

Cong Hoa Xa Hoi Chu Nghia Viet Nam

Did You Know?

- Vietnamese names start with the family (last) name and are followed by one or two given names.
- *Mua roi nuoc* (water puppetry) is a unique Vietnamese art form in which the stage is a pool of water. Wooden puppets are used to portray funny scenes of daily life in the country, as well as events in Vietnamese history and mythology. The puppeteers stand waist deep in the water, hidden behind bamboo screens, and the puppets are lit by floating lanterns and accompanied by music.
- Hanoi has been the capital city of Vietnam for more than a thousand years!
- It is very rude for a non-family member to touch a person on the head because it is considered the most sacred part of the body.
- If a *rural* (countryside) family visits relatives or friends in the city, they might bring a live chicken or something fresh from the garden as a present.
- Legend states the first Vietnamese came from the dragon lord Lạc Long Quân and his wife, the fairy Âu Cơ. Together they had one hundred children, and the oldest became the first king of Vietnam.
- Vietnam is home to about eight hundred species of birds, along with monkeys, iguanas, black squirrels, and two hundred other types of animals.
- The Communist Party is the only legal political party in the country.
- Nguyen is one of the most common last names in Vietnam. Around 30 million people share it!

Flag

Red stands for communism. It's also the color of luck and happiness. Each point on the star represents a group of people: farmers, workers, intellectuals, youth, and soldiers.



National Image

Bamboo is like the Vietnamese people: strong and flexible. People use bamboo for food and to make many items, like chopsticks and houses.



People and Places

Land and Climate

Area (sq. mi.): 127,881

Area (sq. km.): 331,210

Slightly larger than Malaysia or the state of New Mexico, Vietnam is located on the eastern edge of the Indochina *peninsula* (a piece of land mostly surrounded by water but still connected to the mainland). Vietnam is long and skinny, shaped like a long S and covering 994 miles (1,600 km) from north to south (about the distance from New York City to Miami). But at its narrowest point, in the center of the country, it only covers 25 miles (40 km) from east to west.

Before the Red and Mekong rivers empty into the sea, they dump rich nutrients onto the soil. These deposits form a triangle-shaped area called a *delta*. Vietnam's two *deltas* are separated by mountains and a large plain. The entire *delta* region is no more than 9 feet (3 m) above sea level at any point. Flooding is common there. A complex system of dikes and canals contains the Red River and carries water to the many rice paddies in the region. Tea, coffee, rubber, and sugarcane are also grown here. The Mekong River is known as the River of the Nine Dragons because of the way it splits into nine branches as it makes its way toward the ocean. Thick jungles cover the valleys between each mountain. Fan Si Pan is located in the northwest and is the tallest mountain in Vietnam, at 10,312 feet (3,143 m). Nicknamed the Roof of Indochina, it is a popular tourist destination.

Winters in the north are short, but they can be chilly. However, southern temperatures rarely change. They are often hotter than 84 °F (29 °C). *Monsoons* (heavy rains) from May to September make the climate hot and humid—perfect for growing rice.

Population

Population: 93,421,835

Most of Vietnam's people live in *rural* (countryside) areas. They usually live in the river *deltas* (triangle-shaped landforms at the mouth of a river) around Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, which are Vietnam's biggest cities. About 86 percent of the population is ethnic Kinh (Vietnamese). Others are Chinese, Khmer, Hao, and Cham. More than 50 minority groups, each with its own language and culture, live in the mountains.

Over the years, because of war and other problems, many Vietnamese left their country in search of better conditions. There are large immigrant and *refugee* (a person forced to leave his or her home by war) communities in the United States and elsewhere.

Language

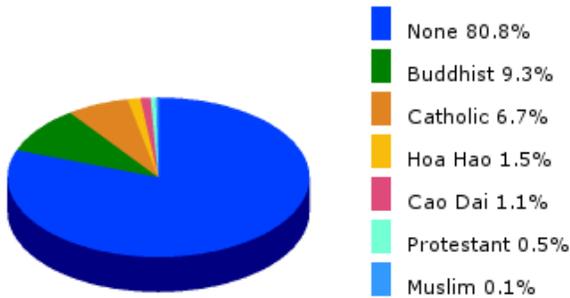
Vietnamese is a *monosyllabic* language, meaning that every syllable is a word. You can join as many as four syllables to form a new word. For example, if you join *thanh* (fresh) with *nien* (years), it becomes *thanh nien* (youth). Vietnamese is also a tonal language, meaning a word can have as many as six meanings depending on which of six tones is used to pronounce it. Symbols above the vowels tell which tone to use. For example, depending on how the word *ma* is pronounced, it can mean "ghost," "horse," "cheek," "tomb," "but," or "rice seedling."



Can You Say It in Vietnamese?

| | | |
|-----------|-----------------|-------------|
| Hello | <i>Xin chào</i> | (seen CHOW) |
| Good-bye | <i>Tạm biệt</i> | (dam BEET) |
| Please | <i>Xin</i> | (seen) |
| Thank you | <i>Cám ơn</i> | (cam UHN) |
| Yes | <i>Đã</i> | (yah) |
| No | <i>Không</i> | (khum) |

Religion



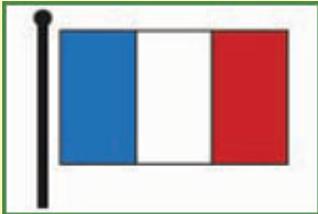
Source: *The World Factbook 2014. Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2014.*

The majority of Vietnamese do not belong to any religion. Buddhism is practiced by 9 percent of the population. Temples and *pagodas* (places of worship) are busy with people offering prayers for success and health. About 7 percent is Roman Catholic. Christianity is becoming more popular in cities. Regardless of religion, nearly all Vietnamese perform rituals for their ancestors. The Vietnamese believe that the dead help or hinder the living. Almost every Vietnamese family has an altar for ancestor worship. Family members place fruit and/or flowers on the altar twice a month. They also burn incense and offer prayers to ancestors for support in overcoming bad luck and finding good luck.

History

Time Line

| | |
|----------|--|
| 2000 BC | |
| 2000 BC | The Vietnamese live in small kingdoms; the largest is the Van Lang |
| 300 | |
| mid-200s | China begins to take land in what is now northern Vietnam |

| | | |
|-----------|--|---|
| 208 | Chao Tuo, a Chinese general, conquers Van Lang and other groups |  |
| 207 | General Tuo creates the independent kingdom of Nam Viet | |
| AD 1 | | |
| AD 39 | The Vietnamese rebel against the Chinese but fail; China begins direct rule of Nam Viet | |
| 500s | Small groups fight against Chinese rule | |
| 939 | Ngo Quyen becomes king of independent Nam Viet | |
| 1010 | Hanoi becomes the capital of Nam Viet | |
| 1407 | China invades once more | |
| 1427 | China is defeated by a united Vietnamese force | |
| 1500 | | |
| 1535 | The Portuguese arrive at the port of Fai Fo | |
| 1558–1772 | Regional wars are fought among the leaders in Nam Viet | |
| 1786 | Three Tay Son brothers reunite all of Nam Viet and change laws to help poor villagers | |
| 1800 | | |
| 1802 | With French help, Nguyen Anh defeats the Tay Son kings, makes himself king, and changes the country's name to Viet Nam |  |
| 1847 | France invades Vietnam | |
| 1883 | France gains full control over Vietnam |  |
| 1887 | France establishes the Indochinese Union, which includes what are now Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia | |
| 1900 | | |
| 1930 | Ho Chi Minh founds the Indochinese Communist Party | |
| 1939–45 | Japan controls Vietnam during World War II, but France takes over again when Japan is defeated | |
| 1945 | Ho Chi Minh declares northern Vietnam an independent country | |
| 1946–54 | In the Viet Minh War, communist soldiers in the north defeat the French | |

| | | |
|----------------|---|---|
| 1955 | South Vietnam, divided from the north since 1945, becomes the Republic of Vietnam | |
| 1960 | North Vietnamese forces help the <i>Viet Cong</i> (rebel communists in the south) fight against the South Vietnamese government; the United States sends help to the south | |
| 1965 | The United States enters the Vietnam War and supports South Vietnamese leaders against the communist north | |
| 1968 | Over 500,000 Americans are in Vietnam; thousands of communists attack cities in the south as part of the Tet Offensive; 2,000 U.S. soldiers, 2,300 South Vietnamese soldiers, and more than 12,000 <i>civilians</i> (non-soldiers) are killed | |
| 1973 | North Vietnam and the United States agree to a cease-fire; all U.S. troops leave Vietnam | |
| 1975 | After U.S. troops leave, North Vietnam conquers South Vietnam |  |
| 1976 | North and South Vietnam become one country named the Socialist Republic of Vietnam; hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese flee to other countries | |
| 1979 | Vietnam invades Cambodia | |
| 1994 | The United States begins trading again with Vietnam | |
| 2000 | | |
| 2005 | Prime Minister Phan Van Khai visits the United States, the first such visit by a Vietnamese leader since the end of the Vietnam War |  |
| 2007 | Vietnam joins the World Trade Organization | |
| 2008 | In an attempt to control population growth, the government formally enforces a two-child policy; the government outlaws bloggers from writing about "inappropriate" subjects | |
| 2011 | The United States and Vietnam lead a joint operation to clean up Agent Orange contamination from the Vietnam War | |
| 2013 | One of the strictest censorship laws in the world passes, <i>banning</i> (outlawing) people from sharing any information, including news articles, that is not personally written | |
| PRESENT | | |

Chinese Invasion

Long ago, the Vietnamese lived in small kingdoms and farmed for a living. They grew rice, raised cattle, and were skilled bronze workers and potters. They made everything from drums to tools and weapons out of bronze. But in the third century BC, Chinese invaders began to take over these kingdoms. The Chinese eventually established one kingdom, called Nam Viet. The Vietnamese united to fight the Chinese, but they weren't a match for the mighty Han Dynasty. The most famous rebellion was the Hai Ba Trung rebellion, led by two sisters. Trung Trac and Trung Nhi defeated the Chinese and ruled as queens for three years before the Chinese returned with stronger forces; the sisters drowned themselves rather than surrender to the Chinese once more.



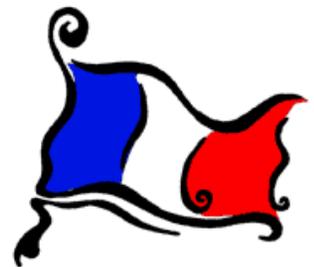
For a thousand years, China spread its culture and politics throughout the land. The native peoples were forced to work for the Chinese governors and pay *tribute* (money given to show loyalty) to them. Finally, in the AD 900s, rebel forces led by General Ngo Quyen defeated Chinese troops in the Battle of Bach Dang River and declared independence.

Tay Son Rebellion

When the Vietnamese weren't fighting off fierce invaders like the Mongols, they often fought each other. After Ngo Quyen's death, civil war broke out. During these long conflicts, clan leaders forced villagers under their control to pay heavy taxes. The villagers grew desperately poor. So three brothers from the village of Tay Son led a large group of people in rebellion against the rich warlords. By 1786, these brothers had most of the country under their control. They made many changes to make life easier for the villagers.

French Era

In 1801, a ruler named Nguyen Anh overthrew the Tay Son brothers with the help of a French army. Nguyen Anh was a harsh king. He turned on the French and the villagers, who hated him. France invaded and by 1883 controlled all of Vietnam. Peasants were forced to pay high taxes and work on plantations for their colonial administrators. The French did not understand Vietnamese society and tried to make the government and culture more like France. Vietnamese people were not allowed to hold high-ranking jobs and were paid very little. Few Vietnamese children were allowed to go to school. The beginnings of a resistance movement formed during this period. When World War II broke out, the Japanese invaded and occupied Vietnam. After World War II, a popular communist leader named Ho Chi Minh declared the north an independent country. By 1954, he had forced the French out.



Vietnam War

Soon, the leaders of the south, who weren't communist, and the leaders of the north, who were communist, began to fight each other for control of all of Vietnam. Fearing the spread of communism in Asia, the United States quickly sent troops to help the south, and the Soviet Union and China provided support for the north. Rebel communists in the south known as the *Viet Cong* fought against the south. American troops began fighting in 1965. U.S. planes dropped bombs on North Vietnam and the Viet Cong supply lines and dropped millions of gallons of *Agent Orange* (poisonous chemicals) on the country. But they couldn't defeat the communist army. Tens of thousands of U.S. soldiers and millions of Vietnamese were killed in the fighting. The U.S. troops left in 1973, and the north eventually took over the entire country two years later. In 1976, north and south were joined as a communist country called the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. The southern capital of Saigon became Ho Chi Minh City.



Today

The civil war killed millions and ruined the economy. Hundreds of thousands of *refugees* (people forced to leave their homes by war) began leaving Vietnam by boat or on foot. After the war, the Vietnamese were very poor and had little, but they slowly began to rebuild their country. At first, communist laws gave people little freedom. But in 1989, the Vietnamese government began to relax some of its laws. Shortly after, the Vietnamese and United States governments began repairing their relationship. Today, Vietnam still has many problems, but new leaders, with international help, are beginning to solve them.

Lifestyle

Games and Sports

Soccer and volleyball are favorite sports, but badminton and table tennis are also popular. Girls don't play organized sports as often as boys do. Many kids play a kind of freeze tag, called *choi do*, at night while their parents visit each other. Kids in *rural* (countryside) areas have less time and fewer toys to play with than city kids. Instead, they like hide-and-seek and dodgeball, and they make their own toys and games out of anything handy. Swimming is also very popular for all Vietnamese kids, as are martial arts such as *vovinam* (in which participants use bamboo sticks and other weapons as well as their bare hands), tae kwon do, kung fu, and judo.



Holidays

There are 11 major *tet* (holidays) in Vietnam, but the most important one is the *Tet Nguyen Dan* (Lunar New Year). Before the holiday, people clean their houses, pay off debts, visit their ancestors' graves, and buy flowers. During the holiday, they feast and visit with each other. Homes are decorated with peach blossoms, which are thought to scare off evil spirits. Streets are decorated with colored lights and red banners. Children receive presents and their favorite treats. Friends and family give children red envelopes with money inside. Traditionally, the first visitor of the new year brings either good or bad luck to the household. In order to ensure good luck, Vietnamese families invite a close friend or respected family member to be the first visitor that day.



Food

Most families eat rice with *nuoc mam* (fermented fish sauce). This sauce is the trademark of Vietnamese cooking and is served as a dressing on almost all foods, including pork, fish, and vegetables. Noodles are almost as popular. One favorite noodle soup, called *pho*, is often eaten for breakfast. Usually, a heaping bowl of rice or noodles is served with many side dishes made of all kinds of vegetables, meats, and sauces. Because Vietnam borders the sea, dishes often include shrimp, eel, fish, and octopus. *Spring rolls* (fried rolls made from thin rice paper stuffed with vegetables and meat) are a popular snack, while *nuoc chanh* (fresh lemonade) is a common drink.



Schools

Adult Literacy: 93%

Kids go to school six days a week because Vietnamese feel a good education is important. Many also go to private tutoring sessions on Sundays. Schools are crowded, so many have morning and afternoon shifts. In Vietnamese schools, gongs ring instead of bells to indicate class is out. The school day is only about four hours long, while the school year lasts from September to May. Some kids drop out early because they can't afford the fees or they are needed to help on the farm. Children in the countryside often don't have as many supplies as kids in the city.



Life as a Kid

Most kids live on small farms. They help their parents grow rice, keep animals, and take care of younger siblings. On the first and middle days of each month, families put fruit and/or flowers on a small altar in the home. This offering is for their ancestors. They also burn incense and offer prayers to their ancestors for support and good luck. Kids play with cousins and friends as often as they can, especially in the evening or on weekends. Most grandparents live with one of their adult children and that child's family. The grandparents often look after the kids while both parents are at work.



Society

Government

Capital: Hanoi

Head of State: Pres. Truong Tan Sang

Head of Government: PM Nguyen Tan Dung

The three most powerful leaders—the president, the prime minister, and the secretary-general—all must belong to the Communist Party. They, along with a number of other people, make up what's called the *Politburo* (Government Council). This group runs the country. Vietnam also has a 500-seat *legislature* (lawmaking body) called the *Quoc Hoi* (National Assembly). It's not as powerful as the *Politburo*, but it's slowly gaining more power as Vietnam changes. The Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) is the only legal political party in the country. The voting age is 18.

Money and Economy

Currency: Dong

Although many Vietnamese farm rice, corn, potatoes, coffee, and bananas for a living, more and more people are starting to open their own businesses. Many farmers are also moving to the cities to find jobs in factories. Sadly, though, they often earn a small amount of money for their hard work. It's difficult for some Vietnamese to feed their families. Vietnam *exports* (sells to other countries) rice, coffee, seafood, clothes, and electronics. Oil, food processing, clothing, steel, and paper are important industries today. Since 2003, money has been printed on plastic instead of paper so that the



money will hold up better in the humid climate. Tourism is also increasing, as millions of people from around the world come to visit Vietnam each year.

Getting Around

Not many Vietnamese own cars. In both the cities and the countryside, they ride bicycles or motor scooters or just walk. Buses are really crowded and sometimes are falling apart, but people often take them to get around the cities or to go from one city to another. People also take trains to travel between cities. The war destroyed many roads, but many have been repaired and new ones are being built.



Culture Facts & Contacts

Animal Kingdom

A saying in the United States is that a dog is a man's best friend. In *rural* (countryside) Vietnam, however, a man's best friend would probably be his water buffalo. The buffalo plow fields and carry people and supplies around the villages. Usually, farms also include ducks and chickens, which are raised for their eggs and for their meat. Wild animals in Vietnam include tigers, black bears, large poisonous snakes, elephants, leopards, and crocodiles.



Learn More

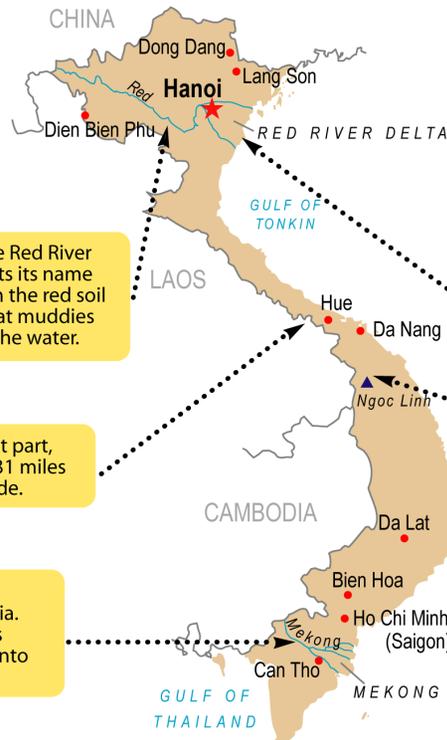
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Vietnam



The Red River gets its name from the red soil that muddies the water.

Ha Long Bay has thousands of small limestone mountains rising out of the water. They look like dragons protecting the beach.

At its narrowest part, Vietnam is only 31 miles (50 km) wide.

Ngoc Linh is the highest peak, at 10,310 feet (3,143 m).

The Mekong River is the longest river in Southeast Asia. It travels about 2,600 miles (4,184 km) before it empties into the South China Sea.

Vietnam is a little larger than New Mexico. It stretches north to south about 1,000 miles (1,609 km).