

HELLO FROM VIETNAM!



October 2013

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Vietnam will be in my heart



I moved to Hanoi in April 2012 with no real future plans. My return ticket for July, was soon forgotten about.

I had been working in London as a Glass Artist, and a volunteer Art Teachers Assistant at a small charity for recovering addicts and adults with learning disabilities. I thoroughly enjoyed my work and was interested in finding out more about becoming an art teacher for special needs and adults. I was unwilling and financially unable to commit to a teaching course, so I decided to take a TEFL (Teach English as a Foreign Language course) as a first step.

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Vietnam will be in my heart

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Through this course I met people who had plans to travel around the world. Travel has always been a passion of mine but not a primary plan at this time. I met someone who convinced me to take a trip to Viet Nam for a few weeks. My answer was “Why not, I have no work booked until the summer”.

How my life has changed since that snap decision!!

I taught English for a few weeks and happened to stumble on a job advert for a position with Projects Abroad. Within 2 months of living in Ha Noi, I had signed a 10 month contract and was seriously rethinking my future.

My time with Projects Abroad has taught me more than I could have ever dreamed about. I had always wanted to work with people less fortunate, especially people with disabilities. I had attempted Psychology in school, but my grades were not good enough. I was convinced I would need to follow a different route as I am not smart enough to pursue a career in anything involving academic studies. Projects Abroad has allowed me to do all of these things and more.

Through my volunteers and the work they have been doing, I have learned more than any traveler could wish to learn about this incredible country. I have been lucky enough to have been given the opportunity to see behind the scenes and see some things that even local people probably wouldn't know about.

As the Viet Nam Assistant Manager I have worked with 239 volunteers over the past 16 months. There have of course been challenges, frustrations and tears. But above all, there has been endless joy, fun, adventure, excitement and some incredible achievements.



I have been fortunate enough to become the main coordinator at an orphanage project we run here in Ha Noi. It has been an incredibly difficult project to run, but the results we have achieved during the past few months has been unbelievable and life changing for so many people.

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Vietnam will be in my heart

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My proudest achievement is the kindergarten class we started in August 2012. From this, a handful of children have started school and a few more are due to start. With a real lack of structure, care and love at the orphanage, I want this class to allow the children to believe in themselves and go on to achieve everything they want and hope. They have been given a tough start in life, I am hoping we are going to be able to soften the blow a little for them.



During my time here I have experienced some **extreme** weather. Met some of the friendliest and hospitable people ever! Eaten incredible food - including things I never expected to. Drank too much rice wine. Seen some ridiculous things on bikes! Swam in waterfalls. Jumped off boats. Zip Lined through tiger inhabited jungles. Suffered the worst road rage possible. Had strangers sing to me in the street. Watched dozens beautiful electrical storms. Driven through the mountains by moonlight. Experienced a love market....??? Seen more Ferrari stickers on motorbikes than anybody could imagine. Slept in stilt houses. Ridden elephants. Seen some HUGE spiders. Played music at a Vietnamese wedding. Laughed and cried with some of the most wonderful children I have ever met (and fallen in love with too many of them...). Stretched my imagination in directions I never thought possible. Overcome bigger problems than I ever imagined I would need to deal with. Laughed until I have cried. Cried until I'm numb. Seen endless jaw dropping scenery. And developed relationships and memories which will stay with me forever.



Vietnam will be in my heart

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I have met some of the most influential and fascinating people during my time here. I have honestly had the best time of my life so far since embarking on this incredible adventure. I am going to be desperately sad to leave my life and home here. But I have been given an amazing opportunity with Projects Abroad to work as the Care Coordinator in Kenya. I have absolutely no doubt that I will enjoy my time there as much as I have here. A new chapter in my life is about to begin.

As for my previous life, I have no desire to let my dreams stop now. I plan to keep hold of this opportunity as long as I possibly can! My only regrets are not travelling enough or learning the local language. These are two lessons learned and will be taken on board for my next destination.

With my life and home here in Ha Noi coming to an end, a whole new one is opening up ahead of me in Kenya! I am seriously excited (and obviously a little nervous) about learning about a country, culture and continent so different to here. My world as I know it is turning upside down! I am slowly packing away all of my memories that I have gathered in Vietnam, to take them away with me to Africa. Vietnam is in my heart, and I will cherish everything it has offered me and keep it with me for the rest of my life.

All I can say is THANK YOU!!!

Sally Shephard

Assistant Country Manager for Vietnam



VOLUNTEER CORNER

Fitting in makes me an anomaly

I'm an anomaly here. I went to Sapa with several other volunteers a few weeks ago, and when we got to the train station in Lao Cai, a shopkeeper praised me for my English speaking skills. When I told her that I am actually an American and was born in the United States, she then praised me for my Vietnamese speaking skills. This scenario has occurred numerous times during my placement here in Hanoi.

Let me explain. I am Vietnamese. Both of my parents are Vietnamese. When I'm at home, I speak Vietnamese to my family. That being said, my Vietnamese skills were not fantastic when I arrived in Hanoi. I have been away for school for five years, and there were no Vietnamese people in the city where I went to school. I spoke Vietnamese to my grandparents and my dad when I came home to visit, but my dominant language was English. Things were different when I spoke to my mom, though. Torn between speaking to my mom in Vietnamese because that's what was expected of me and speaking to my mom in English because it came more naturally, my conversations with my mom would end up being a mixture of Vietnamese and English. Not only would I switch languages between sentences, but I would also switch languages within a single sentence. Upon overhearing my conversations with my mom, my roommate told me that I spoke neither Vietnamese nor English, but instead, I spoke a language he called "Vietlish." The degree of "Vietlishness" increased as my enthusiasm for whatever I was telling my mom increased; I felt that staying in one language hindered the speed at which I could share my story, so I would end up using whatever word came to mind first. As time passed and I was away from home for longer periods of time, I spoke Vietnamese less. My conversations with my mom became predominantly English, and I only spoke pure Vietnamese with my extended family and my dad.



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VOLUNTEER CORNER

Fitting in makes me an anomaly

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That being said, when I got to Hanoi for my placement, I was a bit rusty with my Vietnamese skills. Sure, I had moved home and was able to brush up on those skills a little, but I was far from proficient. Additionally, both sides of my family are from the South, which has a slightly different dialect from northern Vietnam. My anxiety about not being able to speak Vietnamese well was appeased by the fact that I would at least be able to communicate with those at the Projects Abroad office in English, and that I would have a translator to help me at my placement.



Ironically, when my supervisor at my placement, Dr. Thuy, learned that I spoke that little bit of Vietnamese, she deemed that a translator was unnecessary.

After I met Dr. Thuy, she sent me home and asked me to come back the next day. The start of that first official day was a terrifying experience. I arrived at 7:25 AM, but I didn't see Dr. Thuy right away. Instead, I walked into the conference room and waited for her in the same spot I had met her the day before. As the other nurses and doctors arrived and noticed me, they started asking me who I was and why I was there. I realized right then that I had no idea how to answer those questions. I was able to tell them my name and

that I was waiting for Dr. Thuy, but I realized I had no idea how to explain that I was a volunteer. However, once I told them that I was born in the U.S., they generally stopped asking me questions that I was clearly struggling to answer. See, the thing about Vietnamese children who are born and raised outside of Vietnam is that often they cannot speak the language. It is rare when a Vietnamese child raised outside of Vietnam can speak Vietnamese, hence my being an anomaly.

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VOLUNTEER CORNER

Fitting in makes me an anomaly

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That afternoon, there was a lunch celebration for one of the doctors in the department I was in (intensive care unit). When I sat down with everyone, the nurse who sat next to me made it her mission to make sure I had enough to eat and that I was comfortable. She would ask me questions every now and then, and I would try my best to answer. It was much easier answering questions when there was only one person asking the questions. At one point during the meal, several of the doctors started talking about me, unaware that I would understand them if I were paying attention (I wasn't). At that point, the nurse I had been talking to loudly announced to the room that I understood AND spoke Vietnamese, so they better not say anything bad about me (they weren't). There was playful banter exchanged back and forth at the giant conference



table where we ate, and my story was made known to everyone in the room, which was more or less everyone in the department. The questions that everyone had been asking me that morning, who I was and why I was there, were all answered. From that moment on, things were much easier for me. My anxiety had reached its peak.

I still have anxiety when I meet a new crowd of people, but I am more confident when I do meet them now. The confidence is the result of having answered all of the questions that I know I'll be asked, but also because my overall Vietnamese skills have improved greatly. In fact, I have even been texting and chatting with people at my hospital in Vietnamese! (Writing in Vietnamese is another story altogether.) The only thing that I want to work on is expanding my vocabulary to include medical terms. Though the nurses and doctors make it a point to describe patients' ailments to me, I still have trouble understanding what is wrong with the patients. Of course, that could be a function of my lack of medical training in general. If I don't know the medical terms in English, then how can I possibly understand when the doctors describe them in Vietnamese, right? My goal when I start medical school is to learn everything in both English and in Vietnamese. Not only is there a large Vietnamese community where I am from, but I also hope to return to Vietnam one day and perhaps volunteer again. The difference is, next time, I will neither struggle nor have any anxiety with speaking the language.

Gina Nguyen, USA, Medical volunteer

VOLUNTEER STORY

Whistler Secondary School graduate spends six weeks
as a physiotherapy volunteer in Vietnam

“Vietnam is an amazing country and when I heard about the Agent Orange victims in Friendship Village, I realized it would be a really interesting experience,” said Human Kinetics graduate Danielle Robson (26) on why she decided to volunteer in Vietnam through Projects Abroad.



Danielle and the veterans at Friendship Village

Friendship Village is an international reconciliation project that cares for disabled children and adults who suffer from the legacy of the Vietnam War (Agent Orange Victims). The centre offers therapeutic help for mentally and physically disabled children as well as their educational training and medical care. Adults who suffer from the consequences of war get help in the Friendship Village as well. Talking about the placement, Danielle shared her thoughts: “Friendship Village was a very positive experience and I was excited to go to work every day. I truly thank Projects Abroad for giving me this opportunity of Friendship Village and I would definitely recommend this placement and the organisation.”

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VOLUNTEER STORY

Whistler Secondary School graduate spends six weeks
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Danielle's responsibilities at her placement included building programmes for the children, giving them rehab exercises and laughing with them while motivating them to work hard on their exercises. Because all of the veterans have back or neck pain, Danielle instructed them with simple exercises, offered massage sessions to them and worked with them on their postures. The veterans enjoyed being massaged and they all wanted to come in to join in the massage sessions with Danielle.



"A day could vary in the rehab room because the number of veterans always changed, but typically from 8:00 to 11:00, I worked with the children who have more severe disabilities," said Danielle about her daily routine. "Lunch and naptime lasts until 13:00 when I started teaching the local physiotherapists and one of the children English. I believe, by doing that, the physiotherapists opened up more and they were more comfortable with me, too. Then from 14:00 to 16:00 I spent time working with the veterans and children."

During her volunteer time, Danielle was given with a lot of responsibilities which she thinks, "was really enjoyable". Danielle enjoyed the cooperation from the local physiotherapies: "As volunteers, taking your own initiative is really important. It was really good that the physiotherapists let me show them what I do at home; I could also give advice about exercises and activities which work best for helping and benefiting each child. I really hope that they will still continue the exercises."

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VOLUNTEER STORY

Whistler Secondary School graduate spends six weeks
as a physiotherapy volunteer in Vietnam

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During the six weeks Danielle spent at Friendship Village, she managed to improve certain important skills. “I think learning how to be patient is a good one for sure. When working with children and people who speak a different language, there will be a language barrier which calls for patience. But also I learnt that you can really still connect with people and feel an energy from them, even if you cannot communicate verbally to them. This is really special; I don’t think you have ever experienced this until you go to another country and they don’t speak the language that you speak.” Her knowledge about Agent Orange was also enriched: “I think the most valuable experience I had at Friendship Village is gaining an overall better understanding of Agent Orange and the physical impacts it has had on so many people and generations.”

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Duong Pham, Information manager

WORKSHOP REVIEW

September workshop: Culture & Vietnamese Culture

On the 26th of September, 11 volunteers attended a very interesting workshop on the theme of “Culture & Vietnamese Culture” organised by Projects Abroad Vietnam.

The first part of the Workshop focused on giving some most basic understanding about culture which was very informative and academic.

The second part brought volunteers to a very interesting competition about Vietnamese Culture with 13 questions for two groups.



And the most expected part was the last part when everyone got chance to get to know the proper way to make green tea – one of the most popular drinks in Vietnam. Also, they were introduced to the history of Lotus-green tea and the conception of drinking tea in Vietnam. All volunteers felt really excited to try this special traditional drink together with traditional typical Vietnamese cakes and fruits like green-bean sweet cake and peanut-sweet cake. This workshop has been highly appreciated by the participants. Physio volunteer Danielle Robson said, “It was very informative and interesting. It was also cool to try some traditional green tea and cake.”



Tam Nguyen, Project Coordinator

What's On: November 2013

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1 Rebecca, Alexandre, Jerome arrive	2 Fabienne arrives
3	4	5 Helene arrives	6 Lee arrives	7 Water pup- pet show 8PM	8	9
10 Luke arrives	11 Robert and Lisa arrive	12	13	14 Cooking event: Springroll	15 Sigrid arrives	16
17 Outreach event : Terry fox running	18	19	20 Vietnam Teachers' Day	21	22	23 Milad arrives
24 Simon arrives	25 Aman and Jennifer arrive	26 Monthly workshop	27 Danica and Andrea arrive	28	29	30

Nov 7 — Water Puppet Show. An evening to discover one of the most famous traditional art form of Northern Vietnam.

Meet at: Tourist Info center

Time: 7:45PM

Cost: 100,000VND/person

Nov 14 - Cooking lesson: Vietnamese Fried Springroll. Learn how to prepare the filling, roll and fry. :)

Meet at: House 1

Time: 9:00AM

Cost: 30,000VND/person

Nov 17 - Terry Fox Run for Children. Volunteers and staff will join this annual run to raise awareness for children with disability. Refreshments will be provided.

Meet at: Projects Abroad office

Time: 8.20AM

Please wear Projects Abroad t-shirt ;)

Nov 26 – Monthly workshop. More information to come.



IDP volunteer Colm Moylan filmed an interview for the communication plan of his placement



Teaching volunteer Laura and her lesson activity has brought such a good vibe to the lessons.



Every rehab treatment started by physio volunteer Danielle can be a fun and enjoyable activity



Community development volunteer Katharina taught English to disabled women at Mai Chau village



A lovely moment of care volunteer Linh Le and her student at the Agent Orange village



Medical volunteer Ryan has been enjoying his volunteer time at the Traditional Medicine where he can study acupuncture

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Projects Abroad is the leading global organizer of overseas voluntary work placements. Our wide range of projects, including Teaching, Care, Conservation & Environment, Medicine & Healthcare, Sports, Culture & Community projects and Journalism, are designed specifically for the needs of the communities in which we work, whilst giving our volunteers the very best experience of volunteering abroad.

Based in Hanoi, Vietnam, volunteers can work on a variety of projects, including care work with disabled and orphaned children, physical therapy at local hospitals, and teaching either English or French in both primary and secondary schools. The latest projects to be opened is Nutrition, Nursing and Surgery projects. If you are interested in volunteering in Vietnam with Projects Abroad then please log on to www.projects-abroad.net for more information.



Ethnic minority woman weaves at Mai Chau village