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# VIETNAM TOURISM

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ARTHUR ASA BERGER

*Arthur Asa Berger, PhD*

## **Vietnam Tourism**



*Pre-publication  
REVIEWS,  
COMMENTARIES,  
EVALUATIONS . . .*

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*Head, School of Hospitality,  
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Victoria University,  
Australia*





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Arthur Asa Berger, PhD



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## CONTENTS

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>xi</b>
<i>Ross K. Dowling, PhD</i>	
<b>Preface</b>	<b>xiii</b>
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	<b>xvii</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
A Note on Ethnography	1
The Design of the Book	2
Why People Become Tourists: Uses and Gratifications	2
<b>PART I: VIETNAM AS A TOURIST DESTINATION— AN ANALYTIC PERSPECTIVE</b>	
<b>Chapter 1. The Pros and Cons of Vietnam Tourism</b>	<b>9</b>
Statistics on Tourism in Vietnam, Thailand, and Cambodia	9
Visitors in Vietnam by Country in 2001	10
Some Problems of Vietnam's Tourism Industry	12
Benefits of Vietnam As a Tourist Destination	15
<b>Chapter 2. The Consumer Culture and Vietnam</b>	<b>21</b>
Tourism and Consumer Cultures: The Grid-Group Typology	21
Consumer Cultures and Tourist Choices	24
Travel Preferences in Vietnam and Cultural Alignments	25
About Imagining, Interpreting, and Remembering Vietnam	27
<b>PART II: VIRTUAL VIETNAM—IMAGINING VIETNAM</b>	
<b>Chapter 3. Vietnam: Image and Reality</b>	<b>33</b>
Vietnam As an Imagined Place	33
Pico Iyer's Picture of Saigon and Hanoi	34
Two Writers on the Vietnamese Passion for Food	35
The Vietnam War	37



<b>Chapter 4. Touring Vietnam in Safety and Comfort</b>	<b>41</b>
Logistics	41
TF Handspan Group Tour Itinerary	44
Annie, Thu, and Problems with Names	46
Adventure Wear and Magic Glasses: I Go High Tech	47
Teaching the Vietnamese About American Culture	49
Escaping with One's Life While Touring Vietnam	50
A Rainbow the Day We Leave	52
On the Matter of Vietnam's Appeal for Tourists	52
 <b>PART III: SEMIOTIC VIETNAM—INTERPRETING THE COUNTRY</b>	
 <b>Chapter 5. Understanding Vietnam: Culture and Geography</b>	 <b>57</b>
Scholarly Approaches to Studying Foreign Cultures	57
The Ideas of Roland Barthes	58
<i>Quoc Ngu</i> : The Vietnamese Written Language	61
The Cao Dai Cathedral at Tay Ninh	64
Sapa and the Hill-Tribe Girls	65
The Mekong Delta	67
Hanoi	69
Ho Chi Minh City/Saigon	72
 <b>Chapter 6. Exploring Vietnam's Culture: Food and Entertainment</b>	 <b>75</b>
<i>Pho</i>	75
Nuoc Mam (Fish Sauce)	77
Vietnamese Metal Coffee Pots	78
Spring Rolls	78
<i>Non La</i> (Conical Hats)	79
<i>Ao Dai</i> : The Traditional Vietnamese Costume for Women	81
Ho Chi Minh's Body	82
General Giap: The Snow-Covered Volcano	83
Green Pith Helmets	85
Cu Chi Tunnels	87
CD Cafés	88

Dong and Dollars	89
<i>Roi Nuoc</i> (Water Puppets)	90
<b>PART IV: REMEMBERING VIETNAM— BACK IN THE UNITED STATES</b>	
<b>Chapter 7. Reflections on Touring Vietnam</b>	<b>97</b>
A Jumble of Memories	97
The Actual Vietnam versus the Virtual Vietnam	103
Street Cultures and House Cultures	105
An Age-Old Question	106
<b>Chapter 8. Conclusion</b>	<b>109</b>
The Tourist As Stranger in a Strange Land	109
A Final Word	110
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>Index</b>	<b>113</b>

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Arthur Asa Berger** is Professor Emeritus of Broadcast and Electronic Communication Arts at San Francisco State University, where he taught from 1965 to 2002. He also taught at the University of Milan in 1963-1964 as a Fulbright Scholar and at the Heinrich Heine University in Dusseldorf in 2001 as a Fulbright Senior Specialist. He received his BA in literature and philosophy from the University of Massachusetts and his MA in journalism from the University of Iowa, where he also attended the Writers' Workshop. He received his PhD in American studies from the University of Minnesota, where he wrote his dissertation on Al Capp's satirical comic strip, *Li'l Abner*.

He is the author of 50 books on popular culture, media, humor, and everyday life and has published more than 100 articles in various journals. His books have been translated into German, Swedish, Italian, Korean, Chinese, and Turkish. He has lectured in a dozen countries during the course of his career. Berger is also an artist and has illustrated a number of his books, as well as books by others. Among his books are *Media Analysis Techniques*; *Essentials of Mass Communication Theory*; *Bloom's Morning: Coffee, Comforters and the Secret Meaning of Everyday Life*; *Ads, Fads and Consumer Culture*; *An Anatomy of Humor*; *Ocean Travel and Cruising: A Cultural Analysis*, and three mysteries that also function as textbooks: *Postmortem for a Postmodernist*; *The Mass Comm Murders: Five Media Theorists Self-Destruct*; and *Durkheim Is Dead: Sherlock Holmes Is Introduced to Social Theory*. Dr. Berger is married to Phyllis Wolfson, who taught philosophy at Diablo Valley College until her recent retirement. They have two children and two grandchildren. He lives in Mill Valley, California, and can be reached by e-mail at [aberger@sfsu.edu](mailto:aberger@sfsu.edu).

Why is travel so exciting? Partly because it triggers the thrill of escape, from the constriction of the daily, the job, the boss, the parents. “A great part of the pleasure of travel,” says Freud, “lies in the fulfillment of . . . early wishes to escape the family and especially the father.” The escape is also from the traveler’s domestic identity, and among strangers a new sense of selfhood can be tried on, like a costume. The anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss notes that a traveler takes a journey not just in space and time (most travel being to places more ancient than the traveler’s home) but “in the social hierarchy as well”; and he has noticed repeatedly that arriving in a new place, he has suddenly become rich (travelers to Mexico, China, or India will know the feeling). The traveler’s escape, at least since the Industrial Age, has also been from the ugliness and racket of Western cities, and from factories, parking lots, boring turnpikes, and roadside squalor.

Paul Fussell (Ed.)  
*The Norton Book of Travel*



## Foreword

Vietnam is a tourist's paradise, and I believe that it is the best travel destination in the world today. The country is a magical mix of natural, cultural, and historical delights that appeals to emerging new travelers who seek more than the usual replication of their own culture in a far-off land. Straddling the edge of Southeast Asia, Vietnam demarcates the edge of the Indochina peninsula as it abuts the Pacific Ocean from the South China Sea to the Gulf of Tonkin. The country's lengthy coastline, which stretches from the Mekong Delta in the south to the Red River Delta in the north, contains beautiful beaches and a range of other coastal landforms. The lowland plains are covered in a rich tapestry of green rice paddies, and inland the country rises to include cooler plateaus and forested mountains. Three-quarters of the country are either hilly or mountainous, forming the borders with Laos and Cambodia.

People—nearly 80 million of them, and growing—are everywhere. Today it is the thirteenth most populated country in the world, yet, as with all travel, a beautiful land and wonderful climate mean little for the tourist unless the host nation is friendly and willing to embrace visitors. The Vietnamese people excel at hospitality; visitors are greeted by warm smiles, friendly hosts, and an interest in where they come from and what they are doing in the country. Then there is the food. Although established as a firm favorite across the globe, this is the source and it is good! One of the main delights in visiting the country is sampling its outstanding cuisine. *Com* (rice) and *pho* (noodle soup) are the staple foods and these are complemented by chicken, beef, pork, and seafood. Vegetables and fruits are widely available. The Vietnamese bread, a legacy from the French, is wonderful.

Add to the land and the people the complex history and the unique culture of the country, and Vietnam looms large on the horizon of must-see nations. Thus it is extremely timely that Arthur Berger has written this extraordinary book that combines a unique blend of travelog and insightful commentary on a nation in transition. He writes with the authority of a leading global scholar but manages to



present stunning word pictures of Vietnam, conjuring images that simply leap off the page. An accomplished wordsmith, Berger's writing takes the reader straight to the core of the land and its people, giving it a sense of place in our hearts and minds. He delivers a wealth of information while adding a smorgasbord of insights, providing the reader with a multitude of vignettes of everyday life in this historic land.

Berger's book is unique in its ethnographic approach, through which he tries to understand the deeper significance of the sights and experiences. This can be likened to a major leap forward in travel books as Berger deconstructs his perceptions and experiences of Vietnam to give greater meaning to the country as a tourist destination. He does this through the four approaches of analyzing, imagining, interpreting, and reflecting on the country. For the reader trying to understand Vietnam in a more meaningful manner than merely glancing over the glossy brochures and slick guidebooks, Berger delivers a wonderful portrayal of the richness, intensity, and diversity of life available to be observed by a tourist.

This work stands apart from nearly all other travel books that I have read. The author presents a travel guide and travel book. Scholarly commentary on the country is woven throughout the pages, combined with insightful views on Vietnam and its place in history and the world. Arthur Berger manages to energize the traditional tourism discourse, enhancing the written word by integrating his pretour, tour, and posttour thoughts and experiences by his comparison of the virtual and actual Vietnam.

This book is sensational. The reader will thoroughly enjoy it and also will ruminate over it long afterward.

*Ross K. Dowling, PhD  
Foundation Professor of Tourism  
Edith Cowan University  
Australia*

## Preface

Vietnam is a long, thin, vaguely “S”-shaped country that hugs the eastern coast of the Indochina peninsula, clutching tightly to Laos and Cambodia, as if it were afraid it might suddenly fall off into the South China Sea. Only thirty miles wide at its narrowest point, with major rice-producing areas in the north and south, it is a long, thin country somewhat reminiscent of Chile, with Chile’s pencil-thin shape.

Vietnam has four major cities—Hanoi, with approximately 1.5 million inhabitants, Haiphong, with around 1 million, Da Nang with 350,000 in the central area, and the gigantic conurbation of Ho Chi Minh City, in reality a province, with somewhere between 6 and 8 million inhabitants covering an enormous geographical area. The rest of the cities are much smaller.

With nearly 80 million people, half of whom are under thirty, Vietnam is the thirteenth most populated country in the world and also has one of the youngest populations. Curiously, except for the Vietnam War, as people in the United States called it (the Vietnamese call it the American War), and news stories about atrocities committed during the war that appear in news headlines occasionally, one reads relatively little about Vietnam in the American press. Generally, only during times of natural disaster or a trade dispute do we hear about Vietnam.

It is as if Americans, in a collective act of willful repression, have forced the country out of their minds, perhaps because the television images of it, and hence our memories, are so terrible.

So it is a great surprise, when you visit the country, to find that it is full of gentle, friendly people. The Vietnamese generally like Americans and, although our military was driven out many years ago, we still have a considerable presence there in the form of dollar bills, which are a parallel currency to the Vietnamese dong.

The Vietnamese are an incredibly hardworking people and although they are poor by Western standards, they seem to be spirited and happy. A richness and delicacy is found in their culture, a lightness and joyfulness that is quite wonderful. And their food is simply