

Chapter 1

"Xin Chào" (Hello)

Welcome to

Vietnam

Vietnam is a beautiful country with very friendly people. But how much do you know about this amazing country? Let's find out.

Read the five sentences below. Four are true. Only one is false. Do you know which one?

1. Ho Chi Minh City used to be called Saigon.
2. The water buffalo is the national animal of Vietnam.
3. Vietnam is home to the largest cave in the world.
4. The country of Vietnam is shaped like the letter "Y."
5. It is customary to remove shoes before entering someone's home in Vietnam.

If you knew number 4 was false, you're on your way to knowing a lot about Vietnam. But there's more to know. Just turn the page to start your exploration of the "Land of the Blue Dragon."

Oh, one other thing: The country of Vietnam is said to take the shape of the letter "S," not "Y."



Where in the World Is Vietnam?

Vietnam is in Southeast Asia. It is on the eastern edge of the peninsula known as Indochina. It's a long, narrow country, shaped like the letter "S." It shares a border with China to the north and with Laos and Cambodia to the west.



A Very Brief History of Vietnam



More than 2,000 years ago, people lived in the area now known as Vietnam. Back then, it was called Nam Viet.

In the 1800s, France invaded the region and took control. Later, it added Cambodia and Laos into one territory called French Indochina.



After World War II in 1945, a Communist group called the Viet Minh went to war with the French in northern Vietnam. The Viet Minh won the war in 1954.

10 Facts About Vietnam

- 1.** At its narrowest point, Vietnam is only 30 miles (48 kilometers) wide.

- 2.** Vietnam is home to the world's largest cave. (See page 24.)



- 3.** The most common form of transportation in Vietnam is the motorbike. There are 54 million motorbikes in Vietnam. That's one motorbike for every two people.


- 4.** In the U.S., the most common last name (or surname) is Smith. In Vietnam, it's Nguyen.



- 5.** If you like cashew nuts, you can thank Vietnam. It's the world's largest exporter of these favorite nuts.

School in Vietnam

Have you ever wondered what school was like in Vietnam? Here's what these Vietnamese kids have to say about it.



The school year is like schools in the West. They usually last from September until May.

We also have many of the same subjects as schools in the West, like math, art, or physical education. Of course, we also have classes in the Vietnamese language and culture.

But many schools also have classes in morals education. I don't think you usually have that in the West.

There are two main types of schools in Vietnam: public schools which are open to everybody and are free, and international schools which cost money and are more like classes in the West.

Usually, there are two shifts in public schools: a morning shift that runs from 7 am to 11.15 am, and an afternoon shift that runs from 1 pm to 5 pm. Kids only attend one of these shifts for four hours a day.

Kids have to go to school between the ages of six and 11. There is a lot of pressure to be successful and get good grades.

Sports in Vietnam

You probably won't be surprised to learn that some of the favorite sports in Vietnam are the same sports played round the world. Football (soccer), badminton, basketball—they're all popular sports in Vietnam.



Sepak takraw is also sometimes called "kick volleyball" or "foot volleyball."

Chapter 3

Landmarks and Attractions



Can you guess what this famous Vietnamese landmark is? Check your answer on page 26.

Every country has its famous and popular landmarks and attractions.

Some landmarks are made by humans, like the Eiffel Tower in Paris or the Statue of Liberty in the United States.

Other landmarks are natural wonders, created over thousands or millions of years. The Grand Canyon in the United States is an example.

Vietnam also has many famous landmarks and attractions. Here are some of them.

Chapter 4

The Wildlife of Vietnam

Vietnam has a wide variety of wildlife. Some 270 types of mammals, 180 reptiles, 80 amphibians, and 800 bird species live in Vietnam.

Included in all that are some rare and unusual animals, including:

Indochinese tiger



giant catfish



Sumatran rhino



Here are some other animals found in Vietnam.

The water buffalo plays a dual (or double) role in Vietnam.

First, it's an important symbol. It represents (or stands for) bravery, happiness, and prosperity.

Secondly, for centuries, the water buffalo has been crucial to Vietnam agriculture. They have helped farmers. In fact, they are so important, farmers often treat them as part of the family.

WATER BUFFALO

At a Glance

Length: 6.5-9.8 feet (2-3 meters).

Height: 4.2-4.9 feet (1.3-1.5 meters).

Weight: 1,322-1,736 lbs (600-800 kilograms).

Diet: Herbivores, grass, herbs, and other vegetation.

Lifespan: Up to nine years in the wild; 25 years in captivity.

IUCN Status: Endangered.

Fun Fact: The sounds made by water buffaloes resemble a quacking noise.



Words to Know

Crucial: Very important; critical.

Prosperity: Success, especially financially.

Flying Squirrel

One of the weirdest (peculiar?) animals in Vietnam.

A flying squirrel? Are you kidding me? I bet you're thinking, "Squirrels can't fly."

And you are right. But the Flying Squirrel can glide gracefully from tree to tree—which is almost like flying, isn't it?



FLYING SQUIRREL

At a Glance

Length: 12 to 24 inches (30 to 60 cm).

Tail Length: 14 to 25 inches (35 to 64 cm) long.

Weight: 2.2 to 5.5 pounds (1 to 2.5 kg).

Diet: Fruits and nuts, insects, small birds.

Lifespan: Up to 10 years in captivity or about half that in the wild.

IUCN Status: Least concern.

Fun Fact: Flying squirrels can cover more than 150 feet (about half a football field) in a single glide.

Great Hornbill

The largest hornbill species in Vietnam.

There's an easy way to spot a Great Hornbill. Just look for its large colorful, curved beak. On top of the beak is a hollow structure called a casque (sometimes called a helmet). The casque is only found on hornbills and a few other birds.

There are about 60 different species of hornbills. The Great Hornbill is one of the largest.

Hornbills have what looks like long eyelashes. They're really a type of feathers. They protect the hornbill's eyes from dust and dirt.

Years ago, the Great Hornbill could be found throughout the forests of Vietnam. Today, it is very rare.

GREAT HORNBILL

At a Glance

Size: Up to 48 inches (120 cm) long.

Wingspan: From 5 to 6 feet (150-178 cm).

Weight: Up to six lbs (3 kg).

Diet: Mainly fruit but occasionally insects, small reptiles, amphibians, other birds and small mammals.

Lifespan: 30-50 years.

IUCN Red List: Vulnerable.

Fun Fact: Casques are found on only six different kinds of birds.



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