

Vietnam (Socialist Republic of)

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Location and area

Vietnam is a republic of South East Asia, bordered by China on the north, by the South China Sea on the east and south, and by Cambodia and Laos on the west. Its area is 331,690 km². (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Topography

Vietnam occupies the easternmost part of the Indochinese Peninsula, a rugged, elongated S-shaped strip of mountains, coastal plains, and river deltas. Vietnam may be divided into four major regions:

1. In the north-west is the mountainous southerly extension of China's Yunnan Plateau. The country's highest peak, Fan Si Pan (3,143 m, is located near the border with China.
2. To the east of the highlands along the Gulf of Tonkin is the Red River (Song Hong) delta.
3. The Annamese Highlands, which run north-west to south-east, and an associated coastal plain form the backbone of central Vietnam.
4. The southernmost region is the Mekong River delta, a depositional area of flat land.

(Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Water

The Red River in the north and the Mekong River in the south are the two major freshwater streams. The Red River flows almost directly southeast from the north-western highlands, whereas the Mekong follows an irregular path from Cambodia, crosses southern Vietnam, and empties in the South China Sea through a complex network of distributaries. Both rivers have been banked to prevent flood damage.

Climate

Three climate types are found in Vietnam. In the north, especially in the interior, the temperatures are subtropical. Shifting seasonal wind patterns result in dry winters and wet summers. Temperatures in Hanoi range from about 17° C in January to about 29° C in July; mean annual precipitation is 1,830 mm.

The central and southeastern areas have a tropical monsoon climate, with high temperatures and abundant precipitation. In the southwest, distinct wet and dry periods are evident, but temperatures are higher than in the north. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Land use

The country's principal crop is rice (Vietnam is the world's third-largest rice exporter, behind Thailand and the United States). Forests cover about 30 per cent of Vietnam's total land area. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Kivinen & Pakarinen (1981) mention the presence of peatland in Vietnam but present no estimates for its area.

Wetlands

Peatlands

Kivinen & Pakarinen (1980) estimate the peatland area (> 30 cm peat) in Vietnam as being 100 km². Markov et al. (1988) estimate the area of „peat resources“ (peat thickness not mentioned) in Vietnam as being 100 km². Peat thickness: 50-70 (200) cm (van Thuy 1964) Peatland area: 0,01 million ha. Most of them in South Vietnam Peatland loss is about 100.000 ha **Markov et al. (1988)**

Shrier (1985), referring to the FAO/UNESCO 1971-1981 Soil Map of the World 1:5,000,000, mentions a “mire area” and an area of Histosols of 1,830 km² in the Mekong Delta region, just north of Quan Long.

Bord na Mona (1984) and Andriessse (1988) estimate the extent of organic soils in Vietnam to be 1,830 km². This value is also mentioned by Schneider & Schneider (1990) and Pfadenhauer et al. (1993) for peatlands, and by Rieley et al. (1996a) for “peat swamps“.

According to the interpreted World Soil Map (Van Engelen & Huting 2002) 1,332km² of histosols exist in Vietnam and 42,776 km² of gley soils.