



Vietnam 2019 Crime & Safety Report: Hanoi



This is an annual report produced in conjunction with the Regional Security Office at the U.S. Embassy in Hanoi, Vietnam.

The current U.S. Department of State [Travel Advisory](#) at the date of this report's publication assesses Vietnam at Level 1, indicating travelers should exercise normal precautions.

Overall Crime and Safety Situation

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Review OSAC's [Vietnam page](#) for original OSAC reporting, consular messages, and contact information, some of which may be available only to private-sector representatives with an OSAC password.

Crime Threats

There is considerable risk from crime in Hanoi. Although most travelers feel relatively safe, non-violent crimes occur in Vietnam with some frequency. Petty theft, purse snatching, and pickpocketing are most common in hotels, tourist sites, airports, public parks, and other crowded areas popular among foreigners.

One common method of purse snatching involves two criminals riding on a motorcycle. The passenger of the motorcycle, which is often traveling at the same speed as traffic (or faster) will grab the victim's bag, camera, or cell phone. This tactic can be especially dangerous to the victim if the strap of the bag is wrapped over their shoulder or around their neck, as the victim can be pulled down or dragged by the strap until it breaks. In some cases, the criminals use a knife or other sharp object to either cut the strap or make a hole in the bag. In one recent series of incidents, a group of thieves reportedly looked for people traveling alone at night in the Tay Ho District to rob. If you are threatened with violence over money or belongings, comply with demands and attempt to end the confrontation as quickly and as safely as possible.

In 2018, several burglaries occurred in the Tay Ho and Ciputra residential areas, both of which are popular neighborhoods with the expatriate and diplomatic communities. Single-family houses tend to be the most frequent targets of residential break-ins. In January, there was a break-in during the night in the Xom Chua village of Tay Ho. The thief had broken two locks, but failed to break the third, which was connected to an alarm system. Another case occurred in March, when a thief stole a scooter belonging to a U.S. government employee from his residence in Tay Ho during the Tet holiday. Generally, these break-ins have not resulted in injuries to the residents. If confronted with a burglar, do not react using force, as that may lead to an escalation of violence.

The Regional Security Office is aware of occasional instances in which domestic helpers are suspected of stealing valuables from their employers. Only give your keys to a trusted person; do not leave them in possession with others. Do not leave valuables or large amounts of cash in your house. These items are best kept locked in a secured area.

Keep doors and windows locked, especially at night. In general, high-rise apartment complexes with 24-hour guards and access-control systems have lower burglary rates. In general, the safety and security of guest rooms in quality hotels is adequate.

Violent crime (e.g. armed robbery, kidnappings, sexual abuse and harassment, and murder) against foreigners is relatively uncommon, but appears to be on the rise. There has also been a rise in the number of robberies and thefts committed *by* foreigners in Hanoi. In one case, two Peruvian men stole a cellphone and US \$350 worth of cash from a Japanese woman after pretending to make a phone call to distract the victim at a hotel in Hanoi. In other cases, the foreigners pretended to buy something from a shop or ask to exchange currency, at which point they try to convince the victims to give more money than they should or simply grab the money and flee. In 2017, three Colombian men robbed US \$75,000 from Vietnamese nationals in Hanoi by causing a traffic accident involving the victims and then taking cash from the victims' vehicles.

Limit the amount of cash you carry, and leave valuables (e.g. passports, jewelry, and airline tickets) in a hotel safe or other secure place. Keep wallets and other valuables where they will be less susceptible to pickpockets. Exchange foreign currency only in authorized banks, hotels, and other legally authorized outlets, and obtain proper receipts for transactions. Change direction or depart the area if you notice suspicious people, groups, or activity.

There are reports of drugs being laced with chemicals, which results in users experiencing dangerous, unanticipated side effects. The Embassy has received multiple reports of individuals having a psychotic episode after smoking what they thought was marijuana. Local officials acknowledge this issue and believe criminal organizations are spraying synthetic THC on their plants to increase their effect. In another incident, a French tourist died after inhaling the contents of a balloon at a bar in the Tay Ho area. In September, seven Vietnamese citizens died of apparent drug overdose while attending an electronic dance music festival in Tay Ho.

There have also been reports of drink doctoring in order to incapacitate victims in bars and restaurants expatriates frequent. In one case, a British man lost a computer worth nearly US \$900 after taking a woman he met in a bar back to his rented house.

Criminals have copied credit and debit cards to make illegal purchases and withdraw funds without the account holder's knowledge or consent. In 2017, the Hanoi Metropolitan Police discovered devices designed to duplicate debit card information and 200 blank ATM cards in a Hanoi hotel room.

Cybersecurity Issues

Cybercrime has become more sophisticated in Vietnam. Vietnam has one of the highest levels of infected personal computers and malware penetration. This is due in part to the prevalence of unlicensed and expired software, which may not receive necessary security patches and updates. Not only do malicious cyber actors target individuals for personal information, but they also conduct attacks against businesses and foreign government agencies for economic and political information. According to reports, foreign cybercriminals have remotely attacked bank accounts and taken large amounts of money from account holders.

Other Areas of Concern

The government restricts travel and photography in some areas, including near military facilities and sensitive border areas. Be alert for signs warning of zones where photography is restricted.

The Government of Vietnam may not allow or authorize travel to certain sensitive areas of the country. Check with local authorities before visiting border areas to see if you must obtain a travel permit. U.S. citizens have been detained after traveling in areas close to the Vietnamese borders with China, Cambodia, and Laos. These areas are not always marked, and there are no warnings about prohibited travel.

Transportation-Safety Situation

Road Safety and Road Conditions

The two most dangerous activities in Vietnam are crossing the street and driving/riding in traffic. Traffic is dangerous, chaotic, and undisciplined. Traffic accidents are the leading cause of death, severe injury, and emergency evacuation of foreigners in Vietnam.

The road system is underdeveloped, and drivers widely ignore traffic rules. The lack of open sidewalks and adequate traffic controls creates a precarious situation for pedestrians and motorists alike. It is not uncommon for visitors or residents to be involved in some type of road incident while attempting to cross one of the many motorcycle-clogged streets of Hanoi. It is also common for visitors or residents to be involved in some type of incident on a sidewalk or in a park, as local drivers use these as thoroughfares when road traffic is stopped.

Motorcycle accidents are particularly common and serious, since motorcyclists typically have less training than car or truck drivers do. In accordance with local law, all motorcycle riders must wear a helmet. The number of traffic accidents and casualties in Vietnam in 2018 fell, but remained very high. Through October, there were 14,845 traffic accidents (down 8.1% compared to the previous year), 6,674 traffic-related deaths (down 2.2%), and 11,549 traffic-related injuries (down 13%).

Public Transportation Conditions

Only use metered/marked taxis, preferably from the larger taxi companies. In Hanoi, these include Hanoi Taxi, CP Taxi, and Mai Linh Taxi. Less-reputable taxi drivers have painted their vehicles to resemble legitimate companies. Do not take a taxi that looks suspicious (e.g., no meter, no signage) and be mindful of the prevalence of drunk drivers at night. If you smell alcohol on the breath of a driver or in a vehicle, get out and find a new ride. Ride-share services such as Grab are generally safe and reliable.

Visitors generally cannot rent cars; therefore, those needing to travel outside of major cities must use trains, buses, or private cars with hired drivers. Trains are old, slow, and are typically not up to Western standards; accidents and other safety issues, however, seldom occur. The quality and safety standards of buses and private car choices vary greatly depending on the amount of money individuals are willing to pay. Hotels and travel agencies are the preferred way to arrange private transportation options; they will normally provide details on the quality and condition of available vehicles.

Terrorism Threat

There is minimal risk from terrorism in Hanoi. The Department of State recommends that U.S. citizens overseas always maintain a high level of vigilance and take appropriate steps to increase security awareness while traveling internationally.

Anti-U.S./Anti-American Sentiment

Most Vietnamese regard most Westerners in a positive manner, and are friendly to foreigners.

Political, Economic, Religious, and Ethnic Violence

Civil Unrest

There is minimal risk from civil unrest in Hanoi. The government places heavy controls on political protests and public demonstrations, making civil unrest relatively uncommon. Peaceful demonstrations have occurred, often as a result of territorial disputes between Vietnam and China. Avoid large gatherings, as they can become violent with little or no warning.

In 2018, demonstrations took place in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and some other provinces when thousands of people protested against a draft law for new economic zones. The legislation would have allowed Chinese companies to lease land in Phu Quoc island, Van Don island, and Van Phong gulf for up to 99 years.

In 2017 and 2018, anti-Chinese protests in Hanoi marked the anniversary of China's occupation of the Paracel Islands (Hoang Sa) in the South China Sea (a territory that China still holds). The protest followed a peaceful commemoration for soldiers killed in 1974 when China seized the Paracel islands.

Post-specific Concerns

Environmental Hazards

Vietnam's long coastline leaves it susceptible to frequent storms. The the most frequent and devastating natural disasters include flooding, tropical storms (including typhoons), landslides, droughts, and tornadoes. Other environmental hazards that occasionally affect parts of the country include forest fires and saltwater intrusion. Major earthquakes are less common.

Vietnam is expected to be one of the countries most severely impacted by climate change. There have been strong indications that the frequency and severity of storms hitting Vietnam have worsened over the past two decades; researchers warn that this trend is likely to continue.

Some of the important actions for mitigating the impact of natural disasters include developing scenario-based contingency plans; staff accountability and relocation plans; asset movement and protection plans; client and supplier plans; communication trees and crisis communication plans; emergency equipment (e.g. fuel and batteries) plans; and storm/flood insurance plans.

Private-sector organizations that have been able to resume operations rapidly after a natural disaster have often found that suppliers and clients have greater difficulty resuming operations, which can prolong recovery. Before and during an impending storm, security managers should closely monitor information from the Central Committee for Flood and Storm Control, the National Centre for Hydrometeorological Forecasting, and local people's committees for information on evolving conditions and the possible need for evacuations.

Critical Infrastructure

Worker safety remains a concern. Many fatal accidents have resulted from a lack of training and experience for employees, as well as a lack of first-responder capabilities. In order to save money, employers and contracted companies may force employees to exceed their abilities and experience to accomplish a job.

Safety standards in Vietnam are not at the same level as those in the U.S., and vary greatly by company and province; this is especially true in regards to fire codes. Many buildings, including hotels, shops, and restaurants have limited or no safety equipment or emergency exits. Ground and water transportation also lack safety regulations.

Local first responders may lack the training and equipment required to provide emergency assistance. For instance, local fire departments may not have a truck with a ladder that goes past the tenth floor. People trapped above the tenth floor may have to wait for a helicopter or alternative means of rescue. In the event of a large accident, local first responders may be overwhelmed.

Economic Concerns

Economic espionage is a concern for most businesses and manufacturers in Vietnam. Many of the items that infringe on patents, copyrights, and trademarks come from China. However, there is a vast network of Vietnamese organized crime groups believed to engage in similar activity. Consult with the local American Chamber of Commerce or the U.S. Embassy if you feel your product has been illegally copied or distributed.

Privacy Concerns

Authorities may monitor hotel rooms, telephones, and correspondence over the internet. Personal possessions, media, and documents in hotel rooms, apartments, or at the workplace may be searched without the owner's knowledge or consent. Similarly, all movements and activities are subject to surveillance. Exercise caution when discussing sensitive or proprietary information.

Drug-related Crimes

Drug use, particularly the use of methamphetamine and intravenous drugs, is an increasing problem and contributes significantly to the crime rate. Although Vietnam is primarily a transshipment point, drugs are ubiquitous and sold everywhere. Vietnamese organized crime groups work in conjunction with other criminals to bring drugs into the country or to distribute drugs manufactured locally. Violence associated with the drug trade is typically pre-meditated and limited to rival gangs, but local authorities note a rise in violent crimes that can affect the broader public.

Police Response

Police are often under-funded and lack training. Local police will issue a report of a crime, but generally will only initiate investigations for crimes they determine serious, which do not always equate with U.S. standards. Investigations can take several months to complete. While the overall situation is improving, some police have been openly solicitous of compensation, ostensibly to support local police efforts or to facilitate investigation of a crime. If you are involved in a situation where a police officer is soliciting money, contact American Citizen Services at the U.S. Embassy.

How to Handle Incidents of Police Detention or Harassment

If arrested for a crime, authorities will transport you to a jail and bring you before a judge. Contact the American Citizen Services unit at the American Embassy at (024) 3850-5000. If you are involved with the police and cannot contact American Citizen Services directly, ask your hotel, host, or employer to interpret for you.

Crime Victim Assistance

If you are involved in a traffic accident, altercation, or other situation that draws a crowd, leave the immediate area and contact the police. Contact police in Hanoi by dialing **113**.

Police/Security Agencies

The Ministry of Public Security is responsible for policing. Police entities that travelers are most likely to meet are the traffic police (*cảnh sát giao thông*) and public security (*công an*). The traffic police wear khaki uniforms and are similar to highway patrol units or police officers whose primary job is the enforcement of traffic laws. Public security, who also wear khaki uniforms, are in charge of general security and enforcing local laws.

Medical Emergencies

The availability and quality of medical care in major cities is limited; medical care in rural/provincial areas can be non-existent. Even when adequate medical care is available at private clinics, it is often expensive.

Contact Information for Available Medical Services

For medical assistance, please refer to the Embassy's [Medical Assistance website](#).

Insurance Guidance

Doctors and hospitals expect immediate cash payment for health services. International health clinics in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City can treat minor illnesses and injuries, but problems that are more serious often require medical evacuation (medevac) to Bangkok or Singapore. Strongly consider purchasing medevac insurance before travel.

Country-specific Vaccination and Health Guidance

Air pollution is a significant problem in Vietnam's major cities; consult a doctor prior to travel and consider the impact that seasonal smog and heavy particulate pollution may have on you. Information on air quality in Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City is available at [Air Now](#).

Travelers to Vietnam are at risk of tuberculosis, dengue fever, Zika, avian influenza (H5N1), and HIV. The CDC offers additional information on vaccines and health guidance for [Vietnam](#).

OSAC Country Council Information

There are active OSAC Country Councils in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Interested private-sector security managers should contact OSAC's [East Asia and the Pacific team](#) with any questions.

U.S. Embassy Location and Contact Information

Embassy Address and Hours of Operation

U.S. Embassy Hanoi, 7 Lang Ha Street, Hanoi

Hours of Operation: Monday-Friday, 0800-1700 (except U.S. and Vietnamese [holidays](#))

Embassy Contact Numbers

From outside Vietnam: +84-24-3850-5000 or 84-24-3850-5105 (emergency)

From landline within Hanoi: 3850-5000 or 3850-5105 (emergency)

From mobile or landline within Vietnam: 024-3850-5000 or 024-3850-5105 (emergency)

Website: <https://vn.usembassy.gov/embassy-consulate/embassy/>

Nearby Post: [U.S. Consulate Ho Chi Minh City](#)

Embassy Guidance

U.S. citizens traveling to Vietnam should register with the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(STEP\)](#) to ensure they receive pertinent security updates and notices.

Additional Resources

[Vietnam Country Information Sheet](#)