Airmail labels quickly became a popular way for the citizens to indicate airmail service for their letters. Airlines, anxious to promote the use of airmail, provided some labels featuring their names, which were distributed by the post office.

- BLACK ON DARK RED
- BLACK ON RED
- BLACK ON DARK BLUE
- BLACK ON BLUE
- BLACK ON LIGHT GRAY
- BLACK ON GRAY
Airmail Labels

This colorful diamond-shaped label is really a decal for the Air Orient Company. It shows the company’s logo in the circle. Eventually, Air Orient merged with other companies to form a much larger airline – Air France.

Later, labels became less specific only indicating “by airmail” as opposed to the specific carrier.
Airmail Labels

These examples show various types of labels that specified airmail service by Air Orient.

- **BLACK BLUE-GREEN**
- **BLACK ON LIGHT GREEN**
- **BLACK ON BEIGE**
- **BLACK ON LIGHT GREEN**
- **BLACK ON BEIGE**
- **BLACK ON LIGHT GREEN**
- **BLACK ON LIGHT BLUE-GREEN**
- **WHITE ON BLUE**
- **WHITE ON RED**
Airmail Label
Air Orient Service

Given to the public by the Saigon post office, this white-on-red label specified both the routing and the airline for airmail service. Line perforated, the label was distributed from 1931 through 1933 in booklets with panes of 25 (5 x5).
Air France provided this label in booklet form to post offices throughout the French community of nations. The overprinted notice points out that the weekly France-Syria-Indochina service, in 1936, departed from Marseilles on Thursdays.
Labels

Historically, the Indochinese post office had affixed labels on mailings to indicate special services that the sender had paid for. Airmail labels were provided by the post office soon after airmail service had become available.

This cover bears labels for airmail service as well as for registration and expedited delivery.

POSTAL MARKINGS
HANOI R.P. TONKIN 6-1 31
registration label, expedited service label, airmail label
REVERSE
SAIGON CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 9-1 31
Handmade Airmail Label

In the early days of airmail service, labels were not widely available at Indochinese post offices. When senders could not find printed labels, they would fashion their own from available materials. This label was made by writing "Par Avion" on a piece of red paper, which had printing on the reverse.

POSTAL MARKINGS
LONGXUYEN COCHINCHINE 23-1 31
airmail label
black cross obliterator
REVERSE
SAIGON CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 23-1 31
MARSEILLE-GARE BØHEB DU RHONE 2 • II 1931
BORDEAUX GIRONDE 3 • II 1931
Handmade Airmail Label

The sender penned unusual instructions on this cover. It was to go by airmail from Saigon to Haiphong and then by sea to Marseille. The sender affixed a handmade airmail label for the limited service. The "APRÈS LE DEPART" marking was applied by the post office when the letter arrived too late for the airmail service.

POSTAL MARKINGS
ROCAKONG CAMBODGE 27-4 30
airmail label
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 30-4 30
too late handstamp
REVERSE
PNOMPENH CAMBODGE 29-4 30
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 30-4 30
In the early days of airmail, senders would sometimes fabricate their own airmail labels. However, in this case of this 1931 mailing from Tong to Paris, the sender used a post office airmail label coupled with an elaborately made, five-sided label that included his airmail routing instructions.
Routing instructions were normally written directly on the face of the envelope. This letter posted by the branch office of the Bank of Indochina in Qui-Nhon bears a handmade label with typewritten routing instructions.
By Airmail
Saigon, Cochinchina

The earliest airmail label was distributed by the Saigon post office from February to July 1929. The label consisted of black lettering in a black frame on glossy red paper. The label was imperforate.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 9-4 29
registration label
airmail label
flight cachet
Appearing at the same time as the glossy red label was a similar design on matte red paper. This label was perforated. It was widely distributed from February 1929 through 1934.
By Airmail

The same design was printed on blue paper. It was available at all post offices from the second half of 1931 through 1934.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 4-3 33
airmail fee certification handstamp
framed Saigon-Marseille routing instruction
airmail label
REVERSE
MARSEILLE-GARE-AVION BCHES DU RHONE 12 • 3 1933
A third color for the label was gray. Others labels that shared this format were widely distributed. However, the gray label was dispensed only at Saigon.
By Airmail

The second general format to appear consisted of "Par Avion" in black lettering within a black frame that was thickened on the left and at the bottom. It was printed on blue-gray gray paper and was perforated. First appearing in 1932, this label was distributed through 1945.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 20-10 34
registration label
airmail label
REVERSE
PARIS XII DISTRIBUTION 30-10 34
By Airmail

Airmail labels were almost exclusively used on envelopes. Though the practice was not prohibited, labels are only rarely found on postcards because the latter's space restrictions. In the case of this postcard, the label had been trimmed down in size before it was affixed to this mailing in 1935.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 20-10 34
registration label
airmail label
REVERSE
PARIS XII DISTRIBUTION 30-10 34
By Airmail

One label in each sheet identified the printer. Here the imprint reads “Imp. Ngo-tu-Ha, Hanoi – 1934.” The label had serrations (left-hand side), as opposed to perforations.

POSTAL MARKINGS
POULO CONDORE COCHINCHINE 12-6 37
airmail label
REVERSE
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 13-5 37
PARIS VIII RUE CLER 22 • V 1937
By Airmail

This label design was one of the longest lived as it was available from 1932 through 1945. After World War II, the label was printed on blue paper. Its other characteristics remained the same except that the lettering was smaller.
By Airmail

An early variation on this design consisted of bold lettering on blue paper. This label was probably only distributed from the smaller post offices.

POSTAL MARKINGS
QUI-NHON ANNAM 8-11 32
airmail label
REVERSE
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 10-11 32
MARSEILLE-GARE-AVION B CHES DU RHONE 22 • 11 1932
PARIS VIII DISTRIBUTION 23 • XI 1932
By Airmail

A variation of this design employed larger lettering on imperforate red paper. It is uncertain whether this label was distributed through the Indochinese post offices.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 8-12 29
G8 window number handstamp
R with manuscript registration number
printed registration number handstamp
airmail label
REVERSE
GRAVENHAGEN 6.1 1930
By Airmail

Yet another variation from the basic label was one that used sans serif lettering on perforated blue paper.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON R.P. COCHINCHINE 25-4 1949
registration label
airmail label
REVERSE
BOSTON MASS. MAY 1 1949
BOSTON MASS. ROXBURY STA. MAY 2 1949
The layout of a privately printed business envelope employed an airmail instruction that simulated the paste-on labels of the period.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 23-7 31
rate certification handstamp
black cross over airmail indication
The border on Campha’s airmail label was thickened at the bottom and at the right. While this format appeared elsewhere, blue paper was only used for Campha’s airmail labels.
By Airmail
Cambodia and Laos

This label shared format characteristics with the Campha label design (thickened border at the right side and at the bottom). The black on white label, used from Cambodia and Laos, saw very limited service.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SARAVANE LAOS 25-7 36
REVERSE
PAKSE LAOS 25-7 36
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 3-6 36
PARIS R.P. AVION 16 • VI 1936
Although this label was distributed from post offices in Cambodia and Laos, an example found its way to be used on a letter posted from Saigon to France in June 1935.
Another variety of the uncommon format with reinforced border at the bottom and right hand side was printed in black on a lavender background. The label was used on an airmail letter from Hanoi in 1937.
By Airmail

Starting in 1937, an entirely new label design was made available by the post office. It was composed of white lettering in a white frame on a dark blue background.
By Airmail
Pnompenh, Cambodia

For only a short period in 1929, Pnompenh used a distinctive black-on-orange label to signify airmail service.

POSTAL MARKINGS
PNOM-PENH CAMBODGE  5-11 29
HANOI R.P. TONKIN  17-11 29
flight cachet and airmail label

REVERSE
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE  -6-11 29
PARIS R.P. DEPART  21 • XI 1929
NANTES R.P. LOIRE-INF  22 • XI 1929
By Airmail
Quinhon, Annam

In mid-1931, the post office at Quinhon, Annam made available a distinctive blue label with lettering in dark blue. Use of this label has only been reported from Quinhon.

POSTAL MARKINGS
QUI-NHON ANNAM 10-6 31
airmail label
REVERSE
QUI-NHON ANNAM 10-6 31
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 11-6 31
PARIS GARE DU NORD AVION 23 • VI 1931
Quinhon had a second distinctive airmail label. The tri-color label had blue print, a black border and pink paper. Only known from around August 1931, the label may have been a product created by the Quinhon branch of the Bank of Indochina for its own use.
By Airmail
Thainguyen, Tonkin

The Thainguyen post office distributed an imperforate label on red paper. The lettering for Thainguyen’s label was 3 millimeters tall, much smaller than that typically seen on Indochinese airmail labels.

POSTAL MARKINGS
HANOI R.P. TONKIN  8-9 32
registration label
routing instruction
airmail label
franked by sender handstamp
REVERSE
PARIS 2 DISTRIBUTION  26-9 32
The post office at Kontum, Annam prepared an imperforate label with the single word “AVION” in a rectangular frame. The blue-gray label was in service during the 1933-34 period.
Previously, it was thought that Kontum’s label was printed only on blue-gray paper. This example, used in 1932, shows that labels of the same design were prepared on pink paper.
By Airmail
Kontum, Annam

Kontum’s distinctive airmail label must have been prepared by hand. This cover shows an example of the label with the same lettering nearby handstamped directly onto the envelope.
The triangular red-on-white airmail label used on 1935 letter from Mon-Cay to France was a private label, not one distributed by the post office.

POSTAL MARKINGS
MON-CAY TONKIN 13-6 35
REVERSE
HANOI R.P. TONKIN 14-6 35
PARIS R.P. AVION 23 • VII 1935
CHAMBLY OISE 25-* 35
By Airmail Via Air Orient
Saigon, Cochinchina

Some labels went beyond simply saying "airmail." During the second half of 1931, the Saigon post office provided patrons with a label that included the airline's name —"VIA AIR ORIENT". The label employed black lettering and a black frame on a gray-green background. The label was imperforate.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 21-1 32
airmail fee certification handstamp
routing instruction
airmail label
REVERSE
MARSEILLE-GARE-AVION BOCHES DU RHONE 1 • II 1932
By Seaplane
Air Orient Route

Some legs of Air Orient's France-Indochina service were by seaplane. This label indicates “by seaplane via Air Orient route.” It consists of black lettering on perforated light beige paper.

PAR HYDRAVION
VOIE AIR ORIENT

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 3-2 31
flight cachet
airmail label
REVERSE
ATHIS-MONS SEINE ET OISE 17-2 31
Via Air Orient

A separate label with only "VIA AIR ORIENT" was distributed by a number of post offices during 1931-1933. The frame and lettering were black. The perforated label was made from light green paper.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE  3-2 31
registration label
airmail labels
REVERSE
AUBERVILLIERS SEINE  17-2 32
Use of the specialized labels was not restricted to outbound mail. Here a letter posted from France employed the “VIA AIR ORIENT “ label even though only surface rate postage had been paid. Nonetheless, the post office selected the letter for free airmail service to promote its use.
Via Air Orient

This variety of the “VIA AIR ORIENT” label employed a bold, serif typeface very different from the plain, sans serif lettering used on other labels of the period.

POSTAL MARKINGS
HANOI R.P. TONKIN  1-2 36
airmail label
REVERSE
PONDICHERRY  6 FEB. 36
Via Air Orient

Banking correspondence from 1932 bears an example of the Air Orient label with serif text.

POSTAL MARKINGS
PARIS - GARE - P.L.M. - AVION 27-7 32
airmail label
REVERSE
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 7-8 32
By Airmail Saigon – Marseilles
Via Air Orient

From 1931 through 1933, the Saigon post office provided the public with a red label with white lettering that was line-perforated. This was one of the earliest labels distributed by the post office.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 7-5 31
registration label and airmail label
plain T due handstamp

REVERSE
AUBERVILLIERS SEINE 13-5 31
By Airmail Saigon – Marseilles
Via Air Orient

The sender must have felt that this envelope already had sufficient notification for airmail service. The post office label was cut down in size so that only the "SAIGON-MARSEILLE" portion was used for indicating the desired routing.

SAIGON - MARSEILLE

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 28-1 32
airmail routing handstamp
framed Saigon-Marseille routing instruction
airmail fee certification handstamp
airmail label (partial)
REVERSE
PARIS - X QUAI DE VALMY 12 • II 1932
An airmail letter from Sadec, Cochinchina to Paris in November 1934 bears a plain label stipulating service by Air France. This may have been a privately prepared label as Air France was formed a year earlier on 7 October 1933 from the merger of five predecessor airlines.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SADEC COCHINCHINE 30-11 34
registration and airmail labels

REVERSE
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 1-12 34
Far East South America
Via Air France

This label was the first to identify Air France, which was created in 1933 by combining Air Orient with several other airlines. The label consists of blue lettering on a light mauve background. The label was imperforate.

POSTAL MARKINGS
BACLIEU COCHINCHINE 15-12 34
airmail label
REVERSE
MARSEILLE-GARE-AVION B\*CHES DU RHONE 24 • XII 1934
By Airmail

This version of the “winged globe” first appeared in 1938. Here the label was used on bank correspondence from Quinhon, Annam to Paris in 1938.

POSTAL MARKINGS
QUINHON ANNAM 15-12 38
airmail label
REVERSE
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 16 DEC 38
PARIS VIII DISTRIBUTION 25 • XII 1938
As this example from 1946 demonstrates, the winged globe label continued in service after the end of World War II.
By Airmail

After World War II, Air France distributed the same label in sheet form now perforated on all four sides. Here the winged globe label was used on a mailing to Paris in 1948.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON R.P. COCHINCHINE 24-10 48
airmail label
By Airmail

Having features of the familiar “plane over globe” label, the design of this label differs in a number significant ways. Here the label was used on a 1949 airmail letter from Pnompenh to Paris.

POSTAL MARKINGS
PNOMPENH CAMBODGE 21-10 49
airmail label
REVERSE
PNOMPENH CAMBODGE 21-10 49
By Airmail

Distributed in 1941, this label was normally found on mailings between Indochina and China. Here an example was used on a post-war letter from Hanoi to Hong Kong. The postmark is that of a special Army post office established for processing civilian mails while order was being restored in northern Indochina by French troops.

POSTAL MARKINGS
B.P.M. 403 20-9 46
airmail label
REVERSE
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE 23-9 46
By Airmail

English wording shows that this label was not obtained through the Indochinese post office. The routing for this mailing, "Via Bangkok", meant that it was transferred to another air carrier there for onward transport to Switzerland.

POSTAL MARKINGS
SAIGON-CENTRAL COCHINCHINE  8-6 37
airmail label
REVERSE
BANGKOK G.P.O.  12 • 6 • 37