

COUNTRY INFORMATION, FACTS & ADVICE

Vietnam

Vietnam offers a varying feast for the eyes. From picturesque mountains to the dramatic rock formations of Ha Long Bay, ancient coastal towns in Central Vietnam and an eclectic mix of colonial and contemporary elegance in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam is a country full of traditional charm and a rare beauty.

Once a French colony, Vietnam became a united communist state in 1975. However, the 1980's saw the country open up to international exchange. Historically, the culture and its people are of East Asian origin.

The capital city of Hanoi is the second most populous city in the country. Best known for its thriving contemporary arts scene and colonial French architecture, the city also has a vibrant "street culture", where daily activities such as hair cutting and eating at food stalls, take place on cramped sidewalks.

In contrast, Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) is Vietnam's commercial center, a sprawling metropolis of approximately 10 million people. Although the city is growing rapidly with the development of modern skyscrapers and shopping centers, the Saigon of the past is still visible in the city's historic landmarks and beautiful French colonial buildings.

Outside the cities, several interesting destinations are waiting to be explored, such as the countryside area around Sapa in the north, the Mekong River Delta in the south as well as the quaint riverside town of Hoi An and the former imperial city of Hue, both designated UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Capital City:	Hanoi
Estimated Population:	90 million people
Total Area (square kilometers):	332,698
International Dialing Code:	+84

Getting into Vietnam

Passport and Visa

Visa-free

The following nationals enjoy visa-free entry into Vietnam:

- 15 Days: Germany, France, Italy, Spain, United Kingdom, Russia, Japan, Korea, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Belarus
- 30 Days: ASEAN Countries

Please note the following details for all visa-free entrants:

- Passport must be valid for minimum 6 months from entry date.
- Return air ticket must be no later than 15 days (30 days for ASEAN)

E-visa

Nationals of 80 countries are eligible for e-visa. To check your eligibility or to submit an application, visit Vietnam's official [E-Visa Portal](#). E-visas are valid for stays of up to 30 days, single entry only. Please be aware that the application process takes 2-3 days and the e-visa fee will not be refunded in the case that the e-visa is not granted. Visas for longer stays or multiple entry must be obtained from your nearest embassy, prior to departure from your point of origin or on arrival in Vietnam. For all e-visa entrants, the passport must be valid for minimum 6 months from entry date. *(As of July 2022, Vietnam is not issuing multiple entry tourist visas)*

Visa on Arrival

Abercrombie & Kent can help to provide a Visa Approval Letter combined with Fast Track service if you wish to apply for a Visa on Arrival. Please note that the process takes up to three weeks prior to arrival and the service fee depends on your arrival date. There is also a visa stamping fee of USD 25 for single entry or USD 50 for multiple entry which is paid on arrival. The processing time for Visa Approval Letters may be delayed during national holidays in Vietnam such as Tet (Lunar New Year). Please contact your travel consultant or A&K Vietnam or for more details about this service.

If you are arriving into Vietnam by river cruise, you will need to obtain an e-visa prior to departure from your point of origin as it is not possible to obtain a visa on arrival at river or land borders.

While we do our best to provide the most up-to-date information, visa requirements may change at short notice. Obtaining the correct visa is the responsibility of each passenger and the company will not be held accountable for any refusal upon entry. Therefore, we recommend that you check with your consulate or embassy for current visa information before leaving home.

Other Entry Information

Please note that Vietnam Airlines now allows 1 piece of checked baggage not exceeding 23 kilograms (50 pounds) for Economy or Premium Economy Class passengers and 1 piece of checked baggage not exceeding 32 kilograms (70 pounds) for Business Class passengers.

The Civil Aviation Authority of Vietnam has banned all 15-inch MacBook Pro computers that were sold between September 2015 and February 2017 on all commercial flights departing from and within Vietnam. This applies in all cases including both checked baggage and carry-on baggage.

Useful tips:

- Check your passport expiry date and ensure it is valid for more than six months beyond the date of your expected return to your country.
- Ensure you have at least two blank pages in your passport prior to arrival in each country of your journey.
- Write the full details of your next of kin in your passport.
- Make two copies of your passport number, date and place of issue. Leave one copy at home and take the other with you but be sure to keep it in a safe place, separate from your passport.
- Bring along extra passport photos in case you are required to apply for a new visa or a replacement passport during your journey.
- Print all important documents and keep them handy, such as airline tickets and visa approval letters.
- If your passport is lost or stolen overseas, please contact your local Abercrombie & Kent representative or hotel staff. They will assist you in contacting the relevant embassy or consulate.
- Abercrombie & Kent can help arrange VIP and Fast Track services on arrival and departure (supplementary fees apply). Please check with your travel professional.

Early Hotel Check-in

Although we will do our best to accommodate early arrivals, A&K cannot guarantee that your first-day hotel room will be available for immediate occupancy if you arrive on an early-morning flight.

Keeping Healthy in Vietnam

Vaccinations

Please consult your doctor for specific advice about your personal medical requirements and note the following advisories:

- Malaria is present in Vietnam but typically occurs in remote, rural areas. There is little risk to visitors in the major cities and main tourist destinations.

Drinking Water

Do not drink tap water in Vietnam and avoid ice in your drinks unless it is made from mineral water. We also recommend brushing your teeth with bottled water. Exercise caution when eating and drinking outside reputable hotels and restaurants and please only dine at places recommended by your A&K guide or representative as many local restaurants do not follow typical food hygiene practices.

Special Requirements

If you are on prescribed medication, ensure that you take a copy of your prescriptions in case of loss of supply. Be sure to pack enough medication in your hand luggage for the duration of your trip as it may not be available locally. It is important to keep it in its original packaging. Check with the relevant embassy or consulate that your medication is legal in the countries you plan to visit and find out whether you need to take a doctor's letter with you.

Please advise A&K of any special dietary requirements or allergies at least six weeks prior to departure. Every effort will be made to comply with your request. Travelers with physical disabilities and those who require frequent or on-going medical attention should advise A&K of their situation at the time of booking or at the earliest possible opportunity.

Tipping

Tipping is not compulsory but is often expected in Vietnam. You are traveling on an independent itinerary and the cost of your program does not include gratuities. Tipping is a very personal matter and should you feel you would like to acknowledge the service provided, please consider the following as a rough guide, per person per day.

Type of Service	Group Size (Number of People)					
	1	2	3	4	5-9	10+
Tour Director	15.00	12.00	10.00	8.00	6.00	5.00
Guide	15.00	12.00	10.00	8.00	6.00	5.00
Driver	8.00	6.00	5.00	4.00	3.00	3.00
Hotel Porters	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00

Please note: Currency is in USD

The above tipping guidelines are recommendations only and are not compulsory. Please use your own discretion in tipping, based on quality of service.

Restaurants

- Some restaurants add a 10% service charge to your bill.
- It is customary to add about 10% to the bill to show appreciation for the service

Taxis

Taxi drivers do not expect to be tipped but they appreciate the fare being rounded up.

Talk the Talk

The official language of Vietnam is Vietnamese. However, Vietnamese is considered the second language for many ethnic minorities living in regional parts of the country. Some Vietnamese words and phrases have been adapted from Chinese, while others are derived from French, a by-product of the period of French colonial rule. Here are some useful words and phrases to help make yourself understood during your visit.

English	Vietnamese
Hello	Xin chao
Goodbye	Tam biet
Thank you	Cam on
How are you?	Ban khoe khong?
Excuse me	Xin loi
How much?	Bao nhieu?
I don't understand	Toi khong hieu
Beautiful	Dep

Weather

In general, Vietnam has a tropical climate with average annual temperatures ranging from 22°C (72°F) to 34°C (86°F). Although temperatures are consistent year-round, various parts of the country, at certain times of the year, can be affected by unpredictable storms which may cause flooding. From May to November, most of the country is affected by south-western monsoons. The rains, which tend to be concentrated in the late afternoons, provide welcome relief to the heat. The heaviest rainfall tends to occur between July and August in the north; June to October in the south; and October to December in Central Vietnam.

December to March is a pleasant time to visit the southern city of Ho Chi Minh City and the Mekong Delta, although temperatures in Hanoi and northern regions tend to be cooler during those months. In the mountainous regions in the far north such as Sapa, the temperature can at times drop below zero (32°F). The best time to visit the north is between September and December when there's a good chance of clear skies and low humidity, while March to September is an ideal time to enjoy the beaches and sightseeing spots of Central Vietnam.

Beach destinations in the south such as Nha Trang, Phan Thiet, Phu Quoc and Con Dao Island are warm and sunny most of the year. However, the rainy season varies for each destination: Nha Trang (October to December); Phan Thiet (July to October); Phu Quoc (June to September) and Con Dao (November to January).

What to Pack

- Light and comfortable cotton or linen clothing is recommended for the summer months, while warmer clothes for the winter months are recommended
- Avoid sheer clothing and pack long-sleeved shirts and long skirts or trousers for visiting temples, shrines and palaces where it is often a requirement to cover the shoulders and knees
- Smart-casual wear for dining at more established restaurants
- A light waterproof jacket for occasional rainy weather or cooler evenings
- Good walking shoes or sandals; keep in mind that you may be required to remove footwear when visiting religious sites
- A sunhat or umbrella, water bottle, sunscreen, sunglasses and insect repellent
- Universal travel adaptor; Vietnam uses 220V 50Hz with sockets fit for plug types A, C or F

Religion & Etiquette

Religion

In Vietnam, less than 30% of the population identifies with one of the world's major religions. Approximately 12% are Buddhist, while 7% are Catholic. Many Vietnamese people engage in more traditional or folk practices, such as honoring one's ancestors or worshipping local gods. Over the centuries, the nation has developed its own religious sects which reflect a combination of several influences, including Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism along with other ancient Chinese traditions.

Customs

Many Vietnamese customs stem from an understanding of Confucianism, with an emphasis on duty, honor, loyalty and sincerity. It is common to show respect to people of a higher age and social status. For examples, seniors should be greeted and served before younger people.

Cultural Etiquette

The feet are considered the most unclean part of the body and it is offensive to point your feet directly at a person or at an image of the Buddha. The head is considered the most sacred part of the body, so it is considered rude to touch the head of another person.

Bargaining

Bargaining is common practice when shopping at local markets in Vietnam, although it is not practiced in major department stores and shopping malls. Bargaining should be an enjoyable experience for both buyers and sellers. Remember to keep it light-hearted, be reasonable in your offer and meet the seller somewhere in the middle.

Photography

Please ask permission before photographing local people, including young children. Photography is not permitted in some locations, such as museums and art galleries. Avoid taking photographs of government buildings and military personnel. If in doubt, ask your guide.

Waste Disposal

Please help to keep the environment clean and dispose of any waste appropriately. Avoid littering and separate recyclables where possible.

Animal Welfare

Abercrombie & Kent does not offer activities that are harmful to animals, such as riding on the backs of elephants. We work hard to ensure that the experiences we offer are positive and enriching for all involved. If you would like to engage in experiences with animals, please consult your guide for our socially responsible recommendations that do not put any animals at risk.

Child Safety Awareness

Abercrombie & Kent is an advocate of the Friends International ChildSafe Movement. We believe that children from any background deserve an opportunity to learn and grow and should be protected from harmful or exploitative situations. We do not encourage giving money to beggars or children selling souvenirs as these activities incentivize the children to stop going to school. We also do not encourage visits to schools or orphanages, unless the activity has been adequately vetted and does not cause disruption to the children's education or daily life.

If you encounter a situation where you believe a child is at risk, please inform your guide who will be able to contact the relevant authorities or child safe organizations.

Responsible Travel

Consider these simple tips to enhance your experience and have a more positive impact when traveling:

- Find out as much as possible about your destination; learning about the site's history, culture and environment can enhance the experience when you are there
- Learn a few words of the local language
- Pack light and limit excess trash
- Select accommodations, restaurants and activities that have clear goals and policies in relation to environmental impact, employment practices and sustainability objectives
- Buy local products and services
- Minimize your carbon footprint by using alternative transportation options or offsetting your carbon emissions
- Engage in local culture by eating local food, shopping at local markets and taking part in cultural festivals
- Connect with locals who can provide unique insights into the destination
- Leave the places you visit the way you found them; follow designated walking trails and do not remove archaeological or biological treasures from sites
- Bring your own fabric bag, washable straw, refillable water bottle or coffee mug, cutlery and reusable food container to reduce the consumption of single-use plastics; look for water refill stations at #RefillMyBottle or #RefillNotLandfill
- Share your responsible travel tips and help spread the word about best practices in sustainable travel
- Explore more and continue learning about other fascinating places to visit

Money

Currency & Exchange

The national currency in Vietnam is the Vietnamese Dong (VND). Although US dollars are accepted in some shops and restaurants, it is recommended to have some local currency at hand.

Notes are issued in denominations of 500, 1000, 2000, 5000, 10,000, 20,000, 50,000, 100,000, 200,000 and 500,000.

Credit Cards

Visa and MasterCard are accepted in most major shopping centers, restaurants and hotels, although relatively few establishments accept American Express.

Traveler's Checks

Traveler's checks can be exchanged in most banks, authorized exchange bureaus and hotels although they are not generally accepted as payment for items in shops.

Banks & ATMs

Normal banking hours 08:00 to 11:30 and 13:00 to 16:00. ATMs can be found in most major cities.

Time Zone

Vietnam is on GMT+7

Shopping

Souvenirs can be a great way of keeping memories alive and staying connected with a special place that you visited. However, please think carefully about what you buy and consider the supply chain ethics of your purchases. Here are our tips for responsible travel shopping.

- **Purchase Selectively** - Purchasing local crafts is a great way of showing support for local artisans. Some sellers, however, resort to importing mass-produced items from foreign countries. Therefore, we recommend that you inspect your purchases carefully, be selective and ask questions about where the items came from.
- **Purchase Locally** - We recommend dining at locally-run establishments rather than at international franchise restaurants when you have the opportunity. Choosing restaurants that use locally grown ingredients instead of imported products helps to reduce your carbon footprint and is also a great way to immerse in the local food culture.
- **Purchase Responsibly** - Avoid buying counterfeit items and ensure that the item you are purchasing is not stolen or taken without permission from a historical site. Insist on documentation to support the legitimacy of the item and its history.

Ethical Souvenirs

Abercrombie & Kent does not encourage the trade of culturally sensitive souvenirs that may result in negative impacts to the community, culture or nature. To help you make more informed decisions, here is a guide to souvenirs to look out for in Vietnam as well as items you may want to avoid.

What to Buy

- Vietnamese silks and textiles, such as a tailor-made *ao dai* (traditional Vietnamese) or other quality fashion
- Traditional crafts such as lanterns, lacquerware, embroidery, ceramics, conical hats and other handmade items by local artisans
- Vietnamese wood block prints and oil paintings
- Tea, coffee or chocolate sourced from the Vietnamese highlands

What Not to Buy

- Statues of Buddha and other relics from temples or religious monuments
- Elephant tusks (ivory) and other animal products
- Items made from coral, shark teeth, turtle shells and seashells
- Products made from animals, such as bags or purses made from marine turtles, crocodile or snakeskin, tiger skin and bones

Useful Tips:

- Take your purchases home with you wherever possible to avoid complications with additional shipping fees, customs duties and regulations. Airfreight and shipments can sometimes take several months to arrive.
- Avoid purchasing expensive items unless you are certain of its quality and value. Some vendors may overstate the value of their goods. While our guides will try to assist wherever possible, they are not authorities on antiques or rare items.
- Take the time to read credit card slips and calculate the exchange rate before signing.
- Retain receipts of your purchases as you may be asked to provide proof of purchase to local officials when exiting the country. You may also need to present it to customs on your return home.

If you are looking for a specific item, your guide may help refer you to a vendor that carries the item. However, this should not be taken as an endorsement of the vendor. All purchases are your own responsibility and A&K does not accept liability for products that are found to be faulty or not as advertised. A&K does not take responsibility for any loss or damage during shipment.

Local Food & Drink

The cuisine of Vietnam varies from region to region; stir-fried dishes are more commonly found in the north due to Chinese influences, central Vietnamese dishes tend to be hot and spicy, while southern Vietnamese cuisine can be characterized by a wide variety of vegetables, fruits, and spices. French influence can also be seen throughout Vietnam, particularly in *banh mi*, which is a Vietnamese version of baguette.

Vietnamese cuisine is typically known for its use of fish sauce and hoisin sauce as well as generous servings of fresh vegetables, herbs and spices including garlic, shallots, lemongrass and lime. Rice is the traditional staple dish, although noodles are also popular.

Traditional dishes include *pho*, noodle soup often served with fresh slices of beef, and *gio lua* which is a type of pork sausage. Deep-fried spring rolls, known as *nem ran* or *cha gio* can be found in almost every eatery in the country and *cha ca*, or fish balls, are also commonly eaten.

Places to eat in Vietnam include local markets, where the greatest selection is available in the morning before the day gets hot. In addition to Vietnamese food, the larger hotels also serve a wide variety of continental and Chinese cuisine as well as large and varied buffets.

If you have any special dietary requirements, please advise Abercrombie & Kent at least six weeks prior to departure. Every effort is made to accommodate your request, but please be aware that this may not always be possible, particularly in remote areas.