

VIETNAM-Socialist Republic of



Country Dialling Code (Tel/Fax): ++84

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Capital: Hanoi **Time:** GMT + 7

Background: France occupied all of Vietnam by 1884. Independence was declared after World War II, but the French continued to rule until 1954 when they were defeated by communist forces under HO Chi Minh, who took control of the north. US economic and military aid to South Vietnam grew through the 1960s in an attempt to bolster the government, but US armed forces were withdrawn following a cease-fire agreement in 1973. Two years later North Vietnamese forces overran the south.

Economic reconstruction of the reunited country has proven difficult as aging Communist Party leaders have only grudgingly initiated reforms necessary for a free market.

Location: Southeastern Asia, bordering the Gulf of Thailand, Gulf of Tonkin, and South China Sea, alongside China, Laos, and Cambodia

Map References: Southeast Asia

Area: total: 329,560 sq km, land: 325,360 sq km, water: 4,200 sq km

Climate: tropical in south; monsoonal in north with hot, rainy season (mid-May to mid-September) and warm, dry season (mid-October to mid-March)

Terrain: low, flat delta in south and north; central highlands; hilly, mountainous in far north and northwest

Natural Resources: phosphates, coal, manganese, bauxite, chromate, offshore oil and gas deposits, forests, hydropower

Population: 78,773,873 (July 2000 est.)

Nationality: noun: Vietnamese (singular and plural), adjective: Vietnamese

Ethnic Groups: Vietnamese 85%-90%, Chinese 3%, Mout, Tai, Moe, Khmer, Man, Cham

Religions: Buddhist, Taoist, Roman Catholic, indigenous beliefs, Muslim, Protestant, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao

Languages: Vietnamese (official), Chinese, English, French, Khmer, tribal languages (Mon-Khmer and Malayo-Polynesian)

Economy: Vietnam is a poor, densely populated country that has had to recover from the ravages of war, the loss of financial support from the old Soviet Bloc, and the rigidities of a centrally planned economy. Substantial progress was achieved from 1986 to 1996 in moving forward from an extremely low starting point - growth averaged around 9% per year from 1993 to 1997. The 1997 Asian financial crisis highlighted the problems existing in the Vietnamese economy but, rather than prompting reform, reaffirmed the government's belief that shifting to a market oriented economy leads to disaster. GDP growth of 8.5% in 1997 fell to 4% in 1998 and rose slightly to an estimated 4.8% in 1999. These numbers masked some major difficulties that are emerging in economic performance. Many domestic industries, including coal, cement, steel, and paper, have reported large stockpiles of inventory and tough competition from more efficient foreign producers. Foreign direct investment has fallen dramatically, from \$8.3 billion in 1996 to about \$1.6 billion in 1999. Meanwhile, Vietnamese authorities have slowed implementation of the structural reforms needed to revitalize the economy and produce more competitive, export-driven industries. Privatization of state enterprises remains bogged down in political controversy, while the country's dynamic private sector is denied both financing and access to markets. Reform of the banking sector - considered one of the riskiest in the world - is proceeding slowly, raising concerns that the country will be unable to tap sufficient domestic savings to finance growth. Administrative and legal barriers are also causing costly delays for foreign investors and are raising similar doubts about Vietnam's ability to attract additional foreign capital.

Industries: food processing, garments, shoes, machine building, mining, cement, chemical fertilizer, glass, tires, oil, coal, steel, paper

Currency: 1 new dong (D) = 100 xu

Railways: total: 2,652 km, standard gauge: 166 km 1.435-m gauge, narrow gauge: 2,249 km 1.000-m gauge, dual gauge: 237 km NA-m gauges (three rails) (1998)

Highways: total: 93,300 km, paved: 23,418 km, unpaved: 69,882 km (1996 est.)

Waterways: 17,702 km navigable; more than 5,149 km navigable at all times by vessels up to 1.8 m draft

Ports and Harbors: Cam Ranh, Da Nang, Haiphong, Ho Chi Minh City, Hong Gai, Qui Nhon, Nha Trang

Airports: 48 (1999 est.) Airports - with paved runways: total: 36, over 3,047 m: 8, 2,438 to 3,047 m: 3, 1,524 to 2,437 m: 5, 914 to 1,523 m: 13, under 914 m: 7 (1994 est.) Airports - with unpaved runways: total: 12, 1,524 to 2,437 m: 2, 914 to 1,523 m: 5, under 914 m: 5 (1994 est.)

Visa: required by all except transit passengers continuing their journey within 24 hours provided holding valid return or onward tickets.

Duty Free: 400 cigarettes; 2 bottles of alcoholic beverages; a reasonable quantity of perfume.

Health: a yellow fever vaccination certificate is required from travelers. Malaria risk exists throughout the year everywhere except urban areas. All water should be regarded as being potentially contaminated.

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