Backpacking Vietnam... If you are seeking epic adventures, unique experiences, mouth watering foods and ancient historical sights; Vietnam is the place for you. Once upon a time, the very mention of Vietnam conjured up images of war torn destination but now Vietnam is a backpacker haven and travelling in Vietnam is a popular part of many Southeast Asian adventures. Vietnam has fast become one of Asia's top travel destinations due to its well established backpacker circuit, friendly people and chilled out visa situation...

Backpacking Vietnam offers an incredible opportunity to get off the beaten track... Explore dramatic mountains in the North, stop in for some corn wine and a friendly chat with the locals before heading south to party the night away...

Many travellers opt to explore Vietnam by motorcycle which is hands down the best way to get around if you have plenty of time and can afford to linger rather than to just rush through Vietnam's tourist sites. Vietnam is a big country and there's lots of Vietnam backpacking itineraries floating around the interwebs... The most popular backpacking route is heading from Hanoi to Saigon.

Backpacking in Vietnam is a great choice for broke backpackers on account of the super cheap cost of living and the plentiful adventures... I spent six weeks exploring Vietnam and cannot wait to return in 2017.
Arriving Into Vietnam

Vietnam is one of South East Asia's most accessible countries. Whether you are travelling the South East Asia loop and entering by land, coming down from China or flying directly there, border crossings are relatively straightforward and the days of the tricky Vietnamese visa are now over. There are long distance bus/train services that you can use to get all the way from Bangkok to Ho Chi Minh City; or if you're feeling more adventurous, train it from Europe all the way to Vietnam...

You can enter Vietnam by motorbike easily too. For those backpacking Vietnam without the luxury of time, the best way in is to catch a flight to Ho Chi Minh City. There are flights with the likes of Emirates (via Dubai), Air China (via Guangzhou) and many more Airlines. I've found Vietnam Airlines tend to have the best deals for flying direct to Ho Chi Minh City. Most flights will land in Ho Chi Minh but you can fly to other parts of the country. You can easily cross the border from Cambodia to Vietnam using local buses or, if you fancy travelling in style, there are VIP bus services available for flashpackers.

Getting Around Vietnam

Comfortable long distance transport and constantly improving road quality, travelling in Vietnam is becoming pretty smooth. Vietnam has a great coastal train
line, reaching all the way up to the Chinese border and is a great way to travel across Vietnam on a time limit.

**By Bus:** Most backpackers choose to explore Vietnam via bus network. Buses in Vietnam are cheap and there's plenty of hop on/hop off style tickets and the ever increasing presence of Air Con, they are a broke backpackers dream. "Open-Tour" buses are only slightly more expensive than the national bus services but are, in general, more likely to be on time and a tad more comfortable.

Travelling by bus in Vietnam by bus is getting more organised. Rather than just rocking up at the bus stop in the hope they will have space to fit you on, you can now book tickets in advance for most of South East Asia using [12Go](https://12go.as/).

![Train](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

views from the train carriage, pretty good.

**By Train:** A great way to get from one end of the country to the other fast and scenically. Vietnam Railways operates a single track train network running from Ho Chi Minh city all the way to the Chinese border with beautiful views of the countryside and coast. Slightly slow in places as much of the train line dates back to the colonial period; but that's just part of the charm, right? Ensure to book your tickets in advance, hard sleeper class offers the best value. Be aware that if you buy a
through ticket you cannot break up the journey along the way, you will need separate tickets for this. Hop on the Reunification Express for a breathtaking journey.

By Domestic Flight: I did not travel via domestic flight within Vietnam. However, if you are on a time limit a 2hr flight from Ho Chi Minh to Hanoi is a lot more favourable than 30hrs + it can take on the train. Vietnam Airlines, the national carrier and Jetstar both offer cheap and backpacker friendly prices to many destinations within Vietnam.

Could you fit anymore on here?

By Motorbike: Many adventurers backpacking Vietnam choose to explore the country by motorbike. With a motorbike, you have a lot more freedom and will see a side of the country that is completely inaccessible if you are travelling by bus or train. Best of all, motorbiking Vietnam can work out pretty damn cheap as you can simply sell your used motorbike to another backpacker at the end of your trip. Logistically, Vietnam is the perfect shape for a motorbiking adventure - long and thin. The traffic in Vietnam can be a little crazy at times and the rural roads a tad questionable but if you are an experienced driver you should be fine. Plenty of backpackers, myself included, learn to ride a motorbike in Vietnam for the first time. Be aware that accidents among travellers are relatively common, so don’t skip out on the helmet, or travel insurance!
**Taxi:** An increasingly common sight in the cities, it is not hard to find a ride. Just be sure to use a metered taxi or haggle and agree the price before you get in. Vietnamese taxi drives have a reputation of touring you around town and/or taking you to alternative hotels. Be firm with directions and destination whilst using taxi’s within Vietnam.

**Motorbiking in Vietnam**

To kick your backpacking adventure into the next gear, get a motorbike. Motorbiking across Vietnam is often more cost effective than paying for multiple train/bus tickets. It gives you the freedom to really explore, get off the highway and go in search of raw adventure... Plus you look cool and you don't have to deal with the drunken Aussie lads on the bus attempting to rope you into a game of 'drink the beer'.

I picked myself up a **Honda Win Manual Motorbike second hand** from one of the many **backpackers selling their bikes** in Ho Chi Minh. I **payed around $300** and for the few weeks I had it, only some minor repairs were needed. Before travelling to Vietnam, I had never actually ridden a motorbike before and I was, in truth, a little intimidated. Luckily, riding a motorbike is a lot easier than it looks and after about an hour of (somewhat, hilarious) practice, I was good to go.
I had this expectation that the roads in Vietnam were going to be **dangerous dirt tracks**, but for the most part they are fairly decent besides a few potholes. The biggest **threat to you on the road** is your own lack of attention, other drivers and animals/people. Make sure your **travel insurance** covers you for riding a motorbike in Vietnam. Unfortunately accidents among travellers are common, I came off my motorbike myself in Dalat and got away with just cuts and bruises... The bike flipped and hit me in the back of the head, my helmet almost certainly saved my life - always wear a fucking helmet. You might think you look cool without one but, frankly, you look like a twat. Once in Hanoi I **managed to sell my trusty companion** (the motorbike, not my friend) to another backpacker, making my money back with just a thirty dollar loss.

There is no greater feeling than whizzing through the beautiful countryside on the back of a Motorbike. The feeling of complete freedom is awesome, I couldn't wipe the smile off my face the entire time. For anyone backpacking Vietnam, I highly rate buying a Motorbike to explore this beautiful country.

**Entry Requirements for Vietnam**

The visa situation in Vietnam has changed a lot in the last few years and it can be a little confusing. For **UK citizens** you can enter into Vietnam without a visa and travel for a maximum of 15 days. Which is great if you are paying Vietnam a quick visit, but if you want to stay any longer than this you will have to organise a visa before arrival. Not as simple as just doing a quick border run i’m afraid, if they catch you out you’ll be paying a pretty hefty fine..

Thankfully visas are relatively straight forward to organise before you travel to Vietnam. Just pay a visit, or call your local Vietnamese Embassy to apply and ask any questions. The last time I checked it's around $70 for UK citizens. If you don't want to organise it yourself there are many companies out there who claim to help you. I used [VietnamsVisa](https://www.vietnamsvisa.com/) to get mine done quickly and to avoid the dreaded paperwork...If applying for visas stresses you out, check out the awesome [VisaHQ](https://www.visahq.com/). They are my go to people concerning visas!

**Where to Go in Vietnam**

**Hanoi:** One of my favourite cities in all of Asia, **Hanoi** is a beautiful combination of Old meets Modern. A gateway to the incredible mountains and scenery to the North and the warm beaches and bustling cities to the south. Hanoi is worth spending at least a couple days exploring, on foot or by bicycle. I recommend staying at the fantastic [Central Hanoi Backpackers Hostel](https://www.centralhanoibackpackershostel.com/). The dorms are comfortable and at only $5 a night, including breakfast, internet and free beer, they certainly know how to cater to those backpacking Vietnam.
Train tracks running through the small streets of Hanoi

In Hanoi, it is definitely worth visiting the **War Museum**, easily spotted it has a great collection of weaponry marking the entrance. It costs just $3 to get in and it's a good introduction to exploring Vietnam's war-torn past.

Stop by the **Temple of Literature**; Founded in 1070 it was Vietnam's first university where the rich and incredibly brainy attended. Even if you're not into the history behind it, its handcrafted architecture is pretty breathtaking. If you aren't templed out, definitely head over to the 'old section' of the city and stop by **Bach Ma Temple**. The oldest temple in the city. If you only see one temple in Hanoi, make it this one.
The Lake of the Restored Sword; perfect for sunsets and beer.

**Hoan Kiem Lake:** Also known at the 'Lake of the Restored Sword'. Legend goes that once the Emperor defeated the Chinese from Hanoi, a giant golden turtle grabbed the sword and disappeared into the lake to restore it to its rightful owners. All traffic here is banned between 7pm - midnight every Friday to Sunday turning this beautiful place into a meeting place for friends, giving it an almost funfair vibe. If you're an early bird and like morning exercise, 6am Thai Chi takes place every morning.

Sapa the adventurers dream, with sensational views.
**Sapa:** An explorers paradise, you are likely to arrive here early in the morning. Check into the Enjoy Sapa Hostel, leave your bags here and go in search of Motorbikes for hire! It's around $10 per day to hire a motorbike, cheap for the freedom to explore some of the incredible sights around Sapa at your own pace. Getting lost on a Motorbike, exploring the beautiful countryside is just one of the many fun things to do in Sapa. Drive to the beautiful Thac Bac Waterfall, around 15kms outside Sapa main town. A legend says if you look at the falls long enough, you will see a white dragon peering down into the valley below.

Get off the beaten track while backpacking Vietnam and take a day trip out of Sapa town and visit the incredible Ban Pho Village. One of the friendliest tribes in South East Asia, it stands out among others due to the Mongolian Ban Ha population here. Settled on a Mountainous Cliff side these guys literally live life on the edge. Come and explore the culture, talk to the villagers and try not to get too drunk off the legendary corn wine they will insist you taste. Multiple times.

The girls in the Ban Pho Village showing me some epic sights.

There are some truly awesome treks around Sapa and you could spend a few days here exploring. For the more adventurous why not conquer Vietnams highest peak, Fansipan. Not quite Everest but standing at 3,143m it's pretty impressive; it is possible to do in a day but most will recommend at least 2 days. You can do this hike solo or with trekking companies in the area.
If you fancy heading off on some even more adventure-fuelled forays, consider treks around Ha Giang.

Halong Bay, a highlight of my trip!

**Halong Bay:** A UNESCO world heritage sight, often known as the Eighth Wonder of the world and an unmissable stop whilst backpacking Vietnam. Almost everyone who visits Halong Bay does it as part of a pre-arranged package. I'm not normally one for taking the tour option but it is pretty impossible otherwise. The tour's not too expensive and it was totally worth it, we had a great time and were surrounded by some awesome people. It's essential to prebook your trip to Halong Bay; we booked a two day, two night tour from our stay at the Central Hanoi Backpackers Hostel.

Whilst exploring Halong Bay we stayed on a cool 'Junk Boat' one night and in beach huts the other. Being part of a prepackaged tour meant all our food, transport and everything else was included, making it a hassle free adventure.

Once the tour is over you can either stay on Cat Ba island and check out the rock climbing scene or head back to Hanoi for a night before travelling South.
Hue: A beautiful small town offering a great break in the journey from Hanoi to Hoi An. Check into the Hue Citadel Backpacker’s Homestay and meet the family for local recommendations. One of Vietnam’s most royal cities, Hue is littered with impressive historic sights; delighting the inner nerd in us all! Check out the impressive Citadel on the other side of the perfume river. This impressive piece of history is made up of four separate citadel’s and will take a full day to explore, you can hire a bike to get around! There is a ton of things to do in Hue and you could easily spend weeks here. Check out the Thien Mu Pagoda; standing at 21 metres high and decorated with mind-blowing architecture this pagoda is a pretty spectacular eyeful. If rest and relaxation is what you are after the beaches of Lang Co and the mineral hot pools of Phong An are just a short distance away.
Hoi An is a photographers dream

**Hoi An:** This is THE place to get tailor made clothes whilst backpacking Vietnam. There are loads of [things to do in Hoi An](#) but most backpackers come here to get a suit made. Clothes tend to take at least three days to make so you want to get measured as soon as possible... So first stop? Find a tailor! I recommend [Mr XE II](#) - possibly the best tailor in Hoi An!

Check into the [Green Field Hotel](#), our triple room was only $19 and we had an awesome pool and free cocktails! Spend a few days exploring the local area by moped. Up from the Green Field Hotel is a really cool place to eat pizza and play cards. The owner is very friendly and his small restaurant is just past a barbers. Look to get back into the city? [Da Nang](#) is a great day trip, only a forty minute drive from Hue; the sandy beaches, caves and buddhist shrines among [many other activities](#) make for the perfect day out.
Nha Trang: Wanting to let loose, get a bit wild and have some fun on the water? Well you’ve come to the right place. A popular water sports area with the likes of windsurfing, paragliding and jet skiing on offer; there’s enough adrenaline here to keep even the most adventurous happy. No need to prebook, all can be arranged from the beach.

The best places to stay are in the side alleys and not on the main road. Check into the iHome Hostel for as little as $7 a night they’ll offer free beers in the evening and free breakfast to fix you up in the morning.

If you need to get a job or just want to have an awesome night out head to the Why Not Bar, they are often hiring. The work is easy and fun, it’s a great way to replenish funds while travelling Vietnam. I was on a five dollars a day plus two meals and unlimited booze deal... I was totally wrecked for a week or two, not my proudest accomplishment. The beach at night is a great place to hang out with other backpackers and get royally pissed however it, can be dangerous and a few backpackers have been robbed there so avoid ending up there alone.

While enjoying the nightlife be aware of the many hookers strolling the street at night. They will try to pickpocket you by grabbing at your crotch with one hand and
slipping the other into your pockets... Keep your hands on your pockets, no matter what.

Lak Lake: Recover from the heavy nights in Nha Trang and break up the journey to Dalat by venturing out to the tranquil and beautiful Lak Lake. The largest natural body of water in central Vietnam. Paddle out in a kayak and enjoy the still waters, beautiful scenery and explore the Jun Village; A Mennon settlement of wooden stilted houses.

Incredible sand dunes in Mui Ne
Mui Ne / Dalat: From Nha Trang you can head to Mui Ne and check out the awesome sand dunes or you can hire a motorbike from Easy Rider for roughly thirty dollars and ride up the mountain paths to Dalat.

There is not a whole lot to do in Dalat (although you can ride an ostrich!) but the ride itself is very scenic. I managed to crash and hurt myself quite badly, the roads are difficult and if you have limited riding experience I suggest you hire a driver and just go on the back of the bike. Most backpackers do this rather than riding themselves.

Saigon/Ho Chi Minh: The starting point for most backpackers travelling Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh is a crazy bustling city. Expensive for us broke backpackers I recommend spending no more than one night here before venturing into the 'real' Vietnam. Check into the Himalaya Phoenix Saigon Hostel for a night to get over the Jet Lag.

Many of the 'must see' sights around Ho Cho Minh are related to the terrors of the Vietnam War. The War Remnants Museum is a haunting insight in the life of those fighting on the front line during the period of 1954 - 1975. It costs around $1 to enter.
The small social rooms inside the Cu Chi Tunnels

Take a trip out of the city and tour the incredible network of **Cu Chi Tunnels**. Brave claustrophobia and crawl around the safer sections of the restored tunnels, popping (or squeezing) out at the other end. You can pre book half day tours of the tunnels through the [Himalaya Phoenix Saigon Hostel](HimalayaPhoenixSaigonHostel) travel desk.

From Saigon it is easy to arrange a bus onwards to [Phnom Penh in Cambodia](PhnomPenhInCambodia). You get your Cambodian visa for a fee on the border.
**Mekong Delta:** Often referred to as the 'Rice Bowl' of Vietnam this maze of rivers, swamps and islands are home to tiny villages floating on the banks of the Delta. Paddle into the floating markets and pick up some cheap trinkets, you'll find anything and everything. Becoming increasingly popular much of the trinkets sold are aimed at those travelling Vietnam. Moving past the 'tourist' trap section the **Mekong Delta** is a paradise for local wildlife, the quiet and noise of nature is a refreshing change from the busy streets of Ho Chi Minh. Trips to the Mekong can be as quick as half a day or a couple of days, depending on budget. I would recommend spending at least a day exploring the Mekong Delta.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Hostel Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hanoi</strong></td>
<td>Central Backpackers Hostel</td>
<td>Great party hostel in the heart of the old quarter. Free breakfast, city tour, beer &amp; pub crawl, what more could you want?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cat Ba Island</strong></td>
<td>Full Moon Party Hostel</td>
<td>Incredible views of the ocean from your balcony. Free breakfast &amp; friendly staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hue</strong></td>
<td>Hue Happy Homestay</td>
<td>Ran by the sweetest family who treat you like you're part of it. Great location in town that's close to everything.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Da Nang</strong></td>
<td>Funtastic Beach Hostel</td>
<td>Delicious free breakfast &amp; daily shuttle into Hoi An. Clean facilities &amp; located close to the beach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City</td>
<td>Hostel</td>
<td>Description</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sapa</strong></td>
<td>Ta Van Hostel</td>
<td>Nestled in a small ethnic minority village away from the touristy Sapa town. You really get in touch with nature here &amp; have incredible views of the rice terraces &amp; Fansipan mountain range.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nha Trang</strong></td>
<td>iHome Hostel</td>
<td>Located just off the main strip &amp; close to the beach. Love the social atmosphere, rooftop bar, buffet breakfast &amp; free beer!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mui Ne</strong></td>
<td>Mui Ne Backpackers Village</td>
<td>Home of the longest happy hour in town &amp; massive swimming pool. Really social vibes &amp; tons of games to keep you entertained. Loved their movie days when I was hungover.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hoi An</strong></td>
<td>Vietnam Backpackers Hostel</td>
<td>Great party hostel &amp; it has a pool. Loved the social scene here &amp; prime location.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Da Lat</strong></td>
<td>Mr Peace Backpackers</td>
<td>Great travel family vibes here, especially with their family dinners. The free breakfast &amp; happy hour is awesome too!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ho Chi Minh</strong></td>
<td>Vietnam Inn Siagon</td>
<td>Incredible rooftop bar overlooking the whole city! Great party vibes, cheap alcohol &amp; free beer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Currency in Vietnam**

Ever wanted to throw cash in the air and feel like a millionaire? Well the Vietnamese Dong allows every broke backpacker travelling in Vietnam the opportunity to feel rich. $15 US Dollars = 341,219.29 Vietnamese Dongs, crazy huh? Plus the name is Dong... Which, when enjoying multiple dirt cheap beers, is consistently amusing.

![Vietnamese currency](image)

So much dong...

Don't try to obtain Vietnamese currency before entering the country, it's pretty much impossible. If you managed to snag some, you've probably had a pretty bad exchange rate. Take US dollars into Vietnam, you'll find many shops and services accept US dollars.

Credit and Debit cards are widely accepted in the more built up areas such as Ho Chi Minh and Hanoi but venture into the rural areas and you maybe struggle. If heading off the tourist trail stock up on plenty of money before you go... You don't want to be Dongless in a tight situation.

**Must Try Experiences in Vietnam**

**Cruise Halong Bay**: No journey to Vietnam is complete without a trip to check out Halong Bay. Admire the breathtaking scenery of mountainous limestone rocks from the comfort of the 'junk boats'. When the humidity hits take a leap off the side and into the tranquil water below and splash around till your heart's content.
**Squeeze into the Cu Chi Tunnels:** See how the Vietnamese used underground tactics during the Vietnam War. Squeeze yourself into the tiny tunnels, overcoming claustrophobia as you try to experience what the Vietnamese Soldiers once did back in 1954.

**Trekking in Sapa:** Leave the hustle and bustle behind and check into some of the most beautiful mountainous landscapes in Asia. Home to Vietnam's highest peak **Fansipan** is an adventurers dream hike, standing at 3,143m it's pretty impressive. If this is a bit too adventurous, enjoy the day walks or simply kick back and take in the beautiful views.

**Suit up in Hoi An:** **Thailand** has Elephant Pants, Vietnam has incredible Silk Suits. Watch the talented tailors at work in Hoi An and get your own creation made cheaply, beautifully and in just a few hours!

**Ba Hoi:** Friendly bars with **cheap beer**, laid back feels and even more friendly locals. Often located up sketchy looking side streets, these little bars are a great place for a laugh and cheap beer.

**Water Puppet Show:** Originating as far back as the 11th Century from the villages of the Red River Delta in Northern Vietnam, Water Puppet Shows are incredible. Lasting from as little as 5 minutes to hours, these are shows that you have to check out when travelling in Vietnam.

**Street Food:** For as little as $1 for a great meal, you really have no excuse not to try some of the local delicacies. If it's good enough for **Obama**, it's good enough for me.
**Food in Vietnam**

Vietnamese food is popular all around the world, I would be gobsmacked if you have yet to try Spring Rolls, or Bread Rolls? As well as tasting absolutely wonderful Vietnamese food is one of the healthiest foods in the world; prepared with fresh ingredients, vegetables, herbs and either rice or noodles each dish is different but delicious!

Here are a few you should definitely try whilst backpacking Vietnam...

**Buncha** - One of my favourites! This is basically a Pork Meatball Noodle Salad. Yum!

**Goi Cuon** - The famous vietnamese "Summer Rolls" are a perfect light bite. Normally filled with shrimp and/or pork, herbs and vegetables. They are wrapped in rice paper and served with Peanut dipping sauce.

**Pho** - Basically noodle soup. There are many varieties of Pho, perfect for those slightly unsure about Vietnamese food.

**Banh Mi Thit** - Or in other words, the best sandwich in Asia! Basically a well sized baguette stuffed with yummy treats such as ham, cheese, fish, vegetables etc.
Backpacking Travel Costs in Vietnam

Travelling in Vietnam can be cheap without really having to think about it. I spent around twenty dollars a day in Vietnam, sometimes a little more when splurging on a day trip or imported beer.

If you are staying in hostel dorms, trying the local delicacies on the street, catching buses and trains (rather than domestic flights) and enjoying the odd day trip; you can expect to spend no more than fifty dollars a day, if that.

Average Room cost: $5 - $20
Average Meal Cost: $1 street food - $8 meal in a mid level restaurant
Long Distance Bus Service: $3 - $15
Entrance to a site cost: $4 for foreigners on average
Average Day Trip Cost: $15+ depending on what you want to do.
Average Motorbike Hire: $10 per day

Top Tips for Broke Backpacker in Vietnam

Vietnam is one of the cheapest destinations in Asia however, it is still possible to go a little out of control, especially when the currency makes you feel like a millionaire. So here are my top tips to keep it cheap backpacking Vietnam...

Take the bus: The national bus service or 'the chicken bus' has great links throughout Vietnam, even into some of the more remote areas. For as little as $1 a ticket, I’d happily sit next to a chicken for a few hours.

Camp: Vietnam has some incredible countryside and coastline, views that shouldn’t be wasted by sleeping inside. Camping is most popular within the National Parks up and down Vietnam. When camping isn’t an option i.e. busy streets, cities and high tides then go for the hostel dorms. A great back up option for as little as $4 a night. To connect with the locals, check out Couchsurfing.

Cook your own Food: Stock up on some simple basics at the market/supermarket and cook your own feast. I have a small Gas Cooker which I take throughout my travels, it saves you more money than you’d think!

Understand the Money: If, like me, you don’t have a great mathematical brain, use a currency app to help you understand how much you are spending. Knowing the value of the currency will help you avoid being ripped off or spending too much without realising.
**Keep it Local:** Where possible drink the local beer, eat the local delicacies and for day trips, try to use local companies. By using local companies you can haggle a bargain price that larger, international tour operators won't offer. Plus supporting local businesses thrive is awesome!

**Hitchhike:** I didn't hitchhike whilst backpacking Vietnam but I have a couple of amigos who have hitched the whole length of the country, no worries. Smile, motion for a car to stop and practise your Vietnamese....

**Volunteer:** Thailand has some great volunteering opportunities. Be sure to check out Love Volunteers and save a ton of money! More on that in the next section.

**Volunteering Projects in Vietnam**

Keen to save the world on your travels? Volunteering around the world is actually a really smart way to travel on a tight budget. There are lots of expensive volunteering opportunities out there but if you can find an ethical company; you can find projects that include food, accommodation and will set you back just a few dollars a day. I've volunteered all over the world, sometimes arranging my own volunteering placements and occasionally going through volunteering companies.

Volunteering whilst backpacking is an incredible experience; you will form lasting friendships and give something back to the country you are travelling in. It's also a great way to have a base for a little bit and to enjoy a bit of downtime in the evenings rather than preparing for another hectic journey! The only problem is finding a decent volunteering company that isn't out to make a huge profit. Love Volunteers is the only company I am happy to give The Broke Backpacker seal of approval!

Find out more about the ethics of volunteering abroad here, here and here. Visit Love Volunteers today and find out how you can help save the world without spending a fortune.
Learning Vietnamese whilst travelling in Vietnam

The locals around here are pretty friendly. Vietnamese culture has a very heavy focus on respect and nothing is more respectful than attempting to speak another's language. Whilst it is a difficult language to pick up, especially for native English speakers, grasping the basics will help you build instant friendships.

Throughout backpacking Vietnam I used uTalk Go, a free language learning app, to get to grips with the language and learn a few phrases.

My favourite phrases for backpacking Vietnam
Hello - *Sin Chao*
Goodbye - *Tam biet*
Thank You - *Cám on Ban*
No Problem - *Khong Van De Gi*
I like to Eat - *Toi Muon An*
Station - *Ga*
What is this? - *cái si te nài?*
I am Sorry - *Toi Sin Loi*
I’m Hungry - *Tôi Doi*
What is your name? - *Tên cua ban là si*
I don't understand. - *Toi khong hieu*

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**Best Time to Travel in Vietnam**

Vietnam is a country with multiple weather patterns ranging from monsoon rains, cold snaps and hot, humid sunny days. It can be hard to catch the whole country at a consistent time of year. But no fret, it is possible!

If you are planning to backpack Vietnam from top to bottom, the best time of year generally is September - December (Autumn) and March - April (Spring). These
times of the year are your best weather window, where you might be lucky enough to see the whole country in sun!

Looking for specifics? Let me break down by regions, the best time of year for backpacking Vietnam;

**North Vietnam: October - May** will give you dry weather the majority of months. Expect some colder temperatures in the mountains and from March onwards, a little more rain as it gets more humid.

**Central Vietnam: February - July** is the best time of year to avoid heavy rain. Temperatures will hit the upper 30s in June to August.

**Southern Vietnam: December - April** is the 'dry' season. Temperatures will rarely fall below 20 degrees and will reach up to 40 degrees come March/April.

Locals trying to escape the rain!

**Backpack Vietnam for Free!**

Perhaps one of the best options for backpackers wanting to explore Vietnam long-term and experience living in this truly incredible country is to get a Teaching English as a Foreign Language course online. [TEFL courses](https://www.tefl.org) open up a huge range of opportunities and you can find teaching work all over the world. To find out more about TEFL courses and how you can teach English around the world, read my in-depth report on [teaching english abroad](https://tefl.org). To find out more, check out this article with case studies of [TEFL teachers all over the world](https://tefl.org)...
Useful Apps to download before backpacking Vietnam

**XE Currency** - My go to currency app when travelling, you will definitely need this when travelling Vietnam. If not, you have some fantastic maths skills! A great way to keep track of how much your spending and understanding the exchange rate.

**Google Translate** - This app helped me out BIG time, especially when exploring the rural areas not yet blessed with English signs. Working offline you don’t have to worry about a huge data bill. It won’t necessarily help you learn the language but it’s great for practical and quick day to day scenarios.

**Maps.Me** - The most useful app you will ever download. Download the full map of the country before you go and use it offline while you backpack Vietnam. No data used and minimal amount of time getting lost means more time for fun stuff!

**uTalk Go** - So you want to learn Vietnamese? uTalk is the backpacker’s secret weapon when it comes to learning languages, I cannot recommend **uTalk Go** enough. I’ve used this all over the world whilst travelling and with over 130 languages currently available, it’s the perfect sidekick.

**HIDE.ME** - I always have a VPN ready to go on both my phone and laptop, I personally use Hide.Me which is one of the fastest and most reliable options out there. This particular VPN allows for up to five connections which is handy for keeping all your devices connected without having to purchase multiple VPN packages.
Being a Responsible Backpacker

Writing your name in black marker on temples, chugging Chang beer while shirtless, swearing loudly and visiting unethical animal attractions? You Sir, are a twat. Luckily, most backpackers don’t fall into this category but, when you’re out and about and have had a few too many drinks, it can be easy to embarrass yourself. It’s easy to get carried away in South East Asia, everything is so damn cheap and so much fun. I’m in no way the perfect traveller; I’ve been the drunken idiot on the street. I know first hand just how hard it is to be the one person in a group to say no when somebody comes up with a stupid idea that, for some reason, everybody is down for.

By no means am I telling you not to drink, smoke and party. Do it and love it. Just don’t get so drunk you turn into an imbecile your mum would be ashamed of. If you can’t handle drinking buckets, then stick to beer. If you want to see Elephants, then go and see them but do your research first. Look up ethical animal sanctuaries such as The Elephant Jungle Sanctuary in Chiang Mai, who treat and care for animals properly. Don’t ride elephants. If you’re not into seeing the temples, no worries but don’t be disrespectful, inappropriate or deface them - certainly do not try to wander in shirtless.
Wear a helmet when you hop on a motorbike in Asia. Despite being an experienced driver, I’ve had a total of three crashes in South East Asia over the last ten years. On the one occasion I wasn’t wearing a helmet, I split my head open and had to go to hospital. It was an expensive mistake. The local people are sick of scraping foreigners off the road and, trust me, you don’t look cool for not wearing a helmet.

Humans are humans; treat people you meet along the way with the same respect you would show your friends and family back home. You are not superior to anyone including the girls/guys walking the streets. Sex workers in South East Asia are people like you and me; they may enjoy what they do, or they may be on the darker side of it. Regardless of your beliefs and thoughts on prostitution, remember this is another person with thoughts, feelings and a life outside of the sex industry too. You are not superior to these people, you just happen to be from a more privileged background.

Go to Asia and have the time of your life, do the things you’ve dreamed of but be respectful along the way. Travelling the world makes you an ambassador for your country, which is awesome. We can make a positive impact on people when we travel and get rid of any ugly stereotypes that may be associated with your country...

Vietnamese Flag on our boat at Halong Bay
Books to read on Vietnam

**Last Night I Dreamed of Peace: The Diary of Dang Thuy Tram** - An incredibly personal account of the Vietnam War. Translated from Vietnamese, it can be a bit choppy but a heart pulling read.

**Vietnam: Rising Dragon by Bill Hayton** - Written by a BBC journalist, it's an informative book which will help you understand contemporary Vietnam. Very readable I found this really helpful in understanding Vietnam.

**The Quiet American** - A fantastic fictional novel set around the time of the Vietnam War, also a great movie. Moving and will keep you hooked. I highly recommend this one.

**Destination Saigon** - A funny and fascinating book about backpackers travelling in Vietnam. If you are planning your backpacking trip to Vietnam, or just curious about the culture, this book is perfect!

**Vietnamerica: A Family's Journey** - Read this on the plane and feel like you are travelling with GB on his adventure.


**When Heaven and Earth Changed Places (Tie-In Edition)** - An account from a survivor of the Vietnam war who fled to America and then returned to her hometown many years later.

**DK Eyewitness Travel Guide: Vietnam and Angkor Wat** - An informative second 'back up' Vietnam travel guide. Also covers some parts of Cambodia as well as Plenty of awesome maps and guides to the main 'tourist must do's' you'll want to experience when backpacking Vietnam.

**Tunnel Rats** - If you're a military history nerd, like me, this is a great book following the journeys of American GIs specially picked for their small stature to crawl into the Vietcong's network of tunnels and engage reconnaissance missions and often hand to hand combat in tiny spaces. This book, more than any other, shows just how nuts the Vietnamese War was...
Not sure what to take on your Vietnam backpacking adventure? Check out our Backpacking packing list.

**Insurance for Backpacking Across Vietnam**

Even if you are only going on a short trip, you should always travel with insurance. Have fun on your Vietnam backpacking adventure but please do get insurance – take it from someone who has racked up tens of thousands of bucks on an insurance claim before, you need it.

As a wise man once said, if you can’t afford travel insurance, you shouldn’t be travelling – so be sure to get your backpacker insurance sorted before you head off on a backpacking adventure! Travelling without insurance would be fucking stupid. I highly recommend [World Nomads](https://www.worldnomads.com).

If you liked this article, please help spread the word and share it on Facebook and Twitter.

_Yay for transparency! Some of the links in this post are affiliate links. This means that if you book your accommodation, buy a book or sort your insurance, I'll earn a small commission at no extra cost to you. I only link to stuff I've actually used and never endorse crap. Your support helps me keep the site going._