

DOS AND DON'TS IN VIETNAM

Welcome to Vietnam! As you journey through this beautiful country, from the misty mountains of Sapa to the bustling streets of Hanoi and the pristine waters of the Mekong Delta, your actions shape the destination.

This guide is designed to help you navigate local etiquette, respect Vietnamese heritage, support local communities, and minimize your environmental impact.

PHASE 1: BEFORE YOUR TRIP (PREPARATION)

Being a responsible traveler starts before you even leave home. Making smart choices during packing and planning sets the stage for a sustainable journey.

 DO	 DON'T
Pack a reusable water bottle & shopping bag. Many hotels and tour buses in Vietnam now offer water refill stations to help reduce single-use plastic waste.	Bring single-use plastics. Avoid excess plastic packaging, disposable toiletries, and plastic bags that are difficult to recycle locally.
Pack conservative clothing. Bring lightweight shirts that cover your shoulders and pants/skirts that cover your knees for visiting pagodas and temples.	Pack only beachwear or revealing clothes. Showing too much skin is considered disrespectful in sacred sites and rural villages.
Download offline translation & map apps. Learning a few basic Vietnamese words (like Xin Chào for Hello and Cảm Ơn for Thank You) shows respect and helps you connect.	Rely solely on printed papers. Switch to digital e-tickets, hotel vouchers, and travel insurance documents on your phone to save paper.
Choose eco-toiletries. Protect Vietnam's delicate marine ecosystems (especially in Nha Trang, Cham Islands, and Phu Quoc).	Bring chemical-heavy cosmetics. Standard sunscreens contain oxybenzone, which bleaches coral reefs and harms aquatic life.

PHASE 2: DURING YOUR TRIP (ON THE ROAD)

1. Cultural Etiquette & Social Respect

Vietnamese culture is deeply rooted in respect, family values, and modesty. Understanding these social norms will ensure warm interactions with the locals.

 DO	 DON'T
Ask permission before taking photos. This is especially important when visiting ethnic minority villages in Sapa, Ha Giang, or the Mekong Delta.	Take photos of people without asking. Avoid taking photos of children, military installations, or people in sensitive situations.
Remove your shoes when entering. Take off your shoes before entering local homes, temples, and some small family-owned shops (look for shoes piled at the door).	Point your feet at people or altars. Feet are considered the lowest and dirtiest part of the body. Avoid pointing them at anyone or sacred items.
Dress appropriately at sacred sites. Ensure shoulders and knees are fully covered when entering pagodas (chùa) or temples (đền).	Touch someone's head. The head is considered the most sacred part of the body. Avoid touching anyone's head, including children.

 DO	 DON'T
Keep your voice moderate in public. Maintaining a calm, polite demeanor helps prevent "loss of face," which is highly avoided in Asian cultures.	Lose your temper or shout. Showing anger, raising your voice, or arguing aggressively will not solve problems and is considered highly impolite.

2. Economic Responsibility & Community Support

Make sure your travel dollars benefit the local people directly and support sustainable livelihoods.

 DO	 DON'T
Buy directly from local artisans. Purchase handicrafts, silk, and lacquerware from local workshops, social enterprises, and night markets.	Bargain aggressively. Bargaining is normal in markets, but do it politely and with a smile. Remember that a few thousand Dong means much more to them than to you.
Eat at local family-run eateries. Try street food and dine at local Phở stalls or family restaurants to support local businesses.	Give money or candy to begging children. This encourages them to skip school to beg. Instead, support local education charities or buy from adults.
Tip guides and drivers for good service. Tipping is not mandatory in Vietnam but is highly appreciated and directly supports their families.	Purchase wildlife-derived products. Never buy souvenirs made from ivory, turtle shells, coral, or traditional medicines containing endangered species.

3. Environmental Care & Nature Protection

Help us preserve Vietnam's stunning landscapes, from the limestone karsts of Halong Bay to the lush national parks.

 DO	 DON'T
Use electric transport options. Prioritize walking, cycling, or booking electric taxis for urban transfers.	Litter on streets or in nature. Take your trash back to your hotel if public bins are unavailable, especially when cruising in Halong Bay.
Opt for water refills. Use the large refillable water bottles provided in your tour vehicle or at hotel lobbies instead of buying small plastic bottles.	Disturb or touch marine life. When snorkeling or diving, do not touch coral reefs, step on sea beds, or collect shells as souvenirs.
Stay on designated paths. When trekking in national parks (like Cuc Phuong or Cat Ba), stick to marked trails to prevent soil erosion and protect plants.	Feed wild animals. Avoid feeding monkeys (e.g., in Cat Ba or Son Tra Peninsula) as it disrupts their natural diet and makes them aggressive.

PHASE 3: AFTER YOUR TRIP (RETURNING HOME)

Your responsible travel journey doesn't end when you return home. You can continue to advocate for sustainable practices and maintain a positive long-term impact on Vietnam.

 DO	 DON'T
Recommend local micro-businesses. Leave positive reviews or social media specifically naming the local homestays, ethnic minority guides, and family eateries you visited.	Post photos that compromise local dignity. Avoid sharing photos of local people, especially children or ethnic minorities in vulnerable situations, without their consent or context, just to get likes on social media.

 DO	 DON'T
Bring the mindful lifestyle home. Continue the sustainable habits you practiced in Vietnam, such as minimizing single-use plastics, saving water, and supporting independent neighborhood shops.	Vent publicly about cultural differences. Avoid posting negative public complaints about slow service, language barriers, or local customs. Instead, send constructive feedback directly to Travel Sense Asia so we can help our partners improve.
Support verified Vietnamese NGOs. Continue to advocate for or donate to reputable local NGOs you learned about (e.g., marine protection, wildlife rescue, or children's education).	Promote or support animal exploitation. Avoid sharing photos or positive reviews of attractions that exploit animals (such as animal performances or monkey shows) you might have witnessed.

EMERGENCY CONTACTS (VIETNAM)

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Fire: 114
Ambulance: 115
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