

## A Tête-à-Tête about Tết

How can an expat get past the initial impressions of Tết to understand the traditions behind all the rituals? The first step is to understand why Tết is important to the Vietnamese. The Lunar New Year is the most vital holiday celebrated across Asia. It could be compared to Christmas, New Years, the Day of the Dead and Easter rolled up into one momentous occasion. Families will be reunited, the deceased will be honored, the coming of spring will be celebrated and Asia will inherit a new sacred animal. In 2018, the Dog will guide our luck and destinies.



Tết by nature is a homey holiday. All over Vietnam, family members will find ways to return to their hometowns, gathering to cook, converse and celebrate. The kitchen takes on a special significance because this is where the Kitchen God resides, watching over each household. Families can send a wish for the New Year to the Jade Emperor on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December (Lunar Calendar), when the Kitchen God ascends to the heavens to report back on the family's activities. It is

in the sacred space of the kitchen that the traditional bánh chưng cake is crafted from sticky rice, pork and green bean paste. It is boiled for 8 hours, during which time the family can sit around the stove recounting the tales of their bygone year, and strengthening their bonds. Another important aspect of the holiday is the appreciation of community. People will visit extended family, neighbors, teachers, and colleagues to share tea and sweets and to “Chúc Tết.” Chúc Tết is an exchange of well-wishes for the coming year. Children in particular enjoy this ritual because after greeting their elders with a New Year's wish they receive in return a red envelope filled with “lucky money.”

The division of the population in Ho Chi Minh City is especially visible during the week of Tết. Locals not originally from Saigon will depart to spend the holiday with their families. Expats will often head to the beaches to escape the city, as it goes into shutdown holiday mode. What will be left will be the small percentage of people with family in Saigon, tourists, and expats, who enjoy the strangely empty Tết-time city. The fact that most celebrations happen in private homes can make Tết hard



to ingress for foreigners who don't have a link to a Vietnamese family through blood or marriage. However, everyone can enjoy the jubilant spirit of the Lunar New Year. Walk down Nguyen Hue, otherwise known as Flower Street, to buy branches of sunny apricot blossoms to fill your home with the promise of spring. Let the vibrations of drums draw you out to witness a lion dance. Go to a tailor to touch meters of silk ready to be fashioned into ao dai. Go to a pagoda to light an incense stick and say a prayer for a successful year and above all wish everyone you meet a Happy New Year. Because who among us, no matter what continent, country or religion we come from, doesn't need extra familial warmth, a lot more joy, and a little extra luck? Chúc Chúc Mừng Năm Mới!

## 8 Do's and Don'ts of Tết

### Don't:

1. Enter the home of a Vietnamese person on the first day of the Lunar New Year if you haven't been invited. It is believed that the first person to enter brings their luck, whether good or bad, to the household.
2. Don't visit **anyone** during Tết if you've had a recent death in the family.
3. Wear black or white clothing. These are funereal colors. However, wearing red is fortuitous.
4. Clean during Tết because you might sweep out your good fortune with the dust. However, sweeping from the front door *inwards* can collect wealth for the home.
5. Be mean. Talking badly to someone else can bring bad luck.
6. Ask anyone to repay a debt to you. Being asked to repay a debt during Tết can mean a year riddled with financial problems.
7. Take out anything related to fire from a person's home. Legend has it that removing a fire symbol will also remove the warmth and love.
8. Take anything related to water from a person's home. "Money should flow in like water," therefore, removing a water-related item is akin to removing the homeowner's wealth.



### Do:

1. Smile. Your demeanor during Tết will determine the rest of your year.
2. Clean before Tết. Everything should feel shiny and new.
3. Pay your debts. It is unlucky to greet the New Year with financial woes.
4. Give out a Tết bonus if you are an employer. You can also give out "lucky money" to small children to bring them luck in the New Year.
5. Try some of the traditional Tết foods like *Banh Chung* (pork and sticky rice cake), *Gio Cha* (Vietnamese Sausage), and candied Vietnamese fruits called *Mut*.
6. Buy gifts for friends, family and colleagues. However, don't bring clocks, watches, cats, medicine, ink, scissors or knives, as these items are considered unlucky.
7. Walk down Nguyen Hue, otherwise known as Flower Street, to see the plant displays. Peach blossoms ward off evil spirits, while apricot blossoms bring wealth. Kumquat trees can bring fertility to you and your family.
8. Go to a pagoda or a temple to pray for a new year filled with luck, happiness and good health. Single people often pray to find their soul mates.



## 2018 – The Year of the Earth Dog



Dogs are intelligent, open-minded, and above all loyal. It is important to be honest and to live with integrity during the year of the Earth Dog. This is the year to start building for your future. Allow the stability of the Earth sign ground you. It will be a year of increased social awareness and generosity, but don't be surprised by political upheaval around the world. Work hard and stay true to your values and you'll find success in your endeavors.

For some signs the year will also be full of obstacles. It will be necessary to stay calm and find an alternate path to whatever is blocking your path. Don't make quick judgments or decisions. Stay steady.

Signs that will thrive during the Dog year: Tiger, Rabbit, Snake, Horse, Rooster, Pig.

Signs that may have obstacles to overcome this year: Dog, Rat, Ox, Dragon, Sheep, Monkey.

### **Some famous people born in the year of the Dog:**

1970; 1982; 1994; 2006; 2018

Donald Trump, Prince William, Kate Middleton, Madonna, Michael Jackson, Elvis Presley, Mother Theresa, Winston Churchill, Socrates, Debussy, Bill Clinton.

## Activities Tết

### Dragon Dances

Dragon dances featuring acrobatic young men performing astounding stunts will appear all over the city. Businesses solicit the dragon dancers to perform in front of their establishments to bring luck. Every night during the week of Tết, there will also be an outstanding performance in Tao Dan Park.



### Fireworks

In the Lunar New Year, Ho Chi Minh City is expected to set off fireworks in 6 places starting at midnight on February 16, 2018. The high-range display will take place at the Saigon River Tunnel in District 2. The five low-range displays will be at: Dam Sen Cultural Park in District 11, Cu Chi tunnel in Cu Chi district, Rung Sac Square in Can Gio District, Nha Be District and the Nga Ba Giong heroic martyrs memorial in Hoc Mon District. Each display will last 15 minutes.

Ha Noi city is expected to set off fireworks in 30 locations, including five high-range displays at: Hoàn Kiếm Lake, Thống Nhất Park, Lạc Long Quân Flower Garden, Hồ Văn Quán (Van Quan lake) và, Mỹ Đình Stadium, and 25 low-range displays corresponding to the 25 districts and wards. The spectacle will last 15 minutes and will start at midnight on February 16, 2018.

### Flowers

Nguyen Hue Flower street will be open from February 13, 2018 until February 19, 2018. This year's theme is "Desire to reach out" with three main themes: Spring City, Integration and Development, and Reaching for the Future. This year's mascot character is the fast, intelligent, and brave Phu Quoc dog.

The Spring Flower Festival is also held from February 10, 2018 until February 21, 2018 at Tao Dan Park (Nguyen Thi Minh Khai Street, District 1).

Tet Flower Markets are held from the February 8, 2018 until February 15, 2018, at 23/9 Park (Pham Ngu Lao street, District 1), Lê Văn Tám Park (Hai Bà Trưng Street, District 1), and Gia Định Park (Hoang Minh Giam street, Gò Vấp District)

### Markets

Ho Chi Minh City Book Festival will be held on Ngo Duc Ke Street, Dong Khoi Street, and Mac Thi Bui Street (District 1) on the same dates as the Nguyen Hue Flower Street.



### Pagoda

Go to a pagoda or a temple to pray for a new year filled with luck, happiness and good health. Single people often pray to find their soul mates. In HCMC, you can visit Tran Hung Dao temple on Vo Thi Sau street after midnight on February 15, 2018 to see how the Vietnamese worship.

## Opening hours during Tết holiday

<b>AMUSEMENT</b> Dam Sen Park Suoi Tien Park	Open during Tết holiday Open during Tết holiday
<b>BEAUTY</b> Fame nails Quynh Salon Saigon Dep Clinic & Spa	Closed from 17.00 on 15/02 until 19/02 Closed from 16/02 until 20/02 Closed from 13/02 until 20/02
<b>HOSPITALS &amp; CLINICS</b> Animal Doctors International Family Medical Practice FV Hospital Petcare Veterinary Clinic Saigon Pet Clinic Starlight Dental Clinic	Open from 09.00 - 12.00 on 14/02 until 20/02 Closed from 14/02 until 21/02 Closed from 15/02 until 20/02 Only open from 08.00 - 12.00 from 14/02 until 20/02 Open during Tết holiday Closed from 14/02 until 20/02
<b>SHOPPING MALLS &amp; MARKETS</b> Aeon Mall (Tan Phu Dist) An Phu Super Market An Nam Gourmet Ben Thanh Market Crescent Mall Nam An Market Parkson Cantavil Taka Plaza Takashimaya Vincom Mega Mall	Closed from 18.00 on 15/02 until 11.00 on 16/02 Closed from 17.00 on 15/02 until 16/02. From 17/01 until 20/02 open until 17.00 Closed from 14/02 until 19/02 Closed from 12.00 on 15/02 until 18/02 Closed from 18.00 on 15/02 Closed from 12.00 on 14/02 until 20/02 Closed from 14.00 on 15/02 until 14.00 on 16/02 Closed from 15/02 until 18/02 Closed from 16.00 on 15/02 until 09.30 on 18/02 Closed from 12.00 on 15/02 until 16/02
<b>RESTAURANTS</b> Al Fresco Ashoka Indian Rest. D1 & D.2 Au Parc Hue Corner Mad House D2 Mekong Merchant Pendolasco Refinery Starbucks D2 The Deck Saigon The Loop The Tavern	Open during Tết Holiday Open during Tết Holiday Open during Tết Holiday Closed from 12.00 on 13/02 until 23/02 or 24/02 Open during Tết Holiday Closed from 15/02 until 20/02 Closed from 15/02 until 16/02 Open during Tết Holiday Closed from 12.00 on 15/02 until 14.00 on 16/02 Closed from 15/02 until 20/02 Open during Tết Holiday Open during Tết Holiday

## What's New?

### 1. New countries added to Vietnam's e-visa list

As of January 2018, six new countries have been added to the current list of forty countries whose citizens are approved for pilot e-visas. The list has been expanded to include: Australia, United Arab Emirates, Canada, India, The Netherlands, and New Zealand. [Read more.](#)

### 2. Import tax headed for a record low.

As part of its commitment to the FTA (Free Trade Agreement) Vietnam is set to lower its import tax on thousands of products to **0%**. Imports from ASEAN, such as coffee, raw tea, and processed food will benefit from this record-breaking reduction. The tax break on imported cars will begin on 01/01/18. The new rate will affect 456 product lines from Japan, including fats, sugars, and machinery. However, there will be a continued tariff rate for all markets of 5% for sugar, brown rice, some meats, and citrus fruit. [Read more](#)



### 3. New regulations for traffic safety

In a bid to increase safety on the roads, Vietnam has introduced new traffic violations. In 2018, passenger safety belts will officially become mandatory. In addition, there will be a fine of up to 1 million dong for drivers who do not give way to an ambulance, and driving without a driver's license can now result in jail time. [Read more \(Vietnamese\).](#)

### 4. Payroll regulations top affect workers in Vietnam

From 01/01/18, all foreigners working in Vietnam will need to pay for their social insurance (SI). In addition, all workers making minimum wage or above will enjoy an increase of the General Minimum Wage (GMW) from 1.3 million VND to 1.39 million VND. However, this will also increase the upper limit of SI contributions. The SHUI (Social-Health-Underemployment-Insurance) base salary will also include add-ons, such as responsible and regional allowances. [Read more.](#)

### 5. HCMC Metro – latest update

Metro construction is currently at a completion level of more than 57%. According to VTC News, representatives of the HCMC Railway Management board have said that they expect four underground stations to be completed by February 2018. By 2020, the metro is expected to be fully functional. [Read more \(Vietnamese\).](#)



## Around the world

### 1. Renewal of Chinese visa

Travelers should take note that submission through the online portal for visa renewal must be completed at least 30 days before the visa's expiration date. If you miss the renewal window you will be obligated to reapply for a new visa in your home country. [Read more \(Mandarin\)](#).



### 2. Potential tourist Visas for Saudi Arabia

In the past visas have only been issued for those who wanted to travel to Saudi Arabia for work or religious purposes. Now for the first time Saudi Arabia is considering issuing visas for tourists. The new visas are expected to be released in 2018 in an effort to attract more travelers, as well as the income the tourism industry generates. [Read more.](#)

### 3. New Freedom for Foreign Development in Myanmar



The new Condominium Rules will open up the market for foreigners looking to develop in Myanmar. A decrease in growth in the local property and construction fields have prompted lawmakers to ease restrictions on foreign development. Up to 40 percent of units above any condominium's sixth floor will be available for foreign purchase. However, it is important to note that foreigners are still unable to own land under Myanmar law. Developers will need to work in conjunction with Myanmar nationals to buy and build. [Read more.](#)

### 4. Banks see rising foreign inflow in Cambodia

In 2017, Cambodia saw a marked increase in inflow from foreign funds. There was a 32% raise in the banking sector and a 0.8 % augmentation in the fields of real estate and garments. The launch of new foreign banks in the banking sector have contributed to the sharp increase, as well as the national bank's decision to elevate the minimum capital requirements for foreign banks in Cambodia. The majority of the foreign capital inflow came from within Asian. [Read more.](#)

### 5. Cost of living in Myanmar increases

In Myanmar, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) showed a dramatic rise in the price of goods and services in categories such as food, tobacco, housing costs, health and transportation. Compared with 2016, the CPI increased by more than four percent this year. [Read more.](#)

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