

Vietnam seizes 125 kilos of rhino horn hidden in plaster

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Officials found 125 kilos of rhino horn encased in plaster

Fifty-five pieces of rhino horn were found encased in plaster at an airport in the Vietnamese capital, authorities said Sunday, as the country tries to crack down on sophisticated wildlife smuggling routes.

The communist state is both a consumption hub and popular transit point for the multibillion dollar trade in animal parts.

The 125 kilogram (275 pound) haul of rhino [horn](#) discovered at Hanoi's Noi Bai airport on Thursday was found after the carefully disguised shipment aroused suspicion.

Images of the bust show large rhino horns and [smaller pieces](#) sitting on a table and police using rods to break the casts apart.

"It took half a day to break them open," a security source told AFP.

It was not immediately clear which African country the shipment originated from.

The parts were found the same day police arrested a key wildlife trafficking suspect and two other men after seven frozen tiger carcasses were discovered in their vehicle in a [parking lot](#).

The busts follow a record seizure in Singapore a week ago of nearly nine tonnes of ivory and a huge stash of pangolin scales destined for Vietnam.

Elephant tusks, pangolins, tiger parts and rhino horn are all sold on the black market in Vietnam, while the rest is smuggled on to China.

But rhino horn is especially prized, with one kilogram fetching up to \$60,000.

It is in high demand in Vietnam where some believe that it can help cure diseases and hangovers when ground into powder.

Poachers in Africa have decimated wild rhino populations to meet demand despite the trade being banned globally in the 1970s.

Only about 29,000 [rhinos](#) survive in the wild, down from half a million at the beginning of the 20th century, according to conservationists.

Hanoi has long vowed to stem the flow of illegal wildlife criss-crossing its borders but experts say the black market persists thanks to weak law enforcement.

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