



GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT STUDIES INSTITUTE

GESI PRE-DEPARTURE PACKET

SUMMER 2019 | VIETNAM



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Welcome

Dear GESI Student,

Welcome to the 13th annual Global Engagement Studies Institute (GESI)! GESI began with the idea and perseverance of an undergraduate like you. It has since grown from a small experiential-learning program in Uganda exclusively for Northwestern students, into a nationally recognized model that has trained and sent over 650 students from almost 100 colleges and universities to 13 countries for community development work.

GESI offers students the unique opportunity to apply their classroom learning toward addressing global challenges. Students will spend their time abroad working with, and learning from, our community partners across the world. Northwestern University provides students with comprehensive preparatory coursework and training, ensures a structured and supported in-country field experience, and facilitates critical post-program reflection.

This program will challenge you to think and act differently. To create change you will need to listen, ask questions, and build relationships, not merely provide solutions. We trust you'll approach GESI with the respect, curiosity, and humility requisite to understanding people, their talents and challenges, and the role you can play to support positive social change.

GESI is one step on a path toward your personal, professional, and leadership development, as well as your understanding of complex issues of consequence to the planet and its people. Throughout the program, our professors and student instructors will be in contact with feedback and encouragement; during Final Summit, they will help debrief what you've learned. Even after GESI, our staff will be a strong support system as you use your own unique skills and passions to live lives of global social change.

We have seen this program make a tremendous impact on students' academic pursuits, career paths, and worldview, as well as their skills in cross-cultural communication, project management, and collaboration. We are excited to join you on this journey and to see where it leads. Get excited!

Best of luck,

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Program Information

The Global Engagement Studies Institute (GESI) is a study abroad program that provides undergraduates with the knowledge, tools, and experiences to confront shared global challenges. Through service-learning in Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ghana, Guatemala, Uganda, or Vietnam, teams of students join the efforts of local organizations to advance community-driven change.

GESI was created in response to undergraduates' desires to understand global challenges through an academic lens, and then put that learning into action. The result is an interconnected set of initiatives across several key areas: community-engaged scholarship, project and research funding, and professional development. Learn about the full history of GESI on our website: gesi.northwestern.edu/about/history

Who does what in GESI?

GESI is a program, not a physical institute. Whether or not you are a Northwestern student, the "acronym soup" that surrounds GESI is often confusing. It is important for you to understand the difference between each organization that helps make GESI happen so that you can communicate it effectively to your friends and family, and so you know where to turn for support (now and in the future). There are numerous partners who make important contributions to your academic, cultural, and personal experience in GESI.

Global Engagement at the Buffett Institute

At Northwestern, the Buffett Institute is the office that runs GESI. We include people you've met or spoken with when applying to the GESI program, and others that you'll be meeting along the way:

- Diego Arispe-Bazan and Paul Arntson, GESI Instructors
- Patrick Eccles, Corey Portell, Jessica Smith Soto, and Hà Nguyen, GESI Staff

The GESI team supports you before, during, and after your trip, in the following ways:

- **Program Arrangement and Logistics:** GESI works with the on-site teams to make arrangements for your trip. We also provide you with lots of information and support you during the program application phase.
- **Pre-Departure Orientation and Materials:** GESI provides you with important information about your program to help you prepare for your experience. This includes resources, such as this packet, and in-person meetings related to health, safety, budgeting, travel, and academics, as well as Canvas resources and assignments.
- **Academic Coursework and Credit:** GESI is responsible for organizing all Northwestern coursework.
- **In-Country Support:** Your on-site team will provide support for you while abroad and should be your primary resource, but if you need additional assistance or would feel more comfortable approaching GESI staff with any matters experienced in-country, please do not hesitate to contact Meghan Ozaroski, Assistant Director, or Patrick Eccles, Associate Director.
- **Reintegration Support:** Upon your return, we will provide you with resources to help you transition back into campus life, as well as connect you with other returnees and opportunities.

Changing our worldview is an implicit goal of most service-learning programs. Unless we understand how political, economic, and judicial systems tend to favor one group over another, we will be unable to truly assist those in need.

Learning Through Serving: A Student Guidebook for Service-Learning Across the Disciplines. Ed. Christine M. Cress, Peter J. Collier, Vicki L. Reitenauer and Associates. Stylus, 2005: Sterling, VA.

Program Partners

In addition to Northwestern staff, GESI works with a variety of people to run the program. All GESI partners have unique offerings based on their networks and development models. They each have a commitment to community-led development, provide exemplary health, safety, and logistical support to our students, and are well respected locally and internationally, including by our peer universities.

The GESI team works directly with the global headquarters of five partner organizations in six locations in order to manage the logistics and coordination of the program. These organizations have a long-standing history of preparing and hosting students in communities abroad. Our partners include:

- **Amizade** in Ghana
- **Foundation for Sustainable Development (FSD)** in Bolivia and Uganda
- **Institute for Central American Development Studies (ICADS)** in Costa Rica
- **Kaya Responsible Travel** in Vietnam
- **Social Entrepreneur Corps (SEC)** in Guatemala

Each partner has a **site team** that consists of one to two local people who act as both your 24/7 on-the-ground student support, as well as the long-term relationship builders with their organization and/or an organization where you will work. These staff members will assist you in everything from in-country orientation to homestay placements, from work plan advising to community development consulting. Some site teams hire international coordinators who are not from the local community specifically for the summer to act as cultural liaisons.

In each location, regardless of partner organization, you will have a **supervisor** for the duration of your summer. This supervisor is employed by your **host organization** and will work directly with you and your team to learn about, plan, and develop your summer work. Your supervisor is most often a local person, though sometimes they can be individuals from other countries who have worked with the organization for a long time. More often than not, GESI teams will also work with other individuals who also work at the host organization.

Another key partner in your time abroad are your **homestay families!** While they may not contribute directly to your work, your homestay family relationships are integral to your success. Families offer invaluable perspectives on culture, tradition, history, and life experience in your host location and community.

We would be remiss if we did not include **members of the community** as partners in GESI. Community is a complex and multifaceted word you will consistently hear throughout the program. Who this includes (and excludes) depends upon the situation. We encourage you to think about this word and phrase broadly; in any given site, there are a wide variety of communities with whom you will interact. Sometimes who “they” are will be clear, sometimes it will be very murky. Remember that organizations and your supervisors are members of the community at large, as are the community members the organizations serve. Relationships are at the core of GESI partnerships; understanding, building, and maintaining them are how GESI defines success.

Learn more about GESI’s partners on our website at gesi.northwestern.edu/about/partners



Pre-Departure Academic Information

The core of GESI is the collaboration and relationship building that takes place through students' in-country work and experience. What makes GESI unique is how these interactions are shaped and understood through the rigorous preparation and reflection which provides an academic foundation for their fieldwork. Furthermore, students develop the analytical and interpersonal tools to engage, critique, and understand the challenges of community development at an international level. View program syllabi for GESI's required coursework, **Doing Development: The Theory and Practice of Community Engagement** and **Development in the Global Context: Participation, Power, and Social Change**, on our website at gesi.northwestern.edu/logistics/academics

What is experiential learning?

The following are definitions of various types of experiential-learning. GESI fits most closely into the "service learning" category, though the program incorporates elements of all of the below:

- **Volunteerism:** Students engage in activities where the emphasis is on service for the sake of the beneficiary or recipient (client, partner)
- **Internship:** Students engage in activities to enhance their own vocational or career development
- **Practicum:** Students work in a discipline-based venue in place of an in-class course experience
- **Community Service:** Students engage in activities addressing mutually defined community needs (as a collaboration between community partners, faculty, and students) as a vehicle for achieving academic goals and course objectives
- **Service Learning:** Students engage in community service activities with intentional academic and learning goals and opportunities for reflection that connect to their academic disciplines

Adapted from Cress, Christine et al. Learning Through Serving: A Student Guidebook for Service-Learning Across the Disciplines. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2005.

What to expect at GESI Pre-Departure Coursework

The GESI pre-departure coursework at Northwestern University is an intense eight days of class. During Pre-Departure, you will often be in class from 9 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. with breaks for meals. GESI alums will serve as student instructors, facilitating class activities and discussions. We will also have many guest speakers supplementing class lectures; **it is vital that you complete all course readings before arrival**. Some nights, we will assign additional (short) readings. You will need to discipline yourself so that you are able to complete these assignments and be alert and engaged for long days of class.

Below is a sample day of class. A detailed schedule will be provided upon arrival on campus.

9:00 - 12 p.m.	Lecture by Diego Arispe-Bazan on Intl. Development
12:00 - 1:00 p.m.	Lunch
1:00 - 2:00 p.m.	Language lesson
2:00 - 2:30 p.m.	Break
2:30 - 5:30 p.m.	Lecture and group activities with Paul Arntson
5:30 - 6:30 p.m.	Guest speaker on your host country
6:30 - 7:30 p.m.	Dinner with group with discussion or on your own
7:30 p.m.	Back to hostel for evening reading and sleep

In-Country Academic Information

In-Country Assignments

We feel strongly that in a foreign context you should look to your local hosts for expert advice. Your interaction with GESI staff and faculty while abroad will be limited. Occasionally, GESI staff, faculty, or student instructors will reply to your weekly updates (and/or other deliverables, as outlined below) with comments, questions, cautions, or feedback. However, given that they are not in-country with you, their written feedback will be limited. Only you, your site team, and community colleagues can truly understand your situation and challenges in-country. Please note that GESI staff are always available to discuss any program, health, safety or other concerns you have.

You will be evaluated based on satisfactory submission of the following (through Canvas):

- 1. Work proposal:** This should be a maximum of two pages; initial proposals are due within the first few weeks abroad.
- 2. External work plan:** These are due at the same time you submit your work proposal. These should be a maximum of two pages and conform to the template provided. Many students will also be required to submit a budget along with their proposal and work plan, while others will have no budget, only proposal and work plan.
- 3. Weekly group reports:** These are due on each of the seven Fridays while abroad. Submit these online on your group's Canvas discussion board. Entries should be a maximum of one page and should answer the following questions:
 - What you accomplished the previous week
 - What you plan to accomplish in the week ahead and who is responsible for these goals
 - What are the barriers/challenges that you are dealing with in terms of accomplishing the work plan, and interacting with your organization, community and your team
- 4. Field notes:** You will be given a spiral-bound notebook upon arrival to campus. It is your responsibility to complete the essays and reflection activities outlined in the notebook each week. You will be assigned some prompts and be able to choose others from a variety of reflection topics outlined in field notebook. While we will collect these from you at the conclusion of Final Summit, you can choose to fold any page you do not want us to read and we will honor your request. We will mail the notebooks back to you after we are done reviewing them.
- 5. Final Reflection Summit Summary:** In order to share your work with your fellow GESI colleagues, you will complete a summary of your work, including your rationale, process, and assessment. This will be shared with all students at the Final Summit to guide discussions.
- 6. Evaluations:** Before you return to the US, the country site teams will complete a two to three page evaluation with you. You will also be required to submit a comprehensive GESI program evaluation electronically shortly after returning from GESI (date will be specified during Final Summit). Failure to complete the electronic evaluation will result in an "in-complete" grade appearing on your transcript until we receive your completed evaluation.

Note: There may be times when you do not have access to Internet or communications. If you are unable to submit any of the aforementioned assignments due to communications issue, do not worry. GESI staff and faculty are accustomed to technological delays and this will not be held against you as long as you submit any missing deliverables once your internet access allows for it.

Final Summit Academic Information

What to expect at the Final Reflection Summit

Upon returning from their host countries, students meet back on campus for a three-day Final Reflection Summit where we will reflect on some of the program's learning outcomes, including but not limited to:

- Understanding ethical, historical, political, economic, and/or social issues in relation to community development
- Analyzing multiple perspectives of the social issues at hand
- Taking responsibility for your own actions as they have an effect on society
- Contributing to society through the application of new field knowledge
- Appreciating ends as well as means
- Appreciating cultural pluralism and global connectedness, as well as their challenges and opportunities

In addition, GESI participants from all sites share and compare geographical experiences while processing their immersion and what it has taught them about global development challenges, culture, and themselves. Students will also consider how to respond to the GESI experience by networking with professionals who are creating social change in a range of fields.

What happens after GESI?

As the program closes, GESI transitions into the role of alum support. GESI aspires to help students lead lives committed to international social justice. For us, this means helping our alums find internships, jobs, or project support opportunities that allow them to continue engaging with the issues they care about most. You may always contact the GESI team for guidance and support.



Cultural Adjustment

Cultural norms and adjustment

Students will experience cultural differences and react to these differences (commonly referred to as “culture shock”) in a variety of ways. There is a lot of helpful literature related to the cultural adjustment process, including common themes and experiences, representing phases of highs (comfort and excitement) and lows (discomfort and anxiety).

It is also helpful to keep in mind that, just as you enter into a new place and experience adjustment, so too do your host organizations, host families, and host communities; be aware that your actions, habits, and words can impact those around you as much as those around you can impact you.

Your on-site teams will be the most important resources for helping you to navigate cultural differences and adjustment, but just keep in mind a few things:

- Culture shock is normal and however you experience it is normal.
- Intercultural adjustment not only varies by individual, but also by program. You may find that some of the traditional “low” phases may correspond with program excursions and produce a “high.”
- Culture shock can exacerbate other mental health challenges or conditions. If you have seen a therapist or psychiatrist for any mental health conditions within the past three years, be sure to indicate this on the required NU Health Assessment Form and meet with your doctor to discuss your condition in light of study abroad. If you require any special accommodations, be sure to discuss your situation with GESI well before departure, so that we can work with on-site staff to determine what—if any—provisions can be made.
- Be aware of what you are experiencing. If you encounter any difficulties or discomfort, which prevent you from participating and being successful, discuss this with your on-site team or GESI staff ASAP.

Encountering culture

For many GESI students, witnessing extreme poverty first-hand causes a great deal of culture shock. Encounters with beggars, for example, can be a deeply unsettling experience. Richard Slimbach offers the following advice:

“Begging may be a deeply flawed method of redistributing wealth, but letting ourselves lapse into callous indifference only injures our moral sensibilities. Whether to give or not to give ultimately must be decided case by case, because much depends on our knowledge of the particular beggar and the larger social context. We simply cannot give to all beggars but neither must we refuse all. Over time, our giving probably will be selective, biased in favor of those who provide some service. Instead of our “gift” reinforcing the notion that poor folk are simply welfare wards of wealthy westerners, it can become a legitimate and dignifying form of payment for services rendered” (Slimbach , p. 188).

Bargaining is another cultural experience that can sometimes overwhelm students. Yet bargaining can be the most enjoyable of experiences abroad and we hope you’ll learn to have fun with it! Remember that if you really want something, you should plan to pay fair price, not the lowest possible price. Bargaining can be a fun way to form relationships with community members. Just be careful not to pay high prices for basic goods because it may harm local people. If merchants can get premium prices for their goods and services from foreigners, they may be less likely to sell to their neighbors at lower, fairer rates. Your host family and site team are great resources from which you can learn what may be a fair cost for you.

Food for Thought

You are passionate about making a positive impact while abroad, yet short-term study abroad can have long-term negative impacts if the traveler and program provider are not thoughtful and reflective about their engagements abroad. These questions are meant to help you think about the unintended consequences of study abroad and foreign travel. Many GESI sites are located in areas frequented by general tourists throughout the year. We encourage you to reflect with your GESI groups, in your personal writing reflections, and whenever you travel abroad again. These questions can help us continue to develop programming that does not harm local communities.

Economic and Environmental Impact

- Upon arrival, figure out where your food/water/housing comes from. Do foreigners/tourists impose any hardship on local people, such as water shortages? What about garbage disposal and pollution? Is land being used for visitors rather than local needs?
- Does the economic impact of study abroad or tourism create economic inequality in the community? Do foreigners or local elites own or manage the hotels that students/tourists frequent? Are guides and drivers outsiders or wealthier members of the community? Do local prices go up as a result of the student visit? The giving of gifts can contribute to similar questions, however well intentioned—can nonmaterial gifts be given instead, or gifts to the community as a whole?
- Do student/tourist visits contribute to economies of dependency on outsiders, orienting those economies to pleasing or providing pleasure for wealthy foreigners rather than to local needs?
- Is there a season for foreign visitors to come to the area, such that student visits contribute to a boom and bust cycle in the local economy? Is there any way to mitigate this effect?

Cultural Impact

- Do outsiders' patterns of consumption contribute to problems in the community? The "demonstration effect" of students bringing high-end travel gear, lots of clothes, spending money easily on restaurants, giving gifts, etc. may create resentment, the perception of American students as wealthy consumers with no responsibilities at home (McLaren 2006), or the desire in local people (especially youth) to leave the community so they can make money to buy similar goods and services. Even traveling on an airplane or traveling away from home can create these problems among people who do not have that option.
- Are local people excluded from any of the areas where foreigners are encouraged or allowed to go?
- Are foreign visitors well-behaved and respectful in terms of the local culture? Do they dress in culturally appropriate clothing, or otherwise commit cultural offenses that will anger, distress, or shock people in the local community? Do outsiders see culture and the "authenticity" of local people as commodities to be consumed? What other cultural impacts result from outsiders' visits? Cultural differences in themselves are likely sources of confusion and conflict in unanticipated ways.
- Do foreigners smoke, drink, or do drugs during their visit? The effect of these behaviors can range from being poor role models for local youth to bringing new addictions to the community.
- Do students/tourists demonstrate other expressions of privilege during their visit, such as doing things "our" way, eating "our" food, playing "our" music, requiring things to be done on "our" schedule?

Identity Impact

- How well are students prepared to understand the community they are visiting? Do they bring damaging stereotypes that can be countered throughout the program? These might be as narrow as "Bolivians" but for most students are more likely to be broader such as "poor people", "indigenous people", or "people in developing countries", as well as racist and exoticizing images of people in other countries.
- Are there human rights issues already present that are exacerbated by the presence of foreigners?
- Does anything about the students' presence or activities reinforce a negative self-image for local people, for example that Americans are smarter, more competent, more attractive? Is there any way their presence could promote a positive self-image instead?

Make the Most of Your Experience

To mitigate potentially negative impacts, we encourage you to honor the host community's independence and encourage self-reliance; to never impose your personal agenda when working with the community; to respect local people's visions and opinions above your own; and to be vigilant of any cultural impacts you might be having and adjust your behaviors and actions as necessary. Here are some additional tips to make the most of your time abroad and to leave a positive impact:

Be Present

- Engage in every activity fully, remaining mentally and emotionally present. Consider going unplugged, leaving technology like laptops aside as often as possible. While technology can be helpful to keep us connected to our world and people at home, many times it ends up restricting our ability to immerse ourselves in the local community or interferes with our ability to make ourselves available to the people right in front of us. Think about ways you will travel abroad with technology and still remember to look up.
- Recognize the value of play and lightheartedness in cultivating friendships.
- Observe, listen, and inquire rather than criticize, rationalize, or withdraw.
- Risk making mistakes.

Own the Power of Your Words and Actions

- Question your and your peers' use of words like "authentic", "real", "rural", "indigenous", and "traditional". ("To suggest the life of a rural citizen is any more or less "real" than that of an urban citizen of the same culture is condescending and can indicate a disturbingly colonial nostalgia for a cultural experience laden with pre-developed realities") (Johnson, 184).
- Practice culturally sensitive photography: always ask first. Be especially mindful of children, who are often readily photogenic. Photos of children are sometimes easily taken as we seek to document memorable experiences in the community, but be careful and considerate when taking kids' photos.
- When confronted with a language barrier, speak English as little as possible. Expand your vocabulary, if necessary, actively engaging community members with nonverbal communication.

Keep an Open Heart, an Open Mind

- Take advantage of opportunities to interact with people who are different from you.
- Keep an open mind and heart but avoid romanticizing your experiences in host communities. Remember that below the surface of a seemingly homogenous social structure are power hierarchies, conflicting interests, and patterns of discrimination and exclusion.
- Be a listener, more than talker; a learner more than teacher; a facilitator more than leader.
- "Go slow. Respect People. Practice humility, and don't condescend with your good intentions. Make friends. Ask questions. Know that you are visitor. Keep promises even if that means mailing a photograph a few weeks later. Be a personal ambassador of your home culture, and take your new perspectives home so that you can share them with your neighbor" (Potts, 2008).

Stay Flexible, Mindful, and Adaptable

- Do not try to replicate the U.S. in your host community; avoid demanding the services you would expect at home. Observe the way things are done locally, refrain from judgment, and when you feel yourself getting irritated or judgmental, take a step back and try to understand why the local people do things differently from the way you are accustomed. Speak with local people to understand their viewpoints, listen to be surprised so that your own assumptions are challenged.
- Avoid the "theme park" experience, the places that were clearly designed for foreigners' amusement.
- As you meet people and form strong relationships with your hosts, remain curious about the larger global, national and local structures that exist, that recreate the poverty and inequality you are trying to grasp. Global learning must reach in both directions—toward persons and structures.

When Things Get Tough

Stop complaining and start reflecting!

When you catch yourself complaining, ask yourself: Can we—both hosts and guests—learn to adapt to each other? Can our differences be a source of mutual enrichment rather than separation? When we discover that things abroad are profoundly different from things at home, our natural tendency is to flee away from them. Instead of seeking to understand why certain practices irritate us, our immediate impulse is to simply spurn them as primitive and uncivilized, even immoral...

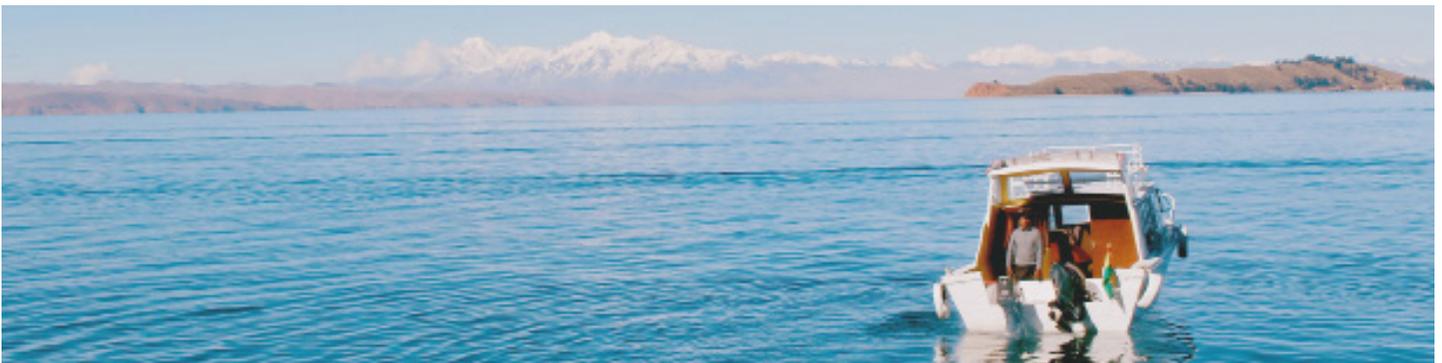
"Doing so justifies our escape from the culturally disagreeable environment into behaviors where we can feel protected and affirmed: calling home frequently, sleeping either too much or too little, reading romance novels, blogging or listening to music for hours, movies...We may not 'return home' in a physical sense, but psychologically we're a world away." (Slimbach, 158-160)

Get out your journal

Writing in an analytic mode helps us to calm down, gain some objectivity, and ask the critical questions: What provoked this reaction from me? How do local people interpret this act or event? And what does my reaction tell me about myself? Especially as we learn to put personal experiences and reactions into a larger social and theoretical context, our writing takes on a distinctive character—one that joins personal expression with cultural analysis—and encourages a more rigorous cognitive process than is common in conversation. Use Open Letters to channel some thoughts, they're designed to provide an analytical space. If you have other thoughts you don't want to share, use a personal journal.

Think About the Six Skills of Intercultural Communication

1. Cultivating curiosity about another culture and empathy toward its members
2. Realizing that effective communication requires discovering the culturally conditioned images that are evoked in the minds of the people when they think, act and react to the world around them
3. Recognizing that role expectations and other social variables such as age, sex, social and economic class, religion, ethnicity, and place of residence affect the way a people act and behave
4. Recognizing that situational variables and convention shape behavior in important ways
5. Understanding that people generally act the way they do because they are using options that their society allows for satisfying basic physical and psychological needs
6. Developing the ability to evaluate the strength of a generalization about the target culture (from the evidence substantiating the statements) and to locate and organize information about the target culture from the library, internet, mass media, people, and personal observation and reflection



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kaya
responsible travel

PART II

Hanoi, Vietnam



Letter from Kaya

Welcome to Vietnam!

Welcome to Kaya Responsible Travel! At Kaya we want to make sure that your experience abroad is as full of learning about yourself and another culture as it is fun and adventurous. The following information should help prepare you for your journey ahead and hopefully answer some specific questions about the program in which you are participating.

The most important step in preparing for your work is to keep a positive attitude and open mind throughout your experience. As you will soon discover, unlike tourist travel where resorts are set up to cater to the Westerner, traveling to the heart of a foreign land often involves making many more adjustments. Meeting new people, eating different foods and managing your own affairs are some of the challenges you will face. Although the adjustments and challenges may seem overwhelming, just remember to be patient with yourself and others as you transition into your new cultural environment.

Our Ground team in Vietnam is registered locally under the company name "Abroader", who operate under our Kaya network at this location. Upon your arrival, you will be met by an "Abroader" team member who will make all the program arrangements and provide you with orientation and support throughout your time in Vietnam, both at work and in your spare time. In the meantime, it is important that you familiarize yourself with this document, as it provides important information for your upcoming trip and will answer many of the questions you may currently have. For any questions you have prior to your departure please continue to communicate with GESI staff as this allows Kaya's Vietnam staff and partners to devote more of their time to their work.

Best of luck with your preparations and let us know if we can be of further assistance.

the Kaya Team



About Kaya

At Kaya, we pride ourselves on delivering only what is best for our volunteers and best for the communities in which we are working. You will find many volunteer organizations to choose between today, and many of these are also offering great placements around the world; however, we believe that no-one works closer with their volunteers and with the receiving communities on the ground to make sure everyone can achieve the greatest benefits that volunteering has to offer.

Responsible Travel

Kaya's mission is to promote sustainable social, environmental and economic development, empower communities and cultivate educated, compassionate global citizens through responsible travel. To help us achieve this, we ask that you consider and adhere to the following:

- respect local customs
- be considerate when using water; supplies are often limited
- the cost of electricity is fairly high so please be sensible about your usage
- use local transportation to support local business
- buy "local" rather than buying imported international items
- by all means, buy souvenirs but avoid items that are made from products or by-products of endangered or threatened species
- avoid bringing plastic items that you will need to dispose of as often there is not the rubbish collection or recycling facilities in place and therefore will lead to pollution
- do not give money, sweets or food to street children; you will make much more of a difference if you donate to a local charity that supports their families.

By implementing the above, we hope not only to encourage Kaya participants to travel responsibly but to educate other participants and the communities in these responsible travel practices.

Partner at Location

Our Ground team in Vietnam is registered locally under the company name "Abroaders", who operate under our Kaya network at this location. Established with the mission of supporting international students looking to gain global awareness and local insights in Vietnam, they have a commitment to supporting reliable, responsible and impactful programs in line with Kaya's mission and values, while providing greater opportunities for international exposure to the local population.

In country, the Abroaders team, headed by Mo Nguyen (also known as Lucy) works to support GESI students with their transition to Hanoi through homestay placements, maintaining host organization relationships and keeping projects on track. With local offices, established relationships with local development networks, and an experienced team who have welcomed hundreds of students to Vietnam, the Abroaders staff will be your primary support throughout your program.

About Kaya

Social Enterprise

At Kaya we operate as a social enterprise. This means that we are a business with primarily social objectives, whose surplus profits are mostly reinvested into our social cause. We operate in a manner that maximizes the amount invested in our work while carrying out the necessary operations of a sustainable business. One of the differences between a charity and a social enterprise is that charities most often fund their missions through grants and donations, whereas a social enterprise funds the social mission through trading activities. The social enterprise model is, especially in these times of financial austerity, considered one of the most sustainable models to support social improvement.

The Volunteer

We know that a volunteer is not a tool! In order for the organization to benefit from your participation, it needs you to arrive prepared and committed to the work at hand. You can only do this if you know enough about the place you are visiting, the work you are doing, and the task you are expected to undertake. Every Kaya volunteer is provided with extensive information about every aspect of the trip before they set off and we ensure that, before you go, you speak in person to a member of the organization on the ground. This way you can discuss your concerns, get all the details on the day-to-day or just check on the weather!

The Work

Our model means that we only commit to work where there is a genuine need for the physical aid of a volunteer, not just financial assistance, so every volunteer is welcomed and is useful. We help to shape these initiatives which in the long run does not encourage dependence on aid, but instead establishes foundations upon which the people of that country can build and develop themselves. And we ensure that the members of those communities are open and eager to learn and discover our culture as we become a part of theirs, for a time.



Development Work

Realities of Working in Development

In an ideal world everything would go to plan. However, when working in authentic, real-world situations, particularly in different economic, cultural and social environments, there are many more challenges that require our flexibility.

As a GESI student, you are here to observe and respect the local cultures. It is not our mission to change or pass judgement the local ways. You are encouraged to seek understanding and find constructive ways to work with these realities along the way.

As this will be a different living experience especially if this is your first time living abroad, you should expect the unexpected. Some examples include:

- Public transport – Busses within the city are slow and crowded, and often delayed, making your daily journey long and occasionally resulting in project supervisors and staff arriving late and making you wait.
- Electricity and Water shortages – The infrastructure in Vietnam is developing rapidly but as the weather is unpredictable, the system can experience interruptions both at home and at work.
- Always being stared at – Outside the main tourist areas, many locals have limited exposure to foreigners, especially Western ones. This overt curiosity is not considered rude locally, but can sometime be unnerving and makes it hard to do anything without attracting attention
- Project supervisors becoming unavailable – working in real organizations, company issues may arise that require supervisors to change their plans and become unavailable at short notice. It is important the organization's work takes priority over our contribution to that work, so requires us to always be flexible

No matter how much you plan, in developing countries, there are barriers to making progress, some of them human some of them environmental. The organizations Kaya works with have committed to working with our participants and have a genuine need for your assistance. Kaya asks that you remain patient, try to use your initiative and find other ways to achieve your goals and use your time. Always share your issues in a constructive manner with your organization contact and look for an alternative solution and way forward. It may be that you will be asked to work on something else for a period of time until the problem is resolved. This will result in your time being used constructively and benefit the work.



About Hanoi

In Hanoi, you'll find out that Hanoi, somewhat unjustly, remains less popular than Ho Chi Minh City. Yet, the Vietnamese capital of Hanoi provides a full-scale assault on the senses. Its crumbly, lemon-hued colonial architecture is a feast for the eyes; swarms of buzzing motorbikes invade the ear, while the delicate scents and tastes of delicious street food can be found all across a city. Despite its political and historical importance, and the incessant noise drummed up by a population of over six million, Hanoi exudes a more intimate, urbane appeal than Ho Chi Minh City.

Hanoi city center comprises a compact area known as Hoan Kiem District, which is neatly bordered by the Red River embankment in the east and by the rail line to the north and west, while its southern extent is marked by the roads Nguyen Du, Le Van Huu and Han Thuyen. The district takes its name from its present-day hub and most obvious point of reference, Hoan Kiem Lake, which lies between the cramped and endlessly diverting Old Quarter in the north, and the tree-lined boulevards of the French Quarter, arranged in a rough grid system, to the south. West of this central district, across the rail tracks, some of Hanoi's most impressive monuments occupy the wide open spaces of the former Imperial City, grouped around Ho Chi Minh's Mausoleum on Ba Dinh Square and extending south to the ancient walled gardens of the Temple of Literature. A vast body of water confusingly called West Lake sits north of the city, harboring a number of interesting temples and pagodas, but the attractive villages that once surrounded it have now largely given way to upmarket residential areas and a smattering of luxury hotels.

Modern Hanoi has an increasingly confident, "can do" air about it and a buzz that is even beginning to rival Ho Chi Minh City. There's more money about nowadays and the wealthier Hanoians are prepared to flaunt it in the ever-more sophisticated restaurants, cafés and designer boutiques that have exploded all over the city. Hanoi now boasts glitzy, multistory shopping malls and wine warehouses; beauty parlors are the latest fad and some seriously expensive cars cruise the streets. Nevertheless, the city center has not completely lost its old-world charm nor its distinctive character.

Please take extra care when crossing the roads in Vietnamese cities. The streets are busy with all sorts of transportation, including a vast number of motorcycles, each vying for attention and subsequently not paying attention to you crossing. If in doubt, stick by a local person and cross when they do. We have tried this out on a number of occasions and it was by far was the safest way to cross! The locals usually don't mind you tagging along for the crossing and you'll feel a whole lot safer for it.

Climate

Vietnam is a year-round destination and even the rainfalls of the hot, rainy summer season (May to October) are over in a couple of hours, refreshing the city and giving way to sunshine. The heaviest rains are generally experienced from June to August. In the run-up to the rainy season, the humidity increases dramatically and sightseeing can be quite exhausting. In Hanoi, winters, meanwhile, are usually cool but with persistent drizzle, so don't forget a raincoat.



Health

GESI and Kaya are deeply committed to student health, safety, and well-being. Our experience in risk assessment and emergency response has enabled us to maximize safety and security for GESI students. We arrange medical insurance with full coverage abroad and emergency evacuation services, and we actively monitor international events that may affect students. We work in cooperation with a team of risk management and legal professionals to ensure comprehensive measures address potential health and safety issues while providing students with 24/7 in-country support. Learn more about health and safety during GESI at gesi.northwestern.edu/logistics/health-safety

As a GESI student, it is your full responsibility to identify and take all necessary health precautions prior to, during, and following the program. Please start your health preparations early, as some vaccinations must be administered as far as eight weeks or more before departure. Providing detailed medical advice is beyond the expertise of Kaya or GESI staff so it is very important to consult the resources below as well as medical professionals such as your doctor or local travel health clinic.

Resources

- Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): Recorded information about health risks and precautions for international travelers: 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747)
- Country-specific traveler's health info: wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/
- Malaria Hotline: 404-332-4555

Topics to talk to your doctor or local health clinic about:

- Any pre-existing conditions. Please note that pre-existing conditions--even those that don't impact you on a regular basis in the United States--can flare up while in a new environment due to altitude, allergens, new food, etc.
- Symptoms of the most common illnesses contracted by travelers and appropriate treatment
- Medicines and supplies for preventing and treating common illnesses and maladies (diarrhea, dehydration, sunburn, food poisoning)
- Medicines and supplies for pre-existing conditions (especially important if you need a specific brand or dosage which are not always available abroad, i.e. anti-anxiety or depression medication)
- Yellow fever and typhoid fever
- Malaria (if participants plan to travel to at-risk areas)
- Rabies
- Food and water-borne diseases

What happens if I get sick?

For serious illness that may occur during your program, there are public and private clinics and hospitals available in most areas. If you should become sick, please alert the site team and your host family immediately and they will ensure that you receive appropriate medical care. Don't be embarrassed to speak to your host family or site team about your medical issues; they are there to support you, so do not postpone the conversation.

GESI's cost includes comprehensive medical coverage through GeoBlue; your enrollment will be completed for you, and your member number will be provided to you at the start of the program. The illnesses and medical issues you are more likely to encounter may require medical consultations and prescriptions that will generally incur an out-of-pocket cost between \$25 and \$100; these types of expenses are reimbursable through GeoBlue. Please plan for emergency medical expenses and seek reimbursement directly from GeoBlue. Kaya and GESI are not responsible for up-front costs or cash-related medical fees.

For more health information, especially regarding what to do if you have a pre-existing condition, visit Northwestern's Office of Global Safety and Security website:

www.northwestern.edu/global-safety-security/health-safety/travel-health/index.html

Safety & Security

Kaya and GESI never anticipate significant issues related to safety and security during the program, but we understand that emergencies sometimes occur. We have had experience dealing with a variety of issues for which we can prepare and respond to appropriately. During local orientation, students will hear from program staff about pertinent safety and security precautions specific to the area.

All of our sites are in safe areas. However, similar to any location in the US, certain common-sense safety measures must be taken (i.e. not walking alone at night or wearing expensive/flashy jewelry or clothing). We emphasize that the most important ways to stay safe are to exercise good judgment, to have a strong network of local contacts, and to have a strong awareness of the potential for harm.

Kaya will do its utmost to provide a safe environment and a responsive support system to you throughout your experience. We depend upon our staff to serve as a barometer of the local political, social, and economic climates. We depend on our participants to act prudently and to be receptive of instructions and suggestions regarding safety and security.

Kaya's responsibilities:

- A safe and secure host community. Kaya is run by staff and trusted colleagues who live locally and have years of experience with international students. While the political climate varies, we feel that our extensive local networks of host families and partner organizations provide us with a good barometer of the climate in relation to the safety of foreign volunteers.
- Inform you about safety and security in your host community through materials like this pre-departure guide. We equip you with the information and tools to be aware of the realities of your host community, to avoid situations that would put you at risk, and to manage these situations should they arise.
- Take you to a preferred medical facility in the case of an emergency.
- Support you logistically and emotionally through any emergency situation.

Your responsibilities

- Follow the guidelines and rules your site team and host family provide; they exist to help keep you safe!
- Learn about the history and current events of your host country and community.
- Secure all recommended vaccinations.
- If you are a US citizen, GESI will register your travel with the State Department. If you are not a US citizen, you should register your travel with your home country's equivalent.
- Avoid volatile or risky situations (especially protests, demonstrations, or politically motivated gatherings).
- Travel with someone you know, and avoid being out alone after dark.
- Be aware of your surroundings. Walk purposefully and act as though you know where you are going.
- Notify your site team of any incidents of harassment, illness, accident, or any other serious event as soon as possible.

The safety and security of our program participants and staff is our first priority. We have rigorous and conservative safety and security procedures, including triaged security measures for students (such as restricted travel, curfews, and buddy systems) should any emergent or potentially emergent event occur. Every site has an emergency evacuation plan (supported by our travel insurance partner) that identifies safe houses, identifies on-call transportation, and provides a variety of options for moving participants out of unsafe area via land and air routes. The vast majority of safety and security incidents are those of petty crime, such as leaving a bag on the table and returning to find it missing and of street harassment, which will be discussed during Pre-Departure and at your on-site orientation.

Arrival & Transportation

Arrival in Hanoi

Our local team will arrange for a driver to pick you up at the airport on your scheduled arrival date. The driver will be waiting at the exit gate with a sign that has GESI's name on it. Before departure, you will be given our on-site team's emergency contacts. Before departure, you will be given the site team's emergency contacts. If your flight is delayed or you are unable to arrive at the airport at your scheduled time, simply call/text or email to let us know. Please respect the drivers time and go immediately to meet them when you get off the plane.

Transportation

It is generally easy to travel in Vietnam. As the tourism industry continues to grow, there are plenty of train and bus services connecting travel hotspots. Some great places to visit are Da Nang, Hoi An, Hue, Halong Bay and of course Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Many of the tour operators speak basic English. After some basic Vietnamese orientation, it is not very hard to navigate location names as Vietnamese uses a Latin-based alphabet system just like English.

Traffic in Vietnam, on the other hand, can be intimidating at first. Cities like Hanoi have millions of motorbikes and cars. Local transportation etiquettes can also be quite different from home. Nevertheless, after some orientations, you will be able to understand the "patterns" and find your way through the sea of traffic. As a general rule, it is always recommended to be cautious and allow extra time for commuting in Vietnam. You can expect to take around 1 hour each way getting from your accommodation to work, and longer in peak rush hours. Transportation in Vietnam is always an adventure; it can be an exciting (and even thrilling) experience.

Types of transportation are varied. Here are some common types of transportation in cities listed by the order of preference:

- **Bus** - In Vietnam, the bus is the cheapest and most convenient means of transportation, since the bus system has been well-developed and covers almost every part of the country. During your program you will be provided a bus pass for Hanoi city transport, allowing unlimited travel in the city, and you will use this to travel to your project each day. They are safe to use and often have A/C, which also makes them very popular. Busses are often crowded with standing room only at peak periods, and traffic congestion affects the timetables, so having a bus schedule then building in a buffer is always recommended. You can catch bus at bus stops scattering around the cities.
- **Taxi** - When you are short on time, taxis are a good alternative. For medium distance like from the airport to the hotel or for getting around within cities, taxis are flexible and have a reasonable cost. However, you need to be aware of the taxi drivers' intentions when it comes to paying. You can negotiate the price with the driver, once you are familiar with the length and typical price of your journey, or use brands with fare meters to avoid bargaining.
- **Grab (Uber)** - Grab, the local version of Uber, has become popular in Vietnam, and are cheaper than regular taxis. If you download the app on your phone and have wi-fi or data, then you can use this as you do at home. Remember that your card will be charged in Vietnamese Dong, so attach a card that gives you the best international exchange rates. This can be useful for getting home late at night after a social occasion, for example, and the local team will teach you how best to use this. Motorbike and regular taxis are available on then app, although we encourage students not to take the motorbike option for safety reasons. Most driver will not speak English, so it is important to enter the address correctly when ordering a Grab.
- **Motorbikes** - Motorbikes and scooters are the most popular form of transport in Vietnam. Vietnam also ranks high in the list of countries with bad road accident rates because of this. For the safety of students, we encourage you to avoid this form of transportation.
- **Bicycles** - Traveling by bicycle is a great way to experience Vietnam. Because of its convenience and economy, cycling is popular for short distance travel, although caution with road traffic within the city is recommended if you borrow, rent or buy a bike during your stay.

Visa Info

Your passport and visa are extremely important. Make sure you keep them in a safe place. Before departing, make sure you have copies for yourself and leave a copy with a responsible friend or family member back home. The passport is the most recognizable form of I.D. and you may be required to show it. However, it is not recommended that you carry your passport and visa around with you. If you lose your passport, contact your country's Embassy immediately to get a replacement. The information below is pertinent to most nationalities, but if you hold a nationality other than citizen of the United States, contact Kaya and GESI about possible additional visa requirements/challenges.

Applying for your Visa

You will apply for a 3-month Business Visa upon arrival at the airport in Hanoi, NOT a tourist visa. Our local team will complete a pre-application and send you a letter before your arrival. Using this letter, and one passport photograph, which you will need to bring with you, on arrival you will pass through immigrations, where you wait in line for about 30 minutes.

DO NOT TAKE ANY ACTION WITHOUT THE GUIDANCE OF THE KAYA/ABROADER TEAM!

For non-US citizens, let Kaya and GESI know in advance of confirming for the program, as rules may be different, requiring a visa before travel, or restrictive. GESI and the Kaya team will help you apply, when possible, but it is important to note there may be additional costs.

Vietnamese embassy in the United States:

Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in the USA
1233 20th Street, NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20036, USA
Tel: (202) 861 0737 or 2293 (consular section)
www.vietnamembassy-usa.org

Kaya and GESI will follow-up with you in advance of applying for your visa to provide you with the required letter of invitation.



Packing List

Clothes:

- Short sleeve shirts/t-shirts/long sleeve shirts
- Shorts
- Lightweight pants
- Socks and underwear
- At least one outfit for formal settings (women: a nice longer skirt and shirt or conservative dress; men: nice shirt and pants and dress shoes)
- Swimsuit
- A light jacket and/or sweater
- Raincoat
- Sandals
- Hiking/walking shoes for treks
- Baseball cap, hat, or visor
- Modest sleepwear

Health and hygiene:

- Personal hygiene products and toiletries like shampoo, toothpaste, etc. (at least enough for your first few days as you can buy most products locally)
- Strong, waterproof sunscreen
- Mosquito repellent
- Over the counter medicines for anything that might come up (pain reliever/fever reducer, Pepto-Bismol, Immodium, laxative, eye drops, etc.)
- Any prescription medications you use in their original containers and a copy of your prescriptions
- Vitamins
- Anti-bacterial wet wipes/gel
- Protein bars - specifically if you are on a vegetarian or vegan diet
- Sunglasses
- Glasses, plenty of contact lenses, copy of your prescription, saline solution (for first few days)
- Feminine hygiene products (sanitary pads are widely available, tampons are not)
- *Note on Homestay Gifts - Bring a small gift on the first day to show appreciation to the host. You can bring: sweets or a typical souvenir from your country, local flowers or fruits. Gifts should be wrapped in colorful paper. Avoid giving handkerchiefs, black colored items, yellow flowers or chrysanthemums.

Practical supplies:

- Small umbrella (essential)
- Towel/travel towel
- Travel alarm clock (with extra batteries) or watch
- Money belt or money necklace
- Camera and film/extra memory cards
- Adapters for laptops and other electrical appliances
- Small first aid kit
- Small flashlight
- Rechargeable batteries and charger (if necessary)
- Daypack
- Luggage (internal or external frame backpack recommended, not required)
- Refillable water bottle
- Binoculars
- Work gloves (useful for conservation work, if pertinent)

Documents and money:

- Passport with three copies, stored in different parts of your luggage
- Passport pictures (two photos, 3cm x 4cm and two photos 4cm x 6cm)
- Visa letter sent to you prior to your trip + a copy
- Two entry and exit forms
- Printed schedule with your on-site coordinator contact information
- Emergency contact sheet from GESI
- ATM card
- Photocopies of all other important documents (including credit card front and backs)
- Cash (at least US\$200 when entering country)

Other:

- Documents: passport (original + 3 copies), airline tickets, personal health insurance information, and cash, ATM/credit cards (and copies of each in a separate place), letter of invitation, visa fee (if pertinent)
- Reading materials
- Pictures of your family, friends, neighborhood, work
- Books and other reading materials
- Small inexpensive gifts for your host family (these are nice to bring but are not mandatory)
- Notebook and pens for your internship
- Journal or diary

Packing Tips

Luggage

Don't overdo it—pack lightly so you can travel more easily and store your bag in small places. We recommend you pack a change of clothes in your carry-on suitcase as suitcases delays tend to be a common occurrence in this day and age. Make sure to check with your airline on how much luggage you are allowed. The golden rule about packing is to lay out everything you want to bring, and then take half. You will most likely bring back souvenirs, clothing, gifts for friends/family, etc. so you will be thankful for the extra space in your suitcase!

Spending Money

How much depends on your lifestyle. Overall, we recommend USD\$200-250 a month for personal expenses, but here are a few example of prices:

- Bottle of Water - 6,312 vnd (£.22 / \$0.27)
- Bottle of Coke/Pepsi - 10,539 vnd (£.37 / \$0.46)
- Local Meal - 40,000 vnd (£1.40 / \$1.76)
- Restaurant Meal (Mid-Range) - 175,000 vnd (\$6.13 /\$8.23)

Dress

Visitors are encouraged to dress on the conservative side, however, the country has become considerably more progressive over the last decade, especially among the young generation. Avoid revealing clothes, especially outside of the cities. In everyday life, T-shirt and jeans and/ or knee-level shorts and dresses are fine. Working attires might be varied depending on the host organizations, but generally the dress code is smart casual. More information on this topic can be found under the culture section.

You will be visiting Vietnam during summer time, so prepare for it to get hot and humid. Lightweight, loose-fitting clothes in natural fabrics thus are recommended to keep you cool and are easy to wash and dry. When visiting culturally sensitive area such as a temple or pagoda however, you should wear particularly conservative clothing that cover your legs and shoulders. Clothes are affordable here as Vietnam has many Western clothes factories so you can always buy more if needed. A good pair of sunglasses plus a good pair of shoes and/ or sandals are also recommended.

Laundry

You will have access to a washing machine at your host family's home. No cost is associated with doing laundry.

Laptops

All students are encouraged students to bring their laptops with them to Vietnam. Nowadays many houses and restaurants have WiFi or internet access, but internet in developing countries like Vietnam is much slower than what you may be accustomed to.

Electricity and Converters

Please be considerate with the light and other electricity you use. The voltage in Vietnam is 220V – which is different from the US, and means that some items may not work. You will require a 2-pin plug converter which you should bring with you if you do intend to travel with any electrical items. A lot of electrical equipment (like video cameras, digital cameras, laptops) that operate on different voltages via a product-specific adaptor will happily cope with dual voltage - check the adaptor and device instructions to be sure. For your country's voltage information visit: <http://www.whatplug.net>

Ladies Sanitary Info

Pads and pantyliners are easy to find in most grocery stores, mini-marts and convenience stores - both Western and Vietnamese brands and quite a lot of variety. Tampons are less common and you generally have to go to a Western market to find those, and they can be a little expensive. We do recommend packing enough for your trip, but you can get more locally if needed.

Contact Lens Solution

Contact lenses/lens solutions are sold at various optical shops (often with free eye exams and consultation). In general, they are cheaper than in the US, but we do recommended checking carefully the expiration dates before purchasing. There are optics stores all over town, but the two most popular areas to shop for contact lenses are on Trang Tien street, between the Opera House and Hoan Kiem Lake, and on Giang Vo street near the corner of Nui Truc Street.

Don't Bring

Food, pets, winter clothing, electrical goods that need a converter (unless you have a converter/adaptor for them), live plants, more than \$5,000 cash, or valuables.

Food & Water

Meals

For your program three meals a day are **included in your budget**. It is most common for Vietnamese people who live in cities to eat breakfast outside the home on their way to work and to eat lunch with their work colleagues. A daily stipend will be provided to enable you to eat out for breakfast and lunch. At your homestay, you will also have access to the kitchen if you chose to store or prepare any food at home.

During your time at the homestays, families will provide an evening meal each day. Sometimes, however, the family may choose to eat out or too busy to cook. In such case, sometimes the family will prepare meal for you, or you can prepare your own food from ingredients they provide for you. It is likely that the parents at your host families are both working professionals and have to work overtime, thus, sometimes family members will have dinner at their own time. That means on some occasions, you may have dinner with only the children, the family maid or by yourself. Nonetheless, please understand that your host families will try to spend time at dinner with you as much as they can.

You are encouraged to be sensible and communicate with your family on meal schedules – for example, if you are not planning on having dinners with your host family, remember to inform them well beforehand so they do not have to wait for you.

Locals usually eat lunch at 12pm and dinner at 7pm or earlier, with lunch being the bigger meal of the day. People usually have a lunch break of 1 to 1.5 hours so they can either choose to bring their own food and eat at work or go out to eat at local food stores. People usually eat rice dishes or noodle soups for lunch. A typical meal out would cost from \$1.5 - \$5 depending on where and what type of food you eat (fast foods at international/local chain restaurants are typically more expensive than foods at local food stores).

Vegetarians/Vegans

It can be fairly hard for vegetarians especially vegans, to find a standard vegan meal at random food stores on the streets, if you are a vegan and you are strict about what you eat, we recommend you prepare your own food or buy them from convenient stores/supermarkets. There are legitimate vegan restaurants but they are generally more expensive than the standard meal prices. If you are a vegetarian, there are both local vegetarian food stores and restaurants but they are rather rare and harder to spot, or you can simply just order vegetable dish from a food store but make sure to have someone who speaks Vietnamese with you because this is rather confusing to vendors that you only want rice and vegetables. It is also worth to keep in mind that the most popular ingredients used for flavoring in Vietnamese food is fish sauce which is made from fish, there are limited ways to make sure your food doesn't contain fish sauce even if it is vegetarian, especially if the food comes from street food stalls. For a list of vegetarian places in cities across Vietnam: <https://www.happycow.net/asia/vietnam/>

Water

Travelers to Vietnam should not drink the tap water unless it has been boiled or purified using iodine tablets (water purifying tablets which you can buy prior to your visit to Vietnam). We recommend that you just buy bottled water for the duration of your stay, which can be picked up easily and cheaply at local convenience stores, or bring a reusable water bottle and boil your own at home.

Food etiquette – Chopsticks and rice

Every Vietnamese meal follows some basic principles. Rice is a staple, consumed at basically every meal, and it will typically be placed at the end of the table. After rice, the second basic ingredient is vegetables and fruit, followed by meat and seafood, which were quite rare during previous hard times. Today, the standard of living is much higher, so meat takes a more important place.

Another element essential to the Vietnamese table: chopsticks. Eat with the thinner end. When you are not actively eating, take care always to prop them across your bowl. To plant them vertically is a sign of misfortune and death because it resembles the incense sticks used for the dead. Younger generations are more flexible with these rules, while in the most traditional families the practice remains firmly taboo. Finally, it is common for the host to serve his guest. Observe that he does not pass food from chopstick to chopstick but instead places it in your bowl. When dining with a Vietnamese family, please wait for head or the eldest to start eating first before you do. Vietnamese often serve you food into your rice bowl. This is an act of hospitality.

Money

Currency

The currency of Vietnam is the Dong (VND). Notes are available in paper denominations of 500,000; 200,000; 100,000; 50,000; 20,000; 10,000; 5,000; 2,000; 1,000; 500, 200 and 100 VND. Throughout the country, American dollars are widely accepted.

Almost ALL places except major supermarkets, will NOT have change for large bills such as 50,000 VND & 20,000 VND, including taxis! Participants should carry small bills at all times to account for this.

ATM and Credit Cards

Kaya recommends using your ATM/debit banking card from your home bank. Using ATM cards enables travelers to access personal bank accounts from any ATM machine around the world. The primary advantages of getting money from an ATM are 24-hour access and preferential exchange rates. There are many ATMs throughout big cities; they accept transactions for Visa, MasterCard, American Express, Maestro, and Cirrus. Only Vietnamese Dong is given from ATMs. You must go into the bank if you require other currency.

You must have a 4-digit pin. You should take care of this, as some banks take a long time to issue a new PIN. Many ATMs in Vietnam only accept cards that have the Cirrus, Plus, Visa, or MasterCard, symbol on the back of the card. It is a good idea to have two options available, an ATM card and a credit card, if you plan to use ATMs as your primary source of funds. Machines are compatible with most international credit cards, but on credit and debit cards there may be local bank charges incurred.

Before you leave home, check with the card issuer to determine exchange rates and commissions, so you'll have an idea of how much they are charging to handle your money. You can also ask for a list of machines that are within their system in Vietnam to avoid ATM "roaming charges."

Credit cards are becoming more popular, especially in the major hotels and restaurants of Hanoi, Da Nang and Ho Chi Minh city. There is usually a 3% fee added.

Kaya would also advise you to inform your bank and credit card company of the dates you will be away for, to ensure they do not put any security blocks on your card.

We suggest you exchange some money at the airport for your arrival to last you a day or so until you identify a bank or ATM machine in the city. Again, we don't recommend you carry large amounts of cash for security. It is also a good idea to have a second source of money that you can access if you lose or have problems with your main cash card.

Tipping and Tax

Tipping is not part of the culture in Vietnam, and you are not required to tip anywhere. There will be a service charge for more upscale restaurants. People more accustomed to receiving tips are tour guides and in Western style hotels. The general tax rate in Vietnam is 10% and is included in the price you see.

MONETARY UNIT & EXCHANGE RATE

Monetary Unit | Dong (VND)

Exchange rates fluctuate. Be sure to check them online before you leave, at websites like:
www.x-rate.com or www.xe.com

Shopping and Bargaining

Bargaining

Most things you buy on the street or “wet” market must be bargained for. Foreigners will often be charged a higher rate, but considering the difference in income between you and the vendor, it is understandable - life is too short to worry about a few cents! It is expected that you will bargain and you will look like an easy mark if you don't. However, be good natured about it. If you can, try bringing along a Vietnamese friend when you go shopping for the first time at any place so that they can advise you not only where to buy good quality products but also how to purchase them at a reasonable price.

Shopping

Shopping in Hanoi is famed for its bustling markets and narrow shop houses but there are a growing number of flash boutiques and shopping malls on the rise with four main popular spots for tourists.

In the streets of Hanoi's Old Quarter, you really discover shopping as part of daily life. Shopping in the Old Quarter can be a challenge. Locals have the practice of shopping from their bikes so they get closer to the edge of the road to look at the items for sale. Then, the sellers bring it to them and if they like it, they close the transaction right there. Hang Gai is one of the most popular streets is well known by the locals and tourists. Hang Gai street is just North of Hoan Kiem Lake and on the edge of the old Quarter where is the best place in Hanoi to shop for high quality, fashionable silk materials, traditional Vietnamese apparel, and home furnishings. Hang Gai is renowned for its quality and choice of craftsmen though two of our absolute favorites on Hang Gai Street are Le Minh shop and Ta My Design as both stores offer ready-to-wear pieces. Suits can be ready within 24 hours, though it's best to allow more time for a second fitting to make sure that your outfit is perfectly tailored. Most stores in Hang Gai Street accept payment via credit cards and it pays to go to a better quality store and avoid the market street traders to guarantee the best quality silk. As with most retail outlets all over Vietnam, bargaining is also highly encouraged to get a decent price – start at 50% off the asking price and pay no more than 70%.

Call Dong Xuan Market is Hanoi's largest indoor market, offering a wide range of goods such as foods, materials for producing, clothes, souvenirs and so on. The sellers are looking to shop for souvenirs, head to the upper levels, where they can find numerous stalls selling tee shirts, fabrics, school uniforms, handbags, handicrafts, all of which are sold at wholesale prices. Specially, the travelers usually come here to buy the gifts for their family because of their cheap costs. However, they need to bargain with sellers for the goods demanded. Surrounding Dong Xuan Market are many more shops where you can purchase traditional Dong Ho drawings, Bat Trang ceramics, Binh Da embroideries and laces, and sand paintings. Within walking distance of Hoan Kiem Lake, Dong Xuan Market is a must-visit if you're looking to experience the local lifestyle. Dong Xuan Market is one of Hanoi's many efforts to develop tourism and attract international visitors.

Near Dong Xuan Market is Hanoi weekend night market, opened every Friday, Saturday and Sunday (Hanoi Weekend). It happens through the Old Quarter district from 19:00 onwards, starting from Hang Dao Street and running north to the edge of Dong Xuan Market. The night market stretches for about one kilometer and the street is closed to vehicles.

Communication

Outside of the tourist areas, not many locals speak English. But don't let it become a barrier. Most Vietnamese, especially young students, are eager to practice English and are happy to talk with you, even if they have limited understanding of the language. As long as you are patient and friendly, it is easy to make friends with Vietnamese who are ranked one of the most hospitable nation in the world! Also, remember to stick to simple and common words and avoid using words that have two meanings in English for higher chances of being understood.

Google Translate is a great company for you throughout the trip. You can download the offline version and have it on your phone along the way. Even when language fails, smiling goes a long way in Vietnam. Smiles are the same in every language and it makes Vietnamese people be much nicer and much more helpful to you. Smile at the security guards of places you frequent (like home and work), smile at the fruit vendor near your house, smile at your bus driver, smile at people you see regularly. It will make your experience much better. It is a simple communication tool that let people know you are nice and friendly and helps Vietnamese people open up to you more.

People & Culture

General

In a country of this size, you would imagine that a number of cultural and ethnic groups exists. While this is the case, Vietnam has 54 recognized ethnic groups, but over 80% of the population is Viet (or Kinh). Ethnic minorities generally live in the highlands and include the Hmongs, Dao and Tay. The national language is Vietnamese. While in the past, Vietnam used the Chinese alphabet, the Vietnamese developed their own characters in the 13th century.

The European occupations brought with it the Roman alphabet, which was adapted within the framework of Vietnamese characters. English is commonly spoken within cities and increasingly amongst the young who now learn it as a compulsory subject at school. The religions of the country are also visibly influenced by its history. Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism are the most widely practiced, though there is also a small but visible Christian presence.

A strong cultural influence is the country's socialist government control. Especially with media control, foreign influences are restricted. However, these regulations have changed dramatically in the past decade. Vietnamese people are similar to the Chinese in that they place great importance on duty, responsibility, family relationships, education and self improvement. Unlike its Thai, Cambodian and Laotian neighbors, the Vietnamese culture is visibly more extrovert and assertive, but the Asian concept of 'saving face' (maintaining dignity and preserving reputation) is still essential.

The most popular and widely-recognized Vietnamese national costume is the Áo dài, which is worn nowadays mostly by women, although men do wear Áo dài on special occasions such as weddings and funerals. Áo dài is like the Chinese Qipao, consisting of a long gown with a slit on both sides, worn over silk pants. It is elegant in style and comfortable to wear, and likely derived in the 18th century or in the royal court of Hue. Áo dài is made compulsory in many senior high schools in Vietnam, and some colleges. Some female office workers (e.g. receptionists, secretaries, tour guides) are also required to wear Áo dài. In daily life, the traditional Vietnamese styles are now replaced by Western styles. Traditional clothing is worn instead on special occasions, except for the white Áo dài commonly seen with high school girls in Vietnam.

In general, respect your elders and address the eldest in a group first. Elderly people always have the right of way in Vietnamese society and should be treated with great respect. When giving or receiving business cards do so by holding it with both hands. Start with small talk and inquire about their families and personal life before discussing any business matter. The Vietnamese need to know more about you, in a casual way, before they discuss business.

Greetings

Cracking your finger to call somebody is considered impolite. Asian people generally use a subtle downward waving motion to summon someone. Showing affection in public is considered quite offensive - kissing is a definite no-no! Away from the major urban centers it is extremely rare to see couples holding hands, though it is quite common to see friends of the same sex holding hands. When meeting with Vietnamese of the opposite sex a handshake is considered the standard greeting. A kiss on the cheek is not recommended practice and may cause embarrassment. It is polite to remove your shoes before entering a house. Look for shoes at the front door as a clue and follow suit.

Communication with host family:

Host families are excited to welcome you to their family. However, navigating a new "normal" can sometimes feel like a chore, while at other times, you won't be able to imagine leaving! Here are some tips to get you started, but don't hesitate to communicate with the site team should you have further questions:

- Try to talk to family members when you're at home.
- Communicate with them about any food restriction or allergies that you have.
- It is important to notify the family in advance of any late night plans, as they will worry and wait up for you. We encourage you not to go out past the family's curfew (usually from 11 pm or earlier) or stay out overnight without prior arrangement.

Cultural Adjustment

Many things in Vietnam are simply different, in economic, cultural and social terms. As a GESI student, you are here to observe and respect the local cultures. It is not our mission to change the local ways. You are encouraged to learn from it and try to find constructive ways to benefit the local communities along the way.

As this will be a different living experience, especially if this is your first time living abroad, you should expect the unexpected. Some examples include:

- Staring from local people – It is not very long ago that Vietnam opened up to the rest of the world and many locals have limited exposure to foreigners, especially though coming from Western countries. They mean no harm, and you'll soon realize that it is not considered rude in the local culture to stare and they stare at locals as well. After a while, you will get used to it and in turn – you can smile back or even talk with them if they seem friendly – most of the time they are just curious and too shy to say hi.
- Begging children – It is not an uncommon sight in Vietnam as well as other developing countries. Though the stories behind may vary and each person has their own approach, it is generally agreed that giving out money is not a good solution. Instead, you can opt to give them candies, or contribute your time and money to a local school or non-profit.
- Animals being treated poorly – Animal rights is a new topic and the traditional way of treating animals might not align with your ideas. You can expect to see the sights of animal parts being openly displayed in local markets, or stray dogs without collars on the streets. Dog meat is also a traditional delicacy, as culturally dogs are viewed as a food source. It is okay that you do not agree or follow these practices, but you should refrain from displaying despise or jumping into arguments over these matters.
- Electricity cut/ Water cut/ Street flooding etc. – The infrastructure in Vietnam is developing rapidly but as the weather is unpredictable, the system can experience interrupts from times to times. In all cases, remember to remain calm and apply common senses, and our on-site team are sure to be there to support.

These are just examples, but you get the idea. These experiences can be challenging but they can make your Vietnam journey a truly unique and learning experience!

Navigating Work and Home

Personal candor in Asia is largely a matter of sensibility and face. It is inappropriate to express anger in a raised voice. Becoming angry is embarrassing to the local people with whom you are dealing - they will be embarrassed for you and not themselves. Criticism should only be used when partnered with praise. Remember this in your work with NGO staff and community members. Also, co-workers are more likely to ask personal questions like relationship status and family and so on; however, this is not out of curiosity but is rather considered the Vietnamese way of getting closer by knowing the other person on a personal level.

Dress

Visitors are encouraged to dress on the conservative side, even though the country and the young generation has become more open in the last decade. Avoid revealing clothes and short shorts, especially outside of the cities. A good rule of thumb is to keep shorts and skirts knee-length or longer. The Vietnamese tend to cover their chests and shoulders; therefore, t-shirts are more appropriate than strappy tops. As someone coming from a different country, you already stand out on your own. Thus, it is recommended that you wear more conservatively to avoid unwanted attentions.

Depending on your placement, you may need clothes that you don't mind getting dirty, and for office work, most organizations have a smart-casual dress code. This means long pants and shirts or dresses that are not too tight or skirts too high above the knees. Once you receive your specific placement, we will advise on further dress requirements. As temperatures can vary greatly throughout the day, layering is always best.

You will be visiting Vietnam during summer time, so prepare for it to get hot and humid. Lightweight, loose-fitting clothes in natural fabrics are recommended to keep you cool and are easy to wash and dry. When visiting culturally sensitive area such as a temple or pagoda however, you should wear particularly conservative clothing that cover your legs and shoulders. Clothes are affordable here as Vietnam has many Western clothes factories so you can always buy more if needed (although plus-size clothing can be more difficult to find). A good pair of sunglasses and a good pair of shoes and/ or sandals that you can use for walking long distances are also recommended.

Family Homestay

While in Hanoi, you will live in a homestay. Each housing option is different from one another and from the housing you are accustomed to back home. The available storage and living spaces may be smaller than what you are used to. You will have a private room and will share the bathroom with the rest of the family. Your homestay family is going to truly see you as part of the family, so it might be a good idea to prepare some photos of your life back home to share with your new family when you arrive. The homestay will include:

- Sheets, blankets and pillows (bring your own towel). Note that the Vietnamese mattress style is often not as soft as what you are used to. In the summer, most Vietnamese also prefer to use sleeping mat (bamboo mat) – you might not feel comfortable with it at first, but gradually you can get used to it and appreciate the mat's cooling effect especially in the hot summer weather.
- Communal living space or kitchen with a table and chairs
- Shared bathrooms or private ones which include toilet and bathing area (depending on the host family)
- One meal per day and a stipend for lunch and breakfast: For dinner, you will have Vietnamese food served in traditional Vietnamese style where the whole family share main dishes and have their own bowl of rice. Sharing is caring!

Again, it is important to remember that the house condition in Vietnam are different. Even though the families try to keep clean homes, due to the climate, you might see some indigenous insects and other creatures in or near the house, such as mosquito, geckos, mice, cockroaches or spiders. Try to stay calm, accept the reality and ask for help from other family members if needed. Even though they can also be afraid of these creatures, they will be sure to help you. Eventually you might find it normal, and get a sense of pride when you truly embrace sharing your environment with all of Vietnam's local residents!

Please remember that you will be living with a Vietnamese family, you must conduct yourself as a responsible adult, and observe certain courtesies such as keeping noise to a minimum, shutting off lights when they are not in use, and cleaning up after yourself. Interns must remember they are no longer in their home country and that keeping regular sleeping and waking hours is important so as not to disturb the other people living in your home. Absolute respect for, and consideration of, all who live in your home is expected. You will be expected to keep your room clean and family members may enter your room from time to time to check everything in clean.

Essential Information

- When there is a family gathering at your host family, do join, and be welcoming to the guests like a family member. Vietnamese cultures value family and social relations. It is very common to see relatives or close friends hanging out at your family frequently or event stay overnight, especially during the summer break when you will be staying. Consider these frequent guests as part of the family, because they truly are in Vietnamese social cycle.
- Show willingness to help with household chores such as washing dishes, cleaning the table, or sweeping the house. In Vietnamese culture, it is often expected that the children help with household chores –now it is your chance to really become a part of the family.
- Keep your room clean at all times – Some families may have house maid to help with cleaning, but you should still be mindful and offer help when possible. It is normal that some family member who is in charge of cleaning, will enter your room to check if it is tidy and might move your stuff if you are untidy. This is normal as part of their routine to take care of the house and they do it with all family members – so please do not interpret this as a violation of privacy. If you prefer to keep your room private, keep it tidy, and if needed, communicate your wish with the ground team so we can discuss the best approach.
- Avoid making loud noises after 10 pm
- Bring sleepwear that is conservative - not too small and revealing or see-through. If you need to use the bath room at night
it is better to be wearing PJs than boxer shorts or a slip!
- Be respectful and willing to adapt to the homestay's rules.

Inviting friends home:

Host families set their own rules regarding whether you can and cannot bring friends home, and when this might be appropriate. If you do want to invite a friend to your home, make sure to ask the family, but avoid embarrassing your family by asking them to provide food. Romantic relations of any kind are not permitted in the homestay, and we ask you not to take friends to your room.

Family Homestay

Top Three Reasons Living why Homestays in Vietnam are the Best

1. You'll be faced with new challenges and awkward situations – and overcome them

One of the biggest difficulties visitors have when staying with a host family is the communication barrier. Although the main language required in most internships is English, outside of the interns' workplace, many Vietnamese don't speak English! We arrange homestay placements so that there is at least one English speaking person at the host family - usually the host brother or sister (the young generation) who would play the role of a translator for all family members. We equip all participants with basic Vietnamese phrases on their orientation, and they also pick up more phrases and vocabulary from their host family along the way. And for those who are not great at learning new languages, body language comes in very useful, and Google Translate helps.

"My host family was really nice and they helped me a lot in accommodating to the new living environment. The only problem I had was that I could only speak with the host sister, as she's the only English speaker in the house. Occasionally, when I'm at home with the host parents, I would use the Google Translate App if I want to communicate anything to them. One day, however, I was preparing to go to work when the electricity was out, my host sister was gone, my host parents couldn't speak English and Google Translate was definitely not available to help. So I decided to utilize every piece of Vietnamese language and body language I had to communicate to them that I needed to go out and I couldn't open the door. This is such a small but impactful incident that made me realize my shortcoming and the importance of communicating in other people's language without the help of technology. It also broke down a barrier as we laughed together and became even closer."

2. You'll learn how to make authentic Vietnamese food, then eat until your stomach bursts!

One of the central elements of Vietnamese culture is food. Essentially, learning how to cook Vietnamese food should be an integral part of your study program or internship in Vietnam. The Vietnamese are extremely welcoming and accommodating to guests. They also love making food and love sharing that passion with others, especially foreign guests. Therefore, it is quite certain that when you are welcomed into a Vietnamese home, you'll never stopped being surprised by the variety of food being offered. Our interns are often astonished by the warmth and enthusiasm of their host family to help them get to know more about Vietnamese culture in general and about Vietnamese food in particular.

"I had a really great time with the host family since my arrival in Hanoi. In the first weekend, after my city tour of the Old Quarter with my local buddy we went to my host family grandparent's villa on the outskirts of Hanoi and stayed the night. I got to help make spring rolls and go groceries shopping with my host mom at the local market, she also bought me pineapple because it is my favorite! It turns out my host family spends most weekends at their home, so this Saturday we will return and the host grandma will show me a new dish to make."

3. You get to join in all of the fun activities including outings; weekend trips, family gatherings and traditional Vietnamese festivals.

Homestay families love to share their culture and family life with their guests. Whether this is local knowledge on the best shops or short-cuts, or inviting you to share in a family birthday, a visit or traditional activity. Throughout the year, Vietnam has no shortage of national holidays. The biggest Holiday of the year is Tet (Lunar New Year) in January/February. At this time, you see a huge transformation within the urban areas as people head back to their hometowns to enjoy the holiday. This is also an ideal time to observe traditional Vietnamese customs like going to Tet market, giving lucky money, worshiping ancestors, and year end party as people prepare to wrap up the year. During other times, the host families are often very enthusiastic about taking interns out to explore Hanoi and nearby areas to show them the beauty of Vietnam.

Traditional homestays usually consists of two or more generations. A typical family structure consists of host father, mother, sister(s), brother(s), and in some cases grandmother, grandfather, niece(s), nephew(s).

The home generally has shared areas, such as the kitchen, bathroom(s), the common room (with T.V) and laundry space (families wash their clothes with a washing machine and hang them on the balcony to dry). Students might be given their own private room or their own bed in a shared room with another student. The room generally has standard facilities like a bed, bed sheet and pillows, wardrobe, air-conditioner or fan, table, all vary among different host families.

Students are expected to do their own laundry with the washing machine (preferably when it is a big batch). They are also expected to keep their own room tidy and clean. Depending on the family's rules, general cleaning is done once or twice per week; students can sweep and mop the floor of their own room then offer to help clean common areas in the house with other family members (kitchen, toilet). When you shares meals with the family, it is expected that you offer to help with meal preparation or with dish washing after the meal.

Sexuality, Race & Gender

How you interact with others will initially have a lot to do with preconceptions. You'll feel more comfortable once the inevitable "getting to know you" period is over, but keep some of these cultural norms in mind.

LGBTQ Rights and Resources

Being safe and comfortable when going abroad is important and at Kaya, we want to make sure we address issues that may concern all of our participants. Attitudes, customs and laws towards members of the LGBTQ+ community can be different around the world compared to what you are used to at home

In Vietnam, sex and sexuality are not openly discussed in the home – even in a heterosexual context. The culture is generally conservative, and as a result, discussions around the subject of sexuality are generally avoided to remove the need to openly address issues that might be contrary to the family views.

Vietnam society has been quickly changing over last decade. The country is one of the first Southeast Asian country to lift the ban on same-sex marriages. The idea of LGBTQ is being increasingly more accepted in legal matters but the society still need some time to embrace it fully. Vietnamese people are very private when it comes to sexual matters regardless of gender preferences. As such, it is likely that you find LGBTQ individual avoid sharing their orientation or simply discussing about sexual matters altogether even with family members. The two biggest city - Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city – are noticeably more open about sexuality and gender matters. You might find a few gay-friendly hotels or cafes in the city, however, even these places are often low-key. A good thumb is to be private about sexuality and gender discussions, be it yours or others, and avoid judgements even when someone else makes judgements that you do not agree with. We recommend that for participants who wish to share openly their identity that you speak with our ground team who are all very comfortable discussing the best options for you to be comfortable with your identity in Vietnam.

Race

Vietnamese people in general don't discriminate by race. Foreigners are seen as foreigners and they do get frequent curious stares, this may happen to you more if you are black or have prominent blue eyes and blond hair or are very tall, just any feature that stands out from the Vietnamese people. Foreigners usually receive more distinct and courteous treatment or smiles from vendors, however, this doesn't mean you get special discounts from them, rather the opposite. This doesn't happen in established shops and convenient stores but be prepared for being charged more than locals at certain local markets or street stalls.



Sexuality, Race & Gender

Gender

Traditionally, Vietnam has a patriarchal society, with men holding greater authority and power in the past. However, women have always held an important role in family and social dynamics. During war time, women fought in the frontier, assisted with food and arm supplies while maintaining responsibilities for taking care of the children. Today, Vietnam's working population is made up of equally of men and women. You can see women in every position and activities – they make up 25% of congress, and, according to World Bank 2017, 42% of SME (small medium enterprises) and 55% of retail businesses are owned by women.

As in western countries, gender equality in Vietnam still has a long way to improve. At home, the traditional roles remain – in most families, women are the one to do the housework and cook, while still having full-time jobs. Not all women have equal access to education and career advancements, especially in rural areas. Many gender stereotypes remain. For example, in children's books, teachers are mainly portrayed as women while doctors and scientists are often portrayed as men. Women of younger generation, especially in the cities are becoming more and more independent and aware of their rights. They are more open to hang out with friends at night, or to go out on their own, dress less conservatively and use clothing as an expression of their identities, however, it is still advised that women cover themselves and have someone else with them when it is late to ensure safety.

Vietnamese women tend to prefer the neutral or no-makeup looks, but women with a more 'masculine' look will still get attract a few stares in the streets. Tattoo, nose rings and revealing clothes are still being viewed negatively and thus they are not commonly seen. Cat-calling can happen in Vietnam, but it is not as common as in Europe - they are mostly cheeky but harmless questions such as "Hello", "Hi beautiful", and followed by no action. As a foreigner who looks and dresses differently, local people of all genders can sometimes gaze at you when walking on the street. It is also a cultural thing to ask about someone's marital status and age – as Vietnamese uses it as a guide to address people properly. If you happen to be asked these questions, do not feel offended.

Vietnamese culture is still on the conservative side. At the same time the country is generally friendly and forgiving. You might need sometimes to navigate around the local social norms regarding physical contacts. Open affection displays of strong emotions, such as kissing, will likely attract a few stares. Generally during first contact, people avoid physical touches. Among close friends, however, Vietnamese can get 'touchy'. It is not uncommon for men and men, women and women and even men and women, especially the younger ones, to hug, pat each other's back or rest arm around shoulders – which is not necessarily interpreted in any romantic way.

A Note on Harassment

We would like to affirm that those who are harassed should not have to feel the responsibility to protect themselves against any type of harassment and that it is not considered their fault or responsibility to avoid it. It is important to note, especially when interacting across and between cultures, that facing harassment of any kind can be confusing. As such, site teams are well-suited to orient you to area norms (including safety precautions and local ways of being), offer a variety of responses (to harassment or other concerns), and are there to support you throughout your experience. Their suggestions come from a long-informed understanding of cross-cultural engagement and local information.

For more information and resources you can visit Northwestern's Undergraduate Learning Abroad Study Abroad Guide for online and in-person resources:

www.northwestern.edu/studyabroad/guide/identity-and-diversity/index.html

Etiquette

The Vietnamese are a proud race of people and are extremely welcoming and tolerant to foreign visitors. That said, their cultural identity and traditions are complex and the casual visitor will find the following forms of etiquette will evoke respect and admiration from the locals:

General Information

- Respect elders and address the eldest in a group first. Elderly people always have the right of way in Vietnamese society and should be treated with great respect.
- When giving or receiving business cards do so by holding it with both hands.
- Start with small talk and inquire about their families and personal life before discussing any business matter. The Vietnamese need to know more about you, in a casual way, before they discuss business.
- When dining with a Vietnamese family, please wait for the eldest to start eating first before you do. Vietnamese often serve you food into your rice bowl.
- Always take your shoes off when entering a Vietnamese home.
- Refrain from showing your anger in public. This causes astute embarrassment to your Vietnamese friends. "Saving face" is extremely important in Vietnam's society. If you are not happy with something, discuss the issue in a calm and respectful manner. Showing anger will have the opposite effect to what you wish to achieve and will only reflect poorly upon you.
- Overall, most Vietnamese are quite reserved when it comes to showing affection for the opposite sex. Amorous liaisons in public are generally frowned upon and whilst a kiss or a hug with your partner is considered acceptable in major cities of Hanoi and Saigon it is a social taboo elsewhere. When meeting with Vietnamese of the opposite sex, a handshake or a slight bow is considered standard greeting. A kiss on the cheek is not recommended and may cause embarrassment.
- As Vietnamese culture value group consensus, locals generally avoid wearing things that might make them stand out from the crowd. This is one fundamental aspect that once you are aware of it, you can understand how many other things work in Vietnam.
- One example is that foreigners whose appearance is different from Vietnamese, can expect to receive a lot of stares from locals. They are simply curious of someone who looks different from the crowd and also because of limited exposure to foreigners.
- Some other examples include Tattoo and men's jewelry – those items are uncommon and often have negative connotations related to gang membership and criminals. This is even more important to take note when it comes to work settings as wearing them can make you appear unprofessional. As such, if you have tattoos and men's jewelry, it is advised that you cover up or remove these items to avoid getting unwanted judgements at least during work – and if that is not possible, maybe 'breaking the ice' with your work colleagues by sharing with them that you understand that these things might not be normal for them, but what this means in your culture and apologizing for not being able to remove these during your stay.

At Work

- Treat the internship as you would any job, with respect and professionalism
- Approach the experience with an open mind and ask when you're unsure of something; everything from time to communication to feedback could be different than what you are used to
- Work towards real results that are useful to the company
- Show up on time to work and meetings
- Show initiative to make proposals (where possible) to improve the host company's service or products.
- Comply with all arrangements made for the placement and do everything necessary to make the placement successful
- Abide by the rules and regulation of the host organization, the agreed-upon schedule, code of conduct and rules of confidentiality
- Communicate with the on-site program coordinator about any problems regarding the placement
- Hierarchy is important in Vietnamese culture, both in the workplace and at home. You should show respect to people whom you work with especially people of higher rank (your supervisor, director). It is polite to greet superior before you greet anyone else with a slight bow and a smile or a handshake.
- Punctuality is expected in both private and public sector, however, employees at some companies/organizations can be flexible with their time so it really depends on the culture of each company/organization

Personal Reflection

Mailee worked in a social, professional organization of volunteers who work in Public Health field based in Hanoi. The following account of her experience was summarized by our local coordinator following regular check-in meetings with Mailee.

On her first day in Hanoi, Mailee shared as she watched the motorbikes swerving around all over the place to get where they want, that she felt amazed by the flow of traffic and the sheer number of motorbikes in Hanoi's busy streets. "This is definitely nothing like the U.S.". She was also pleasantly surprised by how lively the stores along the streets are, here and there were beautiful flower shops, food vendors and of course fashion stores, all are open and easily accessible.

Coming to her workplace on the first day, Mailee was a bit nervous, however, as soon as she walked into the office and saw the smiling faces of the co-workers and supervisor, she immediately felt more confident. Her co-workers were young, energetic and motivated people. They were all very happy to welcome her into the office and offered her very useful advice to start work. Mailee's supervisor, was frank and sincere in giving Mailee tips to adapt and feel comfortable working in a new environment in a new country, he suggested Mailee be proactive and to ask as many questions as she could to everyone. Additionally, her incredibly nice coworkers offered to help take care of Mailee's social life in Vietnam by taking her to places after work to explore Vietnam and its cuisine during her internship in Vietnam.

After the first office visit, Mailee was able to take a break and enjoy her first Vietnamese food adventure. The Kaya staff took her to a popular Pho restaurant in Hanoi where she had a mandatory lesson of how to eat Pho the right way. To our surprise, Mailee was pretty confident with her chopstick skills and only needed to be instructed on adding several other elements (lime, veggies, hoisin, chili sauce...) to her already glorious bowl of Pho. The typical Vietnamese meal was enjoyed with a deliciously fresh iced sugarcane juice which reminded Mailee of Hawaii, where she spent part of her childhood.

Mailee was given the orientation on the first day after she arrived in Hanoi for her internship in Vietnam. During the orientation, everything from dos and don'ts, how-to, internship obligation to must-see places in the North, were covered. The concerns were raised and answered. Then Mailee had to come to what she thought was the most intimidating part of the day, learning useful Vietnamese expressions. For her, the most challenging part was learning how to recognize and pronounce to accents, Mailee didn't think she did so great, but we thought her pronunciation was just fine.

At the beginning of her internship in Vietnam, Mailee shared with us her reflections:

Monday was my first full day at the office, Mondays include a staff meeting with our founding president. The meetings are in Vietnamese, so I did not attend the meeting, but the president had me come in after the meeting business was finished to meet me and discuss what we can bring to each other. I found out I will be mainly working on the giant conference in November on sexual and reproductive rights. There is an international steering committee that is meeting next week in Ha Long Bay, and I get to attend the meeting and will be in charge of taking minutes to be sent to the members. My host sister is studying tourism and will be in Ha Long Bay for work starting Thursday until Saturday and I will be there Monday through Thursday – so I will stay after the work meeting is over and explore the bay for a few more days! At the end of the day our office got together in the conference room for a snack which included the infamous fertilized quail eggs... my co-workers offered me one and I was hesitant at first to try one, but figured I would give it a go – they were nothing like I expected. I figured it would be crunchy or at least could feel the texture of the feathers, but it was actually fairly smooth and the taste was not bad. I would eat another one, but not a regular snack for me.

Saturday after my city tour of the Old Quarter with my local buddy we went to my host family grandparent's villa on the outskirts of Hanoi and stayed the night. I got to help make spring rolls and go groceries shopping with my host mom at the local market, she also bought me pineapple because it is my favorite! It turns out my host family spends most weekends at their home, so this Saturday we will return and the host grandma will show me a new dish to make.

Personal Reflection

After 10 weeks, Mailee, wrapped up her Public Health Internship in Vietnam. During her time, she had quite an adventure and fulfilled her expectation to travel around both the North and South Vietnam. These were her final reflections:

"How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard..."

I think Winnie the Pooh was really on to something here folks! Today was my last day at work – we had my little going away party stocked full of food and my snickerdoodle cookies, I was actually able to make here, on Monday – but today was the real last day. I have tomorrow to check out of my homestay and then I begin my 22 hour long trek home!

I honestly hate goodbyes, and I feel like I have been saying them ever since I went to Sapa. I made friends with my trekking group – you cannot, NOT be friends with the people who sweated, slipped in mud, and took Vietnamese shots together – and at the end of our quick two days we all had to say farewell to one another.

This week is a double whammy – I had to say goodbye to my host family and my coworkers. My host family so kindly wanted me to spend one more meal with them which included the sweetest handmade gifts and one last trip with three people on a tiny motorbike.

Finally, today I said goodbye to my coworkers whom I had grown to love spending time with in-between the food runs and office banter. The party Monday felt like a regular office foodie party as I knew that I would see them later this week. Today came a little too soon. Work felt like normal until after lunch when I realized I only have a few more hours. In those last hours I went on a bubble tea run to the Ding Tea across the street for the last time, and when three of my coworkers returned from a work field-trip they brought back sweet soup for everyone. My last hour was spent laughing and slurping up the sweet tofu and jelly. This is exactly how I would picture the office too – happy and eating food. When 5:30 rolled around, I sadly stood up to start saying my goodbyes – everyone had such sweet words and I would have never imagined it would be that hard to say goodbye.

After I came home I needed to get my groceries for my last meal at home and realized I wanted to communicate that I would be leaving to my beef lady, who always welcomes me with a giant smile. I used my Google Translate to tell her I would be moving back to the U.S. tomorrow – she gave me a sad smile and tried to talk to me in Vietnamese. Again. Still can't understand her, but I got the message she would miss seeing me daily. I brought my camera along and she happily let me take a photo.

I decided I wanted to make pho cuon for my last homemade meal and my veggies lady (she didn't want a photo of herself) gladly helped me pick the ingredients. It was actually the first time I spoke only in Vietnamese to them – I order the beef amount and said I was making pho cuon and gesturing to the veggies was all I needed for her to help me pick out the needed ingredients. She even gave me a few new things to put in the rolls that I hadn't used before when I made it.

They were so happy to help me and wanted to talk more. My beef lady even had a customer ask me in English when I was returning to Vietnam.

It was a small thing honestly – I don't even know her name, but I was sad and so was she that I was leaving. Just as A.A. Milne wrote, I am so incredibly lucky that I have people and things that make saying goodbye to Hanoi incredibly difficult. For if I did not have them, that would have meant I wasted nearly three months internship in Vietnam. I was able to make friends, experience the culture, learn a little Vietnamese in the process; all those things became part of me and make it that much more difficult to say farewell to them.

Film, Reading, & Other Resources

Book List

- Culture and Customs of Vietnam by Mark W. McLeod, Nguyen Thi Dieu
- Vietnam Today, A Guide To A Nation At A Crossroads by Mark A. Ashwill and Thai Ngoc Diep
- Vietnam: Journeys of Body, Mind, and Spirit by Van Huy Nguyen (Editor), Laurel Kendall
- Culture Shock! Vietnam By Claire Ellis
- Pagodas, Gods and Spirits of Vietnam (Hardcover) by Ann Helen Unger, Walter Unger

Movie/Video List

- Welcome to Vietnam: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSIMG7CHyWU>
- Kong Skull Island (this movie was filmed at 3 different locations in the North of Vietnam including: Ha Long Bay – one of the world's 7 natural wonders, Ninh Binh – UNESCO Heritage Site and Quang Binh – where the world's largest cave is located)
- Girl from Hanoi (Vietnamese: Em bé Hà Nội): <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0327681/>
- When the 10th month comes? (Vietnamese: Bao giờ cho đến tháng 10): http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0118148/?ref_=tt_rec_tt
- The Scent of Green Papaya (Vietnamese: Mui Du Du Xanh): http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0107617/?ref_=tt_rec_tt
- The Vietnam War: <http://www.pbs.org/kenburns/the-vietnam-war/watch/>

Other Online Sources

- VnExpress International: <https://e.vnexpress.net/>
- Tuoi Tre News: <https://tuoitrenews.vn/>
- VOV: <http://english.vov.vn/>

