- **New** (printed in the last 5 years)
- **In pristine condition** (no rips, tears, smudges, markings, creases, etc)

Banks and ATMs are available in most major cities, and your guide can generally help with withdrawing cash throughout your trip. There is usually a small fee per transaction on top of what your own bank charges for withdrawing cash at an ATM.

Credit Cards: Credit cards (mainly Visa and MasterCard) are accepted in larger establishments and hotels. Cash is more appropriate everywhere else. Most merchants will typically charge an additional fee for a credit card transaction, about 3-5%.

Smart Traveler Tip!

Consider downloading a conversion app for things like currency, temperature, time, and distance while traveling. Here are some apps that we like:

Units - Free Unit Converter, Convert Units for Free, Converter+, GlobeConvert

IN-COUNTRY INFO

Time

Vietnam follows GMT+7 or ICT - Indochina Time, and does not observe daylight savings time. Vietnam is 11 hours ahead of East Coast U.S. time.

Electricity

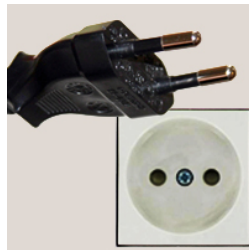
You may encounter plug Type A, C, and F (see images below), and sometimes the plug has a combination of A, B, and C, so a plug from the United States will work.

The voltage/hertz in Vietnam is not uniform, but typically 220V at 50Hz. Devices from the U.S. are typically 110 volts and is different from the electric system used in Vietnam. You need to check the back of your devices to see if it says something like “100-240, 50-60Hz”. If so, it is ok to use them as long as you have the right plug. Otherwise, you need a transformer to convert the voltage from 110 to 220 volts. We suggest purchasing a universal plug and adapter.

Type A



Type C



Type A,B,C combo



Type A,C,F combo



Water & Food Safety

We strongly recommend not drinking tap water anywhere in Vietnam unless boiled. Bottled water is cheap and easy to find. Some people also choose to brush their teeth with bottled water but this is up to personal preference based on how hardy you feel your stomach is. Do not use ice unless you know it was made from purified water. Bottled water and soft drinks will be supplied at all meals and water will always be available in the van.

Toilet Paper

We recommend carrying toilet paper or tissues with you as some bathrooms, especially in more remote areas or restaurants, may not have any. Please also remember that in Vietnam you are required to throw the toilet paper into the bin provided and **not into the toilet** itself, as this can cause problems with the delicate sewage system.

Waste Disposal

Keep in mind that in other parts of the world, waste disposal systems are not as advanced as you might be used to. Oftentimes, landfills are adjacent to conservation land or trash is burned. Recycling is often unavailable. To minimize your impact on the country you are visiting, please consider the following guidelines:

- Leave no trace — everything that you bring with you should go home with you.
- If you plan on shopping, make sure that you have extra room in your luggage or an extra bag to check on your way home (don't dump items to make room!)
- Avoid packing with plastic baggies and instead purchase reusable packing cubes, cloth bags, and reusable toiletry bags
- Bring a reusable water bottle that you can refill
- Remove the packaging or tags of any newly purchased items before you go

Local Cuisine & Drink

Vietnamese food is fragrant, fresh, and healthy. Around the country, you will find a delicious variety on offer, influenced from France, Thailand and even India. Common ingredients include fish sauce, shrimp paste, soy sauce, rice, fresh veggies, and seasonings such as lemongrass, ginger, mint, coriander, chili, lime, and Thai basil leaves. The most popular dish is called Pho and is referred to as the “soul of the nation”. Here are few famous dishes you may encounter:

- ▶ Nem Ran or Cha Gio (fried spring roll)
- ▶ Banh Chung (sticky rice cake)
- ▶ Gio Lua (lean pork pie)
- ▶ Banh Cuon (rice flour steamed rolls)
- ▶ Banh My (pate and egg rolls)
- ▶ Mi voi thit bo/ga (noodles with beef/chicken)

Weather

Vietnam is generally hot and humid. High temperatures will be between 80-95 degrees with heavy humidity, and low temperatures will be in the 70s and 80s, though in the mountains it will be a little cooler. The dry season generally runs from December to May and Vietnam's rainy season runs from June through November. While flooding can occur, rain usually comes in short bursts and rarely impacts travel.

CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

Things To Do

- ▶ Show respect to the elderly.
- ▶ It is polite to give and receive items using both hands.
- ▶ Take off your shoes outside before entering the temples or someone's home.
- ▶ Always ask permission first when taking a photograph of someone.
- ▶ Keep valuable things (like excess cash, airline tickets, visa, credit cards, etc.) in a safety box at the hotel. Before venturing out from your hotel, make sure you do have a hotel business card with you. This will make your return to the hotel in a taxi much easier! It's even better to have a city map.
- ▶ For longer excursions from your hotel, it is always a good idea to carry a roll of toilet paper in your pack or purse. You never know when you will need it!
- ▶ Drink plenty of bottled or filtered water.

Things To Avoid

- ▶ Avoid wearing shorts, dresses or skirts above the knee, or tops with low-neck lines and bare shoulders to temples and pagodas.
- ▶ Avoid touching another person's head, even small children. Avoid sitting with your feet pointing towards someone's face or towards the family altar in someone's house, and avoid pointing the bottoms of your feet at people. These actions are considered rude in Vietnamese culture.
- ▶ Don't venture out from your hotel with more cash than you really need for that day. No need to be paranoid, but just worth minimizing your risks of being pick-pocketed.
- ▶ Avoid public displays of affection. Even just a French kiss is a shocking sight for the locals!
- ▶ Don't lose your temper in public or when bargaining for a purchase.
- ▶ Don't try and take photographs of military installations or anything to do with the military. This can be seen as a breach of national security.
- ▶ It is best to avoid sensitive topics including politics, human rights, etc.

Language

The official language is Vietnamese. Learning a few words in the local language will help you better connect!

English Phrase	Vietnamese
Hello	Chào anh (male) Chào chị (female)
How are you?	Anh khỏe không? (male) Chị khỏe không? (female)
Please	Làm ơn
Thank you	Cảm ơn ông (male) Cảm ơn bà (female)
You're welcome	Không có gì
Yes	Vâng
No	Không
Excuse me (I'm sorry)	Xin lỗi
What is your name?	Bạn tên gì?
My name is _____	Tôi tên là _____
Nice to meet you	Hân hạnh gặp ông
Where is the Toilet?	Toilet ở đâu

Photography

Vietnam is beautiful, and you will want to take lots of pictures. When photographing people, always ask permission first - this is a sign of respect. The only exception to this is when you are photographing a public scene with a lot of people in it, aiming at no one in particular. If you are uncertain about whether or it is appropriate to take a photo, your guide or local staff will be there to advise you.

If you are interested in learning how to engage in ethical photography during your travels, check out our blog post, [“Nine questions to help decolonize your photography”](#).

Human Trafficking in Travel

Elevate Destinations has signed *the Code of conduct for the protection of children from sexual exploitation in travel and tourism* and expects all of its partners to refuse involvement, both direct and indirect, in the commercial sexual exploitation of children. A “child” is defined as a person younger than 18 years of age, according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We encourage our travelers and suppliers to report the sexual exploitation of children. Information, even the smallest amount, can represent the missing piece of an ongoing investigation by law enforcement. If you are uncomfortable with leaving your name and contact information, you can report anonymously to law enforcement or NGOs. Report a concern [using this form](#); alternatively, you can email protect@ecpat.net to report sexual exploitation of children.

Read about Elevate’s values & vision, our [sustainability commitment](#), our programs that give back, and more on our website at www.elevatedestinations.com. Our team members are always excited to share more on this topic. We acknowledge that to maintain truly sustainable travel products takes ongoing commitment. We continue to monitor our programs on the ground in order to improve them, and welcome your thoughts, feedback, and encouragement!

Responsible Travel Tips

Elevate Destinations takes pride in its leadership in the field of responsible travel. We take care in selecting our local partners that share our environmental and social values and are avid supporters of locals working in the tourism industry as they are both the most impacted and impactful players at the local level. All of your ground costs on this trip are carbon offset using [Native Energy's Carbon Calculator](#), and we encourage you to offset your international flights as well.

Here are a few tips that can help enrich your experience as a responsible traveler:

- **Keep an open mind:** Try to observe local customs and respect traditional cultures and people.
- **Language:** Learn a few basic greetings and “thank you” in the local language.
- **Local economy:** Support locally owned businesses, restaurants, and other services. Shop from local artisans to promote traditional crafts and encourage contemporary arts.
- **Pay a fair price:** Bargaining is acceptable on this trip and a great way to engage with locals. Try to have fun and not be overly aggressive in bargaining for souvenirs
- **Respect:** It is important to acknowledge the privacy and dignity of others and ask before photographing or filming people. Ask permission before entering sacred places, homes or private land, and take heed of local customs (i.e. remove shoes, hats, cover hair with shawl, etc). Please ask your guide if you are unsure; they are there to support your introduction to the culture!

- **Community and environment:** Contribute to organizations that support traditional cultures and protect the natural environment. Keep to designated trails, and do not disturb plants and animals or their natural habitats.
- **Animal products:** Avoid purchasing crafts, clothing, furniture or other products that are derived from members of protected or endangered animal species.
- **Properly dispose of trash:** Avoid using plastic bags and try to minimize the use of other disposables. When traveling in areas away from cities, make sure to take out what you take in. Try using a reusable water bottle and treating your own drinking water when possible – check out what our friends at [Travelers Against Plastic](#) are doing!
- **Don't feel pressured to give away money or material items:** You will likely encounter instances of poverty and people asking for donations. We try to discourage giving away money or items as it can actually accentuate an unequal relationship between visitors and locals. Additionally, children that receive money, gifts, and sweets from you are encouraged to stick around for more, rather than to be in school. As difficult as it can be to turn down direct requests, sometimes giving your friendship and respect to locals can be the best gift of all. If you want to help, consider giving to a trustworthy charity, non-profit, or local school.
- **Tip your housekeeping staff:** Many of the the staff cleaning hotel rooms are on the bottom of the economic pyramid. Please consider leaving a tip before you checkout. The equivalent of \$2 dollars a day is appropriate. This is an easy way to ensure some of your money reaches the hands that need it the most.

Smart Traveler Tip!

In travel, especially in remote parts of the world, things happen. Expect the unexpected! Keep an open mind, be flexible, and enjoy the moment. Sometimes the best memories come out of the unplanned.