

## Thoughts and Musings

1. I am not a tour guide. I'll help facilitate the travel arrangements. I'll try to make advance hotel reservations in HCMC, Nha Trang, and Da Lat, and advance travel arrangements between HCMC, Nha Trang, and Da Lat. I'll help with arrangements for in country travel to individual team sites or other side trips.
2. The following is not meant to be critical of anyone. They represent some of my feelings and thoughts – especially during my first return trip.
3. Viet Nam is “Viet Nam”, not “The Nam”, or “Nam”
4. Although about \$16,000VND to \$1USD is closer to the conversion rate, use 15,000/1 – it's easier to calculate in your head – the \$1,000VND difference is only 6 or 7 cents.
5. We are visitors to another country and culture.
6. VN is a developing country
7. VN does have legitimacy as a country and a culture.
8. Be respectful
9. Don't lose your cool
10. Be courteous
11. Everything is slow and/or late
12. Be patient. .
13. It takes a full day to travel anywhere.
14. Don't try to change anything in 2-3 weeks – just observe
15. Don't sweat the small stuff – if you get “conned” out of a dollar – it's only a dollar.
16. Don't leave cash, cameras or valuables in a hotel room – take it with you, or leave it in the hotel safe
17. Wear a money belt under your shirt.
18. Use a money belt, not a fanny pack.
19. It's OK to leave your passport at the hotel desk when you check in – just remember to get it when you leave.
20. Clothes and laundry are cheap in Viet Nam – don't bring too much. If you forget something, you can probably buy it there (eg. I bought a pair of swim trunks for \$1.67, and a hat for \$1.67 – I still use both regularly)
21. Drink lots of bottled water – it's cheap (\$.35 for a 1.5 liter bottle)
22. It's probably OK to have small ice cubes in drinks – it's probably made from bottled water in a freezer. Ice chips from a big block of ice are an entirely different matter – who knows what water was used to make the ice.
23. Only bring one checked bag and one day pack, as a carry-on. With only two bags, it is easier to get around. Use your second checked bag allotment to bring stuff home.
24. Your bags should be easy to carry. I prefer a back pack. A suitcase with wheels may work. HCMC, Nha Trang, Quy Nhon, Da Lat, and other larger cities have mostly paved roads and sidewalks, so rolling a suitcase is an option. In the country, they are not all paved, and the wheels will get mucked up with dirt, mud, and whatever.
25. Don't be too “put off” or critical of all the communist flags. Viet Nam is now one country, and the Vietnamese are very proud of their one country. Nationalism can be a good thing. Remember, just a couple days ago, red, white and blue hung from every lamp-post throughout our country!

26. The Vietnamese that we knew 40 years ago are either dead, in the US, or re-educated. They may not be willing to acknowledge that they knew you. Use your own judgment about trying to contact them. I did not try.
27. Get your shots.
28. Get your passport.
29. Get your Visa in advance from any Vietnamese consulate in the US. The turnaround time was about 5 days with overnight mail. (Amazingly fast for anything Vietnamese!)
30. It is illegal to drive a motor vehicle in Viet Nam – even with an International Drivers License. Many hotels will rent motorbikes – do so at your own risk!! (and I do mean risk – the traffic is horrendous and no one follows the rules) It is not expensive to hire a motorbike driver and/ or a taxi – or just walk – or rent a bicycle.
31. Not all abnormalities were caused by the American War or Agent Orange – leave your guilt at home.
32. The vast majority of the Vietnamese were born after the War, and have no actual memory of it. It is just history to them, so they hold very little animosity. Even if they did, it would be impolite for them to display it.
33. The further you get from the larger tourist cities of HCMC, Nha Trang, and Da Lat, the genuinely friendlier the people will become.
34. English is a required subject in all schools, but many do not use it and have forgotten all but a few rudimentary phrases. (Hello, what your name?, how are you?)
35. Bring a phrasebook.
36. They are proud of their country, and want to show it off.
37. They want to learn about the US – To many, it is a land where money literally grows on trees and the streets are paved with gold! – and opportunity is unlimited.
38. There are internet cafes in almost every town, but the service is slow – very slow.
39. Contact your health insurance carrier for providers in Viet Nam – most policies do have international connections/referrals. Bring copies with you.
40. Don't leave your common sense at home. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.
41. HCMC, Nha Trang, and other large touristy cities in Viet Nam have the same problems as similar cities in the US, and throughout the world – there are pickpockets, thieves and scammers everywhere.
42. Violent crime is very low in Viet Nam.
43. There are ATMs in the larger cities – Da Lat and Quy Nhon and larger.
44. The US dollar is acceptable almost everywhere.
45. Traveler's Checks are a hassle. They are not accepted by many merchants, and banks may not be open.
46. Bring new crisp US money. The Vietnamese do not like "old" money, and may not accept it.
47. Let your bank (and credit card companies) know that you are traveling to Viet Nam, and may be making withdrawals. Some banks have been known to shut down an account, thinking of identity theft.
48. Credit cards are accepted at the larger, more expensive, establishments. Most medium-priced establishments (hotels, restaurants, shops) only accept cash – USD or VND

49. Trains have 4 basic classes: hard seat (like a park bench), soft seat (like an economy airplane seat), hard sleeper (thin sleeping mat, and 6 berths to a room), and soft sleeper (nice mattress, and 4 berths to a room). The prices vary between the type of seat, the routes (local or express), and the age of the train.
50. The larger buses do not have room to sit squarely in a seat – my knees were crammed into the back of the seat in front of me. The smaller buses, or mini-vans, go everywhere, and are much more comfortable. They have more leg room, the people are friendlier, and they are cheaper – but they stop everywhere.
51. If traveling between towns, plan on a full travel day. Between motorbike drivers, taxis, bus stops, etc., it just takes that long.
52. Don't watch the driver, or look out of the front window – it'll scare the H\_\_\_ out of you! That flashing Buddha on the front dash is there for a reason – for protection!
- 53.