

Tips and Hints for Navigation in Vietnam

Date of issue: 17. June 2010

Navigation in Vietnam works of course like everywhere in the world. But according to a different landscape, different topology and different circumstances there are some unexpected issues for non-local people.

Navigation on land

Even there is a lot of construction work to rebuild the roads, the quality of the roads still poor. So it mostly happen that a new road is broken after 2 years of use. The classification of a road does not determine its condition. If a road is unpaved it doesnot mean that this road is not an arterial road.

So be prepared to expect not-so-good road conditions. The issues are like that:

- Many residential streets have no or just limited usability for cars because they are too narrow. In the past cars were no question for local people so the only available vehicle was a motorbike or a bicycle.
- Many houses are only reachable by so-called "hems". A Hem is like a small alleyway even they are residential streets.
- A real huge amount of streets are dead-end streets. The vietnamese road network has the habit that a road just goes to one destination. And when this destination is reached, the street ends. Vietnam seems to be the country with the most dead-end streets and roads.
- The condition and width of a road is not equal to their classification or type. Even a collector road can be bigger than some highways. And highways can appear as small roads compared to some residential streets.
- Highways and arterial roads can still be "unpaved", especially outside the big cities. Submerged and muddy arterial roads are no rarities, especially in the raining season.
- The quality standard of building roads is not very high. It happens that some new highway roads are broken some years after and only passable with a 4x4 truck.

Be aware in the flat areas near sea level altitude. According to tides and groundwater level some streets can get submerged for several hours. This phenomenon appears also in areas which are far away from the sea. Usually beginning late afternoon water appear on the streets which can get a depth of 50 cm. But as quick as it comes the water disappear several hours later.



An arterial road in uptown Ho Chi Min City, temporary submerged

Navigation on water

Vietnam is a country with huge areas near sea level altitude. The depth and the width of rivers is affected by tides and groundwater levels even when far away from the sea. The raining season also affects the appearance of rivers.

When navigating on rivers the following issues can happen:

- Rivers can shrink in dry season so that they can get very small.
- The depth of the river can vary till zero. That means that very small rivers can completely disappear in ebb tide.
- Parts of the river cannot be accessible by boats because of water vegetation.
- Rivers can begin with bigger width and then will get narrow. Often sidearms of rivers are also dead-ends.



"Swimming vegetation" on the vietnamese rivers are common obstacles

In Vietnam many people built their houses on the river or have swimming houses. Sometimes on small rivers the river can be impassable because of parked boats. Take care about these obstacles.

Some other tips and hints when roaming around in Vietnam:

- Always have enough water with you.
- When going countryside with the motorbike keep the tank full at the beginning.
- Take spare batteries with you for the GPS unit.
- On huge trips dont miss a paper map of the area you go.
- Plan your trip carefully. Also plan alternately routes in case of unexpected issues.
- Do an equipment check before starting.

© WILDGOOSE GPS and Navigation Service, www.gps-vietnam.net