

Fact sheet 2: Vietnam – the place and the people

Vietnam is the easternmost country on the Indochina peninsula in Southeast Asia. Vietnam can be described as an 'S'-shaped country, bordered by China to the north, Laos to the northwest, Cambodia to the southwest, and the South China Sea to the east. In 2007 it had a population of over 87 million, which made it the 13th most populous country in the world.

A long, narrow coastal plain links the Red River delta in the north and Mekong River delta in the south. The country is 1650 kilometres from north to south (similar to the length of New Zealand) although Vietnam's total land area is larger than New Zealand's. The Annamite Mountains (ãy Trường Sơn) stretch the length of Vietnam and cover about two-thirds of the country. The highest peak is Fan-si-Pan (3143 metres) in the extreme north.

Climate

The climate of Vietnam can be divided into three distinct zones: the southern lowlands have a tropical climate, the central highlands are wet with a temperate climate, and the mountainous north is cooler. Typhoons can affect the north and central areas between July and November.

People

Most of Vietnam's people live in the Red River and Mekong River deltas. Only about 22% of the population lives in urban areas. Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) is the largest settlement with a population of 4 million, followed by Hanoi, the capital city, with 3 million, and Haiphong with 1.5 million.

Around 80% of the population are ethnic Vietnamese. There are also around 53 ethnic minority groups, the largest being Chinese, Thai, Khmer and Cham people.

Most Vietnamese are Buddhist. Due to strong Chinese influence Confucianism and Taoism are also followed. Christianity, predominantly Roman Catholicism, was established in Vietnam due largely to France's colonisation of the area during the 19th and 20th centuries.

Southeast Asia

Vietnam is part of a sub-region of Asia, consisting of the countries that are geographically south of China, east of India and north of Australia. It consists of two geographic regions:

- the Asian mainland: Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam
- the island states: Brunei, Timor-Leste, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore.

Since the end of the Second World War this region has become increasingly important to New Zealand. During the 1950s and 1960s New Zealand was involved in armed conflicts in both Malaysia and Indonesia. In more recent times New Zealand service personnel have played a role in Timor-Leste (East Timor) as United Nations peacekeepers.

Southeast Asia has become an important region as far as New Zealand's international trade is concerned. Increasing numbers of people from this region have also migrated to New Zealand.

Activities

1. There is a map available from Vietnamwar.govt.nz but sometimes it helps to let students explore maps and locations for themselves. Use the blank map outline provided to **identify and label** Vietnam's neighbours as well as the following features (if you don't have access to atlases there are many good online maps/atlas you could refer to):

- Hanoi
- Ho Chi Minh City
- Haiphong
- Mekong River and its delta
- Red River and its delta
- Red River
- Nui Dat
- 17th parallel (younger students might need to have the term parallel explained to them)
- Hue
- Da Nang

2. Use the maps and these facts about the region to discuss what relevance Vietnam has to New Zealand.

3. While there are many differences between Vietnam and New Zealand there are also a number of similarities. Use the information from this fact sheet and any other sources you can find to draw up a chart that compares Vietnam and New Zealand.

Useful online resources for country information and statistics include [Global Education](#) and the [Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade](#)

