

## **ASEAN CROSS-CULTURAL EXTERNSHIP PLACEMENT COUNTRY BACKGROUND**



**1. (Name of Country) :** VIET NAM

Capital: HA NOI

Largest cities: Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon); Haiphong; Da Nang.

**2. History/Background**

Vietnam is unique among the eleven nations of Southeast Asia because of its strong historical kingdom connections to China as well as India. What is now northern Vietnam was ruled by China for more than a thousand years, between the second century B.C.E. and the tenth century C.E. Ethnic Vietnamese have been both attracted to Chinese ideas and, at times, anxious to resist Chinese political rule for their own people.

The Chinese-influenced northern kingdoms emerged around the fertile Red River Delta, where the national capital of Hanoi is today. These kingdoms often rebelled against Chinese rule, and they eventually became stronger militarily than southern Hindu kingdoms ruled by Chams, who are linguistically related to Malays. The Chams built the Indianized Champa kingdom roughly contemporaneous with Angkor although today they are a small ethnic minority within Vietnam with a significant Muslim population.

The French sent Catholic missionaries to the Vietnam region beginning in the mid 17th century. When many of them were killed by Vietnamese emperors in the 1800s, the French government used their repression as a pretext for invasion and colonial conquest. Saigon was seized by the French navy in 1859. During the following decades, the French repelled the Chinese, who also considered Vietnam as theirs, and expanded French territorial control over what are now the nations of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. They set their capital of Saigon in Vietnam's second fertile river delta region, the Mekong.

The "first Vietnam war" between the French-controlled south and the Communist-led north began in December 1946. In 1954 the French withdrew, leaving Vietnam an independent but divided nation. The United States sent troops to fight the Communists throughout the 1960s, bombing also in neighboring Cambodia.

The United States ended its part in the Vietnam War in 1975. Saigon quickly fell to the Communists who united North and South Vietnam. In 1986, as the Cold War was ending, Vietnam began a series of market and social reforms, working to normalize its relations with the United States and open the country for tourism, which developed in the 1990s.

### **3. Population**

As of 1 January 2015, the population of Vietnam was estimated to be 91.669.433 people. During 2015 Vietnam population is estimated to be increased by 986 363 people and reach 92.655.796 in the beginning of 2016.

### **4. Main Religions and Ethnicities**

**Main religions:** According to official statistics from the government, as of 2014 in Vietnam there are 24 million people identified with one of the recognised organised religions, out of a population of 90 million. Of these, 11 million are Buddhists (12.2%), 6.2 million

are Catholics (6.8%), 4.4 million are Caodaists (4.8%), 1.4 million are Protestants (1.6%), 1.3 million are Hoahaoists (1.4%), and there are 75,000 Muslims, 7000 Bahais, 1500 Hindus and other smaller groups (<1%).<sup>1</sup> Traditional folk religions (worship of gods, goddesses and ancestors) have experienced a rebirth since the 1980s. religions have experienced a revival since the 1980s.<sup>2</sup>

According to estimates by the Pew Research Center, in 2010 most of the Vietnamese practice folk religions (45.3%), Buddhists constitute 16.4% of the population, around 8.2% of the Vietnamese are Christians (mostly Catholics), and around 30% are unaffiliated to any religion.<sup>3 4</sup> Officially, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam is an atheist state as declared by its communist government.<sup>5</sup>

**Ethnicities:** Vietnam is a multiethnic country with over fifty distinct groups (54 are recognized by the Vietnamese government), each with its own language, lifestyle, and cultural heritage. Many of the local ethnic groups are known collectively in the West as Montagnard or Degar. The largest ethnic groups are: Kinh (Viet) 86.2%, Tay 1.9%, Tai Ethnic 1.7%, M'ong 1.5%, Khmer Krom (Kh<sup>ơ</sup> Me Cr<sup>ơ</sup>m) 1.4%, Hoa 1.1%, Nùng 1.1%, Hmong 1%, others 4.1% (1999 census). The Vietnamese term for ethnic group is ng<sup>h</sup>o<sup>i</sup> thi<sup>u</sup> s<sup>đ</sup> or dân t<sup>đ</sup>c thi<sup>u</sup> s<sup>đ</sup> (literally "minority people").

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<sup>1</sup> Home Office: *Country Information and Guidance — Vietnam: Religious minority groups*. December 2014. Quoting United Nations' "Press Statement on the visit to the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief". Hanoi, Viet Nam 31 July 2014. Vietnamese. Quote, p. 8: «[...] [...]»

<sup>2</sup> Philip Taylor. *Goddess on the Rise: Pilgrimage and Popular Religion in Vietnam*

<sup>3</sup> *The Global Religious Landscape 2010*. The Pew Forum.

<sup>4</sup> "Global Religious Landscape". The Pew Forum. Retrieved 4 May 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Jan Dodd, Mark Lewis, Ron Emmons. *The Rough Guide to Vietnam, Vol. 4, 2003. p. 509: «After 1975, the Marxist-Leninist government of reunified Vietnam declared the state atheist while theoretically allowing people the right to practice their religion under the constitution.»*

## **5. Main Languages and Dialects**

Vietnamese (tiếng Việt) is the only official language in Vietnam. It is the first or second language of many ethnic minorities in Vietnam, but some mountain tribes also speak a language of their own.

There are three main dialects of Vietnamese that can be classified geographically: north (Hanoi), south (Ho-Chi-Minh-City), central (Hue).

## **6. General Legal System and Laws of Everyday Importance**

Vietnam (official name: Socialist Republic of Vietnam or Cộng hòa Xã hội chủ nghĩa Việt Nam), is situated in the east of the Indochina Peninsula (Southeast Asia). The legal system of Vietnam is based on the Civil law system. The Vietnamese Civil Code of 2005 reflects a European-style Civil law Code.

## **7. Cultural Do's and Don'ts**

It's not a matter of life and death, but knowing these do's and don'ts could come in handy. Not only to avoid cultural faux pas, but also to have a greater understanding about the Vietnamese way of thinking and values.

### **Losing Face**

The concept of "face" cannot be easily defined, though it is generally related to a person's reputation, dignity, honour, or a combination of all three. It is a very important concept for the Vietnamese people and it boils down to a primal fear of "losing face" (mất mặt).

Avoid showing anger to people in public as it will cause great humiliation for them. Criticism is best conducted gently and discreetly, as the Vietnamese don't understand the concept of "brutally honest" as Westerners do. You might also notice that some people will refuse to say sorry after they have made a mistake and instead try to brush it off with laughter or smile. Don't be offended, as in most cases it is an attempt to "save face".

Showing affection in public between members of the opposite sex is generally frowned upon. Holding hands and innocent caresses are acceptable, but kisses on the lips are still a big no-no. On the other hand, members of the same sex are often seen sitting in very close proximity to each other, or walking arm-in-arm. It is a common gesture between close friends, unrelated to sexual orientation.

### **Keeping a Low Profile**

Flaunting wealth is considered obscene. Decades ago, living an immodest lifestyle was equated with capitalism and frowned upon. This is no longer the case; however, people are still careful not to draw attention to their wealth. So it is best to keep a low profile. Don't wear excessive jewellery and avoid carrying too much cash. You will also reduce the risk of being a target for pickpockets or drive-by bag snatchers.

### **Queuing**

You might notice that people in Vietnam do not respect queue lines. Don't get frustrated as it is interesting to know the reason behind this attitude. Many older people still associate queuing with the era of rations and government subsidies where people would have to queue for hours for food, regardless of the weather. As the market economy opened up, life became easier for people, and they were more than happy to ignore the concept of queuing. Although this attitude is changing – younger generations generally do not mind waiting patiently in line – having someone cutting in front of you is something that you will encounter daily. There is no need to get overly aggravated. Smile, and politely remind them that it is your turn.

### **Taking Pictures**

While Vietnamese, especially youngsters, love to have their photograph taken, it is wise to ask for permission before snapping away. Don't try to take photographs of anything that is related to the military at all – except those that are strictly displayed for tourists – as this can be seen as a breach of national security.

### **Touching**

Touching someone's head, especially when this someone is older than you, is considered insulting. However, caressing a child's head may be a gesture of affection.

### **Gestures**

Take off your shoes when entering a home or place of worship. Beckoning or pointing with a finger is considered rude. Use your whole hand palm facing down to beckon people. Meanwhile, it is considered polite to use both hands when you are handing something to someone.

### **Family Life**

Family is the centre of life for Vietnamese people. Members of the family are bound together by a strong sense of collective responsibility and mutual obligation. Children are expected to obey their parents and consult them before making any major decisions, and this notion does not end with the coming of age or marriage. It is also fairly common for extended families to live in one house. Typically, one finds grandparents, father, mother, children and grandchildren living under the same roof. When invited to a Vietnamese home, always show respect to elder people. Use hierarchical terms of address when interacting with seniors, and understand that younger people are always expected to be the first to issue the common salutation "chào."

## **8. Work Place Culture Do's and Don'ts**

- Appointments are required and should be made several weeks in advance.
- The best means of doing so is through a local representative who can act as a reference and also translator/interpreter.
- The Vietnamese are punctual and expect others to be so to.
- Dress conservatively.
- Handshakes are used upon meeting and departing.
- Some Vietnamese use a two-handed shake, with the left hand on top of the right wrist.
- Always wait for a woman to extend her hand. If she does not, bow your head slightly.
- Business cards are exchanged on initial meetings and should be presented with both hands. When receiving business cards ensure you show proper respect to it and do not simply glance at it and put it on the table.
- Hierarchy and face manifest in different ways within business meetings. For example, the most senior person should always enter the room first.
- Silence is also common in meetings where someone disagrees with another but remains quiet so as to not cause a loss of face.
- Relationships are critical to successful business partnerships. Always invest time in building a good relationship based on both personal and business lines. Any initial meeting should be solely used as a "getting to know you" meeting.
- The spoken word is very important. Never make promises that you can not keep to as this will lead to a loss of face.
- Negotiations can be slow so it is important to bear in mind that decisions have to go through a lot of red tape and also group consultation. Be patient.
- Business gift giving is fairly common at the end of a meeting or during a meal in honour of your business associates. Gifts should be small but not expensive. Something with your company logo or something typical from your country both make excellent gifts.
- Do not point with your finger - use your hand.
- Do not stand with your hands on your hips.
- Do not cross your arms on your chest.
- Do not pass anything over someone's head.

### **9. Dress Codes Do's and Don'ts**

- Vietnamese dress conservatively. 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.
- 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.

### **10. Cross Gender Do's and Don'ts**

- Avoid public displays of affection with a member of the opposite sex.

### **11. Common Communication Challenges and Do's and Don'ts**

#### **When the Vietnamese say...**

Vietnamese culture is very different to the Western interpretation of life and politeness. For instance, it is practically normal for Vietnamese people to ask very personal questions during first encounters. There is no need to be offended, they are just trying to be friendly!

#### **How to answer these questions?**

If you don't want to provide private information, a simple smile is the irreproachable reply that can save and please both parties. And remember, don't take it seriously, and do refrain from giving a crash course in Western politeness!

### **12. Types of Food (Delicious Foods and Foods to Watch Out For)**

In the past few years Vietnamese food has become more and more popular around the world. Food lovers may have tried the two best known Vietnamese dishes – spring rolls and

bread rolls. Rice, noodles, fresh vegetable and herbs all play big roles in Vietnamese food, making it one of the healthiest cuisines in the world.

In Vietnam you'll discover one unmistakable fact: Vietnamese people love noodles. They eat them every day, sometimes for every meal. Vietnamese noodles are made from a few basic ingredients, the most common being rice, wheat and mung beans, but a whole sub-cuisine is built on these basics.

What to order?

- Banh Mi Thit

The Vietnamese equivalent of a “submarine” – a Vietnamese baguette stuffed with any of a wide variety of fillings including ham, cheese, canned sardines, Vietnamese bologna and pickled carrot.

- Bo Kho

Beef-and-vegetable stew, usually accompanied by baguettes.

- Che

For dessert, try Che, a pudding made from sticky rice and beans.

- Buncha

Vietnamese Pork Meatball and Noodle Salad.

- Nem Nuong Xa

Grilled meat on lemongrass skewers.

- Goi Cuon

The famous Vietnamese “summer rolls”: shrimp or pork (sometimes both) with herbs, rolled up in rice paper and served cold with a peanut dipping sauce.

- Pho

Pho is a Vietnamese noodle soup, usually served with beef (phở bò) or chicken (phở gà). The soup includes noodles made from rice and is often served with Vietnamese basil, mint leaves, lime, and bean sprouts that are added to the soup by the person who is dining.

### **13. Eating Etiquette (Customs)**

#### Eating Vietnamese Style

As in many countries in Asian, people tend to eat “family style”, sharing dishes. Each gets a plate or bowl with rice, then shares with everyone else the bowls of food set in the middle of table.

If you are eating with a Vietnamese family expect to see little in the way of meat unless the family is quite wealthy.

Noodles (of course) and vegetables are the standard diet in most households. A typical Vietnamese meal will include rice, a meat or seafood dish, a vegetable dish, soup and fish sauce for dipping.

#### Drinking Vietnamese Style

Green tea is the most common drink, and is offered as a courtesy to guests or visitors. The two most popular local beers are Saigon Export and Saigon Lager, but imported beers are available, at roughly double the price. Vietnam produces several varieties of rice wine - known as Ruou. However, bottles of Ruou commonly contain a pickled snake, the inclusion of which is thought to impart health-giving elements.

There are also numerous varieties of locally distilled spirits, which do not include the reptilian element - even if they may taste as if they do. Fruit wines, such as apricot, orange or lemon, are also common, and Soft drinks are processed from the many varieties of tropical fruits. Bottled drinking water should be checked to ensure that the cap or seal is original and intact.

#### **14. Housing/Accommodation Do's and Don'ts**

- Normally the landlord offer accommodation renting for at least 3 months with one month renting fee for deposit. That means you will pay for 4 months and get the one month deposit back before your departure. The deposit may be deducted due to personal mistakes so you are advised to read the renting contract carefully before signing.
- Prepare Vietnam dong and get it ready for the payment at the beginning of the month.
- Find a friend to share the house will make it cheaper. The price of the accommodation is flexible depending on area, quality, convenience...Nevertheless, most expats prefer to rent homes in Vietnam and they usually have a plethora of choices available for every budget.
- Ask local people or your host to assist you in finding accommodation if possible.
- Do not rent accommodation without signing the contract.
- Do not forget to lock the door carefully when you go out.

#### **15. Visa Information**

1. Office hours for public:

9:00 - 11:30 ; 13:30 -16:30 from Monday to Friday (Exept Vietnamese and Thai public holidays).

2. Consular Section Telephone:

+66 (0) 2 251 3552; +66 (0) 2 251 5838; +66 (0) 2 251 7202 or 02 650 8979.

### 3. General information:

- Visa is required for all visitors, except citizens of some countries for short stay (Thai, Laotian, Malaysian, Indonesian and Singaporean are exempted for up to 30 days; Philippino for up to 21 days; nationals of Japan, Republic of Korea, Norwegian, Finlander, Denish and Swedish are exempted for up to 15 days).

- Applicant can personally or delegate to the third person/ agency to carry out the procedures of visa application.

- Following documents are requested to submit to the Embassy for all kinds of visa:

-- a. The original PASSPORT with blank pages for visa stamp. The expiry date of the passport should not be earlier than 6 months since the date of departure from Vietnam.

-- b. One completed application form, one copy PASSPORT.

-- c. One passport-size photographs: one is stapled or glued firmly to the application form.

-- d. Approval from Immigration Authority or Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam.

-- e. Visa fee (Visa fee should be paid in Thai Baht by cash).

- The application form is available at the Embassy or can be printed out in the forms folder.

- It takes from 1 to 4 days to process a visa.

- Tourist visa is valid for one month, you can ask for normal or express visa.

- The official websites of the Embassy of Vietnam in the Kingdom of Thailand are:

<http://www.vietnamembassy-thailand.org/>

<http://visa.mofa.gov.vn>

- Visitors must obtain a valid visa issued by the Embassy of VietNam in the Kingdom of Thailand before boarding for their travel to Vietnam.

- The Embassy SHALL NOT take responsibility for any problems or legal consequences caused by online visa services, including leaks of personal information, denial of visa or denial of entry on arrival.

**16. Country Information Websites**

<http://www.vietnamtourism.com/disan/en/>