

Vietnam is a friendly and safe place to travel with the hidden charm. But each country have special different, Vietnam too. Different about culture, history and style life... With a sprinkling of common sense, your trip should be smooth and trouble free. Do not be overly paranoid though. Generally, Vietnamese people are very appreciative if they see you trying to abide by the customs, and very forgiving if you get it wrong or forget. If you make the effort, you will be rewarded. With a cool head and sensible planning, one can avoid these problems.

The below advice meant to help you have a perfect trip to Vietnam:

### DOS

- Greetings are no different to western countries, there are no cultural formalities that as a foreigner you would be expected to know or practice.
- Vietnamese dress conservatively. Not only for the prevailing weather, but also not to cause offence to the local people. Despite the heat, it's best not to show off too much skin. If you do, especially girls, you'll only draw stares from the locals. Vietnamese have conservative dress codes, and it is only in larger cities that these codes are a little more relaxed. Do not wear revealing clothing.
- Dress well when visiting pagodas. No shorts or tatty beer t-shirts. Shoes are fine, and rarely will you have to remove them. If unsure, just follow what the locals do.
- Drink plenty of bottled water, especially when walking around sightseeing. No need to carry huge bottles around with you, a vendor is never far away and no doubt they will find you before you find them. During the summer months you should be drinking a minimum of two liters per day. If you drink tea, coffee & alcohol you should increase you water intake accordingly as these will help to dehydrate you.
- Travel with recommend tour agencies. Even if you plan to buy tickets when in country, research your journey a little first on the Internet. A good resource is Lonely Planet's Thorn Tree Forum, where fellow tourists discuss travel in Vietnam. This way you avoid unreliable tour agencies and badly run hotels.
- 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.
- Take a hotel business card from the reception desk before venturing out from your hotel. This will make your return to the hotel in a taxi or cyclo much easier.
- Carry a roll of toilet paper in your daypack on long excursions from your base hotel. You never know when you might need it!
- If invited into a home, always remove your shoes at the front door when entering.
- Ask for permission when taking a photograph of someone. If they indicate that they do not want you to, then abide by their wishes.
- DO NOT offer money or push the issue.
- Check on your first day whether you need to reconfirm your next flight, if so do it then. Some airlines do not require this anymore but it is still worthwhile calling them so that they at least have your contact details, in case the flight is delayed or whatever.

### DON'TS

- Never carry more money than you need when walking around the streets. Do not wear large amounts of jewelry. There are two reasons for not doing this:

(1) It is considered impolite to flaunt wealth in public;

(2) It is more likely that you may become a victim of a pickpocket or drive-by bag snatcher.

- Don't be paranoid about your security, just be aware of your surroundings.

- 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.

- Avoid giving empty water bottles, sweets and candies or pens to the local people when trekking through ethnic minority villages. You cannot guarantee that the empty bottles will be disposed of in a correct manner, and the people have no access to dental health. If you want to give pens, ask your guide to introduce you to the local teacher and donate them to the whole community.

- Never sleep or sit with the soles of your feet pointing towards the family altar when in someone's house.

- Never lose your temper in public or when bargaining for a purchase. This is considered a serious loss of face for both parties. Always maintain a cool and happy demeanor and you will be reciprocated with the same.

- 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. Wear a lot of jewellery or take a bag with you. Violent crime is highly unusual in Vietnam, but petty crime is more apparant. If you have a bag, or tout a digital camera around your neck, you are a potential target.

- When taking a ride by motorbike taxi (*xe om*) make sure your bag, if any, is not on display or easy to grab. Bag snatches, although still rare, are probably the most likely crime a tourist would encounter, and it raises the probability immensely if you are tailing a camera or a laptop in the wind.

- Physical displays of affection between lovers in public are frowned upon. That's why you may come across couples holding hands but not hugging or kissing.

- Remember, this *is* Vietnam, a developing country, and things don't quite work as you are maybe used to. Don't be paranoid about your safety, just be aware of your surroundings.

- Do not carry your passport a leave it in the safe in your hotel. A photocopy will suffice if local law states that you need to.