**Vietnam**

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| **Cộng Hòa Xã Hội Chủ Nghĩa Việt Nam****Socialist Republic of Vietnam** |
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| --- | --- |
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| [Flag](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Vietnam) | [Coat of arms](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coat_of_arms_of_Vietnam) |

 |
| [Motto:](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_state_mottos) Độc lập – Tự do – Hạnh phúc(Independence, freedom, happiness) |
| [Anthem:](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_anthem) [Tiến Quân Ca](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ti%E1%BA%BFn_Qu%C3%A2n_Ca) |
|  |
| [**Capital**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_national_capitals) | [Hanoi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanoi)[21°2′N 105°51′E](http://tools.wikimedia.de/~magnus/geo/geohack.php?params=21_2_N_105_51_E_type:country(331,689)) |
| [**Largest city**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Vietnam) | [Ho Chi Minh City](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ho_Chi_Minh_City) |
| [**Official languages**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Official_language) | [Vietnamese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnamese_language) |
| [**Government**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_system_of_government) | [Socialist republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist_republic)1 |
|  - [General Secretary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_Secretary_of_the_Communist_Party_of_Vietnam) | [Nông Đức Mạnh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/N%C3%B4ng_%C4%90%E1%BB%A9c_M%E1%BA%A1nh) |
|  - [President](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/President_of_Vietnam) | [Nguyễn Minh Triết](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nguy%E1%BB%85n_Minh_Tri%E1%BA%BFt) |
|  - [Prime Minister](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_Minister_of_Vietnam) | [Nguyễn Tấn Dũng](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nguy%E1%BB%85n_T%E1%BA%A5n_D%C5%A9ng) |
| [**Independence**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Vietnam#Post_World_War_II_Period) | From [France](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/France)  |
|  - Declared | [September 2](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/September_2), [1945](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1945)  |
|  - Recognized | [1954](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1954)  |
| [**Area**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_and_outlying_territories_by_area) |
|  - Total | [331,689 km²](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1_E9_m%C2%B2) ([65th](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_and_outlying_territories_by_area))128,065 sq mi  |
|  - Water (%) | 1.3 |
| [**Population**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_population) |
|  - July 2005 estimate | 84,238,000 ([13th](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_population)) |
|  - 1999 census | 76,323,173 |
|  - [Density](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Population_density) | 253/km² ([46th](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_population_density))655/sq mi |
| [**GDP**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gross_domestic_product) **(**[**PPP**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Purchasing_power_parity)**)** | 2005 estimate |
|  - Total | $251.8 billion ([36th](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_%28PPP%29)) |
|  - Per capita | $3,025 ([123rd](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_%28PPP%29_per_capita)) |
| [**HDI**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_Development_Index)**(2004)** | 0.709 (medium) ([109th](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_Human_Development_Index)) |
| [**Currency**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Currency) | [đồng](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnamese_%C4%91%E1%BB%93ng) (₫) ([VND](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ISO_4217)) |
| [**Time zone**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Time_zone) | ([UTC](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coordinated_Universal_Time)+7) |
|  - Summer ([DST](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daylight_saving_time)) | ([UTC](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coordinated_Universal_Time)+7) |
| [**Internet TLD**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Internet_top-level_domains) | [.vn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/.vn) |
| [**Calling code**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_country_calling_codes) | +84 |
| 1. According to the official name and its 1992 Constitution |

**Vietnam** ([Vietnamese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnamese_language): Việt Nam), officially the **Socialist Republic of Vietnam** is a nation in [Southeast Asia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southeast_Asia). It borders the [People's Republic of China](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People%27s_Republic_of_China) to the north, [Laos](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laos) to the northwest and [Cambodia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cambodia) to the southwest. To the country's east lies the [South China Sea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_China_Sea). With a population of approximately 84 million, Vietnam is one of the most densely populated nations in Southeast Asia.

**History**

*Main article:* [*History of Vietnam*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Vietnam)

**Pre-dynastic Era**

The Vietnamese legend tells that the Vietnamese people of various tribes were born outside the womb following the marriage of Lạc Long Quân (Dragon Chief) and Âu Cơ (the Fairy). However, most Vietnamese historians consider the [Dong Son civilization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dong_Son) that covered much of [Southeast Asia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southeast_Asia) to be the beginning of Vietnam's history. In [208 BCE](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/208_BCE) a [Qin Dynasty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qin_Dynasty) general named [Triệu Đà](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zhao_Tuo) established a state called Nam Việt which encompassed [southern China](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern_China) and the [Red River Delta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_River_Delta). The historical significance of the original Nam Việt remains controversial because some historians consider it a [Chinese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China) occupation while others believe it was an independent era. For most of the period from [111 BCE](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/111_BCE) to the early [10th century CE](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/10th_century_CE), Vietnam was under the rule of successive [Chinese dynasties](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_dynasties). Sporadic independence movements were attempted, but were quickly suppressed by Chinese forces.

**Dynastic Era**

In 939 CE the Vietnamese defeated Chinese forces at the [Bạch Đằng River](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Bach_Dang_River_%28938%29) and gained independence after 10 centuries under Chinese control. They gained complete autonomy a century later. During the rule of the [Trần Dynasty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tran_Dynasty), Dai Viet defeated three [Mongol](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mongol) attempts of invasion by the [Yuan Dynasty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yuan_Dynasty). Three times with massive troops as well as careful preparation for their attacks but three times in the row the Mongols were totally swept out of Dai Viet. Incidentally, the final battle in which Vietnamese general [Tran Hung Dao](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tran_Hung_Dao) defeated most of Mongolian forces was held again at [Bạch Đằng River](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Bach_Dang_%281288%29) like his ancestors nearly 300 years before. [Feudalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feudalism) in Vietnam reached its zenith in the [Lê Dynasty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le_Dynasty) of the [15th century](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/15th_century), especially during the reign of Emperor [Le Thanh Tong](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le_Thanh_Tong). Between the [11th](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/11th_century) and [18th](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/18th_century) centuries, the Vietnamese expanded southward in a process known as nam tiến (*southward expansion*). They eventually conquered the kingdom of [Champa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Champa) and much of the [Khmer Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khmer_Empire).

Battle of Bach Dang river. Silk painting by Năng Hiển.

**French Colonialism**

Vietnam's independence ended in the mid-[19th century](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/19th_century) AD, when the country was colonized by the [French Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Empire). The French administration enacted significant political and cultural changes to Vietnamese society. A Western-style system of modern education was developed, and [Christianity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity) was introduced in Vietnamese society. Developing a [plantation economy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plantation_economy) to promote the exports of [tobacco](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tobacco), [indigo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigo), [tea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tea) and [coffee](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coffee), the French largely ignored increasing calls for self-government and civil rights. A nationalist political movement soon emerged, and its young leader [Ho Chi Minh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ho_Chi_Minh) led its call for independence to the [League of Nations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/League_of_Nations). However, the French maintained dominant control of their colonies until World War II, when the Japanese war in the Pacific triggered the invasion of Indochina. The natural resources of Vietnam were exploited for the purposes of Japan's military campaigns into [Burma](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burma), the [Malay Peninsula](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malay_Peninsula) and [India](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/India). In the final years of the war, a forceful nationalist insurgency emerged under [Ho Chi Minh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ho_Chi_Minh), committed to independence and [communism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communism). Following the defeat of Japan, nationalist forces fought French colonial forces in the [First Indochina War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Indochina_War) that lasted from 1945 to 1954. The French suffered a major defeat at the [Battle of Dien Bien Phu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Dien_Bien_Phu) and shortly afterwards withdrew from the country. The countries that fought the [Vietnam War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam_War) divided the country at the 17th parallel into [North Vietnam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Vietnam) and [South Vietnam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Vietnam) during the [Geneva Accords](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geneva_Conference_%281954%29)

**Vietnam War**

*Main article:* [*Vietnam War*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam_War)

The communist-held North Vietnam was opposed by the [United States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States) for its proximity to the [Soviet Union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_Union) and the [People's Republic of China](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People%27s_Republic_of_China). Disagreements soon emerged over the organizing of elections and reunification, and the U.S. began increasing its contribution of military advisors even as Soviet-supplied arms and munitions strengthened communist forces. The controversial attack on U.S. ships in the [Gulf of Tonkin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf_of_Tonkin) triggered a U.S. military assault on North Vietnamese military installations and the deployment of more than 500,000 troops into South Vietnam. U.S. forces were soon embroiled in a vicious [guerrilla war](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guerrilla_war) with the [Viet Cong](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viet_Cong), the South Vietnamese communist militia. North Vietnamese forces unsuccessfully attempted to overrun the South during the 1968 [Tet Offensive](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tet_Offensive) and the war soon spread into neighboring Laos and Cambodia. With casualties mounting, the U.S. began transferring combat roles to the South Vietnamese military in a process known as [Vietnamization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnamization). The effort had mixed results, but with US support the South Vietnamese were able to hold their own. The [Paris Peace Accords](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paris_Peace_Accords) on [January 27](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/January_27), [1973](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1973) formally recognized the sovereignty of both sides. Under the terms of the accords all American combat troops were withdrawn by [March 29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/March_29), [1973](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1973). Limited fighting continued, but all major fighting ended until the North once again invaded in strength and overpowered the South on [April 30](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/April_30), [1975](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1975). South Vietnam briefly became the [Republic of South Vietnam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_South_Vietnam), a puppet state under military occupation by North Vietnam, before being officially reunified with the North under Communist rule as the *Socialist Republic of Vietnam* on [July 2](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/July_2), [1976](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1976).

**Post War**

Upon taking control, the Vietnamese communists banned other political parties, arrested suspects believed to have collaborated with the U.S. and embarked on a mass campaign of [collectivization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collectivization) of farms and factories. Reconstruction of the war-ravaged country was slow and serious humanitarian and economic problems confronted the communist regime. In 1978, the Vietnamese Army invaded Cambodia to remove their erstwhile allies, the Khmer Rouge, from power. This action worsened relations with China, which launched a brief incursion into northern Vietnam in 1979. This conflict caused Vietnam to rely even more heavily on Soviet economic and military aid.

In a historic shift in 1986, the Communist Party of Vietnam implemented [free-market](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free-market) reforms known as [Đổi Mới](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doi_Moi) (*Renovation*). With the authority of the state remaining unchallenged, private ownership of farms and companies, deregulation and foreign investment were encouraged. The [economy of Vietnam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_Vietnam) has achieved rapid growth in agricultural and industrial production, construction and housing, exports and foreign investment. However, the power of the [Communist Party of Vietnam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communist_Party_of_Vietnam) over all organs of government remains firm.

**Government and politics**

*More information on politics and government of Vietnam can be found at* [*Politics of Vietnam*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Vietnam)*, the main article in the Politics and government of Vietnam series.*

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is a [single-party state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Single-party_state). A new [state constitution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_of_Vietnam) was approved in April 1992, replacing the 1975 version. The central role of the Communist Party was reasserted in all organs of government, politics and society. Only political organizations affiliated or endorsed by the Communist Party are permitted to contest elections. These include the [Vietnamese Fatherland Front](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnamese_Fatherland_Front), workers and trade unionist parties. Although the state remains officially committed to [socialism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialism) as its defining creed, the ideology's importance has substantially diminished since the 1990s. The [President of Vietnam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/President_of_Vietnam) is the titular [head of state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Head_of_state) and the nominal [commander in chief](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commander_in_chief) of the [military of Vietnam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_of_Vietnam), chairing the [Council on National Defense and Security](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Council_on_National_Defense_and_Security&action=edit). The [Prime Minister of Vietnam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_Minister_of_Vietnam) is the [head of government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Head_of_government), presiding over a [council of ministers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Council_of_ministers) composing of 3 deputy prime ministers and the heads of 26 ministries and commissions.

The [National Assembly of Vietnam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Assembly_of_Vietnam) is the [unicameral](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unicameral) [legislature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legislature) of the government, composed of 498 members. It is superior to both the executive and judicial branches. All members of the council of ministers are derived from the National Assembly. The [Supreme People's Court of Vietnam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supreme_People%27s_Court_of_Vietnam), which is the highest [court of appeal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Court_of_appeal) in the nation is also answerable to the National Assembly. Beneath the Supreme People's Court stand the [provincial municipal courts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Provincial_Municipal_Courts_of_Vietnam) and the [local courts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Local_Courts_of_Vietnam). [Military courts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_Courts_of_Vietnam) are also a powerful branch of the judiciary with special jurisdiction in matters of national security. All organs of Vietnam's government are largely controlled by the Communist Party. Most government appointees are members of the party. The General Secretary of the Communist Party is perhaps one of the most important political leaders in the nation, controlling the party's national organization, state appointments and setting policy.

The [Vietnam People's Army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam_People%27s_Army) is the official name for the three military services of Vietnam, which is organized on the lines of China's [People's Liberation Army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People%27s_Liberation_Army). The VPA is further subdivided into the Vietnamese People's Ground Forces (including Strategic Rear Forces and Border Defense Forces), the [Vietnam People's Navy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam_People%27s_Navy), the [Vietnam People's Air Force](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam_People%27s_Air_Force) and the [coast guard](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coast_guard). Through Vietnam's recent history, the VPA has actively been involved in Vietnam's workforce to develop the economy of Vietnam, in order to coordinate national defense and the economy. The VPA is involved in such areas as industry, agriculture, forestry, fishery and telecommunications. The total strength of the VPA is close to 500,000 soldiers. The government also organizes and maintains provincial militias and police forces. The role of the military in public life has steadily weakened since the 1980s.

**Administrative Divisions**

*Main article:* [*Provinces of Vietnam*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Provinces_of_Vietnam)

The capital of Vietnam is [Hanoi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanoi) (it had served as the capital of North Vietnam), and the largest and most populous city is the [Ho Chi Minh City](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ho_Chi_Minh_City) (formerly known as [Saigon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saigon)). Vietnam is subdivided into 64 [provinces](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Provinces_of_Vietnam), which are further subdivided into [districts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/District) and [municipalities](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Municipalities). Provincial governments are expected to be subordinate to the central government. Often, the Vietnamese government groups the various provinces into eight regions: [Northwest](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tay_Bac), [Northeast](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Dong_Bac&action=edit), [Red River Delta](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Dong_Bang_Song_Hong&action=edit), [North Central Coast](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bac_Trung_Bo), [South Central Coast](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nam_Trung_Bo), [Central Highland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tay_Nguyen), [Southeast](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Dong_Nam_Bo&action=edit), [Mekong River Delta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dong_Bang_Song_Cuu_Long).

**Geography and climate**

*Main article:* [*Geography of Vietnam*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_Vietnam)

Map of Vietnam

Vietnam extends approximately 331,688 square km (128,066 [sq mi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Square_mile)) in area. The area of the country running along its international boundaries is 4,639 km (2,883 [mi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mile)). The topography consists of hills and densely forested mountains, with level land covering no more than 20%. Mountains account for 40% of the area, with smaller hills accounting for 40% and tropical forests 42%. The northern part of the country consists mostly of highlands and the [Red River Delta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_River_%28Vietnam%29). [Phan Xi Păng](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fan_Si_Pan), located in [Lào Cai province](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lao_Cai_province), is the highest mountain in Vietnam at 3,143 m (10,312 [ft](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foot_%28unit_of_length%29)). The south is divided into coastal lowlands, [Annamite Chain](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annamite_Chain) peaks, extensive forests, and poor soil. Comprising 5 relatively flat plateaus of basalt soil, the highlands account for 16% of the country's arable land and 22% of its total forested land.

[Halong Bay](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Halong_Bay), Vietnam's world natural heritage

The delta of the Red River (also known as the Sông Hồng), is a flat, triangular region of 3,000 square kilometers, is smaller but more intensely developed and more densely populated than the Mekong River Delta. Once an inlet of the Gulf of Tonkin, it has been filled in by the enormous alluvial deposits of the rivers over a period of millennia, and it advances one hundred meters into the Gulf annually. The Mekong delta, covering about 40,000 square kilometers, is a low-level plain not more than three meters above sea level at any point and crisscrossed by a maze of canals and rivers. So much sediment is carried by the Mekong's various branches and tributaries that the delta advances sixty to eighty meters into the sea every year.

Vietnam has a tropical monsoon climate, with humidity averaging 84 % throughout the year. However, because of differences in latitude and the marked variety of topographical relief, the climate tends to vary considerably from place to place. During the winter or dry season, extending roughly from November to April, the monsoon winds usually blow from the northeast along the China coast and across the Gulf of Tonkin, picking up considerable moisture; consequently the winter season in most parts of the country is dry only by comparison with the rainy or summer season. The average annual temperature is generally higher in the plains than in the mountains and plateaus.

**Economy**

*Main article:* [*Economy of Vietnam*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_Vietnam)

The Vietnam War destroyed much of the economy of Vietnam. Upon taking power, the Government created a [command economy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Command_economy) in the nation. [Collectivization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collectivization) of farms, factories and economic capital was implemented, and millions of people were put to work in government programs. For many decades, Vietnam's economy was plagued with inefficiency and corruption in state programs, poor quality and underproduction and restrictions on economic activities and trade. It also suffered from the trade embargo from the United States and most of Europe after the Vietnam War. Subsequently, the trade partners of the Communist blocs began to erode. In [1986](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1986), the Sixth Party Congress introduced significant economic reforms with [market economy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Market_economy) elements as part of a broad economic reform package called "[đổi mới](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doi_moi)" (*Renovation*). Private ownership was encouraged in industries, commerce and agriculture. On one hand, Vietnam achieved around 8% annual [GDP](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gross_domestic_product) growth from [1990](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1990) to [1997](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1997) and continued at around 7% from [2000](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2000) to [2005](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2005), making it the world's second-fastest growing economy. Simultaneously, [foreign investment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foreign_investment) grew three-fold and [domestic savings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Savings) quintupled. Manufacturing, [information technology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_technology) and high-tech industries form a large and fast-growing part of the national economy.

Vietnam is still a relatively poor country with GDP of US$251.8 billion (est., [2004](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2004)). This translates to ~US$3000 per capita. Inflation rate was estimated at 14% per year in 2004. The spending power of the public has noticeably increased. As a result of several [land reform](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Land_reform) measures, Vietnam is now the largest producer of [cashew](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cashew) nuts with a one-third global share and second-largest [rice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rice) exporter in the world. Vietnam has the highest percent of land use for permanent crops, 6.93%, of any nation in the Greater Mekong Subregion. Besides rice, key exports are [coffee](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coffee), [tea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tea), [rubber](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rubber), and fishery products. However, agriculture's share of economic output has declined, falling as a share of GDP from 42% in 1989 to 26% in 1999, as production in other sectors of the economy has risen. Urban [unemployment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unemployment) has been rising steadily in recent years due to high numbers of migration from the countryside to the cities, while rural unemployment is already at critical levels. Among other steps taken in the process of transitioning to a market economy, Vietnam in July 2006 updated its intellectual property legislation to comply with [TRIPS](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TRIPS). Vietnam was accepted into the [WTO](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Trade_Organization) on November 7, 2006. Vietnam's chief trading partners include Japan, [Australia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australia), ASEAN countries, the U.S. and Western European nations.

**Transportation**

*Main article:* [*Transportation in Vietnam*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transportation_in_Vietnam)

Hai Van Pass.

The modern transport network of Vietnam was originally developed under French rule for the purpose of raw materials harvesting, and reconstructed and extensively modernized following the Vietnam War. The railways are the most popular form of transportation in the country. Viet Nam’s road system includes: national roads administered by the central level; provincial roads managed by the provincial level, district roads managed by the district level, urban roads managed by cities and towns: and commune roads managed by the commune level. Bicycles, motorcycles and public bus services remain the most popular form of road transport in Vietnam's cities, towns and villages. Traffic congestion is a serious problem in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City as the city's roads struggle to cope with the booming numbers of automobiles. There are also more than 17,000 kilometers of navigable [waterways](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waterway), which play a significant role in rural life owing to the extensive network of rivers in Vietnam. The nation has 7 developed ports and harbors at [Cam Ranh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cam_Ranh), [Da Nang](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Da_Nang), [Hai Phong](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hai_Phong), [Ho Chi Minh City](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ho_Chi_Minh_City), [Hong Gai](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hong_Gai), [Qui Nhon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qui_Nhon) and [Nha Trang](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nha_Trang).

**Demographics**

*Main article:* [*Demographics of Vietnam*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Vietnam)

**Population**

*Main article:* [*Ethnic groups in Vietnam*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnic_groups_in_Vietnam)

The 1999 census estimates the population of Vietnam to be 76.3 million, and recent estimates place the figure beyond 84 million. [Vietnamese people](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnamese_people) form the largest ethnic group, and are also called *Viet* or *Kinh*. Their population is concentrated in the [alluvial deltas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alluvial_fans) and coastal plains of the country. A homogenous social group, the Kinh exert influence on national life through their control of political and economic affairs and their role as purveyors of the dominant culture. By contrast, most ethnic minorities such as the [Muong](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muong), a closely related ethnic of the Kinh, are found mostly in the highlands that cover two-thirds of the national territory . The Hoa (ethnic Chinese) and [Khmer Krom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khmer_Krom) are mainly lowlanders.

**Languages**

*Main article:* [*Vietnamese language*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnamese_language)

According to official figures, 86.2% of the population speak [Vietnamese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnamese_language) as a native language. In its early history, Vietnamese writing used [Chinese characters](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_characters). In the [13th century](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/13th_century), the Vietnamese developed their own set of characters called [Chữ nôm](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chu_Nom). The celebrated epic [Đoạn trường tân thanh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Tale_of_Kieu) (Truyện Kiều or The Tale of Kieu) by [Nguyễn Du](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nguyen_Du) was written in Chữ nôm. During the French colonial period, [Quốc ngữ](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quoc_Ngu), the Romanized Vietnamese alphabet representation of spoken Vietnamese which was developed collectively by several Portuguese missionaries, became popular and brought literacy to the masses.

Various other languages are spoken by the several minority groups in Vietnam. The most spoken of these languages are: [Tày](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tai_languages), [Mường](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muong_language), [Khmer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khmer_language), [Chinese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_language), [Nùng](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=N%C3%B9ng_language&action=edit), [H'Mông](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hmong_language). The [French language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_language), a legacy of colonial rule, is still spoken by some older Vietnamese as a second language but is losing its popularity. [Russian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_language) — and to a much lesser extent [Czech](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Czech_language) or [Polish](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polish_language) — is often known among those whose families had ties with the [Soviet bloc](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soviet_bloc). In recent years, [Chinese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_language), [Japanese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_language) and [English](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_language) have become the most popular foreign languages, with English study being obligatory in most schools.

**Religions**

For much of Vietnamese history, [Mahayana Buddhism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahayana_Buddhism), [Taoism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taoism) and [Confucianism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confucianism) have strongly influenced the religious and cultural life of the people. According to the 1999 census, 80.8% of Vietnamese subscribe to no religion. Christianity was introduced by French colonists, and to a lesser extent during the presence of American forces. There is a substantial following of [Roman Catholicism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Catholicism) and [Protestantism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Protestantism) amongst the [Cao Đài](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cao_Dai), and [Hoa Hao](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hoa_Hao) communities. The largest Protestant churches are the [Evangelical Church of Vietnam](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Evangelical_Church_of_Vietnam&action=edit) and the [Montagnard Evangelical Church](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Montagnard_Evangelical_Church&action=edit). Membership of [Sunni](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sunni_Islam) and [Bashi](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Bashi&action=edit) [Islam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam) is usually accredited to the ethnic [Cham](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cham_people) minority, but there are also a few ethnic Vietnamese adherents of Islam in the southwest. Vietnamese government has been criticized for its religion violations. However, due to recent improvements in liberty of religion the United States government no longer considers Vietnam a [Country of Particular Concern](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Country_of_Particular_Concern).

**Education**

*Main article:* [*Education in Vietnam*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Vietnam)

Vietnam has an extensive state-controlled network of schools, colleges and universities. General education in Vietnam is imparted in 5 categories: pre-primary ([Kindergarten](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kindergarten)), [primary schools](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Primary_school), [intermediate schools](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intermediate_school), [high schools](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/High_schools) and colleges. Courses are taught mainly in Vietnamese. A large number of public schools have been organized across cities, towns and villages with the purpose of raising the national literacy rate. There are a large number of specialist colleges, established to develop a diverse and skilled national workforce. A large number of Vietnam's most acclaimed universities are based in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi. Facing serious crises, Vietnam's education system is under a holistic reform launched by the government.

**Culture**

*Main article:* [*Culture of Vietnam*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_of_Vietnam)

In a temple in Vietnam

Over thousands of years, the culture of Vietnam has been strongly influenced by neighboring China. Due to Vietnam's long association with [China](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China), Vietnamese culture remains strongly [Confucian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confucianism) with its emphasis on familial duty. Education is highly valued. Historically, passing the imperial [Mandarin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandarin_%28bureaucrat%29) exams was the only means for Vietnamese people to socially advance themselves.

In the socialist era, the cultural life of Vietnam has been deeply influenced by government-controlled media and the cultural influences of socialist programs. For many decades, foreign cultural influences were shunned and emphasis placed on appreciating and sharing the culture of communist nations such as the Soviet Union, China, [Cuba](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuba) and others. Since the 1990s, Vietnam has seen a greater exposure to Southeast Asian, European and American culture and media.

The Hanoi Opera House.

The traditional female costume called "[Áo Dài](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%81o_d%C3%A0i)" is worn in special occasions such as weddings or Lunar New Year celebration or festivals. Áo Dài was once worn by both genders but today it is worn mainly by females.

[Vietnamese cuisine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuisine_of_Vietnam) uses very little oil and many vegetables. The main dishes are often based on [rice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rice), [soy sauce](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soy_sauce), and [fish sauce](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fish_sauce). Its characteristic flavors are sweet (sugar), spicy (serrano peppers), sour (lime), umami (fish sauce), and flavored by a variety of mint and basil.

[Vietnamese music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnamese_music) is slightly different according to three regions: Bắc or North, Trung or Central, and Nam or South. Northern classical music is Vietnam's oldest and is traditionally more formal. Vietnamese classical music can be traced to the Mongol invasions, when the Vietnamese captured a Chinese [opera](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opera) troupe. Central classical music shows the influences of Champa culture with its melancholic melodies. Southern music exudes a lively [laissez-faire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laissez-faire) attitude.

[Football (soccer)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Football_%28soccer%29) is the most popular sport in Vietnam. Sports and games such as [badminton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Badminton), [tennis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tennis), [ping pong](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ping_pong) and [chess](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chess) are also popular with large segments of the population. [Baseball](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baseball), introduced during American presence in Vietnam, has also gained some popularity. The (expatriate Vietnamese) community forms a prominent part of Vietnamese cultural life, introducing Western sports, films, music and other cultural activities in the nation.

Vietnam is home to a small film industry, but the works from its counterparts in [Hong Kong](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hong_Kong), France, the U.S. enjoy greater popularity and circulation.

**Media**

The [Voice of Vietnam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voice_of_Vietnam) is the official state-run radio broadcasting services that cover the nation. [Vietnam Television](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam_Television) is the sole state-run television broadcasting company. As Vietnam moved toward a free-market economy with its doi moi measures, the government has relied on the print media to keep the public informed about its policies. The measure has had the effect of almost doubling the numbers of newspapers and magazines since 1996. Vietnam is putting considerable effort into modernization and expansion of its telecommunication system, but its performance continues to lag behind that of its more modern neighbors.