



**VIETNAM**



## NATIONALITIES

As far as anthropology is concerned, the Vietnamese people have their origin in the Mongoloid race, which is scattered throughout northern and eastern Asia

Vietnam is a multi-nationality country with 54 ethnic groups. The *Viet (Kinh)* people account for 87% of the country's population and mainly inhabit the Red River delta, the central coastal delta, Mekong delta and major cities. The other 53 ethnic minority groups, totaling over 8 million people, are scattered over mountain areas (covering two-thirds of the country's territory) spreading from the North to the South.



Among ethnic minorities, the most populated are *Tay, Thai, Muong, Hoa, Khmer, Nung...* with population of around 1 million each, while the least populated are *Brau, Roman, Odu* with several hundred people each.



Many ethnic groups divided their population into social echelons, especially those who lived in mountainous areas. Each ethnic group has developed its own language and cultural identity, thus making the Vietnamese culture a well-blended combination of different cultures.

A number of ethnic minorities had mastered some farming techniques. They grew rice plants in swamped paddy fields and carried out irrigation. Others went hunting, fishing, collecting and lived a semi-nomadic life. Each group has its own culture, diverse and special. Beliefs and religions of the Vietnamese ethnic minority groups were also disparate from each other.



## Geography

# Regions and Climate



Vietnam, a long and narrow country, has a high percentage of territorial waters. Looking at the map, Vietnam is located in the center of the Southeast Asia, and is shaped like the letter "S". The country lies in the eastern part of the Indochina peninsula, bordered by China to the north, Laos and Cambodia to the west, and the East Sea and Pacific Ocean to the southeast.

Vietnam's coastline is 3,260 km long and its inland border measures 3,730km. The country's total length, from the northernmost point to the Southernmost point is 1,650km. Its width, stretching from east to west, is 600 km at the widest point in the north, 400 km in the south, and 50 km at the narrowest part in the Quang Binh province on the central coast. Vietnam is also a transport junction from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean.

Vietnam is located completely in the tropical zone. It is

characterized by strong monsoon influences, but has a considerable amount of sun, a high rate of rainfall, and high humidity. Regions located near the tropics and in the mountainous regions are endowed with a temperate climate.

Northern Vietnam has large plains lying in the river basins of the Red, Lo, and Chay Rivers and is influenced by a monsoon climate, with four distinct seasons and high humidity. In order to cultivate land and earn their living, inhabitants of the north built dikes over the centuries, resulting in today's system of dikes that are thousands of kilometers long along the riverbanks. The south has only two seasons, the rainy season and the dry season.

Between these large delta regions in the north and south is the long and narrow Central Vietnam. In the west is the Truong Son mountain range. The climate of Central Vietnam is often harsh, and subject to natural calamities such as typhoons.

# CUSTOM & HABITS

The Vietnamese eating habit tends towards vegetarianism; rice and vegetables are the main course of the meal that may be diversified by aquatic products. Vietnamese people like a synthetic food processing style that involves many materials and ingredients.



The old-style Vietnamese house was related to the watery environment (stilted house with curved roof). Then came thatched-roofed house with clay walls, which were built mostly from wood and bamboo. Sizeable ancient architectures were often built shrouded and in harmony with natural environment.

In general, Vietnamese clothing is very diverse. The Vietnamese preferred to wear light, thin, well-ventilated kind of clothing that originated from plants and was suitable for such a tropical country as Vietnam. Every ethnic group in Vietnam has its own style of clothing. Festivals are the occasion for all to wear their favorite clothes. Over thousands of years, the traditional clothing of all ethnic groups in Vietnam has changed, but each ethnic group has separately maintained their own characteristics.



Vietnamese customs of weddings, funerals, holidays and rituals all are attached to village community. Marriages not only reflect the lovers' desire but also had to meet the interests of the family lines, the village; thus, the choice for future bride or bridegroom was done very carefully, which had to go through many formalities from the plighting ceremony, the official proposal to the bride's family, the wedding to the marriage tie, the ritual of sharing bridal cup of wine, the newly-weds' first visit to the bride's family.



Besides, the bride had to pay a fine in order for her to be accepted as a new member of the village. Funeral service is also preceded very thoroughly to express the grief and see off the relative into the other world. The family of the deceased does not have to take care of the service by themselves; they are also given a helping hand by the neighbors.

Vietnam is the country of festivities, which take place all year round, especially in spring when there is little farming work. Each region has its own ritual holidays, the most important of which are agricultural rituals (such as the rituals of praying for rain, getting down to the rice field, and new rice...) and trade's rituals (like the rituals of copper casting, forging, making fire crackers, and boat racing...). Besides, there are also rituals dedicating to national heroes and religious and cultural services (e.g., Buddhist rituals). Ritual holidays are usually divided into two parts: the service is carried out for blesses and thanksgivings, the holiday is the cultural activities of the community consisting of many folk games and contests.

# LANGUAGES

The Vietnamese language belongs to a language group that was established a long time ago in East Asia. Changes in material conditions over many centuries and the increasing demands of cultural life have influenced the Vietnamese language.

While adopting many elements of the Chinese language, the Vietnamese people changed many Chinese words, gradually creating *Han-Viet* (Chinese-Vietnamese), which incorporated purely Vietnamese words.



Under the French domination, *Han-Viet* characters were gradually eliminated and replaced by French that was used in administrative, educational and diplomatic languages. Some Western evangelists including Alexandre de Rhodes produced the National language characters; they cooperated with some Vietnamese to transcribe the Vietnamese language on the basis of the Latin alphabet for using in evangelism in the 17th century. The National language characters were completed and popularized to become a significant cultural tool. In late 19th century, publications were published in the National language characters.

The Vietnamese language is characterized by mono-phonology with a concrete, abundant, acoustic and imaginary vocabulary and a proportionate, rhythmical, lively, flexible, symbolic and emotional way of expression, which tremendously facilitates artistic and literary creation.

Example:

<b>MA</b>	<b>MA<sup>ˆ</sup></b>	<b>MÁ</b>	<b>MẠ</b>	<b>MẢ</b>	<b>MÃ</b>
(ghost)	(preposition)	(mother)	(rice seeding)	(grave)	(horse)
<b>HÔ</b>	<b>HỒ</b>	<b>HỐ</b>	<b>HỘ</b>	<b>HỔ</b>	<b>HỖ</b>
(to cheer)	(pond)	(hole)	(for)	(tiger)	(to help)

# Arts



their aspirations for a happy life.

Vietnamese music has had a rather long history. Since ancient times, the Vietnamese have had a strong inclination for music. For the Vietnamese, music is considered to be an essential need; therefore, numerous musical instruments and genres intended for various purposes have been developed. Vietnamese people use music to express their innermost feelings, to encourage themselves while working and fighting, to educate their children in good traditions and national sentiment, to communicate with the invisible, and to sublimate

Numerous forms of songs and music have also been created and retained. They include lullabies, children's songs, ritual songs, festivity songs, various work songs, courtship songs, riddle songs, melodies, and poem narration. There are also songs and music for groups, as well as for traditional theatre.

Vietnamese traditional music is diverse due to the various genres that took shape during different periods of history. Songs of the same genre often differ very much in melody and expression from ethnicity to ethnicity.

Traditional music has played an important role in the lives of the Vietnamese. Currently, music still occupies a considerable position in the spiritual lives of the Vietnamese. Some genres of music still exist in rural areas, while others were brought to the stage to meet the demands of the population



**CHEO**: is a dramatic genre with deep popular roots on the North Vietnam. Traditionally anonymous authors composed it orally. The oldest datable text comes from the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century, but the origins of the traditional probably go back several hundred years further.

Today's playwrights compose *cheo* operas along traditional lines: the characters in the plays sing time-tested popular melodies with words suited to modern circumstances. At present *cheo* opera is an integral part of Vietnamese theatre and is well liked by people in both country and town, and by foreign spectators as well.

**SIÊU** (Court music): Chamber music originated from royal music with such a foundation source, the music and songs of Hue is nowadays a combination of folk and royal music. Hue music and song bears its unique feature of characterizing the lives of people living in the middle regions of Vietnam. In fact, Hue music is a combination of musical factors of various groups such as the Viet, Cham, Chinese, and others.

**CAI LUONG**: is a kind of folk music that came about in the early 20th century. Amateurs in the south first played it. The performance includes dances, songs, and music; the music originally drew its influences from southern folk music. Since then, the music of *cai luong* has been enriched with hundreds of new tunes. A *cai luong* orchestra consists mainly of guitars with concave frets, and dan kim.

With years, *cai luong* has experienced a number of changes to become a type of stage performance highly appreciated by the people.

**QUAN HO:** The birthplace of *quan ho* folksongs are in Ha Bac province. During village festivals, which are held every year, particularly in spring, young men and women gather in the yard of a communal house or pagoda, on a hill or in a rowing boat, and sing *quan ho*. This is a style of singing where songs alternate from group to group, going back and forth from one to the other.

*Quan ho* singing is a folk art of highly collective nature. Those who sing are not entertainers, but all are part of the performance, and everyone is welcome to join.

**CHAU VAN:** The Vietnamese form of Mahayana Buddhism includes the worship of a system of saints and "spirits". These can be of historical or mythical origin. They form a carefully classified hierarchic order from the "Sacred Mothers" and "Great Mandarins" to "Princesses", "Princes", "Young girls", and "Young boy". Chau Van is the music accompanying the cult of these saints.



**CA TRU:** *Ca tru* is a musical genre that calls for expertise as well as sensibility on the part of the listeners. In return it provides them with the most refined enjoyment. *Ca tru* is where poetry and music meet. *Ca tru* music is most enjoyable. When there is complete harmony between the sung, the rhythm being marked by the pair of small bamboo sticks held by the singer and striking a small block of wood or bamboo called *phach*, and, last but not least, the appreciation shown by a man among the audience beating a small drum, on its face or sides, at the appropriate moments.

**TUONG:** Tuong, also called Hat Boi in the south, is a stage performance that came about during the Ly-Tran dynasty and that became very popular nationwide during the following centuries. During the Nguyen dynasty, 19th century, Tuong was occupying a good position in the cultural lives of the royals.

In Tuong, songs, dancing, and simple music capture space and time. In the past, Tuong did not require any elaborate stage accessories; nowadays, backdrop and make-up in Tuong performances are more elaborate and sophisticated.

## **WATER PUPPETS:**



Historians would have you believe that Vietnam's art of water puppetry, or *Mua Roi Nuoc*, was also once present in China. Whether or not this is true is open to debate, but the fact remains that today this art cannot be found anywhere in the world but Vietnam. And because of its traditional link to the earth, water and rice growers themselves, water puppetry has often been called the "Soul of the Rice fields."

After a period of rapid development from the 11<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries, the art of water puppetry escaped the confines of the royal palaces of the Le and Nguyen dynasties and began showing up at village festivals and ceremonies, thus jump-starting the development of the country's traditional stage arts.

And although hundreds of types of puppets and performances can be found throughout the country, the art is still mostly concentrated in northern and central Vietnam.