

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER

For Projects Abroad Vietnam 



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VOLUNTEER STORY

Arriving in Vietnam



I stumbled exhausted off the plane to be greeted by a friendly face with a Projects Abroad t-shirt. Taking in my surroundings, everything seemed just so foreign; from the terrifying traffic to the incomprehensible language, the distinct aromas and the fact that I was so sweaty that it felt like I had been working out! It was, therefore, nice to know that I was safe and that my driver knew where he was going.

On arrival at my homestay, fortunately one of the daughters spoke English and the family prepared a special first meal for me. I was keen to make a good impression and not to offend, but this was made difficult by having been unwell on the journey, being concerned about what was safe to eat and not being able to use chopsticks. I think that this was when my host mother decided that I needed feeding up! I felt spoilt when I arrived, having my own room, a Western-style toilet and life-saving air-conditioning. I soon settled in very quickly and I think that it helped that I just threw myself into the Vietnamese culture and lived as my homestay family did.

I was welcomed into my neighbourhood by being invited to a party and drinking rice wine for breakfast with some elders. Being the first Westerner in my area, people were not shy about staring at my beautiful white skin and laughing at how big my nose is (normal by Western standards if I may add). Visiting my host family's hometown, I was made to feel as one of the family in their homely and love-filled typical Vietnamese abode.

I was terrified when taking my first motorbike taxi along Hanoi's roads. I had my eyes shut tight and was holding onto my driver for dear life. I found out later that only boyfriends and girlfriends hold onto each other so this explains why the driver was so happy!

Six weeks later...

It is a funny feeling as it seems I have been here ages because I feel at home, and yet my time is just flying by! Despite questioning myself when I initially arrived as to why I had signed up for so long, I can now not imagine leaving. My chopstick skills have improved drastically (a local even commended me on them!) and I am confident sitting on the motorbike. I feel like I have gained two sisters at my homestay and, despite struggling with the language, I am able to communicate with the locals. Vietnam is etching a place in my heart and I feel like I now have a Vietnamese family. I'm just living in the moment as I do not want to think about having to say goodbye.

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Maria's arrival advice:

- I live by this saying: 'Have no expectations and you will never be disappointed'. Just remember you are on an adventure so treat it as such.
- We are in a different and developing country so, of course, things are going to be different – enjoy these unique qualities and immerse yourself in the culture.
- I would recommend not getting in touch with home too often as this is likely to make anyone's homesickness worse. (Obviously, let your family know that you've arrived safely though!)
- Plan your time in Vietnam to make the most of everything – it flies by! Planning weekends away will also give you something to look forward to.
- Try and learn some basic Vietnamese (greetings, apologies and numbers are the key)
- It can feel lonely sometimes being in a host family away from other volunteers but this gave me a much more rustic Vietnamese experience and I would do it again. It would be good to see if you can visit the volunteer accommodation when you arrive, to meet other volunteers and find travel buddies.
- Download a translator app on your phone. It's not always right but can be very useful!

Have an amazing time! ☺

Maria Thaller, UK, Physiotherapy volunteer



VOLUNTEER STORY

Volunteering in Hanoi



Hello everybody,

My name is Michele. I'm a 31 year old Italian guy and I am currently living in Brussels in Belgium.

This summer, I decided not to spend my 3 weeks of holiday in a "conventional" way so I traded beaches, sun and mojitos for volunteering in Hanoi.

Before telling you if it was worth the money to dedicate my spare time to volunteering instead of taking a rest and relaxing after working hard, I would like to briefly describe my experience as a volunteer in Vietnam.

Once in Hanoi, after settling in with the help of both Anh and the Projects Abroad local staff, I started work with another volunteer at a kindergarten for children with mental illnesses. Since I didn't have any previous experience in the domain, I simply tried to help the teachers to manage the classroom. To expand, my tasks included playing with the children, giving them drawing and coloring exercises, helping them to remain focused during the lessons and helping the teachers set activities.



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VOLUNTEER STORY

Volunteering in Hanoi

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Since I do not speak any Vietnamese and my stay there was too short to learn even the basics of the language, I had some difficulties in communicating with the staff at the kindergarten. On the one hand, this meant that I didn't have the chance to get to know some very special people who are working in the school, and this is probably the only thing I regret. However, on the other hand, the challenging situation made me realise that language is just one of the many ways to communicate, especially when it comes to children. One of the funniest moments of my short experience as a volunteer was when the teachers turned on the music and we danced with the children. It was amazing to see the children trying to follow your steps. For the first time in my life, I appreciated how sometimes body language is stronger than words. They also made me realize that everything isn't always as simple as it may seem; even the most basic things can be difficult challenges for some people.

I started this experience wanting to teach something to children but actually, I learned from them a lot more than I could have taught. Both the children and teachers made my stay priceless. I am convinced that such an experience can help you to grow, to learn and to see things from different perspectives. It is definitely worth the money to do this at least once in your life.

Thanks again everyone for everything,

By Michele Lupacciolu, Italy - care volunteer



"I started this experience wanting to teach something to children but actually, I learned from them a lot more than I could have taught. Both the children and teachers made my stay priceless..."

WHAT'S ON: OCTOBER CALENDAR

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
		1	2 Natasha arrives	3	4	5 Danielle arrives Environment social event
6	7	8 Event: Distributing balls at hospital placement	9 Sarah arrives Shannon's birthday	10 Helle arrives	11 Sharon arrives Ida's birthday	12 Nina's birthday
13	14	15 CARE WORKSHOP: Hygiene lesson	16 Olivia and Noelia arrive	17 Monthly Outreach event	18	19
20	21	22 Teaching Discussion	23	24	25	26
27 Vicky, Claire and Hannah arrive	28	29	30	31 Photography tour: Westlake		

October 5 – Environment social event: Join with local volunteers in a cleaning up activity around Hoan Kiem lake.

Time: 3PM

Meet at: the central post office

October 8 – Ball distribution event: Distributing balls for children at National Hospital of Acupuncture

October 15 – Care Workshop: Hygiene lesson.

October 17 – Monthly Community event. More information to come!

October 22 – Teaching Discussion.

October 31 – Social event: Photography tour around Westlake