

Area Codes— The area codes for the provinces of Vietnam are as follows: An Giang 76; Bac Can 281; Bac Giang 240; Bac Ninh 241; Ben Tre 75; Binh Oinh 56; Binh Thuan 62; Can Tho 71; Cao Bang 26; Da Nang 51; Dac Lac 50; Dong Nai 61; Dong Thap 67; Gia Lai 59; Ha Giang 19; Ha Nam 351; Hanoi 4; Ha Tay 34; Ha Tinh 39; Hai Hung 32; Haiphong 31; Ho Chi Minh 8; Hoa Binh 18; Khanh Hoa 58; Kien Giang 77; Kontum 60; Lai Chau 23; Lam Dong 63; Lang Son 25; Lao Cai 20; Long An 72; Minh Hai 78; Nam Ha 35; Nam Dinh 350; Nghe An 38; Ninh Binh 30; Ninh Thuan 68; Phu Yen 57; Quang Binh 52; Quang Nam 510; Quang Ngai 55; Quang Ninh 33; Quang Tri 53; Soc Trang 79; Son La 22; Song Be 65; Binh Duong 650; Binh Phuoc 651; Tay Ninh 66; Thai Binh 36; Thai Nguyen 280; Thanh Hoa 37; Thua Thien Hue 54; Tien Giang 73; Tra Vinh 74; Tuyen Quang 70; Vinh Long 70; Vinh Phu 211; Vung Tau 64; Yen Bai 29.

ATM Networks— ATM service compatible with the major networks is available only in urban areas or popular tourist towns. The towns of Dalat, Danang, Haiphong, Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Hoi An, Hue, Nha Trang, and Vinh have reliable service. Look for Vietcombank outlets or ask at your hotel front desk. The large hotels in major cities sometimes have ATM service in their lobby areas, but in most parts, you'll have to find a bank.

Business Hours— Vendors and restaurants tend to be all-day operations, opening at about 8am and closing at 9 or 10pm. People are up and about very early in the morning in Vietnam — in fact, some towns still follow the old socialist bell system over outdoor speakers that start with waking bells at 5am, exercise regimen at 5:30, siesta bell at 11am, return-to-work bell at 1pm, finish-work bell at 5pm and the news piped in at 6pm (this mostly in remote areas). Note that locals eat an early lunch, usually just after 11am, and some restaurants are all but closed at 1pm. Government offices — including banks, travel agencies, and museums — are usually open from 8 to 11:30am and 2 to 4pm. Streets are often very quiet during the siesta hours of the day when the sun is most merciless. Restaurants usually have last orders at 9:30 or 10pm, and, with the few exceptions of city clubs, bars are rarely open much past midnight.

Crime— Anonymous violent crime is not common in Vietnam, but petty thievery, especially against tourists, is a risk. Pickpocketing is rampant, and Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC), in particular, has a special brand of drive-by purse snatchings via motorbike. Don't wear flashy jewelry or leave valuables in your hotel room, especially in smaller hotels. There are small-time rackets perpetrated against tourists by taxi and cyclo drivers, usually in the form of a dispute on the agreed-upon price after you arrive at your destination. Simply agree on a price by writing it down first, and always smile and demand change; it will eventually appear despite claims that it is impossible (hotel front desks are your best help in such situations). Also stay with established taxi companies or one recommended by a larger hotel as many small operators have rigged meters. Do not mess around with drugs in Vietnam. Even seemingly innocent offers of marijuana are often followed by a drug bust led by the very friendly cat who sold you the bag. Certainly not worth it.

Doctors & Dentists Vietnamese healthcare is not yet up to Western standards. However, there are competent medical clinics in Hanoi and Saigon with international, English-speaking doctors. The same clinics have dentists. If your problem is serious,

try your best to get to either one of these cities as quickly as possible. The clinics can arrange emergency evacuation. If the problem is minor, ask your hotel to help you contact a Vietnamese doctor. He or she will probably speak some English, and pharmacies throughout the country are surprisingly well stocked. Check the products carefully for authenticity and expiration dates. The Vietnamese are big believers in prescription drugs (without prescriptions), although there are still some folk remedies around.

Driving Rules— On streets that look like chaos incarnate, very exacting rules do apply that keep everyone from running each other off the road. It is highly recommended (and quite affordable) to hire a driver to get around.

Drug Laws— Possessing drugs can mean a jail sentence, and selling them or possessing quantities in excess of 300 grams means a death sentence. Cyclo drivers are likely to offer if you look game, but they're also the ones most likely to turn you in for a small fee. Don't take chances.

Drugstores— Vietnamese pharmacists sometimes act as front-line doctors and will listen to your ills and prescribe right across the counter, anything from a simple salve to antibiotics. Note that drugs are often generic copies and it is unlikely that you'll find the brands, or quality, of prescriptions from home.

Electricity— Vietnam's electricity carries 220 volts, so if you're coming from the U.S., bring a converter and adapter for electronics. Plugs have either two round prongs or two flat prongs. If you're toting a laptop, bring a surge protector. Big hotels will have all these implements.

Embassies— Embassies for [Vietnam visa](#) are located in Hanoi at the following addresses: United States, 7 Lang Ha St., Ba Dinh District (tel. 024/843-1500); Canada, 31 Hung Vuong St., Ba Dinh District (tel. 024/823-5500); Australia, 8 Dao Tan, Van Phuc Compound, Ba Dinh District (tel. 024/831-7755); New Zealand, 32 Hang Bai St., Hoan Kiem District (tel. 024/824-1481); United Kingdom, 31 Hai Ba Trung St., Fourth Floor, Hoan Kiem District (tel. 024/825-2510). Tourists can apply [Vietnam visa on arrival](#) easily online or through a travel agency and then get visa at arrival airports.

Emergencies— Nationwide emergency numbers are as follows: For police, dial tel. 113; for fire, dial tel. 114; and for ambulance, dial tel. 115. Operators speak Vietnamese only.

Etiquette & Customs— Vietnamese are very friendly and welcoming to foreign visitors. Attempts to speak Vietnamese are greeted warmly, and warm hospitality is the rule — often a bit overwhelming at first. Say “yes” to invites where appropriate and you'll gain a unique view of Vietnamese culture. “Hey, You! You!” You'll hear this wherever you go in Vietnam, an imploring catcall, usually to sell you a cyclo or motorbike ride. It sounds incredibly rude, but know that this is how Vietnamese people greet each other. “You!” is just a direct translation of the honorific “you” in Vietnamese (“*Em*” for someone younger than you; “*Anh*” for someone slightly older; “*Chi*” for a middle-age lady; “*Ba*” for an older lady; and “*Ong*”

for an older man), which is usually followed by “*Oi*” to get someone’s attention. Want to get a waitress’s attention? Say, “*Em oi!*” very loudly. Remember that local people, particularly kids, are very curious, but in honesty very afraid of foreign visitors, and the shouts are a way to connect with you, however off-putting they might seem.

To call Vietnam: If you’re calling Vietnam from the United States:

1. Dial the international access code: 011.
2. Dial the country code: 84.
3. *Important Note:* City codes are listed in this book with a “0” in front of them as is required when dialing domestically. Do not dial the city code’s prefix of “0” when dialing from abroad. When dialing a number (as listed in this guide), for example tel. 04/555-5555, from abroad, you dial as follows: tel. 011 (for international), + 84 (for Vietnam), + 4 (the city code minus the “0”) + 555-5555. Looks like tel. 011-84-4-555-5555.

To make international calls: To make international calls from Vietnam, first dial 00 and then the country code (U.S. or Canada 1, U.K. 44, Ireland 353, Australia 61, New Zealand 64). Next you dial the area code and number. For example, if you wanted to call the British Embassy in Washington, D.C., you would dial 00-1-202-588-7800.

For directory assistance: Dial tel. **116** if you’re looking for a number inside the country.

For operator assistance: If you need operator assistance in making a call, dial tel. **110**.

Toll-free numbers: Calling a 1-800 number in the States from Vietnam is not toll-free. In fact, it costs the same as an overseas call.

Time Zone— Vietnam is 7 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time. There’s no daylight-saving time in Vietnam, meaning that in the summer months, it’s 12 hours ahead of the U.S. East Coast, in winter months 11 hours ahead; it’s 14 or 15 hours ahead of the U.S. West Coast, and 3 or 4 hours ahead of Sydney, Australia.

Tipping— Tipping is common in Hanoi and in Saigon. In a top-end hotel, feel free to tip bellhops anywhere from 10,000 VND to 15,000 VND (about \$1). Most upscale restaurants throughout the country now add a service surcharge of 5% to 10%. If they don’t, or if the service is good, you might want to leave another 5%. Taxi drivers will be pleased if you round up the bill (again, mainly in the big cities). Use your discretion for tour guides and others who have been particularly helpful. Contrary to rumor, boxes of cigarettes as tips don’t go over well. The recipient will say regretfully, “I don’t smoke,” when what he really means is “Show me the money.” Exceptions to this are chauffeurs or minibus drivers.

Useful Phone Numbers— U.S. Department of State Travel Advisory tel. 202/647-5225 (manned 24 hr.); U.S. Passport Agency tel. 202/647-0518; U.S. Centers for Disease Control International Traveler’s Hotline tel. 404/332-4559; Vietnam Embassy in the U.S. tel. 202/861-0737; Vietnam Embassy in Canada tel. 613/236-

0772; Vietnam Embassy in the U.K. tel. 0171/937-1912; Vietnam Embassy in Australia tel. 2/6286-6059.

Water– Water is not potable in Vietnam. Outside of top-end hotels and restaurants, drink only beverages without ice, unless the establishment promises that it manufactures its own ice from clean water. Bottled mineral water, particularly the reputable La Vie and “A&B” brands, is everywhere. Counterfeits are a problem, so make sure you’re buying the real thing, with an unbroken seal. Beware of big typos; “La Vile” water speaks for itself.