

Introduction to VIETNAM

Country name: Socialist Republic of Vietnam

Capital: Hanoi

Geographical location: (main land)

Longitude: from 102°09' to 109°30' East

Latitude: from 8°10' to 23°24' North



Mainland area: 331,690 km²

Distance (air way) between the Northernmost point and the Southernmost point: 1,650 km

Distance East-West at max: 600 km (Northern), 400 km (Southern); at min: 50 km (Quảng Bình, Central Part)

Population: more than 80 millions (2002) in which Age structure is female 51%, male 49%.

Administrative divisions: 64 provinces and municipalities (Hanoi, Hồ Chí Minh City, Hải Phòng, Đà Nẵng).

Terrain:

+ Mountains, hills: Mountains and highland hold 3/4 of the total area. Mountain system extends from the Northwest border to the eastern side of the South, 1,400 km in total length.

The highest point: Fan Si Pan 3,143 m.

+ Deltas:

Red River Delta: 15,000 km².

Cửu Long River Delta: 40,000 km².

+ Main rivers: total length of all rivers in Vietnam is 41,000 km with total flow is nearly 300 billions m³ of water, and 3,100 km of canals.

Red River's length is 1,149 km in which 510 km is on Vietnam territory.

Mekong (Cửu Long) River's length is 4,220 km in which 220 km is on Vietnam territory.

Climate: Vietnam is located in the tropical and temperate zone characterized by high temperature and humidity all year round, especially in rainy season.

+ Temperature:

+ The average rainfall each year:

Hanoi: 1,763 mm.

Huế: 2,867 mm.

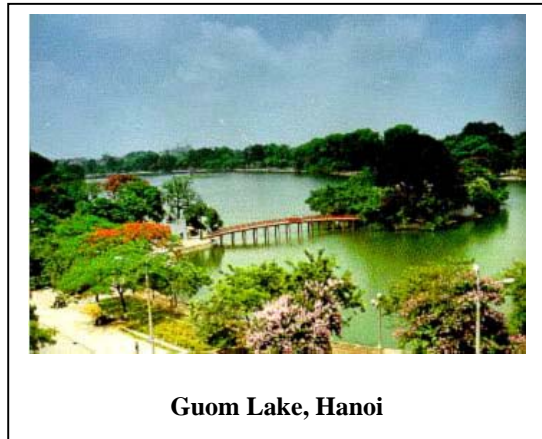
Hồ Chí Minh City: 1,910 mm.

+ The average air humidity is over 80%, even 90% in rainy season and in drizzly weather.

Transportation:

+ Roadways: 86,327 km (1995); main distance (overland):

* Hanoi-Hồ Chí Minh City: 1,738 km



Guom Lake, Hanoi

* Hanoi-Điện Biên Phủ: 474 km

* Hanoi-Hải Phòng: 102 km

* Hanoi-Huế: 654 km

+ Railways: 3,219 km (1995), includes 5 lines.

+ Air way: The Vietnam Airlines has 17 international routes and 16 domestic routes. Large airports are: Nội Bài (Hanoi), Tân Sơn Nhất (HCM City) , Đà Nẵng, Phú Bài (Huế), Cát Bi (Hải Phòng), Điện Biên (Lai Châu), Vinh (Nghệ An), Nha Trang, Cần Thơ.

+ Main ports: Hòn Gai, Hải Phòng, Đà Nẵng, Qui Nhơn, Cam Ranh, Vũng Tàu, Sài Gòn.

Lying on the eastern part of the Indochinese peninsula, Vietnam is a strip of land shaped like the letter "S". China borders it to the north, Laos and Cambodia to the west, the Eastern Sea to the east and the Pacific Ocean to the east and south.

Mountains and hills cover two thirds of the mainland. Areas above 500m in altitude account for 70 percent of the mainland. The most grandiose and highest mountain ranges lie in the west and northwest of the country.

Việt Nam's territorial waters make around 1,000,000 km², with over 3,000 km long coastline lines. Việt Nam lies along the Indochinese Peninsula and circles the old southeastern part of the Asian continent with its back turned to the Eastern Sea (Pacific Ocean). These mountain and sea areas boast a diversity and richness in natural resources as well as minerals.

In the South West area of Central Vietnam, there is a huge "mountain-highland" at over 1,000m high, covered by basalt soil ideal for growing tropical and temperate industrial crops (rubber, tea, coffee and cacao).

Along the coastline, from the North to the South, Vietnam has lots of beautiful beaches, especially Hạ Long Bay with more than 3,000 islands, is listed by UNESCO as a World Natural Heritage site.

Jungles along the country are home to rare, precious animals and plants. In addition, there are some sub-climate regions in Viet Nam including regions with temperate climate and unique sight-seeing, such as Sa Pa (Lao Cai Province), Da Lat (Lam Dong province) and plenty of lakes, streams, falls and extraordinary caves.

The mineral coal such as mines, bauxite and precious metal are mainly in the North and the Central; on the offshore and coastline we have lots of oil field and natural gas. In the rivers, lakes and territorial waters we have variety of fishes, shrimps and aqua products.

Guidance to Travelers

Visa

Visa exemption:

- Not more than 30 days: for citizens of Thailand, Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Laos.
- Not more than 15 days: for citizens of Japan, South Korea, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland.
- Not more than 14 days: It will be applied when the multilateral visa -free travel agreement takes force for citizens of Cambodia, Brunei, and Myanmar travel within the Asean region.

Others who want to enter Vietnam must be provided with a visa.

- Tourist visa is valid in 30 days.
- Visa is issued at the Vietnamese diplomatic offices or consulates in foreign countries. Visa is possibly issued at the border gates to those who have written invitations by a Vietnamese competent agencies or tourists in the tours organized by Vietnamese international travel companies.
- Application files for visa: the entrance application (printed form) must be accurate and full-information; two 4x6 photos; passport and fee for the visa issuance.

Customs Information:

Customs procedures in Vietnam are quick and simple. To enter and exit Vietnam, visitors are required to fulfill the arrival - departure declaration

1.- Passengers are given duty free allowance for not more than 1.5 liters of liquor with above 22 degrees of concentration of alcohol and 2 liters of liquor below 22 degrees of concentration of alcohol; 400 cigarettes; 100 cigars; 500 gram of raw tobacco.

- Other items which are allowed in accompanying baggage are duty free with value not over VND 5,000,000.

- Passengers bringing goods exceeding the amount as above stated are required to fill in the declaration form No.HQ/2002-PMD and pay duty(ies) according to Vietnamese laws.

2. Passengers whose goods are not subject to customs declaration on page 4, 5 (For customs declaration) do not have to declare.

***Goods prohibited to import:** weapons, ammunition, explosives, military technical equipment, drugs, toxic chemicals, debauched and reactionary products, firecrackers of all kinds, toys with negative impacts on the dignity education, social security and safety, cigarettes beyond the stipulated quantity, etc.

***Goods prohibited to export:** weapons, ammunition, explosives, military technical equipment, antiques, drugs, toxic chemicals, wild animals, rare and precious animals and plants, documents related to the national security, etc.

Currency:

Vietnamese dong (VND) is the official currency in Vietnam.

- Paper notes include: VND 500,000; 200,000; 100,000; 50,000; 20,000; 10,000; 5,000; 2,000; 1,000; 500; 200 and 100. Coins include VND 5,000; 2,000; 1,000; 500 and 200.

Cheques with value as Vietnamese dong include: VND 1,000,000 and 500,000.

- Foreign currencies and tourist cheques can be exchanged into Vietnamese dong at banks or foreign exchange agencies.
- Credit cards are popularly used, especially in cities and big tourist centers.

Vietnamese dong can be changed into foreign currencies at the airport.

Exchange rate of some foreign currencies (*source: Bank for Foreign Trade of Vietnam (Vietcombank) as of 10/11/2008*).

Code	Currency	Rate (VND)
AUD	Australian Dollar	11542
CAD	Canadian Dollar	14184
CHF	Swiss France	14257
EUR	Euro	21623
GBP	British Pound	26492
HKD	Hong Kong Dollar	2153
JPY	Japanese Yen	168
SGD	Singapore Dollar	11312
USD	US Dollar	16930

Language:

- Vietnamese is the official language.
- The most widely spoke languages: English, Chinese, French and Russian (more or less on that order).

Food, fruit and drink

Eating while in Vietnam is a delight for visitors, because many of the local specialties come straight from the imperial kitchens that served the emperors of Vietnam. The diversity of dining options is tremendous, ranging from cheap street side noodle stalls to banquets of freshly caught seafood.

Seasonal fruits such as dragon fruit, rambutans and longans, can be enjoyed, though all fruits and vegetables should be cooked or peeled before eaten. Drinking water or ice is generally not recommended, even in the cities. Bottled water is cheap and readily available, so it is recommended not to take the risk. Vietnam is a beer culture, and there are plenty of local as well as imported brands. 333, Carlsberg, Hanoi, Tiger, Saigon, La Rue, San Miguel and Heineken are some common brands.

Health

No vaccinations are officially required to visit Vietnam, but local medical authorities recommend protection against polio, diphtheria, typhoid, tetanus, hepatitis A and B, and Japanese encephalitis. For travellers spending much time in the countryside, anti-malaria pills are recommended and you should take precautions not to get bitten. Repellents and mosquito nets are necessary.

All travellers are advised to bring any prescription medications (in the original containers) currently required. Travellers should pack a small medical kit, which includes sunscreen, insect repellent, diarrhea medication, ibuprofen or aspirin and antibacterial ointments. For those who wear eyeglasses, it is recommended that an extra pair be taken, as the quality of local replacement services varies.

Medical care facilities are available in the largest cities, but are limited outside of Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. It's wise for each traveller to consult with each insurance company to see whether coverage is included for Vietnam, because care is expensive, and often requires evacuation to nearby countries.

Shopping

Bargaining is customary at roadside stalls and at open markets.

The following items are preferred by foreign travellers:

- Carved wooden furniture, fine lacquerware (these can be shipped home upon request).
- Traditional Vietnamese hand-made silk dresses, kimonos, embroideries, etc.
- Simulated antiques, fine ceramics, old watches or Zippo lighters, etc.
- Copies of famous artist paintings

Security and advice

Vietnam is by and large a very safe country; violent crime is extremely rare. Unfortunately you cannot expect hospitality at every turn and you may experience problems with petty theft and pick pockets.

- As with any big city, do not bring items of value as you go shopping or sightseeing on city streets.
- It is customary to give alms to beggars and to buy souvenirs from street vendors.
- Foreign currencies should be exchanged at banks, or authorized exchange facilities. Do not exchange money in the street.
- Store your cash, credit cards, airline tickets and other valuables in a safe place. Most 4-star hotels have in-room safes, otherwise ask the reception to keep your valuable things in their deposit facility.
- Don't wear singlets, shorts, dresses or skirts, or tops with low-neck lines and bare shoulders to Temples and Pagodas. To do this is considered extremely rude and offensive.
- Do not try to take photographs of military installations or anything to do with the military. This can be seen as a breach of national security. Never take video cameras into the ethnic minority villages. They are considered to be too intrusive by the local people.
- It is advisable NOT to take pedicabs or "honda-om" on your own.

Time zone: Hours in Vietnam: GMT + 7

Electricity and water supply

- Electric power: 220V, frequency: 50 Hz
- Cities, towns and townships are supplied with fresh sterilized water.

Hotel and restaurant

- Accommodation is various from one star to five star hotels that can meet the diverse demands of visitors at different levels.
- Restaurants in the major towns and cities can satisfy tourists' gastronomic demands. Some specialize in European, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean foods, so clients can always find some food that suits their fancy. In popular tourist centers, special restaurants are available for travellers who are vegetarian, on diet or religious.

Transportation

Airports

- International airports: Noi Bai (Hanoi), Tan Son Nhat (Ho Chi Minh City) and Da Nang (Da Nang).
- Domestic airports: Gia Lam (Hanoi), Cat Bi (Hai Phong), Dien Bien Phu (Dien Bien), Na San (Son La), Vinh (Nghe An), Phu Bai (Hue), Pleiku (Gia Lai), Buon Ma Thuot (Dak Lak), Lien Khuong (Da Lat), Phu Cat (Quy Nhon), Tuy Hoa (Phu Yen), Cam Ranh (Khanh Hoa), Con Son (Ba Ria-Vung Tau), Phu Quoc, Rach Gia (Kien Giang), Camau (Camau).

Domestic flights

- From Hanoi: to Ho Chi Minh City, Hue, Da Nang, Cam Ranh, Da Lat, Na San, Dien Bien Phu and vice versa.
- From Ho Chi Minh City: to Hanoi, Hai Phong, Hue, Da Nang, Cam Ranh, Da Lat, Buon Ma Thuot, Pleiku, Vinh, Tuy Hoa, Quy Nhon, Phu Quoc, Rach Gia and vice versa.

International flights

- To Vientiane, Phnom Penh, Siem Reap, Bangkok, Beijing, Guangzhou, Kaoshiung, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Taipei, Seoul, Pusan, Tokyo, Osaka, Fukuka, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Manila, Singapore, Sydney, Melbourne, Dubai, Frankfurt, Paris, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Moscow.

Airport charge: included in air-ticket fare

Hanoi-Noi Bai motor-vehicles

- Bus: VND 3,000/person: Kim Ma-Noi Bai (No 07) and Long Bien-Noi Bai (No 17)
- Vietnam Airlines mini bus, No. 1 Quang Trung, fare: VND 25,000/person/turn
- Taxi: A taxi ride from Noi Bai Airport (Ha Noi) to downtown Ha Noi costs about VND 250,000/turn.

Ho Chi Minh City's center-Tan Son Nhat motor-vehicles

- Bus: VND 3,000/person: Ben Thanh-Tan Son Nhat (No 154)
- Taxi: A taxi ride from Tan Son Nhat Airport (Ho Chi Minh City) to downtown Ho Chi Minh City costs about VND 80,000

Da Nang City's center-Da Nang Airport

- Taxi: VND 40,000/turn

Land road

- From Laos through the border gates of Lao Bao (Quang Tri), Cau Treo (Ha Tinh)
- From Cambodia through the border gates of Moc Bai and Xa Mat (Tay Ninh), Tinh Bien (An Giang)
- From China through the border gates of Huu Nghi Quan (Lang Son), Ha Khau (Lao Cai)

Railway

Vietnam has 5 railway lines: Hanoi-Ho Chi Minh City (Thong Nhat); Hanoi-Hai Phong; Hanoi-Thai Nguyen; Hanoi-Lang Son and Hanoi-Lao Cai.

In Hanoi

- Hanoi-Vinh: via Phu Ly, Nam Dinh, Ninh Binh, Thanh Hoa, Vinh. Hanoi Railway Station, 120 Le Duan, Tel. 9423697/9423949
- Thong Nhat (Reunification) Express Train (Hanoi-Ho Chi Minh City) runs through many tourism centers such as Nam Dinh, Thanh Hoa, Vinh, Hue, Da Nang, Quy Nhon, Nha Trang, and Ho Chi Minh City. You should buy ticket two or three days in advance (paid in Vietnamese dong only). Journeys: 29 hours, 30 hours, 33 hours. Soft seats; 4-6 beds/room with or without air-conditioners. Hanoi Railway Station, 120 Le Duan, Tel. 9423697/9423949.
- Hanoi to other provinces: Haiphong, Lang Son, Lao Cai, Thai Nguyen, Halong. Tickets bought at 120 Le Duan. Check-in and out at the Hanoi Station B, Tran Quy Cap Road. For the routes to Haiphong, Yen Bai, Thai Nguyen, also check-in and out at Long Bien Station.
- Hanoi-Beijing International Train via Dong Dang (Lang Son): twice a week on Tuesday and Friday. For the group of 6 people and above, leaving at the same station, ticket price will be reduced by 25%. Hanoi Railway Station, 120 Le Duan, Tel. 9423697/9423949

In Ho Chi Minh City

- Thong Nhat Train: via Nha Trang, Quy Nhon, Da Nang, Hue, Vinh, Thanh Hoa, Nam Dinh and Hanoi. Saigon Railway Station, 1 Nguyen Thong, Tel. 8436528/8466091

Waterways

The traditional means of transport in remote areas is waterways. Ship of all types together with the river and the wharf, are familiar in the Vietnamese geological and humanitarian images. So if you want to make trips to such places like Mekong Delta, be prepared to go by this means.

Tourists can come to Vietnam by sea routes to the ports: Ha Long, Danang, Nha Trang, and Ho Chi Minh City.

- Daily ships to islands: Cat Ba, Con Dao, Phu Quoc
- Haiphong - Ha Long, Mong Cai routes, daily
- From Hanoi, there are ships to some provinces in the Red and Thai Binh River Delta
- Daily speed boats from Ho Chi Minh City to Vung Tau, Can Tho, Rach Gia
- In some provinces in the Mekong Delta, boats can navigate along the Mekong River.

Traffic services

- Taxis: Taxis with meters are available in big cities and in many provinces: 24/24h. Most metered taxi drivers speak little English.
- Pedicabs: in Hanoi, Haiphong, Hue, Danang, Khanh Hoa, Ho Chi Minh City, Cantho, etc. VND 2,000/Km
- Motor-taxis (xe om): price similar to pedicabs
- Bicycles: for rent, daily or hourly
- Motorbikes: for rent, VND 80,000-120,000/day

- Automobiles: tourist cars for hire, with or without drivers.

Telephone, Fax, Internet, Email

- Country code: Vietnam : 84
- Area Code:

Province/City	Area code
Hanoi	4
Ho Chi Minh city	8
Hai Phong	31
Hue	54
Da Nang	511
Quang Nam (Hoi An)	510
Quang Ninh (Ha Long Bay)	33
...	...

- Phone calls or fax to foreign countries can be directly made at post offices or hotels.
- As effective from 05/Oct/2008, fixed phone numbers in 55 provinces and cities will be prefixed by "3", announced the Viet Nam Post and Telecommunications Group, the area codes are not changed. For example, number (84-4) 836 3485 of Hanoi, Vietnam is changed to (84-4) **3**836 3485.
- Internet and emails are popular in almost provinces and cities.
- Mobile network is used in different forms: subscribe, monthly- or daily-payment in advance.
- Main mobile phone service providers:
 - GSM: Vinaphone, Mobiphone, Viettel,
 - CDMA: S-Fone

Working hours

- Governmental agencies work 8 hours/day from 7.30am to 4.30pm (excluding one-hour lunch). Saturday and Sunday are close.
- Banks are open from 7.30 or 8.00 to 11.30am and from 1.00pm to 4.00pm. Saturday and Sunday are close.
- Shops are open from 8.00am or 8.30 to 8pm or 9pm

Credit Cards and Travellers Cheques

Visa, Amex, JCB and Mastercard are accepted at some banks and most large hotels. You will seldom be able to shop or pay in restaurants with credit cards. Travellers cheques, preferably in US dollars, can be easily cashed at banks, hotels and some travel agents.

ATM

If your bank at home is part of the Plus or Star systems, you can withdraw from your ATM account at home in either dong or Dollars. You can also get a cash advance on your Visa card at the Hong Kong Bank office in Hanoi or through the ANZ Bank's offices in HCMC and Hanoi.

Tipping

With the advent of tourism, the practice of tipping is just beginning in Vietnam. Tip sparingly and only where it is deserved. Ten percent will suffice. It is increasingly common to tip guides, drivers, waiters and masseurs.

Television and Radio

Vietnam TV broadcasts three channels throughout the country; satellite channels such as CNN are available in most hotels catering to foreigners. Voice of Vietnam Radio broadcasts throughout the country; all provinces and cities have their own radio stations as well.

More of VIETNAM

History

Vietnam is located in a region considered a cradle of mankind, one of the earliest agricultural centres practicing wet rice farming, where the stone and metallurgical revolutions took place. On the basis of socio-economic development in the time of the Đông Sơn culture and given the struggle with nature and against aggression, Văn Lang State, the first State in Vietnam was established in the 7th century B.C. Thanks to their hard work and creativeness, Văn Lang (and then Âu Lạc) residents created a civilization that influenced the entire Southeast Asian region. Together with the formation of the first State in Vietnam's history was the evolution of a diverse economy and advanced culture known as the Red River civilization (or Dong Son civilization) symbolized by Đông Sơn bronze drum, a heritage reflecting the quintessence of the lifestyle, traditions and culture of the ancient Vietnamese.

In the cause of national building, the Vietnamese also had to cope with the foreign aggression. During 12 centuries from the resistance against the Qin dynasty in the 3rd century B.C until late 20th century, the Vietnamese had to endure hundreds of wars and uprisings against foreign aggression. The tactic, as stated in the Proclamation of Victory over the Wu “*Bình Ngô Đại Cáo*,”... *Relying on surprises, we placed our weak forces before much stronger ones; In skillful ambushes, our few troops destroyed large units,*” has become the rule of thumb for the wars to safeguard the Fatherland of the Vietnamese.

Since the 2nd century B.C, Vietnam had been dominated by different Chinese dynasties for more than a thousand years. During this period, the existence of the nation had been challenged which helped give rise to the spirit of indomitability and staunchness of the Vietnamese in the struggle to maintain the nation's vitality, preserve and build on the quintessence of its culture and the determination to gain national independence.

Despite many vicissitudes, from Văn Lang, Âu Lạc to Vạn Xuân, Đại Cồ Việt and Đại Việt, the Vietnamese nation continued to develop in all fields, reflecting its strong vitality and unceasing evolution.

A typical feature of Vietnamese culture is the village culture. It is Vietnamese villages that have nurtured and fostered the quintessence of the traditional culture, the spirit of unity among the Vietnamese in the struggle against the domination of the North and the policy of assimilation of Northern dynasties to gain national independence, maintaining the nation's traditions and cultures.

The Bạch Đằng victory in 938 opened up a new era in Vietnam's history – the era of development of an independent feudal state, national construction and defense. As a result, the centralized-administration state was established under the Ngô (938-965), Đinh (969-979) and earlier Le (980 - 1009) dynasties.

Then, Vietnam entered the period of renaissance and development under the Lý (1009-1226), Trần (1226-1400), Ho (1400-1407) and Le So (1428-1527) dynasties. Dai Viet, the name of the country under the Ly-Tran-Le So dynasties, was known as a prosperous country in Asia. This period marked the golden age of Vietnam's history. Economically, this period saw the development of agriculture, irrigation (with the construction of the Red River dike) and the formation of traditional handicrafts. In terms of religion, Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism were considered the three co-existing official religions exerting great influence on people's life.

"Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom"

One important achievement in the Ly-Tran dynasties was the introduction of Nom scripts, Vietnam's own writing system based on the reform of Chinese Han scripts. In addition, this period also marked the splendid development of education, science, culture, art, history and law etc (such as the establishment of Van Mieu Quoc Tu Giam– the first university

of Vietnam, the introduction of Hong Duc Code and Complete History of Dai Viet etc). This period was called the Civilized Age of Dai Viet. Thang Long (the old name of Ha Noi capital) was officially recognized as the imperial city of Dai Viet according to the Proclamation on the transfer of the capital to Hanoi in 1010 by Ly Thai To.

From the 16th century, the backwardness and weakness of the feudal regime under Confucius ideology were revealed, feudalism fell into a decline. While many nation states in Europe were moving to capitalism, Dai Viet was bogged down in internal wars and divisions, which heavily impeded the country's evolution despite certain developments in the economy and culture, the establishment of towns and ports and the growth of trade and exchanges between the 16th and 18th century.

In the 19th century, Western capitalist countries entered the period of imperialism and colonialism. Through missionaries and trade, the French gradually dominated Vietnam. For the first time in history, the Vietnamese nation had to cope with the invasion of a Western country. In that context, some Vietnamese intellectuals were aware of the need to carry out reforms in an effort to bring the country out of stagnation and save national independence. Many plans of reform were proposed, yet rejected by the Nguyen dynasty. Subsequently, the country was driven into backwardness and deadlock. Vietnam became a semi-feudal colony for nearly 100 years from 1858 to 1945.

After setting up the colonist rule in Vietnam, the French colonialists quickly began large-scale exploitation in the country. *Capitalist production relations infiltrated in Vietnam, stimulating the formation and evolution of internal capitalist factors, and as a result, narrowing and breaking up the existing feudal production relations. Vietnam's economy thus moved from a backward and self-sufficient economy to a colonized one totally controlled by the French capitalists.* A new social structure evolved along the line of capitalism, and subsequently the division between landlords and farmers was deepened while new forces, such as the working class, the bourgeoisies and petit bourgeoisies gradually came into being. Eventually, the struggle against the French colonialists was initiated by two forces i.e. the bourgeoisies (represented by Vietnam Quoc Dan Dang and Yen Bai revolt in early 1930) and the proletarians led by the Communist Party of Vietnam.

The formation of the Communist Party of Vietnam marked the prevailing strength of the working class and revolutionary movements led by the proletarians. In August 1945, under the leadership of the Communist Party headed by Nguyen Ai Quoc (later known as President Ho Chi Minh), the Vietnamese people and the Armed Propaganda Unit for National Liberation (now the People's Army) successfully launched a general uprising to seize power. With the Proclamation of Independence on 2nd September 1945, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam came into being."

The globe-shaking victory of Dien Bien Phu (May 1954) and the Geneva Accord (July 1954) put an end to the war of resistance against the French colonialists, opening up a new era of independence and freedom for the Vietnamese nation in which North Vietnam embarked upon the transitional period towards socialism. According to the Geneva Agreement, South Vietnam was under the temporary control of the French and the Americans in the run-up to the general elections. Nevertheless, the general elections could never be held due to the interference of the United States. The Republic of South Vietnam headed by Ngo Dinh Diem was established by the United States. Vietnam continued to be divided for more than 20 years.

Between 1954 and 1975, Vietnam had to fight another war for national liberation and unification. With untold hardships, the war came to a successful end following the victory of the historic Ho Chi Minh Operation in 1975. Since then, the unified Vietnam has ushered into a new era of peace, unification and national construction.

However, in the first ten years of this period, many socio-economic targets were not achieved due to both internal and external reasons. Vietnam's economy fell into crisis and stagnation and people's lives were difficult.

At the 6th Congress of the Communist Party in 1986, the *Doi Moi* (reform) policy was launched with the focus on economic reform. This marked an important milestone in the new stage of

development of the Vietnamese nation. The *Doi Moi* policy was consistently reaffirmed throughout the later Party Congresses. With the implementation of four five-year socio-economic development plans, Vietnam, from a food importing country, has become the second largest rice exporter in the world. Vietnam also exports a lot of other commodities with well-known brands. The economy attained high growth rate in the late 20th century and the early years of the 21st century, people's lives have been significantly improved; social policy received greater attention, the legal system has become increasingly complete and social management based on the rule of law put into place.

Looking back on the formation and development of the Vietnamese nation, we can see that patriotism, self-reliance, tradition of unity and the willpower to fight for the righteous cause of the nation are the most important features and the moral standards of the Vietnamese. The tradition of industriousness, creativeness and patience originated from the life full of hardship of the Vietnamese people. The need to stand united to cope with difficulties and challenges has created close bonds between the people and the nature and among the people in the family and in the community in the family-village-nation relations. Throughout history, the Vietnamese people have been characterized by the traditions of mutual assistance, ethic-based lifestyle, benevolence, one-mindedness and sharing of hardships in needy times, flexible ways of behaviour, the tradition of eagerness to learn, respect for righteousness and tolerance. These are the powerful and endless endogenous strengths for the Vietnamese nation to embark on the cause of national construction towards the goals of strong country, prosperous people, just, democratic and advanced society.

Tourism

In 1981, Vietnamese tourism became a member of the World Tourism Organization (WTO). In 1989, it was the member of the Pacific Asia Tourism Association (PATA). With the policy on bringing tourism as an important economic industry of the country's general economic structure, the Vietnamese Government has already approved the general plan of national tourist development. International cooperation, promotion and advertisement on tourism are highlighted. Vietnam has signed 12 tourism cooperation agreements with Southeast Asian nations, China, France, Uzbekistan, Israel and some others in the future. Many Vietnamese tourist enterprises have been participating in PATA, JATA, ASTA and having business relations with 800 business partners from over 50 countries. There are more than 80 international travel companies operating nationwide. Quantity and quality of hotels in several recent years have been considerably improved. In order to meet the increasing demand of visitors, the Vietnamese tourism has already mobilized internal and external resources to develop technical infrastructure, especially hotels and restaurants to serve 8.9 million international visitors and 25 million domestic tourists. Many tourism cooperation projects with foreign partners are still implemented.

World heritage sites



Hạ Long Bay



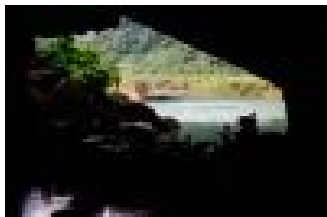
Hue Ancient Capital



Hoi An ancient town



Mỹ Sơn Holy Land



Phong Nha Cave-Kẻ Bàng

Culture

Vietnam has an age-old and special culture that is closely attached to the history of the formation and development of the nation.

Historians have shared a common view that Vietnam has a fairly large cultural community that was formed around the first half of the first millennium B.C. and flourished in the middle of this millennium. That was Dong Son cultural community. This culture attained a degree of development higher than that of others at that time in the region and had its own characteristics but still bore the features of Southeast Asian culture because of the common South Asian racial root (Southern Mongoloid) and the wet rice culture. Different development routes of local cultures in various areas (in the deltas of Red River, Ma River, Ca River and so on) joined together to form the Dong Son culture. This was also the period of the very "embryonic" state of Vietnam in the form of inter- and super-village community, which came into being and existed in order to resist invaders and to build and maintain dykes for rice cultivation. From this pattern of "embryo" state, primitive tribes grew into nations.

The period of Van Lang-Au Lac State: (lasting for nearly 3,000 years up to the end of the first millennium before Christ) in the early Bronze Age with 18 Hung kings was regarded as the first apogee in the history of the Vietnamese culture, which was typified by the Dong Son bronze drum and stable technique of cultivating wet rice.

The post-Chinese domination period was characterized by the two parallel trends of Han assimilation and anti-Han assimilation. The Dai Viet (Great Vietnam) period was the second apogee of the Vietnamese culture. Throughout the time of independent feudal states, milestone by the Ly-Tran and Le dynasties, the Vietnamese culture underwent comprehensive restoration and quick boom, under the tremendous influence of Buddhism and Taoism.

After the chaotic Le-Mac and Trinh-Nguyen period, when the country was separated, and since the Tay Son dynasty reunited the country and territory, the Nguyen dynasty tried to restore Confucian culture. They, however, failed because Confucianism had already been fading and the Western culture started to penetrate into the country. The period up to the end of French domination was marked by a cultural mix brought about by two opposite trends - i.e. of Europeanization and anti-Europeanization; that presented the fight between patriotic culture and colonialist culture.

The period of modern Vietnamese culture has gradually taken shape since the 30's and 40's of last century under the banner of patriotism and Marxism-Leninism. Vietnamese culture, with the increasingly intensive integration into the world modern civilization and the preservation and enhancement of the national identity, promises to reach a new historical peak.

It can be said that there were three layers of culture overlapping each other during the history of Vietnam: local culture, the culture that mixed with those of China and other countries in the region, and the culture that interacted with Western culture. The most prominent feature of the Vietnamese culture is that it was not assimilated by foreign cultures thanks to the strong local cultural foundations. On the contrary, it was able to utilize and localize those from abroad to enrich the national culture.

The Vietnamese national culture emerged from a specific living environment: a tropical country with many rivers and the confluence of great cultures. The natural conditions (temperature, humidity, monsoon, water-flows, wet-rice agriculture) exert a remarkable impact on the material and spiritual life of the nation, the characteristics and psychology of the Vietnamese. However, social and historical conditions exert an extremely great influence on culture and national psychology. Thus, there are still cultural differences between Vietnam and other wet-rice cultures like Thailand, Laos, Indonesia, India and others. Though sharing the same Southeast Asian cultural origin, the Vietnamese culture was transformed and bore East Asian cultural characteristics because of the long Chinese domination and its cultural imposition on Vietnam.

The Vietnamese nation was formed early in the history and often had to carry out wars of resistance against foreign invaders, which created a prominent cultural feature: a patriotism that infiltrated and encompassed every aspect of life. Community factors with primitive origin were amalgamated early in the history and became the foundations for the development of patriotism and national consciousness. Continual wars were the major cause of the vicissitudes of the Vietnamese social development history. All the social and economic structures were often dismantled by wars, so the social development could hardly reach its peak. Also because of the destruction of wars, Vietnam has virtually no gigantic cultural and artistic construction, or if any, they could not have been preserved intact.

Vietnam has 54 ethnic groups living across the country. Each ethnic group has its own cultural identities, thus, the Vietnamese culture has both diversity and unity. Apart from the typical Viet-Muong culture, there are other cultural groups like Tay-Nung, Thai, Cham, Hoa-Ngai, Mon-Khmer, Mong-Dao, and especially the groups in the Central Highlands that still maintain fairly diverse and comprehensive traditions of a purely agricultural society that is closely attached to forests and mountains.

The following is an overview on main culture fields:

1. Philosophy and ideologies

At the start, with primitive and rudimentary cognition of materialism and dialectics, Vietnamese thought was mixed with beliefs. However, originating from agricultural culture that differs from nomadic culture by the appreciation of stillness over movement and closely related to natural

phenomena, the Vietnamese philosophy paid special attention to relations that was typified by doctrine of *yin* and *yang* and the five basic elements (not exactly the same as the Chinese doctrine) and manifested by the moderate lifestyle tending towards harmony.

Afterwards, the influence of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism, that were conciliated and Vietnamized, contributed to the development of the Vietnamese society and culture. Particularly, Zen-Buddhists in the Tran dynasty came up with the interpretation of most philosophical subjects that was set forth by Buddhism (Heart-Buddha, being or not being, life and death) in an original and distinguished way. Although Confucianism flourished afterward, many famous Vietnamese Confucian scholars did not stick blindly to Confucianism and Mencianism, but rather adopted the spirit of Buddhism and Taoism to make their ideology more open, closer to the people and more harmonious with nature.

Under autocratic dynasties, deep feudal ideologies were imposed on farmers and bound women, however, village democracy and primitive community still existed on the basis of self-supplied agriculture. Farmers' thoughts that penetrated deeply into the Vietnamese agricultural society had many positive and typical features of the traditional Vietnamese. Farmers were the core of wars of resistance and uprisings against foreign invaders. Many talented generals, topped by Quang Trung Nguyen Hue - the hero of the common people in the 18th century, came from farmers.

The policy that facilitated agriculture and restrained trade, prevailing in the Nguyen dynasty, blocked the development of city-dweller's consciousness. In the past, the Vietnamese ranked agriculture and education as their first and second priorities of occupations, while having a low opinion of business people. Other trades were regarded as minor ones, including cultural activities.

In the 19th century when Vietnamese feudalism faded and Chinese civilization declined, Western culture started to penetrate our countries, following the colonialists' guns. The working class formed at the start of the 20th century as a result of the colonial exploitation programs. Marxism-Leninism was introduced in Vietnam in the '20s and '30s, combining with patriotism to become a momentum of historical changes, which led the country up to independence, democracy and socialism. The person representing this era was Ho Chi Minh, who was recognized by the international community and UNESCO as Vietnamese hero of national liberation and great man of culture.

The agricultural society is characterized by the village community with many prolonged primitive vestiges that have formed the specific characteristics of the Vietnamese. Those were the thoughts of dualism, a concrete way of thinking that was tilted to emotional experiences rather than rationalism and preferred images to concepts. However, it was also a flexible, adaptable, and conciliatory way of thinking. This was a way of living that highly valued emotional ties and attachment to relatives and the community (because "there would be no home in a lost country" and "the whole village rather than a sole roof would be engulfed by flood"). This was a way of behaving toward conciliatory, equilibrium and relations-based settlement of conflicts and disputes. This way of living could cope accordingly with the situation, which many times in the history was successful in using suppleness to prevail over firmness and weakness to resist strength.

On the scale of spiritual values, the Vietnamese highly appreciate "Benevolence" and closely combined it with "Righteousness" and "Virtues"; no benevolence and righteousness are tantamount to no virtues. Nguyen Trai once described the Vietnamese concept of Benevolence and Righteousness as the opposition to fierce violence, which was enhanced to the foundation for the policy of ruling as well as saving the country. The Vietnamese understood that Loyalty meant being loyal to the nation, which was higher than the loyalty to the ruler, and respected Piety without being so bound with the framework of family. Happiness was also among the top social values; people often make compliments on the happiness of a family rather than wealth and social position.

2. Customs and practices

The Vietnamese gastronomic habit tends towards vegetarianism; rice and vegetables are the main course of the meal that may be diversified by aqua products. Boiling is a special way of cooking of the Vietnamese people. Vietnamese people like a synthetic food processing style that involves many materials and ingredients. Today, although meat and fish are the main dishes of the meal, the Vietnamese do not forget pickled egg-plant.

The Vietnamese preferred to wear light, thin, well-ventilated kind of clothing that originated from plants and was suitable for such a tropical country as Vietnam, with grey, indigo and black colours. Men's clothing changed from loin-cloth with bare upper part of the body to short jackets and Vietnamese traditional trousers (re-designed from Chinese trousers). In the past, women often wore brassieres, skirts and four-piece long dresses that were later modified to the modern *ao dai*. In general, Vietnamese women adorned themselves subtly and secretively in a society where "virtue is more important than appearance". Old-time clothing also paid attention to kerchiefs, hats and belts.

The old-style Vietnamese house was related to the watery environment (stilt-houses with curved roof). Then came thatch-roofed houses with clay walls, which were built mostly from wood and bamboo. This kind of house did not stand too high to avoid strong winds and storms, and more importantly, the house should face to the South direction to be free from hot and cold weathers. The interior of the house was also not so spacious to leave room for the courtyard, pond, and garden. Also, the Vietnamese thought that "spacious home was no better than sufficient food". Sizeable ancient architectures were often built shrouded and in harmony with natural environment.

The traditional means of transport is waterways. Ship of all types together with the river and the wharf, are familiar in the Vietnamese geological and humanitarian images.

Vietnamese customs of weddings, funerals, holidays and rituals all are attached to village community. Marriages not only reflect the lovers' desire but also had to meet the interests of the family lines, the village; thus, the choice for would-be bride or bridegroom was done very carefully, which had to go through many formalities from the plighting ceremony, the official proposal to the bride's family, the wedding to the marriage tie, the ritual of sharing bridal cup of wine, the newly-weds' first visit to the bride's family. Besides, the bride had to pay a fine in order for her to be accepted as a new member of the village. Funeral service is also proceeded very thoroughly to express the grief and see off the deceased into the other world. The family of the deceased does not have to take care of the service by themselves, they are also helped by the neighbors.

Vietnam is the country of festivities which take place all year round, especially in spring when there is little farming work. The major festivities are Lunar New Year, *Nguyen tieu* (15th day of the first lunar month), *Han thuc* (3rd day of the third lunar month), *Doan ngo* (5th day of the fifth lunar month), the Day for Wandering Souls (15th day of the seventh lunar month), and Mid-Autumn Festival. Each region has its own ritual holidays, the most important of which are agricultural rituals (such as the rituals of praying for rain, getting down to the rice field, and new harvest) and handicraft rituals (like the rituals of copper casting, forging, making fire crackers, and boat race). Besides, there are also rituals dedicated to national heroes and religious and cultural services (e.g, Buddhist rituals). Ritual holidays are usually divided into two parts: the service is carried out for blesses and thanksgivings, the holiday is the cultural activities of the community consisting of many folk games and contests.

3. Religions and Beliefs

The Vietnamese folk beliefs since the ancient time consist of belief in fertility, worship of nature and worship of man. Human beings need to be reproduced, crops need to be lushly green for the nourishment and development of life, so belief in fertility came into existence.

In Vietnam, this long-standing belief was displayed in the cult of *linga* and *yoni* (in India, only *linga* was worshipped) and the act of sexual intercourse (this is an unpopular practice in Southeast Asia). Many traces of this practice can be found on many stone statues and columns, decorative motifs in the Central Highlands tomb-houses, some customs and dances, especially in the shape and motifs of ancient bronze drums.

Wet-rice agriculture that depended much on natural factors ignited the belief of worshipping nature. In Vietnam, this belief was polytheism and respect for goddess, and worship of animals and plants as well. A research book published in 1984 listed 75 goddesses or Holy Mothers, mostly matriarchal goddesses, also called *Mau* (ancient people not only worshipped the Creator but also *Mau Cuu Trung* which was a female Creator, as well as Goddess of Forest, River Goddess and so on). Regarding botany-worshipping belief, the rice plant was most venerated, the next were the banyan-tree, the areca-tree, the mulberry tree and the gourd. In respect of animal-worshipping beliefs, unlike nomadic culture that worships fierce wild animals, the Vietnamese tend to worship gentle species of animals like stags, deer, frogs, especially those which are easy to come by in the riverside regions like water-birds, snakes, and crocodiles. The Vietnamese proclaimed themselves as belonging to the Hong Bang family line and the Tien Rong breed (Hong Bang is the name of a huge species of water-bird; Tien, or Fairy, is deification of an egg-laying species of bird; Rong, or Dragon, is an abstract image of snake and crocodile). The ascending dragon that was born in the water is meaningful and special symbol of the Vietnamese nation.

Among the human-revering beliefs, the custom of ancestral worship is the most popular, which nearly become one belief of the Vietnamese (also called *Dao Ong Ba* in South Vietnam). The Vietnamese choose the death-day rather than the birthday to hold a commemorative anniversary for the deceased. Every family worships *Tho cong*, or the God of Home, who takes care of the home and blesses the family. Every village worships its *Thanh hoang*, the tutelary god, who protects and guides the whole village (the Vietnamese always honour the people who rendered distinguished services for villagers or national heroes who were born or died in the village to be their *Thanh hoang*). The whole nation worships the very first kings, sharing the common ancestors' death anniversary (the Festival of Hung Kings Temple). Particularly, the worship of *Tu Bat Tu*, or the Four Immortal Gods, namely, Tan Vien (preventing flooding), Saint Giong (resisting and defeating foreign invaders), Chu Dong Tu (together with his wife growing out of poverty to consistently build his fortune) and Lieu Hanh (heavenly princess who left Heaven for the earth in the yearning for happiness) has been regarded as extremely beautiful national values.

Although turning into superstition in some specific cases, folk beliefs have lasted consistently and mixed with orthodox religions.

Theravada Buddhism might have been imported directly into Vietnam from India through sea routes since the 2nd century A.D. Vietnamese Buddhism stays on earth rather than ascends up to heaven, attaches to exorcism and prayers for wealth, happiness and longevity rather than heading toward nirvana. Only when Mahayana Buddhism approached the country from China did Vietnamese monks have the chance to carry out in-depth study of Buddhism; however, separate sects were later formed, such as Truc Lam Buddhist Sect which attaches importance to the Buddha inside the human heart. In the Ly-Tran dynasties, Buddhism, though having reached its peak, still embraced both Taoism and Confucianism to create a cultural face with "the three religions existing at the same time". Over ups and downs throughout the history, Buddhism has

become absolutely familiar to the Vietnamese; according to the 1993 statistics, there were up to some 3 million Buddhist followers and some other 10 millions frequently going to the pagoda for worshipping the Buddha.

Under the Chinese domination, Confucianism had yet to gain a position in the Vietnamese society. The official adoption of Confucianism had not been recorded until 1070 when King Ly Thanh Tong built Van Mieu (Temple of Literature) to worship Zhou Gong and Confucius. In the 15th century, due to the need of constructing a unified nation, a centralized administration and a social order, Confucianism took the place of Buddhism to become a national religion under the Le dynasty. Confucianism, mostly Song Confucianism, that took root deep into the social and political structure, the system of education and examinations and the circle of Confucian scholars gradually dominated social and moral life. However, Confucianism was only accepted to Vietnam in specific factors, particularly on politics and morality, rather than its entire system.

Taoism penetrated Vietnam at roughly the end of the 2nd century. Since the Vo Vi (letting things take their own course) doctrine bore the thought of resisting the Chinese rulers, it was used as a weapon against the Northern feudalism. This religion also contained factors of magic and mystery, so it fits human subconsciousness and primitive beliefs. Many Confucianists also admired Taoist tendency of enjoying quietness and joyful leisure. However, Taoism has long been regarded as an extinct religion that only left vestiges in folk beliefs.

Christianity came to Vietnam in the 16th century as an intermediary of the Western culture and colonialism. It made use of the favourable opportunity in which feudalism was in crisis, Buddhism was deprived and Confucianism was in deadlock to become a spiritual relief of a part of the population. However, this religion failed to integrate into the Vietnamese culture for a long time. Christians had to set up an altar dedicated to Jesus Christ right at their homes. Only when the Gospel was introduced into Vietnam, Christianity was able to gain a position. In 1993, there were 5 million Catholics and nearly half a million Protestants.

Foreign religions imported to Vietnam did not exterminate the local folk beliefs, but they mixed with each other to derive specific variants for both sides. For example, Taoism could not lower the women's role, which was reflected by widespread worship of Mau (Holy Mother). The features of polytheism, democracy, and community are manifested by the worship of groups of ancestors, and pairs of gods. Entering a pagoda, people can easily recognize that not only Buddhas but also gods and even human are worshiped there. Perhaps, only in Vietnam, there were legends that a toad dares to sue Heaven or a human being marries a fairy. These are the prominent features of Vietnamese beliefs.

4. Languages

There have been many theories regarding the origin of the Vietnamese language. The most persuasive one argues that the Vietnamese language previously belonged to the Mon-Khmer group of the Southeast Asian linguistic system, it was later transformed into Viet-Muong language (or old Vietnamese language) and then separated to form the modern Vietnamese language. In the present-day Vietnamese language, many words have been proved to contain Mon-Khmer roots and to be phonetically and semantically relevant to the Muong language.

Throughout a millennium of Chinese domination and under the Vietnamese feudal dynasties, the official language was Chinese, but the Vietnamese always demonstrated its strength for self-preservation and development. The Chinese language was pronounced in the Vietnamese way, called the Han-Viet way of pronunciation, and Vietnamized in various ways to create many commonly used Vietnamese words. The diverse development of the Vietnamese language brought about the birth of a system of writing scripts transcribing the Vietnamese language on the basis of the Han script in the 13th century, called the Nom script.

Under the French domination, Chinese script was gradually eliminated and replaced by French that was used as the official language in administrative, educational and diplomatic activities. Thanks to the *quoc ngu* (Romanized) writing script that boasts the advantages of simple figure, composition, spelling and pronunciation, the modern Vietnamese prose was actually formed and then accepted positive influence from the Western cultural language. The *quoc ngu* writing script was produced by some Western missionaries including Alexandre de Rhodes; they cooperated with some Vietnamese to transcribe the Vietnamese language on the basis of the Latin alphabet for using in evangelism in the 17th century. The *quoc ngu* writing script was perfected and popularized to become a significant cultural tool. In late 19th century, publications were published in the *quoc ngu* script.

After the August 1945 Revolution, the Vietnamese language and the *quoc ngu* script have seized a dominating position and strongly developed and established itself as a multi-functional language that has been used in every field, at every educational level and has reflected every reality of life. Today, thanks to the Revolution, some ethnic minorities have their own writing scripts.

The Vietnamese language is characterized by mono-syllables, a concrete, abundant, acoustic and imaginary vocabulary and a proportionate, rhythmical, lively, flexible, symbolic and emotional way of expression, which tremendously facilitates artistic and literary creation. The Vietnamese dictionary published by the Center of Lexicography in 1997 consists of 38,410 entries.

5. Literature

Parallel and deeply interacting with other cultural aspects, the Vietnamese literature came into being at an early date, including two major components - folk literature and written literature. Folk literature held a great significance in Vietnam and made immense contribution to the preservation and development of the national language as well as nourishing the people's soul. Folk literary works were diversified by myths, epics, legends, humorous stories, riddles, proverbs, folk-songs and so on, with many identities of Vietnamese ethnic groups.

Written literature was born roughly in the 10th century. Up to the 20th century, there had been two components existing at the same time: works written in the Chinese script (with poems and prose demonstrating the Vietnamese soul and realities; thus, they were still regarded as Vietnamese literature) and works written in the *Nom* script (mostly poems; many great works were handed down to the later generations). Since the 1920s, written literature has been mainly composed in the *quoc ngu* script with profound renovations in form and genre such as novels, new-style poems, short stories and dramas, and with a diversity in artistic tendency. Written literature attained speedy development after the August 1945 Revolution, when it was directed by the Communist Party of Vietnam's guideline and focused on the people's fighting and working life.

Admittedly, the whole Vietnamese nation likes poetry and composing poems - ranging from kings, mandarins, generals to monks, feudal scholars, and even revolutionaries. A farmer, an old boatman, a soldier all know some six-eight-word meters or satirical verses.

Regarding the content, the mainstream was the unyielding patriotic literature in every time and the anti-feudalist literature that was often expressed through the plight of women. Another important theme was the onslaughts against social vices. Great poets of the nation were all great humanists.

Modern Vietnamese literature has developed from romanticism to realism, from heroism in wartime to all aspects of life, and scoured into ordinary life to find out genuine values of the Vietnamese people.

Classical literature generated such masterpieces as *Truyen Kieu* (Nguyen Du), *Cung oan ngam khuc* (Nguyen Gia Thieu), *Chinh phu ngam* (Dang Tran Con), *Quoc am thi tap* (Nguyen Trai). Vietnam had some brilliant female poets like Ho Xuan Huong, Doan Thi Diem, and Ba Huyen Thanh Quan centuries ago.

In the Vietnamese modern prose, there were authors who could emulate with whoever in the world, namely, Nguyen Cong Hoan, Vu Trong Phung, Ngo Tat To, Nguyen Hong, Nguyen Tuan, and Nam Cao. They were sided by excellent poets like Xuan Dieu, Huy Can, Han Mac Tu, Nguyen Binh. Regrettably, great works that faithfully reflect the country and the times have yet to appear.

6. Arts

Vietnam has got some 50 national musical instruments. Among percussion instruments, the most popular, diverse and long-lasting are *trong dong* (bronze drums), *cong chieng* (gongs), *dan da* (lithophone), *dan t'run*g... The set of blowing instruments is represented by flutes and pan-pipes, while the set of string instruments is specified by *dan bau* (monochord) and *dan day*.

The Vietnamese folksongs are rich in forms and melodies of regions across the country, ranging from *ngam tho* (reciting poems), *hat ru* (lullaby), *ho* (chanty) to *hat quan ho*, *trong quan*, *xoan*, *dum*, *vi giam*, *ca Hue*, *bai choi*, *ly*. Apart from this, there are also other forms like *hat xam*, *chau van*, and *ca tru*.

Traditional performing arts include *cheo* and *tuong*. Water-puppet is also a special traditional art that was ignited in the Ly dynasty. At the start of the 20th century, *cai luong* (renovated theatre) appeared in Cochinchina with melodies of *vong co*.

The Vietnamese acoustic arts generally have symbolic, expressive and emotional features. Traditional stage relates closely to the audience and is a combination of music and dance forms. The Vietnamese dance has few strong and tough actions, but contains many smooth and curling features with closed feet and a lot of arm-dancing actions.

In Vietnam, the arts of sculpture on stone, copper and terra-cotta came into existence very early, dating back to the 10,000 B.C. Later, enameled ceramics, wooden statues, shell-encrusted pictures, lacquers, silk paintings and paper-made pictures all attained high degree of artistic development. The Vietnamese plastic arts focus on expressing innermost feelings with simplified forms using many methods of stylization and emphasis.

There have been 2,014 cultural and historical sites have been recognized by the State and 5 sites, namely the Ancient Capital of Hue and Ha Long Bay have gained international recognition as the world heritage sites. The remaining ancient architectures are mostly pagodas and temples of the Ly-Tran dynasties, palaces and stelas of the Le dynasty, the 18th century's community houses, citadels and tombs of the Nguyen dynasty and Cham towers.

In the 20th century, in contact with the Western culture, especially after regaining the national independence, many new categories of arts like dramatics, photography, cinema, and modern art had taken shape and developed strongly, obtaining huge achievements with the contents








reflecting the social and revolutionary realities. Up to 1997, there were 44 people operating in cultural and art fields honoured with the Ho Chi Minh Prize, 130 others conferred with the honourable titles of People's Artist, and 1,011 with Eminent Artist. At the start of 1997, there were 191 professional artistic organizations and 26 film studios (including central and local ones). There have been 28 movies, 49 scientific and documentary films receiving international cinematic awards in many countries.







The traditional and national culture in the time of industrialization and modernization is facing tough challenges posed by the market economy as well as the tendency of globalization. Some cultural and artistic branches have been seeking for renovation. The preservation and development of the national culture, the selection of the traditional values and the construction of the new ones have turned the most important than any time in history. The traditional cultural values should be preserved but should be also enriched by the advanced cultural values of the mankind. Culture should be modernized but should not be separated from the nation. The process of cultural reform is still under way...







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<p>Russia</p> 	<p>Hanoi</p> <p>-----</p> <p><i>Add: 191 La Th?nh</i> <i>Tel: (04) 833 6991</i> <i>Fax: (04) 833 6995</i></p>	<p>Ho Chi Minh City</p> <p>-----</p> <p><i>Consulate General</i> <i>Add: 40 Ba HuyenThanh</i> <i>Quan, Dist.3</i> <i>Tel: (08) 930 3936</i> <i>Fax: (08) 930 3937</i></p>
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