



# Newsletter

## Embassy of Switzerland in Hanoi Consulate General of Switzerland in Ho Chi Minh City

April 2020

### Greeting message



Dear readers,  
Dear Swiss nationals in Vietnam,

A little more than four months ago, the first signs of a new viral disease were detected in Wuhan. This discovery has since changed the world more rapidly and to a greater extent than any event our generation has experienced. At the same time, governments, companies, organizations and every individual are affected and challenged by it. Where the journey will take us and how we will find our way back from the raging storm to calmer waters is unclear at the moment. The only thing that is clear, however is that we all have to do our part. Doctors, nurses, ambulance drivers, hospital workers and numerous front line personnel called upon by this crisis are working tirelessly and selflessly - and with a commitment and courage that can only be admired. This is the case in Switzerland as well as here in Vietnam. While the pandemic has so far caused more than 28,000 sick people and 1,400 fatalities in Switzerland, the measures taken by the Federal Council and the cantons in March and April have led to a reduction in infections and victims. The Swiss healthcare system has been able to cope with the increase in cases. Aply, the Federal Council has announced an initial gradual easing of the restrictions, which will be implemented from the end of April onwards. Clearly, the measures taken to protect the public from the pandemic come at a high social and economic cost, the extent of which is far from being clear.

Here in Vietnam, the government responded to the pandemic outbreak quickly, decisively and – up to now - with compelling success. With fewer than 270 infections and no fatalities, Vietnam has become a reference point for all countries, including Switzerland. Measures such as the rapid introduction of travel restrictions and limitations of movement, the persistent tracking of cases, extensive quarantines and the consistent implementation of hygiene and social distancing measures have contributed to this accomplishment. The fact that the population actively supports these steps is another key factor for success. It is, of course, gratifying that the entire population in Vietnam, including the Swiss community and Swiss tourists, are benefiting from the measures taken.

Evidently, the pandemic has also affected the Swiss Embassy in Hanoi as well as the Swiss Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City. Responding to the COVID-19 outbreak, our main focus quickly shifted towards providing consular assistance to Swiss nationals living or temporarily residing in the country. At the same time, we also adapted our organizational structures to the new situation. In this newsletter we will describe some of the new challenges that we are facing, in particular the Consulate General in HCMC: Providing information, especially to Swiss citizens passing through the country; helping fellow citizens who have been placed in quarantine; assistance with the return journey for those travelers no longer able to find commercial flights; or providing help to Swiss tourists in difficult circumstances due to illness, accident or being blocked in the country. Working closely with the relevant authorities in Berne as well as with the other Swiss embassies in the region allows us to focus our assistance and hopefully find solutions to stranded tourists for their journeys back home. Cooperation with other embassies here in Hanoi also enabled numerous Swiss nationals to travel on evacuation flights organized by other European countries. Similarly, citizens of other countries also travelled on flights chartered by the FDFA from other Southeast Asian cities back to Switzerland.

Much of our activities over the past two months in Hanoi and HCMC were directly related to coronavirus related crisis management. And even if we were seriously constrained in exercising many of our other diplomatic tasks, we are trying to prepare for the time after the easing of the COVID restrictions. The objective will be to fully re-establish cooperation and relations between Switzerland and Vietnam as quickly as possible and,

above all, of course, to provide the necessary support for Swiss business and the Swiss companies here in Vietnam. To this end, the planning work for the next four-year phase of the SECO country programme is proceeding, and we are also moving ahead with preparations for the celebration of next year's 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Switzerland and Vietnam. And most importantly, we will continue to be there for you - despite or, indeed, because of the coronavirus pandemic.

In these challenging times, I wish you all much perseverance, patience and cautiousness. Take care of yourself and the people around you, and do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of assistance to you.

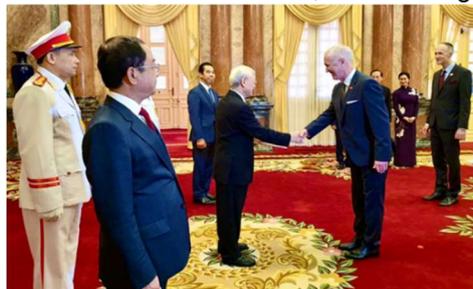
Stay healthy!

Yours sincerely, Ivo Sieber

### Presentation of the credentials letter to the Vietnamese President

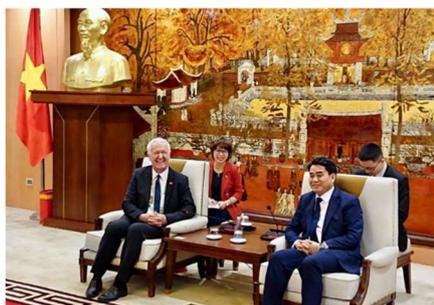


The formal assumption of office of each Ambassador at his new place of assignment begins with the handing over of the letter of credentials to the Head of State of the host country. For Ambassador Sieber this event took place on 27 February 2020. Together with six other ambassadors, he was received by President Truong Phu Truong at the Presidential Palace in Hanoi. In a strictly scripted formal ceremony, President Truong accepted Ambassador Sieber's credentials, which designate him as the Swiss Federal Council's authorized representative in Viet Nam. In his short address to the newly appointed ambassadors, President Truong underlined Vietnam's commitment to further strengthening bilateral relations with the seven countries represented by the ambassadors and to promoting peaceful cooperation with the international community of states based on international law.



### Inaugural visit to the mayor of Hanoi

On 10 March 2020, Ambassador Sieber was received by the Chairman of the People's Committee of the City of Hanoi, Mr. Nguyen Duc Chung, for an inaugural visit. Shortly after the handover of the letter of credentials to the Vietnamese President, this was a traditional meeting with the mayor of the embassy's host city. Both sides were able to highlight the excellent relations between the city administration and the Swiss embassy, but also between Hanoi and Switzerland. After Switzerland opened its first embassy in Hanoi in 1971 in the Metropole Hotel, the cooperation between the two countries developed very positively over the years. In addition to a number of high-ranking political visits, the expansion of cooperation in the economic and development sectors in particular led to a strengthening of the Swiss presence in Vietnam and especially with the au-



thorities of the Vietnamese capital. In addition, exactly 10 years ago at the end of April 2010, on the occasion of the visit by the then mayor of Bern, Mr. Alexander Tschäppet, the two capitals Hanoi and Berne entered into a twinning arrangement, which is still symbolized today by the Swiss flower clock on the banks of Lake Hoàn Kiếm. Ambassador Sieber and Mayor Chung agreed to continue to maintain the close contacts and in particular to use the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Switzerland and Vietnam next year as an opportunity to further strengthen them.

## COVID-19: Working organization at the Embassy

The pandemic (COVID-19) triggered by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-19 has also had a marked impact on the work of the Embassy in Vietnam. On 6 February, immediately after the end of the Têt celebrations, the Embassy participated for the first time in a briefing on COVID-19. Just one week later, passengers on a cruise ship, including several travelers from Switzerland, were prohibited by the authorities from disembarking in Vietnam. In the course of the authorities' tracking of chains of infection, Swiss nationals were also found in quarantine for the first time in March.

While the Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City is monitoring the situation of our stranded compatriots and providing them with all possible advice and support, the Embassy is ensuring contact with the government. It monitors and analyses the further development of the situation and the impact on Swiss interests in Vietnam. Despite the worldwide border closures and travel restrictions, international cooperation remains essential for successful containment of the pandemic in the medium and long term.

In the short term, the priority for Swiss representations abroad is to maintain operations under the given conditions. In order to be able to continue working in the event of an infection, the Embassy and Consulate General divided their staff into two separate groups from 10 March onwards. Each group works alternately in the office and at home. Since the government severely restricted freedom of movement at the beginning of April, most local employees and some expatriates work only from home.

The diplomatic work takes place in tightly woven networks. It thrives on encounters and intensive personal exchange. This includes social and cultural events, discussions and negotiations on political issues or participation in business events. The current situation therefore also poses a great challenge for the practice of international relations. It is important to maintain the exchange without the possibility of personal encounters. The technical solutions for this are basically available, and we are constantly improving our skills in dealing with them.

## COVID-19: Example of a repatriation

Have you ever crossed a border post on foot during your trip to Switzerland? As this report shows, this can be done in a roundabout way.

In March, the measures to contain the spread of Covid-19 were continuously adapted. Various airlines discontinued their international connections to and from Vietnam. As a result of quarantine measures, some passengers had to wait for test results and a 14-day period. Many visitors lost their return flight, sometimes several times, and remained blocked in Vietnam.

On 30 March Austria organized a repatriation flight (Vienna - Manila - Hanoi - Vienna). Only 10 hours before departure, the Austrian Embassy was able to confirm that all 7 registered Swiss could travel with us. The good news was immediately communicated to the travelers and a meeting point in front of the Noi Bai airport building was arranged.

The instructions from Vienna were clear: the travelers have to start their journey to Switzerland immediately after arrival, otherwise a 14-day self-isolation will follow. 5 hours before departure we received the message that the Austrian plane could not take off at 04h20 as planned. At Ninoy Aquino Airport in Manila an accident happened and the airport remained closed for several hours. Passengers were informed not to go to the airport. The embassy asked everyone to remain available and ready to leave.

On the same day in the afternoon we finally got the green light. The flight should take place at 21h00. The embassy informed the group accordingly. At 18h30 representatives of the embassy handed over a pass for Austria and other return



travel information to the travelers. This time everything worked and the Austrian OS1022 plane took off at 22h00. After arrival in Vienna, the direct continuation of the journey by train with destination Feldkirch took place. From Feldkirch we went by bus to Liechtenstein where the border post Tisis - Schaanwald was crossed on foot.

Afterwards the travelers continued their journey individually to their places of residence. The Swiss Embassy in Hanoi was delighted with the good teamwork of the Swiss travel group.

### The Consulate General and COVID-19

Who would have thought on 6 December 2019 that our next group pictures look like that?



More than a month ago, the Embassy and the Consulate General decided to implement a wide range of safety precautions to maintain the operational functioning of the two Swiss diplomatic representations in Vietnam for as long as possible. In order to avoid a complete shut down after a potential infection of individual staff members, our teams were split in two groups which work on alternative days in the offices or at home. To remain able to address the needs of our Swiss community in Vietnam, we are continuing this working schedule in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City as long as necessary.

The management teams of the Embassy and the Consulate General coordinate activities as well as necessary measures and share information including situation analyses with daily conference calls. This allows us to maintain a very direct and fruitful burden sharing to handle our resources adequately to protect Swiss interests in Vietnam.



To assist stranded travellers from Switzerland and Liechtenstein, the Consulate General changed its opening hours and was welcoming visitors seven days a week from 8h in the morning until 6h in the evening. As the situation calmed down for the time being, we removed office work from our to-do-list on weekends as from Easter Monday onwards. However, we are fully prepared to gear up again, should the necessity arise. You will find our current working hours further down in the official communications.

Working closely with other western countries, we were able to repatriate many compatriots. Swiss travellers stuck in Vietnam were able to travel back with special flights organized by Austria, France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom. At the same time, Switzerland brought back over 2'600 other Europeans from various destinations around the world. The impeccable collaboration and the demonstrated solidarity were some of the rare highlights during the challenging times of the last weeks. We thank all our European colleagues for the enormous effort, empathy and professionalism.

During this time of crisis, we are enhancing our communication with Swiss and Liechtenstein citizens in Vietnam and working hard to inform you in all Swiss official languages and in English. With the support of sophisticated translation tools, we even try to communicate in languages, no staff member of the Consulate General masters as mother tongue. Thank you for bearing with us.

As verified and accurate information became a very valuable asset in these turbulent times, the Consulate General is dedicated to inform you about important developments. However, as it is also for us extremely difficult to procure reliable real-time news about developments, we cannot give any guarantee for accuracy and completeness. We inform you mainly through our webpage, which we update regularly. You are most welcome to pay us a daily virtual visit at [www.eda.admin.ch/hochiminhcity](http://www.eda.admin.ch/hochiminhcity). We will continue to reach out to you by email only in very urgent and important cases.

The team of the Consulate General wishes you perseverance and good health. We are looking forward to meet with you in the post COVID-19 time!

**Other working conditions with COVID-19**



The pictures show how the life of our team at the Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City has changed over the past view weeks.



After the “Social Distancing Campaign” in Vietnam, the controls at the entrance to the Bitexco Tower have become stricter. Entrance without a mask is prohibited. In addition, temperature measurements are taken at all entrances. For the safety of visitors and our team, only one person or family may be present in the waiting room of the Consulate General. We also try to ensure social distance in our office.

At the moment, there is a high chance to see the Consul Jérôme Charbonnet on a Grab Bike on the streets of Ho Chi Minh City because public transport is very limited, it is the only way for most of our team members to get to the Consulate General.



We have got used to hand sanitizers, face masks and working from home, our team has also got used to the fact that our Consul General Martin Maier does not always wear a suit and tie in the office.

**Swiss companies in Vietnam help in the fight against COVID-19**

Switzerland is known worldwide for the quality of its research, particularly in the life sciences. Some Swiss companies are also active in Vietnam, where they contribute to efforts to contain COVID-19. For example, Novartis, in collaboration with the US aid agency USAID and six Vietnamese universities, has developed a course to train nurses in the use of COVID-19. Roche has donated protective equipment for staff working with COVID patients in Vietnam. Roche's diagnostic solutions are used in Vietnam, as elsewhere in the world, and are applied in the treatment of COVID.

**SECO: Regional Bio Trade Project**

Is it possible to increase profits of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) trading with natural ingredient-based products while preserving biodiversity at the same time? The Swiss-funded Regional BioTrade project has taken up this challenge. As a COVID-19 counterpoint, we share some remarkable results this project has achieved over the past four years.

The Regional BioTrade project in South East Asia (Vietnam, Laos, and Myanmar) aims to create economically viable business models for sustainably sourced and value-added natural ingredients, for example:



Star anise



Thanaka



Cinnamon

The project is focusing on native plants that can be processed locally to obtain natural ingredients with high value and export potential while preserving the biodiversity hotspots of these countries. Ultimately, this shall help increase value addition within these countries and generating jobs and incomes for local people.

Thanks to the project’s contribution, following key results have been achieved in Vietnam:



BioTrade refers to collecting, producing, transforming, and commercializing sustainably sourced goods and services derived from native biodiversity.

## Report on Vietnam by Swiss television - RTS

On 9 March, French-speaking Swiss television broadcasted a three-quarter-hour report on Vietnam as part of the "Toutes taxes comprises" series. It tries to show the general public in Switzerland still little known facets of Vietnam. The focus is on the rapid modernization process, which is highlighted by various broadcast segments. Among others, Swiss entrepreneurs and visitors to Vietnam also have their say. This is the last reportage in the series of broadcasts to date that does not deal with the corona virus. It is available on the Internet under the following link: <https://www.rts.ch/play/tv/t-t-c--toutes-taxes-comprises/video/a-boom-au-vietnam?id=11153135>

## Official communications

Regarding the situation in Vietnam, please consult [www.eda.admin.ch/hochiminhcity](http://www.eda.admin.ch/hochiminhcity). The information published on this webpage reflects our current knowledge and is updated regularly.

The Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City continues to be open without restrictions and offers all services with the following exceptions:

- Applications for marriage preparation and the issuing of certificates of no impediment to marriage or preliminary proceedings for the establishment of a registered partnership cannot be accepted until the COVID-19 measures in Switzerland are lifted (presumably 26 April 2020)
- No visa applications can be accepted and no visas issued until 15 June 2020. Relevant details can be found on the website of our [Visa Section](#).

The Consulate General can currently be contacted by phone from Monday to Friday between 08.00h and 18.00h at +84 28 6299 1200. Should all staff be busy, please call again later.

Outside the opening hours you can reach us for non-emergency inquiries by [email](#) and we will get in touch with you in due time.

In an emergency outside our opening hours, Swiss and Liechtenstein citizens can contact the [Helpline FDFA](#) around the clock.

## Please help us!

COVID-19 has once again clearly shown how important updated contact data can be in a crisis. Please provide us with your current addresses, telephone numbers and email addresses so that we can keep our register of residents up to date. You can do this by e-mail at [hochiminhcity@eda.admin.ch](mailto:hochiminhcity@eda.admin.ch), by phone at +84 28 6299 1200 (option "Passports and other consular matters") or by letter. Please note that for legal reasons, family members who have reached majority must personally communicate their personal data.

## Swiss Business Association SBA



[www.swissvietnam.com](http://www.swissvietnam.com)

After COVID-19, our Stamm will be held again every second Thursday of the month at various locations in Ho Chi Minh City, usually starting at 6.30 pm. All members and guests are invited to join the monthly SBA-Stamm and other events.

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## Swiss Alumni Association in Vietnam SAAV



<https://www.saaav.vn/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/vietnam.thuysi/>  
<https://www.linkedin.com/company/swissviet/>

The Swiss Alumni Association in Vietnam SAAV is the most active Swiss alumni community in Vietnam, established since 2016. We work closely with Swiss government offices and Swiss Business Association in Vietnam to establish an extensive network spanning across Vietnam, Switzerland and other countries, aiming to create lasting impacts for our community.

Our Vision

Our Mission - SAAV's 3 S's

Our Motto

Supporting Swiss' sustainable success

Supporting – Sustainable – Successful

Your true Swiss Pride

## Rega – Help from the air



In addition to its aid services in Switzerland, [Rega](#) also offers assistance worldwide:

- Advice in case of medical problems abroad provided by Rega's emergency operations centre
- Medically indispensable repatriation flights to Switzerland for patrons resident in Switzerland or in the Principality of Liechtenstein as well as for Swiss nationals living abroad