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Minh City), and Central (Hue) Vietnamese. This guide used the Northern (Hanoi) pronunciation. Vietnamese Tonal System If you listen closely to a Vietnamese speaker, you will notice that some words are pronounced with a high or low pitch and other sound more musical. This is because Vietnamese uses tones to make distinctions between words. Other tonal languages include Norwegian, Swedish and Thai, just to name a few. Vietnamese syllables can have six different tones, with five of them indicated by tone marks applied to the syllable's main vowel. Tone marks can be combined with the other diacritics. Here's an example of the letter 'a' with it's various sounds a - flat á - high rising; example: 'day', like saying "day?" à - low â - creaky ã - falling, then rising ă - a low "a" ah" Because tones are so important in being correctly understood, Trang and I have included audio clips for each phrase to help you with your pronunciation. Vietnamese Grammar One of the fascinating things about the Vietnamese is its grammar. As a whole, Vietnamese grammar is very simple in that nouns and adjectives don't have genders and verbs aren't conjugated. This is a welcome change for learners of European languages such as French, Italian, and Spanish where you live and die by nailing these rules. Vietnamese has its own quirks, if you will, that I find super interesting. For example, it might sound strange but Vietnamese is spoken almost entirely in the second and third persons. So, instead of saying "I think you are very beautiful" to a girl you like, you might say, "This older male thinks you (the younger female) very beautiful". To Western ears, talking in the third person can sound very pretentious, but to Vietnamese ears it is totally normal. Vietnamese has a word for "I", (tôi) but it's only used in formal situations such as public speaking, talking to a TV camera, or writing a book. Foreigners, naturally tend to use tôi in conversation, which to Vietnamese ears sounds unnatural but they understand why we do it and almost expect it. In addition to this, there is a proper way to refer to yourself and others depends. This all depends on hierarchy, age, and sex. Many of these terms have literal translations that refer to family relationships, though they are used for all people on all occasions. Without going into too much detail for each, it's important to be aware of such distinction. Options include: Ban - friend, pronounced "bhang" with a heavy A Con - child, pronounced "ghome" Em - literally, younger person, generally reserved for a younger sister, younger female relative, or a younger female acquaintance. This is the equivalent of "my dear", Anh - older brother Chi - older sister - woman older than you by up to 10-20 years Chú (literally, "Mister" with implications toward "uncle") Cô (literally, "Miss" or "Young Mrs." - woman older than you by 10+ years) Bác (unisex term, used for both Sir and Madam, - refers to a mature person, generally 40 to 60 years old) Ông (literally, "old gentleman", grandfather) Bà (literally, "Madam" or "elderly lady", grandmother) Useful Vietnamese Phrases for Travellers Want the infographic to take with you? Scroll to the bottom of the page and save it. P.S. If you're reading this on your phone and can't see the pronunciation column, turn it to landscape mode. For some reason, tables aren't mobile friendly. Sorry! Useful Vietnamese Phrases for Travellers [Infographic] Like it? Pin it for later! Sources VietnamesePod101 | Instant Vietnamese | Survival Vietnamese | Wikipedia | Lonely Planet Vietnamese Phrasebook & Dictionary Want to know more about learning languages? Start here! Over to you! Which of these Vietnamese phrases did you find the most useful? Are you planning a trip to Vietnam or have already been? Let me know using the comments section below or join me on social media to start a conversation. Thanks for reading and I hope you enjoyed this post. Like what you see? Subscribe using the form below to have all of my posts delivered directly to your email.