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Community work with orphans in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Project Overview



Got a lot of heart and even more wanderlust?

Don't let Vietnam's relaxed attitude to life fool you; there's so much here to see, visit, and taste! And as if the floating markets, bustling streets and emerald paddy fields aren't enough you will also experience the famous Vietnamese hospitality as you get involved with playing games, singing songs and planning arts projects in one of a number of local orphanages. You'll play a valuable role in the overall development of the children and your efforts will last long after the sun tan fades! If you enjoy a challenge this project is the perfect way to discover why Vietnam is becoming one of the hottest destinations in Asia and have lots of fun while you do it.

Trip Highlights:

- Bringing smiles and happiness to disadvantaged children
- Living in this bustling, vibrant city - enough to keep you occupied for years!
- Exploring the city's markets - a real Vietnamese experience

Project details:

You will be working at one of a number of orphanages located in Ho Chi Minh City. There are both male and female children at the orphanages aged between 1 and 18 years. The children live in the orphanages and the older ones attend school during the day. Many of the male children love football and are keen to take part in outdoor activities. One of the orphanages is run by Buddhist nuns but rely on the donations of sponsors. The orphanages do have a large proportion of disabled

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children that you will be helping with as well as able bodied children. The orphanages that we work with can vary in size from 50 to 500 children so be prepared for a busy schedule!

Why the project needs volunteers:

While volunteering in Vietnam on these projects, you'll find they offer valuable support to children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, many of whom are orphans. While the children at the projects have access to education provided by the government, they are usually unable to benefit from it fully due to the many complexities in their lives. The support that our volunteers provide allows many of the children to improve their English skills, which will create more opportunities for them, and learn about a new culture. Often the staff members do not have time to give attention to all of the children, and they will really benefit from spending time and doing creative activities with volunteers. The aim of working with the mentally and physically impaired children is to help rehabilitate them into society when they get older.

What kind of skills you need to go on this type of project:

Volunteers at these projects should have a genuine love of children and young people. Although you do not require any special skills, any experience working with children or young people would be valuable. Volunteers must be able to use their initiative and be motivated to work without guidance. You should be patient, compassionate, resourceful and imaginative.

Your role as a volunteer:

Take the leap and join in volunteer work in Vietnam on these projects. You will be providing essential support to the staff by assisting with daily activities at the orphanages and by offering a positive role model for the children. You may become involved in a variety of activities, including teaching English, outdoor activities, arts and crafts activities, games, songs and social education and helping with disabled children. Volunteers will be teaching life skills and helping with domestic duties. Your schedule will be flexible and will depend on the needs of the project. You may be asked to help the staff members improve their English or IT skills, or you may become involved with fundraising or improving the appearance of the project. Please note that the children do go to sleep for a couple of hours over the lunch break so you will be working in the morning and the afternoons.

Where the project is based:

The orphanages are located in the heart of Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam's largest city. Here you will find traditional street markets and pagodas alongside modern architecture, international cuisine and American cultural influences. Motorbikes are everywhere, and you will find plenty of places to go silk shopping or have clothes tailor-made at bargain prices. You will be staying in a local guesthouse in a residential area of the city, so you will have easy access to local amenities. Transport to the projects is normally by motorbike taxi and can take between 30 minutes to an hour.

Fast Facts

Project Information

- Project Duration: Min 1 week - Max 12 weeks
- Project Costs: US\$ 1295.00 for 1 week, US\$ 220.00 for every week thereafter
- Location of project: *Various locations within Ho Chi Minh City*
- Arrival Airport: *Ho Chi Minh City (airport code SGN)*
- Activities: *Providing general care and assistance in looking after the children, some of which have special needs. This will involve playing games, teaching English & basic life skills*
- Working Hours: *Flexible; usually Monday to Friday, up to 8 hours a day, all other time is free.*
- Getting to the project: *Dependent on location; 30 minutes -1 hour motorbike taxi ride (please budget approximately US\$25 per week)*
- Requirements: *Minimum Age 17*
- Other: *Vietnamese New Year (Tet) will be 26th January 2009 and 14th February 2010. There is a 7 day public holiday around this time which will affect projects. Final dates for this festival are confirmed at very short notice. Dates have been closed for a week either side of Tet but please be aware that you may have some disruptions to your placement around this time (TET in 2011 is February 03, 2012 is January 23)*

What's Included

- Accommodation: *Shared room in guesthouse*
- Food: *Food is not included; you will need to purchase your own food (budget approximately \$50 per week)*
- Airport Pickup: *Included on arrival date. Ask us for details if you're arriving early!*
- Training: *In-country orientation*
- Support: *Pre-departure helpdesk, Local in-country team and 24hr emergency support*

What's not included

- *Flights, Insurance, Visas, Return Airport transfer, Local Transport, Food*

Country Guide

Vietnam

A little bit of history...



Vietnam's history has been marred by war and various power struggles as it has sought to regain and maintain independence. Its earliest origins are believed to date back to the Dong Son civilization circa the 3rd century. Up until the 10th century it was ruled by a succession of Chinese dynasties before it achieved independence. The period up until the mid 19th century saw a series of dynasties including, Ly, Tran and Le, with aims to carve out the country's own identity against the influence of China.

The country was unable to fend off the dominance of the French Empire and by 1883 the French had overtaken the country. Ho Chi Minh, the founder of the Vietnamese Communist party, was a key force in the country's quest for independence, and post-WW II he declared the country independent after his communist army defeated French colonists in 1954. At the 1954 Geneva conference the French agreed to withdraw and the country was effectively divided into the communist north and the anti-communist south, which was intended to be temporary and followed by democratic elections. This didn't turn out as planned when Ngo Dinh Diem, the leader of the south, refused to hold elections and the north began strengthening their communist influence in the south. An armed struggle ensued and the USA, who supported the south, intervened in the early 1960s and was joined by other foreign troops. War raged until a ceasefire in 1973, and two years later the north gained control and unified Vietnam under communist rule.

Stability was not assured and Vietnam incurred the wrath of China when it invaded Cambodia in



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1978 which resulted in China attacking Vietnam the following year. Years of fierce combat meant an economy at near collapse which contributed to thousands of refugees fleeing the country in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Aside from Soviet influence, it remained isolated from the world. Economic reforms in 1986 paved the way for a modernized economy and economic growth. Having established diplomatic relations (notably with the USA) the country opened itself up to foreign investment. While it remains one of the world's poorest countries, it has one of the fastest growing economies in Asia.

Best time to go...

To experience Vietnam at its most weather-friendly, there is no clean cut time of when to go as climate varies between the north, south and central regions. The north is defined by a cool, wet winter from November to April and a hot summer from May to October, during which time typhoons may occur. The temperatures in the north are at their mildest from late September to November and in March and April. To avoid the wet season in the central region which runs from August to December, it's best to visit between January and July; the coastal regions tend to bear the brunt of the wet weather. The most desirable time to visit the south is between October and February when it's dry and a respite from the baking temperatures experienced during March through to May. The south's two main seasons are wet, from May to November, and dry, during the months of December to April, with June to August the wettest period.

The busiest time to visit is typically from November to January and April to June when tourists are out in full, leading to a rise in accommodation rates. A worthwhile, albeit packed, time to visit is during the weeks leading up to the lunar new year, known as Tet, a major holiday in Vietnam. The days change each year depending on the lunar cycle but for 2007 the first day of Tet is earmarked for February 18. During the holiday, there may be limited services and a number of businesses close for three or four days but the build up is the best part if you're a visitor.

Currency and living costs...

The dong is Vietnam's unit of currency. The current exchange rate is: \$1 to 16,090.00d. Check www.xe.com or equivalent for the most up to date exchange rate.

The average costs of life's little essentials are as follows:

- **Meals** – main dishes for lunch can cost between 15,000d and 30,000d in restaurants, while dinner is in the region of 30,000d and upwards. Pho, a traditional soup dish containing meat, can be purchased for as little as 2,000d to 4,000d.
- **Beer** – a bottle of beer can range between 5,000d to 10,000d, whereas draft beer is priced around 2,500d for half a liter.

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- **Coffee** – A cup of coffee is priced between 2,000d and 5,000d.
- **Taxi ride** – A taxi ride is usually charged from a rate of 14,000d, though it's possible that some taxis will charge as low as 12,000d and others as high as 16,000d. Most charge between 4,000d and 5,000 per km thereafter.
- **Accommodation** – A 2* hotel room, depending on season and availability, can be priced at around 320,000d and 650,000d.
- **Internet café** – Rates per hour differ from as low as 5,000d to up to 15,000d.

Getting around...

For long distances, flying is a doable but often expensive option compared to trains and buses. The main domestic airlines are Vietnam Airlines and Pacific Airlines which offer regular services between major cities; flying time between Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City is around 2 hours. It's often cheaper to purchase domestic tickets within Vietnam.

Vietnam has an extensive bus network in place and cheap fares but the buses are all too often overcrowded and road safety is dubious; driving is not recommended. While the fares may still be relatively cheap, foreigners are usually charged more than locals. Aimed at the tourist trade, Open Tour Buses are inexpensive, comfortable buses that journey to the major destinations and stop at selected hotels and restaurants along the way. Although a pleasurable way to travel, it can feel like a tourist bubble rather than an experience of the real Vietnam. Minibuses are also plentiful but can be irritatingly slow with numerous pick ups and drop offs. It's best to ride express minibuses which have far fewer stops and are air conditioned.

If time isn't an issue, train travel is a relaxed way to travel. The journeys can take longer than by bus but offer more leg room and are generally less crowded. Also, unlike bus fares, foreigners pay the same as locals. Depending on your travel budget, trains range from the non-air conditioned seated variety to air-conditioned sleepers, the latter being an obvious choice if you plan to brave the 30 hour plus trip from Ho Chi Minh City to Hanoi which is often referred to as the Reunification Express. All trains require a reservation and it's often possible to book a train from a station other than the one you are departing from.

Aside from crowded buses, taxis are good for getting around major cities. It's advisable to use metered taxis or at least negotiate a fare before departure. Cyclos, three-wheeled bicycles, are an alternative way of traversing city streets and can be hired for a full day. For a more high-powered mode of transport, Honda Oms, motorbikes whereby the passenger sits behind the driver, are also plentiful. For both modes, it's best to have a pen and paper to hand to write down your destination and agree on a fare prior to the journey.



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Useful links

www.lonelyplanet.com

Lonely Planet are leaders in the travel guide sector and their website is a great source of travel information.

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/4130.htm>

US. State Department Consular Information

www.pacificairlines.com.vn

Pacific Airlines.

www.vietnamairlines.com

Vietnam Airlines.

www.vr.com.vn

Train operator Vietnam Railways.