

I. Shopping in VN in brief

Shopping in Vietnam is a fun and interesting experience, and guarantees good bargains to those who know what to look for. It is true to say that you can find nearly anything in Vietnam. Markets vary from high class shopping malls, supermarkets to bustling open market, galleries, boutiques and street stalls.

It is not recommended that you buy imported, famous branded products such as clothing, perfume or electronics in Vietnam as tax makes these items more costly than neighboring countries.

In terms of shopping for tourists, Vietnam is most famous for its handicrafts, war souvenirs, authentic clothing, art, antiques and gems.

Hotspots include Hanoi, Hoi An and Ho Chi Minh City, each of which has a tempting selection of everything from avant-garde art to sumptuous silk suits.

Art and Antiques

Vietnam has very strict regulations about exporting real antiques. There are several shops to hunt for art and antiques. Both traditional and modern paintings are a popular item. More sophisticated works are displayed in art galleries, while cheaper mass-produced stuff is touted in souvenir shops and by street vendors. Be careful and check your sources for certificates if they claim to sell you an original or antique piece.

Clothing

Vietnam is emerging as a regional design center and there are some extravagant creations in the boutiques of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

Clothing varies greatly from tourist T-shirts to beaded handbags and traditional ao dai (the traditional costume) made to fit your size. Items made from silk are a popular buy, with prices varying depending on the material and tailor. Pre-made traditional dresses are sold in many places. However, it is more recommended to have the dress made to fit your body, which takes more time and slightly more money.

Shoes, slippers and handbags made from traditional materials (silk and bamboo) can also become unique gifts and accessories.

The Vietnamese traditional conical hat, can be found everywhere throughout the country, but hats made in Hue are most famous as they have a poem embroidered on the inside.

Non (conical hats) are favorite items for women in both rainy and sunny times. The best quality ones can be found in the Hue's area.

Gems and jewelry

Vietnam is rich in gemstones. The jewelry business is also increasing during current years, and sophisticated works are produced by both big businesses and traditional craftsmen. The quality of the gemstones sold is sometimes doubtful, so it is recommended that you buy gems at prestigious locations and be ware with cheap prices.

War souvenirs

Most war souvenirs sold today in Vietnam (for example, Zippo lighters engraved with platoon philosophy) are fake reproductions. Be careful while transporting these items as many airlines do not allow weapons, even fakes to be carried on their planes.

Handicrafts

Other popular handicrafts in Vietnam include lacquer ware, wood-block prints, and oil and watercolor paintings, blinds made from bamboo, reed mats, carpets, and leatherwork.

Tip: Bargaining

Bargaining should be good-natured, smile and don't get angry or argue. Once the money is accepted, the deal is done. Remember that in Asia, "saving face" is very important. In some cases you will be able to get a 50% discount or more, at other times this may only be 10%.

II. Shopping in VN: DOs and DON'Ts

Markets & Minimarts

DON'T miss the markets: among the most atmospheric in Southeast Asia and still the hub of commercial activity everywhere in Vietnam. Notable markets include floating ones in the Mekong Delta, Cho Lon market in the district of Hochiminh City that bears the same name, the large fruit and flower market in Da Lat, any of the major markets in Hanoi, the colorful Sa Pa market and other ethnic minority markets in the mountainous north of the country.

DO go early when shopping at local markets. Goods are brought fresh everyday from the countryside and without refrigeration they will suffer from the heat as the day drags on.

Shopping in Hochiminh City is now little different from shopping in Bangkok or any other Asian metropolis. Commercial complexes and supermarkets are also sprouting up in Hanoi and other sizeable towns.

DO check the expiry dates carefully on any imported produce you buy: many of the more obscure items in these shops have been quietly gathering dust (not to say rotting away) for years. In Hanoi, you may notice a baffling remnant of the city's old ways. Tradesmen as part of Chinese-style commercial guilds were traditionally grouped together geographically (as many have remained in the Old Quarter), but a more modern breed of shopkeepers, such as those selling televisions or making photocopies, often elect to bunch together in a similar way. The practical upshot of this is simply impossible for the moment to obtain, say, a tennis racquet. Then, one day, you will turn a corner into an unexplored street and be confronted by an entire row of shops selling nothing but tennis racquets.

Bargain, bargain, and bargain

The idea of a fixed pricing system is still quite novel in most commercial contexts, which means that a little good natured haggling is an important habit to develop. Anywhere outside of supermarkets, restaurants and anything controlled by the state, bargaining is possible and usually essential.

DO be warned that, as you are always easily spotted from a distance as a foreigner, you will be asked to pay more than locals. Sometimes just a little more, but often outrageously more,

even if this is not always immediately obvious to you, especially when relatively small sums are involved. It might seem like a snip, but you may be paying ten times the going rate.

If you feel mean haggling over such small sums or are tempted just to pay up for a quiet life, DON'T forget to think of other people who will pass this way after you. You should not be too afraid of offending local sensibilities: if you pay vastly over-inflated prices without a murmur, you'll simply be seen as the sucker you're letting yourself be taken for!

DO negotiate firmly if you want to rent a place: as a foreigner, you are a good prospect, since you will almost certainly pay more than a local, you won't start worshipping your ancestors in the house and refuse to ever move out – and you may even attract other monied foreigners to the neighbourhood. However, you should also be aware that there is no legal protection for people renting accommodation: if you have a problem, you must solve it with your landlord – again, through negotiation. The pleasant result is that Vietnam has actually been getting cheaper over the last few years.

Fake goods

Much of Southeast Asia is notorious as an earthly paradise for counterfeiters and Vietnam is no exception.

DO consider your motives carefully if you purchase counterfeit goods: if you buy a Rolex wristwatch for \$20, you know that there is no chance of it being anything like a real one, except for its superficial appearance. If this is all you want, that's fine, but DON'T complain if you get searched at customs on your return home, have your fake Rolex confiscated and are made to pay a fine equivalent to the cost of a genuine one. Copies of expensive makes (especially good ones) pose a real threat to business and these luxury goods companies are determined to defend their interests – and have the means to do so.

Very good copies can be found in Vietnam, particularly items such as clothes, sports equipment and luggage. The Vietnamese are redoubtable and wily business operators, and both foreign and domestic companies often find it impossible to prevent know-how from leaking out. Even products made from materials imported exclusively find their way onto the local market at budget prices.

However, DO let the buyer beware that it's possible to find excellent deals, but only if you really know what you are doing.

DO check the quality of what you're buying, especially if there are safety concerns involved. DON'T expect to get your money back if you change your mind after making a purchase, or even if you realize belatedly that the goods you have been sold are not as advertised... Check everything checkable yourself before you hand over your money. If it runs on electricity, get the assistant to plug it in and test it.

What not to buy in Vietnam?

There are some products which you may find for sale here which you should avoid. These may be illegal in Vietnam or your home country, or simply may encourage destruction of the environment and harm to the local people. These include:

Coral and coral products. Buying these products encourages destruction to Vietnam's irreplaceable coral reefs.

Sea Turtle products. You may find preserved sea turtles in shops - particularly sold in the open in Hanoi. This should be obvious--but sea turtles are endangered and all products made from them are illegal.

Rice wine containing whole animals or animal products. Wildlife populations have been decimated in Vietnam. Many of the animals and animal parts used as ingredients in rice wine are globally threatened and endangered - including the snakes.

Ivory, bone and tooth products. This animal product will be illegal in most home countries, regardless of which animal it came from. The only allowable products may be those made from farm animals--but this may be very difficult to distinguish.

Alligator and crocodile leather. This is illegal to transport between many countries.

Drugs - including marijuana are illegal and the sale or use of them can carry SEVERE penalties.

Prostitution is illegal and destroys not only yourself, the person you engage with, and your family. Aids and other serious STD's are VERY COMMON in Vietnam--even the countryside.

III. 10 tips to savvy shopping in VN

DO always ask around to get an idea of basic prices: a ride on a motorbike, a plate of fried noodles, a packet of cigarettes, a kilo of mangoes, etc. For more important purchases, try and get a local friend to go along with you, or better still, let him do the buying without you: prices are often lower when foreigners aren't around.

DON'T feel awkward or rude about bargaining: everyone bargains in Vietnam and you'll look like a green tourist if you don't.

DO insist on being quoted a price as soon as you start showing interest in a commodity or requesting a service. It's too late to ask once the silk shirt has been wrapped or after your bike has been fixed. This first price is your starting point and it's quite probably too expensive, so

DON'T look happy or resigned to paying what you're asked: always begin by showing your gentle disapproval, tut-tutting or saying something like: *Đã t quá!* (Too expensive).

DO consider various bargaining options, not just a straight fight over figures. If you buy several, the price should come down. Ask them to throw in some small extra you would like, for the same price. If you are quoted a price in US dollars, ask how much that is in Vietnamese Dong and try rounding it down. Be forewarned, though, that the concept of the special offer is still in its infancy here (like 1 percent off if you buy a truckload)...

DON'T hesitate to walk away if you cannot agree on a price: either they'll come after you or you'll find the same thing on sale somewhere else.

DO stay Zen... Shopping can be quite a rodeo when you're surrounded by eager stallholders all shouting, smiling, waving and pointing at their wares.

DON'T buy antiques to take home unless you're confident that you can get them out of the country. The law prohibits their export, but remains vague as to what exactly constitutes as an antique.

DO buy ethnic minority products directly from ethnic minority people, if at all possible, rather than from shops run by ethnic majority merchants, who often exploit their suppliers ruthlessly.

DON'T expect to get the better of any deal: Vietnamese have boundless reserves of experience and patience in doing business.

Ref: Good buys in Vietnam:

Lacquer ware

Ceramics Painting

Woodblock prints

Silk

Clothes in general

Embroidery

Carvings (stone and wood)

Precious or semi-precious stones (such as jade)

Jewellery

Rugs

IV. Newspapers, Magazines, CD-ROMs

Newspapers and magazines are mainly written in Vietnamese. However, there are some

newspapers and magazines available in English and French, including:

The Vietnam Investment Review

Vietnam News

Saigon Times

Investment News

Vietnam Economic News

Vietnam Economic News

Vietnam Today

Vietnam Pictorial

Le Courier du Vietnam

Street vendors and big hotels also sell foreign newspapers and magazines, including:

The Bangkok Post

New Nation

Business News

News-week and Times

Indochina

Asian Weekly, etc.

CD-ROMs: Once in Vietnam, visitors can make the acquisition of different CD-ROMs created by the Tourism Information Technology Centre. They present different aspects of Vietnam, of the culture, or they focus on one special region. Useful for the traveler, these CD-ROMs are also nice souvenirs to bring back home or to other.

V. Top recommended shopping places

1. HANOI

Shopping center in HANOI

Trang Tien Plaza

Add: 24 Hai Ba Trung St., Hoan Kiem Dist.
Tel: 934 9734
Fax: 934 9715

Vincom

Add: 191 Ba Trieu St., Hai Ba Trung Dist
Tel: 974 9999
Fax: 974 8888

Arts Products

54 Traditions Gallery

Address: 30 Hang Bun St, Hanoi
Tel: 04/715-0194

Website: www.54traditions.com

This gallery is more like an ethnographic museum, library, and gallery all rolled into one. The space is divided into five theme rooms (e.g. "Functional Objects", and "Shamanism") and co-owner Mark S. Rapport is more than happy to play guide for a day. Rapport is a self-described collector, baseball cards when he was a kid, African art while living in New York, and then Vietnamese minority art when he moved to Hanoi. Rapport has a natural gift for bringing the artifacts to life and, given the range of affordable pieces (small mounted prints made from antique stamps or seals got for less than \$10/£5.55) and exquisite antique artifacts, few people walk away empty-handed.

Apricot Gallery

Address: 40B Hang Bong St, Hanoi
Tel: 04/828-8965

Website: www.apricot-artvietnam.com

This gallery features minimalist artists like Le Thiet Cuong, whose family fled Hanoi for the countryside from 1964 to 1973 to escape American bombings, and Le Thanh Son, whose colorful canvases of village life impressed Mr. Clinton enough that he bought one to take home.

This large, well-lit, air-conditioned space holds some works by Vietnam's most well-known contemporary lacquer painter, Dinh Quan, as well as other artists of the current vanguard (all priced accordingly, of course). Apricot Gallery carries 80% famous artists and 20% upcoming artists. See if you can spot which paintings fall into which categories. The gallery has hosted several international customers, including former president Bill Clinton, who purchased a

landscape piece by Hoang Hai Anh. Hoang, naturally, falls into the 80% group.

Enen

Address: 24 Xuan Dieu St, Hanoi

Tel: 04/240-4344

This store has a random, but good selection of foreign labels that appears to have fallen off the export truck. You'll stumble across pieces by boutique darlings like Vanessa Bruno, Baby Phat, BCBG, and even some familiar Abercrombie & Fitch cotton separates. They have western sizes, but whatever is on the rack is what they have, so if it's not your size, it's not meant to be.

Galerie Royal

Address: 60 Ly Thai To St, Hanoi

Tel: 04/936-6672

This small boutique is sandwiched between the Hilton and the Metropole and caters to high-end shoppers. They carry three lines only, Kenzo, Korloff and La Perla. The La Perla lingerie and swimsuit selection is top notch.

Hanoi Art Contemporary Gallery

Address: 36-38 Trang Tien St, Hanoi

Tel: 04/934-7192

Website: www.hanoi-artgallery.com

This large corner space carries a large collection. The friendly staff greets you with smiles. Here you'll find standard copies and some very unique pieces.

Hanoi Gallery

Address: 42 Cau Go St, Hanoi

Tel: 04/824-1854

Different from all the rest by virtue of the fact that this little open-air storefront sells only old Communist propaganda posters, mostly artful copies that are "worried" to look old (the difference is obvious), but the stark images are quite appealing.

Hanoi Moment

Address: 101 Hang Gai St, Hanoi

Tel: 04/928-7170

Website: www.nishinjsc.com

A small selection of porcelain and lacquer flatware is sold in this smartly laid out store. Rather than leaving you to dig through assorted stacks of plates and bowls, Hanoi Moment displays a small selection of pieces arranged in eye-pleasing display areas.

Lien Art Gallery

Address: 27 Nha Tho, Hanoi

Tel: 04/828-5913

Website: www.lien-art-gallery.com

On the corner adjacent to the cathedral, the cramped two floors here are stuffed with lots of copy works of both famous Vietnamese artists and European masters. This is the best place to drop off a family photo and have it done in oil in a few days.

Life Photo Gallery

Address: 39 Trang Tien St, Hanoi

Tel: 04/936-3886

This gallery carries the works of two prominent Hanoian photographers whose color prints of the Vietnamese hinterlands, including some of the finest portraits and scenes from the hilltribes of the far north and Central Highlands region, have been published widely. You'll find some of their best prints here, framed and at prices unheard of in the West. Pick up a great souvenir or get some inspiration for your own snapshots. The eccentric photographers themselves, Mr. Le Quang Chau and Mr. Do Anh Tuan, are often on hand and happy to chat.

Mai Gallery

Address: 183 Hong Bong St, Hanoi

Tel: 04/828-5854

Website: www.maigallery-vietnam.com

Like the Apricot Gallery and Art Vietnam, this gallery carries a good deal of work by well-known and established Vietnamese artists. It also has a handful of exclusive artists, whose works are only available at their gallery. These include the latest darling of Vietnamese landscapes Phan Thu Trang, a young painter (born in 1981) who has been with Mai Gallery since 2004. Staff here is helpful and the gallery has an excellent layout with good lighting for easy viewing.

Handicrafts

Indochine House

13 Nha Tho, Hanoi

Tel: 824 8071

Craft Link

43 Van Mieu, Hanoi

Tel: 843 7710

Anh Duy Lacquer

25 Hang Trong, Hanoi

Tel: 514 1580

<http://www.adpub.com.vn/>

Art Antique Shop

3 Hang Can, Hanoi

Tel: 8266109

Dong phuong Oriental House

7 Xuan Dieu, Hanoi

Tel: 716 0131

Hand Made

6 Au Trieu, Hanoi

Tel: 091 330 8443

Vietnamese House

1 Trang Thi, Hanoi

Tel: 934 7417

Vinh Nga

Group 5, Bat Trang Village, Gia Lam

Tel: 874 0123

Craft Collection

39A Ly Quoc Su, Hanoi

Tel: 828 9524

Quilt & Crafts

4B Yen The, Hanoi

Tel:747 0982

Song

5-7 Nha Tho, Hanoi

Tel: 828 9650

99 Hang Gai Shop

99 Hang Gai, Hanoi

Tel: 8268684

Garments and fashion in Ha Noi

Louis Vuitton

Address: 15 Ngo Quyen, Hanoi

Tel: 04/824-4977

Odd that you can buy a knockoff of the latest Louis Vuitton bag just around the corner -- any corner really -- but these are the real deal at the real deal prices. They also have beautiful original antique LV trunks on display in-store, and sometimes in the lobby of the Metropole. Next door is a Cartier Watch boutique. You have arrived, darling.

Hanoi Silk

Address: 1 Thanh Nien Rd, Hanoi

Tel: 04/716-3062

Website: www.hanoisilkn.com

Hanoi Silk has a collection comparable to Khai Silk and carries good ready-to-wear as well as tailors' silk garments.

Hoa Sua Embroidery and Sewing Showroom

Address: 21D Ha Hoi, Hoan Kiem District, Hanoi

Tel: 04/822-6912

Like their affiliated restaurants and cafes in Hanoi (and in Sapa), the folks at the Hoa Sua Showroom are an outlet for disadvantaged children, many of whom are hearing-impaired, to receive on-the-job training and placement in a career. The shop here carries a nice collection of daily-use items, tablecloths, and slip covers, as well as made-to-order goods. An expat favorite, and your money goes to a good cause.

Ipa Nima and Tina Sparkle

Address: Ipa Nima: 34 Han Thuyen St., Hai Ba Trung District; Tina Sparkle: 17 Nha Tho St., Hoan Kiem District

Tel: 04/928-7616 Tina Sparkle

Website: www.ipa-nima.com

You've come to the right place for gaudy little Zakka fashion bags and accouterments for the ladies. Run by jet-setting Hong Kong lawyer-turned-designer Christina Yu, the place is popular with Japanese and Singaporean ladies and has managed to cause a small stir in other international markets. Celebrities Jamie Lee Curtis and Kelly Osbourne (admittedly, not your typical fashion icons) have been known to sport an Ipa Nima creation or two. Yu herself admits that you either love it or you hate it. Her bags are creative, glitzy affairs adorned with rhinestones, metal grommets, and contrasting materials. They have two stores: a newly opened flagship Ipa Nima store in the south end of town, and Tina Sparkle in the heart of the popular

Church Street cafe area.

La Casa

Address: 12 Nha Tho St, Hanoi

Tel: 04/828-9616

Website: www.lacasavietnam.com

This store uses traditional Vietnamese crafts and combines local materials with a modern edge. It's an excellent place to scope out little gifts to bring back home that people will actually like.

Coco silk

Add: 37A Van Mieu St.

Tel: 7471535

Fax: 7471535

Vu Thu Giang

Add: 148 Giang Vo St., Ba Dinh Dist.

Tel: 8312519

Fax: 8312519

Thuy An (silk, tailoring)

Add: 179 Hang Bong St.

Tel: 8269402

Fax: 9287541

Kenly silk

Add: 108 Hang Gai St.

Tel: 8267236

Fax: 8289785

Khai silk

Add: 121 Nguyen Thai Hoc St.

Tel: 7470583

Fax: 8245150

Mirror Mirror

Address: 1 Truong Han Sieu, Hanoi

Tel: 04/944-6529

Website: www.mirror-design.com

Young designer Ha Truong's creations are, according to her slogan, "understated, artful, contradictory."

Mosaique

Address: 22 Nha Tho St, Hanoi

Tel: 04/928-6181

Here is a popular little boutique and a great place to pick up some designer silver jewelry, silk hangings, or ready-to-wear items, and home goods from furnishings to lamps. Major credit cards are accepted.

Ha Dong silk

Add: 102 Hang Gai St.

Tel: 9285056

Fax: 9285438

Hanoi Boutique

Add: 2B Ly Quoc Su St.

Tel: 8255507

Le Minh silk

Add: 79 Hang Gai St., Hoan Kiem Dist.

Tel: 8288723

Duc Loi silk

Add: 93 Hang Gai St., Hoan Kiem Dist.

Tel: 8286981

Markets and Supermarkets in Hanoi

Dong Xuan market

Add: Dong Xuan street, Hoan Kiem dist

Tel: 928 0671

Hang Da market

Add: Hang Da street, Hoan Kiem dist

Tel: 828 6889

19-12 (19 December) market

Add: 41-43 Hai Ba Trung street, Hoan Kiem dist

Tel: 826 2410

Big C

Add: 222 Tran Duy Hung street, Trung Hoa Ward, Cau Giay dist

Tel: 784 6878

Metro

Add: Pham Van Dong street, Cau Giay dist

Tel: 755 1617/ 755 2204

Fax: 755 1650

Citimart Somerset Grand

Add: 49 Hai Ba Trung street

Tel: 934 2999

Fax: 934 2888

Fivimart

Add: 210 Tran Quang Khai street

Tel: 826 0167

Fax: 934 1039

Book Shops in Hanoi

Bao Thang Book Shop

276 Pho Hue

Tel: 978 2321

Doan Trang Book Shop

40B Ba Trieu

Tel: 824 3716

Dong Tay

32 Ba Trieu

Tel: 825 1374

Foreign Language Bookshop

61 Trang Tien

Tel: 824 8914

Ha Noi Book Shop

46 Tran Hung Dao

Tel: 934 6855

Ha Huong Book Shop

6 Trang Thi

Tel: 828 5781

Hoa Hien Book Shop

56 Ba Trieu

Tel: 826 7207

La Boutique

15 Ngo Quyen

Tel: 826 6919

Tien Phong Book Shop

175 Nguyen Thai Hoc

Tel: 733 6235

Trang An

240 Ton Duc Thang

Tel: 511 3040

Thuan Book Shop

80B Ba Trieu

Tel: 822 7272

Tinh Hoa Book Shop

147 Doi Can

Tel: 722 1419

Yen Bookshop

24 Kham Thien

Tel: 518 0571

2. HOCHIMINH CITY

Shopping Centers in Ho Chi Minh city (HCMC)

Diamond Plaza Center

Add: 34 Le Duan St., Dist 1

Tel: 8225500

Tax Plaza

Add: 135 Nguyen Hue, Dist 1

Tel: 8213849

Sai Gon Center

Add: 65 Le Loi, Dist 1

Tel: 8232505

An Dong Plaza

Add: 18 An Duong Vuong St., Ward 9, Dist 5

Tel: 8323288

Zen Plaza

Add: 54-56 Nguyen Trai St., Dist 1

Tel: 9250339

Parkson Trade Center

Add: 35 Bis Le Thanh Ton St., Dist 1

Tel: 8277635

Arts & Crafts

Dong Duong

Address: 45 Dong Khoi St, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City

Tel: 08/827-3748

Soapstone carvings and fine statuary.

Galerie Lotus

Address: 47/202 Dong Khoi St, and 30 Le Loi St, Ho Chi Minh City

Tel: 08/829-2695

Website: www.lotusgallery.com

Stop by this large upstairs gallery space and the friendly staff can arrange reproductions and commission work. They also have the standard Vietnamese copies lining the walls.

The Ho Chi Minh Fine Arts Museum

Address: 97A Pho Duc Chinh St, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City

Tel: 08/829-4441

If you're truly keen on learning about the scene in Ho Chi Minh, this is the place to start. Three floors house an evolving modern collection, featuring new and established Vietnamese artists' works in sculpture, oil, and lacquer, as well as a nice collection of ancient Buddhist artwork and some Cham statuary. The museum offers a good glimpse into the local scene. From there, have a look at Lac Hong Art Gallery, located on the ground floor of the museum (tel. 08/821-3771), which features the works of many famous Vietnamese artists. There are galleries throughout the city, many clustered around Dong Khoi and near all the major hotels. Here, you can get some great deals on reproductions of popular works (reproduction being a big industry in town), and those with deep pockets will find easy introductions to the artists or their representatives themselves. For a price, you can turn any photo into an enormous oil painting.

Garments & Fashion

Catherine Denoual-Maison

Address: 15C Thi Sach St, Ho Chi Minh City

Tel: 08/823-9394

This store has exclusive linen and silk cotton blends in elegant neutral tones of white and cream. Bedding, cushions, and runners are designed with tasteful embroidery and everything has a luxuriously high thread count.

Gaya

Address: 39 Ton That Thiep, Ho Chi Minh City

Tel: 08/914-3769

This store carries a beautiful selection of clothing, home décor, and furniture from one local Vietnamese and four expat designers. Everything is of serious quality. The linens are from Catherine Denoual, so expect a beautiful collection. Clothing is by Cambodian-born, France-raised Romyda Keth. The dresses are beautifully cut and are often multi-colored and touched with embroidery or a bit of sparkle. It can look like too much on the hanger, but more often than not looks smart and sophisticated once you put it on. The quality of material and cuts

are amazing and the staff has an excellent eye for fit.

Hoang Silk

Address: 201 Dong Khoi St, Ho Chi Minh City

Tel: 08/825-6629

Tailor Lien can make you a lovely ao dai or a silk separate according to your style and design in 24 hours. If the fit comes out wrong or is off, she is excellent at tweaking and working with you until it comes out right.

Ipa Nima

Address: 85 Pasteur St, or 76 Le Lai St, Ho Chi Minh City

Tel: 08/824-2701

The place to get funky, original handbags decked out in tassles, patterns, and busy prints. Their Saigon stores are not as large and expansive as their flagship in Hanoi, but there is still a great selection on offer.

Kenly Silk

Address: 132 Le Thanh Ton, Ho Chi Minh City

Tel: 08/829-3847

A brand-name supplier with some of the best ready-to-wear silk garments in the town.

Khai Silk

Address: 38 or 107 Dong Khoi St, in Legend Hotel, New World Hotel, and Sheraton Hotel, Ho Chi Minh City

Website: www.khaisilkcorp.com

With outlets throughout the country, Khai Silk is one of the best places for ready-made and tailored silk in Vietnam. The signature store is right downtown at 107 Dong Khoi St., but they have shops throughout the city in some of the finer hotels. Good business sense says, "If something works, then copy it," so there are lots of Khai Silk look-alikes, but Khai is the best.

La Bella

Address: 85-87 Pasteur St, Ho Chi Minh City

Tel: 08/823-0172

Come here for a fine collection of silk, jersey, and cotton separates and dresses as well as silk sleep and lounge wear. Some designs are simple, like long, roman-style jersey dresses, and others are eccentric, like silk wraparound halters and sequined skirts.

Hochiminh City's Gifts & Souvenirs

Alphana Jewelry

Address: 159 Dong Khoi St, Ho Chi Minh City

Tel: 08/829-7398

Gold, silver, and precious stones for all budgets.

Annam

Address: 16-18 Hai Ba Trung, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City

Tel: 08/822-9391

A fine selection of imported goods, with Italian and French wines as well as European chocolates and other comfort foods.

Authentique Interiors

Address: 38 Dong Khoi, Ho Chi Minh City

Tel: 08/822-133

This outlet is just across from the Majestic Hotel, at the terminus of Dong Khoi Street at riverside. The place is two floors of warehouse-style shopping, with every chachki you could imagine. On the first floor, find unique table settings that are decidedly modern, but made from local materials and with a Vietnamese/Chinese flair. Upstairs are lots of little bins with trinkets, as well as furnishing and gifts. Prices are marked, but they offer discounts if you buy in bulk (and this might be a good place to pick up a handful of small gifts for family and friends back home).

HCMC's Wine

Bacchus Corner

Address: 17/11 Le Thanh Ton St, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City

Tel: 08/829-3306

Website: www.tankhoa.com

Expat communities bring their luxury tastes with them, and this stylish storefront carries hundreds of fine vintages for the discerning.

Markets and supermarkets in Ho Chi Minh

Ben Thanh Market (Traditional)

Add: Quach Thi Trang square, Dist. 1

Binh Tay Market

Add: Thap Muoi St., Ward 2, Dist. 6

Tel: 855 6130

An Dong Market

Add: 34-36 An Duong Vuong St., Ward 9, Dist. 5

Tel: 832 4543

Big C

Add: 138A To Hien Thanh St., Ward 15, Dist. 10

Tel: 863 2993-863 2991

Bookshops in Ho Chi Minh city

The best area to look for maps, books and stationery is along the north side of Le Loi street, between the Rex Hotel and Nam Ky Khoi Nghia street, in the Dong Khoi area. There are many small, privately run shops as well as the large government-run ones.

On De Tham street, around Pham Ngu Lao, there is a handful of shops dealing in used paperbacks and bootleg CDs. Here you can also swap books. Check out the following places.

Fahasa Bookshop

Add: 185 B Dong Khoi and 40 Nguyen Hue street

Tel: 822 4670 and 822 5446

One of the best government-run bookshops, with good dictionaries, maps and general books in English and French.

Phuong Nam Bookshop

Add: 2A Le Duan street

Tel: 822 9650

Opened: 8am-9.30pm

Carries imported books and magazines in English, French and Chinese, mostly of the instructional variety.

Tiem Sach Bookshop

Add: 20 Ho Huan Nghiep street

Opened: 8.30am-10pm

Not so much a bookshop as a backdrop of used English and French titles for the cosy Bo Gio cafe.

3. HUE CITY

Shopping Centers in Hue

General Department Store
1 Hanoi St., Hue

Souvenir shops in Hue

Nguyen Phuc Long
8 Hung Vuong St., Hue

Shop Hue
7 Hung Vuong St., Hue

Perfumer River
7A Hung Vuong St., Hue

Huong Duong
59 Phan Dang Luong St., Hue

Clothing, Cosmetics, Shoes, & Silk

Bao Thanh

49 Tran Hung Dao St., Hue

Boi Tran

17 Tran Hung Dao St., Hue

Trang Tien

95A Tran Hung Dao St., Hue

Camay

80 Hung Vuong St., Hue

Thao Vi

25 Hung Vuong St., Hue

Ryna

6B Tran Cao Van St., Hue

Xuan Thu

10 Hung Vuong St., Hue

Binh Nhi

5 Hung Vuong St., Hue

Bao Tran

11 Hung Vuong St., Hue

Ben Ngu

36 Tran Thuc Nhan St., Hue

Thanh Thanh (shoe)

15 Phan Dang Luu St., Hue

Hung Phu

11 Tran Hung Dao St., Hue

Silk Huong Giang

44 Le Loi St., Hue

Tan Quang

66 Le Loi St., Hue

Liz

18A Nguyen Tri Phuong St., Hue

Mimi

10 Phan Boi Chau St., Hue

Markets & Supermarkets

Hue is known for producing the finest conical hats in Vietnam. The city's speciality is "poem hats", which, when held up to the light, reveal shadowy scenes of daily life.

Hue is also home to one of the largest and most beautiful selections of rice -paper and silk paintings available in Vietnam, but the prices quoted are usually inflated to about four times the real price.

Dong Ba market

Tran Hung Dao St., Hue

(This is Hue's largest market.)

Ben Ngu Market

Phan Boi Chau St., Hue

Hue Unimes Shop

2 Tran Hung Dao St., Hue

4. HOI AN

Arts & Handicrafts

Hung Long Art Gallery

Address: 105 Nguyen Thai Hoc St, Hoi An

Tel: 0510/861-524

This popular gallery features fine lacquer-works by artist Nguyen Trung Viet. These stylized images, mostly of young women, are quite appealing. Prices are affordable and they can ship anywhere on the globe.

Hand-painted Chinese scrolls make a great souvenir, and Mr. Ly Si Binh, down the street from this gallery at 21 Nguyen Thai Hoc St. (Tel. 0510/910-721), can script anything from *peace* or *destruction* to your best buddy's name in Chinese (if it's wrong, he won't know the difference anyway). And it's fun to watch cheery Mr. Binh at work.

Kim Bong Carpentry

106 - 108 Nguyen Thai Hoc St., Hoi An

Tel: (84-510) 862 279

Que Noi Gallery

83 Nguyen Thai Hoc St., Hoi An

Tel: (84-510) 863 184

Recently opened gallery showcasing the contemporary artwork of acclaimed local artist

Bui Cong Khanh.

Reaching Out (Hoa Nhap Handicrafts)

103 Nguyen Thai Hoc St., Hoi An

Tel: (84-510) 910 103

A centralised marketing service for gifts & handicrafts made by disabled Vietnamese. "Great gifts for a Great Cause".

Fashion shops

Yaly Couture

Address: 47 Nguyen Thai Hoc St, Hoi An

Tel: 0510/910-474

47 Tran Phu St., Hoi An

Tel: 510/861-119

580 Cua Dai St., Hoi An

Tel: 0510/914-997

If you're confused by the glut of small tailor storefronts and wonder about the quality of the work, Yaly Couture is your answer. Yes, the prices are higher, but quality comes with more of a guarantee and the same efficient service (12-hr. turnaround for a new suit). Also try their many ready-to-wear items in the small showroom at the town center. Good track record.

Bao Khanh Tailors

37 Phan Dinh Phung St, Hoi An

Tel: (84-510) 861 818

Popular tailors specialising in made-to-measure fashion, formal wear and casual clothing. Well patronised and enjoying a good reputation.

Bambou Company

Address: 96 Nguyen Thai Hoc St, Hoi An

Bambou produces their own unique T-shirts with local themes and designs, all in real cotton with big Western sizes available. They also have cool Asian-inspired clothes, like string-button Chinese shirts and loose travel togs like fishermen's pants and loose shirts.

Hanh Hung

Address: 39 Phan Dinh Phung St, Hoi An

Tel: 0510/910-456

This is one of the best of the town's many budget tailor shops. Ms. Hung is friendly, speaks English well, and cuts good budget deals or can do higher-quality work with better materials for just a hitch more. You can't miss this two-story, neon-lit place on the corner of Phan Dinh Phung and Nhi Trung or at 02 Le Loi (also near Phan Dinh Phung). It's open daily from 8:30am to 10pm.

Son Ca

127 Tran Phu St., Hoi An

Tel: (84-510) 861 569

Napkins, table linen and more all beautifully embroidered by hand. Son Ca also offers

bespoke fashions and ready-to-wear.

Thuong Gia

41 Nguyen Thai Hoc St, Hoi An

Tel: (84-510) 910 712

Foreign-managed tailor shop housed in a converted ancient shophouse which was used as a set during the filming of The Quiet American.

Yaly Couture

47 Nguyen Thai Hoc St., Hoi An

Tel: (84-510) 910 474

High-quality tailors specialising in modern fashions for ladies and gentlemen. Wide range of fabrics & styles. All tailoring is carried out on the premises - unlike many other Hoi An outlets.

Leisure Activities

Jeremy Stein's RAINBOW DIVERS

Hoi An Beach Resort, Hoi An

Tel: 0914 224 102

PADI 5 Star IDC&National Geographic Divecentre

www.divevietnam.com

5. Da Nang

Fine Handicrafts & Souvenir Products

Ha Long Pottery - Central Vietnam Branch

Add: Plot No.5, the 2nd September street

Tel: (84.511) 611170

Gia Thinh High-Grade Pottery

Add: 315 Hoang Dieu street

Tel: (84.511) 897167

Hoang Kiet Fine Handicrafts Terra-Cotta

Add: 68 Vo Van Tan street

Tel: (84.511) 647113

Non Nuoc fine handicrafts stone Co., Ltd

Add: 153 Nguyen Chi Thanh street

Tra My Cinnamon Cuisine Art Production & Trading Co. ☐

Add: 211 Phan Chau Trinh street

Tel: (84.511) 827293

Muoi Thuong Fine Arts Products

Add: 133 Hung Vuong street

Tel: (84.511) 824695

Nam Hai

Add: 95B Phan Chau Trinh street

Tel: (84.511) 810952

Viet Tri

Add: 77 Hung Vuong street

Tel: (84.511) 824006

Non Nuoc fine arts stone products are on sale everywhere at the Non Nuoc Fine Art Village at the foot of the Marble Mountains in Hoa Hai ward, Ngu Hanh Son district of Danang City and mostly at all hotels in the city area.

Pottery products

No.123 - 129 Le Duan St., Da Nang, or
T-junction linking Nui Thanh - Trung Nu Vuong street.

Jewelery and Cosmetics

Sai Gon Jewelery Company (SJC), Danang Branch

Add: 131 Hung Vuong street

Tel: (84.511) 837517

Hoa Kim Nguyen Goldsmith's Shop

Add: 270 Ong Ich Khiem street
Tel: (84.511) 823544

Tin Thanh Goldsmith's Shop

Add: 37 Tran Hung Dao street
Tel: (84.511) 823705

Phia Van Goldsmith's Shop

Add: 336 Ong Ich Khiem street
Tel: (84.511) 823226

Cat Loi Goldsmith's Shop

Add: 08 Le Duan street
Tel: (84.511) 810010

Thanh Toan Goldsmith's Shop

Add: 63 Tran Hung Dao street
Tel: (84.511) 822445

Debon Cosmetics Company, Danang Branch

Add: 41 Nguyen Van Linh street
Tel: (84.511) 871501

Revelon Cosmetics Branch

Add: 69 Tran Hung Dao street
Tel: (84.511) 823307

Shiseido Cosmetics Branch

Add: 35 Hung Vuong street
Tel: (84.511) 825163

Tulip Cosmetics Shop

Add: 105 Le Dinh Duong street
Tel: (84.511) 582523

Amore Cosmetics Branch

Add: 26 Phan Chu Trinh street
Tel: (84.511) 810566

Tenamyd Cosmetics

Add: 182 Hung Vuong street
Tel: (84.511) 837966

KosÃ© Cosmetics

Add: 90 Quang Trung street
Tel: (84.511) 887727

Carita Paris Cosmetics

Add: 130 Nguyen Thi Minh Khai street

Tel: (84.511) 812532

South-Korean Cosmetics

Add: Le Duan street

Kanebo Cosmetics

Add: 47 Le Duan street

Tel: (84.511) 812669

Books, Newspapers & Other Cultural Products in Da Nang

Books Publishing Center

Add: 31- 33 Yen Bai street

Tel: (84.511) 821246

Central Vietnam Children's Books Center

Add: 169 Tran Phu street

Tel: (84.511) 812333

Danang Bookstore

Add: 78 Bach Dang street

Tel: (84.511) 820413

Central Vietnam Bookshop

Add: 264 Hoang Dieu street

Tel: (84.511) 582085

Phan Chau Trinh Bookseller's

Add: 409 Phan Chau Trinh street

Tel: (84.511) 822919

Le Thanh Ton Bookstore

Add: 11 Le Thanh Ton street

Tel: (84.511) 832719

Danang Publishing House Bookshop

Add: 17A Quang Trung street

Tel: (84.511) 812964

Foreign Languages Bookseller's

Add: 101 Phan Chu Trinh street

Tel: (84.511) 822760

General Cultural Bookstores

Add: 70 Phan Chu Trinh street

Tel: (84.511) 816003

Chanh Tri Bookshop

Add: 116A Nguyen Chi Thanh street

Tel: (84.511) 820129

6. NHA TRANG

Along with Hanoi, HCMC and Hoi An, Nha Trang has emerged as a reasonable place to look for art. Though actual galleries are scant, there are several local painters and photographers who display their work on the walls of Nha Trang's resorts, restaurants, cafes and bars.

Fashion shops

Bambou Company

Add: 15 D Biet Thu St., Nha Trang

Tel: 910 774

Email: bambou-company@hotmail.com

Run by a French expat, Bambou Company produces high-quality T-shirts (75,000d to 100,000d) featuring cool original designs.

Also worth checking out are the hand-painted T-shirts done by a friendly local painter named

Kim Quang

(Tel: 0913-416 513). Quang works every night from his wheelchair at the Nha Trang Sailing Club.

Arts & Handicrafts

XQ Nha Trang Arts & Crafts Centre

Add: 64 D Tran Phu St., Nha Trang

Tel: 826 879

Website: www.xqhandembroidery.com

Opened: 8am-8pm

You can watch the artisans at work at this embroidery workshop and gallery, where intricate embroidery 'paintings' are painstakingly worked by hand.

Hung Hara Photo Lab

Add: 2CD Biet Thu St, Nha Trang

Tel: 828 030

Bookshops in Nha Trang

Mr.Lang's Book Exchange

Add: Outdoors, near the War Memorial, Nha Trang

Stocks a good collection of used books in a variety of languages.

Shorty's Bar

Add: 45 Biet Thu street, Nha Trang

Tel: 810 985

Carries a great selection of mostly English-language books.

6. SPECIAL BUYS IN LAI CHAU

Rice 64 and Dien Bien sticky rice

These are best kinds of rice that are grown in Muong Thanh rice field, one of the largest ricefield in the North West of Vietnam. They are known all over the country and especially popular in such provinces as Son La, Hoa Binh, Ha Noi and other neighbouring provinces.

Sau Chit alcohol

According to local people, Sau Chit is a good kind of alcohol for the health, which have been favored by the administration of villages and group of villages. Nowadays, all of visitors coming to Dien Bien Phu want to taste it.

Brocade products

Brocade products reflex clearly the cultural and spiritual life of ethnic groups. In addition, they are made by hard-working and skilful ethnic women. They also show their soul and feelings through every single design of such brocade products as costumes, Pieu scarves, bags, blankets, mattresses, etc.

Rattan and bamboo painted products

In every day life, the ethnic people have used natural materials to make useful objects. They are also very nice souvenirs for tourists such as rattan desks, chairs, baskets, etc.

Coming to Dien Bien Phu, visitors will feel the greatness of Dien Bien Phu historical victory. Visitors also have chance to taste special local made products, to enjoy beautiful folk songs and to buy nice souvenirs for relatives and friends.

7. GOOD SPECIALTIES IN DA LAT

Once you are lucky enough to be in Da Lat, a wide range of souvenirs and specialties are available for your choice. Markets in this flowerful town are also flowerful. Be bent with fresh colorful flowers and beautiful arts & handicrafts, like Da Lat dinner wine, sweaters, wooden sculptured paintings, brocades, jams, fruits, and so forth.

Da Lat dinner wine

Any market in Da Lat can be easily found Da Lat dinner wine. Or you can buy it at: Showroom of Trade & Tourism Promotion Center, or

Da Lat dinner wine Factory at

31 Ngo Van So St., Da Lat

Tel: (063) 822491/ 822437

Where to buy sweaters?

You can reach Hoa Binh area, or at Da Lat market's shops, A zone. Prices range from 35,000 to 60,000 VND/sweater.

Delicate wooden sculptured paintings

These are popularly sold in Hoa Binh area. Wooden sculptured paintings express the delicateness of Da Lat people via delicate and nice drawings and poems onto the paintings. You can also order the artists to draw what you would like. Prices are from 20,000 VND to hundreds of thousand VND/painting.

Da Lat fruits

It's best to buy fruits at Da Lat markets in the early morning for best quality. Persimmon, avocado, peach, strawberry, etc. are available at your disposal. Prices are around 20,000 VND/kilo.

Special jams

Jam prices changes as to quality, but the difference is small. Besides shops at Da Lat markets, you can come to some jam and specialty shops at:

1 Le Hong Phong St., Da Lat

Tel: (063) 821176

Some reliable tea shops for suggestion

Le Ky Coffee Tea

21 Hoa Binh zone, Da Lat

Tel: (063) 831915

Hoa Lam Coffee Tea

49 – 51 Phan Boi Chau St., Da Lat

Tel: (063) 825661

Vinh Tien Tea

39 – 41 Pham Ngoc Thach St., Da Lat

Tel: (063) 821844

Dat Viet Atiso

1C Nguyen Khuyen St., Da Lat

Tel: (063) 822303

VI. Markets & Supermarkets

Markets and Supermarkets in Hanoi

Dong Xuan market

Add: Dong Xuan street, Hoan Kiem dist

Tel: 928 0671

Hang Da market

Add: Hang Da street, Hoan Kiem dist

Tel: 828 6889

19-12 (19 December) market

Add: 41-43 Hai Ba Trung street, Hoan Kiem dist

Tel: 826 2410

Big C

Add: 222 Tran Duy Hung street, Trung Hoa Ward, Cau Giay dist

Tel: 784 6878

Metro

Add: Pham Van Dong street, Cau Giay dist

Tel: 755 1617/ 755 2204

Fax: 755 1650

Citimart Somerset Grand

Add: 49 Hai Ba Trung street

Tel: 934 2999

Fax: 934 2888

Fivimart

Add: 210 Tran Quang Khai street

Tel: 826 0167

Fax: 934 1039

Markets and supermarkets in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC)

Ben Thanh Market (Traditional)

Add: Quach Thi Trang square, Dist.1, HCMC

Binh Tay Market

Add: Thap Muoi St., Ward 2, Dist.6, HCMC

Tel: 855 6130

An Dong Market

Add: 34-36 An Duong Vuong St., Ward 9, Dist.5, HCMC

Tel: 832 4543

Big C

Add: 138A To Hien Thanh St., Ward 15, Dist.10, HCMC

Tel: 863 2993-863 2991

Markets & Supermarkets in Hue

Hue is known for producing the finest conical hats in Vietnam. The city's speciality is "poem hats", which, when held up to the light, reveal shadowy scenes of daily life.

Hue is also home to one of the largest and most beautiful selections of rice -paper and silk paintings available in Vietnam, but the prices quoted are usually inflated to about four times the real price.

Dong Ba market

Tran Hung Dao St., Hue

(This is Hue's largest market.)

Ben Ngu Market

Phan Boi Chau St., Hue

Hue Unimes Shop

2 Tran Hung Dao St., Hue

VII. Bookshops

Book shops in Hanoi

Bao Thang Book Shop

276 Pho Hue
Tel: 978 2321

Doan Trang Book Shop

40B Ba Trieu
Tel: 824 3716

Dong Tay

32 Ba Trieu
Tel: 825 1374

Foreign Language Bookshop

61 Trang Tien
Tel: 824 8914

Ha Noi Book Shop

46 Tran Hung Dao
Tel: 934 6855

Ha Huong Book Shop

6 Trang Thi
Tel: 828 5781

Hoa Hien Book Shop

56 Ba Trieu
Tel: 826 7207

La Boutique

15 Ngo Quyen
Tel: 826 6919

Tien Phong Book Shop

175 Nguyen Thai Hoc
Tel: 733 6235

Trang An

240 Ton Duc Thang
Tel: 511 3040

Thuan Book Shop

80B Ba Trieu
Tel: 822 7272

Tinh Hoa Book Shop

147 Doi Can

Tel: 722 1419

Yen Bookshop

24 Kham Thien

Tel: 518 0571

Bookshops in Ho Chi Minh city

The best area to look for maps, books and stationery is along the north side of Le Loi street, between the Rex Hotel and Nam Ky Khoi Nghia street, in the Dong Khoi area. There are many small, privately run shops as well as the large government-run ones.

On De Tham street, around Pham Ngu Lao, there is a handful of shops dealing in used paperbacks and bootleg CDs. Here you can also swap books. Check out the following places.

Fahasa Bookshop

Add: 185 B Dong Khoi and 40 Nguyen Hue street, HCMC

Tel: 822 4670 and 822 5446

One of the best government-run bookshops, with good dictionaries, maps and general books in English and French.

Phuong Nam Bookshop

Add: 2A Le Duan street, HCMC

Tel: 822 9650

Opened: 8am-9.30pm

Carries imported books and magazines in English, French and Chinese, mostly of the instructional variety.

Tiem Sach Bookshop

Add: 20 Ho Huan Nghiep street, HCMC

Opened: 8.30am-10pm

Not so much a bookshop as a backdrop of used English and French titles for the cozy Bo Gio cafe.

Books, Newspapers & Other Cultural Products in Da Nang

Books Publishing Center

Add: 31- 33 Yen Bai street, Da Nang

Tel: (84.511) 821246

Central Vietnam Children's Books Center

Add: 169 Tran Phu street, Da Nang

Tel: (84.511) 812333

Danang Bookstore

Add: 78 Bach Dang street, Da Nang

Tel: (84.511) 820413

Central Vietnam Bookshop

Add: 264 Hoang Dieu street, Da Nang

Tel: (84.511) 582085

Phan Chau Trinh Bookseller's

Add: 409 Phan Chau Trinh street, Da Nang

Tel: (84.511) 822919

Le Thanh Ton Bookstore

Add: 11 Le Thanh Ton street, Da Nang

Tel: (84.511) 832719

Danang Publishing House Bookshop

Add: 17A Quang Trung street, Da Nang

Tel: (84.511) 812964

Foreign Languages Bookseller's

Add: 101 Phan Chu Trinh street, Da Nang

Tel: (84.511) 822760

General Cultural Bookstores

Add: 70 Phan Chu Trinh street, Da Nang

Tel: (84.511) 816003

Chanh Tri Bookshop

Add: 116A Nguyen Chi Thanh street, Da Nang

Tel: (84.511) 820129

Bookshops in Nha Trang

Mr.Lang's Book Exchange

Add: Outdoors, near the War Memorial, Nha Trang

Stocks a good collection of used books in a variety of languages.

Shorty's Bar

Add: 45 Biet Thu street, Nha Trang

Tel: 810 985

Carries a great selection of mostly English-language books.
