

Arrival Guide

Development studies 1

Hoi An, Vietnam

Spring 2025

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1 Introduction

Welcome as a student with Kulturstudier!

We hope you are excited about the upcoming semester. Our local staff in Hoi An will do their best to help you adapt to your new life upon arrival. However, a successful journey always begins at home.

This guide aims to provide you with essential information about life in Hoi An and help you prepare to make the most of your semester abroad. For details on academic preparations, please refer to the study guide.

We urge you to read this arrival guide carefully, to download this PDF on your computer, and print it to keep with you while in Hoi An.

If you have any further questions, contact us at mail@kulturstudier.no or by phone at +47 22 35 80 22.

2 Important information

Make sure to save this information and pass it on to your emergency contacts.

2.1. Local staff contact information

Manager: Le Ho Phuoc Vinh (Vinh). Phone: +84 913 438 302 / vinh@kulturstudier.org

Assistant Manager: Le Phuoc Khuong Duy (Duy). Phone: +84 914 850 880

Seminar leaders:

- Tran Ha My (Ha My). +84 847 480 484 / hamy@kulturstudier.org
- Duc Hoang Trung (Duc). duc@kulturstudier.no
- Nguyen Thi Le (Le) +84 917 748 384 / le@kulturstudier.no

2.2. Your postal address in Hoi An

The Balance Café
02 Tran Quang Khai street, Thanh Nam village
Cam Chau, Quang Nam 560000 VIETNAM
(Phone: 0913438302)

Postal service in Vietnam is slower and less reliable than what you are used to. It may take up to 7 weeks for a small package to arrive.

If someone sends you a package from Scandinavia you might not even receive it during your 10 weeks stay. When sending mail, if the envelope contains more than a letter, it should be sent as a registered letter.

2.3. Medical contacts in Hoi An

Pacific Hospital

English speaking doctors and staff, good health services for small injuries and illnesses. Phone: (+84) 235 392 1656

Ho Huu Phuoc

English speaking doctor, specialist in tropical medicine.
Office address: 67 Hai Thuong Lan Ong.
Visiting hours: weekdays 11 AM -12:30 AM and 5 PM-7:30 PM
Weekends 7 AM to 12:30 AM. Can make house-calls outside office hours.
Phone: +(84) 903 5830 13.

Family Medical Practice

International practice in Da Nang. Dr. Ross Bernays is from Australia and Dr Jocelyn P. Nava is from the Philippines.
Address: 96-98 Đ Nguyen Van Linh Street, Nam Duong Ward, Hai Chau District, Danang. Phone: 0236-3582-699\700.
For emergencies: (+84) 913 917 303.
E-mail: danang@vietnammedicalpractice.com.
Website: www.vietnammedicalpractice.com.

MAI:tri VN, /mai-tree vn/

Private practice: provides professional art therapy and community gatherings in Hoi An and online.
E-mail: maitrivietnam@gmail.com.
Website: <https://maitrivietnam.com/eng/>.

Flavia Breu

Swiss physiotherapist based in Hoi An. WhatsApp: (+84) 936 135 368.
E-mail: flavia_breukobler@yahoo.com.

2.4. Ethical conduct

We have a zero-tolerance policy for harassment or bullying. We expect students and staff to treat each other with respect and to avoid offensive language in their communication with each other. Sexual harassment is unacceptable, both in the case of harassment of fellow students and from our staff towards students. All Kulturstudier staff and teachers are informed that any sexual attention towards students is strictly prohibited. If you experience harassment, sexual or otherwise, from Kulturstudier staff or lecturers, we urge you to report this to alarm@kulturstudier.org. All reports will be treated confidentially.

3 Preparation: getting ready

3.1. Be prepared to take responsibility

Kulturstudier is an organization run by academics, and we consider the academic aspect of your stay our primary responsibility. We see our students as responsible adults and believe that each student should take responsibility for creating a good life for themselves in Hoi An.

For instance, if your luggage does not arrive with you, you must contact the airline yourself. If you need to see a doctor, you should go by yourself or with a roommate. We expect you to act in the same manner you would if you were traveling independently. Nevertheless, our local staff serve as a safety net. If you encounter problems or something serious occurs, you can always ask them for help.

You must also be prepared to take responsibility for your studies. Studying with Kulturstudier is fundamentally the same as studying at any university; what you gain from it depends on what you put into it. You can fail your studies and learn nothing, or you can be academically inspired and discover what you want to do for the rest of your life. Read more in the study guide.

3.2. Be prepared to step outside your comfort zone

You will be part of a group of Scandinavian students, which provides a sense of safety in a new situation. It is easy to only spend time with your fellow Scandinavians instead of stepping out of your comfort zone to get to know the locals. However, if you wish to truly experience Vietnam, you must be adventurous and make an effort to get to know the locals and their culture.

3.3. Packing

3.3.1. Clothing

Hoi An can get very hot, so make sure to pack appropriately for the tropical climate. During your free time, you are welcome to wear whatever you like. However, during classes, you are expected to adhere to the university dress code, which requires covering your shoulders and knees (no crop tops). Please note that this dress code applies to everyone, regardless of gender. Make sure to pack enough clothing that meets these requirements. Wearing linen clothing or other materials suitable for tropical climates that cover your knees and shoulders can often keep you more comfortable in the heat than cotton tank tops and shorts.

You should bring a cap or sun hat to protect yourself from the sun. You will likely prefer to wear sandals, flip-flops, or other light shoes during your time in Vietnam. Additionally, it can be wise to bring a pair of wool socks for cooler nights or when hiking or going on field trips. You should also pack one formal outfit for official visits to local businesses. While you do not need to bring regular towels, you should bring a beach towel.

3.3.2. Toiletries

You can get most pharmaceuticals in Hoi An or in neighboring city Da Nang. Bring any prescription drugs you might need. Bring enough sunscreen for the entire stay. Most sunscreens in Vietnam contain whitening agents. Make sure to check the expiry date if you do buy sunscreen in Vietnam. You can buy shampoo, conditioner, deodorant etc. in Hoi An. If you use contact lenses, make sure you bring what you need from home (lenses under 1.0 strength are not available in Hoi An). If you use tampons, bring enough for the entire stay, as they are hard to find. Bring earplugs if you are a light sleeper.

3.3.3. Study supplies

You can buy paper, pens, staplers, tape etc. in Hoi An. Bring a laptop and your books.

4 Your first week: settling in

4.1. Arriving in Hoi An

The closest airport to Hoi An is in Da Nang. If you arrive on the joint arrival by Kilroy you will be picked up at the airport. From the airport you can take a taxi to Hoi An. The taxi ride from Da Nang costs around 30 EUR and takes about 40 minutes. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your arrival, contact manager Vinh Le.

Vinh can help you book a taxi if you send him your flight number and time of arrival. If you arrive in Vietnam at night, e-mail Vinh in advance, so that he can arrange for someone to meet you at the house you will be staying at.

As soon as you arrive in Vietnam, we request that you register your stay with your country's embassy if you have not already done so prior to departure. Register your travel with your Ministry of Foreign Affairs in [Norway](#) / [Sweden](#) / [Denmark](#).

4.2. Information meeting

An information meeting will be held before the first lecture. At the meeting, we will go through important practical information with regards to the houses, the study center, transportation, social activities, and cultural etiquette. There will be plenty of time for questions. The time and location of the meeting will be announced in the Facebook group.

4.3. Buy a bicycle

We recommend that students buy a bicycle on one of the first days after arriving in Hoi An. This will give you the freedom to move around Hoi An as you please. Avoid the cheapest brands like Thong Nhat, as they break down quickly. Choose reliable brands like Martin or Asama. Do not buy bikes made for children as these will also break after a while under the weight of an adult. A good bike can be bought for around 120 EUR. It is a Kulturstudier tradition to donate your bike to a Vietnamese friend, organization, or an orphanage upon departure. This is, of course, voluntary.

4.4. Buy a SIM-card

You are expected to buy a Vietnamese SIM-card so people can reach you when needed. Pre-paid SIM cards are cheap and easy to use. You can get 4G Internet in Hoi An. Currently you can get 6-8 GB for 10 EUR per month. If you have an old phone that still works, bring it as a backup in case your primary phone gets lost or stolen. You can put your home country SIM card in the backup phone to use services like BankID.

4.5. Withdraw cash

The currency in Vietnam is the VND (Vietnamese dong). 1 EUR = 27 000 VND (approx.) It is a good idea to withdraw some cash early on. The maximum withdrawal amount in ATMs is normally 3 million VND, but there are some ATMs where you can withdraw 5 million VND. If you want to withdraw a larger amount, you can go to any of the banks in Hoi An, where you can withdraw the maximum amount allowed by your bank.

4.6. Communicating with Kulturstudier

4.6.1. Student representatives

During the first week, we will ask the students to elect representatives who will meet with Kulturstudier staff every other week. These individuals will act as intermediaries between students and staff and they are responsible for notifying the staff of any problems. For specific occasions or trips, separate committees may be formed.

4.6.2. E-mail, Canvas and Facebook

Check your e-mail, Canvas and the Facebook group frequently to stay up to date on the academic programme and other activities. It is your responsibility to make sure that you receive important information. The seminar leaders each have their own individual Kulturstudier e-mail address, but in general you should use the joint e-mail account vietnam@kulturstudier.org. Please use e-mail or WhatsApp, and not social media channels, for urgent matters.

4.6.3. Compulsory Tuesday meetings

Starting the first week, each Tuesday after class all students and staff gather for a weekly meeting. The purpose is to share information and to discuss any difficulties

and opportunities for change. These meetings are compulsory. If you for some reason cannot attend, you are responsible for obtaining information from fellow students.

4.6.4. Suggestion box

At the study center, you will find a suggestion box where you can submit your suggestions and comments. We truly appreciate feedback from students throughout the semester. It is important to us that suggestions and grievances are communicated while there is still time to make changes, so please do not hesitate to voice any concerns. This includes issues related to the academic schedule, housing, food, welfare, and other aspects of the programme.

4.6.5. Complaints

If you have spoken with our local staff about issues or used the suggestion box but still feel that your concerns have not been appropriately resolved, you are welcome to file a complaint by contacting Kulturstudier in Oslo in accordance with specifications given [here](#), preferably in time to make us able to act on your issues.

4.7. Academic schedule

The academic schedule for the semester can be found in the study guide. Classes usually start at 9 AM. The academic week lasts from Monday through Friday. On Mondays, half of the class will spend the day at VNUK's campus in Danang. On these days we leave by bus from the Balance Café at 8 AM and return to Hoi An in the afternoon. Tuesday through Friday, lectures are held at the university campus in Hoi An, about 10-15 minutes by bicycle from the Balance Café.

Early on you will be given a preliminary schedule for the whole semester. Here you will find dates, times, venues and important deadlines for lectures, seminars and assignments. The intent is to create predictability throughout the semester. However, changes are inevitable; lecturers get sick and unforeseen incidents may occur. Changes to the academic schedule will be sent by e-mail and important information about different activities will be posted on Facebook and/or Canvas. Check your e-mail, Canvas and the Facebook group daily before breakfast.

5 Health, accommodation and food

5.1 Health: staying well in Vietnam

If you are insured with Europeiske, you have access to counselling for health issues by phone at +47 21 49 24 01. Check with other insurance providers what options they have for counseling if you suffer health issues.

Roommates have a special responsibility to look out for and help each other if someone gets ill. If you or your roommate is too sick to attend a lecture or seminar, inform the team before breakfast. It is inevitable that some students will get sick during the semester. You will most likely be affected by an upset stomach at some point during your stay. At the pharmacy, you can buy electrolyte powder, which can help. Preventative measures include washing your hands often and being careful with uncooked/raw foods. However, try not to let anxiety prevent you from exploring and enjoying new foods.

In Hoi An's tropical climate, it is important to stay hydrated—aim to drink at least 3 liters of water daily. Fresh juice is another great way to maintain hydration. The ice served in Hoi An is generally safe. If you feel weak and unwell, dehydration is the most likely cause. While tap water is not safe to drink, most houses have filtered water available.

You should pay special attention to open cuts on your skin. Clean any open cuts daily with a disinfectant and cover them with band aids. It is much easier to get an infection here than in colder climates. There are many stray dogs in Hoi An. Most are friendly, but if a dog bites you, you must consult a doctor and get a rabies vaccine.

You should use mosquito repellent at night. Always use sunscreen with a high SPF to protect your skin from the sun. If you spend too long in the strong sun you can suffer a heat stroke, which will make you feel ill and exhausted. Stay out of the sun, rest and drink plenty of water to recover. Remember to not set your AC to a very low temperature to minimize the risk of getting a cold from the temperature changes between inside and outside.

Support for mental health difficulties in Vietnam is limited. If you struggle with mental health difficulties, please consult your doctor before departure and inform the staff beforehand if there is anything we should be aware of. Read more on [your page](#).

5.2. Accommodation

The accommodation Kulturstudier offers varies from semester to semester according to availability. Rooms vary in size, furnishing and appeal. Read more on [your page](#).

5.2.1. Student houses

We try to rent houses in close proximity to each other, The Balance Café (where lunch is served), and to the town center. Still, you may find that other students' houses are closer to the center than yours. It is impossible to ensure that houses are completely equal with regards to location and other aspects. The houses are comfortable, but do not expect Scandinavian standards. Each house has between two and seven bedrooms, with two students per bedroom. They also include a kitchen, shared bathroom, and living room. Your bed will come with two sets of bed sheets. You are responsible for your own laundry, including towels and bed sheets. The kitchens are equipped with basic dishes and cutlery such as bowls, plates, cups, and a few pans. Students are responsible for purchasing drinking water tanks for their own houses. To avoid attracting bugs and ants, all food must be kept in the refrigerator or in sealed containers. Keep in mind that Vietnamese daily life is generally louder than what you may be accustomed to at home, so do not expect your neighbors to be quiet during the day. However, it should be quiet at least from 10 PM to 6 AM.

5.2.2. Electricity and wi-fi connection

Electricity in Hoi An is 220 volts. Since electricity is expensive and air conditioning consumes a lot of it, please be considerate of the environment and the cost. Do not waste electricity—be sure to turn off the air conditioner when you leave your room or when the door is open. While we cannot promise excellent internet access, overall, Wi-Fi in Hoi An is quite accessible and satisfactory. Most cafés offer Wi-Fi access.

5.2.3. Cleaning

You are responsible for cleaning your own room. The houses have washing machines, and it is also possible to have your clothes washed at various laundry services in town. Cleaners come once each week to clean communal areas.

5.2.4. Mold

Mold is a common issue in the tropics. Clothes, books, shoes, and other items can easily get damaged if kept in closed compartments, such as in your suitcase, a drawer, or a closed cabinet, for many days. To prevent mold, ensure proper ventilation. Keep windows, drawers, closets, and doors open as much as possible when you are at home. Keeping the fan on can also help. It is recommended to turn your laptop on at least once daily to dry out any humidity. Remember that mold is expected, and people in Hoi An are familiar with how to deal with this issue. Importantly, the mold in Vietnam is different from the invasive mold you may be accustomed to in Scandinavia.

5.2.5. Safety and house rules

Please call Vinh if you are having issues or if something is broken in the house. Every person is registered to a particular address. Thus, students are not allowed to sleep overnight at another student house. This is Vietnamese local law. Should an emergency occur that causes you to sleep over at someone else's house, you must ask Mr. Vinh for permission, as he is responsible to register your stay with the local authority. Parties may only occur on weekends, must end by 10 PM, and require permission from your neighbors, in accordance with local law. Bikes should always be locked and, if possible, brought inside the gates at night. The house gate should be locked during nighttime for security. Below you will find the house rules.

House rules

1. Cleanliness and responsibility

All students are responsible for maintaining the cleanliness of shared spaces, including the kitchen, bathrooms, and living rooms. Personal belongings should be stored properly to ensure that common areas remain orderly.

2. Noise control and respect for quiet hours

All students must maintain a peaceful environment conducive to study and rest. Students must respect their neighbors and observe quiet hours in accordance with local laws.

3. Safety first

For the safety of all residents, students must follow the security protocol, which include locking doors and informing staff of any safety concerns. Furthermore, individuals who are not Kulturstudier students are not permitted to visit the student houses.

4. Substance use

The use of drugs is strictly prohibited. Alcohol consumption must be conducted responsibly. Excessive drinking that endangers your own safety, or the safety of others, is not permitted.

5. Respectful behavior and non-discrimination

All students must treat their housemates with respect and dignity. Discrimination based on identity, race, sexual orientation etc. is strictly prohibited. So is physical or verbal violence, intimidation, and threats. Sexual harassment, bullying, or any actions that compromise the well-being of others will not be tolerated.

5.3. Food

Lunch is served at The Balance Café 11:30 AM to 12:30 PM Monday to Friday. For the group in Da Nang on Mondays lunch is served at the campus at the same time. We provide options for dietary needs such as celiac disease or lactose intolerance. Vegan options will be provided. Please notify us of your dietary needs in the arrival form before departure. While breakfast and dinner are not included in your stay, there are plenty of restaurants in Hoi An. If someone invites you to dinner, you should accept, as the best Vietnamese food is often served at home!

6 Living in Hoi An, Vietnam

6.1. Etiquette

For detailed information on the codes of conduct and how to behave in Vietnam without offending anyone, please read the memo called “Vietnamese etiquette – the do’s and the don’ts”. You will find this document on [your page](#).

6.2. Culture shock

To stay in a foreign country for a long time is usually a wonderful experience, but you should also expect to experience some difficulties during your stay. Many students go through phases of feeling very happy, followed by times when they suddenly feel sad and irritable. This phenomenon is common enough to have a name: culture shock. Culture shock is often divided into three phases:

1. **The tourist phase:** initially, everything new is exciting fascinating. You are likely to feel happy and energetic as you explore your surroundings.
2. **The sentencing/reaction phase:** as the novelty wears off, you may start to experience frustration, homesickness, and irritability. Everyday challenges, such as language barriers and cultural differences, may become more difficult to deal with.
3. **Reorientation phase:** you begin to develop routines and feel more comfortable navigating cultural differences. Eventually, you find a balance and start to appreciate your new life more fully.

Communication problems are bound to happen. Keep in mind that it is not the locals who should learn to speak better English, but we as guests who should ideally make an effort to learn to understand basic Vietnamese. The language barrier may be challenging and may lead to misunderstandings. Getting angry will only escalate the situation and may contribute to the Vietnamese “losing face”. This is a severe offense in Vietnam, so try your best to avoid it.

6.3. Activities in your free time

The cost of living is generally modest in Hoi An. You can enjoy a Vietnamese meal for around 3 EUR, or opt to spend a bit more at one of the many western-oriented restaurants in town. Taxis and electric cars are also affordable, and Grab (similar to Uber) is a popular and inexpensive option. Hoi An's ancient town is a UNESCO World Heritage site for a reason—explore it and help each other make the most out of this magnificent location. There are numerous restaurants, cafés, and shops to discover, in addition to the historic sites. The beach is waiting for you a scenic 20-minute bicycle ride from The Balance Café.

Kulturstudier will arrange events such as trips and other activities during the semester. These trips/activities will usually be announced at the Tuesday meetings. Kulturstudier does not charge to arrange group trips, but those who participate must share the cost of transport and accommodation. If you are interested in leisure activities such as Vietnamese cooking classes, sports activities, or volunteering, local staff can assist you with this. The Balance Café is available to students to use for studying and other activities such as movie screenings. Ask Mr. Vinh before arranging other activities.

You should try as much as you can to plan and carry out some of your own activities. This is the best way to become familiar with Vietnamese culture. For example, there is more to Hoi An than just the Old Town and the beach. If you go on overnight trips, you must notify the manager.

6.4. Road traffic safety

Traffic rules in Vietnam are quite different from what most of you are used to. There are many small accidents on the road every day, so please be alert. We ask you to be constantly careful when you are riding your bicycle, and to always wear a helmet. As stated in the terms and conditions of Kulturstudier, you are not allowed to drive a moped or motorcycle without a license valid in Vietnam. If our students disregard the law this affects our relationship with the police and authorities in Hoi An. They notice

it if Kulturstudier students are driving motorbikes and will stop you and check your license.

6.5. Illegal drug use

We do not accept that our students use illegal drugs. Students who use illegal drugs will be expelled and told to leave our premises. The use and possession of illegal drugs is a serious criminal offense in Vietnam, and the penalties are harsh for those caught in possession of illegal substances. The Vietnamese government is particularly strict with tourists, and some Westerners serve long sentences after being charged with possession of illegal substances. Someone may offer you cannabis or "happy balloons" (nitrous oxide), claiming that the police do not care. This is not true.

Kulturstudier has been present in Hoi An for a long time. Local people as well as the authorities pay particular attention to what we do. The police are very helpful towards our students and staff when we need their assistance, and maintaining our good reputation is important for our good relationship with local authorities. Breaking the law would be very damaging to Kulturstudier's work in Hoi An, and could threaten our very existence in Vietnam.

Please keep in mind that while you may be comfortable taking the risk, breaking the law will affect others besides yourself. Our local staff will suffer consequences for your actions.

6.6. Tipping and bargaining

Tipping is not strictly necessary, but it is common and much appreciated at restaurants and cafés. If you stay at a coffee shop for several hours, dine at a restaurant in a large and loud group, or are particularly satisfied with your service, it is considered good manners to leave a small tip. You can either round up the bill or tip around 10% of the total. Be aware that some fancier restaurants may include a 5% service charge in their bill.

6.7. Personal Safety

Hoi An is generally a safe location for foreigners, particularly during daytime. However, caution is advised, especially after 10 PM when most local places close and local people go home. Pickpockets are known to work in the old town and drive-by robbers sometimes target foreigners on bigger roads leading to the beach. We suggest you always keep your valuables on your person (e.g. neck or belt pockets). Avoid riding your bike with your wallet in the bicycle basket where they could be snatched. Bicycles get stolen occasionally, especially downtown at nighttime. At nighttime, one must take further safety precautions in Hoi An as in other places.

Muggings and sexual harassment, though rare, have been known to occur in recent years. You are strongly advised never to travel home alone at night, neither by foot nor by taxi. This is especially relevant when leaving bars and clubs after a night out. If you experience anything uncomfortable please contact the local staff as soon as possible and provide them with your specific location.

7 After your stay

7.1. Returning home: reverse culture shock

Having lived abroad for months, you may experience a reverse culture shock when returning home. After finally having become familiar with life in the foreign country, the way of living in your home country may suddenly seem strange. Everyday life might feel different, and you may find that you have acquired a new way of looking at things. You are not the same person you were when you left, and it may take some time to integrate your new experiences—and possibly a changed outlook—into life back home. Sharing your new experiences with family and friends who have not gone through the same journey can be challenging. They may not fully understand what you have been through, which can make it difficult to communicate your feelings.

Experiencing a different culture and adapting to a new way of life can greatly benefit you in your studies and life moving forward. Consider how you can keep parts of Vietnamese culture and everyday life with you as you transition back to your habits at home. It can also be useful to stay in touch with your fellow students to share experiences and discuss the challenges of living at home and abroad.

7.2. Honor your commitments

Please remember to fulfill your promises to local people who have helped you in your daily life or as research respondents in group work. It is easy to promise to send photographs or a copy of your group paper, but just as easy to forget to do so. Make sure to deliver what you have promised. It costs you little but can bring great joy to your Vietnamese contacts.

7.3. Evaluation

At the end of the semester, you will receive an extensive evaluation form where you can give us your feedback and help us improve. We greatly appreciate your responses.

We wish you the best of luck with your studies – get ready for
a life-changing semester!

Questions?

Contact us at:

mail@kulturstudier.no

+47 22 35 80 22