



VIETNAM

JOURNEYS OF BODY, MIND & SPIRIT

An Educator's Guide

INSIDE

- ACTIVITIES YOU CAN DO WITH YOUR STUDENTS **BEFORE** YOUR VISIT
- MUST-READ **INFORMATION** TO HELP YOU PREPARE
- **WHAT TO DO** WHEN YOU GET TO THE MUSEUM
- **CONNECTIONS** TO OTHER PLACES IN THE MUSEUM
- TIES TO **NEW YORK STATE STANDARDS**
- **PRE-, DURING-, AND POST-VISIT ACTIVITIES**

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION AND ACTIVITIES, VISIT OUR WEB SITE AT WWW.AMNH.ORG/RESOURCES/EXHIBITIONS/VIETNAM

VIETNAM

Exhibition Section Titles



Water Puppets ①



Sapa Market ②



Yao Initiation ③



Giarai Funeral ④

Mid-Autumn Festival

Shamanic Journeys

Community Gods on Parade

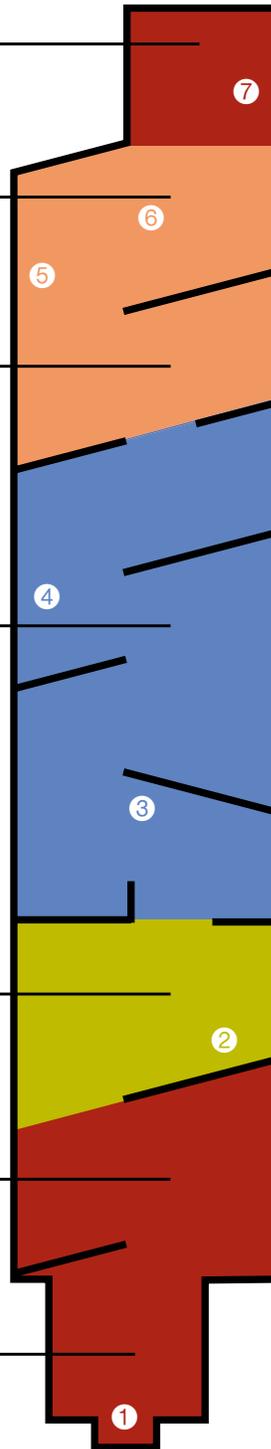
Life Journeys

Journeys of Peoples & Goods

Journeys of Gods & Ancestors

Journeys through Time & Space

Exit



Entrance

The four journeys described in the exhibition section of this guide are color-coded to the areas shown on this map.

- Journeys Through Time
- Journeys of Peoples and Goods
- Rites of Passage as Life Journeys
- Journeys of Spirits and Souls



⑤ Len Dong Ritual



⑥ Ky Yen Ritual



⑦ Mid-Autumn Festival



KEY CONCEPTS and background

come prepared !

Teaching Vietnam

A land of rich traditions and diverse landscapes and people, Vietnam is a vibrant country in the midst of tremendous change. Vietnam's population is young; the majority was born after 1975. For many Americans, the word Vietnam automatically triggers images of the Vietnam American war. A major goal of this exhibition is to provide a broader, more contemporary view of Vietnam as a dynamic, multicultural nation participating in a global marketplace. The beautiful and useful objects in the exhibition—from toys to ceramics, from clothing to ritual items—are windows through which your students can increase their knowledge and understanding of Vietnamese culture. Familiarize your class with the content of the exhibition before you come (see Before Your Visit). Learn about the exhibition at www.amnh.org/exhibitions/vietnam.

Learning about other cultures is also an important way to examine the values and customs of your own culture. Therefore, the suggested activities in this guide encourage students to ask questions about their own values and experiences as they reflect on the sights and sounds of the exhibition through the photos, videos, and items on display.

Teaching in the Museum

As an informal learning environment, the Museum offers many opportunities for self-directed learning through the exploration of questions such as "What is culture?" and "What is tradition?" Build flexibility into your plans to allow students to follow their interests.

Explainers (most of whom speak both English and Vietnamese) will be present in the exhibition to provide additional information and answer questions.

The second most populous country in Southeast Asia, Vietnam contains almost 80 million people within an area about the size of New Mexico. **Vietnam: Journeys of Body, Mind & Spirit** portrays the diverse peoples of Vietnam, reflecting the country's distinctive cultural identity and conveying its long history. The exhibition is a joint project of the American Museum of Natural History and the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology in Hanoi, which furnished many of the exhibition materials, including artifacts, photographs, and videos. The Vietnam Museum of Ethnology is a new museum that highlights the ethnic groups of Vietnam and presents contemporary culture as well as traditional practices.

CULTURE AND RELIGION

- The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is a multiethnic country of 54 recognized **ethnic groups**—categories of people who see themselves as sharing a culture, history, and identity that differentiates them from other groups or from the larger society as a whole. The official language is Vietnamese, and Vietnam prides itself on its high literacy rate of around 85 percent.
- Like all cultures, Vietnam's culture is fluid, adaptive, and alive. The culture of a country has not one but many expressions. This is as true for Vietnam as it is for the United States. Traditions vary within Vietnamese culture, particularly from region to region. People move and times change, transforming cultural traditions.
- At different times in its history, Vietnam has incorporated elements of both Chinese and Indian culture and religion.
- There are many religions in Vietnam, including Daoism; Buddhism; Catholicism; Islam; Hinduism; a variety of folk practices, especially ancestor veneration; and Confucianism, an ancient Chinese social philosophy.
- For many Vietnamese, familial relationships extend beyond death. The living make offerings to ancestors at household altars. In return, the ancestors help protect the family.

COMMERCE

- Although Vietnam follows socialist economic principles, the country entered the global marketplace in 1986. *Doi Moi*, or "Renovation," is the reform movement that encouraged individual responsibility in agriculture and led Vietnam from a state-subsidized to a market economy. Since then, Vietnam has undergone enormous economic change.
- Largely **agrarian**—or agricultural—about 80 percent of Vietnam's population lives in the countryside, and more than half its people are engaged in agriculture.
- In the central highlands, farmers plant tea, coffee, sugarcane, pepper, peanuts, and other **cash crops**—crops grown primarily to sell at market. Farmers also tap trees for rubber, another major export.
- Vietnam has two major urban centers: the capital Hanoi (population 3 million) in the north and Ho Chi Minh City (population 5 million), with the largest concentration of urban industry and business, in the south. Danang, on the central coast, is also a major city and port.

GEOGRAPHY

- The Vietnamese see their country as having three geographical areas: the north or *Bac Bo*; the center or *Trung Bo*; and the southern portion or *Nam Bo*.
- The rich soil of the north's Red River and south's Mekong River **deltas**—soil deposits carried by a network of streams at the mouth of some rivers—provide fertile ground for rice farmers. Rice, in its many varieties, is a vital part of Vietnam's culture, economy, and landscape. A leading export, it is grown on three-quarters of the country's farmland.
- Vietnam's extensive coastline supports fishing and other **maritime**—relating to the sea—industries. Its accessible ports have been gateways for trade and cultural influences.
- A quarter of Vietnam's population lives in **highland**—or mountainous—areas. Mountain ranges run from north to south, separating Vietnam from Laos and Cambodia. Another mountain range crosses northern Vietnam from southern China.



EXHIBITION



Vietnam: **Journeys of Body, Mind & Spirit** uses the motif of the journey to illustrate the Vietnamese experience. This guide presents four journeys through the exhibition:

JOURNEYS THROUGH TIME

A journey through time is also a journey through change. The exhibition begins with images from the period of the Vietnam American War to present-day Vietnam. An exhibition time line highlights two millennia of the country's history.

The Vietnamese mark their journey through the year with different calendars. While business may follow a Western calendar, the majority of the population follows the lunar calendar and the holidays associated with it.

In Vietnam, holidays are a vital part of the yearly cycle. The exhibition opens with Tet, the festival of the **Lunar**—of the moon—New Year, and ends with the Mid-Autumn Festival.

- In the Tet displays, visitors familiar with Chinese and Korean New Year celebrations will see similarities derived from common notions of time and the cosmos. Ask students to note the many ways in which Tet New Year customs signify a fresh and **auspicious**—promising good luck—start for the new year.
- The Mid-Autumn Festival illustrates that a living culture is a changing culture; new elements are incorporated in response to new circum-

stances. Ask students to note how both original paper masks and new plastic masks are now used in festivals, and how Hello-Kitty® lanterns join paper and bamboo lanterns with more traditional images in the children's parades.

JOURNEYS OF PEOPLES AND GOODS

Vietnam is a country of people in motion. The exhibition displays three journeys of peoples and goods—journeys fueled by the global marketplace.

- Bat Trang is a village in the north that has produced and exported ceramics throughout Asia since the 15th and 16th centuries. Today, these ceramics will find their way to Internet auctions and Parisian boutiques.
- At the Sapa market near Vietnam's northern border, ethnic craftspeople and traders from the highland villages meet travelers from foreign countries. Many of the ethnic goods are especially made for tourists. Examine the display of Sapa market hats and notice the difference between those for Hmong and Yao children and those made for sale to tourists.
- Vietnam has seen a massive movement of people from the lowland regions to the highlands, causing overpopulation that has strained available resources. **Swidden** agriculture practiced in the highlands consists of cutting and burning upland forest, planting, and then allowing the land to rest before burning and cultivating again. With the pressure of overpopulation, swidden fields are not given enough time to regenerate and the soil deteriorates. Ask students to think about their experience or that of their families in moving from one geographical region to another, and the difficulties they faced.

before your visit

- Careful observation of exhibition objects will provide students with important insights into learning about material culture. Ask students to practice their observation skills by bringing in an object from home that has personal significance for them. Ask students to describe and draw their objects in detail, with attention to material, form, use, color, and function. Then ask students to switch objects with another student and repeat the activity.
- Initiate an age-appropriate discussion about key terms such as culture, traditions, symbols, and rites of passage. For example, ask: What is tradition? How are new family traditions created? After the discussion, start a classroom tradition such as a weekly or monthly event.
- Ask students to work in pairs to create a list of the celebrations and holidays which mark their journeys through time. Ask students to share their lists with the class, and discuss the variety of ways in which we celebrate these important events.
- Review the vocabulary in bold throughout this guide.
- The following discussion/activity suggestions will provide excellent comparison points for students while they are in the museum and after their visit.
- ▲ Ask students what they know about Vietnam. Make a list on the blackboard and ask students to copy the list. Have students cite the sources of their information, such as parents, newspapers, books, or personal experiences.
- ▲ Distribute copies of the map insert, or display a large map of Vietnam. Ask students to identify the geographical features of the country, such as its size, shape, rivers, coastline, mountains, and neighboring countries. What ideas about industries, occupations, transportation, or food resources does the map suggest? List these on the board.
- ▲ Ask each student to bring in an image of Vietnam from a magazine, newspaper, travel brochure, book, or Web site. Ask students to work in pairs and write down ways in which these images show similarities to their own lives—and ways in which they are different. Ask students to write down any conclusions they can draw about how Vietnamese people live in the countryside and in cities. Open a discussion about how Vietnam is portrayed in these images, and what ideas about the country they may suggest.





rites of passage as life journeys

Coming-of-age ceremonies, weddings, and funerals are all **rites of passage**—ceremonies that mark transitions from one stage of life to another. Different regions and ethnic groups in Vietnam practice different ceremonies. Several minority groups in Vietnam use the idea of a journey to mark the space between life and death. *Ask students to note the tall decorated poles erected by the Thai at the tomb to help souls ascend to the ancestors in the sky.*

Rites of passage also change. Cultural fashions are evident in ceremonies such as the Kinh wedding, at which it is now in vogue to take "Hollywood"-style photos. Another new tradition is to have all guests at a wedding sign a tablecloth. *Ask students if they are familiar with similar occasions in the United States at which people collect signatures, such as in yearbooks or guest books. What might be the reason(s) for this custom?*

Votives—items burned as offerings for the dead—continue to change so that the dead can also make use of newly available commodities. Today, paper votives may take the shapes of VCRs, luxury cars, and cell phones. This exhibition section also contains a memorial to the "wandering ghosts"—those who died under violent circumstances and have not received proper burials.

The Giarai minority group of the central highlands sends the dead on a journey to the land of the ancestors with an elaborate ceremony in which a grave house and wooden mortuary sculptures are created. *Consider what the five mortuary statues on display convey about the Giarai's view of the afterlife.*

JOURNEYS OF SPIRITS AND SOULS

Festivals that engage the spirit world enhance people's lives with a sense of esteem, continuity, and community. The exhibition presents examples of ways in which spirits are invited to journey to present-day ritual sites to manifest themselves and in which spirits are honored in village festivals. For instance, a water puppet performance celebrated in the Chua Thay Festival honors the creator of the water puppet tradition, the monk Tu Dao Hanh. And in fishing villages along Vietnam's south and central coast, "Sir Fish" festivals honor the spirit of the whale who keeps fishermen safe and helps them to prosper. *Students can examine these festivals more closely at a media station in the Community Gods on Parade section, which offers four different videos with cultural information about these and other festivals.*

Many Vietnamese believe that people have multiple souls and that when some of these souls leave the body, illness results. The Tay people of northeastern Vietnam hold a ritual, Ky Yen, in which a **shaman**—an individual who has direct personal experiences of the supernatural—retrieves a person's missing soul and may conduct a rite to insure good luck and health. In this ritual, as illustrated in a nearby video, the entranced shaman leads a spirit army on a series of adventures. In the different shamanic Len Dong ritual of the Kinh people, spirits from different cosmic realms are entertained with dances, songs, and lively audience interaction.



while you're at the museum

- Break students into small groups or pairs, and assign each group one of the four suggested "journeys" through the exhibition (see the Exhibition section). With a large class, multiple groups may work on the same journey. Ask each group to collect information and the main ideas of the journey. Have students record what interests them most about each journey, and what questions they have.
- Throughout the exhibition, displays illustrate new traditions that have been incorporated into Vietnamese culture. Ask students to locate and record examples of these new traditions. These might include plastic masks of characters from popular culture or modern "Hollywood"-style wedding photos.
- Objects can be expressions of a culture. Ask students to select an object or a group of related objects that they find particularly interesting. Students should record a detailed description of its physical appearance (including its form, composition, and function) through words and drawings. Ask them to answer: How was the object made? What cultural meanings and values are attached to it? Think about an object in American culture used for a similar purpose.
- Ask students to work in pairs, and compare the photos and images in the exhibition to the ones they collected before their visit. Ask them to record what they find surprising or most interesting about the differences between their images and those in the exhibition. Have them write down any opinions and thoughts they might have about the photos in the exhibition. Ask if there were any photos they would have liked included in the exhibition that were not.





back in the classroom

connections to other exhibits in the museum

- Walk through the **Akeley Gallery Hall**. An exhibition of photos and specimens offers opportunities to investigate biodiversity in Vietnam.
- Visit the **Hall of Asian Peoples**. The hall contains two display cases to broaden visitors' knowledge of Vietnam. One is labeled "Southeast Asia: the Land" and shows the geographic spread of ethnic groups within Vietnam. The second is a case labeled "Tribal Southeast Asia" that displays clothing of the Yao. The adjacent exhibits show influences on Vietnam from China to the North and India to the South, as well as from Islam that may have spread to Vietnam through maritime contacts.
- Go to the **Hall of Asian Mammals**. A display in this hall provides a look at the water buffalo, an animal used in Vietnam for both irrigated and dry cultivation.
- In **The Discovery Room** a water puppet in the shape of a water buffalo has been constructed. Visitors can also read a famous Vietnamese folktale about a naughty buffalo boy.



- A follow-up discussion to "Before Your Visit": Ask students to compare the notes they made before their visit to what they learned at the exhibition. Ask them specifically what new or surprising knowledge they gained.
- A follow-up activity for "While You're at the Museum": Ask the pairs of students who recorded their "journey" findings together at the museum to present their observations and questions to the class. Discuss possible answers to these questions with the class.
- A follow-up activity with the images collected in "Before Your Visit" and "While You're at the Museum": Ask the pairs of students who investigated and took notes about the exhibition images to present their findings to the class. Have students refer to the images that were collected before the visit and the drawings made at the exhibition to aid in the discussion.
- Invite Vietnamese and/or Vietnamese-Americans (relatives of students, if possible) from your community to talk to the class about their lives, backgrounds, and cultures. Build in time for students to ask questions.
- Break students into small groups or pairs. Ask each group to choose a city or region in Vietnam to research. Using impressions from the exhibition as a starting point, ask them to collect images, historical background on the region, and other information that they find interesting, and then present their findings to the class.
- Divide students into groups and ask them to write a brief outline for organizing a museum exhibition about culture in the United States. Ask them to consider a main theme or topic for their exhibition. What objects would they include to best illustrate that theme? Ask them to list reasons for their particular choices.

For older students:

- Both Vietnam and the United States are multiethnic countries. Research the differences between minorities in Vietnam and those in the United States with reference to their origins, geographical distribution, languages, and customs. Students can share the results of their research with the class.
- Traditions are never static. Ask students to identify one or more traditions that have changed in their own families, such as a family anniversary or holiday. Why did this tradition change? How are these reasons similar to or different from changes in tradition that they discovered in the exhibition? In general, why do traditions undergo change?

Links to New York State Standards

The exhibition and the activities in this guide fulfill the following standards:

Social Studies Standards for Elementary, Middle School, High School

- STANDARD 1: History of the United States and New York
- STANDARD 2: World History
- STANDARD 3: Geography
- STANDARD 4: Economics

Arts Standards Elementary and Middle School

- STANDARD 2: Knowing and Using Arts Materials and Resources

Resources:

For a book list, related Web sites, and additional activities visit:

www.amnh.org/resources/exhibitions/vietnam

CREDITS:

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Photo Credits: Cover - clockwise from top left - cultivating rice near Saigon, celebrating Tet with sparklers, pilgrims boat to the Perfume Pagoda during Tet, Ellen Kaplowitz; boys raised in a Buddhist temple, Nguyen Hong Sam; embroidered shaman's vest, Barry Landua, AMNH

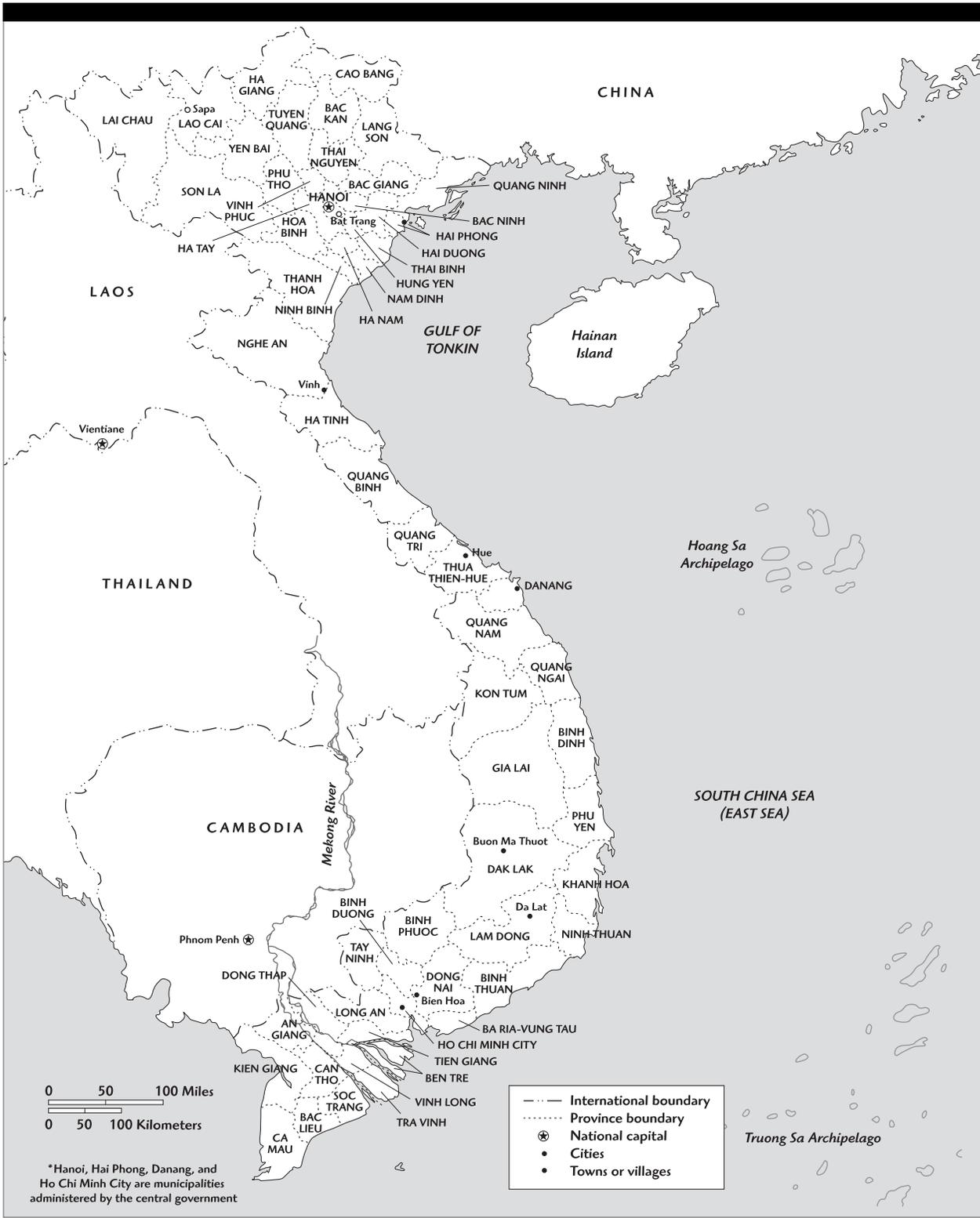
Key Concepts - old woman selling calendars, Ellen Kaplowitz; billboards in Ho Chi Minh City, Nguyen Hong Sam

Exhibition - first page - Hmong child, Claire Burkert; painting of a diety, Craig Chesek, AMNH; transporting melons by boat, Jerry Seiser

Exhibition - second page - top: woman in Sapa with laundry, Judith Barbanel; wedding party in Ho Chi Minh City, VME/courtesy of Mr. Pham Buu Hoa; bottom: Dragon dance performed by the Hoa, Ellen Kaplowitz; market in central Vietnam, Jerry Seiser

Floor plan page - Artifact photos, Craig Chesek, AMNH

Back cover - top: Yao Red children, Andy Schmid, AMNH; bottom: harvesting fields, Jerry Seiser; opera troupe actor, John Kleinen; traveling to market in the Mekong Delta, Ellen Kaplowitz



*Hanoi, Hai Phong, Danang, and Ho Chi Minh City are municipalities administered by the central government

The "S" shape of Vietnam is often said to look like two rice baskets on a pole. The north and south regions—which possess the major deltas where much of the rice is grown — are the rice baskets, and the central region is the pole.

Location:
Southeastern Asia, bordering the Gulf of Thailand, Gulf of Tonkin, and South China Sea, alongside China, Laos, and Cambodia

Area:
total: 329,560 sq km
land: 325,360 sq km
water: 4,200 sq km

Area - comparative:
slightly larger than New Mexico

Coastline:
3,444 km (excludes islands)

Climate:
tropical in south; monsoonal in north with hot, rainy season (mid-May to mid-September) and warm, dry season (mid-October to mid-March)

Terrain:
low, flat delta in south and north; central highlands; hilly, mountainous in far north and northwest

Geography - note:
extending 1,650 km north to south, the country is only 50 km across at its narrowest point

HISTORICAL TIMELINE

300,00 BC Prehistory]

First inhabitants. Farming, pottery and metalworking develop.



Water puppets of the Trung sisters

The Trung sisters led their rebel army against the Chinese occupiers of the Red River Delta and northern uplands in A.D. 40. The revolt succeeded at first, and one of the sisters was made queen, but the Chinese reclaimed the region within three years. Hailed today as national heroines, the Trung sisters appear as characters in puppet shows to illustrate the central role of women in Vietnam's struggle for independence.



Woodblock print of Ngo Quyen's victory over the Chinese

Ngo Quyen reestablished an independent Vietnamese state after nearly a thousand years of Chinese domination. In 938, upon learning that ships bearing enemy troops were about to sail up the Bach Dang River, Ngo Quyen ordered his forces to submerge spikes in the estuary. The Chinese ships sailed in easily, but when they were forced to retreat at low tide the spikes pierced their hulls and they sank. With this decisive victory Vietnam gained independence and Ngo Quyen proclaimed himself king.

Water puppet of Le Loi

One of Vietnam's greatest national heroes, Le Loi led a successful ten-year uprising against the Chinese in the early 1400s. According to legend, Le Loi's sword was a gift from the King of the Sea. After Le Loi's victory, he threw the sword into Hoan Kiem Lake, at the center of what is now Hanoi, and it was retrieved by a giant turtle.



1945 Indochina wars]

August Revolution. French colonists expelled. American War.



Woodblock print of a literacy class

Universal literacy was a top priority for the revolutionary leaders who fought to oust the French between 1945 and 1954. In 2000 the literacy rate of Vietnam was estimated at 85 percent. This woodblock depicts a literacy class for ordinary people.

[800 BC Early states period

Small states rise and fall. Chinese invasions.



Terra cotta bowl

Oc Eo, where this bowl was found, was a flourishing port in what is now southwestern Vietnam between 0 and A.D.500. Part of a maritime civilization whose trade network stretched from China to the western Mediterranean, Oc Eo was rediscovered by archaeologists in the 1940s. It had been submerged for hundreds of years.

[1000 AD Monarchy

Independent kingdoms start with Ly dynasty. Chinese invasions resisted. Champa kingdom flowers and declines.



My Son



The Cham people of central Vietnam built a powerful civilization based on seafaring trade that reached its height around the year 1000. In the 1600s, the Kinh people began to absorb the declining Champa kingdom. These crumbled towers in My Son suggest the architectural splendor of the Cham civilization.

[1858 French colonial period

French dominate first south, then center, then north.



The Automobile

The clothing, vehicles and courtship rituals of the French—a colonial presence from 1859 to 1954—were alien and slightly comical to the Vietnamese.

[1975 Unified Vietnam

War with Cambodia and China. Refugees depart by sea. Renovation of economy.

Toy motorbikes made from recycled aluminum cans

Beginning in 1986, the government of Vietnam initiated a series of reforms known as *doi moi* ("renovation") that included a growing receptivity to foreign investment. The motorbikes that clog the streets of many cities in Vietnam symbolize the changing lifestyle of Vietnamese in the *doi moi* era.

