The monthly newsletter of the American Citizen Services Units of the U.S. Embassy Hanoi and the U.S. Consulate General Ho Chi Minh City

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Upcoming U.S. Citizens Services Visits

Officials from the American Citizen Services (ACS) unit will offer consular services at the following locations:

No services scheduled for the month of December.

Da Nang

Date: Friday, 11 January 2018

Place: Bread of Life, 4 Dong Da, Thuan Phuoc, Hai Chau, Da Nang

Time: from 9:00am to 12:00pm

No appointments are necessary. Consulate officials will offer notarial services, and U.S. citizens will be able to apply for U.S. passports.

Federal benefits annuitants who have not been contacted by SSA or consulate for the stop of quarterly physical presence, please come to finalize the paperwork.

At this time, officials will not be interviewing for Consular Reports of Birth Abroad. Visa and immigration services will not be provided. Only the services listed will be available during the visits.

For additional information concerning applying for U.S. passports and notary services please see our Website at: https://vn.usembassy.gov/

Please check our website for more information as it becomes available.

This newsletter is also available on the U.S. Embassy & Consulate's website at: https://vn.usembassy.gov/

Please pass this newsletter on to any other U.S. citizens in Vietnam and encourage them to enroll in STEP (https://step.state.gov/step/) to receive the newsletters in the future

Upcoming Holiday Closures

The Embassy and Consulate will be closed on the following days:

* Tuesday, 25 December, 2018: Christmas Day
* Tuesday, 1 January, 2019: New Year's Day

A complete list of all of our holiday closings for 2018 is available on-line at http://vn.usembassy.gov/holiday-calendar/

*Vietnamese Holiday
+American Holiday

Services for U.S. Citizens

Ho Chi Minh City

The Consulate General in **Ho Chi Minh City** uses a service-by-appointment system. Please visit our Website at : https://vn.usembassy.gov/ to make an appointment to apply for a U.S. passport, a Consular Report of Birth Abroad, and for notary services and authentications.

Those with genuine emergencies, such as the death, arrest, or life threatening illness of a U.S. citizen, can appear on a walk-in basis from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and from 1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday to Friday (except Vietnamese and American public holidays) or call us any time at (84-28) 3520-4200.

Every day we have a number of no-shows for routine services. If you make an appointment and find you cannot keep it, please log back into the appointment system and cancel the appointment so that the appointment slot will be available to another client.

If you are *only picking up passports,* you do not need to make an appointment and can walk in for assistance between the hours of 8:30 – 11:30 a.m., Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, excluding Vietnamese and American holidays. If you are submitting additional information related to a *Consular Report of Birth Abroad* case, please send an email to VietnamCRBAAppt@state.gov with the subject line: "The additional required documentation – [NAME OF YOUR CHILD]", we will then set up a date for you to come in the Consulate for a review of your additional documents. Each child will need a separate appointment.

Hanoi

The U.S. Embassy in **Hanoi** uses a service-by-appointment system. Please visit our website at https://vn.usembassy.gov/ to make an appointment to apply for a U.S. passport, a Consular Report of Birth Abroad, as well as for notary services.

Those with genuine emergencies, such as the death, arrest, or life threatening illness of a U.S. citizen, can appear on a walk-in basis from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and from 1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday to Friday (except Vietnamese and American public holidays) or call us any time at (84-24) 3850-5000.

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If you are *only picking up passports,* you do not need to make an appointment and can walk in for assistance between the hours of 8:30 – 11:30 a.m., Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, excluding Vietnamese and American holidays. If you are submitting additional information related to a *Consular Report of Birth Abroad* case, please send an email to VietnamCRBAAppt@state.gov with the subject line: "The additional required documentation – [NAME OF YOUR CHILD]", we will then set up a date for you to come in the Consulate for a review of your additional documents. Each child will need a separate appointment.

ALL APPOINTMENTS ARE FREE (no cost) FOR U.S. CITIZEN SERVICES, including passports, notary services, and Consular Reports of Birth Abroad. The website also has detailed instructions about service costs and required documents/procedures for each service.

WE ARE DEDICATED TO FIGHTING FRAUD.

If you wish to report fraudulent activity related to any of the Consular services we provide, please contact our Consular Fraud Prevention Unit at HCMCFPU@state.gov for Ho Chi Minh City

or HanoiFPU@state.gov for Hanoi.

Passport Fee Increase

Effective April 2, 2018, the passport execution fee will increase from $25 to $35. The $10 execution fee increase applies to U.S. passport applicants using the DS-11 form including: first-time applicants over age 16, children under age 16, and applicants who reapply after reporting their previous passport lost or stolen.

Customers applying with the DS-11 form at a U.S. embassy or consulate abroad pay two separate fees: an application fee to the U.S. Department of State and the execution fee to the Passport Acceptance Facility (such as a post office in the United States or a U.S. embassy or consulate abroad). Accordingly, the total passport fee for such applicants will increase by $10 in total.

The $10 fee increase does not apply to adults eligible to renew their passport using the DS-82 form. The Department of State published a Final Rule confirming this fee change on January 31, 2018.

Glasses are no longer accepted in passport or visa photos. For more info, visit: Nonimmigrant Visa, Immigrant Visa, and Passport pages on U.S. Mission Vietnam's website.

NOTICE REGARDING SOCIAL SECURITY SERVICES

The Social Security Administration (SSA) has consolidated its overseas operations into several regional offices that provide a full range of SSA services for U.S. citizens residing outside of the United States.

Effective October 1, 2017, individuals residing in Vietnam who require social security services or have questions about SSA benefits must contact the SSA Federal Benefits Unit (FBU) located in Manila, Philippines, rather than Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City.

Please be advised that as of October 1, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City can no longer accept telephone calls, emails, or walk-in consultations regarding Social Security issues.

For more information or any questions about the services provided at the FBU in Manila, Philippines and how to contact them, please visit their webpage at: www.ssa.gov. You can also reach them at (phone number) 00632-301-2000, extension 9 or (email address) FBU.manila@ssa.gov.

For comprehensive information on SSA's services abroad, please visit SSA's webpage, "Service Around the World."

If you are already receiving SSA benefits payments, there will be no change in the method of distribution of those payments.

U.S. Citizens Eligible for E-Visa Program

In February 2017, Vietnam launched a pilot e-visa program for citizens of 40 countries, including the United States. The program uses an online application process to issue 30-day, one-entry visas for $25, payable via bank transfer. E-visa holders may enter and exit Vietnam through 28 designated international border gates, including all international airports. The program was recently extended until 2021. The Vietnamese e-visa instructions and application are available online.

The correct Vietnamese government website for e-visas is

https://www.xuatnhapcanh.gov.vn.

Air Quality Monitors in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City

The U.S. Embassy and U.S. Consulate have installed air quality monitors to measure PM 2.5 particulates as an indication of the air quality. You can read more information and check the current reading for Hanoi and for Ho Chi Minh City at: https://vn.usembassy.gov/embassy-consulate/embassy/air-quality-monitor/ and https://vn.usembassy.gov/embassy-consulate/ho-chi-minh-city/air-quality-monitor/

For more details on air quality index, please follow the link to the Environmental Protection Agency's ***Air Now*** website. The AQI can be observed either by clicking on the location on the map, or by selecting Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City in the "Select a City" option on the upper right part of the page. The page provides AQI over the last 24 hour period as well as pollutant concentration and a downloadable historical document.

Please note that citywide analysis cannot be done with data from a single monitor. This data provides an accurate measure of the air quality in the section of each city close to the location of the monitor. The Vietnamese Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment also provides air quality data for Hanoi. You can view this information at http://www.cem.gov.vn/.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has developed a formula to convert PM 2.5 readings into an air quality index (AQI) value that can help inform health-related decisions. Meanings of AQI numerical values can be seen in the chart below. For more information on AQI and how it is calculated, please click here.

Air Quality Index Levels of Health Concern	Numerical Value	Meaning
Good	0 to 50	Air quality is considered satisfactory, and air pollution poses little or no risk
Moderate	51 to 100	Air quality is acceptable; however, for some pollutants there may be a moderate health concern for a very small number of people who are unusually sensitive to air pollution.
Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups	101 to 150	Members of sensitive groups may experience health effects. The general public is not likely to be affected.
Unhealthy	151 to 200	Everyone may begin to experience health effects; members of sensitive groups may experience more serious health effects.
Very Unhealthy	201 to 300	Health warnings of emergency conditions. The entire population is more likely to be affected.
Hazardous	301 to 500	Health alert: everyone may experience more serious health effects.

Travel Alerts and Warnings

The U.S. Department of State regularly issues travel alerts or travel warnings for various countries and regions. For information regarding all travel alerts and warnings, please go to this site:

http://travel.state.gov/content/passports/english/alertswarnings.html

U.S. citizens are reminded to maintain a high level of vigilance and to take appropriate steps to increase their security awareness.

U.S. Embassy Hanoi and U.S. Consulate General, Ho Chi Minh City wish to take this opportunity to remind American citizens in Vietnam that protests can happen spontaneously and quickly turn violent. It is recommended citizens do the following:

- Avoid the areas of the demonstrations.
- Exercise caution if unexpectedly in the vicinity of large gatherings or protests.
- Monitor local media for updates.
- Keep a low profile.
- Visit Vietnam Country Information.
- Enroll in Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) to receive security updates.
- Follow us on Facebook.

TRAVELLING WITH PETS?

The Animal and Plant Health Inspections Service launched a new website to help international travelers determine travel requirements for pets. For more info, please visit the site here.

The U.S. Mission in Vietnam recently updated Country Specific Information about local conditions in Vietnam for travelers. Below are some excerpts from the updated sections. Please be sure to review travel.state.gov regularly for updated information about travel and country conditions.

Local Laws and Special Circumstances:

Speech: The Government of Vietnam maintains strict control over all forms of political speech, particularly dissent or speech it deems as critical of the government and/or party. U.S. citizens have been detained, tried, and convicted for political activities (including criticizing the government or its domestic/foreign policies or advocating alternatives to Communist Party rule), possession of political material, and non-sanctioned religious activities (including proselytizing). Authorities have also detained U.S. citizens for posting messages on blogs or online chatrooms that are political or critical of the government. Americans of Vietnamese descent should be especially careful with their online postings.

Association with Groups: Persons whom the Government of Vietnam perceives to be associated with dissident or political groups may be denied entry to Vietnam, prevented from departing, detained, interrogated, placed under surveillance, or even tried and convicted. Note that if arrested, you could be subject to lengthy detention without access to an attorney or family members. Americans of Vietnamese descent should be especially careful about associating with dissident groups. U.S. citizen travelers have been summoned by immigration or local security officials for reasons that are unclear or not explicitly related to any suspected or alleged violation of law. We recommend that U.S. citizens finding themselves in this situation contact the U.S. Embassy or Consulate General immediately for further information and/or assistance.

Travel and Transportation

Traffic Safety and Road Conditions: Traffic in Vietnam is dangerous, chaotic, and undisciplined. Road conditions are poor; traffic accidents are the leading cause of death, severe injury, and emergency evacuation of foreigners in Vietnam. Long-distance buses and trains do not meet U.S. safety standards. Buses and trucks can often be overloaded and travel at high speeds with little regard to other modes of road transportation.

Driving in Vietnam is not comparable to driving in other countries. Vietnamese drivers routinely ignore traffic laws, which causes traffic fatalities on a daily basis. We strongly discourage you from operating a motorcycle or scooter in Vietnam. Vietnamese drivers and pedestrians may not behave in a manner to which Americans are accustomed. If you do choose to operate a motorcycle or scooter in Vietnam, wear a helmet and *always* yield to larger vehicles. Motor bike fatalities are a leading cause of death or serious injury among foreign nationals visiting or living in Vietnam, with several fatalities having occurred on major roads and rural routes within the past year. If you are the victim of a serious motor bike accident in Vietnam, the prognosis for full recovery and survival is low due to Vietnam's poor medical infrastructure. A motorbike license is required to operate a motorcycle or scooter in Vietnam. Motor scooter drivers without a license can be held criminally liable for injuries to or death of a victim in an accident, and you may be held in custody for an extended period of time without the ability to speak to family or a lawyer during the investigation.

Pedestrians should always look carefully *in both directions* before crossing streets, even when using a marked crosswalk with a green "walk" light illuminated or when crossing what is believed to be a one-way street. When walking on sidewalks, be mindful of scooters that may be behind you. Vietnamese commonly drive their scooters on sidewalks.

Because the United States is not a party to the Convention on Road Traffic, international driving permits and U.S. drivers' licenses are **not valid** in Vietnam. Foreigners renting vehicles risk fines, prosecution, and/or imprisonment for driving without a Vietnamese license endorsed for the appropriate vehicle. If you wish to drive in Vietnam, contact the Provincial Public Transportation Service of the Vietnamese Department of Communications and Transport to obtain a Vietnamese driver's license.

Health

We do not pay medical bills. Be aware that U.S. Medicare does not apply overseas.

Medical Insurance: Make sure your health insurance plan provides coverage overseas. Most care providers overseas only accept upfront payments. See our webpage for more information on insurance providers for overseas coverage.

We strongly recommend supplemental insurance to cover medical evacuation as it can cost many thousands of dollars.

It is extremely important that travelers have sufficient funds and/or insurance to cover any potential medical costs. Frequently hospitals will hold onto a patient's passport as collateral for payment, and patients may have difficulty getting their passport back without paying their medical bills in full. Patients who do not pay their medical bills in full also run the risk of being barred from departing the country.

Miscellaneous

Attention U.S. citizens!

Beginning January 1, 2017, the IRS will require that all (Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITINs)
not used on a federal tax return at least once in the last three years will no longer be valid for use on a tax
return. Find more information, please visit our website https://vn.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/internal-revenue-service-u-s-taxes/ or at IRS.gov.
For the info in Vietnamese, please go to: vn.usembassy.gov/vi/u-s-citizen-services-vi/

How to Subscribe/Unsubscribe to this Newsletter

The U.S. Embassy in Hanoi and U.S. Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City are sending this monthly newsletter via the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) as a public service to U.S. citizens in Vietnam.

If you are departing Vietnam after a long stay, please be sure to update your status in STEP: https://step.state.gov/step/

Updating your status if you move away from Vietnam will remove you from the mailing list for this newsletter and other Embassy and Consulate Messages for U.S. citizens in Vietnam.

If you encounter any difficulties or have any questions about the travel registration website, please send an e-mail to CASTEP@state.gov

Please note: Inclusion of Non-U.S. Government links or information does not imply endorsement of contents.

Have an ACS experience to share? Share your story with:

ACShanoi@state.gov

Enroll in STEP to receive security and emergency messages from the U.S. Consulate.