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PORT EXPLORER



HO CHI MINH CITY

VIETNAM

This lively, bustling, chaotic and congested city has been officially known as Ho Chi Minh City since 1976. Most of its residents, however, still refer to it as Saigon. By whatever name...this is a booming metropolis of nearly 10 million people, the largest city in Vietnam and all of Indochina. Due to its size and industrious population Ho Chi Minh City has become nation's economic engine.

A few miles up the Saigon River from the South China Sea, the city began as a small Khmer (Cambodian) fishing village. Its easy access to the sea allowed it to develop into a thriving port. In the early 1600s Vietnamese refugees were fleeing south to escape a civil war. The king of Cambodia welcomed them to the city that was then called Prey Nokor. The Vietnamese community rapidly grew. With Cambodia weakened by war with Thailand, in the late 1600s the government of Vietnam took control of the city and much of the surrounding region. The city was renamed Saigon.

By the mid 1800s France had taken much of Indo China as a colonial possession. Saigon soon developed a French look and feel. Stately yet elegant buildings framed the wide tree-lined avenues. Much of the colonial period architecture can still be seen in the city. But today those wide boulevards are crammed with over 4 million motor-scooters. This is a city on the move and it is made all the more exciting due to the fact that the "rules of the road" are basically optional.

Visitors are warmly welcomed in Ho Chi Minh City. The sites and sounds, the wonderful food, the mixture of the old and the new all combine to make this a dynamic port of call. Just remember to be careful crossing the street. Stop signs and red lights are only suggestions and there is no such thing as a pedestrian's "right of way".

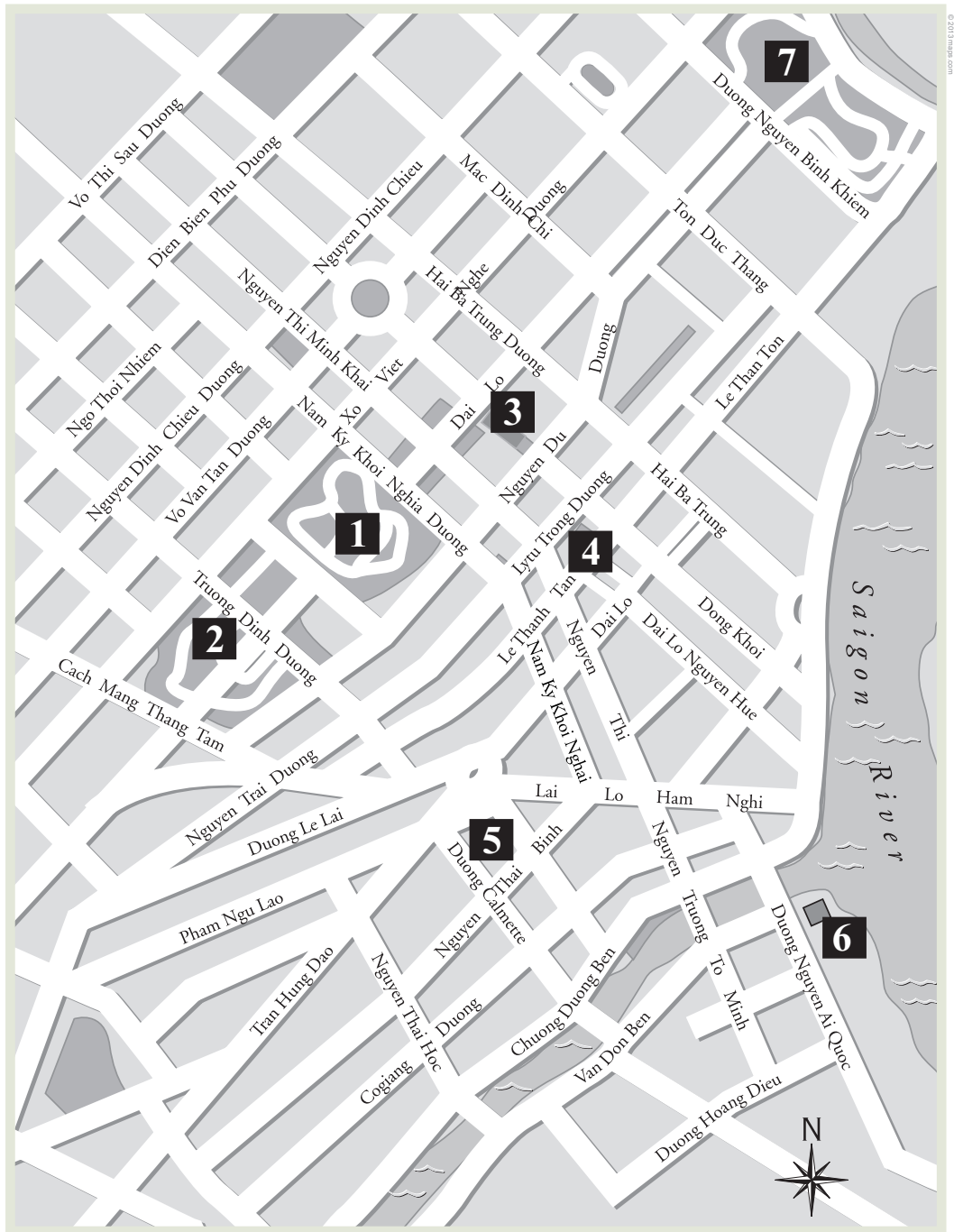


HISTORY

The origins of the Vietnamese people are surrounded in legend. Recent finds indicate that the earliest human habitation of northern Vietnam dates back 500,000 years. The Chinese conquered the Red River Delta in the 2nd century B.C. where they had found a feudally organized society based on hunting and agriculture. Chinese settlers migrated into the area over the next few centuries and tried to impose a centralized state system. From the 1st to the 6th centuries AD, the south was part of an Indianised Kingdom of Funan, which produced refined art and architecture. After the collapse of the Tang Dynasty in China in the early 10th century, the Vietnamese revolted against Chinese rule. In 938 AD the Chinese lost the battle of Bach Dang River, ending 1,000 years of Chinese rule. Cholon rose to prominence after Chinese merchants began settling there in 1778. To date, Cholon constitutes the largest ethnic-Chinese community in Vietnam. Because of the anti-Chinese persecution in the late 1970s, hundreds of thousands of Cholonese have fled Vietnam since reunification. France's military activity in Vietnam began in 1847, when the French Navy attacked Da Nang Harbor in response to Thieu Tri's actions against Catholic missionaries. After the death of Emperor Tu Duc in 1883, the French attacked Hué and imposed a Treaty of Protectorate on the Imperial Court.

The Japanese overthrew the French government in Vietnam in 1945. During their short reign it is estimated that 10 million people starved to death due to the lack of rice. After the atomic bombs were dropped

on Japan by the USA, the Viet Minh assumed full control of the north, while other non-communist groups wrestled for power in the south. The Democratic Republic of Vietnam was formed in Hanoi in September, 1945. Though there were Communist led guerrilla attacks on Diem's government during the mid 1950s, the real campaign to 'liberate' the south began in 1959. Hanoi, responding to the southern Cadres' demands that they be allowed to resist the Diem Regime, changed from a strategy of 'political struggle' to one of 'armed struggle.' Shortly thereafter, the Ho Chi Minh Trail, which had been in existence for several years, was expanded. The Viet Cong was formed in 1960 to force the withdrawal of all foreign troops on Vietnamese soil. In 1964, North Vietnamese troops began advancing to the south. In addition, the regime in Saigon was becoming weaker and the peasants were disillusioned. Because of this the Americans made a full scale military commitment to the preservation of the South Vietnamese Government. During the Tet (Vietnamese Lunar New Year) Offensive of 1968, many major cities and towns were attacked by the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese army. In 1975, North Vietnamese troops rolled into Saigon after a massive offensive and Saigon fell. In 1977, Vietnam entered the United Nations. The U.S. Trade Embargo against Vietnam was lifted in February, 1994 and full diplomatic relations were re-established in late 1995.



HO CHI MINH PLACES OF INTEREST

1 Reunification Hall was formerly the Presidential Palace and is the site where tanks of the North Vietnamese army crashed through the gates in April 1975 which ended the American involvement in Vietnam.



2 Cong Vien Van Hoa Park was an elite sporting club during the French period and is still an active sports center. The park contains 11 tennis courts, a swimming pool,

clubhouse, coffee shop and Roman Baths. Other facilities include a gymnasium, table tennis, weight lifting, wrestling area and dance classes, but are not recommended for tourists.

3 Notre Dame Cathedral was built between 1877 and 1883 and is set in the center of the city. It has a Neo-Romanesque form and two 131 foot (40 meter) square towers, tipped with iron spires.

4 The City Museum is housed in a white Neo-Classical structure built in 1886 and once was known as Gia Long Palace. This museum pays tribute to the heroes who fought against the French and Americans. Most information plaques are

in Vietnamese only. It can be found at 65 Ly Tu Trong Street.

5 An interesting **Art Museum** containing revolutionary paintings and sculptures along with artifacts from the Funan civilization may be found at 97A Pho Duc Chinh Street.

6 **Ho Chi Minh Museum** is housed in the old customs house at 1 Nguyen Tat Thanh Street. The museum houses many of Ho's personal effects including clothing and memorabilia.

7 **Zoo and Botanical Gardens** also known as "Thao Cam Vien" were founded in 1864 by the French. Lakes, flower beds, tended lawns and tropical trees are the highlights. The zoo contains elephants, crocodiles and big cats.

BEYOND CENTRAL HO CHI MINH

In the **Cholon District** (Chinatown) you will find the **Thien Hau Pagoda** which is also known as Ba Mieu. The pagoda is dedicated to Thien Hau, the Chinese Goddess of the Sea who protects sailors, merchants, fisherfolk and anyone else who travels by sea. The pagoda is located at 710 Nguyen Trai Street.

Cu Chi Tunnels are located 46.5 miles (75 km) northwest of Ho Chi Minh City. This is a vast network of more than 124 miles (200 km) of underground tunnels in Tay Ninh. These tunnels were constructed by the Viet Minh and later used by the Viet Cong to conduct operations and hide from the enemy. When operational, the tunnels ran from Saigon to the Cambodian border.



SHORE EXCURSIONS

To make the most of your visit to Ho Chi Minh City and surrounding areas, we suggest you take one of the organized Shore Excursions. For information concerning tour content and pricing, consult your Shore Excursion Brochure or contact the Shore Excursion Desk. When going ashore, guests are advised to take with them only the items they need and to secure any valuables.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Bargaining: Bargain in either the local currency (Dong) or the U.S. Dollar. Bargaining should be good natured – smile, don't raise your voice or argue. In some cases you will be able to get a discount of up to 30%. Prices tend to be fixed in most large stores, but smaller shops will negotiate.

Tipping: Tipping is becoming increasingly expected in Vietnam, although it is not usually required. Government run hotels and restaurants generally add a 10% service charge.

Dress Code: Light cotton clothing is suggested. T-Shirts, shorts and jeans are suitable in most cases. For women, longer dresses and pants are the norm. The Vietnamese on the whole are very tolerant, but a show of too much skin is taboo. When visiting temples be sure to dress more conservatively. Slip on shoes (not open toe) are the easiest to get in and out of.

Avoiding Offence: Displays of emotion – from affection to anger – are considered crass and rude. Never show anger, regardless of the situation as most Southeast Asians abhor conflict. Don't touch the head of anyone, including children as it is a sign of disrespect. The feet are considered to be unclean. When seated, don't point them in anyone's direction.

LOCAL CUISINE AND DRINK SPECIALTIES

The Vietnamese are particularly fond of seafood, but prepare chicken, beef, pork and vegetable dishes equally well. The proper way to eat is to take rice from the large shared dish and put it in your rice bowl. Using your chopsticks, take meat, fish or vegetables from the serving dishes and add them to your rice. Do not stick your chopsticks vertically into a rice bowl and leave them there as this is a classic Buddhist death sign. *Pho* is the Vietnamese name for the noodle soup that is a special favorite at breakfast. *Lau*, fish and vegetable soup; *Bun Thang*, rice noodles with fried egg and prawns; *Ech Tam Bot Ran*, frog meat soaked in batter and fried; and various vegetarian dishes are the most popular. There are a wide variety of restaurants including Chinese and Western-style cafés.

Vietnamese coffee is served French-style, brewed at the table. Vietnamese tea is inexpensive, but not particularly tasteful. *Nuoc Dua* (coconut milk) can be sweetened with sugar and is excellent on a hot day. *So-Da Chanh* (lemon soda) is the most prevalent. Coca-Cola and Sprite can usually be found as well. Imported beer is fairly cheap in Vietnam. Imports such as *Heineken*, *San Miguel* and *Tiger* are available in hotels and marketplaces. The local brew is 333. New local brands are emerging quite rapidly. Bottled water is recommended.

SHOPPING

In Ho Chi Minh City the main areas for shopping include Dong Khoi Street, Le Loi Blvd. and Nguyen Hue Blvd. The specialties of the

area include silk clothing, lacquerware, ceramics, handicrafts and bamboo furniture. Many tourist oriented stores and street merchants may accept U.S. Dollars. Some stores allow the use of major credit cards.

LOCAL CURRENCY

The unit of currency in Vietnam is called the Dong (VND). The currency of choice seems to be the U.S. Dollar in many locations, but the government is trying to dissuade its use.

POST OFFICE AND TELEPHONE FACILITIES

The General Post Office in Ho Chi Minh City is located at 2 Cong Xa Paris, next to the Notre Dame Cathedral.

A Telephone Office can be found within the General Post Office in Ho Chi Minh City. Collect overseas calls will need to be placed by a Vietnamese operator. Dial the following access numbers to use a personal calling card:

AT&T: 1.201.0288

MCI: 1201.1022 - service is only available from local post offices

TRANSPORTATION

Cyclos (three-wheeled pedi-cabs) are readily available at the pier. Fares need to be negotiated with the driver before climbing on board. Buses are available in Ho Chi Minh City, but are not recommended for tourists.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The Saigon Tourist Office is located in Ho Chi Minh City at 49 Le Thanh Ton Street. A Vietnam Tourist Office can be found at 69-71 Nguyen He Blvd., also in Ho Chi Minh City.

USEFUL WORDS AND PHRASES

Good morning/afternoon – Xin chao (Buoì sang)

How much? – Bao nhieu?

Thank you – Cam on

You're welcome – Khong co chi

Please – Lam on, vui long

Where is the toilet? – Phong ve sinh?

The official language is Vietnamese, which is a combination of Chinese, Thai, Cham and Mon-Khmer. English and French are widely spoken.
