



Vietnam HOLIDAY INFORMATION PACK

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Thank you for choosing to travel with See Asia Differently. We hope that you have a fabulous holiday and return home with some wonderful memories of this incredible region and we look forward to hearing all about it!

This Holiday Information pack has been designed to help you get even more out of your Cambodian holiday with us. We are here every step of the way to assist you; so, if you have any further questions that are not answered in this pack then please get in touch with your Sales or Customer Services representative.

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About Vietnam

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam occupies an area of 329,247sq/km and has a population of almost 90 million people. Unlike other Asian countries, Vietnam stretches for almost 2000 km north to south and this is the reason for the climate variation throughout its regions. Three quarters of Vietnam's territory consists of mountains and hills. The capital is Hanoi and the second largest city Ho Chi Minh City, also known as Saigon, is the cooperative capital of Vietnam. Buddhism is the country's major religion and their main exports are petroleum, rice, coffee, clothing and fish. Vietnam has 54 ethnic groups, each of which has its own traditional culture. The diversity of the ethnic groups is apparent in the many traditional and cultural Vietnamese treasures. These treasures include the various works of art found throughout the country, including sculpture, ceramic, painting, and casting, made from materials such as clay, stone, bronze, steel, wood, and paper.

Most people that visit Vietnam take a 14 day north to south trail (Hanoi to Saigon) covering the highlights of the country and finishing with some relaxing days by the southern beaches & islands. Each part of the country has many hidden treasures and idiosyncrasies offering you different experiences throughout your Vietnam experience.

Some of these destinations are unknown to the outside world, helping the Vietnam visitor feel more of an explorer than a tourist.

A Brief History

Geographically the country of Vietnam as we know it was only established in the early 19th century, however Vietnam's history stretches back thousands of years. Vietnam has one of the longest histories in the world, starting around half a million years ago, with the first settlements on the Red River valley in the north and later extending 1700km south to the Mekong Delta. No other country in Asia has gone through so many changes over such a short period of time as Vietnam. In less than forty years, Vietnamese people were able to place behind all the bitterness and slaughter of the disastrous American and civil War and while transiting from an old communist system to a socialist market economy, focus resiliently on the future.

Hong Bang Period 2879BC – 258BC

It is thought that an early tribal leader formed a political union between 15 primary tribes of the northern Red River Valley. Hung Vuong was the first king in Vietnam and founder of the country. He named his kingdom Van Lang which today means Vietnam.

Thuc & Trieu Dynasty 257 – 111 BC

Thục Phan was an explorer and from Cina who assembled an army that did defeat King Hung Vuong XVIII, the last ruler of the Hong Bang Dynasty. Declaring himself 'King An Duong' he secured this land for his people to prosper at a turbulent time in China. Chinese-orientated historians regard the Trieu Dynasty as Chinese whilst Vietnamese historiography says the dynasty was the government of the Vietnamese nation. Many have struggled therefore, with the issue of whether the Trieu historically should be considered as founders of Vietnam or as foreign invaders.

Han Domination & The Trung Sisters

In 111 BC, the Han Dynasty of China conquered the Nam Viet kingdom as they expanded southwards. This expansion brought what is now northern Vietnam in to modern Guangdong and Guangxi under the new name of Jiaozhi. The Han Empire divided the former kingdom into nine commanderies. In response to this increasingly impressive rule a revolt broke out in A.D. 39, led by Trung Trac and her sister Trung Nhi. These sisters incited the armed revolt that expelled the Han in A.D. 39 and were crowned queens in A.D. 40 renaming the country Linh Nam and marking the end of the first Chinese domination of Vietnam.

Anterior Ly Dynasty

The Early Ly Dynasty dates from A.D. 544 to 602 and was founded by Ly Nam De who is traditionally recognized as the first emperor of Vietnam. Ly Nam De established his capital at Long Bien (modern-day Hanoi) surrounding himself with effective military, leadership and administrative scholars, as well as building fortresses in strategic locations to fend off threats from the north Han and the southern Champa Kingdom.

From this time, the country progressed through various dynasties: From Sui to Tang domination (602–905) Autonomy (905–938) Ngo, Dinh, & Prior Le dynasties (939 – 1009) Ly, Tran, & Ho dynasties (1009 – 1407) Ming domination & Posterior Le Dynasty (1407 – 1527) Divided period (1527 – 1802)

Nguyen Dynasty & French protectorate (1802 – 1945)

The country in this period was called Vietnam and it was the first time it fell under a single authority from the northern border to the point of Ca Mau. France began to see Vietnam as a potential route into the resource – rice provinces of Yunnan and southern China. In 1847 Napoleon III launched an armada of 14 ships, first to take Da Nang then Saigon. Up until the 1920s, Vietnam's fragmented anti – colonial movements were easily controlled by the French secret police. Japanese forces seized full power of the country in March 1945 and imprisoned most of the French army. The Viet Minh moved quickly onto the offensive and when the US forces dropped the first atom bomb on Hiroshima, precipitating the Japanese surrender on August 14th.

Communist North & Capitalist South (1945 – 1975)

The Democratic Republic of Vietnam, established by Ho Chi Minh was not recognized in the Potsdam Agreement in 1945 which marked the end of World War II. Fighting with the French started in 1947 and after \$3billion spend on war by 1954 the French withdrew drawing in America. Clashes continued for decades between the north and south with backers supporting the fight for or against communism with half a million US troops stationed in Vietnam by 1967. With most of the country devastated, Saigon fell to the communist north on 30 April 1975.

Vietnam Today (Socialism after 1975)

Vietnam, a one-party Communist state, has one of south-east Asia's fastest-growing economies and has set its sights on becoming a developed nation by 2020. Despite pursuing economic reform, the ruling Communist Party shows little willingness to give up its monopoly on political power. Vietnam actively suppresses political dissent and religious freedom. Despite the problems, Vietnam has faced since 1975, some Quality of Life indicators are heading in the right direction. According to World Bank figures, the number of Vietnamese living in poverty has dropped from seventy percent in the 1980s to under fifteen percent today, child mortality has fallen, literacy levels are well over ninety percent, and the average life expectancy is now around 75 years compared to 65 in 1990.

Weather

Welcome to the country with 4,510 km of coastline and 3 different weather systems. There is no right or wrong season to visit Vietnam. In most months of the year, you will experience both sunshine and rain in varying quantities. Overall, Vietnam is warm and humid but as you will see bellow, weather can significantly vary from one region to another.

Sapa and the far north:

The best time to visit this region is from October to late March. The best trekking conditions in Sapa are from September to November and March to May. These periods are normally dry with temperatures Ranging to 15-28C in daytime and 1018C at night time. December and January can get very cold and occasionally it can snow. April to September can be quite wet.

North Vietnam:

Hanoi and North Vietnam have a distinct summer and winter season. The cooler and drier winter lasts from November to April with average temperatures ranging 17-22C. During May to October, the summer months, it is hot and humid while July to September are often the wettest months of the year. It is during these months that Junks sailing off to Halong Bay may be stopped due to weather conditions.

South Vietnam:

The average temperatures range between 25-35C all year round. November to end of April are generally the drier months. The temperature and humidity rise towards May. From June to the beginning of November, the chance of tropical thunderstorm is higher especially during late June to August.

Do not let the downpours of our green season stop you from visiting. Streets could turn into streams and rivers during a tropical thunderstorm but all in all water and rain are gone before you know it. Most of all, nature is in its most radiant peak, rice-paddies wear their most vibrant shade of green while different flowers and fruits find their way to the local market stalls.

Main Festivals

- 28th January Tet (Vietnamese New Year)
- February Central Highland Festival/Elephant Race
- 2nd February Huong Pagoda Festival
- 12 to 13th February Whales Festival
- Various Dates Hoi An Full Moon Lantern Festival

*Please note that dates of some festivals can change slightly from year to year.

Before You Leave

Emergency Contact

See Vietnam Differently Emergency Telephone Numbers 24 Hours Emergency: +84 (0)985 459 921 Secondary: +84 (0)912 528 411

See Asia Differently Contact Details

- Cambodian Office Number +855 (0) 63 966 355
- International Number +44 90)208 150 5150
- Cambodian Mobile Number +855 (0) 16 565 496

British Embassy (Hanoi)

4th floor, Central Building, 31 Hai Ba Trung Street, Hoan Kiem District, Hanoi (84 4) Vietnam British Embassy. Hanoi@fco.gov.uk <u>Tel:+84</u> 4 39360500

British nationals who need emergency assistance outside normal office hours should call +84 (0) 4 3936 0500 where they will be given details on how to proceed and how to contact a consular officer if needed.

Visas Requirements

Do I need a Visa to enter Vietnam?

Yes: There was a period that there was exemption for certain nationalities if the stay was less than 15 days but this ended on the 30th June 2017. But now all visitors require a visa if visiting Vietnam.

How to get a Vietnamese Visa?

There are three ways:

1) In Advance (E-Visa) – You can now obtain an e-visa for Vietnam in advance. The visa costs \$45 and payment can be made online via credit or debit card.

*You can apply for your visa in advance by applying here: <u>https://www.govietnamvisa.com</u> or <u>https://www.myvietnamvisa.com</u>

2) In Advance (With See Asia Differently) - If for some reason the online system does not work. As a last resort and for last minute bookings it is possible for us to process your application for an additional \$15 per person.

3) In Advance (Embassy) – Alternatively you can visit the Vietnamese embassy in your country of origin.
The visa in the UK costs £54 + a £6 surcharge to get your passport returned via special delivery.
*Please make sure this is done in advance as to get everything back can take up to 4 weeks.

Additional Information:

- Please make sure that your passport does not expire within 6 months of your holiday. And that your passport has at least one full clean page for the visa and another page for additional stamps.

- If applying for a visa on arrival please make sure that you have 2 passport photographs with you.

- For every day, you are in the country without a valid visa you will have to pay a fine per day.

- Please note that you are no longer need to pay an airport departure tax as this is included in your airline ticket.

Insurance

Travel Insurance is compulsory for anyone travelling on a 'See Asia Differently' holiday and you will be asked to supply us with your insurance details before travelling. Travel insurance can be acquired from a multitude of companies but it is vital that your insurance is comprehensive and covers you for all aspects of the trip you are taking.

Health (Vaccinations)

We recommend that you see your doctor or a travel clinic at least 6 weeks before your departure for general advice on travel risks, malaria, and vaccinations.

Rather than giving out the wrong advice we have found that <u>www.masta.org</u> offers excellent medical advice about recommended vaccinations and malaria advice. With them you can buy a number of useful products including mosquito repellent, malaria tablets and many other forms of travel related products. An alternative you might like to try the Travelpharm.

If you are currently taking medicine or drugs, whether prescription or not, please make sure that you take a sufficient supply to last through your trip. Also ensure that you have insurance for accident and sickness. If you need a doctor while in Vietnam, you must be prepared to pay for these services and claim it back on your insurance on your return to your home country. Ensure you keep all receipts and it is recommended that you take a copy of your prescription with you.

Money, Expenses & Credit Cards

The local currency is Vietnamese Dong (VND), but US dollars are also widely accepted. There are presently bank notes in circulation in dominations of: 100, 200, 500, 1000, 2000, 5000, 10000, 20000, 50000 and 100000 Dong. Only recently, coins were reintroduced in denominations of 200d, 500d, 1000d, 2,000d and 5,000d.

You can only change VND into US dollars with a plane ticket showing your onward destination.

Only change money at official money exchange counters with a clear sign showing this status. Illegal exchange places like gold shops may offer a higher rate and you may risk losing your money. Credit cards are now widely accepted, however outside main tourist areas cash is the only acceptable currency and it may be difficult to cash travellers' cheques.

ATMs are available in major cities and tourist areas. Funds can be transferred to Vietnam via international money transfer companies like Western Union or Moneygram. Best currency to take: US dollars. Cash can be used at many places. The exchange rate for US dollars is better than for other currencies.

The rate and T/C commission varies slightly between banks and cities. Not much difference in rate between T/C and cash. The rate is slightly higher for larger notes. When price is quoted in US\$, you can pay in dollars or Vietnamese Dong. Sometimes paying in VND is better because of the exchange rate they use.

What to Pack

Wear light and airy clothing to protect yourself from the sun during the day and mosquitoes at night. The sun can be quite intense at times so bring a hat, sunglasses, and sunscreen. Carry a lightweight rain coat during the green season in case of an afternoon shower and a warmer but light jacket for the nights in rural and mountainous regions.

Wear practical shoes when visiting temples and monuments. You may climb narrow steps and walk on uneven surfaces. As in all travel in warm climates, pack light and sensibly.

Our list of essentials:

- Passport (with photocopies)
- Travel insurance (with photocopies)
- Airline tickets (with photocopies)
- 2 Passport photographs for visa on entry (bring 4 to 6 as backup)
- USD cash and travellers checks
- Credit or debit card
- Flashlight
- Sun hat, sun block, sunglasses and after sun (just in case)
- Walking shoes/sport sandals
- Waterproof jacket (just in case)
- Camera, additional memory cards and camera charger
- Travel power adapters
- Insect repellent

• First-aid kit (should contain lip salve, aspirin, band aids, anti-histamine, Imodium, or similar tablets for mild cases of diarrhoea, re-hydration powder, extra prescription drugs)

Recommended Reading & Films

We are aware that you may want to do some background reading into Vietnam before your trip. There are a number of different books available but here are the top 3 that we recommend:

The Quiet American

This novel by Graham Greene is a story about idealistic foreign policy and its brutal consequences. It's a great read while traveling through Vietnam. It provides a glimpse into what revolutionary Vietnam was like in Saigon during French occupation. Crack this open in a Saigon cafe.

A Dragon Apparent

A poignant description of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam in 1950 with all their beauty, gentleness, grandeur and intricate political balance intact. This lost world from the ashes of the Vietnam war and its aftermath shows the Vietnamese guerrilla movement in its infancy, ranged against the French colonial powers, and the early effects of imported Western materialism.

Destination Saigon

Author Walter Mason provides a taste of the real and contemporary Vietnam and its people on a sometimes funny, but always fascinating journey from the bustling cities to out of the way villages, into Buddhist monasteries and along the Mekong. This is a real delight for armchair travellers and those contemplating their own adventure.

During your Travel

Responsible Travel

Vietnam is a safe country in which to travel and it is most unlikely that you will find yourself with any problems during your holiday. Just be as careful as you would be in your home country and use your common sense. For example: Don't make it easy for thieves by putting your passport or cash in your back pocket and don't take expensive jewellery with you.

You will be seen as a role model here and you're also an ambassador for yourself and your home country. Set a good example at all times in the way your dress, your behaviour, and your time keeping. Be aware that whilst the vast majority of people and organisations are genuine, there are some known instances where this is not the case. Be aware of mothers asking you to buy them milk powder for their babies. The babies are not receiving the milk and are being exploited so the older children and adults can make money by returning the milk powder to the shop after the donor has left.

Avoid paying for simples acts of kindness with cash, a thank you is sufficient. Giving money to adults and children promotes a culture of begging, which is not sustainable. In particular, don't give money or food to children; if you must do something then a payment for goods of services (postcards or shoeshine) is better, thought even better is only transacting with adults.

Dental care is limited in parts of Asia, so it's best not to give sweets or chocolate. If you want to help then supporting local NGOs and hiring local guides and drivers, going to local restaurants, and buying locally are your best contribution.

Do's and Don'ts

Do avoid behaviour that causes embarrassment to another party.

Do bring fruit, sweets or incense as a gift.

Do dress modestly when visiting temples and Pagodas and do not swim naked or topless in public.

Do use both hands to pass things and do not pass anything over someone's head.

Do always ask first for permission before you take someone's photo and do not photograph anything to do with the military.

Do avoid public displays of affection with a member of opposite sex. Anything beyond holding hands is seriously frowned upon.

Don't sit with your feet pointing towards people or family altars. Don't sit down until shown where to sit and allow elderly people sitting down first.

Don't cause the Vietnamese to 'lose face', extremely important in East Asia.

Don't give gifts of handkerchiefs, anything black, yellow flowers or chrysanthemums.

Don't take video cameras into minorities villages, they are considered to be too intrusive.

Don't Lose your temper in Vietnam this means loss of face.

Please don't litter and picking up rubbish sets a good example for Vietnamese youths.

Language

The national language is Vietnamese. English is commonly used in most tourist centres and establishments. Most people you meet in Vietnam, outside of any travel-related businesses, will have a very limited (if any) knowledge of English.

Some people will be able to understand a bit of French, which was taught in schools as a foreign language and few, especially those from the north of Vietnam, will have some knowledge of Russian. Chinese and Japanese, are also spoken by some young people.

Here are a few words that we have spelt out phonetically that may help you on your way:

Hello – xin chao (sin chow) I'm a vegetarian – toi an chay Thank you – cam on ban Goodbye – tam biet Yes – vang No – khong Excuse me/I'm sorry – xin loi/toi xin loi One Beer Please – mot ly bia No thank you – khong cam on ban How much – bao nhieu

Numbers:

- **1** mot **6** sau
- **2** hai **7** bay
- **3** ba **8** tam
- 4 bon 9 chin
- **5** nam **10** dieu nay

Food and Drink

To understand Vietnamese cuisine, one has to take into account the country's unique historical and social influences that have shaped their thinking and attitude towards food. Being a former colonial country in the Southeast Asia, Vietnam has been the context of various cultural and historical fusions.

The development of its cuisine from the earliest times bears the marks of new influences from other countries and tastes, helping to make a truly rich and unique collection of dishes that reflect the country's history. Vietnamese food is one of the healthiest cuisines around the world and quickly becoming popular in the more health-conscious societies.

In Vietnam meals, usually are not divided into courses and everything is served at once. A meal is not complete without vegetables on the side and a variety of small bowls filled with salty sauces in which to dip your food. Vegetables are usually served as salads tossed in with beef or shrimp, in order to complement the strong flavour of the meaty main dish. The classic dip is a kind of salty fish sauce called Nuoc Mam.

Tipping, Bartering & Tuk Tuk's

Unlike in Europe and America, Vietnam doesn't have a specific rule on tipping. It is up to you how much you tip, generally tip is not expected. as it is not expected. Tip if you feel that your experience has been enhanced, but don't leave too much as sometimes it can be slightly insulting. Saying this, sometimes there are a few exceptions, tourist guides and porters traditionally rely on tips to build up their wages.

Prices of goods in supermarkets, pharmacies, restaurants, hotels, official transport, basic commodity shops, and so on are usually fixed.

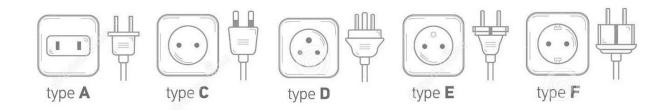
When in local markets don't be afraid to barter most of the shop owners will at least double their price. Keeping your sense of humour is most important and remember that no shop owner will sell you something at a loss. Always think of your ideal value before you start to barter.

For richkshaws, tuk tuks, mottos, and all taxies in Asia, always bargain first and make sure that you agree on the price before you start the service.

Electricity

24 hours' electricity is available in all major population centres and all district capitals. For more details please check on: <u>http://www.powerplugadapter.uk/vietnam</u> **Voltage:** 220 V **Frequency:** 50 Hz Electricity

Power Sockets in Vietnam:



Communications

The country code for Vietnam is +84. Mobile phone coverage is sufficient and you can get a SIM card which allows you to make calls from your own mobile phone as long as you get your phone unlocked before you travel. The cost is just a few dollars and can be bought in many street side stores. The easiest solution is for you to create a Skype or WhatsApp account before you leave home as there is internet pretty much everywhere in Vietnam. The best solution however is to leave all your worries and technology at home and completely switch off.

Internet

Internet access is available in many hotels, guesthouses, and restaurants in big cities. Although internet cafes are often available in provincial capitals, and it is difficult to connect on the internet in rural areas.

Our Recommendations

We believe that in parts of your holiday you should follow your instinct as to where to eat, drink and what to do in your spare time as people's tastes vary dramatically. However, in this section we have listed a few of our favourite places to give you a helping hand.

Hanoi (Restaurants):

Quan An Ngon

Described as street food without the street, excellent quality, and extensive Vietnamese dishes.

Green Tangerine

Green Tangerine is housed in a restored colonial French villa built in 1928. Check-out their charming open courtyard with lush green plants and cobblestone floor. Just like the villa's interior design the cuisine here is French/Vietnamese fusion. Probably Hanoi's best alfresco restaurant.

Club De L'Oriental

This is a Vietnamese fine-dining restaurant with the highest quality of food and service. Located in the heart of the city, near Hanoi Opera House, the L'Oriental's bar has 10,000 bottles of different types of wine, which makes it one of the largest wine bars in Southeast Asia.

Bobby Chin

For intimate dining with Western and Vietnamese menu, this restaurant is situated within the home of chef and restaurateur Bobby Chinn. The intimate style is reflected in the furnishings and artwork from Chinn's private collection. Guests can choose from two silk-lined dining rooms to sample the award-winning cuisine or relax in the lounge with an Egyptian shisha pipe. Bobby's menus are always inspired by the freshest seasonally available ingredients and exclusively organic produce. We recommend their customized tasting menus prepared at customer's request (24-hour advance notice is advisable).

Hanoi (Bars & Pubs):

The Rooftop Bar & Restaurant

Address: 83B Ly Thuong Kiet street, Hoan Kiem District, Hanoi Phone: 04 3946 1901

Summit Lounge Bar

Address: 1 Thanh Nien street, Tay Ho District, Hanoi Phone: 04 3823 8888

17 Seventeen Saloon Club

Address: 98B Tran Hung Dao street, Hoan Kiem District, Hanoi Phone: 04 3942 6822

Frunky Buddha Club

Address: Ta Hien street, Hoan Kiem District, Hanoi Phone: 04 3292 7614

Hanoi (Spa's & Massages):

Just Massage

Began in late 2007 as collaboration between Action for the City, a local NGO and an international NGO to create a place for young adults with visual impairments to learn the art of massage and earn a fair wage from their skills. Address: 237 Au Co street, Tay Ho District, Hanoi Phone: 04 3718 2737

Thu Cuc Spa

Address: 57 Nguyen Khac Hieu street, Ba Dinh District, Hanoi Phone: 04 3715 0316

QT Anam Spa

Address: 26-28 Le Thai To street, Hoan Kiem District, Hanoi Phone: 04 3928 6116

Ho Chi Minh (Restaurants):

Temple Club

Housed on the 2nd floor of a beautiful colonial-era villa offers a good selection of delectable Vietnamese and western dishes, including vegetarian specialties, alongside a spectrum of cocktails.

Ly Club

Vietnamese and Western menu, all-day restaurant with a wide selection of high quality food and beverage choices at good value.

Thao Dien Village

Vietnamese, Western, Thai and Italian menu, set in a secluded, verdant garden and occupying 1.2 hectares along the Saigon River, Thao Dien Village is a tropical hideaway 20 minutes from the city centre. Ideal for those looking for a romantic getaway or celebrating a special occasion.

Hoa Tuc Restaurant

Vietnamese menu with the desire to explore new avenues in Vietnamese cooking. Set in one of Saigon's old opium refineries, Hoa Tuc was build and designed locally with custom made wrought iron furniture, cast iron lamps and pergolas.

Ho Chi Minh (Bars & Pubs):

Saigon Bar

This historic bar on the roof-top of Caravelle Hotel is a good place to admire the skyline and listen to live Cuban music. During the Vietnam War 'Saigon Saigon Bar' was the watering hole of the daily war correspondents. In those days - before the construction of the much taller Sheraton Hotel nearby - the view from the rooftop bar, looked uninterruptedly across the Saigon River so the journalists had a clean view of the fighting as they relaxed with a few beers and shared war stories. Open 11:30am with live music from 9:00pm and closes midnight

Chill Sky Bar

Chill Sky Bar is located on 26th floor of AB Tower that you can expect great views, stellar service and perfectly rendered cocktails. Open @ 8:00 - 8:30pm until midnight

Lush Bar

After undergoing a refurbishment and opening a new svelte outdoor area, this stylish nightclub is a popular place, playing the latest in R&B, hip-hop and house, Lush is packed until late every night of the week. Open 8:00pm until midnight.

Gossip Discotheque

Gossip Club is a large club is very popular with the local, overseas Vietnamese and expat crowd. Generally packed on weekends. Open 9:00pm until mid-night or 2:00am

Ho Chi Minh (Bars & Pubs):

Anam QT Spa

Anam QT Spa is one of the first deluxe spas in Vietnam with over seven years of professional operation in Saigon, it has been awarded the best spa in Ho Chi Minh City.

Sen Spa

Address: Miss Ao Dai building, 21 Nguyen Trung Ngan street, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City Phone: 08 3910 2174

Thann Spa

Address: Nguyen Du Park Villa, 111 Nguyen Du street, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City TEL: 08 3822 0885