

Aleah Wilson

Travel story

A Rookies Guide to Vietnam

Vietnam– a country filled with rich history, beautiful scenery and a unique culture. There are many sights to see and things to experience. If you're a free spirit who likes to wander, you've come to the right place. Get ready to dive into the country because I'm here to show you the ropes.

On a recent trip to Vietnam I began my travels in Ho Chi Minh City. After spending a night there, I flew to Hanoi. I spent a night in Hanoi before taking a bus ride to Ha Long Bay. I experienced the beauty of Ha Long Bay while sailing on a traditional junk boat for two days. I flew back to Ho Chi Minh City and spent my last three days there.

Ben Thành market



Photo by Aleah Wilson

Bargaining, it's part of the culture. When visiting the markets and bazaars of Ho Chi Minh City make sure to make a stop at the Ben Thành market. The market is

an array of vibrant colors. Vendors selling everything from clothes, accessories, food and trinkets surround you.

Fellow Traveler Annie DeFreitas had a great experience at the market. "I couldn't believe the amount of people trying to bargain and sell in such a small space," DeFreitas said. "I was trying to find a pair of pants and there were rows upon rows of options."

If you're a good schemer and love getting the best deal, you'll learn to bargain well. When I bargain, I never buy anything unless it's being sold at half the initial price. I suggest setting a price lower than half. If the vendors are hesitant, act uninterested.

You could even pretend to walk away and they typically settle for your desired price. Eventually you'll pick up how to bargain. Make sure to be assertive and have fun with it.

Propaganda



Photos by Esra Gumrukuler

An important part of any nation's culture is food. Pho is a popular cuisine amongst the Vietnamese. Others around the world enjoy it too. The dish is typically

served in a large bowl that includes, beef or vegetable broth, meat or fish, vegetables and rice noodles.

It's also served with a side plate that contains Thai basil, bean sprouts, slices of lime and fresh Thai chili peppers. These are good items to add to your broth because they provide lots of flavor.

If you're already a fan of pho or have yet to try it, Propaganda is the restaurant to visit. Don't be scared off by the name, it has nothing to do with propaganda.

The restaurant has an extensive menu filled with many traditional Vietnamese dishes such as spring rolls, pho, rice dishes and more. They also have a wide selection of fresh juices. I recommend the passion fruit, pineapple and guava juice. It's flavorful and vibrant in color.

Fellow traveler Esra Gumrukuler enjoyed the restaurant. " Propaganda had a fun atmosphere and tasteful Vietnamese food," Gumrukuler said. "The restaurant was quirky and designed well. I loved it."

When ordering pho, propaganda has options to suit many dietary restrictions or lifestyles such as vegetarian and vegan options. If you eat meat, I recommend the traditional beef pho.

The dish is flavorful and filling. The portion size is large which is common at all pho restaurants. If you like spicy food, I suggest adding some sriracha hot chili sauce for an extra kick.

Vietnam War museum



Photos by Brooke Ortmayer

Whether you enjoy museums or not, the Vietnam War museum is something everyone should see. The museum is densely packed with facts about warfare tactics, machinery, weapons, the aftermath and lasting affects it had on those involved.

The museum is eye opening. As you move through it, you're naturally filled with a sense of sadness and heartbreak. It displays the lives and courage of so many who were killed in the war.

Student Brooke Ortmayer was grateful for her experience at museum. "I'm so glad I saw the museum and saw it from the Vietnamese perspective," Ortmayer said. "It was really emotional."

There's a great section of the museum dedicated to war correspondents that risked their lives. They went overseas to tell the stories of those affected and involved in the war while also reporting information to their publications back home.

I must warn that the sections dedicated to those affected by Agent Orange are graphic. Of course you should still look around and read. It's simply a heads up. "I was surprised by how graphic the images were and how much I was affected by them," Ortmayer said.

You're not limited to time spent in the museum. You can spend as much time as you want looking around and learning. Take your time and read the courageous stories of those involved.

Ha long bay



Photos by Aleah Wilson

Listed as one of the five natural wonders of the world, Ha long bay should be at the top of your itinerary. The mountainous island views stretch as far as the eye can see. I recommend taking a boat trip through the bay. This is the best way to see its natural beauty.

If you enjoy the outdoors, rent a kayak and see the different islands up close. I did a kayaking excursion on my recent visit and that was the highlight of my trip. Fellow traveler Elle Bergevin also enjoyed her time kayaking in the bay.

"I was stunned to see as much as I did. Ha Long Bay is a beautiful place," Bergevin said. "The view was honestly breathtaking as we kayaked through the bay."

If you visit the bay, you'll notice the large amount of trash in the water. I took part in a small beach clean up. If you're environmentally conscious, you might look into that.

Bergevin also took part in the same beach clean up. "It was heartbreaking to see all the trash in the water," Bergevin said. "We were lucky to participate in a beach clean up that helped clean one of the smaller beaches in the bay."

My silk tailor



Photo by Aleah Wilson

Looking for some fashion forward fun? Make a quick visit to My Silk Taylor located in Ho Chi Minh City. The staff is friendly, inviting and talented. The tailor shop is located on the same street as the Ben Thành market so I recommend visiting both locations on the same day.

You can receive any custom clothing item in as little as one day. There's a multitude of things you can have made such as dresses, pants, skirts and suits. The list is endless.

Do you have that one special piece of clothing that you can't live without? You can bring the item in and have the tailor replicate it in different materials. They have tons of different fabrics in various colors to choose from.

A few friends and I took a visit to the tailor shop with some designs in mind. Fellow traveler Andrew Behm had a custom suit made. "The tailors knew the value of their material and didn't rip us off," Behm said. "My suit turned out great and I was surprised at how fast they made it."

I drew out some dress designs as well as a skirt design and had the tailor's custom make those. They viewed my designs, looked at a few photos I provided and took my measurements. My clothing items turned out perfectly. The process was fast and well organized.

Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum



Photo by Aleah Wilson

His house, office and mansion still stand tall. The mausoleum located in Hanoi is the burial site for the freedom leader of Vietnam – Ho Chi Minh. Although he had a mansion, Minh was a minimalist. He chose to live in a small house across from his bright yellow mansion.

Student Emily Kruger enjoyed her time there. “ I got to see all of his old cars as well as his own home,” Kruger said. “ It was a cool experience and I learned a lot about the history of Ho Chi Minh.”

His body is at rest in the large mausoleum accompanied with armed guards. Time is unlimited when walking through the complex. You receive a good understanding of how Minh lived out his personal life.

Overall, the country of Vietnam is a sight to see. It’s filled with unique quirks and a beautiful culture. Step out of your comfort zone and try to immerse yourself into the culture. Explore the country with an open mind and enjoy your time.