



Viet Nam & New Zealand

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Let's go!

About the author

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About the Asia New Zealand Foundation Te Whītau Tūhono

The Asia New Zealand Foundation Te Whītau Tūhono is New Zealand's leading non-partisan, non-profit authority on Asia. We were set up in 1994 to build New Zealanders' knowledge and understanding of Asia. We rely on a mix of public, philanthropic and corporate funding. The Foundation works in partnership with influential individuals and organisations in New Zealand and Asia to provide high-level forums, cultural events, international collaborations, school programmes and professional development opportunities. Our activities cover more than 20 countries in Asia and are delivered through programmes with a focus on arts, leadership, entrepreneurship, sports, business, media, education, research and informal diplomacy (Track II). We have three offices: in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch.

About the Asia New Zealand Foundation's research programme

The Asia New Zealand Foundation's research programme commissions studies that support informed public conversations about New Zealand's relationship with Asia. The Foundation releases three to four pieces of research each year. Our aim is to generate research that is useful, relevant and authoritative for our stakeholders and beyond.

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Front cover	Rush hour in the city
Back cover	Ninh Binh province, Vietnam

Contents

Introduction

2



Part 1 — Building enduring connections

6

Connections forged through history

8

A 45-year partnership

10

Trade, development, and security

18

Looking ahead: A strategic partnership for the future

19



Part 2 — Globally connected Viet Nam

22

Globally connected Viet Nam

24

A hub for global business

26

Viet Nam on the world stage

28

Pho'nomenal Viet Nam

29

Trading places

31



Part 3 — New horizons

32

A quantum leap

34

From Silicon Valley to Saigon

35

Spotlight on education

37

Future discovery

38

Connect with Viet Nam!

40

Endnotes

41

Introduction

Viet Nam sits at the easternmost edge of Southeast Asia, bordered by China, Laos, Cambodia, and the Pacific Ocean. Viet Nam is now the world's 15th most populous country, with 54 ethnic groups making up a population of 97 million people. Viet Nam is an increasingly urban country; about 37 percent of its population now lives in the nation's vibrant cities and towns.¹

Colonisation and conflict characterised Viet Nam's experience in the first half of the twentieth century before a politically reunified country emerged in 1975. New Zealand established formal ties that same year. Viet Nam, like New Zealand, undertook significant economic reform in the 1980s to liberalise its economy and open to the world.

Economic progress has been complemented by social progress. Viet Nam's strong commitment to education has driven its social, economic and technological development. It has transformed from a low to middle-income country, lifting 40 million people out poverty in the process.²

Modern Viet Nam is a mix of captivating natural beauty, urban dynamism, and national optimism. Matt Wilson, a New Zealander living in Ho Chi Minh City, captures the spirit of the country: "The energy of the place is incredible – just so much activity going on in the streets. It doesn't always make sense, but it puts a smile on my face. Whenever I arrive back in Ho Chi Minh City and exit the airport I smile – it's like happy chaos."

As cone hats and rice paddies give way to billion-dollar companies and hi-tech manufacturing, this fast-changing Southeast Asian nation presents many opportunities for New Zealanders, now and into the future.

In 2020, New Zealand and Viet Nam celebrated 45 years of formal diplomatic relations and took the important step of elevating the relationship to a Strategic Partnership. The Strategic Partnership reflects the depth of connection that has been forged between the two nations by our businesses, academics, scientists, students, artists, diplomats and – most recently – our health experts, working together to combat the global coronavirus pandemic.

The Asia New Zealand Foundation Te Whītau Tūhono commissioned this report to celebrate these connections. The report looks at our history and the people who have brought us together. It also explores the opportunities that an energetic and fast-growing Viet Nam offers young New Zealanders, and equally, what New Zealand can offer young Vietnamese eager to explore, learn, or do business in New Zealand. The report includes the findings of a new survey conducted by the Foundation on the perceptions and aspirations of our next generation.³ Finally, the report looks to our shared future and the opportunities we have to work together and continue to grow this phenomenal partnership.

The COVID-19 pandemic

“As cone hats and rice paddies give way to billion-dollar companies and hi-tech manufacturing, this fast-changing Southeast Asian nation presents lots of opportunities for New Zealanders.”

No commentary following 2020 can ignore the impact of COVID-19. Our global ‘normal’ has been disrupted as countries grapple with the immediate public health challenges and associated economic shocks of the pandemic.

New Zealand and Viet Nam have both been praised for their effective response to the pandemic in the first half of 2020. Like New Zealand, Viet Nam mobilised public health information campaigns, carried out extensive contact tracing, closed its borders and enforced strict quarantine and social distancing measures. As a result, Viet Nam recorded among the lowest numbers of COVID-19 cases internationally and had very few deaths – a remarkable achievement for a country of almost 100 million people.

While border closures have prevented New Zealanders travelling to Viet Nam and Vietnamese to New Zealand, it is anticipated two-way tourism will continue to grow once border restrictions are lifted.

Vietnamese and New Zealand government public health posters
↓



Same-same but different

New Zealand and Viet Nam in a snapshot

Country size



New Zealand
268,000
sq km

Viet Nam
331,000
sq km

GDP size 2019
in NZ dollars



New Zealand
\$300B

Viet Nam
\$390B

Literacy
15 years +



New Zealand
99%

Viet Nam
95.8%

Beer consumption
per capita



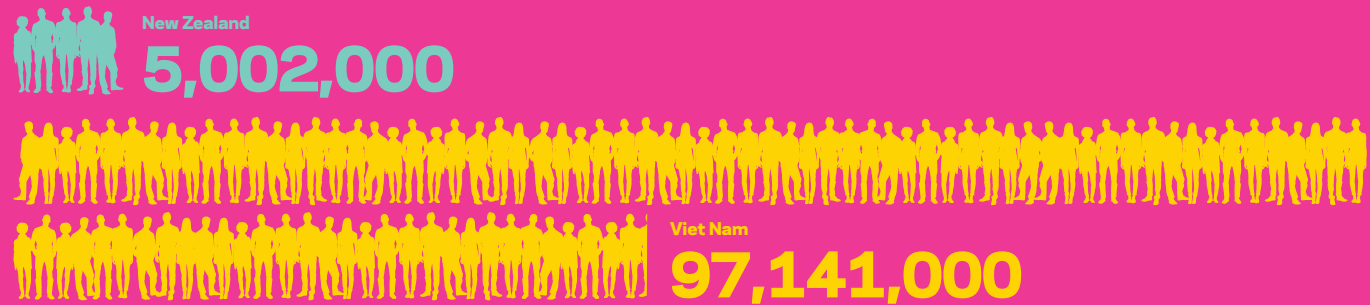
New Zealand
65.4
litres (2017)

Viet Nam
64.9
litres (2019)

Same-same but different

New Zealand and Viet Nam in a snapshot

Total population



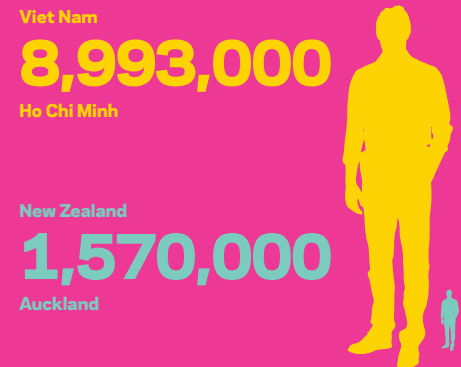
Price for a bowl of Pho noodles in NZ dollars



GDP per capita in NZ dollars



Population of the largest city







1—

Building enduring connections

The Golden Bridge (Cau Vang) near Da Nang.
<

Connections forged through history

Vietnamese patients in Binh Dinh with a member of the New Zealand medical team, circa 1963. Photo: New Zealand Vietnam Health Trust. →

Rewind to the early 1960s. Conflict in Viet Nam was intensifying, and the United States had begun escalating its military presence. In 1963, New Zealander Dr Michael Shackleton and his small civilian surgical team arrived in Binh Dinh, a small coastal province in Viet Nam, to provide medical assistance. Unrest, uncertainty and confusion were all around. The New Zealanders quickly made a name for themselves for their professionalism and their insistence on treating everyone, regardless of which side of the conflict their patients were on.

The legacy of Shackleton's medical team endures thanks to the ongoing efforts of the New Zealand Viet Nam Health Trust, which continues to support Binh Dinh's health needs today [see *Lifesavers*, page 9].

Close connections between New Zealand and Viet Nam have also been forged through education. Hundreds of Vietnamese students received scholarships to study in New Zealand from 1957 onwards under the Colombo Plan, an initiative to support development in Southeast Asia. Colombo Plan alumni have made a significant contribution to the New Zealand-Viet Nam relationship, serving as informal ambassadors and — for many — investing their time and energy across both countries [see *First contact*, page 11].

Fast forward to 2020 and Viet Nam has changed beyond recognition, yet our historic connections continue to resonate in the present.



Kelly, Hung and Anh after surgery at Binh Dinh General Hospital
→



Lifesavers

The New Zealand Vietnam Health Trust

One of New Zealand's most enduring links with Viet Nam is in the area of healthcare.

In 1963, New Zealand Prime Minister Keith Holyoake agreed to send a civilian team to Binh Dinh, a province in southern Viet Nam, to treat the wounded from military conflict.

From 1963 to 1975, the team built the surgical unit of the main provincial hospital, provided training and developed deep relationships with the locals. This provided the foundation for future work by the New Zealand Red Cross, Volunteer Service Abroad, and in 1995, the New Zealand Vietnam Health Trust.

Fifty-six years on, Health Trust volunteers – dedicated Kiwi medical professionals – continue to work in areas such as paediatrics, obstetrics, mental health, orthopaedics and haematology/blood banks.

"We focus on supporting local medical teams to build their own skills," says Dr Johan Morreau, chair of the Health Trust. "Ours is less of a 'doing to', more of a 'doing with', relationship."

The impact has been huge. To take one example, new-born mortality rates in the area have dropped dramatically, from 13 percent of admissions to intensive care in 2005 to just four percent in 2018.⁴

What does the future hold? In 2014, Anh Nguyen, a Vietnamese student completing her medical studies at the University of Otago, learned about the Trust's work. Anh spent an amazing six weeks with the Trust in Binh Dinh. "The staff at the orthopaedic centre were very welcoming. And the patients just appreciated everything you could do."

Anh returned in 2018 and 2019 and plans to go back again every year once travel is possible, fitting this work alongside her ongoing orthopaedic training. "As a Vietnamese I feel a sense of responsibility to use my skills for the Vietnamese people".

The Trust has now appointed Anh as an ambassador to promote its work. Her value to the Trust is not only in her medical skills. "When I'm in Viet Nam, I'm not just there as a doctor, but also a cultural and political interpreter – a bridge builder. I feel I can fill that role well; it feels really good."

A 45-year partnership

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern with Viet Nam's Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc at the 2017 APEC summit in Viet Nam.
→

Connections between New Zealand and Viet Nam have expanded considerably since diplomatic ties were first formally established in 1975. Viet Nam is now attracting serious attention from New Zealand (and many other countries) as one of the world's most dynamic economies and as one of only a handful of countries in Asia expected to register positive economic growth in 2020 despite the coronavirus pandemic.⁵

In recent years, young Vietnamese – more connected and mobile than ever before – have been discovering New Zealand through our education, films, food and tourism.

Pre-pandemic, Viet Nam was a hotspot for New Zealand tourists. In 2019, 40,000 Kiwis visited Viet Nam,⁶ enjoying Ho Chi Minh City's bustle, Hanoi's delicious street food, Hoi An's history and Ha Long Bay's stunning beauty.

In the other direction, Vietnamese students have been attending New Zealand schools and universities in record numbers,⁷ becoming 'Ambassadors for Life' like their Colombo Plan predecessors [See *Spotlight on Education*, page 37].

The Vietnamese community in New Zealand, now numbering more than 10,000,⁸ grew by 60 percent between New Zealand's 2013 and 2018 census. While COVID-19 has limited travel in both directions for the time being, these figures speak to a strong mutual interest and a desire to know and experience each other's countries.



Tran Huu Chinh (left)
in Christchurch circa
1967, and today.
→

First contact

**Mr Tran Huu Chinh,
Colombo Plan alumni**



It didn't take long for Tran Huu Chinh and his fellow students to discover the culinary high points of 1960s New Zealand: fish and chips and Tip Top ice-cream. These quickly became firm favourites for Chinh and his friends, who arrived in New Zealand in 1967 on Colombo Plan scholarships.

The Colombo Plan was established in 1951 and over many years provided scholarships for hundreds of students from Asia, including from Viet Nam, to receive higher education in New Zealand.

Chinh knew nothing about New Zealand when he applied for the scholarship, but the New Zealand Embassy staff (based in Saigon in those days) were friendly and helpful, including with English language study. "But we still couldn't understand a word when we arrived!"

Chinh studied chemical engineering at the University of Canterbury from 1967 to 1971 and returned to Viet Nam confident in the knowledge and skills gained from study in New Zealand. He has subsequently led a successful career in multiple businesses - real estate, seafood and trading.

Chinh's connection with New Zealand has remained strong in the 50 years since his life-changing study in New Zealand. He advises New Zealand companies in Viet Nam and has supported generations of New Zealand Embassy officials. "Now the relationship has become beautiful, and good for both countries."



Tomorrow's leaders
and explorers:

How do young New Zealanders and Vietnamese perceive each other?

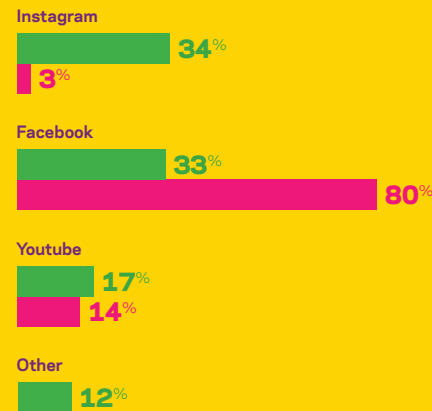
Original research findings

Young people in all countries are a force for progress, development and innovation. The Asia New Zealand Foundation commissioned Research New Zealand to conduct original survey research with young Vietnamese and young New Zealanders. We asked for their perspectives on New Zealand and Viet Nam, and to share their ambitions for the future. The research shows many areas of similarity – young Vietnamese and young New Zealanders are globally minded, ambitious, and curious about each other and the possibilities on offer.



● New Zealand
● Viet Nam

What's the most influential social media?



Instagram is by far the most influential platform for 16-20 year olds in New Zealand (50%), while Facebook was much more influential for the 25-30 age group.

In Viet Nam, Facebook is king! Eighty percent of survey respondents identified Facebook as the most influential platform.

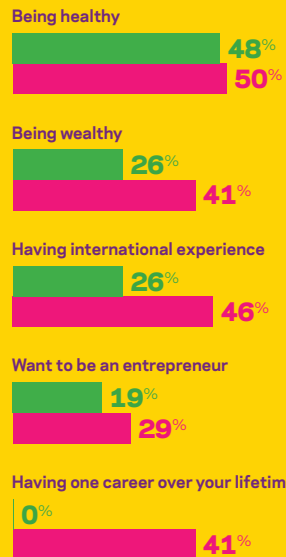
What are the things that you are most worried about?



Both groups are concerned by crime and safety as well as economic security. Environment features heavily for both, but for young New Zealanders the greater concern is about climate change, while for young Vietnamese it is pollution. Vietnamese also worry about traffic and corruption, while young New Zealanders worry about racism and mental health.

- New Zealand
- Viet Nam

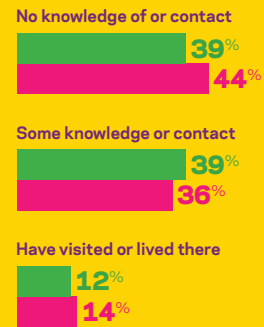
What are your ambitions for the future?



Young New Zealanders and Vietnamese share similar aspirations around health, wealth and international experience.

Vietnamese are increasingly outward looking: gaining international experience features much more prominently for young Vietnamese compared to New Zealanders

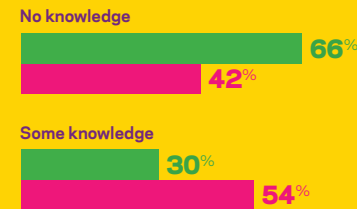
Have you ever engaged with New Zealand/Viet Nam or their people?



New Zealand and Vietnamese youth are travelling much more than in the past. Half of the New Zealanders surveyed have had some engagement with Viet Nam or its peoples, with 12% having travelled to or live in Viet Nam.

Half of the Vietnamese surveyed had had some engagement with New Zealand, with 14% having lived or travelled to New Zealand.

Do you know what products/services come from New Zealand/Viet Nam?



The most common answers are rice, food, clothes, travel. Electronics are mentioned, but not much, which is surprising as electronics are by far the largest export item from Viet Nam to New Zealand.

More than half of young Vietnamese have some knowledge of New Zealand products and services. Young Vietnamese have significantly greater knowledge of New Zealand products and services than their Kiwi counterparts (54% compared to 30%). Most answers are travel, milk, fruit, education and healthcare/health products — spot on.

What are young people most interested about NZ/Viet Nam?

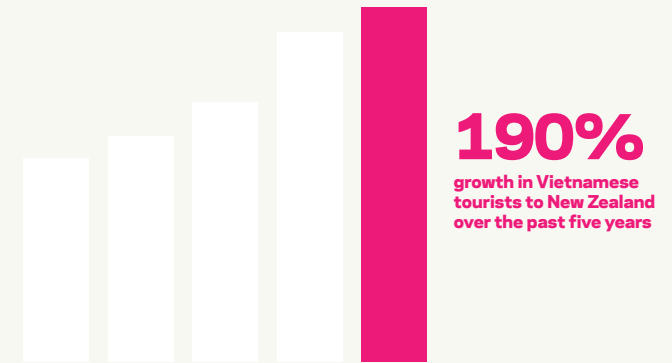


Young Vietnamese were more focused on their longer-term engagement with New Zealand (the possibility of living, working, or studying in New Zealand) rather than New Zealanders, who were more focused on short-term experiences.

The survey was commissioned by the Asia New Zealand Foundation Te Whaitau Tūhono and led by Research New Zealand. The research took place in December 2019 and surveyed 200 Vietnamese and 200 New Zealanders between the ages of 16 and 30.

New Zealand Viet Nam connections: By the numbers

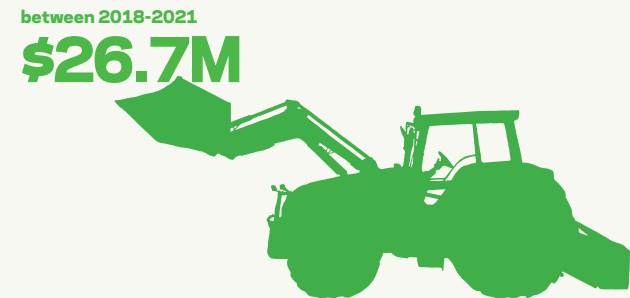
Tourism (before COVID-19)



Population



New Zealand development assistance to Viet Nam (NZ dollars)



Education



2,755

Vietnamese students studying in New Zealand in 2018

10th largest

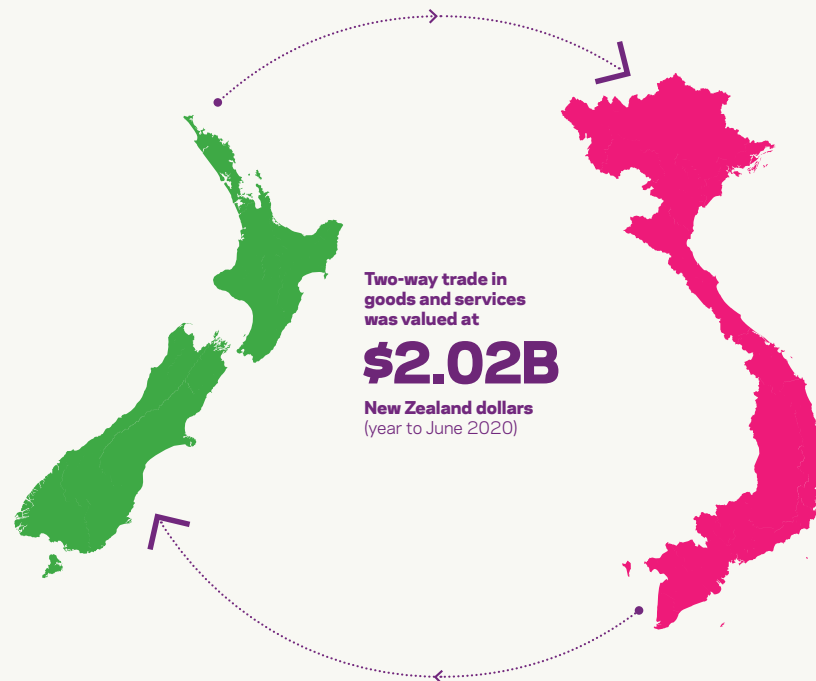
source market for international students

Viet Nam is New Zealand's fastest growing student market in the world in 2018 — worth

\$97M

New Zealand dollars to our economy

Trade



Two-way trade in goods and services was valued at

\$2.02B

New Zealand dollars (year to June 2020)

Ticket to tech

Ezel Kokcu



Ezel Kokcu.
Photo:
Maddie Aiken
→

2019 Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Finalist Ezel Kokcu visited Viet Nam as part of an Asia New Zealand Foundation Young Business Leaders Initiative delegation in 2016.

Kokcu, co-founder and CEO of ticketing platform Passsphere, recalls being blown away by the scale of operations in Viet Nam. “The efficiencies of scale are hard to comprehend coming from New Zealand. Visiting the Samsung factory was one of the most mind-blowing experiences of my life.”

The Samsung factory she is talking about is on the outskirts of Hanoi, and a city in itself - with a workforce of 60,000, its own hospital, bus service, school and accommodation. Its cutting-edge production facilities produce a range of Samsung's latest consumer electronics including tablets and smartphones.

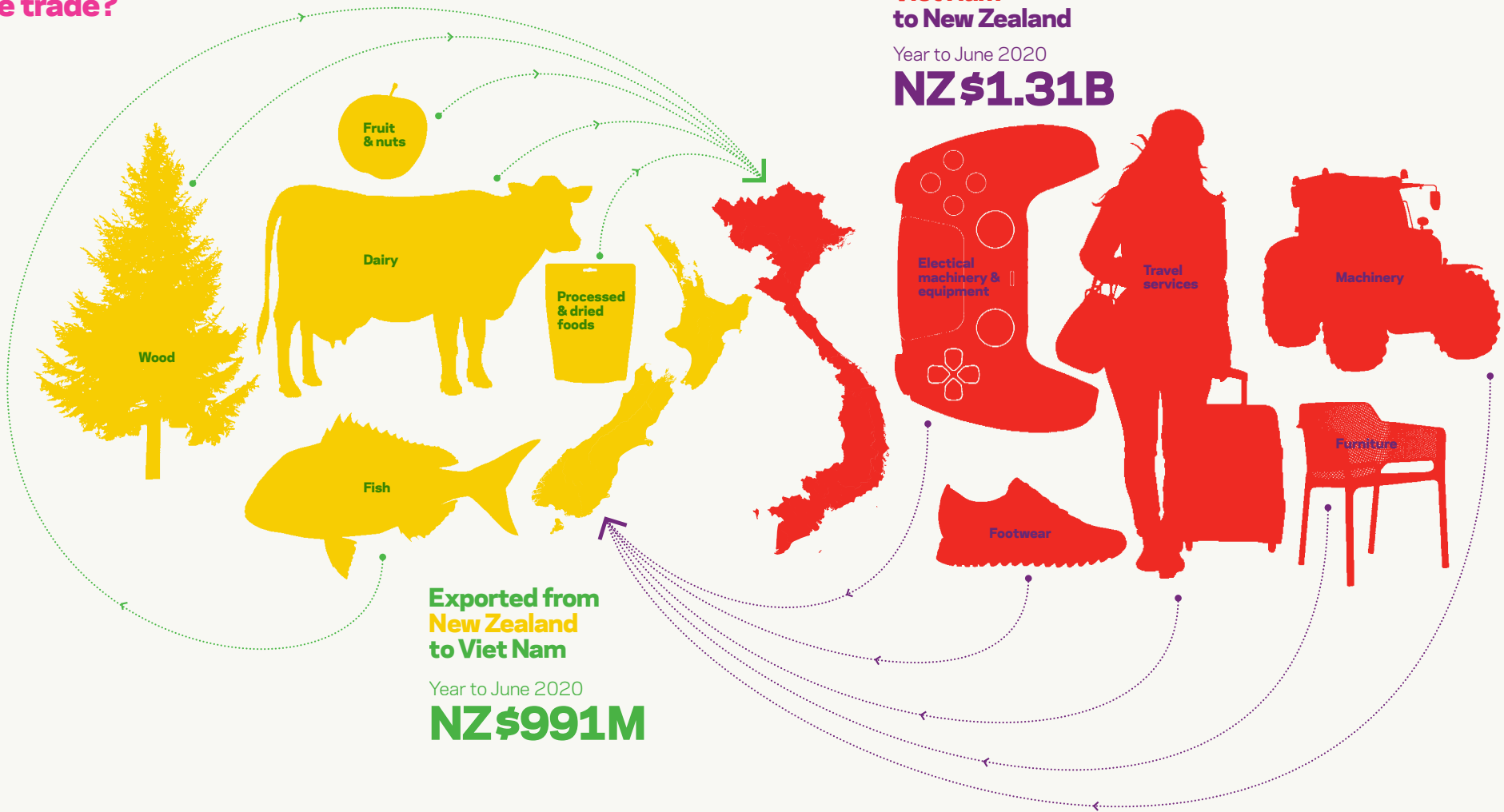
Kokcu points to the high level of support for the tech sector in Viet Nam, and the availability of international funding for Vietnamese start-ups. “People underestimate the technology and manufacturing powerhouse that Viet Nam is becoming. It’s just wow!

“We [the New Zealand tech sector] don’t really look enough at Viet Nam at the moment, and that should change. They have lots of quality developers, and traditional barriers [such as language] are disappearing. During the pandemic, we continue to look locally and abroad in places like Viet Nam for assistance to continue our efforts to scale globally.”

Kokcu hopes to return to Viet Nam soon to learn more about its growing significance as a tech hub.

“We [the New Zealand tech sector] don’t really look enough at Viet Nam at the moment, and that should change.”

What do we trade?



Imported from Viet Nam to New Zealand

Year to June 2020

NZ\$1.31B

Exported from New Zealand to Viet Nam

Year to June 2020

NZ\$991M

Trade, development and security

Captain of the HMNZS Te Mana, Lisa Hunn, in Viet Nam →

Growing trade is a key focus for both countries. Since 2009, the signing of new regional trade agreements⁹ has facilitated an impressive 335 percent growth in trade between New Zealand and Viet Nam.¹⁰ New Zealand dairy, apples, kiwifruit and cherries have been in demand from Viet Nam's wealthier consumers. Meanwhile, New Zealanders are discovering Vietnamese coffee, dragon fruit, furniture, clothing, electronics and smartphones.

While the pandemic has had an immediate impact on tourism and education, our trade in goods has remained robust. Indeed, New Zealand exports to Viet Nam have remained steady in 2020.¹¹ "Our key exports like dairy and fruit are known for being safe, high quality, and nutritious, and this is resonating well with Vietnamese consumers, who are now – more than ever – conscious of health," explains Karlene Davis, New Zealand's Trade Commissioner based in Ho Chi Minh City.

New Zealand Ambassador to Viet Nam Wendy Matthews highlights other important connections between the two countries, including New Zealand's ongoing contribution to Viet Nam's development [see *Helping the dragon fly*, page 20], cultural exchanges, and cooperation in groupings like the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

"Our development work is a significant strand of the relationship. We tend to focus on sharing our know-how in areas where we have real strengths, for example in food safety, disaster risk management, [and in] education," says Matthews. "In recent times we've also stepped in to provide support to local communities particularly vulnerable to the economic fallout from the pandemic".¹²

Viet Nam and New Zealand are also working together on defence and security, including peacekeeping cooperation, training and exchanges. Royal New Zealand Navy visits to Viet Nam have enjoyed high visibility, including the successful visit by HMNZS Te Mana to Ho Chi Minh City in late 2018, led by Captain Lisa Hunn.



Looking ahead: A strategic partnership for the future

Wendy Matthews,
New Zealand
Ambassador to
Viet Nam.
→



In July 2020, the Prime Ministers of New Zealand and Viet Nam took the important step of announcing a “Strategic Partnership”¹³ – a diplomatic ‘upgrade’ in the relationship, placing New Zealand among a small group of nations with strategic partner status.

“The Strategic Partnership recognises the fantastic growth in the relationship in recent years, and reflects an ambition to drive stronger, deeper connections between our countries,” says New Zealand Ambassador to Viet Nam, Wendy Matthews. “Our Prime Ministers made a deliberate decision to make this commitment during COVID, saying ‘while our borders remain closed, our minds are not – and our cooperation can continue to grow.’”

One immediate outcome of the partnership is a new e-certification arrangement, which makes trade in agricultural products faster, more secure and cheaper between the two countries. This is an important development given the growth in New Zealand agriculture exports to Viet Nam. “We’ve got a great foundation to build from, and we also want to change perceptions in Viet Nam about New Zealand. We’re known in Viet Nam for our clean green image and products, which is great, but it’s also time to showcase New Zealand innovation, our creative industries and our tech sector.”

Matthews adds a message for all New Zealanders: “This is a country on the move – take a look!”

“ We’ve got a great foundation to build from. We’re known in Viet Nam for our clean green image and products, but it’s also time to showcase Kiwi innovation, our creative industries, and our tech sector.”

**Ambassador
Wendy Matthews**

Helping the dragon fly

Plant & Food Research

Drive through parts of southern Viet Nam at night and you'll see otherworldly scenes of row upon row of large truffid-like plants being grown under floodlights. Dragon fruit is an extraordinary plant, producing extraordinary fruit. And New Zealand scientists from Plant & Food Research have been working with Viet Nam to make it even more extraordinary.

Funded since 2013 through the New Zealand Government's development programme with Viet Nam, the Plant & Food Research team have been working with Vietnamese partners to improve the taste of dragon fruit, as well as improve production and commercialisation models. New Zealand's assistance is based on its own success with kiwifruit, apples and blueberries.

Dragon fruit is a cactus originating from central America, introduced by the French into Viet Nam more than a century ago. But it's become an iconic national fruit – a Vietnamese version of kiwifruit.

Viet Nam already exports more than NZ\$1.5 billion worth of dragon fruit a year, making it the world's largest exporter and producer of the product.¹⁴ These days you can find dragon fruit on New Zealand supermarket shelves. The goal is to build on this success, bringing dragon fruit to many more markets.

Plant & Food Research's project is starting to bear fruit: a new variety will be available for commercialisation by the end of 2020, with an enhanced flavour profile. The variety will have intellectual property protections and is expected to be commercialised. The commercialisation model may be a licensing and controlled production model, similar to that used for the well-known Jazz™ and Envy™ brands of apples.

The success of the project is down to the strong relationships built between the New Zealand team and their Vietnamese partners. "Trust and respect are really strong," says Plant & Food Research's Dr Michael Lay-Yee. Creating a commercial model where all parties can share in the benefit is fundamental to this project: "If successful, the Vietnamese dragon fruit industry and our partners will enjoy significant returns from these varieties; and Plant & Food Research will also benefit from a share of royalty streams generated."



Trading places

Miraka and Vinamilk

Vinamilk's CEO Madam Mai Kieu Lien with Miraka kaumātua Eru George in 2011.
→



Vinamilk is a household name in Viet Nam. More than that, for the past four years, the Viet Nam-owned dairy and beverages giant has been rated among Viet Nam's top brands.¹⁵

Vinamilk has also been at the forefront of the next phase of Viet Nam's international integration: outward Vietnamese investment. In 2010, Vinamilk made its first ever foreign direct investment offshore. It chose a new Māori-owned company called Miraka, based in Taupo, New Zealand.

Miraka produces a range of ingredients (such as milk powders) and consumer products (such as long-life milk) and has a strong export focus.

Vinamilk bought a 23 percent share in Miraka during its establishment phase – a timely and important investment for the fledgling New Zealand company.

"We were looking for money in a post-Global Financial Crisis environment, and without investment from partners like Vinamilk, we wouldn't have got off the ground," says Miraka CEO Richard Wyeth.

Miraka felt that Vinamilk was a good fit from a values and strategy perspective. Aside from providing much needed capital, the relationship has also enabled Miraka to build its export business with Viet Nam. When Miraka invested in UHT processing lines in 2014, it visited Vinamilk's factories in Viet Nam to learn from their world-class operations.

Ten years on and the relationship is still going strong. Vinamilk's iconic CEO Madam Mai Kieu Lien sits on Miraka's board, but Vinamilk largely leaves Miraka to run its operation and strategy.

As a Māori-owned business, Wyeth believes that the instinctive focus on relationships resonates strongly in Viet Nam.

"We had dinner one night in Ho Chi Minh City with the senior leadership of Vinamilk, and at the end of the dinner we got up and sang a waiata," he recalls. "You could see the impact this had – it sets us Kiwis apart. When Vinamilk visited us later in New Zealand, Madam Lien and her delegation sang their own waiata at our company opening. It really created a connection."

Given Viet Nam's population of nearly 100 million people and fast-growing incomes, Wyeth thinks more Kiwis should get involved: "Viet Nam is growing in front of our eyes – and growth provides opportunity. And the Vietnamese are great people to deal with."





2—

Globally connected Viet Nam

Fans in Hanoi
watching the ASEAN
Football Federation
Championship final.



Globally connected Viet Nam

Viet Nam is one of the few places on earth expecting positive Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth in 2020.¹⁶ While no country has been shielded from the economic shock of COVID-19, Viet Nam's economic dynamism and success to date in responding to COVID-19 positions the country well for an early recovery.

Economic progress is being felt at street level. When Japanese clothing retailer Uniqlo opened its first Viet Nam store in downtown Ho Chi Minh City in December 2019, it couldn't have imagined the response from Viet Nam's consumers. In scenes reminiscent of an Apple store when a new iPhone is released, crowds of young Vietnamese lined up overnight to be first in the new store. In the days that followed, people queued for an hour or more to get in the doors. Uniqlo's delighted senior manager confirmed soon after that Uniqlo would set up another 100 stores across Viet Nam over next year. Sure enough, new Uniqlo stores are popping up in Viet Nam despite the impact of the pandemic.

Optimism, dynamism and scale are what the world sees in Viet Nam in 2020. While average incomes are still modest, Viet Nam has been the second fastest growing economy on the planet over the past 25 years and remains a bright spot in an otherwise gloomy global economic picture.¹⁷

Viet Nam's international connectivity is growing too. Indeed, by some measures Viet Nam is now the most globalised economy in modern history.¹⁸ Viet Nam has negotiated a raft of free trade agreements with partners from across the world and is becoming an international hub for manufacturing and increasingly services.

Viet Nam is one of the most digitally connected countries in the region, with some of the best digital infrastructure in Asia.¹⁹ It is effectively an incubator for aspiring tech talent and start-ups, with a vibrant e-commerce and hospitality scene.

“ Viet Nam is now the most globalised economy in modern history.”

The secret sauce

Saigon Charlie's chili sauce



Charlie Page's chili sauce range
↑

New Zealander Charlie Page has a long history with Viet Nam. He first arrived in Hanoi in 2000 and, with two of his University of Canterbury buddies, opened the city's first Western-style café. Puku Café – with its strong Kiwi influence – was the grandfather of a now thriving café scene in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

Twenty years on, Page is on the verge of the next big thing with his premium chili sauce company Saigon Charlie's. He produces three types of hot sauce based on the unique regional flavours from Hanoi (North), Hue (Central) and Ho Chi Minh City (South). Only Vietnamese chilis are used.

"Viet Nam was changing so quickly and so was the food," remembers Page. "In the past, every noodle shop you went to made their own chili sauce, but then suddenly it all started to be mass-produced. The noodle shops stopped making their own sauce and instead offered cheap [ready-made] bottled sauces – it seemed like such a loss."

It turns out that Page's family has pedigree: his wife's grandmother and great grandmother used to grow chilis for the Imperial Court of Viet Nam in Hue, a city in central Viet Nam. Armed with an old family chili sauce recipe and a 50-litre cooking pot, Charlie started making chili sauce by hand.

Demand is growing thanks to word of mouth and now Saigon Charlie's production has outgrown the 50-litre pot. Production is forecast to rise four-fold in 2020, and Page is eyeing export markets in Europe and North America. His vision is to build a family business that endures.

Page's advice to young New Zealand entrepreneurs looking at Viet Nam? "The culture and business environment in Viet Nam are very different [from New Zealand], so engage early with someone trustworthy who can advise you on the lay of the land."

As well as Vietnamese business mentors, New Zealanders living and working in Viet Nam can offer great insider advice.

Postscript: The coronavirus pandemic has hit business hard, but Page has his fingers crossed that tourists will again return to Viet Nam soon, once borders reopen.

A hub for global business

Viet Nam's economic dynamism is drawing in billions of dollars of foreign investment – particularly from Asia – into sectors such as manufacturing, retail, real estate and energy. Japan and South Korea are major investors, with Singapore and Hong Kong also making big contributions. Japanese investors rank Viet Nam as one of their top three global investment destinations, behind only China and India.²⁰ COVID-19 is unlikely to dampen these trends.

These days, if you own a Samsung smartphone or AirPods, the chances are that they were made in Viet Nam. South Korean electronics giant Samsung is one of the most recognised major investors in Viet Nam. As of 2018, the company had channelled NZ\$26.1 billion of investment into the country,²¹ and exported NZ\$81.5 billion dollars' worth of smartphones and electronics, making it Viet Nam's largest single exporter.²²

Viet Nam is now the second largest exporter of smartphones globally, second only to China.²³ Viet Nam's smartphone exports in 2019 were five times the size of New Zealand's dairy exports – our biggest goods export category.

“ Viet Nam is now the second largest exporter of smartphones globally, second only to China. Viet Nam's smartphone exports in 2019 were five times the size of New Zealand's dairy exports — our biggest trade item.”

Bottle caps to bridges

Matt Wilson's beer tale



Viet Nam is the fastest growing beer market in the world. Photo: Pablo Rebolledo
↑

Vietnamese love beer [See 'Same same but different', page 4]. New Zealanders travelling to Viet Nam will be familiar with the freshly brewed beer and plastic chairs of bia hoi, where sidewalk bars serve NZ\$0.50 cent beers to locals and tourists long into the evening.

Indeed, Viet Nam has been the fastest growing beer market in the world over the past five years and is now a top 10 beer market globally.²⁴ It's little wonder that global brewing giant Heineken has bet big on Viet Nam.

New Zealander Matt Wilson, corporate director at Heineken Viet Nam, has made sustainability a core focus. Inspired by his days at DB Breweries, Wilson championed several initiatives that have seen Heineken emerge as a leader in environmental sustainability in Viet Nam. This includes steel beam bridges ("Tiger Bridges") made from recycled bottle caps, previously the only part of the beer bottle previously not being reused or recycled. Now the locals collect them, which Heineken then uses to build bridges in local communities. The next big project is to use biomass (typically rice waste) to provide the thermal energy needed to power their massive breweries (which is already the case) and packaging lines.

What does Wilson find special about Viet Nam? "The energy of the place is incredible - just so much activity going on in the streets. It doesn't always make sense, but it puts a smile on my face. Whenever I arrive back in Ho Chi Minh City and exit the airport I smile - it's like happy chaos."

Postscript: After more than four years in Viet Nam, Wilson recently moved back to New Zealand with his family. "Being back in New Zealand now it's interesting to reflect on the two countries. New Zealand is perceived as clean and green and Viet Nam not so, but there are some areas where Viet Nam is miles ahead. For example, most beer bottles in Viet Nam are returnable - washed and reused multiple times, whereas here almost all bottles are used only once and then melted again to make a new bottle. And while Viet Nam and New Zealand are at different stages of development, living in Viet Nam taught me that one is not necessarily better than the other: there's heaps we can learn from each other."

Viet Nam on the world stage

Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Photo: Georgios Domouchtsidis →

While Viet Nam's "tiger economy" rightly attracts a lot of attention, the story doesn't end there. In recent years Viet Nam has become an increasingly confident regional and global player. At a time when some countries have turned inward, it continues to embrace international and regional cooperation, encouraging nations to keep their economies open. Viet Nam has demonstrated active leadership in 2020 as Chair of ASEAN, and supported efforts to conclude a major new regional trade agreement, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which also involves New Zealand.

In recent years, Viet Nam has contributed to United Nations (UN) Peacekeeping missions and has twice hosted APEC, one of the most important regional economic organisations.²⁵ Viet Nam is increasingly seen as a regional trouble-shooter – in 2019 the country put its hand up to broker talks between the United States and North Korea. In 2020, Viet Nam commenced a two-year term as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council.

Its historic, political and cultural ties with China are an important part of the regional picture. So too are the differences between China, Viet Nam and other Southeast Asian countries over territorial claims in the South China Sea. Effective management of these security tensions is critical to the region's peace and security. New Zealand's trade, education, political and security interests in Southeast Asia also depend on a stable

and peaceful regional environment. Emerging powers such as Viet Nam will become increasingly influential in ensuring that stability and security are maintained.

On the health front, Viet Nam has been a leader in the field of "coronavirus diplomacy", donating medical supplies such as masks and other protective equipment to many countries in Asia, Europe and North America, as well as supporting the World Health Organization (WHO) by sharing its experiences and medical insights.²⁶



Pho'nomenal Viet Nam

Lion dance and
confetti during
Vietnamese New
Year celebration.
Photo: Tony Pham
→

In reference to its stellar handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic impact, HSBC bank recently praised the country as “Pho'nomenal Viet Nam” (a play on Pho soup, a noodle dish Viet Nam is famous for). But Viet Nam's success is not a matter of good luck. As another observer noted, “good management is the key here. It is not like Viet Nam doesn't have notable vulnerabilities. Or that good fortune just landed in its lap. The real learning is how it has minimised weaknesses and maximised strengths. Making the most of the hand it has been dealt.”²⁷

Longer term, PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) predicts that Viet Nam, India and Bangladesh will be three of the world's fastest growing economies over the next 30 years, averaging five percent growth a year in real terms. By 2050, Viet Nam's GDP is expected to rank 24th in the world, placing it ahead of Malaysia, Thailand and the Netherlands.²⁸



Up, up and away

New Zealand-Viet Nam aviation links

A Vietnamese aviation student in the South Island
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Pre-COVID-19, Viet Nam's aviation market was booming. In fact, Viet Nam was expected to be the world's fastest growing passenger market over the next 20 years.²⁹ Passenger numbers grew an incredible 16 percent a year and cargo increased by 14 percent a year between 2010 and 2017.³⁰

The aviation sector in Viet Nam is forecast to eventually recover from the pandemic and New Zealand will play its part in supporting this recovery and future growth by providing training for Vietnamese air traffic controllers and pilots.

Conducting traffic

New Zealand's air navigation service provider Airways began training Vietnamese air traffic controllers in the 1980s when the country started to develop its aviation infrastructure. Rapid growth in recent years has led to a shortage of Vietnamese air traffic controllers and a need for existing controllers to upskill. Since 2015, 60 students from the Viet Nam Air Traffic Management Corporation (VATM) have undertaken air traffic control training with Airways in Christchurch, New Zealand. Airways has also provided refresher training for VATM's existing controllers over the years.

Top guns

With more flights and more planes, Viet Nam also requires more pilots. These days, if you're taking a flight in Viet Nam, chances are one of your pilots trained in New Zealand. Christchurch-based International Aviation Academy New Zealand (IAANZ) is one of four New Zealand flight schools formally licensed to provide training to Vietnamese pilots.

Nguyen Hong Hai, first officer with national carrier Vietnam Airlines, is one of a number of exceptional Vietnamese pilots to have graduated from New Zealand. IAANZ staff describe Hai as a "natural", perhaps not surprising given his pedigree: his father was chief pilot of Vietnam Airlines and his older brother is also a pilot. Hai himself is now on course to become Vietnam Airlines' youngest ever captain.

By 2019 IAANZ had put 55 Vietnamese pilots through their rigorous 18-month training programme. Viet Nam has quickly become IAANZ's most important international market (and pilot training doesn't come cheap). The Christchurch company is confident about its prospects: prior to COVID-19, Vietnam Airlines alone needed to train some 200 new pilots every year to keep up with demand.³¹

So why do Vietnamese aviators choose New Zealand?

Airways' regional director for Asia, Daniel Jimenez, says this is due to the quality of New Zealand's training, but also the Kiwi way. "Our partnership with Viet Nam Air Traffic Management is very important to our business," says Jimenez. "We take care to listen to what they need and then we adjust to that."

IAANZ's head of business development Prince Joel agrees: "It's the quality of our training, Kiwi friendliness, our interest in building relationships, and our transparency. A bit of humour helps too!"



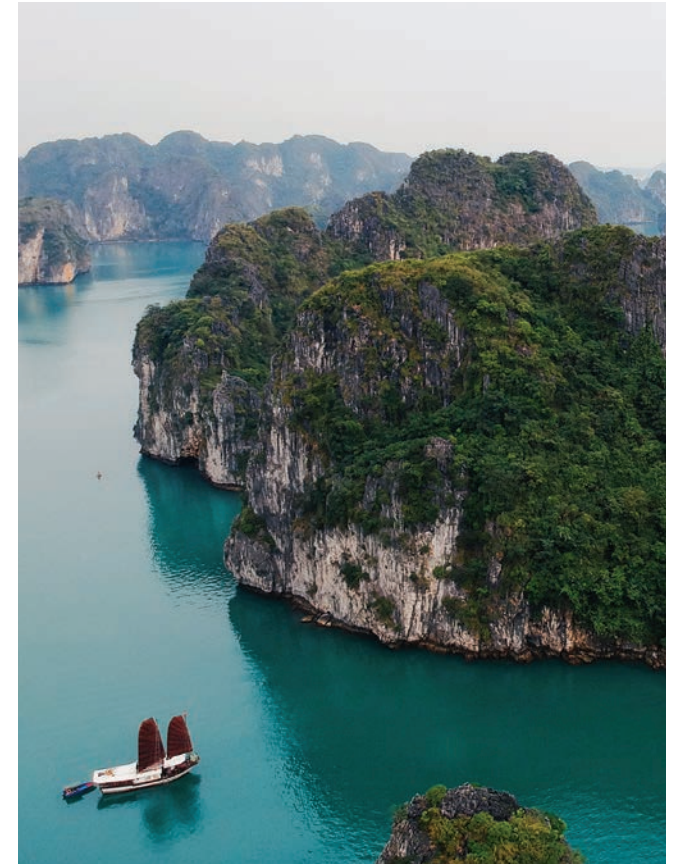
Trading places

Bai Tu Long Bay,
Ha Long. Photo:
Taylor Simpson
→

By 2050 Viet Nam's population is expected to reach 120 million.³² As per capita incomes have grown, so too has expenditure on luxury goods and services, including international travel. Although the pandemic has prohibited travel in the short term, in the longer term, Vietnamese are expected to continue to represent a growing share of New Zealand's tourism market.

Research conducted by the Asia New Zealand Foundation in 2019 supports this assessment. Survey results reveal that close to half of Vietnamese respondents aged 16 to 30 have an ambition to work, live or travel overseas.³³

As tourism grows, it is also likely we'll see a growing community of Vietnamese keen to call New Zealand home. Already we have seen significant expansion in this area: New Zealand's 2018 Census recorded more than 10,000 Vietnamese living in New Zealand – a 60 percent increase in just five years.³⁴





3—

A bowl of Pho noodle soup. Pho is considered one of Viet Nam's national dishes.



New horizons



A quantum leap

An aerial view of
Ho Chi Minh City's
skyline. Photo:
Tron Le
→

Viet Nam has gone from New Zealand's 22nd largest trading partner in 2013³⁵ to its 15th largest trading partner in 2020,³⁶ with more than NZ\$2 billion in two-way trade in goods and services.

As the chair of the New Zealand Chamber of Commerce in Viet Nam, Warrick Cleine, notes: "The features of Viet Nam that are attractive to New Zealand traders are growing, such as its increasingly mobile, educated and well-resourced population. Equally, the 'Made in New Zealand' brand is becoming a powerful and trusted brand in Viet Nam - particularly for our food products." (See *View from the top*, page 36)

Relocation of production from China to Viet Nam - because of its competitive cost, quality manufacturing and stable operating environment - is becoming more commonplace, with many major international electronics, textiles, footwear and furniture producers, as well as New Zealand's own Icebreaker brand, having made the move already.

As Viet Nam becomes a larger and more globally dominant manufacturer, demand for New Zealand's raw materials such as timber, fibre, ingredients and unprocessed foods will undoubtedly increase - first for processing and then for re-export to the world. And as New Zealand businesses become more familiar with the opportunities in Viet Nam, and Vietnamese get to know New Zealand better, trade ties look set to expand further. Over the coming decade, two-way trade could hit NZ\$5 billion a year.³⁷



From Silicon Valley to Saigon



Mitchell Pham
↑

A 2019 joint report by Google, Temasek and Bain & Co concludes that Viet Nam is emerging as the most digital of all economies in Southeast Asia.³⁸

Mitchell Pham, proud Vietnamese Kiwi and chair of the Digital Council for Aotearoa New Zealand as well as the New Zealand Technology Industry Association (NZTech), believes tech will be a big part of Viet Nam's future as well as for the New Zealand-Viet Nam relationship. Pham sees the Vietnamese diaspora, especially from the US, shifting their innovation activities from Silicon Valley to Ho Chi Minh City. "As the Vietnamese tech ecosystem has been built by outside influences, it is inherently international by nature - whereas New Zealand's is more homegrown." This fusion presents both countries with real opportunity to collaborate and grow.

In 2019, Viet Nam ranked second only to Singapore in Southeast Asia for inwards fintech investment (accounting for 36 percent of the region's total investment in the sector).³⁹ As momentum grows and investment increases, Pham predicts that Viet Nam will start producing many more unicorns (start-ups valued at US\$1 billion or more) in the next three to five years.

The New Zealand tech sector also shows stellar growth: it is now the third largest export earner for New Zealand after primary industries and tourism.⁴⁰ Pham argues that New Zealand tech companies should be increasingly orienting their products and services to the Asian market, and Viet

Nam offers a great base: "The closer to the market you innovate, the better your product is going to be. The real opportunity is to collaborate in Asia, and to customise to local markets in the region. Vietnamese tech entrepreneurs are hungry to work with Western partners and entrepreneurs."

One recent trend has been the increasing popularity of Viet Nam as an offshore development and regional operations hub. Viet Nam's successful management of COVID-19 has also meant that its talented tech workforce has been able to continue working throughout the pandemic. "Tech firms in the US and elsewhere increasingly see Viet Nam as providing 'strategic capability' and 'scalable capacity' to their operations," notes Pham. "We should too."

New Zealand's secret weapon for connecting to Viet Nam in the future? A small but rapidly growing pool of talented Vietnamese tech professionals in New Zealand. Pham has spearheaded the creation of the Viet-Kiwi Tech & Digital Interest Group to connect and mobilise these young professionals. "This offers a direct and powerful connection back to the tech sector and network in Viet Nam."

"Both Viet Nam and New Zealand's post-COVID recoveries will be digital-led," says Pham. "And we have a great opportunity to co-create and build new solutions together for global markets."

View from the top

Warrick Cleine, KPMG Viet Nam and New Zealand Chamber of Commerce



We asked Warrick Cleine, chair of New Zealand Chamber of Commerce in Viet Nam and KPMG Viet Nam, how he sees the country's future and future opportunities for New Zealand.

What changes you have seen in Viet Nam during your time here?

I first arrived in 1997 – it was a different world then. Ho Chi Minh City was transitioning to a post-conflict city – anyone in their 30s or 40s had been through the war. The foreign population was very small. The city was also a lot smaller, around four million people [it is now more than eight million]. Twenty years on, it's a very different city, it's much more international.

Why does Viet Nam matter to New Zealand and how do you see Viet Nam becoming more relevant for the country in future?

New Zealand is on Asia's doorstep and that's where the economic future lies – this is the Asian Century. But Asia is many different stories – and even within the 11 countries of Southeast Asia there are big differences. As well as a growing demand for New Zealand products and services, Viet Nam is also playing an increasingly important role in maintaining regional stability

and security. Maintaining peace is essential for trade and economic ties to grow. So New Zealand should work hard in its relationship with Viet Nam to support efforts to protect security and peace in the region.

What are the key economic and investment opportunities for New Zealand in Viet Nam in future?

I think we're going to see an amplification of existing ties and the new Strategic Partnership will help that. Viet Nam will be a good market for New Zealand consumer products, good for education services. Viet Nam will outperform others in economic growth in the coming years, which means a disproportionately greater opportunity for New Zealand here in future. We're also going to see the move of more manufacturing capacity from China to Viet Nam – which will change New Zealand's relationships with both countries.

The challenge now is for New Zealand exporters to "step up" and take the opportunity in front of them. Our exporters will need to do their homework and build market specific knowledge to trade with the likes of Viet Nam. They will need to be clear on their channel to market and articulate why a Vietnamese consumer should buy their product.

What do you think Viet Nam will look like in 2030?

The country will be richer, more important, more relevant in global supply chains; it will be higher up the value chain, meaning it will be making more and more sophisticated things. It is also 10 years away from an inflection point on demographics and dealing with an ageing population. I think we're going to see big changes in financial products such as savings, pensions and insurance, and the development of some sort of welfare state.

Warrick Cleine
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Spotlight on education



Vietnamese students in New Zealand 2017



As the legacy of the Colombo Plan scholarship demonstrates, education has been a powerful conduit for connecting New Zealand and Viet Nam. New Zealand has welcomed students from Viet Nam to attend its schools and universities. Many students have returned with goodwill towards New Zealand, leading to new business and social connections between the two countries. Vietnamese students coming to New Zealand have contributed almost NZ\$100 million per year through studying, living and exploring New Zealand.

But international education has been one of the sectors hit hardest by the pandemic, with students from Viet Nam and elsewhere unable to travel to New Zealand. Haike Manning, the report author, has witnessed this first-hand, as his consulting business specialises in international education. Families unwilling or unable to send their children abroad are keen on 'close to home' study options. But crisis is driving positive change with more New Zealand institutions exploring the possibility of bringing their programmes to Viet Nam, as an alternative to bringing Vietnamese students to New Zealand.

Auckland University of Technology (AUT) was one of the first New Zealand universities to engage deeply in Viet Nam. AUT has been delivering offshore programmes and training in Viet Nam for more than 10 years, which has laid the foundation to grow its Vietnamese student numbers: in 2020, Viet Nam made up the third largest group of international students at AUT, behind China and India.

So why has AUT bet on Viet Nam? "There's huge opportunity in Southeast Asia, and countries like Viet Nam are an important part of our diversification strategy to build our business in multiple markets" says Lester Khoo, group director international at AUT. "And Vietnamese students are fantastic; they come with a clear purpose and are focused and hard working."

AUT knows from experience that effective delivery of programmes in Viet Nam can be challenging. But Khoo believes offshore delivery is an essential step for New Zealand universities to future-proof their international business, pandemic or not. "We have the opportunity to re-imagine our international engagement. We need to collaborate more deeply with strategic partners in key markets like Viet Nam and to use technology to improve our delivery options."

Future discovery

Ninh Binh,
Vietnam. Photo:
Catherine Dionne
→

Tourism and education are key connection channels for young people from both countries. The impact of COVID-19 means that re-establishing channels will be a staged, careful process. However, there remains many established pathways for young New Zealanders to engage with Viet Nam through working holiday opportunities, education or business exchanges, and internships (See *Connect with Viet Nam*, page 40).

Modern Viet Nam offers young New Zealanders a chance to see the Asian Century taking shape in front of their eyes. Fast forward to 2030 and imagine New Zealanders and Vietnamese increasingly connecting, experiencing what each country has to offer, and co-creating products and services to take to the world. Anything is possible.



Down to earth cuisine

Bicky Nguyen



“The programme [Asia New Zealand Foundation Young Business Leaders Initiative] was really beneficial — before I only knew about kiwi, dairy; now I know a lot more.”

Bicky Nguyen

Where does your protein come from? According to Bicky Nguyen, a dynamic young Vietnamese entrepreneur and co-founder of Cricket One, an increasing number of us are now turning to insect protein for health and sustainability reasons. “It tastes nutty and earthy, with a hint of shrimp,” says Nguyen, describing the flavour profile of crickets.

Four years ago she set about building the biggest cricket protein company in the world. Cricket One now operates a 45-tonne capacity processing factory, which is equivalent to 60 million crickets at full capacity! That makes it the largest insect protein producer globally.

Nguyen visited New Zealand in 2018 as part of the Asia New Zealand Foundation Young Business Leaders Initiative to learn about agriculture and food production. “The programme was really beneficial – before I only knew about kiwi, dairy; now I know a lot more,” she says.

She sees a real opportunity in Viet Nam for New Zealand to promote our agriculture and food production know-how, including animal health. Nguyen is keen to develop and test new probiotic products in New Zealand, with an eye to global markets.

So what should young Kiwis know about Viet Nam? “Vietnamese young people are very active and daring! These days they are more open-minded and internationally-oriented!”



Bicky at Fieldays in Hamilton in 2018
↑

Connect with Viet Nam!

Kieran Burns at the historic Imperial City of Hue in central Viet Nam. Burns participated in the Asia New Zealand Foundation's internship with KPMG in Ho Chi Minh City in 2017.
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Numerous avenues have been established for young New Zealanders to get a great study or professional experience in Viet Nam. The rapidly evolving situation around the COVID-19 outbreak means that many are on hold, pending the re-opening of borders.

Young Business Leaders Initiative

A programme run by the Asia New Zealand Foundation Te Whītau Tūhono for young New Zealand entrepreneurs to better understand and connect with Asia. Since 2012, 15 New Zealand entrepreneurs have visited Viet Nam, and 20 Vietnamese entrepreneurs have visited New Zealand, covering tech, tourism, sustainability, social enterprise and agribusiness sectors.

Working Holiday Scheme

Up to 100 New Zealanders between the ages of 18-30 can get a working holiday visa to live and work in Viet Nam for up to 12 months. As Viet Nam becomes more connected globally and tourists flock to Viet Nam, opportunities for English-speaking candidates continue to increase.

Internships

An increasing number of internships are available for both students and graduates. Many New Zealand universities have arrangements with international internship organisations offering internships in Viet Nam. The Asia New Zealand Foundation also has a long-standing internship programme for law or accounting students with KPMG Viet Nam.

Prime Minister's Scholarship for Asia

Under this programme, a sizeable number of scholarships are available each year for New Zealand university students to study or intern in a range of locations in Asia, including Viet Nam.



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