

History of Saigon

How well do you know your Saigon history?

There's a fascinating history of political contests and rival armies that gave us the city we live in today, one marked by Chinese emperors and French conquerors.

Looking at Ho Chi Minh City through a historical lens shows how Vietnam's southern metropolis has always been an international destination. You can see how worldly Ho Chi Minh City has always been by looking at the strong representation of foreign residents who'd already settled here as early as the 18th Century, as well as in the Chinese merchants who had settled the city way back when Hue was still the country's capital.

This isn't just a walk down memory lane, but a long drive down history's highway. Jump in, and let's take a ride.

An Early International Destination

The name Saigon came about when Chinese settlers first developed the area that would become Districts 5 and 6. The original name was spelled: Tai Ngon.

The name morphed in to "Sai Gon" when the French invaded the city. In 1862, they declared Saigon as the capital city of their French Cochinchina colony.

With French guidance, Saigon matured in to an international destination, which wowed French diplomat Léon Caubert when he arrived in the city in August 1887.

The Saigon Caubert saw at the close of the 19th century impressed him with it's international appeal and developed commercial infrastructure, like the well-trafficked rue Catinat (the street known as Dong Khoi today) and the network of canals that had been built to supply goods throughout the city.



Caubert's judgement was that it was better than home.

At the time when Caubert made his visit to Saigon, a small brochure welcoming visitors was distributed to all tourists titled "Saigon-Souvenir" showing that at that time the city had already become an international destination. The brochure contained a breakdown of the city's population by country of origin: of Saigon's 55,750 residents, about 30,000 were Vietnamese and the rest foreign hailing from China, India, France or somewhere else in Europe.

Saigon and Hanoi: A Study of Contrasts

Any study of the city must see it in contrast to Hanoi, the northern capital.

The French vacated Vietnam in the middle '50s and the country was divided in two. At that time, Saigon served as the capital of the country's southern half before the country was reunited in 1975 and Hanoi was designated the capital.

The country's two biggest cities still have very different cultural styles and even distinct dialects. The pronunciation of words, foods and disposition differ strongly between Hanoi and Saigon.

Saigon has trumped the northern city in terms of economic development and relative global stature, but Hanoi will always remain the soul of the nation.

Whereas Saigon dates back to about the 17th century, Hanoi was founded in 1010 and served as the nation's capital for about 800 years before Hue rose to occupy that role. For that reason—as well as the fact that the northern city contains the lion's share of Vietnam's most important cultural artifacts, like the remains of Ho Chi Minh himself—Saigon is seen as something of a city without a history.

If you don't have a past, then the most important element is the now.

Saigon's modernism is expressed in a number of ways including the city's robust nightlife and the city's ambitious work ethic seemingly pulled straight from New York or London.

What's shared between the two cities? A love of motorbikes. When you visit either city you can see a mess of bikes and cars all in movement on any one of Vietnam's crowded streets

Little by little old Saigon with its charming French buildings and winding *hems* (alleyways) are giving way to modern skyscrapers, top quality international schools and an endless selection of eateries. The new Saigon is a fun and well-equipped place to live but if you wander through the older parts of the town you can still catch glimpses of the city's amazing history and marvel at how times have changed.



The Future of Saigon

More and more, expats are choosing to extend their stay in Vietnam.

What was once just a temporary location for a gap year is turning in to country where professionals are establishing and growing their careers as well as starting or raising families. It's no surprise then that Vietnam ranked 12th for happiness in expat networking group Internations' poll in 2017.

The fact that fortunes are on the rise in Vietnam's metropolises is in contrast to the lower quality of life for expats living in former hotspots such as Hong Kong. There the country's foreign nationals are seeing a five-year low in average pay.

Vietnam also ranks consistently high for personal happiness, friendliness and work-life balance.

So it's no wonder people are calling on Saigon Van and other Ho Chi Minh City relocation services to come and settle here.

But what is the city going to look like moving forward? Will the charming vintage buildings and unique busyness (i.e. disorder) of the city remain constant? Or will the city pull a Singapore on us and decide to become orderly to a fault?

Traffic Improvements Led By New Tunnel at D2



In March 2017, municipal authorities proposed the [creation of a tunnel](#) intended to relieve some of the traffic coming in and out of District 2 at a busy crossing known as the An Phu Intersection.

An overpass is being talked about along with the tunnel to ease traffic at what's known as Ho Chi Minh City's eastern gateway.

Work at the An Phu Intersection is just part of the city's multi prong strategy to relieve the city's burdened roads. Some 8.5 million vehicles—cars, motorbikes and everything between—share the nearly 4,000 kilometers of road that make up the city's roadways.

The [Ho Chi Minh City metro](#) is currently projected to be completed by the end of 2020. This is the first in a long line of steps that Saigon is taking to truly be a world-class city for tourists, expats and local residents alike.

Activating D2's Peninsula

Bordered by Thao Dien in the north and District 1 in the west, the Thu Thiem peninsula looks across the river to some of the most well developed areas in Saigon, yet remains elusive to develop. Developers are taking what appear to be the first steps in activating this dormant part of the city.

In March, representatives from an estimated 100 Vietnamese and Japanese businesses gathered in Ho Chi Minh City to discuss the city's



[broader development objectives](#), among them the development of the Thu Thiem peninsula's 657 acres.

The plan was officially called the "New Urban Area" when it was started in 2011. It calls for a road plan comprised of a rings of streets as well as a port and new apartments.

To do this, developers want to renovate or replace the 474 old apartment buildings there, some dating back to before the end of the American War in 1975.

One of the biggest projects budgeted for the area is [Empire City](#), a 14.6 hectare development that will include about 3,700 apartments and an 87-story tower that would rival the height of the recently completed tallest building in Vietnam—the [Landmark 81](#).



Compared to ten years ago, Saigon is doing a booming business in real estate, which means there are a multitude of options for expats planning on moving to Saigon. From the [Vinhomes Central Park complex](#), which includes the Landmark 81 building to the recently completed [Diamond Island](#) project, there are many available apartments with every possible amenity.

The Future City is Smart

Developments in District 2 and the city's infrastructure improvements are minor realignments compared to the high-tech city infrastructure upgrades that will become more common in the future.

As the world's cities mature, development will benefit from a tech-driven city development in creating what planners call a "smart city," a broad umbrella term that includes everything from self-driving city buses to open high speed internet in all public space.

Japan's heavy industry companies are hoping to become a leader in infrastructure through a partnership with Vietnam.

Vietnam has created a formal agreement with the Japanese government and a group of more than 20 companies including Mitsubishi and metro operator Tokyo Metro in a \$37.3 billion partnership that promises to deliver amenities like self-driving buses, and energy-saving technologies in an effort to construct a smart town located near Hanoi.

The city will be both a small, liveable futuristic complex for those working in Hanoi as well as a walkable showroom of sorts where Japanese firms can demonstrate what their technologies can do for the world's cities.

Similar partnerships exist in Binh Duong province and coastal city Da Nang to bring to life elements of the "smart city" in Vietnam's municipalities.

Those technologies could be widely deployed in cities across Vietnam, including our own Saigon.

Some elements of the smart city are live at this very moment. Log in to your phone's app store to check out [BusMap](#), the city's first official public bus app that shows routes and schedules for this transport.

Little by little it seems, things are going to keep changing to continue to make Saigon a very liveable city for all.

Where to Enjoy the Mid-Autumn Festival and Where to Buy Mooncakes

Everyone knows that Tet is the biggest celebration of the year in Vietnam, however, there is a festival, little known outside of Asia, that includes some wonderful traditions. The Mid-Autumn festival, sometimes known as the Children's Festival, celebrates the full moon and the coming of Autumn.

On the 15th day of the 8th lunar month (the 24th of September this year), Vietnamese people celebrate by eating "mooncakes" and drinking green tea. Children often join in hand-crafting lanterns, which they then fill with candles and join in an evening "lantern parade." Beautifully dressed children aglow in candle light is a delightful thing to witness.

Mooncakes go on sale in mid-August and are available until the day of the celebration, however, be forewarned that these special cakes will no longer be available as soon as the special day has passed. The cakes are usually lovingly packaged in the finest papers and the cakes themselves have intricate designs pressed into them. They are like a fine piece of art that is the perfect choice for a special gift.

Flavours range from the traditional—green bean paste, lotus seed or taro root—to the exotic—chocolate, blueberry or even shark's fin. Most of the cakes will have a whole egg yolk, either sweet or salty depending on the flavour combination, in the center. The yolk represents the beauty and cheerful color of a bright full moon.



Places to Celebrate:

The Lantern Village in District 11 or the Lantern Quarter in District 5 - Here you will see hundreds of lanterns of all shapes and sizes lit up and ready for purchase.

Nguyen Hue walking street in District 1 - A lantern parade followed by live music and lion dances will delight kids of all ages.

Hoi An Sense Restaurant in District 1 - A pond in the center of the restaurant is decorated with hanging and floating lanterns to mimic the beauty of the ancient town of Hoi An. This is a great location if you want to celebrate with some traditional foods and music away from the crowds.

Where to buy mooncakes:



During the month leading up to the Mid-Autumn festival, mooncakes are available at nearly every local bakery in town and at many temporary sales points. Here are a few other choices for some unusual flavour combinations and assured quality.

Maison Marou
169 Calmette, D1

Tous Les Jours
Locations all over the city

Le Meridien
3C Tôn Đức Thắng, D1

My Life Coffee
22 Trương Định, D3, Ho Chi Minh and other
locations around the city.

Annam Gourmet
16-18 Hai Ba Trung, D1
Saigon Center: B2-11/12, 65 Le Loi, D1
41A Thao Dien, D2
SB2-1 My Khanh 4, Nguyen Duc Canh, D7

News and Tips for Life in Vietnam

[Vietnam takes strong measures to increase traffic safety by proposing a video monitoring system.](#)

Cameras at intersections are commonplace but now passenger cars, container trucks, semi-trailer trucks and cargo transporters may be obliged to install surveillance equipment in every vehicle. The deadline that the Ministry of Transport has suggested to the Government for compliance is between July 2022 to July 2025.

[Recent Fire at the Landmark 81, Vietnam's highest building, shines light on fire safety](#)



On August 11th, a fire was reported at the Landmark 81. While no one was injured in this fire, apparently caused by a spark from a welder who was working on the building, a fire in another downtown [high-rise caused the death of 13 people in March](#). Apartment dwellers should follow these tips to keep themselves, their loved ones and their possessions safe in the case of a fire.

- Install smoke alarms and check regularly to make sure they are functioning. Replace the batteries once a year.
 - Place a fire extinguisher or two somewhere in your home and make sure that it functions and is easily accessible.
 - Use surge protectors to protect your appliances.
 - Don't overload circuits or extension cords.
 - Regularly check electrical cords to make sure that they are not frayed or damaged in any way. Replace any unsafe cords.
 - Avoid placing electrical cords beneath rugs or low furniture.
 - Don't smoke inside your home.
 - Keep lighters and matches out of reach of children.
 - Do not leave the room if you are burning candles or incense.
 - Keep open flames away from fabric such as curtains or anything else that may be flammable.
- Do not store flammable materials such as gasoline in your home.
 - Never leave food unattended on a stove.
 - Keep dish towels and other items away from the cooking area.
 - Don't wear clothing with long sleeves when cooking.

- Have all large appliances such as your washer and dryer installed and serviced by a professional.
- Don't use a dryer without a lint filter.
- Clean the lint filter before every load of laundry.
- And last but definitely not least, be prepared! Plan your escape route and have a back-up in case your usual exit is blocked.

Slow Internet? You're not the only one.

An undersea internet cable snapped on the 24th of August and is still in the process of being repaired. Don't be surprised if your high-speed internet slows to a sluggish pace. Everyone in HCMC is fighting the same battle, so take a deep breath and meditate while you wait for that YouTube video to load.

Ready for life on the road in Saigon? Avoid these 8 high traffic areas.

1. Truong Chinh Street linking the international airport to downtown.
2. The intersection of Cong Hoa and Hoang Hoa Tham in Tan Binh district.
3. Nguyen Thai Son Roundabout where seven different streets intersect outside of Tan Son Nhat airport in Phu Nhuan district.
4. Thu Duc Crossroads, which connects the city to the southern industrial zone.
5. The intersection of Xo Viet Nghe Tinh, Dinh Bo Linh and Bach Dang where the East Coach Station is located in Binh Thanh district.
6. My Thuy crossroads. The biggest container port in Vietnam is located here.
7. Dan Chu roundabout is a gathering point for seven major roads in District 3.
8. Intersection of Su Van Hanh, Thanh Thai and 3 Thang 2 in District 10.

Customs Officials Launch an Automated System at Major Ports

On August 24th, the automated system, which will streamline the customs procedure and allow officers to spend more time checking potentially fraudulent cargo, officially launched at Tan Cang/Cat Lai and Tan Thuan ports. By the end of September, the system should be fully functioning in all ports and warehouses in the city. Here are some links, which share the procedures for the new customs systems: <http://customstrade.asia/2018/08/22/vietnam-pilots-new-import-export-customs-procedures/>

Tax laws updated in Vietnam for VAT and Income Taxes

The new laws, which went into effect in May, change some details for companies who import and export in Vietnam as well as for both corporations and individuals who pay income tax. For a full list of the changes, follow this [link](#).

Events in HCMC this fall

Just some examples of the vast variety of events that will take place in HCMC this fall:

<p>Mexico and Vietnam: Notes of Friendship Concert – Wednesday, September 19, 2018 The concert will be held at IDECAF in D1. Free entry.</p>
<p>Jake's 2nd Charity Chili Cook Off – Saturday, September 22, 2018 Eight teams will battle making their best chili in D1.</p>
<p>Zumba For The Hearts – Saturday, September 22, 2018 This will be a very special Zumbathon with expected participation of 300 people at the new ISHCMC in D2.</p>
<p>3rd Saigon International Latin Dance Festival – Friday, 28 to Sunday, September 30, 2018 Platform for Vietnam Latin Dance Community to enjoy an international dance experience and to connect people through dance at Kim Do Hotel, D1.</p>
<p>BBGV HCM 18th Fun Run for Charity (Fun Run) - Sunday, September 30, 2018 The Fun Run in D7 is an excellent team building opportunity for companies or a great day out with families and friends.</p>
<p>Vietnamese Women's Day – Saturday, October 20, 2018 This day is celebrated throughout the country and everybody celebrates and cherishes the women in their life and remembers all the sacrifices women of Vietnam have made. The most common gifts that a woman will receive are flowers and a lot of love from their beloved ones.</p>
<p>International Charity Bazaar by the Consular Club– Saturday, November 3, 2018 The 25th International Charity Bazaar will take place this year at Adora Conferences & Events Centre in Tan Binh District.</p>
<p>ILV Bazaar – Thursday, November 8, 2018 The traditional bazaar organized by the International Ladies in Vietnam will be held at the Purple Jade at Hotel InterContinental in D1. Free entry.</p>
<p>Dutch Open Golf Tournament – Friday, November 30, 2018 This charity tournament will be played at Song Be Golf Course in Binh Duong. There is choice of a golf clinic for those not wanting to play 18 holes.</p>
<p>St Andrew's Ball – Saturday, December 1st, 2018 A grand ball that will be held at Park Hyatt, D1.</p>
<p>22nd Annual AmCham Governors Ball - Saturday, December 8, 2018 A grand ball with 400 people that will be held at InterContinental Saigon, D1.</p>

Contributors:

Articles by Molly Headley-Benkaci
Copyright © 2018 Saigon Van Relocations, all rights reserved.