

Vietnamese Cuisine

Written by Lan Nguyen Thi

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Food and eating habit are one of criterions to value a nation's culture, life as well as living standard. To some people, value a dish isn't simple to measure the nutritious level, to see the decoration or to know its taste but to find out the relation between food itself and natural characters of the place where people live.

In general, there is something in common and differences between Vietnamese cuisine in the North, the South and also in the Middle. Materials, spices, way of cooking, as well as serving are dominant characters which flexibly changed from place to place in this country.

[Vietnamese food](#) has long been appreciated in France, yet, it was the U.S residents who discovered its fine features. Vietnamese chefs like to refer to their cooking as "the nouvelle cuisine of Asia." Indeed, with the heavy reliance on rice, wheat and legumes, abundance of fresh herbs and vegetables, minimal use of oil as well as treatment of meat as a condiment rather than a main course, Vietnamese food has to be among the healthiest on the planet.



The main features.

Cuisine in the country with more than 70,000,000 people differs strikingly between the north, south and central regions, but two key features stand out.

Firstly, rice plays an essential role in the nation's diet as it does throughout Southeast Asia. Humorous speaking, Vietnamese is noodle-crazy. You have seen regularly the appearance of noodle in their breakfast, lunch and dinner, in homes, restaurants and at roadside stands. Noodles are eaten wet and dry, in soup or beside soup, and are made in different shapes and thicknesses of wheat, rice and *mung* beans such as *bun cha*, *Cao Lau*, *Hue beef noodle*, *bun rieu*...

making
xeo, *banh beo*, *xoi*...

Rice is also a main ingredients for
banh chung, *banh bao*, *banh*

Secondly, no meal is complete without fresh vegetables and herbs. Thanks to the tropical climate, fresh vegetables are available all the year round. As the result, dishes with fresh vegetable become familiar with every family, especially with poor people in the old days. Some popular dishes are *canh*, *goi ngo sen*, *nom du du*, *rau muong*, *ca phao*... Vietnam can also be considered as a tropical paradise of dessert and beverage with *che*, *sugarcane*, *fruit smoothies*, *bubble tea*...

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With different cooking methods, different dishes were made, extremely enjoyed and gradually popularized in the country. A key portion of every meal from the North, the Central to the South is a platter containing cucumbers, bean threads, slices of hot pepper, sprigs of basil, coriander, mint and a number of related herbs found principally in Southeast Asian markets.

Food of three regions

Vietnamese cuisine reflects its geography and history. Geographically, it consists of two great river deltas separated by a belt of mountains. Vietnamese describe their country as two great rice baskets hung on a carrying pole. The Red River Delta surrounding Hanoi provides rice for the residents of North Vietnam. The tremendously fertile Mekong Delta, centered by Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) produces rice plus a wide variety of fruits and vegetables.

As a former colony of China, Vietnamese adopted not only the Confucianism, Buddhism, but also the habit of eating by chopsticks. Due to its proximity to the border, North Vietnam reflects more Chinese influence than central or south. Soy sauce rarely appears in Vietnamese dishes except in the North. It is replaced by the most important and common ingredients in Vietnamese cuisine - fish sauce or *nuoc mam* and *shrimp paste*. In the North, fish - dipping sauce is usually used plain or almost mixed with nothing. In the South, sugar, vinegar or lemon juice are added to weaken the sauce's smell while in the Middle, people mixed the sauce with some chilly.



Actually, in the North, dishes with salty taste seem to be much preferred to suit the chill weather. On the contrary, the Southern cuisine is a combination between sweet and sour. Foods of the Middle are famous for its hot but sensitive taste that closely links with eating habit set for hundreds of year by royal families

Northern cuisine exhibits fewer herbs and vegetables than the other regions because its climate is less hospitable than the Mekong Delta. For heat, North Vietnamese cooks rely on black pepper rather than chilies.

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The royal tradition in the Central region goes back beyond the recent Vietnamese monarchy to the ancient kingdom of Champa. The royal taste reveals itself in the preference for many small dishes placed on the table at once. The more lavish the spread, the wealthier the household. However, even the poorer families are likely to have multiple dishes of simple vegetables.

Style of cooking

The Vietnamese cook their food in a variety of ways, from deep fry, stir fry, boil to steam. Unlike the Chinese, the Vietnamese use a minimal amount of oil while cooking. Their purpose is to preserve the freshness and natural taste of food as much as possible. Hence, Vietnamese cuisine is often considered as one of the healthiest foods in the world.

A typical family meal

A typical Vietnamese meal (lunch or dinner) will include steamed rice, a soup dish to eat with rice, a meat or fish dish and a vegetarian dish (either stir fried or boiled).

Vietnamese do not eat in separate servings; however, food is placed in the middle. Each member of the family has a small bowl and chopsticks which allow him or her to take food from the table throughout the meal.

Though there were many rises and falls through the time and historical events, including cultural crosses between Vietnam and other countries, Vietnamese cuisine is always deep and strong in identity. It reminds people of the folk creation and adaptation to nature. Increasingly famous worldwide restaurants have sprawled over the globe, yet, no Vietnamese food abroad can equal in flavor or quality to the one made in Vietnam itself. In brief, Vietnamese cuisine depends heavily on rice grown in water paddies throughout the country with dishes varying from simple everyday meals to most complex dishes designed for the King. Reaching a balance between fresh herbs and meats as well as a selective use of spices, Vietnamese food can be considered one of the healthiest cuisines in the world.

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