

Language and culture guide

Vietnamese

Language experts agree that language learning is most effective when language and culture are linked. *The Polyglots* apps aim to spark children's interest in language and culture through play. This guide provides some general information about Vietnam and Vietnamese language and culture that may be of interest to you and may extend children's learning.

About Vietnam

Vietnam is a country in South-East Asia situated on the most easterly point of the Indochinese Peninsula. Vietnam has a population of 102 million and Hanoi is the capital city. Vietnam is bordered by China to the north and Laos and Cambodia to the west.

Language

Vietnamese (Tiếng Việt) is the most widely spoken language in the Austroasiatic language family and is the official language of Vietnam. It is spoken by over 82 million native speakers worldwide. Australia has a sizeable Vietnamese-speaking community after large numbers of Vietnamese refugees made Australia their home after the Vietnam War.

Vietnamese is a tonal language. In a tonal language, words are spoken with a particular pitch or intonation. This makes Vietnamese a very musical-sounding language!

The alphabet used for writing in contemporary Vietnamese is called chữ Quốc ngữ. This alphabet is based on a Latin script and has accents added to numerous letters. There are 29 letters in the Vietnamese alphabet including 12 vowels.

Vietnamese has lots of 'loan words' from Chinese, French and English; for example, the Vietnamese word for coffee is cà phê from the French word café.

For correct pronunciation, listen carefully to the words as they are spoken in the app or in the sound library in the app toolkit on the ELLA website.

Culture

Vietnamese culture combines traditional customs with a wide range of foreign cultural influences. Vietnamese culture is influenced by nearly a thousand years of Chinese rule. Later, during the French colonial era, European influences were absorbed into Vietnamese culture. This is particularly evident in the architecture and cuisine. The Vietnamese are a proud, hardworking people with a steadfast commitment to family.

Politeness and customs

- It is very rude to touch anyone on the top of the head as this is considered the most sacred part of the body. This even applies to babies and children, so no tussling little ones' hair!
- The idea of 'face' is a very important aspect of Vietnamese culture. Face is a person or family's reputation and dignity. The Vietnamese place great importance on protecting one's own face and honouring that of others. By showing respect you 'give face', but by criticising or mocking someone you cause them to 'lose face'.
- Elders are deeply revered in Vietnamese society. When greeting a group of people in Vietnam, the elders must always be greeted first to show respect.
- Good manners and modesty are very highly valued in Vietnamese society.
- The Vietnamese can be quite superstitious. In some regions, people put mirrors in front of doors to scare away dragons, while others believe praising a newborn too much can cause it to be stolen by the devil for its desirability.

Culture in *The Polyglots* apps

As children play with the apps, they can discover fun and intriguing Vietnamese cultural references, such as a lychee, an apricot blossom, a buffalo and a Vietnamese pond turtle. You can learn more about the cultural references in the app toolkit.



Interesting topics

Animals

- Tonkin snub-nosed monkeys
- great hornbills
- Indian elephants
- sun bears
- water buffaloes
- pygmy slow loris
- red-shanked doucs
- Sunda pangolins

Arts

- The dragon is a very important symbol in Vietnamese art and culture. It is believed to bring rain and represents prosperity and power. You will find a lot of dragon imagery in Vietnamese architecture, art and sculpture.
- Vietnam has a rich and varied musical culture with many different forms of traditional folk music throughout the country. Xẩm singing is an example of a song style from northern Vietnam. Traditionally, Xẩm was sung by blind performers who earned their living singing from town to town.
- Áo dài is the name of the Vietnamese national garment. It is a long, fitted tunic, usually made from silk, that is worn over trousers. The áo dài used to be worn by both men and women but these days it is mainly worn by women on special occasions.
- Silk painting dates back to the 15th century. The artist paints directly onto the silk, using the silk as the backdrop of a painting. Silk paintings are usually vibrant, colourful works depicting rural life and natural landscapes.

Food

- Vietnamese food is among the healthiest cuisines in the world with an emphasis on fresh ingredients, vegetables and minimal use of fats or oils.
- Vietnamese cuisine is based on the Asian five-element principle, which separates taste into five 'elements': spicy (metal), sour (wood), bitter (fire), salty (water) and sweet (earth).
- Food in Vietnam is bursting with fresh flavours thanks to a love of fresh herbs such as coriander, lemongrass, chili, basil, ginger and mint.
- The Vietnamese love their coffee. It is served hot or cold, thick and sweetened with condensed milk.
- Bánh mì is the Vietnamese word for bread. The baguette was introduced to Vietnam by the French. Today, bánh mì is popular around the world, with fillings including pork, paté, coriander, pickles, mayonnaise and daikon (a type of radish).



Interesting topics

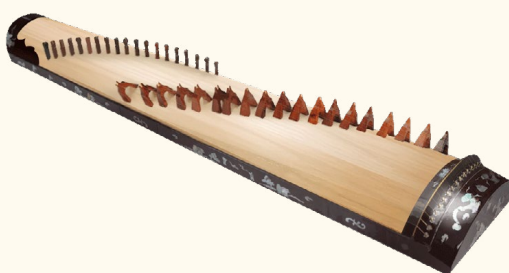
Places

- Ha Long Bay features stunning limestone islands in beautiful blue water. Visitors often stay on junk boats.
- Hội An is a vibrant, historical port town known for its expert tailors.
- With over 3,000 kilometres of coastline, Vietnam has no shortage of beautiful beaches. Some of the most popular are located around Nha Trang.
- Ho Chi Minh City, formerly Saigon, is the most populous city in Vietnam and is located in the south-east of the country. It is a busy, modern city jam-packed with vibrant markets and historical buildings from the French colonial period.
- Cat Tien is one of the largest national parks in Vietnam. Its lush rainforest is home to hundreds of species of animals, with many people visiting for a chance to see the golden-cheeked gibbon in the wild.

Celebrations

- Tết Nguyên Đán, or Tết for short, is the name of the Vietnamese Lunar New Year celebration. Tết Nguyên Đán, which means 'Feast of the First Morning of the First Day', is celebrated at the beginning of spring over the first three days of the lunar calendar. During Tết, offerings are made to gods and ancestors, gifts of tien le xi (lucky money) are given, and families gather to feast on delicious food.
- Hội An's lantern festival is held on the 14th day of each lunar month. In the evening, the city is aglow with beautiful, brightly-coloured lanterns that are sent floating down the river.
- The Hue Festival is a celebration of Vietnamese culture. It takes place every two years and includes historical re-enactments, as well as music, street performances, dance, kite-flying, boat races and poetry.

Note: This document contains content that has been gathered through independent research and consultation with subject matter experts. The figures and information included in this document should be reviewed for accuracy over time.



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