

VIETNAM



History

- Vietnamese immigration to the U.S. is characterized by three distinct waves of immigration.
 - The first wave of immigration occurred at the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. ~60,000 Vietnamese left with the aid of the U.S. Another 70,000 fled on their own.
 - The second wave of immigration was from 1975 to 1977. These immigrants left for political or economic reasons and often escaped by sea.
 - The third wave of immigration started in 1978 when the Chinese invaded northern Vietnam. Many ethnic Chinese fled Vietnam by boat without any financial resources.
 - Currently, many Vietnamese return home after working for a few years in the U.S.
- ~ 1.2 million Vietnamese live in the U.S. (2000 Census)
- Vietnamese Americans tend to live in urban areas in western and Gulf States. Approximately 40% in California and 12% in Texas.

Culture and Social Values

- In the U.S., Vietnamese families live together often with three generations. Assimilation is slower and elders often decide on practices.
- The Vietnamese hold high esteem for and interdependence among family members as well as deep respect for elders. Misconduct by an individual reflects upon the entire family.
- An individual's namesake is highly valued. A good name is more important than any material possession, and can determine whether or not a person will be respected.
- Education is valued; a child's academic success is considered a reflection of the entire family.
- Extended families settle with or near one another. Family members are encouraged to live in the same house, next door or at least in the same neighborhood.
- The father and grandfather have the utmost authority. Vietnamese show great respect for elders, superiors, and strangers.
- The mother usually works in the home, managing domestic duties such as food shopping and preparation, although younger Vietnamese women are moving into the workforce.

Health Concerns

- Conditions common to Southeast Asians which may compromise their nutritional status.

- SUNDS (Sudden Unexpected Nocturnal Death Syndrome)
- Inactive form of tuberculosis (50-60% of immigrants to the U.S. test positive)
- Intestinal parasites and malaria
- Dental problems due to chronic malnutrition
- Liver and renal disease
- Obesity rates are currently very low; overweight increases with length of stay in the U.S. Overweight is considered the result of eating American food.
- High incidence of low-birth weight babies due to poor maternal weight gain during pregnancy. Weight gain is associated with difficult delivery.
- Tend to be lactose-intolerant. Calcium intake is low.
- Iron intake is marginal, especially among children.
- Vietnamese tend to be suspicious of biomedicine, and are likely to postpone medical assistance until they are very ill.
- Vietnamese may be fearful of invasive laboratory tests; especially blood tests because they believe it may upset the body's balance.

Health Beliefs

- Health is related to personal destiny and is affected by behavior in a past life, the individual, and their ancestors. Good deeds or bad behavior can influence health status. Pleasing the good spirits and avoiding the evil spirits are also believed to impact health. Being unhappy, stressed and worried can cause poor health. When ill, older people will pray as they believe a dead person might be doing something to them.
- Vietnamese believe three separate souls represent the body—life force, intelligence, and emotion—while nine vital spirits provide assistance to the souls. Soul loss can be an important reason for illness. Strong emotions can cause the soul to leave the body.
- Herbal remedies, tonics, massage, and avoiding excess are a way to maintain good health. Many do not trust western medicine and consider it as a last resort.
- Traditionally, mental illness falls into the spiritual realm and is treated by traditional healers. Southeast Asians would rarely seek western psychological help for anxiety or depression.
- Traditional Chinese Medicine is practiced by Chinese Vietnamese (North). Maintaining a balance between yin and yang, especially through diet and treatment of disease, is a primary health consideration.
- Vietnamese saying: “Chew when you eat, think when you speak.”

Food Management Practices

- Women have traditionally been the primary food buyers and preparers, while men have been the financial providers. As the traditional patriarchy is slowly eroding and Vietnamese women are attaining higher levels of education, men are now helping with shopping and cooking.
- Surveys indicate that approximately 60% of girls and 35% of boys are totally responsible for preparing dinner each evening.



- There is a significant decline in families eating meals together.

Foods

- For Vietnamese immigrants the cost of food is a primary determinant of food eaten. More elaborate dishes are eaten only on holidays and celebrations.
- Rice is the staple of the diet; rice is served with vegetables, meat and fish are used as condiments
- *Pho* is the very popular noodle based soup (top photo). Can be made with just vegetables, tofu, chicken, beef or pork.
- Nuoc mam sauce is a ubiquitous condiment made from fermented fish. (bottom photo)



- “Without fish sauce or salt, life is nothing.”–Vietnamese saying
- Soy products in the form of tofu and tempeh are popular. Most Vietnamese are lactose intolerant; some will drink a soy beverage.
- Fish, poultry and pork are the predominant protein sources eaten in small amounts; most parts of the animal are used including the brains, heart, lungs and spleen. Fried noodles topped with meats and vegetables are a favorite.
- Tofu is eaten in stews with tomato, boiled in fish sauce, in soup, fried but not grilled. Soy milk and beverage is common.
- A variety of green leafy vegetables are consumed. Kinh Gioi (photo on left) La Lot (photo on right)



- Wheat is used to make French bread but in U.S., the most common use of white bread is in Vietnamese sandwiches. This is a six-inch roll filled with meat and *Nuoc mam* sauce.
- Fresh fruits and vegetables are important components of the diet.
 - Bananas, oranges, pineapples, mangoes, papayas are popular; canned food is not.
 - Fresh leafy vegetables top rice or noodles with a hot broth poured over the top.
 - Uncooked vegetables are often served in the form of salads and pickles

- Tea is the preferred beverage and is served before or after meals.
- Rice paper is used as egg roll or wonton wrappers. In the dish *cha gio*, the moistened paper is wrapped around a variety of meats, fish, vegetables, and herbs and then deep fried. Vietnamese summer rolls are not fried and include shrimp or tofu, rice noodles and Thai basil. (top photo)
- A special-occasion dish, called *goi go*, is shredded chicken and cabbage. (bottom photo)
- Chinese, French and Indian customs have strongly influenced the Vietnamese cuisine.



Specific Food Practices

- Vietnamese eat two or three meals daily depending on finances. Snacking is uncommon.
- There are no specific foods associated with breakfast, lunch or dinner; i.e., soups are usually consumed at every meal.
- All meals are served family style.
- Chopsticks (from the Chinese) are used for most dishes, though spoons and fingers may be considered appropriate for certain foods.
- Ancestors are honored on the anniversary of their death with a special celebration and meal.
- Pregnancy
 - Observance of am and duong (hot and cold) helps maintain balance in meals, and is considered especially important during pregnancy. Warm foods are encouraged during pregnancy.
 - During pregnancy, women are encouraged to eat black chicken (also known as silkies). They are very small and usually consumed in a deeply flavored, aromatic, amber-colored soup, simmered or steamed with ginger, ginseng, dried wolfberries and dried red dates, also known as jujubes. The broth is usually served clear, but occasionally it has bits of meat in it.
 - Seafood is encouraged so the baby will be born smart.
 - Other foods can influence the baby: egg yolk and papaya with help a girl's skin; coconuts will keep a baby's skin light and smooth.
- After birth
 - Most Vietnamese mothers breastfeed their babies for one year; traditions encourage longer nursing.
 - Encouraged to eat more ginger which is considered warm; beef, shrimp and fish are discouraged; chicken and pork are encouraged; no noodle soup; hot water is okay but not cold water.
 - Soup made of pig foot, a green vegetable similar to water spinach, and rice is encouraged.
- At one month of age, sacrifices are offered to the gods so that the gods will care for the baby in his following life. Relatives and close friends of parents are invited to have a small party. Sticky rice with green beans is served (North) and sticky rice and red beans is served (South). Twelve foods are offered each with a prayer.
- Organ meats are consumed in the belief that they will benefit like human organs.



A packet of glutinous rice in a traditional

Major Celebrations

- *Tết* (Lunar New Year) is the biggest holiday and cultural event; it is usually at the end of January or the beginning of February. It is celebrated in Vietnam with a two week holiday and family gatherings.
 - The celebration consists of numerous rituals including visiting family grave sites and offering gifts and food.

- On the *Tết* New Year's Eve, Vietnamese immigrants will go into the street for midnight prayers. This is followed by a meal including boiled chicken, cake and candies. They drink wine and beer. Fresh fruit is eaten as it is thought to bring good luck: pineapple, oranges, grapefruit, bananas. If they can, they take time off of work at this time of year.



A banana leaf covering a filling of rice, green beans and pork

- *Bánh chưng* is a special treat. It is sticky rice with green beans and pork inside a banana leaf. (photo) On *Tết*, it is cooked in a 7" by 7" square.
- *Tết Trung Nguyen* (Wandering Souls Day) occurs in the middle of the 7th lunar month. Even though it is actually a Buddhist festival it is not restricted to the Buddhists only, but celebrated in houses, industrial units, business units, and government buildings along with being celebrated in Pagodas. During this day people call upon the Lord Buddha and pray to him to dissolve all unjust accusations against their deceased ancestors and other spirits and also pray for their souls to rest in peace. They offer all kinds of delicacies including meat, rice, cakes and many others to please the hungry souls.
- *Trung Thu* is held on August 15th and is specifically for children. Parents, relatives, and social gatherings provide candy to children.

Communication Style

- Vietnamese highly regard social harmony, modesty and trust. Therefore, polite, unhurried, reserved conversation style is appreciated. Tend to be excessively polite and delicate. Being frank and outspoken is usually considered rude; true feelings are often veiled.
- Rarely kiss and have physical contact even after not seeing someone after a long time.
- Manners are extremely important when interacting with an elder or someone of authority.
- When greeting elders, it is respectful to give a small bow of the head.
- When giving something to a client, use both hands to present it.
- Until a strong client-provider relationship has been established, Vietnamese prefer a medical provider of the same gender.
- When angry or embarrassed, Vietnamese may smile or laugh to hide their feelings.
- Nonverbal forms of communication are important as well.
 - The head is considered sacred and it is offensive to touch another person's head without permission.
 - It is offensive to show the bottom of one's shoes.
 - It is rude to snap one's fingers or signal using the index finger.

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