



With war memories from that part of the world fading into the distant past, Vietnam is becoming more popular and accessible for senior American tourists. When making your plans, be sure to be thoroughly familiar with all requirements. Unless you're traveling for special purposes, such as funeral, family illness, disaster aid or other emergencies, a valid tourist visa must be obtained several months in advance.

There are four variables. A tourist visa can be for a single entry or multiple entries, and can be valid either for thirty days or ninety days. The visa cost depends on those variables. The Vietnam tourist visa procedure requires travelers to send their passports, along with applications and I.D. photos, to the Embassy of Vietnam (1233 20th St NW, Suite 400 - Washington, DC 20036). The Embassy places the visa sticker on a page inside the passport and returns it to the traveler.

The system is set up for the traveler to have the visa in advance, before departing their home country. Alternatively, travelers can get a "loose-leaf visa" which accompanies the passport and does not require submission of a passport.

Applicant passports must have at least six months of validity remaining. Also the completed visa application and a single passport-sized photograph must be submitted (two photos must be submitted for the loose-leaf visa). A postage-paid return envelope must also be included, and must be a FedEx or USPS Express Mail envelope, addressed to the applicant, with required postage already on it.

The Embassy of Vietnam needs five business days to process the visa application. Be aware that some travel services advertise a "visa on arrival" service where paperwork is submitted electronically and the visa is obtained on arrival in Vietnam.

They are not endorsed by the Vietnamese government, and there is a specific warning in English on the official website notifying travelers they must have a valid visa before boarding aircraft for travel to Vietnam. For costs and other info, go to vietnamembassy-usa.org