

FOOD AND CULTURE

FACT SHEET

QUICK FACTS

- Location:** Southeast Asia
- Cultural influences:** Cambodia, French, Chinese and Americans. ^{1,2}
- Capital:** Hanoi
- Language:** Vietnamese
- Bordering countries:** China, Laos, Cambodia. ³
- Cuisine:** known for its balance of the five Asian elements; spicy, sour, bitter, salty and sweet. ³
- Street food culture:** is quite popular and Vietnam is considered to be one of the best in the world. ¹
- Noodles or “pho”:** second most popular food in Vietnam, after boiled rice. ³
- Beverages:** Hot tea is served before and after meals, but not during the meal. In the late afternoon, tea or coffee may be enjoyed with a sweet treat or fruit. ¹
- **Nuoc mam:** [salted and fermented anchovies], fish sauce Most common condiment. ²



Image: kk.nationsonline.org

TRADITIONAL EATING PATTERNS

- Rice is the staple of the diet, consumed in some form for every meal. ⁴ Cooking methods often involve steaming or stir-frying. ⁴ Claypot cooking is common. ²
- Variations include congee [rice, ground pork, bean sprouts, mint or basil] and pho [rice noodle soup made with beef or chicken broth, slices of meat, garnished with bean sprouts and basil]. ⁴
- High in fruits and vegetables, low in protein, little to no dairy. ²
- Vietnamese people eat two or three meals a day depending on income. ²
- Breakfast is sometimes pho or Bánh xèo [salty cakes made of rice flour with minced pork and dried shrimp]. ⁴
- Lunch is a bahn mi [a sandwich of carrots, cilantro, onions and daikon with pork or chicken on a French roll]; or bún tàu [rice vermicelli soup]; or Tráng Bàng [pork and vegetables wrapped in thin rice-paper wrappers]. ⁴
- Dinner is almost always rice, with a few steamed or stir-fried dishes, usually including vegetables and either fish or pork. ⁴
- For all meals, the food items are served at once and diners serve themselves over rice and add garnish and condiments as desired. ²
- Most foods are often eaten with chop sticks and soup spoons. ²
- Street foods, hand held snacks or "fast foods" are common in city streets, however, snacking between meals is uncommon. ²
- It is tradition to serve the eldest person first, wait until everyone is served, then ask them for permission to start eat. Dining is done around a low table sitting on mats. ²

TẾT (LUNAR NEW YEAR)

Usually celebrated between January 19 and February 20th depending on the lunar calendar.¹

Symbolize's new beginnings and is the most important festival.¹ Activities involve happiness, joy and good luck.⁵

Foods consumed for this occasion are mut [candied fruit], banh chung [steamed sticky rice cake with pork stuffing wrapped in banana leaves], keo dua [coconut candy], and keo me xung [peanut brittle with sesame seeds].⁵

RELIGION

-Buddhism is historically the most popular religion, about 54% call themselves Buddhist.^{7,8}

-Many do not eat meat, seafood, chicken or eggs on the first and middle days of each lunar month.²

-Vietnamese Buddhism emphasizes mental and physical self-discipline and proper conduct.⁶

HEALTH BELIEFS

For several thousand years, traditional Vietnamese Medicine has evolved from Chinese traditional Medicine and culture.¹

Many believe in the Chinese yin/yang classification of food. All foods being either hot or cold. Overconsumption of either hot or cold foods cause ailments due to the yin/yang balance being off.⁴

Fasting is common when people are sick. Many Vietnamese believe it is best to give their digestive systems rest and to only drink hot water and eat cháo [rice, water and salt].⁴

Several foods are thought to have medicinal value such mung beans. When ground into a paste with water can neutralize foods. Also, mung beans and green beans are said to interfere with Western and Eastern medicine. Bitter melon is also believed to be helpful in controlling high blood pressure.⁴

VIETNAMESE IN THE U.S.

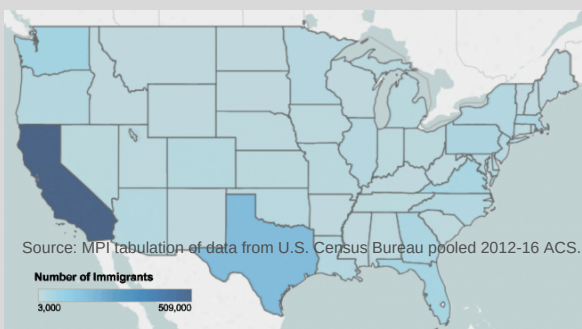
- In the U.S., most older people still prefer a traditional diet. In large cities Vietnamese foods and markets are easy to find.¹

-There is a tendency to increase meat consumption because it is cheaper in the U.S. than in Vietnam. Often moving to America has negative implications on their diet and are more susceptible to weight gain, high cholesterol and diabetes.⁴

-Vietnamese desserts include coconut milk and coconut oil which is high in saturated fat.⁴

-Overall, the diet can be high in sodium, and lack fiber. Many lack calcium due to milk, dairy, and soy not being included in the diet.⁴ Most older Vietnamese are lactose intolerant due to lack of use.^{2,4}

-Immigrants from Vietnam are highly concentrated in California 39 percent, Texas 13 percent,⁹ and Washington State, and Florida 4 percent.



References

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