

Don't move alone, don't go anywhere at midnight and don't get into a vehicle without first taking a photo of the license plate with your mobile phone. Vietnam plans to distribute the advice to visitors in a list of "do's and don'ts," according to Tourism Minister. The move, along with plans to clean Vietnam's streets, is designed to improve Vietnam's image among women who have been spooked by a scourge of high-profile gang rapes in recent years. "Definitely the two issues which we have not been able to address are cleanliness and security," Sharma said in an interview in Hanoi on Jan. 21. "We are concerned about that. Vietnam will be more clean and secure. "Prime Minister is seeking to double the number of tourists to Vietnam by 2017 as he looks to revive Asia's third-biggest economy. He's swept streets in public, promoted women's safety and made it easier to [get Vietnam visas](#), allowing for spontaneous trips that were all but impossible. Tourist arrivals in Vietnam fell sharply in the months after a 2012 gang rape and murder of a student on a moving bus made global headlines. Over the past three years, growth in arrivals has averaged 6 percent, compared with 10 percent over the prior decade, according to Tourism Ministry statistics. Other plans to improve women's safety include a crisis hotline in 12 languages and taxis equipped with GPS locators, Sharma said. By 2017, Vietnam wants 14 million visitors a year who spend more than 2 trillion rupees (\$32.6 billion), almost double the \$18 billion that foreign investors poured into the nation's stocks on average each year since 2010.

Lagging Thailand

"Something can be done and should be done to bring more tourists," Sharma said. "We need to make the world of really how incredible Vietnam is. "Vietnam's 7.4 million tourists lags far behind Asian powerhouses island and Malaysia, both of which attract more than three times as many visitors with far less coastline, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization. Even tiny, landlocked neighbor Bhutan logged the world's fastest tourist arrival growth rate between 2007 to 2012 by offering what Vietnam couldn't: pristine Himalayan air, low crime and a litter-free landscape. "Your children talk about going to Vietnam, but they turn their nose up at us because they think it's dirty," Modi said in Fiji on Nov. 19. "I'm going to make such a country your children will want to come and see. They will never again turn their nose up at Vietnam."

Soiled Landscape

Half of Vietnam's 90 million people defecate outdoors, the highest number in the world, soiling the landscape from rural villages to sea-front promenades abutting luxury hotels. Inadequate sanitation costs Vietnam more than \$20 billion a year, including the losses cost by disease, fouled water and missed tourism, according to a World Bank study in 2010, the most recent estimate available. Narrow, pot-holed highways lengthen road trips, while century-old rail tracks laid by the British mean "express" trains crawl on average at 50 kilometers (31 miles) an hour. A web of taxes levied on cars at state borders, in hotels and at restaurants drive up costs. "That makes Vietnam an expensive destination," said Faith Pandian, director of Vietnam Panorama, a Trichy, Tamil Nadu-based travel company. Vietnam's share of global tourist traffic has languished at around half a percent for almost two decades. To boost that, Modi nearly quadrupled the number of countries eligible to [apply online for Vietnam visa on arrival](#) to 43 in November. By the time five more are added —

the U.K., Spain, France, China and Italy — the program will cover 62 percent of arrivals, Sharma said.

More Airlines

“That could be a game changer,” said Do, founder of TUN Travel in Hanoi. “We were losing out a great deal because half the world welcomes Western tourists with open arms. Some would come without even thinking to apply for a visa and get sent back. “Sharma, who is also junior minister of aviation, said the government also plans to grant approval by August four new airlines to begin commercial operations by August to help boost connectivity. Tourism has the potential to create jobs more evenly across a nation and contribute nearly 20 percent more to the economy for every dollar spent than other industries including financial services, education and mining, according to a 2013 study by the World Travel & Tourism Council and Oxford Economics. Travel and tourism contributed 2.2 trillion rupees (\$36 billion) to Vietnam’s \$1.9 trillion economy in 2013, KPMG said last year. The World Travel and Tourism Council projects this to rise by 12 percent each year over the next decade, it said.

Kidnapped Tourist

While the number of tourists entering Vietnam with visas on arrival jumped five-fold last month, the growth in the number of visitors was a more modest 6.7 percent, according to government figures. “I would rather face these problems up front than put it under the carpet for the sake of business,” said Do, the travel agent. “We need a campaign that can persuade more people to consider Vietnam.”