
Guest column: Clear skies for Vietnam

By **Keerthi "Happy" Hapugasdeniya** on | Airline & Terminal News



This is a special feature from *PAX International's April World Travel Catering and Onboard Services Hamburg 2020* [edition](#).



The world's largest spring roll was created at APOT Asia 2014 in Nha Trang City, Vietnam, making The Guinness Book of World Records

The days of Vietnam being cut off from the rest of the world are long gone. In the last 15 years, economic growth and the tourism interest in the country has caused Vietnam to blossom into one of the most popular destinations to visit in Asia.

Tourism growth increased 200 per cent from 2018 to 2019, solidifying the country as a truly great holiday destination. It's safe, it's inexpensive and it has lot to offer, while many of its locations remain untouched.

The country has distinct north and south regions – which can be tasted in the food – joined together by a long beach stretched along the South China Sea. The north has four seasons with snow-topped mountains, whereas the south of Vietnam is a true tropical climate, with temperatures from 20 to 38 degrees Celsius for most of the year.

Vietnam boasts numerous intersections with its neighbors near and far. It is a favored spot for those who travel by sea and serves as a popular cruise port in the region. On land, Vietnam is connected to China, Cambodia and Thailand where the travelers can enter at border crossings.

Meanwhile, the modernization of the airline business in the last 15 years makes it easy for local and international travelers to reach many of Vietnam's beautiful cities by air. And, the country offers direct international flights to Europe, Australia, the Middle East, Asia and soon the USA.

The country's national carrier, [Vietnam Airlines](#), has a comprehensive domestic network and is growing to accommodate many destinations in Europe, Australia and Asia. For those looking to explore more within the country's border, Vietnam Air Services Company (VASCO), a fully owned subsidiary of Vietnam Airlines, flies to rural destinations in Vietnam.

[Vietjet](#), the country's low-cost airline, has a massive fleet that flies to nearly all 35 airports in Vietnam and other Asian destinations. [Jetstar Pacific](#) is another low-cost airline headquartered in Vietnam as a joint Australian-Vietnamese brand under Jetstar Airways.



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And, with just one year in business, [Bamboo Airways](#) is the youngest airline in Vietnam skies posing direct competition with local carriers, such as [Vietnam Airlines](#). Owned by Vietnam five-star hotel and resort operator FLC Group, Bamboo features a full-service cabin with modern interiors and high-end inflight offers. The airline, which began operations in January 2019, will soon starting flying to Singapore and Japan, and will embark on the first Vietnam-owned-airline direct flight across the globe₂

to Los Angeles in mid-2020. Bamboo appears to be seeking a five-star rating itself, and based on its service and brand new 787 Dreamliners, it wouldn't be a shock if it's the first Vietnam airline to achieve this.

Air travel competition in Vietnam has become equivalent to that of Europe and the USA with lots of airline options for travelers to choose from. The competition and affordability of these local flights has prompted not only foreigners to visit, but also for some of the 96 million people who call Vietnam home to explore the beauty of the country.

And, of course, these travelers' journey through the country's expanding airports:

- [Tan Son Nhat International Airport](#) (SGN) – Located about four miles from Ho Chi Minh City, SGN is that largest airport in Vietnam and operates from two terminals, Domestic Terminal 1 and International Terminal 2. It handled more than 38 million passengers in 2018.
- [Noi Bai International Airport](#) (HAN) – This the largest airport in northern Vietnam serving the capital city of Hanoi. International Terminal 2 opened in 2014 and offers 96 check-in counters, ten self-service kiosks, 17 boarding gates and 283 flight information display systems. Domestic flights operate from Terminal 1.
- [Da Nang International Airport](#) (DAD) – This transportation hub in the central region is approximately one mile from the city center. The newest terminal opened at the end of 2018 and offers modern facilities, shopping and dining options.

With such high travel demand at these locations, there are still some gaps when it comes to required ground services – particularly catering and ground handling. To alleviate this issue at SGN, airport services provider [Southern Airport Service Joint Stock Company](#) (SASCO) has an international catering facility at the airport to help support the booming industry demand. The facility is designed for growth and currently has the strength to deliver between 12,000 and 15,000 meals per day.

Location, location, location!

Among the many historical attractions Vietnam has to offer is Hue, the country's lost imperial city. Located on the bank of Song Huong, this was once the national capital, political, cultural and religious center of Vietnam under the rule of the Nguyen Dynasty. It has been recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Get cookin': Cha Ca La Vong

For most people who enjoy travel, it's safe to say their palette includes Italian, Indian, Mexican, Spanish, Thai, Japanese and perhaps even Vietnamese. Like many other regions with deep historical roots, the food culture in Vietnam goes back centuries. As expected, food from the north of the country differs from that of the tropical southern region. Here's a fun fish dish to try bringing a piece of Vietnam into your kitchen:

Ingredients

- 2 two-inch pieces fresh turmeric, peeled and chopped
- 1 teaspoon ground turmeric
- 1-inch fresh peeled ginger, chopped
- 2 inches fresh peeled galangal, chopped (or substitute ginger)
- 1-and-a-half pounds skinless hake fillets, cut in 2-inch squares
- ¼ cup Vietnamese fish sauce (nuoc mam)
- 3 tablespoons minced garlic
- 2 teaspoons chile flakes

- 1/3 cup lime juice
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 4 ounces dried Vietnamese or Thai rice noodles (also called rice stick)
- 1 head Bibb lettuce, rinsed, trimmed, core removed, sliced thinly
- 1/4 cup canola oil
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 medium-large onion, sliced thin vertically
- 1 and 1/2 bunches scallions, trimmed and chopped
- 1 bunch dill, stems discarded, fronds coarsely chopped
- 1/2 cup each cilantro leaves, mint leaves and Thai basil
- 1/4 cup chopped roasted salted peanuts
- 1/4 cup crisp fried shallots (sold in jars in Southeast Asian stores), or canned fried onions

Preparation

Place the fresh turmeric, ground turmeric, ginger and galangal in a food processor or mini-chopper. Process until very fine, almost a paste. Transfer to a stainless-steel dish. Wash food processor immediately to prevent staining. Place the fish in a bowl. Rub mixture all over fish, remembering to wear gloves or plastic bags on your hands to avoid turmeric stains. Set aside at room temperature for 1 hour.

Combine fish sauce, 2 tablespoons of the garlic, half the chile flakes, the lime juice, sugar and 1/2 cup cold water in a small bowl. Stir well. Refrigerate. Place noodles in another bowl, cover with warm water and set aside 10 minutes until softened.

Bring 3 quarts of water to a boil, drain noodles and add to boiling water. Cook 1 minute, then drain.

Spread lettuce on a serving platter. Spread noodles over lettuce. Cover lightly with a sheet of foil or plastic wrap.

Place oil in a large nonstick or well-seasoned cast-iron skillet and heat to a high temperature. Add fish pieces. When seared on one side, 1 minute or so, turn to sear other side, sprinkle with salt and remaining chile flakes and cook through, another minute or two. Remove to another platter. Add onions to pan and reduce heat to medium. When onions start to brown, add remaining garlic, stir, and add scallions. Stir again. Tuck fish pieces back into the pan and add the dill. Cook about 1 minute, just enough to warm fish. Remove pan from heat.

Spread contents of the pan, including all the oil, on noodles. Scatter herbs on top, then toss on peanuts and fried shallots. Serve with sauce on the side.

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