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ACCOMMODATION

Vietnam offers beds for every budget – from bargain basements to sky-high super-hotels – and we cover them all. Beyond the main cities, many hotels in Vietnam quote prices in a mix of Vietnamese dong and US dollars. The lower dong price is usually reserved for locals, while foreigners pay the higher dollar price. Prices are quoted in dong or dollars throughout this book based on the preferred currency of the particular property.

When it comes to budget, we are talking about guesthouses or hotels where the majority of rooms cost less than US\$20. These are

usually family-run guesthouses, mini-hotels or, usually the least-appealing option, state-run guesthouses stuck in the '70s. Budget rooms generally come well equipped for the money, so don't be surprised to find air-con, hot water and a TV for 10 bucks.

Moving on to midrange, we are referring to rooms in the US\$20 to US\$75 range, which buys some pretty tasty extras in Vietnam. At the lower end of this bracket, many of the hotels are similar to budget hotels but with bigger rooms or balconies. Flash a bit more cash and three-star touches are available, such as access to a swimming pool, and a hairdryer hidden away somewhere.

At the top end are a host of international-standard hotels and resorts that charge from US\$75 a room to US\$750 a suite. Some of these are fairly faceless business hotels, while others ooze opulence or resonate with history. There are some good deals when compared with the Hong Kongs and Singapores of this world, so if you fancy indulging yourself, Vietnam is a good place to do it. Most hotels at the top end levy a tax of 10% and a service charge of 5%, displayed as ++ ('plus plus') on the bill.

Be aware that some budget and midrange hotels also apply the 10% tax. Check carefully before taking the room to avoid any annoying shocks on departure.

Accommodation options are limited in off-the-beaten-track destinations in the far north and the central highlands. Usually there will just be a few guesthouses and basic hotels. However, in major towns and along the coastal strip, there is now an excellent range of accommodation, including some of the world's biggest names, such as Sofitel and Six Senses.

BOOK ACCOMMODATION ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com. You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

PRACTICALITIES

- **Electricity** The usual voltage is 220V, 50 cycles, but sometimes you encounter 110V, also at 50 cycles, just to confuse things. Electrical sockets are usually two-pin.
- **Laundry** Most guesthouses and hotels have cheap laundry services, but check there is a dryer if the weather is bad. There are also dry-cleaning outlets in every town.
- **Newspapers & Magazines** *Vietnam News* and the *Saigon Times* are propagandist English-language dailies. Popular listings mags include the *Guide*, which covers the whole country, plus *AsiaLife* and *The Word* in Ho Chi Minh City.
- **Radio & TV** *Voice of Vietnam* hogs the airwaves all day and is pumped through loudspeakers in many rural towns. There are several TV channels and a steady diet of satellite stuff.
- **Weights & Measures** The Vietnamese use the metric system for everything except precious metals and gems, where they follow the Chinese system.

Peak tourist demand for hotel rooms comes at Christmas and New Year, when prices may rise by as much as 25%. There is also a surge in many cities during Tet, when half of Vietnam is on the move. Try to make a reservation at these times so as not to get caught out. During quiet periods it is often possible to negotiate a discount, either by email in advance or over the counter on arrival, as there is a surplus of hotel beds in many destinations.

Passports are almost always requested on arrival at a hotel. It is not absolutely essential to hand over your actual passport, but at the very least you need to hand over a photocopy of the passport details, visa and departure card.

Accommodation prices listed in this book are high-season prices for rooms with attached bathroom, unless stated otherwise. An icon is included if air-con is available; otherwise, assume that a fan will be provided.

Camping

Perhaps because so many Vietnamese spent much of the war years living in tents, as either soldiers or refugees, camping is not yet the popular pastime it is in the West.

Some innovative private travel agencies in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) and Hanoi offer organised camping trips to national parks, plus camping out in beauty spots such as Halong Bay (p139). See Travel Agencies in Hanoi (p87) and HCMC (p351).

Guesthouses & Hotels

Many of the large hotels (*khach san*) and guesthouses (*nha khach* or *nha nghi*) are government owned or joint ventures. There

has also been a mushrooming of mini-hotels – small, smart private hotels that represent good value for money. The international hotel chains are now well represented in Hanoi and HCMC.

There is considerable confusion over the terms ‘singles’, ‘doubles’, ‘double occupancy’ and ‘twins’, so let’s set the record straight here. A single contains one bed, even if two people sleep in it. If there are two beds in the room, that is a twin, even if only one person occupies it. If two people stay in the same room, that is double occupancy. In some hotels ‘doubles’ means twin beds, while in others it means double occupancy.

While many of the newer hotels have lifts, older hotels often don’t and the cheapest rooms are at the end of several flights of stairs. It’s a win-win-win situation: cheaper rooms, a bit of exercise and better views! Bear in mind that power outages are possible in

HOTELS FROM HELL

It is hardly unique to the country, but there are quite a lot of hotel scams in Vietnam. They are mostly, but not exclusively, happening in Hanoi, although keep the radar up in most of the major cities. Copycat hotels, dodgy taxi drivers, persistent touts – all this is possible and more. Overcharging is a concern, as is constant harassment to book a tour. However, most guesthouse and hotel operators are decent folk and honest in their dealings with tourists. Don’t let the minority ruin your Vietnam experience. For more on horror hotels in Hanoi, see p104.