

## Before traveling to Vietnam

### Passport and Visa

- A valid passport and a [Vietnam visa](#) are required of all foreigners visiting Vietnam. With very few exceptions, there is also such thing as a "[Vietnam visa on arrival](#)". Visas are issued by Vietnamese embassies and consulates. Some travel agency offices of Vietnam tourism are able to issue tourist visas.
- Tourist visas are good for thirty days and may be extended after your arrival in Vietnam. Fees vary from embassy to embassy; about \$50 in Bangkok and \$85 in Washington, for example. A double entry visa is also available for tourists making side trips from Vietnam to destinations in Thailand, Cambodia and Laos.
- Do not complete your visa application until your travel plans are fairly firm. You are required to state your intended ports of arrival and departure (for example, arriving in Hanoi and departing from Ho Chi Minh City). Changing either of these upon or after your arrival could result in a mountain of red tape and extra expense. Submit your application along with two standard passport photos, your passport and the required fee.
- Business visas are good for six months and provide for multiple entries. Sponsorship by a licensed Vietnamese enterprise is required. Your Vietnamese trade partner will provide you with the necessary details.

### Formality immigration

- You will receive a Vietnam IMMIGRATION /CUSTOMS form from the flight attendant. This is fairly self explanatory. DO NOT leave any blanks unless the question doesn't apply to you. If you have any questions ask a fellow traveler or flight attendant. The last thing you want to do is get to the Vietnam immigration desk with an incomplete form. The official will probably have limited English language ability and there likely be a long line of travelers behind you. You don't want to spend any more time at the desk than absolutely necessary.
- When you get off the plane you will proceed to the immigration line. Be sure to get in the tourist line. Have your passport and other documents ready.
- The Vietnam immigration officer will compare the visa stamped in your passport and the visa entered in the immigration information system. If you get a pre-approved letter for visa from a service agency the procedure will be the same. He will stamp the visa in your passport and give you a white immigration card. This card is your official Vietnam travel/tourist permit. DO NOT LOSE THIS FORM! You must turn in this form when you leave the country.

## When traveling in Vietnam

### Money

- Đồng (VND; symbol đ). Notes are in denominations of 500,000đ; 200,000đ; 100,000đ; 50,000đ; 20,000đ; 10,000đ; 5,000đ; 2,000đ; 1,000đ; 500đ; 200đ and 100đ. Coins are in denominations of 5,000đ; 2,000đ; 1,000đ and 500đ.
- The US Dollar is the most favored foreign currency. Australian, British, Japanese, Singaporean and Thai currency, as well as the Euro, can usually be changed in the larger cities; great difficulty may be encountered in trying to

exchange any other currencies. There is a commission charge for changing money in banks.

#### Weather

- Vietnam is a country of Southeast Asia, rather larger than Britain and about half the size of the state of Texas. Extending between 9° and 23° N, it lies entirely within the tropics. It has a long coastline on the Gulf of Tonkin and the South China Sea. On the landward side it borders China in the north and Laos and Cambodia in the west.
- Like other countries of the region, it has a tropical monsoon climate dominated by south to southeasterly winds from May until September and northerly to northeasterly winds between October and April. There is a twice-yearly period of variable winds at the time of transition from the north to south monsoon.
- In the north of Vietnam there are more cloudy days with occasional light rain during the period of the northeast monsoon. The south of the country is more likely to be dry and sunny at this time.
- In the southern and central parts of Indo-China, temperatures remain high around the year, but in the north there is a definite cooler season as the north monsoon brings colder air from central China from time to time.

#### To stay healthy, do...

- Wash your hands often with soap and water
- Drink only bottled or boiled water or carbonated (bubbly) drinks in cans or bottles. Avoid tap water, fountain drinks, and ice cubes.
- Take your malaria prevention medication before, during, and after travel, as directed. (See your health care provider for a prescription.)
- To prevent fungal and parasitic infections, keep feet clean and dry, and do not go barefoot, even on beaches.
- Always use latex condoms to reduce the risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.
- Protect yourself from mosquito insect bites:

#### Do not

- Do not eat food that is not well cooked to reduce risk of infection (i.e., hepatitis A and typhoid fever).
- Do not drink beverages with ice.
- Avoid dairy products, unless you know they have been pasteurized.
- Do not swim in fresh water to avoid exposure to certain water-borne diseases such as schistosomiasis.
- Do not handle animals, especially monkeys, dogs, and cats, to avoid bites and serious diseases (including rabies and plague). Consider pre-exposure rabies vaccination if you might have extensive unprotected outdoor exposure in rural areas.
- Do not touch dead animals or surfaces spoiled with animals dejections.
- Do not share brush teeth, razors, needles for tattoos, body piercing or injections to prevent infections such as HIV and hepatitis B.

#### Important notes

A - Environmental hazards

Climate & air pollution : heat, humidity, dust and motor fumes (especially in Saigon and Hanoi ) combine their effects that can worsen a lung disease. It can also aggravate coughs, colds and sinus problems. The use of air conditioned too cold and directed on the face or the chest should be avoided. If you have sinus or lung disease, take your usual medication (inhaler...) for exacerbation of the symptoms. Sunburn : in the tropics, even you do not feel very hot especially on the beach or under the clouds you can get sunburn quickly. Protect your skin with a sun cream with a strength adapted to your skin sensitivity, wear a hat and protect your eyes with sunglasses.

## B - Infectious diseases

### Diarrhea

Diarrhea is a common symptom among the travelers often call "tourista"; but it can be just the sign of diet changes until the sign of a very severe disease that needs a hospitalization.

When should you see a doctor?

- If you have bloody stool or/and mucus
- if you have fever
- if you have severe abdominal pain
- if you have very often watery stool and you loose a lot of water and weight
- if you are vomiting
- If you are not in these cases, you can help yourself by a good diet:

fluid replacement: drink at least equal to the volume being lost; take the World Health Organization ORS solutions but if you cannot find it you can drink Coca-Cola or Pepsi-Cola; take away the gas by adding 1 teaspoon of sugar into each glass.

Bland diet: eat only white steam rice with boiled carrot, porridge ("chao" in Vietnamese) and soups ("pho" in Vietnamese).

Stick to this diet for 48H to 72H. If the symptoms are not released after 3 days, you should seek for medical advice. Some medication like Loperamide (Imodium) should be avoided because it can delay the recovery. Use only if you must travel to seek medical advice and have no access to the toilets.

### Hepatitis

5 types of hepatitis are known: A, B, C, D and E. The most common are the types A, B and C. They are all widespread worldwide but hepatitis B and C are more common in Asia than they are in Western countries.

Hepatitis A is transmitted by contaminated food and water or through direct person-to-person contact. You can be protected by a vaccine. If not vaccinated wash your hands often and more before eating or drinking.

Hepatitis B is transmitted through contact with infected blood, blood products or body fluids: sexual contact, unsterilised needles, blood transfusions or some breaks of the skin (shaver, body piercing, tattoo); it is very common in all Vietnam particularly in some areas. Now the Vietnamese health program includes the systematic vaccination of the newborns and also vaccination during the pregnancy to give immunization to the fetus and prevent the contamination from the infected mother at

birth. There is a very effective vaccine recommended to have before to come to Asia . If not yet done, avoid any blood exposure; in the clinics and hospitals they use disposable needles and syringes; use condom can prevent sexual exposure.

Hepatitis C is mostly spread through infected blood contact and blood products (unsterilised needles and blood transfusion) and rarely by sexual contact; it is widespread in Vietnam and there is no preventive vaccine. The only prevention is to avoid risk situations.

Hepatitis D is usually a co infection that contaminates the people already infected with hepatitis B virus or also with hepatitis C virus and HIV. We do not have much data about this hepatitis in Vietnam .

Hepatitis E is transmitted by contaminated food and water; it is not common in Vietnam , just sporadic cases are found. Prevention is the same as Hepatitis A by having a good hygiene but there is no vaccine. It is particularly serious for the pregnant women during the third trimester.

#### HIV and AIDS

An infection with the human immunodeficiency virus may lead to immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), which is a very severe chronic disease that leads to many others complications. We have now some good medications to prevent most of the complications and to live in good condition but not to cure the disease.

The people are infected through the blood or blood products from infected people or sexual contact. The only prevention is to avoid risk situations and use condom to prevent sexual exposure.

#### Parasites

The tropical zone is known to have much kind of parasites.

You can be contaminated through: food (raw or not enough cooked), drinking water, fresh water when swimming, the soil and contacts with animals by skin bites. They can give no symptoms or various symptoms including but not limited to: skin rash and itching, abdominal pain, diarrhea, hematuria for the most common. If you are experiencing some symptoms, better to seek doctor advice.

#### Bird Flu

The Bird Flu has been spreading to some countries in the world and there are cases in Vietnam among the poultry mostly the chickens, but also the ducks and the pork. Some people are affected but they are all people who work in the farms and take care directly of the affected animals; they have been infected by dejections of affected animals or dead affected animals.

- Some people from people contamination (12 cases in Thailand) have been supposed inside the same family with permanent or repetitive contact but without spreading outside the family.
- No case has been reported from eating cooked animals.
- It is advisable not to go to the areas where they grow poultry but there is no or very minimal risk in the normal tourist areas.

- No vaccine has been recommended and the normal flu vaccine does not protect against the H5N1 virus responsible of the bird flu. There is one antiviral drug that reduces the symptoms of the affected people: oseltamivir (Tamiflu®).
- No restriction for traveling has been making by the WHO but avoid the animal farms. Just do not touch dead animals even in the market or surfaces spoiled with animal's dejections, wash your hands often with hydro alcoholic solution, and cook the food at more than 70°C.

The Traveler Medication Kit (It's available in every big city in Vietnam)

Mild sleeping pills (Lexomil);

Urinary antiseptics (Noroxine);

Antidiarrhoeics (Tiorfan, Smecta);

Laxatives (Forlax);

Antalgics (Paracetamol) ;

Antispasmodics (Spasfon, Debridat);

Antipyretics (Paracetamol);

Antihistaminic (Cetirizine);

Antimalarials ;

Antibiotics (Augmentin);

Eye-drops (antiseptic, antiallergic) ;

Antiemetics (travel sickness) Primperan ;

Oral rehydration salts (WHO recommendation ; can be prepared by yourself: 6 level coffee spoons of sugar and 1/2 coffee spoon of salt in 1 liter of drinking water) ;

Ear drops.