

# Language

## CONTENTS

Languages in Vietnam	505
<b>Vietnamese</b>	<b>506</b>
Written Vietnamese	506
Pronunciation	507
Tones	507
Grammar	507
Proper Names	507
Pronouns	508
Accommodation	508
Conversation & Essentials	509
Directions	509
Health	510
Emergencies	511
Language Difficulties	511
Numbers	511
Paperwork	512
Question Words	512
Shopping & Services	512
Time & Dates	513
Transport	513
Travel with Children	514
<b>Hill Tribe Languages</b>	<b>514</b>
Tay	515
H'mong	515
Dzao	515

## LANGUAGES IN VIETNAM

Vietnamese is the official language of Vietnam, and it is spoken throughout the country. There are dialectal differences between the north, central and southern regions. There are also dozens of different languages spoken by the various ethnic minorities, particularly in the central highlands and in the far north of the country. Khmer, the Cambodian language, is spoken in parts of the Mekong Delta, and Lao and various Chinese dialects are evident in areas bordering Laos and China.

The Vietnamese people's knowledge of foreign languages reflects their country's relationship with foreign powers – cordial or otherwise – in recent history.

Much of Vietnam's elder generation still speak French, while many middle-aged Vietnamese speak Russian and other Eastern

European languages – many of these people spent time in countries like Russia, Bulgaria and the former East Germany during the Cold War (at least until it thawed in the late 1980s). Today, however, Vietnam's youth has fully embraced the English language. A fair number of young people also study Japanese, French and other Western European languages.

The most widely spoken foreign languages in Vietnam are Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin), English and French, more or less in that order. People in their 50s and older (who grew up during the colonial period) are much more likely to understand some French than southerners of the successive generation, for whom English was indispensable for professional and commercial contacts with the Americans. Some southern Vietnamese men – former combat interpreters – speak a quaint form of English peppered with all sorts of charming southern-American expressions such as 'y'all come back' and 'it ain't worth didley squat', pronounced with a perceptible drawl. Apparently, they worked with Americans from the deep south, carefully studied their pronunciation and diligently learned every nuance.

Many of the Vietnamese who can speak English – especially former South Vietnamese soldiers and officials – learned it while working with the Americans during the war. After reunification, almost all of them spent periods of time ranging from a few months to 15 years in 're-education camps'. Many of these former South Vietnamese soldiers and officials will be delighted to renew contact with Americans, with whose compatriots they spent so much time, often in very difficult circumstances, more than half a lifetime ago.

These days almost everyone has a desire to learn English. If you're looking to make contacts with English students, the best place is at the basic food stalls in university areas.

Spoken Chinese (both Cantonese and Mandarin) is making a definite comeback after years of being suppressed. The large number of free-spending tourists and investors from Taiwan and Hong Kong provide

the chief motivation for studying Chinese. In addition, cross-border trade with mainland China has been increasing rapidly and those who are able to speak Chinese are well positioned to profit from it.

After reunification, the teaching of Russian was stressed all over the country. With the collapse of the USSR in 1991, all interest in studying Russian ground to a screeching halt. Most Vietnamese who bothered to learn the language have either forgotten it or are in the process of forgetting it.

## VIETNAMESE

The Vietnamese language (*Kinh*) is a fusion of Mon-Khmer, Tai and Chinese elements. Vietnamese derived a significant percentage of its basic words from the nontonal Mon-Khmer languages. From the Tai languages came certain grammatical elements and tonality. Chinese gave Vietnamese most of its literary, technical and governmental vocabulary, as well as its traditional writing system.

The following list of words and phrases will help get you started. If you'd like a more comprehensive guide to the language, pick up a copy of Lonely Planet's pocket-sized *Vietnamese Phrasebook*.

The variation in vocabulary between the Vietnamese of the north and that of the south is indicated in this chapter by (N) and (S) respectively.

### WRITTEN VIETNAMESE

For centuries, the Vietnamese language was written in standard Chinese characters (*chữ nho*). Around the 13th century, the Vietnamese devised their own writing system called *chữ nôm* (or just *nôm*), which was created by combining two Chinese words or by using single Chinese characters for their phonetic value. Both writing systems were in use until the 20th century – official business and scholarship was conducted in *chữ nho*, while *chữ nôm* was used for popular literature. The Latin-based *quốc ngữ* script, widely used since WWI, was developed in the 17th century by Alexandre de Rhodes (see the boxed text, right). *Quốc ngữ* served to undermine the position of Mandarin officials, whose power was based

### ALEXANDRE DE RHODES

One of the most illustrious of the early missionaries was the brilliant French Jesuit scholar Alexandre de Rhodes (1591–1660). De Rhodes first preached in Vietnamese only six months after arriving in the country in 1627, and he is most recognised for his work in devising *quốc ngữ*, the Latin-based phonetic alphabet in which Vietnamese is written to this day. By replacing Chinese characters with *quốc ngữ*, de Rhodes facilitated the propagation of the gospel to a wide audience.

Over the course of his long career, de Rhodes travelled back and forth between Hanoi, Macau, Rome and Paris, seeking support and funding for his missionary activities and battling both Portuguese colonial opposition and the intractable Vatican bureaucracy. In 1645 he was sentenced to death for illegally entering Vietnam to proselytise, but was expelled instead; two of the priests with him were beheaded.

For his contributions, de Rhodes gained the highest respect from the Vietnamese (in the south, anyway), who called him *cha cả* (father). A memorial statue of de Rhodes stands in central Saigon.

on traditional scholarship in *chữ nho* and *chữ nôm*, scripts that were largely inaccessible to the masses.

The Vietnamese treat every syllable as an independent word, so 'Saigon' is spelt 'Sai Gon' and 'Vietnam' is written as 'Viet Nam'. Foreigners aren't too comfortable with this system – we prefer to read 'London' rather than 'Lon Don'. This leads to the notion that Vietnamese is a 'monosyllabic language', where every syllable represents an independent word. This idea appears to hark back to the Chinese writing system, where every syllable is represented by an independent character and each character is treated as a meaningful word in its own right. In reality, Vietnamese appears to be polysyllabic, like English. However, writing systems do influence people's perceptions of their own language, so the Vietnamese themselves will insist that their language is monosyllabic – it's a debate probably not worth pursuing.

### PRONUNCIATION

Most of the names of the letters of the *quốc ngữ* alphabet are pronounced like the letters of the French alphabet. Dictionaries are alphabetised as in English except that each vowel/tonal combination is treated as a different letter.

Most of the consonants of the Romanised Vietnamese alphabet are pronounced more or less as they are in English with a few exceptions. Vietnamese doesn't use the English letters 'f', 'j', 'w' and 'z'.

To help you make sense of what is (for non-Vietnamese) a very tricky writing system, the words and phrases in this language guide include pronunciations that use a written form more familiar to English speakers. The same symbols as *quốc ngữ* are used for marking the tones.

For example, Vietnamese **d** and **gi-** are represented with 'z', **đ** with 'd', **ph-** with 'f', **x** with 's', **-ng** with 'm', **-nh** with 'ny' etc.

### SYMBOL & PRONUNCIATION

<b>c, k</b>	<b>g</b>	an unaspirated 'k'
<b>đ</b>	<b>đ</b>	(with crossbar) as in 'do'
<b>d</b>	<b>z/y</b>	(without crossbar) as the 'z' in 'zoo' (N); as the 'y' in 'yes' (S)
<b>gi-</b>	<b>z/y</b>	as a 'z' (N); as a 'y' (S)
<b>kh-</b>	<b>ch</b>	as the 'ch' in German <i>buch</i>
<b>ng-</b>	<b>ng</b>	as the '-nga-' sound in 'long ago'
<b>nh-</b>	<b>ny</b>	as the 'ny' in 'canyon'
<b>ph-</b>	<b>f</b>	as in 'farm'
<b>r</b>	<b>z/r</b>	as 'z' (N); as 'r' (S)
<b>s</b>	<b>s/sh</b>	as 's' (N); as 'sh' (S)
<b>tr-</b>	<b>ch/tr</b>	as 'ch' (N); as 'tr' (S)
<b>th-</b>	<b>t</b>	a strongly aspirated 't'
<b>x</b>	<b>s</b>	like an 's'
<b>-ch</b>	<b>k</b>	like a 'k'
<b>-ng</b>	<b>ng</b>	as the 'ng' in 'long' but with the lips closed; sounds like English 'm'
<b>-nh</b>	<b>ng</b>	as in 'singing'

### TONES

The hardest part of studying Vietnamese for Westerners is learning to differentiate between the tones. There are six tones in spoken Vietnamese. Thus, every syllable in Vietnamese can be pronounced six different ways. For example, depending on the tones, the word *ma* can be read to mean

'phantom', 'but', 'mother', 'rice seedling', 'tomb' or 'horse'.

The six tones of spoken Vietnamese are represented by five diacritical marks in the written language (the first tone is left unmarked). These should not be confused with the four other diacritical marks that are used to indicate special consonants and vowels.

The following examples show the six different tone representations:

*ma* (ghost): middle of the vocal range

*mà* (which): begins low & falls lower

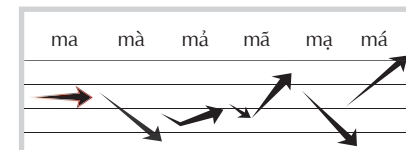
*má* (tomb): begins low, dips and then rises to higher pitch

*mã* (horse): begins high, dips slightly, then rises sharply

*mạ* (rice seedling): begins low, falls to a lower level, then stops

*má* (mother): begins high and rises sharply

A visual representation looks something like this:



### GRAMMAR

Vietnamese grammar is fairly straightforward, with a wide variety of possible sentence structures. Nouns have no masculine, feminine or plural forms and verbs have only one form regardless of gender, person or tense. Instead, tool words and classifiers are used to show a word's relationship to its neighbours. For example, in the expression *con mèo (cúa) tôi* (my cat), *con* is the classifier, *mèo* is the noun, *cúa* means 'of/belong to' (and can be omitted), and *tôi* is the personal pronoun 'I'.

### PROPER NAMES

Most Vietnamese names consist of a family name, a middle name and a given name, in that order. Thus, if Henry David Thoreau had been Vietnamese, he would have been named Thoreau David Henry and would have been addressed as Mr Henry – people are called by their given name, but to do this without using the title Mr, Mrs or Miss is considered as expressing either great intimacy or arrogance of the sort a superior would use with his or her inferior.

In Vietnamese, Mr is *Ông* if the man is of your grandparents' generation, *Bác* if he is of your parents' age, *Chú* if he is younger than your parents and *Anh* if he is in his teens or early 20s. Mrs is *Bà* if the woman is of your grandparents' age and *Bác* if she is of your parents' generation or younger. Miss is *Chị* or *Em* unless the woman is very young, in which case *Cô* might be more appropriate. Other titles of respect are *Thầy* (Buddhist monk or male teacher), *Bà* (Buddhist nun), *Cha* (Catholic priest) and *Cô* (Catholic nun).

There are 300 or so family names in use in Vietnam, the most common of which is Nguyen (which is pronounced something like 'nwee-en'). About half of all Vietnamese have the surname Nguyen! When women marry, they usually (but not always) take their husband's family name. The middle name may be purely ornamental, may indicate the sex of its bearer or may be used by all the male members of a given family. A person's given name is carefully chosen to form a harmonious and meaningful ensemble with their family and middle names and with the names of other family members.

## PRONOUNS

<b>I</b>	
<i>tôi</i>	doy
<b>you</b>	
<i>ông</i>	awm (to an older man)
<i>bà</i>	baà (to an older woman)
<i>anh</i>	aang (to a man your own age)
<i>cô</i>	gaw (to a woman your own age)
<b>he</b>	
<i>anh ấy</i>	ang áy
<b>she</b>	
<i>cô ấy</i>	gô áy
<b>we</b>	
<i>chúng tôi</i>	júm doy
<b>they</b>	
<i>họ</i>	họ

## ACCOMMODATION

### Where is there a (cheap) ...?

<i>dâu có ... (rẻ tiền)?</i>	đoh gô ... (zà dee-ùhn)?
<b>camping ground</b>	
<i>nơi cắm trại</i>	ner-ee gúhm chại
<b>hotel</b>	
<i>khách sạn</i>	kaák sạn
<b>guesthouse</b>	
<i>nhà khách</i>	nyaà kaák

### What is the address?

*Địa chỉ là gì?*  
dee-ùh cheè làa zèè?

### Could you write the address down, please?

*Bạn có thể viết giùm địa chỉ được không?*  
baan gô tè vee-ùht zòom dee-ùh jeè duhr-êrk kawm?

### I need to leave at ... o'clock (tomorrow morning).

*Tôi phải đi lúc ... giờ (sáng mai).*  
doy faí dee lúp ... zèr (saáng mai)

### How much does a room cost?

*Giá một phòng là bao nhiêu?*  
zàá mawt fòm làa bow nyee-oo?

### I'd like (a) ...

<i>Tôi muốn ...</i>	doy moo-úhn ...
<b>bed</b>	
<i>cái giường</i>	gái zuhr-èng
<b>single room</b>	
<i>phòng đơn</i>	fòm dem
<b>double-bed</b>	
<i>giường đôi</i>	zuhr-èng doy
<b>room</b>	
<i>phòng</i>	fòm
<b>room with two beds</b>	
<i>phòng gồm hai</i>	fòm gawm hai
<i>giường ngủ</i>	zuhr-èng ngoò
<b>room with a bathroom</b>	
<i>phòng có phòng tắm</i>	fòm gô fòm dúhm
<b>to share a dorm</b>	
<i>ở chung phòng nội trú</i>	èr jum fòm nøy choó

### air-conditioning

*máy lạnh* máy lạng

### bathroom

*phòng tắm* fòm dúhm

### blanket

*mền* mèn

### fan

*quạt máy* gwaạt máy

### hot water

*nước nóng* nuhr-érk nóhm

### laundry

*giặt úi* zùht o-èe

### mosquito net

*màng* maàng

### reception

*tiếp tân* dee-ùhp duhn

### room

*phòng* fòm

### room key

*chìa khóa phòng* chee-aà kwaà fòm

### 1st-class room

*phòng loại 1* fòm lwaị mawt

## MAKING A RESERVATION

(for written and phone inquiries)

<b>To ...</b>	
<i>Đến ...</i>	đen ...
<b>From ...</b>	
<i>Từ ...</i>	dừh ...
<b>Date</b>	
<i>ngày tháng</i>	ngày taáng
<b>I'd like to book ...</b>	
<i>Làm ơn cho tôi</i>	laàm ern jo doy
<i>đặt trước một ...</i>	đùht truhr-érk mawt ...
<b>in the name of ...</b>	
<i>tên là ...</i>	den làa ...
<b>from ... (date)</b>	
<i>Từ ...</i>	dừh ...
<b>until ...</b>	
<i>Đến ...</i>	đen ...
<b>credit card</b>	
<i>thẻ tín dụng</i>	tả đín zòom
<b>number</b>	
<i>số</i>	sáw
<b>expiry date</b>	
<i>hết hàng</i>	hết haàng

### 2nd-class room

*phòng loại 2* fòm lwaị hai

### sheet

*ra trải giường* zaa chấi zuhr-èng

### toilet

*nhà vệ sinh* nyaà vệ sing

### toilet paper

*giấy vệ sinh* zây vệ sing

### towel

*khăn tắm* kúhn dúhm

### How much is it ...?

*Giá bao nhiêu ...?* zàá bow nyee-oo ...?

### per night

*một đêm* mawt dem

### per person

*một người* mawt nguhr-èe

### May I see it?

*Tôi có thể xem phòng được không?*  
doy gô tè sam fòm duhr-êrk kawm?

### Where is the bathroom?

*Phòng tắm ở đâu?*

*fòm dúhm ở đâu?*

### Where is the toilet?

*Nhà vệ sinh ở đâu?*

*nyaà vệ sinh ở đâu?*

### I'm leaving today.

*Hôm nay tôi rời đây.*  
hawm nay doy zer-èè day

### We're leaving tomorrow.

*Ngày mai chúng tôi rời đây.*  
ngày mai júm doy zer-èè day

## CONVERSATION & ESSENTIALS

### Hello.

*Xin chào.* sin jòw

### Goodbye.

*Tạm biệt.* daám bee-ùht

### Yes.

*Vâng. (N)/Dạ. (S)* vuhng/vạ

### No.

*Không.* kawm

### Please.

*Làm ơn.* laàm ern

### Thank you.

*Cảm ơn.* gảam ern

### You're welcome.

*Không có chi.* kawm gô jee

### Excuse me. (often used before questions)

*Xin lỗi.* sin lối

### Sorry.

*Xin lỗi.* sin lối

### How are you?

*Có khỏe không?* gắw kwá kawm?

### Fine, thank you.

*Khỏe, cảm ơn.* kwá gảam ern

### Good night.

*Chúc ngủ ngon.* júp ngoò ngon

### What's your name?

*Tên là gì?* den làa zèè?

### My name is ...

*Tên tôi là ...* den doy làa ...

### Where are you from?

*Bạn từ đâu đến?* baan dừh doh đến?

### I'm from ...

*Tôi đến từ ...* doy đến từh ...

### I like ...

*Tôi thích ...* doy tíc

### I don't like ...

*Tôi không thích ...* doy kawm tíc

### I want ...

*Tôi muốn ...* doy moo-úhn ...

### I don't want ...

*Tôi không muốn ...* doy kawm moo-úhn ...

## DIRECTIONS

### Where is ...?

*ở đâu ...?* ở doh ...?

### Go straight ahead.

*Thẳng tới trước.* tũhng dere-èe chuhr-érk

### Turn left.

*Sang trái.* saang chấi

### Turn right.

*Sang phải.* saang faí

## SIGNS

Lối Vào	Entrance
Lối Ra	Exit
Hướng Dẫn	Information
Mở	Open
Đóng	Closed
Cấm	Prohibited
Cảnh Sát/Công An	Police
Nhà Vệ Sinh	Toilets/WC
Đàn Ông	Men
Phụ Nữ	Women

## at the corner

ở góc đường ờ gốp đưhr-èrng

## at the traffic lights

tại đèn giao thông đại đèn zow tawm

## behind

đằng sau đùhng sow

## in front of

đằng trước đùng chuhr-érk

## far

xa saa

## near (to)

gần gùhn

## opposite

đối diện đóy zee-ùhn

## north

bắc búhk

## south

nam naam

## east

đông dawm

## west

tây day

## beach

bãi biển bãi be-ùhn

## boulevard

đại lộ đại lạy

## bridge

cầu gôh

## island

đảo đỏv

## main square

quảng trường chính gwaàng chuhr-èrng jing

## market

chợ trường jờ chuhr-èrng

## mountain

núi noo-éé

## quay

bến tàu bén đòh

## river

sông sawm

## sea

biển be-ùhn

## square (in a city)

công viên gắwm vee-ùhn

## street

phố/đường (N/S) fắw/duhr-èrng

## temple

chùa joo-ùh

## HEALTH

## I'm sick.

Tôi bị đau. doy be-đoh

## It hurts here.

Chỗ bị đau ở đây. jắw be-đoh ở đây

## Please take me to the hospital.

Làm ơn đưa tôi bệnh viện. làm ơn đưhr-uh doy bện vee-ùhn

## dentist

nha sĩ nyaa seé

## doctor

bác sĩ baák seé

## pharmacy

nhà thuốc tây nyaa too-úhk day

## I'm ...

Tôi bị ... doy be- ...

## asthmatic

suyễn swe-ùhn

## diabetic

bệnh đái đường bện đái đưhr-èrng

## epileptic

động kinh đắwm ging

## I'm allergic to ...

Tôi bị dị ứng với ... doy be- zee úhng ver-éé ...

## antibiotics

thuốc kháng sinh too-úhk kaáng sing

## aspirin

thuốc giảm đau too-úhk zắm doh

## penicillin

thuốc pênicilin too-úhk pe-nee-see-lin

## bees

con ong gôn om

## peanuts

đậu phộng độh fòm

## backache

đau lưng đoh luhng

## diarrhoea

tiêu chảy dee-oo jắy

## dizziness

chóng mặt jóm mựt

## EMERGENCIES

## Help!

Cứu tôi! gùhr-óo doy!

## There's been an accident!

Có tai nạn! gố dai nạn!

## I'm lost.

Tôi bị lạc đường. doi be- lạk đưhr-èrng

## Leave me alone!

Thôi! toy!

## Thief!

Ăn cắp! uhñ gúhp!

## Pickpocket!

Móc túi! móp doo-éé

## Please call ...

Làm ơn gọi ... làm ơn goy ...

## an ambulance

xe cứu thương sa gùuh-óo tuhr-èrng

## a doctor

bác sĩ baák seé

## the police

công an gắwm aan

## fever

bệnh sốt bện sắwt

## headache

nhức đầu nyúhkr đoh

## malaria

sốt rét sắwt zét

## nausea

buồn nôn boo-ùhn nawn

## stomachache

đau bụng đoh bựm

## toothache

nhức răng nyúhkr zuhng

## vomiting

ói óy

## antiseptic

thuốc khử trùng too-úhk kúhr chùm

## condoms

bao dương vật bow zuhr-èrng vựt

## contraceptive

cách ngừa thai gắak nguhr-ùh tai

## insect repellent

thuốc chống muỗi too-úhk jắwm mo-èe

## medicine

y thuốc ee too-úhk

## mosquito coils

hương đốt chống muỗi (N) huhr-èrng đét jắwm mo-èe

## nhang chống

muối (S) nyaang jắwm

## muối (S)

mo-èe

## sanitary pads

băng vệ sinh buhng vệ sing

## sunblock cream

kem chống nắng gắwm jắwm núhng

## tampons

ống băng vệ sinh áwm buhng vệ sing

## LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES

## Do you speak English?

Bạn có nói được tiếng Anh không?

Bạn gố nỏy đưhr-èrk đing aang kawm?

## Does anyone here speak English?

Có ai biết nói tiếng Anh không?

gố ai bee-úht nỏy đing aang kawm?

## What does that mean?

Nghĩa là gì?

ngée-ùh là zee?

## I (don't) understand.

Tôi (không) hiểu.

doy (kawm) hee-oo

## Could you write it down, please?

Xin viết ra giùm tôi.

sin vee-úht zaa zùm doy

## Can you show me (on the map)?

Xin chỉ giùm (trên bản đồ này).

sin jeé zùm (chen bản đồ này)

## NUMBERS

1	một	mắwt
2	hai	hai
3	ba	baa
4	bốn	bắwn
5	năm	nuhm
6	sáu	sốh
7	bảy	bắy
8	tám	đúhm
9	chín	jín
10	mười	muhr-èé
11	mười một	muhr-èé mắwt
19	mười chín	muhr-èé jín
20	hai mươi	hai muhr-èe
21	hai mươi một	hai muhr-èe mắwt
22	hai mươi hai	hai muhr-èe hai
30	ba mươi	ba muhr-èe
90	chín mươi	jín muhr-èe
100	một trăm	mắwt chuhm
200	hai trăm	hai chuhm
900	chín trăm	jín chuhm
1000	một nghìn (N)	mắwt ngàyn
	một ngàn (S)	mắwt ngắn
10,000	mười nghìn (N)	muhr-èé ngàyn
	mười ngàn (S)	muhr-èé ngắn
1,000,000	một triệu	mắwt chee-oo
2,000,000	hai triệu	hai chee-oo

first thứ nhất túhr nyúht

second thứ hai túhr hai

**PAPERWORK**

<b>name</b>	
tên	den
<b>nationality</b>	
quốc gia	gwáwk zaa
<b>address</b>	
địa chỉ	dee-uh jẻ
<b>date/place of birth</b>	
ngày/nơi sinh	ngày/ner-ee sing
<b>sex/gender</b>	
giới tính	zer-eẻ dẻng
<b>passport (number)</b>	
(số) hộ chiếu	(sáw) hạw jee-oỏ
<b>visa</b>	
thị thực	teẻ tẻhrk

**QUESTION WORDS**

<b>Who?</b>	
Ái?	ai?
<b>What?</b>	
Cái gì?	gáỉ zeẻ?
<b>What is it?</b>	
Cái này là cái gì?	gáỉ này là gáỉ zeẻ?
<b>When?</b>	
Khi nào?	kee nõw?
<b>Where?</b>	
Ở đâu?	ẻr doh?
<b>Which?</b>	
Cái nào?	gáỉ nõw?
<b>Why?</b>	
Tại sao?	tại sow?
<b>How?</b>	
Làm sao?	làm sow?

**SHOPPING & SERVICES**

<b>I'd like to buy ...</b>	
Tôi muốn mua ...	
doy moo-ủn moo-uh ...	
<b>How much is this?</b>	
Cái này giá bao nhiêu?	
gáỉ này zaỏ bow nyee-oỏ?	
<b>I want to pay in dong.</b>	
Tôi muốn trả bằng tiền Việt Nam.	
doy moo-ủn chà bẻng dee-ủn vee-ủt nam	
<b>I don't like it.</b>	
Tôi không thích nó.	
doy kawm tẻk nõ	
<b>May I look at it?</b>	
Tôi có thể xem được không?	
doy gỏ tẻ sam duhr-ẻk kawm?	
<b>I'm just looking.</b>	
Tôi chỉ ngắm xem.	
doy jẻẻ ngủm sam	

**It's cheap.**

Cái này rẻ.  
gáỉ này zỏ

**It's too expensive.**

Cái này quá mắc.  
gáỉ này gwaỏ múhch

**I'll take it.**

Tôi lấy cái này.  
doy lấy gáỉ này

**Do you accept ...?**

Bạn có nhận ... không?  
baẻn kỏ nyẻhn ... kawm?

**credit cards**

thẻ tín dụng      tả dẻn zẻm

**travellers cheques**

xẻt du lịch      sỏt zoo lẻk

<b>more</b>	nhiều hơn	nyee-oỏ hern
<b>less</b>	ít hơn	ít hern
<b>smaller</b>	nhỏ hơn	nyỏ hern
<b>bigger</b>	lớn hơn	lẻn hern

**I'm looking for ...**

Tôi tìm ...  
doy tìm ...

<b>a bank</b>	ngủhn hàẻng
<b>the church</b>	
nhà thờ	nyaỏ tẻr
<b>the city centre</b>	
trung tâm thành phố	chum duhm taẻng fỏw
<b>the ... embassy</b>	
sự quan ...	sự gwaỏn ...
<b>the hospital</b>	
nhà thương	nyaỏ tuhr-ẻng
<b>my hotel</b>	
khách sạn của tôi	kaỏk sạn gỏỏ-uh doy
<b>the market</b>	
chợ	ẻr
<b>the museum</b>	
viện bảo tàng	veẻ-ủn bỏw daẻng
<b>the police</b>	
cảnh sát	gỏẻng saỏt
<b>the post office</b>	
bưu điện	buhr-oỏ dee-ủn
<b>a public phone</b>	
phòng điện thoại	fỏm dee-ủn tẻại
<b>a restaurant</b>	
nhà hàng	nyaỏ hàẻng
<b>a public toilet</b>	
phòng vệ sinh	fỏm vệ sẻng
<b>tourist office</b>	
văn phòng hướng dẫn du lịch	vủhn fỏm huhr-ẻng zủhn zoo lẻk

**TIME & DATES**

**What time is it?**  
Mấy giờ rồi?      máy zẻr zỏy?

**It's (8) o'clock.**  
Bảy giờ là (tám) giờ.      bay zẻr làỏ (dủhm) zẻr

**When?**  
Khi nào?      kee nõw?

**now**  
bây giờ      bay zẻr

**in the morning**  
sẻng      saẻng

**in the afternoon**  
chiều      jee-oỏ

**in the evening**  
tỏi      dóy

**today**  
hỏm nay      hỏw nay

**tomorrow**  
ngày mai      ngày mai

<b>Monday</b>	thứ hai	tứr hai
<b>Tuesday</b>	thứ ba	tứr baỏ
<b>Wednesday</b>	thứ tư	tứr duhr
<b>Thursday</b>	thứ năm	tứr nuhm
<b>Friday</b>	thứ sáu	tứr sốh
<b>Saturday</b>	thứ bảy	tứr bảy
<b>Sunday</b>	chủ nhật	jỏo nhựt

<b>January</b>	tháng giẻng	taẻng zee-ủng
<b>February</b>	tháng hai	taẻng hai
<b>March</b>	tháng ba	taẻng baỏ
<b>April</b>	tháng tư	taẻng tuhr
<b>May</b>	tháng năm	taẻng nuhm
<b>June</b>	tháng sáu	taẻng sốh
<b>July</b>	tháng bảy	taẻng bảy
<b>August</b>	tháng tám	taẻng đủhm
<b>September</b>	tháng chín	taẻng jẻn
<b>October</b>	tháng mười	taẻng muhr-ẻẻ
<b>November</b>	tháng mười một	taẻng muhr-ẻẻ mỏw
<b>December</b>	tháng mười hai	taẻng muhr-ẻẻ hai

**TRANSPORT****Public Transport****What time does the (first)... leave/arrive?**

Chuyến ... (sẻm nhất) chạy lúc mấy giờ?  
jweẻ-ủn ... (sẻm nyủt) jẻy lủp máy zẻr?

<b>boat</b>	
tàu/thuyền	dỏw/tweẻ-ủn
<b>bus</b>	
xe buýt	sa beẻt
<b>plane</b>	
máy bay	máy bay

**train**  
xe lủa      sa lủhr-uh

**I'd like a ... ticket.**

Tôi muốn vé ...  
doy moo-ủn vá ...

**one way**  
đi một chiều      dee mặt jee-oỏ

**return**  
khứ hồi      kủhr hạw-ẻẻ

**1st class**  
hạẻng nhất      hạẻng nyủt

**2nd class**  
hạẻng nhì      hạẻng nyẻẻ

**I want to go to ...**

Tôi muốn đi ...  
doy moo-ủn dee ...

**How long does the trip take?**

Chuyến đi sẽ mất bao lâu?  
jweẻ-ủn dee sẽ mút bow loh?

**What time does it arrive?**

Mấy giờ đến?  
máy zẻr đến?

**The train has been cancelled.**

Chuyến xe lủa bị hủy bỏ.  
jweẻ-ủn sa lủhr-uh beẻ hweẻ bỏ

**the first**  
đầu tiên      đỏw dee-ủn

**the last**  
cuỏi cùng      gỏỏ-eẻ gủm

**bus station**  
bẻn xe      bẻn sa

**ticket office**  
phỏng bán vé      fỏm bán vá

**timetable**  
thời biểu      ter-ẻẻ beẻ-oỏ

**sleeping berth**  
giỏẻng ngủ      zủhr-ẻng ngoỏ

**railway station**  
ga xe lủa      ga sa lủhr-uh

**Private Transport****I'd like to hire a ...**

Tôi muốn thuê ... (N)      doy moo-ủn twe ...  
Tôi muốn mượn ... (S)      doy moo-ủn muhr-ẻẻm ...

**car**  
xe hơi      sa her-ẻẻ

**motorbike**  
xe moto      sa mo-to

**bicycle**  
xe đạp      sa đạp

**cyclo (pedicab)**  
xe xích lỏ      sa sẻk lơ

**Is this the road to ...?**

*Con đường này có dẫn đến ...?*  
gôn duhr-èng này gô zũhn đến ...?

**How many kilometres to ...?**

*... cách đây bao nhiêu ki-lô-mét?*  
... gǎak đây bow nyee-oo kee-law-mét?

**Where's a service station?**

*Trạm xăng ở đâu?*  
chaam suhng ờ doh?

**Please fill it up.**

*Làm ơn đổ đầy bình.*  
laàm em đồ đầy bình

**I'd like ... litres.**

*Tôi muốn ... lít.*  
doy moo-úhn ... lét

**diesel**

*dầu diesel* zòh dee-sel

**leaded petrol**

*dầu xăng có chì* zòh suhng gố jèè

**unleaded petrol**

*dầu xăng* zòh suhng

**highway**

*xa lộ* saa lạp

**National Highway 1**

*Quốc Lộ 1* gwáwk lạp mạpw

**map**

*bản đồ* baàn đầw

**(How long) Can I park here?**

*Chúng tôi có thể đậu xe được (bao lâu)?*  
júm doy gố tề dộh sa duhr-er̄k (bow loh)?

**Where do I pay?**

*Trả tiền ở đâu?*  
chaà dee-úhn ờ doh?

**I need a mechanic.**

*Chúng tôi cần thợ sửa xe.*  
júm doy gũhn tợ sũhr-uh sa

**The car/motorbike has broken down (at ...)**

*Xe bị hư (tại ...).*  
sa beę huhr (dạj ...)

**The car/motorbike won't start.**

*(Xe hơi/Xe moto) không dễ được.*  
(sa her-ee/sa mo-to) kawm đề duhr-er̄k

**I have a flat tyre.**

*Bánh xe tôi bị xì.*  
baáng sa doy beę sèè

**I've run out of petrol.**

*Tôi bị hết dầu/xăng.*  
doy beę hết zòh/suhng

**TRAVEL WITH CHILDREN****Is there a/an ...?**

*Ở đây có ...?* ờ đây gố ...?

**I need a/an ...**

*Tôi cần ...* doy gũhn ...

**baby change room**

*phòng thay quần áo* fôm tay gwũhn ów  
*cho em bé* jo am bá

**car baby seat**

*ghế ngồi trong xe* gế ngòy chom sa  
*cho em bé* jo am bá

**child-minding service**

*dịch vụ giữ trẻ em* zĩk voę zũhr chà am

**children's menu**

*thực đơn cho trẻ em* tũhrk đem jo chà am

**disposable nappies/diapers**

*tã lót* daã lốt

**(English-speaking) babysitter**

*người giữ trẻ em* nguhr-èè zũhr chà am  
*nói tiếng Anh* nòy đĩng aang

**highchair**

*ghế cao cho em bé* gế kow jo am bá

**potty**

*bô cho trẻ em* bo jo chà am

**stroller**

*xe đẩy cho em bé* sa đạy jo am bá

**Do you mind if I breastfeed here?**

*Xin lỗi tôi có thể cho con tôi bú ở đây không?*  
sin lỏy doy gố tề jo gôn doy bóo ờ đạy kawm?

**Are children allowed?**

*Trẻ em có được phép vào không?*  
chà am gố duhr-er̄k fáp vòw kawm?

## HILL TRIBE LANGUAGES

The task of neatly classifying the different hill tribe groups of Vietnam is not an easy one. Ethnologists typically classify the Montagnards by linguistic distinction and commonly refer to three main groups (which further splinter into vast and quite complex sub-groupings). The Austro-Asian family includes the Viet-Muong, Mon-Khmer, Tay-Tai and Meo-Dzao language groups; the Austronesian family includes Malayo-Polynesian languages; and the Sino-Tibetan family encompasses the Chinese and Tibeto-Burmese language groups. In addition, within a single spoken language there are often myriad dialectical variations.

The following words and phrases should prove useful when visiting members of the larger Vietnamese hill tribes. If you're planning on spending a lot of time within hill tribe areas, consider taking Lonely Planet's *Hill Tribes Phrasebook* with you. For more

information on hill tribes and the areas they inhabit see p72.

**TAY**

Also known as the Ngan, Pa Di, Phen, Thu Lao and Tho, the Tay belong to the Tay-Thai language group.

**Hello.**

*Pá prama.*

**Goodbye.**

*Pá paynó.*

**Yes.**

*Mí.*

**No.**

*Boomi.*

**Thank you.**

*Đay fon.*

**What's your name?**

*Ten múng le xăng ma?*

**Where are you from?**

*Mu'ng du' te là ma?*

**How much is this?**

*Ấu ni ki lai tiên?*

**H'MONG**

The H'mong are also known as Meo, Mieu, Mong Do (White H'mong), Mong Du (Black H'mong), Mong Lenh (Flower H'mong), Mong Si (Red H'mong). They belong to the H'mong-Dzao language group, but their spoken language resembles Mandarin Chinese.

**Hello.**

*Ti nầu/Caó cu.*

**Goodbye.**

*Caó mun'g chè.*

**Yes.**

*Có mua.*

**No.**

*Chứi má.*

**Thank you.**

*Ồ chừ.*

**What's your name?**

*Caó be hua chan'g?*

**Where are you from?**

*Caó nhao từ tuá?*

**How much is this?**

*Pổ chố chá?*

**DZAO**

Also known as Coc Mun, Coc Ngang, Dai Ban, Diu Mien, Dong, Kim Mien, lan Ten, Lu Gang, Tieu Ban, Trai and Xa, this tribe belongs to the Mong Dzao language group.

**Hello.**

*Puang tọi.*

**Goodbye.**

*Puang tọi.*

**Yes.**

*Mái.*

**No.**

*Mái mái.*

**Thank you.**

*Tờ dun.*

**What's your name?**

*Mang nhi búá chiền nay?*

**Where are you from?**

*May hải do?*

**How much is this?**

*Pchiá nhãng?*



Also available from Lonely Planet:  
*Vietnamese Phrasebook* and *Hill Tribes Phrasebook*

# Glossary

For food and drink terms, see *Eat Your Words* on p53. For information on the Vietnamese language, and pronunciation, see the *Language* chapter (p505).

**A Di Da** – Buddha of the Past  
**Agent Orange** – toxic, carcinogenic chemical herbicide used extensively during the American War  
**am duong** – Vietnamese equivalent of Yin and Yang  
**Amerasians** – children borne of unions between Asian women and US servicemen during the American War  
**American War** – Vietnamese name for what is also known as the ‘Vietnam War’  
**Annam** – old Chinese name for Vietnam, meaning ‘Pacified South’  
**Annamites** – term with derogatory overtones used by the French to describe the Vietnamese  
**ao dai** – Vietnamese national dress worn by women  
**apsaras** – heavenly maidens  
**arhat** – anyone who has attained nirvana  
**ARVN** – Army of the Republic of Vietnam (former South Vietnamese army)

**ba mu** – midwife. There are 12 ‘midwives’, each of whom teaches newborns a different skill necessary for the first year of life: smiling, sucking, lying on their stomachs and so forth  
**Ba Tay** – a term used to refer to Western women, meaning ‘Mrs Westerner’  
**ban** – mountainous village  
**bang** – congregation (in the Chinese community)  
**bar om** – literally ‘holding’ bars associated with the sex industry; also known as ‘karaoke om’  
**Black Flags** – a semi-autonomous army of Chinese, Vietnamese and hill-tribe troops  
**bo de** – Bodhi tree, or pipal tree  
**bonze** – Vietnamese Buddhist monk  
**buu dien** – post office

**cai luong** – Vietnamese modern theatre  
**Cao Daim** – indigenous Vietnamese religion  
**cay son** – tree from whose resin lacquer is made  
**Cham** – ethnic minority descended from the people of *Champa*  
**cham cui** – acupuncture  
**Champa** – Hindu kingdom dating from the late 2nd century AD  
**Charlie** – nickname for the Viet Cong, used by US soldiers  
**chua** – pagoda  
**chu nho** – standard Chinese characters (script)

**Cochinchina** – the southern part of Vietnam during the French-colonial era  
**com pho** – rice and rice-noodle soup; common sign on restaurants  
**cong** – gong  
**corbeille à bec** – wooden staff with a crayon attached for writing messages from spirits  
**cowboys** – motorbike-riding thieves  
**crachin** – fine drizzle  
**crémaillère** – cog railway  
**cu ly** – fern stems used to stop bleeding; also known as *kim mao cau tich*  
**cyclo** – pedicab or bicycle rickshaw

**Dai The Chi Bo Tat** – an assistant of *A Di Da*  
**dan bau** – single-stringed zither that generates an astounding magnitude of tones  
**dan tranh** – 16-stringed zither  
**danh de** – illegal numbers game  
**den** – temple  
**Di Lac Buddha** – Buddha of the Future  
**dikpalaka** – gods of the directions of the compass  
**dinh** – communal meeting hall  
**DMZ** – the misnamed Demilitarised Zone, a strip of land that once separated North and South Vietnam  
**doi moi** – economic restructuring or reform, started in Vietnam in 1986  
**dong** – natural caves; also Vietnamese currency  
**dong chi** – comrade  
**do son** – drums  
**DRV** – Democratic Republic of Vietnam (the old North Vietnam)

**ecocide** – term used to describe the devastating effects of the herbicides sprayed over Vietnam during the American War

**feng shui** – see *phong thuy*  
**flechette** – experimental US weapon; an artillery shell containing thousands of darts  
**fu** – talisman  
**Funan** – see *Oc-Eo*

**garuda** – Sanskrit term for griffin-like sky beings who feed on *naga*  
**ghe** – long, narrow rowboat  
**giay phep di lai** – internal travel permit  
**gom** – ceramics

**hai dang** – lighthouse  
**han viet** – Sino-Vietnamese literature

**hat boi** – classical theatre in the south  
**hat cheo** – Vietnamese popular theatre  
**hat tuong** – classical theatre in the north  
**hieu** – filial piety  
**ho ca** – aquarium  
**Ho Chi Minh Trail** – route used by the North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong to move supplies to guerrillas in the South  
**ho khau** – residence permit needed for everything (eg school, employment, land ownership, vehicle registration, home and business ownership)  
**Hoa** – ethnic-Chinese, one of the largest single minority groups in Vietnam  
**hoi** – 60-year period (used in calendars)  
**hoi quan** – Chinese congregational assembly halls  
**Honda Dream** – most popular model of Honda motor-scooter sold in Vietnam  
**Honda om** – motorbike taxi, also called *xe om*  
**huong** – perfume  
**huyen** – rural district

**Indochina** – Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. The name derives from Indian and Chinese influences.

**kala-makara** – sea-monster god  
**kalan** – a religious sanctuary  
**ken doi** – musical instrument made from two seven-holed bamboo flutes  
**khach san** – hotel  
**Khmer** – ethnic-Cambodians  
**Khong Tu** – Confucius  
**kich noi** – spoken drama  
**kim mao cau tich** – fern used to stop bleeding in traditional Chinese medicine; also known as *cu ly*  
**Kinh** – Vietnamese language  
**Kuomintang** – Chinese Nationalist Party, also known as KMT. The KMT controlled China between 1925 and 1949 until defeated by the communists.  
**ky** – 12-year cycle (used in calendars)

**lang** – hereditary noble family who rules the communal land and collects the benefits of labour and tax through its use by locals  
**lang tam** – tombs  
**li xi** – lucky money distributed during the Vietnamese Lunar New Year  
**liberation** – 1975 takeover of the South by the North; what most foreigners call ‘reunification’  
**Lien Xo** – literally, Soviet Union; used to call attention to a foreigner  
**linga** – stylised phallus which represents the Hindu god Shiva

**MAAG** – Military Assistance Advisory Group, set up to instruct troops receiving US weapons on how to use them  
**mai son** – lacquer

**mandapa** – meditation hall  
**mang dang** – bitter bamboo-shoot soup  
**manushi-buddha** – Buddha who appeared in human form  
**mat cua** – ‘door eyes’, supposed to protect the residents of a house from harm  
**MIA** – missing in action  
**mihrab** – niche in a mosque wall indicating the direction of Mecca  
**minbar** – feature of mosques  
**moi** – derogatory word meaning ‘savages’, mostly used by ethnic-Vietnamese to describe hill-tribe people  
**Montagnards** – term meaning highlanders or mountain people, used to refer to the ethnic minorities who inhabit remote areas of Vietnam  
**muong** – large village unit made up of *quel* (small stilt-houses)

**naga** – Sanskrit term for a mythical serpent being with divine powers; often depicted forming a kind of shelter over the Buddha  
**nam phai** – for men  
**napalm** – jellied petrol (gasoline) dropped and lit from aircraft; used by US forces with devastating effect during the *American War*  
**NGO** – nongovernment organisation  
**nha hang** – restaurant  
**nha khach** – hotel; guesthouse  
**nha nghi** – guesthouse  
**nha rong** – large stilt house, used by hill tribes as a kind of community centre  
**nha tro** – dormitory  
**NLF** – National Liberation Front; official name for the VC  
**nom** – Vietnamese script, used between the 10th and early 20th centuries  
**nu phai** – for women  
**nui** – mountain  
**nuoc mam** – fish sauce, added to almost every main dish in Vietnam  
**NVA** – North Vietnamese Army

**Oc-Eo** – Indianised kingdom (also called Funan) in southern Vietnam between the 1st and 6th centuries  
**Ong Bon** – Guardian Spirit of Happiness and Virtue  
**Ong Tay** – a term used to refer to Western men, meaning ‘Mr Westerner’  
**Orderly Departure Program (ODP)** – carried out under the auspices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), designed to allow orderly resettlement of Vietnamese political refugees  
**OSS** – US Office of Strategic Services; the predecessor of the CIA

**pagoda** – traditionally an eight-sided Buddhist tower, but in Vietnam the word is commonly used to denote a temple

**Phoenix Program** – also known as Operation Phoenix; a controversial program run by the CIA, aimed at eliminating VC cadres by assassination, capture or defection

**phong thủy** – literally, ‘wind and water’; used to describe geomancy. Also known by its Chinese name, feng shui.

**piastre** – the local currency in the days of French Indochina

**pneumatographie** – Cao Dai ritual in which a blank slip of paper is sealed in an envelope and hung above an altar. When it is taken down, there is a message on the paper.

**Politburo** – Political Bureau; about a dozen members overseeing the Party’s day-to-day functioning with the power to issue directives to the government

**POW** – prisoner of war

**PRG** – Provisional Revolutionary Government, the temporary Communist government set up by the VC in the South. It existed from 1969 to 1976.

**quan** – urban district

**Quan Cong** – Chinese God of War

**quan lai** – mandarins

**Quan The Am Bo Tat** – Goddess of Mercy

**quel** – small stilt-house hamlets

**quoc am** – modern Vietnamese literature

**quoc ngu** – Latin-based phonetic alphabet in which Vietnamese is written

**rap** – cinema

**Revolutionary Youth League** – first Marxist group in Vietnam and predecessor of the Communist Party

**roi can** – conventional puppetry

**roi nuoc** – water puppetry

**rong** – see *nha rong*

**RVN** – Republic of Vietnam (the old South Vietnam)

**salangane** – swiftlet

**sao** – wooden flute

**sao la** – antelope-like creature

**shakti** – feminine manifestation of Shiva

**social evils** – campaign to prevent evil ideas from the West ‘polluting’ Vietnamese society

**song** – river

**SRV** – Socialist Republic of Vietnam (Vietnam’s official name)

**Strategic Hamlets Program** – programme (by South Vietnam and the USA) of forcibly moving peasants into fortified villages to deny the VC bases of support

**sung** – fig tree

**Tam Giao** – literally, ‘triple religion’; Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism fused over time with popular Chinese beliefs and ancient Vietnamese animism

**Tao** – the Way; the essence of which all things are made

**Tet** – Vietnamese Lunar New Year

**thai cuc quyen** – Vietnamese for t’ai chi

**Thich Ca Buddha** – the historical Buddha Sakyamuni, whose real name was Siddhartha Gautama

**Thien Hau Thanh Mau** – Goddess of the Sea and Protector of Fishermen and Sailors

**thong nhât** – reunification, also a common term for the *Reunification Express* train

**thung chai** – gigantic round wicket baskets sealed with pitch; used as rowboats

**thuoc bac** – Chinese medicine

**to rung** – large bamboo xylophone

**toc hanh** – express bus

**Tonkin** – the northern part of Vietnam during the French-colonial era; also the name of a body of water in the north (Tonkin Gulf)

**trong com** – cylindrical drums

**truyen khau** – traditional oral literature

**tu sat** – dominoes

**UNHCR** – UN High Commissioner for Refugees

**VC** – Viet Cong or Vietnamese Communists

**Viet Kieu** – overseas Vietnamese

**Viet Minh** – League for the Independence of Vietnam, a nationalistic movement that fought the Japanese and French but later became Communist-dominated

**VNQDD** – Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang; largely middle-class nationalist party

**vo binh dinh** – traditional martial art performed with a bamboo stick

**xang** – petrol

**xe dap loi** – wagon pulled by a bicycle

**xe Honda loi** – wagon pulled by a motorbike

**xe lam** – tiny three-wheeled trucks used for short-haul passenger and freight transport

**xe loi** – wagon pulled by a motorbike in the Mekong Delta region

**xeo** – rice wine

**xe om** – motorbike taxi, also called *Honda om*

**xich lo** – *cyclo*, from the French *cyclo-pousse*

**xo so** – state lottery

**yang** – genie

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it’s fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don’t upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - ‘Do the right thing with our content.’