

## General

**Card Phones:** Not many except in Ho Chi Minh. Cards in units of **60,000D, 300,000D, 450,000D** can be bought at shops with a yellow Phone card sign.

**International** calls are best made from the post office. To call abroad from Vietnam, dial 00 + country code + area code minus first 0 + number. Always use the prefix 171 to save costs for dialing overseas (ie tel 171+ 00 + country code + area code etc); this is a new government service covering over fifty countries, with a flat rate of \$1.30 per minute. Hotels may mark this up however, and the rate does not cover faxes. Dialing without this prefix, phone rates shoot up, costing \$2.50–3.50 per minute (cheaper rates Mon–Sat 11pm–7am, all day Sun and on public holidays.) There's no facility for reverse-charge calls but you can almost always get a "call-back" to the post office you're calling from, for the price of a one-minute call.

### Motorbike Rental

Also check the small print on your insurance policy, and consider taking out local accident insurance anyway. The biggest local insurer is Bao Viet, with offices in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi; their policies cost \$14 for the basic three-month cover and are easy to obtain.

### WATER

*Giai khat* means "quench your thirst" and you'll see the signs everywhere. The simple rule is don't drink the water in Vietnam, and avoid ice in your drinks – dung bo da, camon (no ice, thanks). Contaminated water causes diarrhoea, gastroenteritis, typhoid, cholera, dysentery, poliomyelitis, hepatitis A and giardia.

## Hanoi

**International SOS Clinic:** Central Bldg. 31 Hai Ba Trang T

**Bach Mai Hospital:** D.Giai Phong T8522004 24hr English speaking

**Dental Clinic Bach Mai Hospital:** T8522004

**Hanoi Dental Clinic:** B3 Van Phuc T8230281 F8230281, emergency 090401919 M-F 9-17:00

**International SOS Dental Clinic:**T9340555 F9340556, 24hrs

**TRAIN STATION:** Ga Hanoi Le Duan St. 1km SW from the Hoan Kiem Lake 7-8min from center, by cyclo **5,000-8,000D**

Ticket office open: 7:00-12:30,13:00-20:50

Trains to Ho Chi Minh Lao Cai Long Son Hai Phong

**Cyclo:** Anywhere in town - **5,000D-10,000D.**

Same charge for 2 persons, but their starting price is usually \$1-2/p **Charter \$1/hr.** Cyclo drivers often ask for more money than originally agreed so it's better to write the agreed amount down on paper.

**Bike Taxi:** Slightly higher charge than cyclos. Need to bargain.

**Taxi:** Metered. Usually found in front of high class hotels. They are not so expensive.

**Five Taxi:** T8555555 **first 1km \$0.95 additional \$0.65/km**

**Taxi PT:** T8533171 **first 1km 7,000D additional 5,300D/km**

**CITY Taxi:** T8222222 **first 1km 7,000D additional 5,500D/km**

**Bicycles / Motor bike:** Bicycles are best to get around the city. Traffic is very heavy, no hills. Bicycle hire from GH's and Tourist cafes.

Check brakes & tires.

## FOOD

### **Restaurant Hue (Quan Hue) \$, 6 Ly Thuong Kiet Tel: 84-4-8264062**

True to its name, this small family restaurant serves Hue-style Vietnamese cuisine in a casual covered patio atmosphere. Great place for an inexpensive meal. Popular with locals and expats in the know.

### **Hoa Sua: 81 Tho Nhuom, Viet&French 20-80,000D**

It looks high class but isn't. French dishes cost more than 50,000D but Vietnamese dishes are about 20,000D, cheap & tasty. Special bread are sold at the entrance. **2500D; Rec**

the **Relax Bar**. They had great frosted mugs of Tiger beer for about a buck each and I think I drank enough to float a boat. They had food in the Relax which was OK. One night I had nems/spring rolls which were OK (God knows what was in them - it was kinda dark) and then I had Mystery Fried Rice that included chunks of meat that would bark if it could talk I suppose.

### **Cafe 252**

252 Hang Bong Street in the heart of old Hanoi

It has a simple but welcoming atmosphere: no fancy prices, no fancy menu, no fancy decor and no air-conditioning. Just good food and hot coffee served on chipped but clean plates and always with a little bit of philosophy from the ever-watchful proprietor, Le Huu Chi. Eclairs, cream puffs, donuts, pain au chocolate and brioche fill the display case in the narrow storefront. There is also a choice of hamburgers, omelets, sandwiches and steamed pork buns. Everything is made by hand

Mr. Chi says his yogurt is the best because unlike his competitors he understands the taste of it. "Vietnamese like the sugared yogurt, but that's not real yogurt. No one has yogurt like ours." The yogurt at 252 is all natural, unsweetened and served with a miniature pot of honey on the side. And it's the yogurt that keeps customers coming back, according to Mr. Chi. "Madame Deneuve told me the yogurt was excellent. At first I thought she was just flattering me, but then she came back every day."

### **Hanoi Hints May 2004-05-03**

There are so many things to see and do in Hanoi... depends on what you're interested in... galleries, museums, temples and pagodas.... the Dong Xuan market is worth a visit... but an even better place to explore that tourists never really hear about is the **Hoa Binh** market, also known as the black market, its located down Pho Hue near Tran Khat Chan, endless alleys to explore.... Pick up a tourist map for 10,000dong and hit the places of interest to you.

## Dong Hoi

the town is great, completely unused to tourists, great local pancake-things at the market. There's a nice river ride to a series of caves, Phong Nga Cave is the name

I'd stay the night, you could spend the day on the river and visit the cave (and see huge bomb craters in the rice paddies left over from the war); but remember, Dong Hoi is off the "tourist trail" for a reason. There's nothing there except for local people going about their business. For you I think that would be fine. Also, the cave isn't exactly well-maintained...but the boat ride offers wonderful views of river life.

## Hoi An

**ATM: Vietcom Bank:** 37 Tran Hung Dao 6-22:00

**Police Office:** Hoang Dieu + Tran Phu

**Hoi An Hospital:** 4 Tran Hung Dao, T861218

**Rental bicycles:** from GH's, cafes, travel agencies, etc. **10,000d/day**  
**5,000D/half day**

**Rental Motorbikes: Rua Xe Thanh:** 47 Phan Dinh Phung, T863349, 6-18:00 **\$3/day**

**Airport:** Closest one is Danang airport. Daily flights to **Hanoi**(dep7:00, 19:40), **Hai Phong**(10:15), **Pleiku**(10:10), **Nha Trang**(10:10), **Saigon**(8:15, 18:00), **Bangkok**(dep11:30 arr12:45), **Singapore**(dep8:30 arr9:20)

### FOOD

**Cau Lau:** noodle dish Hoi An style. **5000D**

**White Rose(Banh Bao):** cooked shrimp wrapped with small rise paper and steamed. It was named by French because the shape is like rose petals

**Food stall:** in front of the Cantonese Assembly hall, near the river. Local food. Their displayed photos menu makes us easy to order, **drink 2000+, che 2000, meal 5000+**

Suffice it to say that an evening meal at the **Thu Bon River restaurant** at sunset looking out over the river towards the rice fields and coconut palms is sublime. The family that run the Thu Bon are great - very friendly, the menu is excellent, and again - they're so generous! I got a free coffee and a ride back to my hotel on the owner's Honda!

**Kimijam** at 99 Thai Hoc Street (one street from river - off Le Loi St) fabulous French/Viet food around US3-5 for some of the finest food in Asia. Lovely elder lady waitress and Viet widow whose husband was french chef. The best onion tart & pate we have ever tasted! 100's of variety of teas & coffee-could have eaten there for a week! Open bfast/lunch/dinner ph 910-311.

**Nguyyet Cam** Restaurant 23 Phan Dinh Phung Work: 84-510-861-203  
Enter by the right-hand side of the building - good for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

### Boat Trip

Along the river Thu Bon, stopping at guild villages, villages of wood-carving, ceramics etc., along the way. The craftsmen work purely for the tourists. Make lots of inquiries, as there are many different boats. Bargain hard. **\$4-5** for part of the day, or just ride up and down for an hour for **\$1-2**. It's also possible to go out to Cham Island, 20km off the coast, to hang out in the fishing villages. The ferry leaves sometime in the morning (between 7:00 and 8:00), and comes back in the afternoon.

### Tailors – Hoi An

1: Everything is tailor made. Best quality Italian silk wool blend suits (armani, versacci bolts), \$55US (I upgraded to silk lining and multiple pants.) They all had shelves full of "light wool" which was supposedly a wool/kashmir blend, but after a little questioning and an offer/threat to test it with a cigarette lighter, it turned out to have at least a reasonable polyester content. Demand the best bolts and pay a few extra bucks. Remember, silk, wool and kashmir do not melt when exposed to naked flames.

Silk shirts \$10-12US. Cargo Pants, \$15US.

We tried 4 shops. **19 Le Loi Street** was by far the best quality, but maybe \$1 or \$2 more.

2: I got excellent clothes at **23 Nguyen Thai Hoc St.** in Hoi An

3: I found **Phuong 1** at 15 thi Trung (???) St exceptional. I have had clothes made all over Asia and I have to say that after I went back to her a second time she went SO out of her way for me. Definitely check out the quality of the material. I appeared to know my stuff (eg: Japanese Silk is 20%+ polyester) and she was sensational and ended up bringing the price RIGHT down.

4: Recommended : **Hung Vi** for handmade shoes. A small shop in the alley to the left side of the main Cloth Market as you look at it from the front. As well as being lovely people, they made me a beautiful pair of leather shoes for \$20 in just 12 hours. Having come home and looked at the suits we had made in the cold light of day, I now realise those shoes were far better value than any of the clothes I had made.

go to **Thuy's** at number 60 Le Loi Street and ask for Manageress, she's a honey and very savvy and knowledgeable about sewing and fabrics. Tell her you want quality items, measured and cut and sewn by her best people and not crappy stuff. You should save about 60% on what you'd pay in US or UK for similar.

Check out other shops and bargain at Thuy's-also check out fabrics very carefully. I paid US\$65 ea for two beautiful silk coats and they are perfectly cut and sewn. Do not pay until you are satisfied. You will need to leave a deposit but do not pay balance until you are happy. This shop has been around for yonks and values repeat business and its reputation. Good luck.

A basic full-suit (cotton) is about US\$25 to 28. The market ones would cost you US\$23 to 25. Bear in mind the cost of your full-suit goes up according to the kind of material you go for. Pay no more than US\$100 for cashmere material. Though I heard you could knock it down to US\$90

## Saigon

### **Banks / Exchange**

US\$/T/C & Cash: Can change at almost every bank & moneychanger. After office hours Exchange counter of banks at Pham Ngu Lao or Le Loi open Sa Su or after 15:00.

Cash Advance Visa, MC(Master Card), accepted. Commission 0-4, rate depends on cards

**ATM: Vietcombank, Sacom Bank.**

**Police Office: Emergency Call T113 Ambulance T115**

**AEA Int'l Hospital:** 65 Nguyen Du T8298520 F8298551 24h medical & dental service

**International Hospital SOS** Hannam Bldg. #65 Nguyen Du T8298520 9:00-18:00. English, Japanese and translators available, 24 hr Emergency

**Columbia Asia Saigon Clinic:** 8 Alexandre de Rhodes, Dist1, T829 0485. It accepts insurance, 24 hour and western standard services.

**Tan Son Nhat Airport:** NW from the city. 30 min. by car.

**Airport Tax International = \$12 Domestic 20,000D**

**Transport to town: Taxi costs US\$4-5**

**Ferry(Local):** Duc Thang St, opp Riverside Hotel. ferry across the River Ton - 500D

**Speed Boat:** E end of Ham Nghi Blvd. There are a few companies operate on the same route. Many boat between 6:15-16:45

**Cyclo:** everywhere costs about **5,000+D. US\$1-2/hour** Bargain hard. Ask to write down the price to avoid confusion.

**!Warning** Hassle with Cyclo drivers is common. Not only with bargaining but also threats at knife point have been reported. It's better not to use Cyclos at night.

**Motorcycle taxi(Honda):** bargain hard. (The cost is same as cyclo)

**Taxi:** Taxi (metered). The price differs between companies. **First 2km 12,000D add. 250m 1,500-1,700D** Because of the hassle with Cyclo drivers the taxi is worth using here. Some taxis hanging around Pham Ngu Lao Area alter the meter. Better to try to get one running on streets.

**Yellow Vitataxi: 7,500D for the 1st km,+1500D/200m**

**Taxi (charter):** Unmarked taxis can be arranged at most hotels or tour companies.

**Rental : Bicycle \$1/day.**

Available at some GH & cafes. Very useful but parking requires fee, **1,000D.** many streets are one-way, this is enforced.

## Markets

**Ben Thanh Market:** Le Loi+Le Lai, town center. The biggest market in Ho Chi Minh. Daily goods, souvenirs, snacks.A market for tourists. Bargain hard. Good and comfortable food court in North part of the market.

**Binh Tay markets:** in Cho Lon Faced to Thap Muoi Rd. Daily goods etc. Lively market.

**Thai Binh Market:** West end of Pham Ngu Lao. Small market. Some food stands selling snacks

### Souvenir shops

Many along Dong Khoi St. and in Benh Thanh Market. Chinese and Vietnamese ceramics, old watches, lacquer-ware & mother-of-pearl inlaid screens.

**Antiques:** Many on Dong Khoi St, Mac Thi Buoai and Ngo Du Ke St.

**Handicrafts:** Around Rex and Continental Hotel, along Dong Khoi St and Nguyen Hue.

**Northern? Hill Tribe's shop: Sapa**

**sapa1:** 29 Ngo Duc Ke T8258942

**sapa2:** 235 Pham Ngu Lao T8369863

**sapa3:** 223 De Tham T8365163

**Lacquer-ware:** In many handicraft shops on Nguyen Hue, Dong Khoi St.

**Silk/Ao Dai:** Dong Khoi St & in Ben Thanh Market. not only tailors, you can order at cloth shop. selecting material, they call a tailor and measure your size. Ao dai will be ready next day.

Ao Dai (Silk) Tailor-made 1 piece: **\$20+, At T & T Travel \$25+**

**T-shirts:** Handmade-embroidered T-shirts **\$2+**. Bargain hard.

**Coffee:** Many different kinds sold. **\$0.5-3/100g.** At Ben Thanh they are expensive and at Binh Tay cheapest. But Vietnamese prefer coffee with other flavors, such as butter, chocolate, etc. I do not think they are western taste. So if you buy a package, read the package carefully.

**Laundry:** GH have laundry service.

**2,000-3,000D/T-shirt 5,000D/ pair of jeans**

## Food

### Pham Ngu Lao Area

**Kim Cafeteria:** #270 De Tham International 15,000-30,000D Popular with travelers. Good food. Try squid dishes. Rec

Shellfish stall: **Bui Bien + De Tham** open in the evening. cook(boil or fry) a few different kinds of selfish, such as cram 7000k delicious and cheap. Highly Rec.

**Mr & Mrs HIEN:** 185-187 Nguyen Thai Hoc, Vietnam 10,000 Cheap Local people's restaurant. Crab & shellfish are good. There are many similar restaurants on this street.

**Restaurant 13** - 13 Ngo Duc Ke St, D1 - a bit touristy but one of my favourites. Serves classic Vietnamese food that is a step up from street food, but still cheap and tasty. They cater to foreigners by serving chicken with no skin, no bones, etc. Extensive menu with some strange translations like Fried Fallopian tubes. Head waiter is a charming older man who speaks French to all foreigners. Even serve house Bordeaux by the glass! Best dishes are Lemongrass Chicken, Deep Fried Squid with Plum Sauce (read Crusty Squid), Caramel Claypot Pork, Thai Style Soup and Water Spinach with Garlic.

**Sama** - Dong Du St, D1 - fabulous French deli that sells cheese and cold cuts with a small restaurant attached. Open for lunch and dinner. Great baguettes for take out or eat in if you can find a seat amongst the French expat lunchtime crowd

**Saigon Saigon** on the 10 floor of the **Delta Caravelle Hotel**, has some of the best views of Saigon. Built on a corner you have three different views of HCM. It is the place to meet and tends to receive a fair number of earlier after work drinkers. They also have a live band, which attracts quite a crowd, although it is nothing like back home, the bartender kept insisting that it got better. Great bar. Now with Happy Hour from 4pm to 8pm "Buy one Get one free" on all standard drinks and also Carlsberg beer. Go for it !!

**Apocalypse Now** Do not go here unless you want a quiet game of pool, before 22:30 as it only really starts to get busy from then on. This is more of a disco come bar with one pool table thrown in. It is very popular at the weekends with expats and locals alike. Good music, inexpensive drinks, and a novel decor have made it famous within Vietnam During our travels, Thao turned down an empty street. A motorcycle zoomed up from behind and the pillion rider grabbed at my lap expecting to get a camera, instead he got an arm that remained attached to its owner. They sped off empty-handed. It was standard Saigon modus operandi: they followed us until we hit an empty street and then sped up to make the grab. Do not, I repeat do not, go around Saigon with an SLR camera hanging around your neck. Instead, wrap the strap tightly around your wrist a few times and hold the camera tight in your hand, leaving no significant amount of the camera strap exposed.

### **Rex's Rooftop** Garden Restaurant

The restaurant is entirely in the open air atop the Rex Hotel, with an exception of the bar area in the middle which was covered by a cabana style hard umbrella. They served both French and Vietnamese cuisine. Some dishes were a fusion of both cuisines.

Absolutely the best views of Ho Chi Minh Square from the rooftop. We insisted on a table by the edge for views of down below. From our table we had a vantage point of the busy traffic circle and the famous Continental Hotel across the street with its revolving globe. The Rex also has its own revolving icon atop its building - a jewelled crown (similar to the Parkay commercials). The rotating crown looked small from the street below but if you managed to get a rooftop table next to it, your view could be obscured by the six foot behemoth. Be sure to get seated at one of the tables on the roof side that face Ho Chi Minh's statue and the ornate french city hall building. Good photo op.

My appetizer was vietnamese spring rolls (Chai Gio), one of my favorite anyway. We all ordered different main courses, some Vietnamese, some French. The best dish we

ordered was a steamed shrimp batter that was cooked and molded around a sugar cane section.

**ALLEZ BOO**

197 Pham Ngu Lao District 1  
Ho Chi Minh City  
Tel: (84-8) 837 2505 Fax: (84-8) 836 4557

With its tropical, bamboo and thatch decor, open and airy atmosphere and friendly welcome, Allez Boo is one of Saigon's most popular restaurants with travellers and expatriates alike.

The food is delicious, servings are generous and prices are reasonable

**SAHARA BAR**

277 Pham Ngu Lao District 1  
Ho Chi Minh City Tel: (84-8) 837 8084

I'd been to **Com Nieu Sai Gon** several times last year. Loved the food there. I heard there are several restaurants under the same name now (not sure owned by the same people) but I went to the original restaurant. It's in District 3, on a small street between Nam Ky Khoi Nghia St. and Le Quy Don St. (near the Cultural House for Children). They serve two forms of rice there: "com nieu," which is ordinary steamed rice but cooked in clay pots, and "com dap," the same type of rice in clay pots but being left longer on the stove so that the rice at the bottom of pots becomes a little burnt and hardened. This is what servers would throw across the room. I would suggest you order one "com dap" for the show but have "com nieu" instead unless you have strong teeth and a taste for crunchy rice. Don't forget their wonderful "canh cua rau day" (a type of light soup with green vegetable & crabmeat, but unlike anything you've ever tasted), deep-fried fish fillet, and "tom cang rim" (sautee prawns). They are my favorites. The restaurant is very casual and the prices are a little expensive for the locals but quite cheap for visitors.

There's another interesting Vietnamese restaurant just across from the Reunification Palace in District 1, called "**Quan Ngon**," (the delicious diner). The story is that the owner went to food courts in open marketplaces around town and had a sampler of different types of food and cuisines. He (or she?) then invited those who prepared the best dish in each category to go cook for his restaurant. After you are seated, you can order your food from a menu, or you can ask your server to give you a tour around the "food market" where dishes are prepared in front of your eyes and displayed on wooden/rattan trays, imitating a Vietnamese market place (better food hygiene and service than in the real markets there though). Just ask about and point to what you have the mood for--food is prepared in a much smaller portion there than in the west so you can indulge yourself with 3-4 appetizers/ dishes before getting full. Better, bring a friend/travelmate so you two can share the food and the ooh-ahh experience.

## ***Shopping***

**Ben Thanh Market** - A large indoor market spilling out into the surrounding streets. It was built in 1914, originally called the Halles Centrales, and occupies an area of 11 square km.

**Cholon - Binh Tay Market & An Dong Market** in district 5, referred to as Cho Lon

Not as central as the famous Ben Thanh Market in district 1, but still brimming with exotic goods and smells for western nostrils. Bargains can be made, the price is generally at a lower level, but don't come without your Vietnamese phrasebook. Unlike other markets, Cholon Market hasn't changed since the days of the Viet Nam War. Derelict shells of empty old French style houses are still surrounding the market and set you back in time. Best time to travel to Cholon will be just after the main morning rush, giving you most of the day at your disposal. If the traffic scares you and you do not want to spend half an hour on

the back of a motorbike (known as Honda-Om) then going by taxi is a sensible choice. The fare from the city centre will set you back at least 60.000 VND (US \$4) each way.

If you're into **shopping**, I'd try the new (relatively) multi-story arcade on **Nguyen Trai St.**, near the back of the New World Hotel. In fact, all of Nguyen Trai is good for that sort of thing

**Ho Chi Minh Center:** Intersection of Le Loi and Nguyen Hue (near the Rex hotel and the Hotel de Ville). The Vietnamese hang out in the evening in the small grassy squares around here. Watch the well-dressed beautiful people cruise by on their motorbikes. Pick a spot and hang; you'll make some friends.

## To Do

Saigon's Continental Hotel Walk through the lobby and relax in the Terrace, the courtyard bistro/bar that was faithfully recreated to the period for the film. With its banyan trees, wrought iron furnishings and display of historic photographs, the canopied courtyard is a ready-made film set. Indeed it is the backdrop for the scene where Alden Pyle, played by Brendan Fraser, is first introduced to Fowler, played by Michael Caine.

Walk to the steps of the Opera House and face the square, once known as the Place Garnier. This is the locale of one of the most pivotal scenes in both novel and film.

Cross the square and turn left on Dong Khoi, once the Rue Catinat, toward the Saigon River. On your right is the Mondial Hotel, the site where Greene once kept an apartment. Further along, just before the river, stop in for a look at the beautifully restored Majestic Hotel. Pay a visit to the Majestic Hotel's rooftop bar at nightfall, taking in its sweeping Saigon River vista. It's easy to imagine Greene's murder scene along its banks. You can still see a sampan or two amid the new hydrofoils and brightly-lit billboards.

**Reunification Palace(Hoi Truong Nha):** 106 Nguyen Du.7:30-11,13:00-16:00 \$4  
Highly Rec 30 minute tours, available in English, French, Chinese, Japanese. Fuzzy video about Vietnamese history is shown in English, French and Chinese. This building was the old Presidential Palace of South Vietnam. It's preserved as it was from that time. See many official rooms, the living quarters, the dance floor, the helipad, the underground war room. On April 30, 1975, Viet Cong tanks crashed through the gates and erected their flag here to mark the end of the war. Free bicycle parking available.

**Ben Thanh Market:** Le Loi & Le Lai, on the north side of the huge turning circle. Most user-friendly market in town. Vietnamese food available, daily products, clothes, electronic goods, souvenirs, etc. Tagged with tourist prices. Bargain hard and watch out for pickpockets. **Rec**