

ASIA · FOOD · HISTORY · CULTURE · BEACHES · HIKING · ROAD TRIPS

 Vietnam

Vietnam stretches some 1,650 km from the karst mountains of the Chinese border to the Mekong Delta, and a north–south journey is one of Asia's great trips. Cruise Ha Long Bay, wander Hoi An's lantern-lit old town and Hue's imperial citadel, trek between ethnic-minority villages near Sa Pa, and eat brilliantly and cheaply all the way.

 Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for Vietnam and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 21 September 2026.

 CAPITAL Hanoi	 CURRENCY Vietnamese đồng (VND) £1 ≈ ₫34,529	 LANGUAGE Vietnamese	 BEST TIME Feb–Apr
 DAILY BUDGET £30–£160 ££ Moderate	 PLUGS Type A, C 220V · adapter needed	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 12h 30m direct ~£600–£1,150 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+7 standard time

Vietnam's long, thin shape makes route-planning simple: most first trips run between Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City over two to three weeks. In the north, add Ha Long or Lan Ha Bay, the karst scenery of Ninh Binh and the terraced valleys around Sa Pa or Ha Giang. The centre holds the caves of Phong Nha, the old imperial capital of Hue, the Hai Van Pass and Hoi An. The south brings Ho Chi Minh City's energy, the waterways of the Mekong Delta and island beaches on Phu Quoc.

Travel is easy and very good value: sleeper trains, cheap domestic flights and the Grab app make getting around simple, and street food is often the best food. Weather is the main complication, because the north has a cool, grey winter while the centre's wet season peaks from September to December, so few months suit the whole country perfectly. Crowds concentrate in Ha Long, Hoi An and Sa Pa. Vietnam suits first-time Asia travellers and food lovers alike; visitors are often surprised by how chilly Hanoi can feel in January.

Top 5 highlights

- 1** NATURE

Ha Long Bay

Around 1,600 limestone islands and pillars rise from the Gulf of Tonkin in this UNESCO-listed bay. Overnight cruises explore caves and kayak through hidden lagoons; neighbouring Lan Ha Bay is often quieter.
- 2** HISTORY

Hoi An Ancient Town

A well-preserved trading port of ochre merchants' houses, Chinese assembly halls and the Japanese Covered Bridge, best seen early or after dark when lanterns light the riverside. Tailors can make clothes overnight.

3

ARCHITECTURE

Hue Imperial City

The walled citadel of the Nguyen dynasty, Vietnam's last emperors, with palace gates, temples and the Forbidden Purple City under restoration. Visit the royal tombs along the Perfume River by boat or bike.

4

NATURE

Sa Pa rice terraces

Mountain trails from Sa Pa lead through terraced valleys and Hmong and Dao villages, greenest from June and golden in September. Fansipan, Indochina's highest peak, rises above and can be reached by cable car.

5

CULTURE

Mekong Delta

A watery world of canals, orchards and rice paddies in the far south. Base yourself in Can Tho to visit the Cai Rang floating market at dawn, then cycle or boat through quieter villages.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Ho Chi Minh City

≈ 9 million people

Vietnam's largest and most commercial city, still called Saigon by many: visit the War Remnants Museum and Independence Palace, eat at street kitchens and markets, and day-trip to the Cu Chi tunnels.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Hanoi

≈ 5 million people

The capital's Old Quarter of tube houses and guild streets is the place to stay; add Hoan Kiem Lake, the Temple of Literature, Ho Chi Minh's mausoleum and an evening of bia hơi.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Da Nang

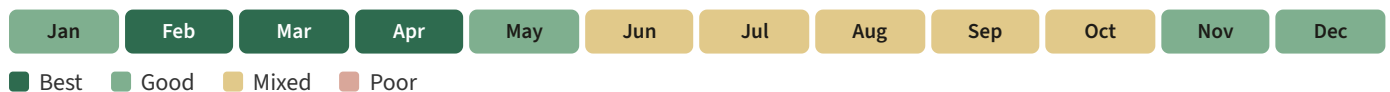
≈ 1.1 million people

A modern beach city with a long sandy coastline, a dragon-shaped bridge and the Marble Mountains; most visitors use its airport as the gateway to Hoi An, Hue and the Hai Van Pass.

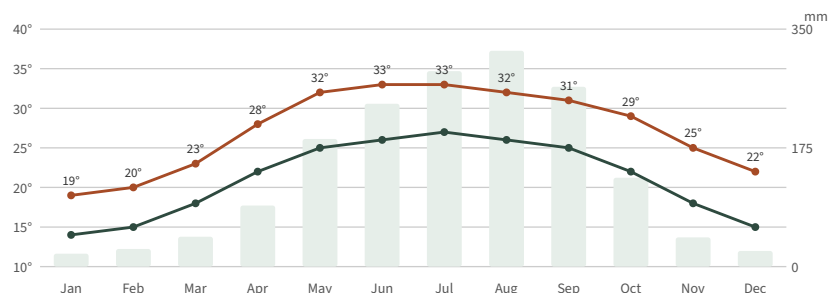
Ranked by urban-area population where available. Figures are rounded estimates, and sources define city limits differently, so rankings of similar-sized cities can vary.

When to go to Vietnam

Best time: **Feb–Apr**.

**Average climate in Hanoi**

— High °C — Low °C — Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Jan–Feb

Tết Nguyên Đán

The Lunar New Year is Vietnam's biggest festival: cities fill with peach blossom and kumquat trees, families travel home, and many shops and restaurants close for up to a week.

Jan–Dec

Hoi An Full Moon Lantern Festival

On the fourteenth day of each lunar month, Hoi An's old town dims its electric lights in favour of silk lanterns, and candle-lit paper lanterns are floated on the Thu Bon River.

Sep–Oct

Mid-Autumn Festival (Tết Trung Thu)

Held on the fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month, with lion dances, lanterns and mooncakes; Hanoi's Hàng Mã street and Hoi An are especially atmospheric.

How much does Vietnam cost?

SHOESTRING

£30

per person / day

≈ ₫1,035,864

hostels, street food, buses

MID-RANGE

£70

per person / day

≈ ₫2,417,015

3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis

COMFORTABLE

£160

per person / day

≈ ₫5,524,606

4-star+, guided trips, private transfers

Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Phở

Rice-noodle soup in a long-simmered beef or chicken broth scented with star anise and charred ginger; Hanoi's version is clear and restrained, Saigon's comes with heaps of herbs.

Bún chả

Hanoi's lunchtime favourite: smoky grilled pork patties and belly in a sweet-sour dipping broth, eaten with rice vermicelli and fresh herbs.

Bánh mì

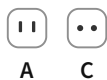
A crisp baguette, a French legacy, stuffed with pâté, cold cuts or grilled pork, pickled vegetables, coriander and chilli; Hoi An's versions are especially celebrated.

Getting around

Vietnam Airlines and budget carriers such as VietJet make hops between Hanoi, Da Nang and Ho Chi Minh City quick and cheap. The Reunification Express railway runs the length of the coast with sleeper berths, and open-tour sleeper buses cover similar routes. In cities, Grab and Xanh SM handle cars and motorbike taxis, and both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City now have metro lines.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE



A C

220V — bring a UK-to-A/C adapter

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Ambulance: **115**

Fire: **114**

Police: **113**

National search and rescue: **112**

Hotline for child protection: **111**

Source: FCDO “Getting help”

DIALLING CODE

+84

TIME ZONE

UTC+7 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Not safe — drink bottled or treated water

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

Not traditionally expected, but small tips for guides, drivers and spa staff are appreciated; upmarket restaurants may add a service charge.

ETIQUETTE

Cover shoulders and knees in temples and pagodas, remove shoes where others do, keep your temper in disputes to avoid causing loss of face, and hand over money or cards with both hands.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Noi Bai International Airport (HAN), Hanoi; Tan Son Nhat International Airport (SGN), Ho Chi Minh City; Da Nang International Airport (DAD), Da Nang

Visas & entry for Vietnam

Shown for a British passport.

No visa needed

You can visit Vietnam without a visa for up to 45 days for tourism or business. On arrival, your passport will be stamped with an entry and exit stamp (the date you have to leave by). Check that the date given is 45 days from your arrival date, as Immigration will not change this after you have left the airport/land border.

If you want to stay longer than 45 days, you can:

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Hepatitis A

Tetanus

Typhoid

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

- Chikungunya
- Dengue
- Hepatitis B
- Japanese encephalitis
- Measles
- Rabies
- Tuberculosis

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

No yellow fever certificate is required to enter.

MALARIA

Low risk of malaria

- There is a low risk of malaria in the southern part of the country in the provinces of Tay Ninh, Lam Dong, Dak Lak, Gia Lai, and Kon Tum, and other rural areas of Vietnam: awareness of risk and bite avoidance recommended.

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in Vietnam

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Tue 24 Nov 2026	Vietnam Cultural Day
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Thu 4 Feb 2027	29 of Lunar New Year
Fri 5 Feb 2027	Lunar New Year's Eve
Sat 6 Feb 2027	Lunar New Year
Sun 7 Feb 2027	Second Day of Lunar New Year
Mon 8 Feb 2027	Third Day of Lunar New Year
Tue 9 Feb 2027	Fourth Day of Lunar New Year
Wed 10 Feb 2027	Fifth Day of Lunar New Year
Fri 16 Apr 2027	Hung Kings' Commemoration Day
Fri 30 Apr 2027	Liberation Day/Reunification Day
Sat 1 May 2027	International Labour Day
Mon 3 May 2027	International Labour Day (observed)
Thu 2 Sep 2027	National Day
Fri 3 Sep 2027	National Day

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Vietnamese

ENGLISH	VIETNAMESE	SAY IT
Hello	Xin chào	sin CHOW
Thank you	Cảm ơn	gahm UHN
Please	Làm ơn	lahm UHN
Excuse me	Xin lỗi	sin LOY

ENGLISH

VIETNAMESE

SAY IT

How much is this?

Cái này bao nhiêu tiền?

kai NAY bow nyew TYEN

Know before you go

Use Grab or Xanh SM rather than street taxis or cyclos to avoid inflated fares, and agree prices in advance for anything without a meter.

Check notes carefully when paying: the blue 20,000 and 500,000 đồng polymer notes look similar, and mix-ups, accidental or otherwise, are common.

Avoid travelling in the week of Tết unless you want to experience it: transport books out weeks ahead, prices rise and many restaurants and shops close.

Visa, health and safety rules change. Before you book or travel, check the FCDO travel advice (gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice) and TravelHealthPro (travelhealthpro.org.uk). Costs are estimates. © 2026 Pick My Trip.