

Vietnam: Traditional Medicine & Community Health

Country Overview & Packing Guidelines

Summer 2025

Country Overview

GENERAL INFORMATION

Vietnam is located on the eastern edge of mainland Southeast Asia. It is bordered by Cambodia and Laos to the west, China to the north and the South China Sea to the east. The population of Vietnam is 100 million, making it the 13th most populous country in the world. There are 54 ethnic minority groups in the country, but 86% of the population is ethnically Vietnamese.

Bordering and having more than two thousand years of history with China, Vietnam has learned and influenced from Chinese culture, even though Vietnam has recently emerged as a prominent economic partner and an active member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Vietnam now has 67 traditional medicine hospitals. Traditional medicine has been expanded to nearly 85 per cent of healthcare centers at communal level according to the 2018 report of the Ministry of Health in Vietnam. Annually, an estimated 30 per cent of patients are diagnosed and treated with traditional medicine or a combination of traditional and western medicine.

SIT Vietnam's *Traditional Medicine and Community Health* program focuses on alternative health concepts, traditional practices, and the realities of contemporary healthcare among the Vietnamese and ethnic minorities peoples. Course content includes indigenous visions of health and healing and community health. Students examine the intercultural components of the Vietnamese healthcare system, and the proposed integration of traditional medicine alongside biomedical practices. Concepts of community health and the role of the community in health promotion and prevention in the rural context are also explored. Students learn about these topics through lectures, reading materials, discussion, and extensive field experiences.



SIT Vietnam's *Traditional Medicine and Community Health* program is founded on the principles of experiential learning which take place both inside and outside formal institutional structures. A key goal of this course is to increase each student's capacity to think critically and creatively, and to integrate and analyze information from a variety of primary and secondary sources. In the process, students develop self-motivated learning skills with potential lifetime applications, which are directly linked to an integrated understanding of the reciprocal relationship between health, community and holistic practice.

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CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

Vietnam has a diverse climate because of its wide range of latitude and altitudes. Vietnam is located in both a tropical and a temperate zone. It is characterized by strong monsoon influences, but has a considerable amount of sun, a high rate of rainfall, and high humidity. Southern Vietnam lies entirely within the tropics, which has two main seasons: the wet and the dry. From May to August, Southern Vietnam experiences hot and humid weather with average temperatures ranging from 25 to 35 degrees Celsius. During this period, there are heavy, short-lived downpours almost daily. The dry season is December to April. April and May are very hot. Hats are essential to avoid sunstroke.

[HCMC]: AVERAGE HIGH/LOW TEMPERATURES (°F)

JAN 90/72	FEB 92/73	MAR 94/76	APR 95/79	MAY 94/78
SEPT 90/76	OCT 90/75	NOV 90/74	DEC 89/72	

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Most of the Vietnamese in urban areas no longer bow when they meet each other. The custom of handshaking is now achieving popularity due to the Western influence in the country. Men will generally shake hands and say the equivalent of "how are you" and tip their hats when greeting people. Women, especially those in the countryside, still shy away from shaking hands, especially with men from their own country. It is best not to offer to shake hands with a woman unless she offers her hand first.

Whereas Americans often immediately introduce themselves in given situations, the ordinary people of Vietnam think this to be rather bold and like to have a mutual acquaintance make the introduction. They will rarely introduce themselves when going into a home or office until asked to do so. This may be due to their innate shyness and modesty.

Names carry great importance in Vietnam. Most Vietnamese names consist of a family name, middle name and a personal or given name. The order is reverse to the American custom. For instance, Miss Hoang Ngoc Van. Hoang is the family name. We would call her Miss Van.

Vietnamese people have a habit of not looking into your eyes when they talk to you. This is often because of shyness, but one of the main reasons is that traditionally they do not look into the eyes of those they respect or those higher in rank when talking to them. This indicates politeness.

The smile of a Vietnamese can be very confusing in Vietnam to an outsider and cause misunderstandings. In Vietnam, it may indicate a polite, but perhaps skeptical reaction to something, compliance or toleration of a blunder or misunderstanding or on occasion represents submission to judgment that may be wrong or unfair. This is particularly true if the one making the judgment is at a superior level and perhaps has lost his temper. For instance, a launderer may ruin a favorite shirt and is called in by her employer to be asked about it. She may smile. This does not mean that she thinks it is funny that she burned the shirt, but instead is submission to the fact. If the owner of the shirt loses his temper, she may keep smiling indicating politeness or patience with superiors.

Because of this, foreigners should be very cautious in voicing their opinions and perhaps be a little more delicate, more tolerant and restrain from being obstinate.

LOCAL DIET

Participating in the local food culture is a central aspect of daily life in Indonesia. Special or restricted diets may not always be fully understood by your host family, although they may have previously hosted a student with similar dietary restrictions. By trying to replicate your diet at home you may miss out on an important part of your host culture.

Vietnamese cuisine shows diversity from north to south, as well as similarities with Chinese and Southeast Asian cuisine. Even French cuisine and food culture has been adapted in striking ways. There is an emphasis on fresh vegetables and herbs, often served in a broth or light sauce. The most common meats used in Vietnamese cuisine are pork, beef, prawns, various kinds of fish, and chicken. In Vietnam, Breakfast is early in the morning, lunch is around 11 o'clock, and dinner is usually around 6-7 o'clock. Rice is a staple in Vietnamese family meals, making it the main component of every meal. Most Vietnamese restaurants offer a selection of salads and cooked vegetables, and many have a dedicated section for vegetarian options. A vegetarian breakfast might consist of a *banh mi* with egg, or a bowl of mushroom congee.

Ho Chi Minh City offers a fantastic range of food choices that can compete with any world city – ranging from small outdoor food stalls, to Asian, European and American-style restaurants, and even some familiar fast-food chains. A good choice for breakfast is the world-renowned pho, a noodle soup usually made with beef or chicken. Lunch will typically consist of rice with meat or fish, plus a side vegetable dish and soup. Bread, or more specifically the *baguette (bánh mì)* or sandwiches with pâté and other fillings are also common quick meals. Vietnamese dinners are often more elaborate, including several shared meat and vegetable dishes, usually accompanied by rice and soup.



Though it is possible to maintain a vegetarian diet while in Vietnam, you may wish to ask whether fish or meat products have been added to vegetable dishes. Fish and fish products are somewhat unavoidable in Vietnamese cuisine and therefore students with severe fish allergies and who are strict vegetarians and do not eat fish or fish products, might want to consider a different location. For strictly vegetarians, keep your eyes peeled for premises with a "Cơm Chay" sign. The food in those vegetarian eateries often contains meat-like chunks or slices, but they are imaginative creations using tofu, pulses or soya beans.



Elsewhere, the situation is somewhat more difficult. The words "vegetable" and "vegetarian" are often confused in Vietnam, and even though menus may have a vegetarian section, the dishes listed tend to be along the lines of spinach with beef, cabbage with chicken and so on. Even without the added meat, the vegetables are often cooked with fish sauce or shrimp paste. Fried rice often contains tiny pieces of pork and noodles may be fried with pork fat and splashed with fish sauce. Vegetable pho (noodle soup) is invariably made with chicken or beef stock.

In addition to the "Com Chay," which translates as vegetarian rice, look for "Món Chay" on the menus, which translates as vegetarian dishes and is more common.

Realize that there are a good number of Buddhists in Viet Nam, (not as many as people think because ancestor worship is not Buddhism, but that's a different story) and staunch Buddhists are strict vegetarians. You will be able to find plenty of good food to eat, and everywhere you go, fresh fruit is plentiful.

In Ho Chi Minh City or in Hanoi Capital, you will find restaurant Italian dishes along with the more traditional fare.

Veganism is practiced by some Vietnamese Buddhists, particularly on festival days, and there are some vegan restaurants.

For those wishing to remain Kosher, pork is a popular meat and flavoring, but milk and dairy products are rarely used in cooking. Yogurt is available and often used in blended fruit drinks.

Note: if you have special dietary needs, including allergies, please inform the office of [Student Health, Safety & Wellbeing](#) prior to the start of your program. We will advise you on realistic expectations about avoiding or incorporating certain foods within the program context.

SAFETY, SECURITY, AND HEALTH

Maintaining good health is essential to having a successful study abroad experience.

SIT recommends you do research prior to departure about the health, safety, and security specifics of the country(ies) you plan to visit. Consult the [U.S. Department of State](#) website and search their [Countries and Areas Archive](#) for international travel information and current travel advisories for each country. Search the Center for Disease Control [Traveler's Health](#) page to see travel health notices and vaccine requirements and recommendations for any country(ies) you plan to visit.

SIT recommends doing research ahead of time to stay up to date on It will be critical that you educate yourself about the potential health and safety hazards that may exist in your areas of travel and make informed decisions about what preventative measures to take prior to departure. You should also reference the Health, Access, and Identity information on your program's [webpage](#).

If you have any questions, please reach out to the [Student Health, Safety, & Wellbeing Team](#). Students are thoroughly briefed on safety considerations during in-country orientation and are updated throughout the semester if and when circumstances change. For information regarding safety and security, emergency communications, SIT policies, health and personal property insurance, and general program tips, please read the Safety, Security, and Health document and Student Handbook on your program's [predeparture page](#).

HOUSING

As many SIT Study Abroad alumni will tell you, the homestay experience can be one of the most rewarding and most challenging aspects of the program. We hope you will come prepared for the experience and committed to moving beyond cultural immersion as you begin to question, distinguish, and analyze the host culture vis-à-vis your own culture and come to a deeper understanding of both. Family structures vary in every culture. SIT Study Abroad values the diversity of homestay families, and your family may include a single mother of two small children or a large extended family with many people coming and going all the time. Additionally, please bear in mind that, in many countries, the idea of what constitutes a “home” may be different from what you expect. You will need to be prepared to adapt to a new life with a new diet, a new schedule, new people, and new priorities, and expectations.

Each program’s homestay coordinator will be responsible for placing students in homestays. These placements are made first based on health concerns, including any allergies or dietary needs, to the extent possible. **Please note: in order to ensure the best fit for students and families, SIT may make final adjustments to homestay placements after student arrival in country. Therefore, SIT will not provide information about your homestay family before you depart for the program.**

We seek to foster increased cross-cultural understanding in students by immersing them in local culture through daily life in a new family and community. Students are expected to assume roles as family members, respecting and following host family norms around communications, visitors, and activities of daily living.



On this program, you will be staying in homestays in HCMC, the program-base, each student will have around a one-month homestay. You might have your own room or sometime share room with a university student of the same age and gender. During the different Excursions throughout Vietnam, you will pair up with one student to stay in a guest house or hotel in towns or cities.

Most homes will be located within commuting distance of the center of town and university campus. Most students will have a commute of between 15 and 45 minutes via bus or private taxi, though there may be traffic jams during rush hour.

OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS

Students should expect to share a room with one or more students during orientation/launch and while on excursions.

In addition to the homestay in HCMC, other accommodations during the program include guesthouses, hostels, educational institutions, or small hotels. When you first arrive in Vietnam, you will share a hotel

room with another student. The rooms are furnished with beds, wardrobes, writing tables, televisions, and all have bathroom facilities (towels and sheets are provided).

TRANSPORTATION

Vietnam has a comprehensive transportation system ranging from jets, trains and buses to cars, scooters, bicycles, and three-wheeled motorized buggies. Transportation depends on the region and its economics. The traffic pattern will probably seem chaotic to you at first because the roads aren't very wide and traffic moves quickly without an apparent system; however, having grown up within this system, local people follow a group sense of order, which you will pick up on after a short time. For example, horns are used as a warning to others. Keep in mind that in larger towns and cities, air and noise pollution may be a problem because it is not regulated and the number of motorized vehicles on the roads is increasing each year.

It is recommended that students commute to class each day by the frequent public buses. You also have the option of travel by taxi, bicycle, or motorcycle.

For many years, SIT Study Abroad participants have been prohibited from riding as a passenger on motorbikes at any time during their study abroad program. In fact, on most of our programs, students are strictly forbidden from riding as passenger and can be immediately dismissed from the program if they do so. In all programs, students are prohibited from driving motorbikes.

In recent years however, as public transportation options have changed, motorbikes are becoming one of the dominant forms of transportation in Vietnam. As a result of this shift, SIT Study Abroad staff have evaluated the risks and instituted a policy that permits students to choose to travel as a passenger on motorbikes under limited circumstances and only in certain localities where motorbikes are the dominant mode of transportation for local people.

All students will undergo an orientation to the motorbike culture in Vietnam and will receive instructions on how to ride a motorbike and visually identify a mechanically sound bike and driver. Students will be required to sign a waiver before using motorbike transportation and may only ride a motorbike while wearing a helmet. Any violation of the waiver and/or policy may result in immediate dismissal from the program.

COMMUNICATION

While you may want to be in regular communication with friends and family from home during the term abroad, please bear in mind that different time zones, unreliable phone lines, and changing program activities can complicate communication.

It's important to be clear with family and friends about your availability during the term. Many students recommend making an appointment to call home or to receive a call. You should also consider the impact of constant communication with friends and family at home on your cultural immersion.

Visit our [Contact & Communication](#) page for practices on program communication, emergency communication, and home institution communication.

PHONES AND INTERNET

[Cell Phone Policy](#)

As part of SIT's commitment to student safety and security, all students are required to have a working cell phone capable of making and receiving both local and international calls, including a data plan so that your phone is operational when you are away from wi-fi. If needed, during orientation SIT staff can assist students in purchasing a local SIM card and acquiring minutes for calls and texting. Failure to maintain a working phone capable of making and receiving calls/texts will be considered a conduct violation and a breach of our student code.

Telecommunications is not cheap in Vietnam and international phone calls are expensive, however, access to local and international phone lines is easy throughout HCMC. Phone calls from Vietnam cost about US\$1-2 per minute, and faxes may cost US\$1-2 per page. It is much less expensive to call from the U.S. to Vietnam.

When you travel outside of HCMC you will find a range of access to local and international phone lines, but should have reliable. SIT students can also make calls at the post office, though these rates can be rather high.

Some students may currently be using a phone that is compatible with the Vietnamese cellular phone networks. Check your phone to see if it is functional on a GSM 900/1800 network and has an unlocked SIM card. You may need to contact your provider to have it unlocked.

Keep in mind the time difference when calling or receiving an international call. Vietnam is 12 hours ahead of EST, 11 hours ahead during Daylight Savings Time (April - October).

Most places that you stay in Vietnam will offer internet services, and many places have wireless internet available. In addition, there are some up-market coffee shops in HCMC with wireless Internet access. There will be times during the semester, particularly when on excursion, when you will not have Internet access. For this program we expect all students to bring their own laptop to Vietnam. Students take full responsibility for their own belongings.

Note: Using pen and paper to communicate with home is encouraged! In these days of instant communication, this mode allows you to retain your cultural immersion while still sharing your experience with your friends and family. Mail to and from Vietnam usually takes two weeks or longer.

The SIT program center provides internet access during posted hours.



MAILINGS

Unlike receiving a package here in the US, receiving a package at your program site is usually **expensive** and **problematic**. Customs agents must inspect all packages and you, as the recipient, are responsible for duty and storage fees. In addition, there are cases of items being lost in the mail or taking so long to reach the recipient that the recipient is nearly back in the US by the time the items are received. For these reasons, sending packages should be done only for emergency situations. Additionally, sending valuables is highly discouraged. Mailing prescription medication abroad is illegal.

For this program, **DHL, FedEx, and UPS services are available in country**. Despite cheaper prices, reliance on the US Postal Service is not advised due to delays and unreliability. When given the option, it's always a good idea to send packages certified and with a tracking number that allows the sender to track the package.

If it is necessary for someone to send you mail then posted letters and packages should be sent to the following address:

Student Name

Room 801, Number 49 Nguyen Thi Minh Khai Street, District 1, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, Zip Code 70 000
Tel. 84 283 9100 423

MONEY

Vietnamese Dong can be purchased in some large U.S. banks, but it is also very easy to get upon arrival in Vietnam. Students may exchange U.S. currency or withdraw Vietnamese Dong from an ATM machine inside the international airport in Ho Chi Minh City upon arrival.

ATM machines are in abundance throughout Vietnam. Accessing money should not be a problem for you. Many restaurants, large department stores and tourist boutiques take major credit cards, such as Visa and MasterCard. A Visa or MasterCard can also be helpful in emergencies, medical or otherwise.

For your valuable items, such as passports, air-tickets, major credit cards, you should ask the front desk of your guesthouse to place them in the safe box. During your homestay period, you should ask your homestay family to store these things in a safe place, although the homestay family does not take responsibility for their security. Otherwise, you can put these in the locked box in your room.

Check current exchange rates: <http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>

If using a debit and/or credit card, you should contact your bank and/or credit card companies regarding your travel plans. If you don't inform these companies that you will be away, they will often assume the card has been lost or stolen and will put an immediate hold on the card. You should also check on costs of withdrawal, as these costs vary and can sometimes be very expensive. Renewing and receiving reissued credit and debit cards



while on the program will be an expensive and highly inconvenient process. Before you leave for your program, please check the expiration dates on your cards to ensure that they will not expire while you are abroad. It is also very important that you make photocopies of all your debit/credit card information and leave them with someone you trust in case your card(s) is/are lost or stolen.

We suggest that you budget between US\$900 to \$1100 for out-of-pocket costs not covered by the Tuition and Housing Fees. To determine where you might fall in this range, please examine your spending habits during a typical semester at your home school and consider any exceptional expenditures you may have on the program. Please carefully consider your personal spending habits when creating your out-of-pocket expense budget. Some items to consider are textbooks, Field Study Project or Internship-related expenses (if applicable) not covered by the program, interpretation services, medical expenses, personal spending, and gifts. Use the average estimates below as a guide to help you plan for out-of-pocket expenses.

Personal spending (from past student suggestions):	\$300
Books, printing, supplies:	\$100
Up-front medical costs:	\$500
Cell phone (if you don't already have one):	\$200
Estimated total:	\$900-1100

Please note that up-front medical costs can vary widely. Though you are completely covered by SIT's travel insurance GeoBlue, which you can read more about on our [Participant Insurance](#) page, you still may need to pay up-front for medical care and then file for reimbursement.

VISITORS AND FREE TIME

SIT strongly discourages and will not provide support for any visitors to students during the term, due to the rigorous nature of the program and the disruption that such visits cause in program flow and group dynamics. Students should be sure that relatives and friends are aware of this policy and that visits are scheduled for dates after the formal conclusion of the program. Students will not be excused from program components to attend to visitors. See the [Attendance and Participation Policy](#).

If a visitor does come while a program is in progress, they must plan their own independent accommodations; SIT Study Abroad homestay families can accommodate only their assigned student and, due to cultural and contractual understandings with SIT, should not be asked to host students' guests.

INDEPENDENT TRAVEL

Please read our full [Independent Travel](#) policy for our definition, guidelines and how to access our independent travel notification form. Please note that independent travel is only allowed during program free time and students will not be excused from program activities to travel. SIT is not responsible for any costs of student independent travel including logistics, preparations, cancellation fees, change fees, and any other costs associated with independent travel. We highly recommend you wait to book any independent travel until AFTER arriving on program and receiving the final academic schedule from your program.

During the program, students follow an intense schedule of classes and field-based learning assignments. Free time for pursuing an independent interest or hobby during the program will be limited. Your admissions counselor can advise you about particular interests you may have. For example, if you must keep in shape for your next athletic season, or if you play a musical instrument and want to know whether to bring it, we can help you to understand your schedule and any concerns or limitations that may exist.

CODE OF CONDUCT AND POLICIES

SIT maintains a [Code of Conduct](#) and clear institutional [policies](#) regarding student behavior through a commitment to mutual learning and respect for others. Visit the policy page for detailed policies around academic integrity, alcohol and drug use, anti-harassment and non-discrimination, attendance and participation, credit hours, equal education opportunities, grading, housing, independent travel, prohibited activities, religious holiday observance, sexual harassment and misconduct, and withdrawal among others.



Packing Guidelines

LUGGAGE

Please pack lightly and include only necessary items. You should be able to carry all your luggage significant distances on your own. Try to minimize both the number of bags and weight of your bag(s) since you will likely be acquiring more belongings while abroad. We recommend a small daypack, which will also be useful for short excursions when on the program.

If carrying prescription medications, you should carry a letter from your doctor to prevent any concerns at customs or in transit. (Please see the “General Health Tips” section in the Safety, Security, and Health pre-departure document.)

Please check the current requirements of the Transportation Security Administration (<http://www.tsa.gov>) as well as those of the airline on which you are flying for domestic and international baggage restrictions.

CLOTHING GUIDELINES

Vietnam is becoming more open to contemporary influences and global trends, but you will find that the dress code for college students is still conservative. By following local customs, you will show your respect for the people you meet here. Even on a hot day, long and short-sleeved shirts and blouses, long pants and skirts are good choices for most occasions, especially when you might meet people older than yourself. In most situations, you should avoid sleeveless shirts, short skirts, shorts and torn clothing. These can be considered very disrespectful, and so if you wear them, it is possible you may be criticized – even by complete strangers! Keep in mind you should wear proper clothes when you visit religious sites.

You should wear smart casual clothing to class on all campuses of different colleges/universities throughout the semester, although jeans and t-shirts may be fine with some of your younger teachers. You can wear less formal clothing when you are in your hotel or homestay, but please use your judgment when going out with friends, since you might encounter situations where conservative dress is more appropriate. There are many inexpensive markets to buy any clothes you might need, although larger-sized clothes and shoes are not readily available.

There will be formal occasions when you meet lecturers from local universities or attend functions with homestay families and other guests. For these occasions, you will need to dress in a more formal style. This means a nice dress and dress sandals for women, nice pants and shirt and good shoes for men.

For traveling, you should bring wash-and-wear and light-colored clothes that you can wash by hand and dry quickly. It may get cold during the excursions to the north or in the mountains, so you should bring some warmer items, such as sweaters and windbreakers. Dampness and the lack of heating can make it feel colder than it is.

Tailor-made garments are inexpensive in Vietnam. You may want to pack less and have things made.

For the rainy season, you will need a rain jacket or a rain poncho (which can be easily bought in Vietnam).



EQUIPMENT

Students do not need to bring bed linens or pillows, though they should bring one towel. Students also do not need sleeping bags, tents, or other camping equipment. Students can bring mosquito nets, but many rooms use electric fans as a method of keeping mosquitoes off your body.

It is a good rule whenever you travel to pack all your gear inside your pack in Ziploc and/or garbage bags. If you are bringing expensive camera gear, have a strategy to protect your camera and lenses from moisture and humidity.

COMPUTERS AND OTHER ELECTRONICS

It is required that you bring a laptop computer. If you bring a laptop, the computer will be your personal property and responsibility. It is recommended that you insure your computer, smartphone, or other valuables for full coverage in the event of loss or theft (SIT insurance does not cover personal property).

Not all computer manufacturers have service centers in Vietnam, so even if your computer is covered by an international warranty, service may not always be available. Students in the past who have had computer problems have not been able to get their computers repaired in a timely manner here. If your computer breaks down, you will still be expected to soldier on and do your work.

Internet cafes are quite common now where students can have access to Wi-Fi services. The great majority of computers in Vietnam are PCs. These facilities also allow customers to transfer digital photos from cameras to flash drives or blank CDs. You should bring your camera docking cord if you would like to transfer photos.

When using public computers, you are cautioned to save your work frequently and send it to yourself as an email attachment from time to time. You should also be familiar with anti-virus software and use it regularly.

Please see the following website for information about electricity, voltage and electrical adapters.
<http://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/>.

If you plan to bring electrical equipment you will need to bring a voltage adapter and plug converter. The voltage in Vietnam is 220v, AC 50 Hz. There can be frequent power surges, and the current is not always stable. Keep in mind that you might need to have a two-prong adapter if your computer has a three-prong grounded plug because most of the wall outlets in Vietnam are equipped with two ground prong.

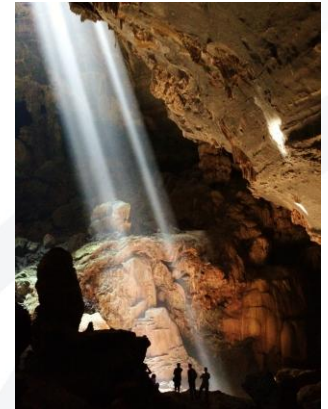
GIFTS

As you might imagine, it is best to be prepared with a gift to offer your homestay family in gratitude for their hospitality and as a means to share a part of your culture with them. We suggest one or two gifts that the whole family can enjoy. You may also wish to consider gifts for people outside your homestay

family. Try to choose gifts that represent you or the part of the country and/or community you live in. Think about what your city, state, or local artisans produce. Draw upon your personal interests or hobbies for ideas. Pack a couple of small gifts for children, such as small games, bubbles, or a Frisbee. Even if your homestay family does not have small children, chances are that you will engage with children in your homestay community. Once you are on the program and learn more about the local culture, you will discover other ways to thank your family. Remember to bring pictures of your friends and family to share.

Former students have recommended calendars, picture books, postcards, music, or souvenirs from your college bookstore as gifts.

Gifts are an important form of social interaction in Vietnam. Successful lightweight gifts in the past have been framed photographs of yourself or family, T-shirts, calendars or posters with scenes of your home locations. CDs, small musical instruments (harmonicas, recorders, etc.), match box cars, small toys, fancy soaps and cosmetics, shampoos, lotions and bottles of perfume have also been popular gift items for homestay brothers and sisters.



Photographs of you, your family and friends, your home, school or town, are an excellent means of bridging language and cultural gaps. When selecting photographs to share with those you meet in Vietnam, you should remain aware of Vietnamese attitudes regarding dress and displays of affection between men and women. It may be taken as a sign of disrespect rather than informality to appear disheveled or untidily dressed. Photos of women in bikinis will not likely result in greater cultural understanding but instead lead to greater confusion over what are already many conceptions of women in the West. Similarly, photos in which men and women openly display affection for each other can often result in embarrassment and/or discomfort to Vietnamese unaccustomed to what appears to them to be inappropriate public behavior or a serious relationship. Extreme affluence, as demonstrated by photos of many homes, cars, and boats may also have an effect of which you should be aware.

WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT OBTAIN IN COUNTRY

In Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) you will be able to obtain film (it is not overly expensive), soap, toilet paper, cosmetics, deodorant, razor blades and other items but specific brands may not be available. Indeed, most basic consumer items are available in Vietnam.

Sun hats are very nice to wear in HCMC. If you do not have a wide brim hat there is a better selection and variety in Vietnam. If you have a bigger than average head, you may want to purchase one before arriving in Vietnam.

ALUMNI CONTACTS

If you have further questions, please contact your admissions counselor and/or ask an alumni contact: <https://studyabroad.sit.edu/admissions-aid/application-process/contact-a-former-student/>.

Packing List

These packing guidelines are based on suggestions from past students and your center director.

GENERAL

- Loose cotton pants
- T-shirts or blouses (anything light, long and loose)
- Sweater and light jacket or coat
- Dressy outfit for presentations, dinners, professional meetings
- Several pairs of longer, moderate-length shorts - no short shorts please!
- Nightgown/pajamas (light for sleeping)
- Underwear - (two week supply) - 100% cotton undergarments are recommended to avoid skin rashes, infections, and other irritations
- A few pairs of socks
- Walking sandals good for rain and mud, such as Tevas (not flip flops)
- Flip-flops for shower
- Tennis shoes
- Nice shoes for presentations, dinners and professional meetings (closed-toe is best)
- Hiking boots

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

- Passport
- Two photocopies of your passport, stored separately from your actual passport
- Photocopy of visa

HEALTH/TOILETRIES

- An adequate supply of any medication you use regularly including birth control (drugs for use other than for medical purposes is strictly forbidden on your program and strict penalties are in effect)
- A list of any medications you are currently taking with the generic name of each (if there is one)
- Small first aid kit with band-aids, hydrogen peroxide, antiseptic cleanser/alcohol pads, moist towelettes, rehydration salts or powder form of Gatorade, and over-the-counter drugs for minor pain, diarrhea, anti-itching, and motion sickness, as approved by your doctor (chewable tablets when possible as water is not always available)
- Multi-vitamins
- An extra pair of eyeglasses or contact lenses, if worn
- Plenty of contact lens cleaning solution, if used
- Eye drops (the dusty and polluted air is quite irritating)
- Hand and face lotion, lip moisturizer
- Tampons (not available in Vietnam)

OTHER IMPORTANT ITEMS

- Sunglasses
- Raincoat (poncho can be bought in Vietnam and is good for bike riding in rain)
- Luggage locks for your bags
- Insect repellent with DEET of 20/30% for use on skin and 100% DEET or Permethrin for use on clothing

- Plenty of sunscreen
- Travel alarm clock and/or watch
- Notebook and paper, journal and pens
- Daypack
- Homestay gifts
- Photos of friends/family to share with homestay family
- Discreet-sized money belt – important
- Digital camera
- Students are encouraged to bring a **battery-operated carbon monoxide detector**)

OPTIONAL

- Linens: A travel sheet is very helpful and a lightweight towel and washcloth (most hotels/guest houses in Vietnam provide one per guest)
- Athletic/running clothing
- Novels (bring a few so that you can trade with classmates; novels can be hard to find)
- Ear-plugs
- CD/MP3 player/recorder and favorite music