



Vietnam 2012 Crime and Safety Report: Ho Chi Minh City

Transportation Security; Threats; Surveillance; Stolen items; Information Security; Assault; Bribery; Extortion; Theft

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Overall Crime and Safety Situation

Most travelers in Vietnam feel relatively safe, and crime in general is similar to many other countries throughout the world. Pick-pocketing, snatch and grabs, and petty thefts are the most frequent types of crime reported in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC). Violent crimes, such as murders, armed robbery, and kidnapping, remain very rare in Vietnam, especially for the expatriate community.

Crime Threats

Petty theft, purse snatching, and pick-pocketing are most common in the areas frequented by foreigners, such as major hotels, tourist sites, and public parks. HCMC is experiencing a steady increase in this type of activity. The most common modus operandi is for criminals to utilize motorbikes during their assaults. Thieves employ two people on a motorcycle with the passenger snatching the victim's cellular phone, camera, necklace, bags, etc. often while traveling at the same speed as, or swerving in and out of, traffic. This method can be especially dangerous to victims when 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.

During 2011, there were many reports of U.S. government permanent and temporary duty employees losing their cellular phones, bags, and purses to thieves. In some cases, perpetrators used a knife or other sharp cutting instruments to cut the strap or to make a hole to reach in and steal valuables.

U.S. citizens who formed small business ventures with Vietnamese partners have occasionally reported threats from their Vietnamese partners or employees if the business relationship deteriorated. Some foreign business people have faced threats, vandalism, and harassment in connection with their business dealings but have not reported acts of actual physical harm. In business disputes, local police may confiscate a U.S. citizen's passport and



visa. On a few occasions, individuals have not been allowed to leave the country until the dispute is resolved.

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, if possible, do not leave them on a tour bus/boat. If you must leave the bags behind, take all valuables with you. There have been no reports in 2011 of U.S. government employees having items stolen from their hotel rooms or residences. There have been several reports via social networks of residential break-ins at expatriate residences. None of these reports involved U.S. government personnel; these reports presumably have been submitted to the relative property manager and security personnel of the compound.

Credit card and ATM fraud is relatively uncommon, and there have been no incidents reported to U.S. Consulate HCMC.

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 chaotic, and traffic laws are widely ignored. Police officials admit that they have a considerable problem controlling the steadily growing number of motorcycles and vehicles on their streets. It is estimated that as Ho Chi Minh City's population approaches 10 million, there are still fewer than 800 traffic enforcement police on duty. The lack of open sidewalks and adequate traffic controls, such as stoplights at all intersections, creates a precarious situation for pedestrians and motorists. Motorcycle accidents are very common and serious in nature since motorcyclists generally have less training than car/truck drivers, and some are unlicensed. By western standards, the comparative death toll due to traffic accidents is staggering.

Even though the Vietnamese government enacted a helmet law in December 2007, it did not specify acceptable quality standards for helmets, which led to prevalence of substandard or poor quality helmets on the road that offer little to no protection. If you plan on riding a motorbike or bicycle in Vietnam, you must wear a helmet, and it is recommended that you bring a U.S. Department of Transportation approved helmet.

Political Violence



Historical Perspective

The political situation in Vietnam is stable with no known threats to Americans. Sporadic disputes have occurred between local residents and authorities, but foreigners have generally not been involved.

Civil Unrest

The most common political unrest experienced in 2011 concerned Land Rights activists who gathered and protested against unlawful land seizures by the Vietnamese government without equitable compensation. These demonstrations have been a common occurrence, and on a few occasions have resulted in a disruption of Consulate operations.

Peaceful demonstrations have also erupted as a result of the territorial disputes between Vietnam and China in the South China Sea but were later banned by the Vietnamese government.

Post-Specific Concerns

Intellectual Property Threat

One should assume that all rooms, telephones, and fax machines may be monitored. Similarly, all movements and activities may be subject to surveillance by government services. 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

There have been problems with consular access to American citizens. Frequently, the Embassy or Consulate General is not 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 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 the police or medical authorities. If dialing 113 or requesting assistance from local citizens is not a viable option, one should try to get to a western-type hotel where staff are more likely to speak English and are generally very helpful in emergency situations. If you are involved in a traffic accident, altercation, or other situation that draws a crowd, leave the immediate area and contact the police.

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.

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.

Clinics/hospitals that cater to foreigners in Ho Chi Minh City:

SOS - 24-hour emergency clinic
167A Nam Ky Khoi Nghia St, District 3
3829 8520
HCMC Family Practice
4 Le Duan Street, District 1
3822-7848

FV Hospital
Nguyen Luong Bang Street, District 7
5411-3500 (Emergency), 5411-3333 (Appointment)

West Coast Dental
27, Nguyen Trung Truc, District 1
3825-6999

Air Ambulance Services



American or western medical insurance with medical evacuation coverage is highly recommended. When traveling outside of major cities, emergency medical evacuation is limited to ambulances; there are not any emergency medical evacuations via helicopter.

Tips on How to Avoid Becoming a Victim

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 detention and questioning by the authorities and possible confiscation of film and/or camera. In the past, individuals have been detained for traveling to sensitive areas and taking photographs of military installations or other sensitive areas/situations.

Try to minimize any potential losses ahead of time. When you go out, bring only what is needed and only what you can afford to lose. If you are confronted by criminals, surrender whatever is being demanded, then immediately leave the area and contact the police. Protect identity documents and most of your valuables (including cash) in a safe place, such as a hotel safe. If you must carry a bag, purse, or backpack, carry it in a manner that would allow you to release it quickly and easily in an emergency.

When out on the streets, be as alert as possible to your surrounding area and the people around you. Watch out for distractions that facilitate criminal acts, such as kids surrounding you to sell something while picking your pockets or prostitutes trying to solicit sex by grabbing pedestrians' arms, but in reality stealing their watches. When traveling at night, it is best to go with someone you know. Do not take cyclos/pedicabs at night.

If you are out late at night, take only metered/marked taxis, preferably from the larger taxi companies, such as Saigon Tourist, Mai Linh Taxi, Vina Taxi and Vinasun. Watch out for unattended drinks in bars; drinks might be spiked in order to incapacitate a potential victim. Avoid unorganized/ unauthorized gatherings such as street races or demonstrations.

Further Information

U.S. Consulate General
4 Le Duan Boulevard
District 1, Ho Chi Minh City
Tel: (84) (8) 3520-4200



Fax: (84) (8) 3520-4244

Regional Security Officer
(84) (8) 3520-4435
Switchboard
(84) (8) 3520-4200

Medical Unit
(84) (8) 3520-4354/6

Consular Officer
(84) (8) 3520-4446

Political Officer
(84) (8) 3520-4405

Economic Officer
(84) (8) 3520-4445

Duty Officer (cellular phone)
(84) (8) 90-392-4613

OSAC Country Council

OSAC Country Council
Regional Security Officer
Christopher Gu
GuCK@state.gov
(84) (8) 3520-4435

Assistant Regional Security Officer
Jon (Carter) Bass
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