PRE-DEPARTURE PACKET

SUMMER 2018 | VIETNAM
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Dear GESI Student,

Welcome to the 12th 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 nearly 600 students from almost 100 colleges and universities to ten 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:

• Noelle Sullivan and Paul Arntson, GESI Instructors
• Patrick Eccles, Meghan Ozaroski, Corey Portell, Jessica Smith Soto, Abby Engle, 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 supports 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.
• 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.

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 asset-based community 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 (Kaya) 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 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, 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


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 important 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:00 - 12 p.m.</td>
<td>Lecture by Noelle Sullivan on International Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00 - 1:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00 - 2:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Language lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:00 - 2:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:30 - 5:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Lecture and group activities with Paul Arntson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:30 - 6:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Guest speaker on your host country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:30 - 7:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Dinner with group with discussion or on your own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Back to hostel for evening reading and sleep</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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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. Kaya students will also be required to submit a budget along with their 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 “incomplete” 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 issue 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 the challenges and opportunities of each

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:

• Cultural 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 administrators 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.
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.

• 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?

• 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?

• 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:

- Take advantage of opportunities to interact with people who are different from you.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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-development realities”) (Johnson, 184).
- 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.
- Recognize the value of play and lightheartedness in cultivating friendships.
- 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.
- 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.
- Observe, listen, and inquire rather than criticize, rationalize, or withdraw.
- When confronted with a language barrier, speak English as little as possible. Expand your vocabulary, if necessary, actively engaging community members with nonverbal communication.
- Risk making mistakes.
- “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).
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.

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

Works Cited
• International Program Development Study Abroad Handbook, Northwestern University, 2011.
PART II

Hanoi, Vietnam
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.

Upon your arrival, you will be met by a team member from our partner organization in Vietnam, Student Exchange. The Student Exchange team will take care of all your needs whilst you are in Vietnam and will provide you with your orientation and support throughout your work. 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 which we are working with. You will find many volunteer organizations to choose between today, and many of these are also offering great placements around the world. But 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 try to 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.

Realities of Working in Development

In an ideal world everything would go to plan. However, when working in a developing country, where there are many challenges, placements and activities don’t always go to plan. Some examples are:

• teachers may not turn up to class - this may be because a child is sick, there is no childcare alternative and no substitute teacher is available
• electricity may not be available when you are running a presentation while working at an NGO
• the translator is unavailable and no-one else is free to help that day
• where you work is under-resourced and there are no funds to buy the resources that you need
• the weather prevents a building / environmental work from going forward or participants are unable to attend work activities because of it
• an emergency situation arises on animal welfare work and you may be asked to help out or you may not be skilled enough to help leading to your planned activity not taking place that day

These are legitimate reasons why your work may not go to plan. No matter how much you plan, in developing countries, there are barriers to making progress, some of them human some of them environmental. The work that Kaya works with have committed to working with 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 / 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 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 an 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, where 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.

Partner at Location
Student Exchange Vietnam (SE Vietnam) was established with the mission of supporting international students to gain global awareness and local insights from ongoing engagement via internship and study programs in Vietnam. They have a strong commitment in offering reliable, flexible and affordable international education programs sharing Kaya’s mission and values. SE Vietnam works to support GESI students with their transition to Hanoi through homestay placements and maintaining host organization relationships.
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 experience 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.
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:

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. 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 him when you get off the plane.

Transportation
It is very easy to travel in Vietnam. There is an excellent train and bus service connecting the travel hot spots throughout the country. It is easy to book overnight train trips and bus tickets.

Some great places to visit are Danan, Hoi An, Hue, Halong Bay and of course Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Transportation in Vietnam is always an adventure; it can be a joyful, exciting (and even thrilling) experience, but be sure to use caution.

Types of transportation are varied, which are ordered by the distance of destinations:

- **Taxis** - For medium distance like from the airport to the hotel or for getting around within cities, because 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 with the driver about the price of the ride, and it is highly advised you research beforehand the length and typical price of your journey as they will try to rip you off.
- **Uber** - The app has become popular in Vietnam, and are cheaper than regular cabs. If you have an Uber app on your phone and 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.
- **Motorbikes** - Vietnam still ranks high in the list of countries having high rates of accidents. For the safety of students, we do not encourage this type of transportation.
- **Bicycles** - Traveling by bicycle can be one of the most rewarding ways to experience Vietnam. Because of its convenience and economization, bicycle is highly recommended for the short distance travel.
- **Buses** - In Vietnam, bus is the cheapest and most convenient means of transportation for foreign travelers, since the bus system has been well-developed and covered almost every part of the country. Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and some major tourism destinations, there is public bus service for people both local and foreigners. Those buses also departure from major terminals before heading to other streets. You can catch bus at bus stops scattering around the cities and buy ticket directly from the conductor. Although the ticket is very cheap (under VND 10000), the service is not very high (you may have to stand if the bus is too crowded, the bus may not have air conditioner, or the conductor cannot speak English). However, local bus is one interesting way to understand more or make friends with local people.
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.

Apply for Visa at Airport
We suggest you get your visa upon arrival as our local partner will do the pre-application and send you a letter before your arrival. It’s easy and convenient to obtain your visa upon arrival as long as you bring the right documentation with you. Just plan on waiting in line for about 30 minutes. Make sure you bring the letter that was sent as well as one passport photo. You will fill out the tourist visa form while you are in line and proceed to a long, somewhat slow line.

You will apply for a 3-month single entry tourist visa upon arrival at the airport in Hanoi; the cost is $45.

Complete “Obtain Visa on Arrival” in Advance
You may also apply for your visa in advance. There are two ways to do this: the easiest and cheapest way to do this is by applying online to obtain a visa on arrival. There are a number of websites that can arrange this for you.

Secure Visa Before Travel
A visa application will usually take five days plus postage. There is usually an express two-day service for an additional fee. They will require your passport for the duration of your application so apply well in advance. Your passport must have a minimum of six months left to expiry.

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.

If you are an international student, you may need to apply for your tourist visa before arriving in Vietnam. If you are a non-U.S. citizen interested in going to Vietnam, please reach out to the Kaya and GESI teams to learn more about possible additional requirements.
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, Imodium, 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)

**Don't Bring**
Food, pets, winter clothing, electrical goods that need a converter (unless you have a converter/adapter for them), live plants, more than $5,000 cash, or valuables.

**Dress**
Visitors are encouraged to dress on the conservative side. Avoid short shorts - 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. For you work you may need clothes that you don't mind getting dirty, and most work need only a casual dress code. Make sure you bring some closed-toed walking shoes and, as temperatures can vary greatly throughout the day, layering is always best. Dressing smart casual is advised for most workplaces. This means long pants and shirts or dresses that are not too tight or skirts too high above the knees. 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.

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

**Laptops**
We encourage all 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 adapter and device instructions to be sure. For your country's voltage information please see: 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.
Food & Water

Meals
During our time at the homestays, families will provide breakfast and an evening meal each day. It is most common for Vietnamese 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 students to eat out for breakfast and lunch. Students will also have access to the kitchen if they chose to cook or store any food at home.

Locals usually eat lunch at 12pm and dinner at 7pm or earlier, with lunch being the bigger meal. People usually have a lunch break from 1 to 1.5 hours so they can either choose to bring their own food and eat at the pantry 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 - $3 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.

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 during previous hard times were quite rare. 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, the 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 – perfect if you’re too pressed for time to get a tailor-made outfit during your holiday in Hanoi. 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. The tourists are popular end up leaving with a pair of cheap sunglasses and a Vietnamese conical hat. 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.
People & Culture

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’ is still essential.

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.

Crooking 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.

Dressing modestly is also very important. As usual, rural areas are more conservative than the cities, but overall avoid short skirts and shorts and strappy, revealing tops, and always cover up in temples. Local women will often swim with their clothes on, and in these local situations it is respectful for foreigners to swim with their t-shirts or a sarong over their swimsuits.

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.
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 with a lock 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)
- 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)
- Two meals per day and a stipend for lunch – Vietnamese cuisine

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. Anything less will not be tolerated.

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.

Communication with host family:
- Try to talk to family members when you’re at home.
- Communicate with them about any food restriction or allergies that you have.
- 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. It is important to notify the family in advance as they will worry and wait up for you.

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.

The following is an account from our Intern – Reina – whose most memorable moment during her internship in Vietnam was with her host family:

“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 stop being surprised by the variety of food being offered. Our interns are often astonished by the warmth and enthusiasm by their host family to help them get to know more about Vietnamese culture in general and about Vietnamese food in particular. Let’s hear from the interns about their experience cooking with the host family.

“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, 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, it is expected that you offer to help with meal preparation or with dish washing after the meal.

A typical meal at a homestay would be rice together with a protein dish (pork, chicken, beef, fish...) and vegetables (sauté, soup or salad). Families will also try to treat students to more fancy or exotic dishes during the weekend such as banh xeo (Vietnamese pancake), spring rolls, noodle soups, and so on.
Race, Sexuality & Gender

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 in your home country. You’re unlikely to have any problems abroad if you research and prepare for your destination country before you go.

Things to consider:
1. What are the social attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community in my destination country?
2. Are there any specific laws relating to same-sex relations, public decency or public display of affection in my host country?
3. Are same-sex relationships accepted and considered legal?
4. Are there any LGBTQ+ groups or LGBTQ+-friendly establishments where I will be?
5. Will my sexual orientation be acceptable to my host family or roommates if I choose to come out?
6. Are there safety and legal issues for LGBTQ+ individuals in this area?

Below are a few resources you might found helpful:
- The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) offers Lesbian and Gay Rig Maps that detail legal climate. Other useful information is available throughout their website.
- The National Center for Transgender Equality provides air travel and airport security tips for transgender individuals.
- The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office offers some guidelines for LGBT tourists traveling abroad.
- The US Department of State’s US Passports & International Travel Department has LGBT Travel Information for LGBT individuals going abroad.

We encourage you to do more research on your own, and to speak to our placement advisor for any concerns you may have, as we have knowledge and experience of the countries and work which we support that can help to answer your questions and help you prepare for your travels. Make sure to read our Kaya Tip 9 on Considerations for LGBTQ Travelers for additional resources.

Gender
When traveling abroad, it is essential to be considerate of the culture of your destination country. Gender roles, relationships and how to dress are part of being a considerate and safer traveler. Some locations may be much more different than what you are familiar with back home. Indeed, gender interactions differ from one country to another: men to women, men to men and women to women. Some cultures segregate between sexes, others don’t. Some cultures may find what is normal to you offending and vice versa, like staring, holding hands, kissing, hugging, etc. Some cultures are much more sensitive about personal space, and public display of affection than others. Some cultures may find your fashionable piece of clothing from back home, offending in their home country.

The key to be comfortable and make your host community feel comfortable is to prepare and plan accordingly, as well as observe the norm the first few days you arrive in country.

A few tips for women to stay safe while abroad include:
- Be careful about whom you invite home; be aware that in some countries offering hospitality shortly after meeting someone may imply more than ordinary friendliness.
- If unsure about someone’s motives in inviting you to their home, ask if you can take a friend with you.
- Be sensitive to any ways in which your clothes and behavior may be uncharacteristic of the local population; style of dress or behavior which is perfectly acceptable at home may give out different signals overseas.
- Don’t react to verbal abuse/invitations, and avoid eye contact with strangers.
- Always tell someone where you are going and when you expect to return.

Note: these tips are not intended to alarm, but to advise participants to stay safe.

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.
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.

At Work
- Treat the internship as you would any job, with respect and professionalism
- Approach the experience with an open mind, 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 negotiated for the placement and do everything necessary to make the placement a success
- 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

Essential Information
- When there is a family gathering at your host family, do join, and be welcoming to the guests like a family member.
- Show willingness to help with household chores such as washing dishes, cleaning the table, or sweeping the house.
- 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 bathroom 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.
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 venders and of course fashion stores, are all 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 used to 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 hesistant 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 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/