

Vietnam in favour of the dong. All domestic transactions must now be in dong, including rents, hotel bills and domestic contracts. However, exchange counters are available at key shops, hotels and airports. The value of \$1 US is approximately 11,000 dong.

Business Protocol

Generally, business meetings are relaxed affairs, less formal than dealing with Japanese or Chinese delegations. Gifts are not formally exchanged, but like anywhere, they are appreciated. Meetings are an integral part of doing business in Vietnam. Always be prepared for meetings to take far longer than anticipated, so don't plan too many appointments for one day. Tea drinking is an essential business ritual. It is usually considered polite to wait for the senior opposite member to start drinking before you begin. When using a translator in conversation, always face the person you are addressing, try not to talk to your interpreter the whole time. Let your Vietnamese counterpart speak uninterruptedly for a stretch. Do not question him immediately on points you think ought to be dealt with there and then. It is more polite and effective to make notes, bringing up queries when it is your turn to do the speaking. Entertaining is an important part of the business ritual, and generally involves a lot of drinking. It is not necessarily what you drink, but the act of drinking together. This seldom happens at the first meeting.

Communications

Vietnam is one of the most expensive countries in the world for telecommunications. If making a phone call, International Direct Dialing (IDD) is now available to 214 countries. The international dialing code is 84. For Hanoi, dial 84-42 and for Ho Chi Minh City, dial 84-82. Vietnamese telephone numbers typically have five digits.

Making collect calls from private phones is impossible. You have to go to a post office and a charge of \$1 or 11,000 dong will be levied. Ask your hotel operator to try for you.

Telexes are also prevalent and remain the easiest form of international communication. The majority of organizations will have access to a telex machine.

If you want to send a fax from Vietnam, a post office will charge you by the page. Hotels generally charge by the minute. Outgoing faxes can be expensive ranging from US\$10 to \$20 per page, depending on the destination. Vietnam also charges for receiving faxes. Usually \$1 per page at hotels and 50 cents at post offices.

Interpreters

- 1 Interpreters are a necessity for most meetings in Vietnam. Many older officials, particularly in Hanoi, have a limited knowledge of English; however, some may be able to speak French. Most directors and administrators have gone to school in eastern European countries or the former Soviet Union. As a result, they can speak Russian, Czechoslovakian or Romanian. One is more likely to encounter English than French among the younger generation.

Car Rental and Taxis

Hotels or service organizations will supply a car and a driver for approximately US \$35 a day and a minibus for US \$50 per day. In Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, unofficial taxis are on the increase. Trains do not operate to Western standards.