



## **Vietnam 2012 Crime and Safety Report: Hanoi**

Stolen items; Theft; Transportation Security; Counterfeiting; Drug Trafficking; Extortion; Surveillance; Floods; Bribery

East Asia & Pacific > Vietnam > Hanoi

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### **Overall Crime and Safety Situation**

#### **Crime Threats**

Although most travelers in Vietnam feel relatively safe, pick-pocketing and petty crimes occur. Violent crimes such as armed robbery, kidnappings, and murder against westerners or tourists remain rare. Drug use, which contributes significantly to the crime rate, is an increasing problem in Vietnam, particularly the increasing use of methamphetamine and intravenous drugs.

Petty theft, purse snatching, and pick pocketing are most common in the areas frequented by foreigners such as major hotels, tourist sites, airports, and public parks. One common method of purse snatching used throughout Vietnam employs two people on a motorcycle with the passenger snatching the victim's bag, camera, cellular phone, etc., often while traveling at the same speed or faster than street traffic. This method can be especially dangerous to victims if the straps of the bag are over the shoulder or around the neck, as the victim can be pulled down or dragged by the strap until it breaks. This is an ongoing and often dangerous trend. In some cases, a knife or other sharp cutting instrument is used by the perpetrators to cut the strap or to make a hole to reach in and steal valuables.

Visitors/residents should never leave possessions unattended, particularly in public areas such as airports, parks, restaurants, hotel lobbies, etc. Thefts of briefcases, luggage, laptop computers, and other items can occur when the owner's attention is diverted momentarily.

In general, the safety and security of guest rooms in quality hotels is adequate. Valuables and important documents (passport, etc.) should be kept inside a safe in the room (provided by many of the better hotels) or in a safety deposit box at the front desk. If on guided tours, secure your personal bags, and do not leave them on the tour bus/boat. If you must leave the bags, remove any valuables. There have been a number of incidents involving tourists leaving



their bags on buses/boats and, upon their return, finding that their bags were stolen or rifled through for valuables.

Individuals planning to lease homes or apartments within the city limits are advised to acquire properties properly outfitted with crime prevention devices, especially against home invasions. In 2011, several burglaries were reported in the Tay Ho and Ciputra residential areas, both popular neighborhoods within the expatriate and diplomatic community. Additionally, individuals planning to hire domestic help should screen candidates carefully. There are numerous instances of domestic help stealing valuables from their employers. In one case, a housekeeper forged her employer's signature on a check and was able to withdraw over US \$60,000 from their bank account. To avoid this situation, it is recommended that individuals use one of the many local domestic referral agencies that have opened recently in Hanoi and that charge a small fee for the screening and referral of household help.

### Road Safety

The two most dangerous activities in Vietnam are crossing the street and driving or riding in traffic. The road system throughout Vietnam is underdeveloped, and traffic rules are widely ignored. The lack of open sidewalks and adequate traffic controls creates a precarious situation for all pedestrians and motorists. It is not uncommon for visitors/residents to be involved in some type of road incident while attempting to cross one of the many motorcycle-clogged streets in Hanoi.

Motorcycle accidents are particularly common and serious in nature since motorcyclists generally have less training than car/truck drivers. There were over 9,000 recorded vehicle fatalities for Vietnam in 2011. If planning to ride a motorcycle in Vietnam, in accordance with local law a helmet must be worn.

### Political Violence

#### Historical Perspective

The political situation in Vietnam is stable with no known specific threat to American citizens. However, Vietnamese Americans known or suspected to be affiliated with anti-Vietnamese government organizations abroad have been harassed and in some cases arrested when visiting Vietnam. Visitors should respect local laws and customs, and avoid unauthorized gatherings or uncontrolled crowds. Exercise care in taking photographs; photographing military, police, or other government facilities may result in questioning by the authorities and



possible confiscation of the film and/or camera.

### Regional Terrorism and Organized Crime

Vietnam is not known to harbor any regional terrorism groups.

Some organized criminal elements do exist and usually concentrate their activities in the manufacture and distribution of drugs and counterfeit goods as well as extortion against businesses.

### International/Transnational Terrorism

Vietnam is not known to be the target of any international/transnational terrorist groups.

### Civil Unrest

Sporadic disputes have occurred in rural areas between local residents and authorities, but foreigners have generally not been involved. Aside from unrest in the Central Highlands in 2001 and 2004, political demonstrations are uncommon, and the threat from civil unrest in the cities is generally minimal.

## **Post-Specific Concerns**

### Environmental Hazards

New residents and visitors to Vietnam should be aware of massive street flooding that commonly occurs in many of the cities during the rainy season. Many city streets are not equipped with the proper sewage infrastructure needed to properly drain the large amount of seasonal rain that falls in a very short amount of time. This inordinate amount of rainfall often overwhelms the capacity of the existing infrastructure, causing flooding that makes navigating the streets difficult.

### Privacy Concerns

One should assume that all rooms, telephones, and fax machines might be monitored. Similarly, all movements and activities may be subject to surveillance. Personal possessions, media, and documents kept in hotel rooms, apartments, or at the workplace may be searched. Visitors and residents should be cautious when discussing sensitive or proprietary



information.

## **Police Response**

In the event of an emergency, the police can be contacted by dialing 113 (Vietnam's equivalent of 911) from a local telephone, though few of the 113 operators speak English. (Depending on the nature of the incident or ongoing situation, local citizens may assist foreigners in distress by contacting police or medical authorities.) If dialing 113 or assistance from local citizens is not a viable option, one should try to go to a western-type hotel where staff are far more likely to speak English and are generally very helpful in emergency situations.

Be aware that police are often under-funded and lack training in a number of areas. While the overall situation is gradually improving, some police have been openly solicitous of compensation, ostensibly to support local police efforts or to facilitate an investigation of a crime.

### **Where to Turn to for Assistance if you Become a Victim of Crime**

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

There have been problems with consular access to American citizens. Frequently, the Embassy or Consulate General is not immediately notified when U.S. citizens are arrested or detained. The Vietnamese government considers all persons born in Vietnam or born to Vietnamese parents to be Vietnamese citizens unless they have formally renounced their Vietnamese citizenship with the Vietnamese government. For this reason, Vietnamese officials may treat U.S. citizens of Vietnamese origin differently from other U.S. citizens.

In the past, individuals have been detained for traveling to sensitive areas and taking photographs of military installations or other sensitive areas/situations. In business disputes, local police authorities may confiscate a U.S. citizen's passport and visa. On several occasions, individuals have not been allowed to leave the country until the dispute is resolved, even if that takes months or even years.

## **Medical Emergencies**

Visitors and residents should be aware of the limitations of medical care in Vietnam. Even when adequate medical care is available at private clinics, it is often rather expensive. The



quality of medical care in major cities is limited, and medical care in rural/provincial areas can be non-existent. American or western medical insurance with medical evacuation coverage is highly recommended.

#### Contact Information for Local Clinics/Hospitals:

International SOS  
1 Dang Thai Mai Street, Hanoi  
(84-4) 934-0666; Emergency: (84-4) 934-0555

Hanoi Family Medical Clinic  
298-I Kim Ma Road, Hanoi  
(84-4) 843-0748 / (84) (0)90-340-1919

Hanoi French Hospital  
Phuong Mai Street, #1, Hanoi  
(84-4) 577-1100; Emergency (84-4) 574-1111

#### **How to Avoid Becoming a Victim**

Small joint ventures formed by U.S. citizens in conjunction with Vietnamese partners have occasionally reported threats from their Vietnamese partners or employees if the business relationship sours. Some foreign business people have faced threats, vandalism, and harassment in connection with their business dealings, though only a few cases of actual physical harm have been reported.

Try to minimize any potential losses ahead of time. When going out, take only what is needed. If confronted by a robber, quickly give up whatever is demanded and then leave the immediate area and contact the police. Protect identity documents and leave most valuables (including cash) in a safe place. If carrying a bag, purse, or backpack, carry it in a manner that would allow it to be released quickly and easily in an emergency.

When out on the street be as alert as possible to the surroundings. Watch out for distractions such as kids surrounding tourists to sell something and then picking their pockets, or prostitutes trying to solicit sex and grabbing a potential customer by the arm, but in reality stealing their watch.

When traveling at night, it is best to go with a friend. Do not take cyclos/pedicabs at night. If out late at night take only metered/marked taxis, preferably from the larger taxi companies



(Hanoi Taxi, CP Taxi, and Mai Linh Taxi). Watch out for unattended drinks in bars – on a few occasions drinks have been altered in order to incapacitate a potential victim. Avoid unorganized gatherings such as street races or demonstrations.

### **Further Information**

U.S. Embassy  
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### **OSAC Country Council**

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