



Vietnamese

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Thanks

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Published by Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd

ABN 36 005 607 983

6th Edition – Sep 2013

ISBN 978 1 74321 436 7

Text © Lonely Planet 2013

Cover Image Binh Thuan Province, Rene Mattes/Corbis ©

Printed in China 0 987654321

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acknowledgments

Editor Branslava Vladislavljjevic would like to acknowledge the following people for their contributions to this phrasebook:

Ben Handicott for transliterations, translations, cultural information and proofing the manuscript. Ben lived in Vietnam for three years and now works as a publisher for Lonely Planet.

Ben would like to thank Benjamin Reichman for his translations and advice; Ralph Schwer and Nga Ngọc Schwer for their assistance with the dictionary and comments on the manuscript; and Ralph again for his thoughts on the transliteration system. Thanks also to a dedicated bunch who've tested the transliterations in Footscray *phở* haunts and *bánh mì* bakeries (as if the food wasn't thanks enough).

Yukiyoshi Kamimura for the internal illustrations and Lara Cameron for the cover illustration.

Mark Germanchis, David Burnett and Nick Stebbing for technical assistance and software support.



make the most of this phrasebook ...

Anyone can speak another language! It's all about confidence. Don't worry if you can't remember your school language lessons or if you've never learnt a language before. Even if you learn the very basics (on the inside covers of this book), your travel experience will be the better for it. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain when the locals hear you making an effort.

finding things in this book

For easy navigation, this book is in sections. The Basics chapters are the ones you'll thumb through time and again. The Practical section covers basic travel situations like catching transport and finding a bed. The Social section gives you conversational phrases, pick-up lines, the ability to express opinions – so you can get to know people. Food has a section all of its own: gourmets and vegetarians are covered and local dishes feature. Safe Travel equips you with health and police phrases, just in case. Remember the colours of each section and you'll find everything easily; or use the comprehensive Index. Otherwise, check the two-way traveller's Dictionary for the word you need.

being understood

Throughout this book you'll see coloured phrases on each page. They're phonetic guides to help you pronounce the language. Start with them to get a feel for how Vietnamese sounds. The pronunciation chapter in Basics will explain more, but you can be confident that if you read the coloured phrase, you'll be understood. As you become familiar with the spoken language, move on to using the actual Vietnamese text which will help you perfect your pronunciation.

communication tips

Body language, ways of doing things, sense of humour – all have a role to play in every culture. 'Local talk' boxes show you common ways of saying things, or everyday language to drop into conversation. 'Listen for ...' boxes supply the phrases you may hear. They start with the language (so local people can point out what they want to say to you) and then lead in to the pronunciation guide and the English translation.

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vietnamese



official language

For more details, see the **introduction**.

ABOUT VIETNAMESE

The distant ancestor of today's Vietnamese was born in the Red River Delta region, now in northern Vietnam. Initially, it was strongly influenced by Indic and Malayo-Polynesian languages, but this all changed when the Chinese took control of the coastal nation in the 2nd century BC.

Over a millennium, nearly 30 dynasties of Chinese rulers held sway in Vietnam. This period saw Chinese used as the language of literature, academia, science, politics and the Vietnamese aristocracy. The common people, however, still spoke the vernacular language, which was written in chữ nôm **jühr nawm**. This script consisted of Chinese characters adapted to express Vietnamese sounds, and it was used until the early 20th century. Over two thirds of Vietnamese words are derived from Chinese sources – this vocabulary is termed Hán Việt **haán vee-ùht** (Sino-Vietnamese).

Following a century of fighting for independence, the Vietnamese gained control of their own land in AD 939. Vietnamese, written in chữ nôm, gained prestige as the nation rebuilt itself. This was the richest time for Vietnamese literature – great works such as the poetry of Ho Xuan Huong and the epic poem Truyện Kiều **chwee-ùhn ġee-oò** ('The Tale of Kieu') by Nguyen Du were composed.

The first European missionaries appeared in Vietnam in the 16th century. The French gradually asserted themselves over the

at a glance ...

language name:

Vietnamese

name in language:

tiếng Việt

dee-ùhng vee-ùht

language family:

Mon-Khmer

approximate number of speakers:

about 85 million
worldwide

close relative:

Muong

(Hill Tribe language)

Portuguese as the region's dominant European power, adding Vietnam to Indochina in 1859 when they took control of Saigon. French vocabulary began to be used in Vietnamese, and in 1910 the Latin-based quốc ngữ **gwáwk ngũhr** script was declared the language's official written form, facilitating French rule even further. This 29-letter phonetic alphabet had been invented in the 17th century by Alexandre de Rhodes, a French Jesuit missionary. Today virtually all writing is in quốc ngữ.

Despite the many conflicts which Vietnam has faced since the middle of last century, little has changed in the Vietnamese language. Some modifications, however, were made to quốc ngữ during the '50s and '60s – this made the script representative of a 'Middle Vietnamese' dialect which combines the initial consonants of the south with the vowels and final consonants of the north.

Today, Vietnamese is the official language of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. It's spoken by about 85 million people worldwide, both in Vietnam and among migrant communities in Australia, Europe, North America and Japan.

This book gives you the practical phrases you need to get by in Vietnamese, as well as all the fun, spontaneous phrases that can lead to a better understanding of Vietnam and its people. Once you've got the hang of how to pronounce Vietnamese words, the rest is just a matter of confidence. Local knowledge, new relationships and a sense of satisfaction are on the tip of your tongue. So don't just stand there, say something!

abbreviations used in this book

a	adjective	Ⓝ	north
adv	adverb	pl	plural
f	feminine	pol	polite
inf	informal	prep	preposition
lit	literal	sg	singular
m	masculine	Ⓢ	south
n	noun	v	verb