

## Welcome to Vietnam and Hoi An! Autumn semester 2020

### 1. Introduction and preparation

Welcome as a student with Kulturstudier! Once you have arrived in Hoi An you will stay in close contact with Kulturstudier staff. We will do our best to give you advice and help you to adapt to your new life in Vietnam. However, a good journey always begins at home. Here we will give you practical information that will help you prepare for your arrival in Hoi An, what we expect of you as a student and what you can expect from us. It is therefore important that you read this carefully and keep it with you after your arrival.

Kulturstudier's staff in Hoi An:

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You can email your seminar leader on vietnam@kulturstudier.org

Make sure you save these contact information of our staff members.

### **Seek Medical Advice**

We encourage all students travelling to Hoi An to consult a doctor or a vaccination clinic before travelling to Vietnam in order to get advice on which vaccines you should take prior to your travels. Remember that some of the vaccines must be taken 2-3 times in order to have an effect. You should therefore not consult the doctor just a few days prior to your departure!

You must also tell the medical advisor if you intend to visit any other countries.

If you have any medical needs or health conditions, please let us know in the arrival form so that we can support you better during the course. This includes mental health conditions such as bipolar disorder.

### **Packing advice and tips**

Make sure that you pack for the climate – Vietnam can get very hot. During your free time you are welcome to wear what you want, however during school you are expected to follow the dress code which is the same for men and women – cover shoulders and knees (and no crop tops). Make sure you pack enough clothes that fill these requirements. You will most likely use sandals, flip-flops or other light shoes during your time in Vietnam. You can get most pharmaceuticals you might need in Hoi An or in Da Nang. Bring any prescription drugs you might need from your doctor. Remember to bring enough sunscreen lotion – most

sunscreens in Asia has whitening agents in them - and make sure to check the expiry date if you do buy sunscreen in Vietnam. SPF 20 and above is to be recommended, especially from the middle of the semester. Unless you are very picky, you will find shampoo, conditioner, deodorant, soap, body lotion etc in Hoi An, and some eco products are also available. If you use contact lenses make sure you bring necessary equipment (lenses under 1.0 strength are not available in Hoi An). Paper and pens, stapler, tape etc you can get anywhere. You should bring a portable computer and the set books used in the course, and then you're all set for an exciting semester in Hoi An!

## **2. The Programme**

### **The First Week**

The information meeting will start at **14:30 on Sunday 27 September 2020**, at **The Balance Café**, 02 Tran Quang Khai Street. Then we will go together to the university campus (The College of Technology, Economics and Irrigation Central, at 14 Nguyen Tat Thanh street) to have the meeting. At the meeting, we will go through important practical information with regards to the houses, the study center, transportation, reading room, social activities, and cultural etiquette. There will be plenty of time for questions during and after the meeting. The next day, **Monday 28 September 2020 is the first day of lectures**, held at the university campus, starting at 8:30 am. A regular program of academic activities has been organised to cover the 10 weeks in Hoi An. An overview of this can be found in the study guide.

### **Lectures**

The academic week is from Monday to Friday. They normally start at 08:30 at the university campus, about 10 - 15 minutes by bicycles from the Balance Café.

### **Dress code at the university campus**

Although the Vietnamese are very polite, they do find it offensive when people wear casual or beach wear to the college, to meet officials or to visit public offices. As a foreign student it is important to behave respectfully and fit in with Vietnamese norms of dress. Therefore, we expect you to dress appropriately when you use the facilities at the college. This means that skirts, shorts or dresses should cover the **knees** and shirts, tops and blouses should cover the **shoulders** and not have a low neckline. This dress code applies to both male and female students and staff.

### **The beach**

The beach is about five kilometers outside of the town center and you can go there anytime you want to read and study in the ocean breeze and tranquil surroundings. It takes about 20 minutes by bicycle, passing through a beautiful landscape of rice fields. There are quiet restaurants there where you can study in peace.

### **Weekly plans**

In the beginning of the semester, you will be given a lecture and seminar plan for the whole

semester. Here you will find the dates, times, venues and important deadlines for the lectures and seminars. This 10 week plan has been developed in order to create predictability throughout the semester. However, during the semester, changes are bound to occur; lecturers may be sick and unforeseen things may occur. The Kulturstudier staff do not have the capacity to notify all students in person about changes. Changes in the academic schedule will be sent by email and important information about different activities will be posted on Facebook. You should check your email and the Facebook page every day, preferably before breakfast.

### **Getting the most from your studies**

An individual student's responsibility and effort to learn is the foundation for all university studies. Kulturstudier's academic staff are highly motivated to help you along the way with lectures and seminars, but successful study is still dependent on your own preparation for lectures and seminars. You are expected to attend both lectures and seminars, and to be well prepared for both. Look at the Study Guide for detailed advice.

### **Free time**

The time you are not studying is your own. However, if any of you are interested in leisure activities such as Vietnamese cooking classes, sports activities, or volunteering etc., the staff can assist you with this. Kulturstudier will also arrange events and specific occasions, such as trips and other activities during the semester. Separate committees can be formed to plan the events. These trips/activities will usually be announced at the Tuesday meetings. Kulturstudier do not charge to arrange the group trips, but those who participate must share the cost of transport and accommodation.

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. Trips and activities made on your own are equally successful and give you a good opportunity to have contact with Vietnamese people. 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 field manager* so that you are not reported missing by others.

## **3. Food and accommodation**

### **Meals**

Breakfast is served in The Balance Café from 7:00 till 8:30. On the weekends breakfast is from 8.30 to 10.00 am.

Lunch and dinner is not included in the stay. You have a kitchen in your house. And there are plenty of restaurants in Hoi An. Help each other to find your favorite places.

The Balance Café is also available to students to use for studying and other activities such as movie screenings. Ask Mr. Vinh before arranging other activities.

We appreciate your suggestions during the semester. At The Balance Café, you will find a “**suggestion box**” where you can put your suggestions and comments

### **Accommodation**

The accommodation Kulturstudier offers varies from semester to semester according to availability. It is not possible to give exact details on what you can expect. Rooms vary in size, furnishing and appeal. You may find that someone else had more luck than you when the houses and rooms were assigned. You may also find that construction is going on nearby or that the window in your room looks into your neighbor’s kitchen. Please be open for such possibilities, as they are part of life. If you break something you must pay for it – like everywhere else. There will be house rules from the landlord. But the main thing is that each student is considerate to roommates, and that you work out how you would like to live together.

The houses have two to five bedrooms, two students per bedroom, with a kitchen, shared toilet, and living room. We try to rent houses in close proximity to each other and to The Balance café, where the breakfast is served, and to the town center. The houses are nice, but do not expect a Scandinavian house. Electricity is expensive and air conditioning uses a lot of it. Electricity is 220 volts. Please be considerate of the environment and the high cost – do not waste electricity. Turn off the air conditioner when you leave your room or when the door is open.

Your bed comes with two sets of bed sheets. You are responsible for your own laundry, including towels and bed sheets. You clean your own room. It is possible to have your clothes washed at various laundry services in town.

Cleaners come once each week to clean communal areas. The kitchens have basic dishes and cutlery such as bowls, plates, cups, and a few pans. Students are responsible for buying drinking water tanks for their own houses. All foodstuffs must be kept in the refrigerator or in sealed containers; otherwise you will attract bugs and ants.

Mold (mugg) is a common problem in the tropics. Clothes, books, shoes etc. can easily get damaged if they are kept many days in closed compartments, such as in your suitcase, a drawer or in a closed cabinet. The way to prevent mold is by ventilation. Keep windows, drawers, closets and doors open as much as possible when you are at home. Keeping the fan on helps. With your laptop, it is recommended to run your laptops at least one time a day in order to stay away from humidity.

Bikes should always be locked and preferably taken inside the house at night. The gates to the house should be locked during night time.

There are many aspects of life that are regulated by the government. For example, every person is registered to a particular address. Thus, students are not allowed to sleep overnight

at another student house. In an emergency when you need to sleep somewhere else, you need to ask Mr. Vinh for permission as he is responsible to register your stay with the local authority. For the same reason, no one else is allowed to stay in the student houses. Parties can only be held on the weekend, must end at 10pm and have the permission of the neighbours. This is Vietnamese local law and not something that Kulturstudier have come up with by ourselves.

Please call **Mr. Duy** on 0914850880 when you need help with house issues.

#### **4. Living in Hoi An**

**You postal address is:** The Balance Café,  
02 Tran Quang Khai street,  
Thanh Nam village,  
Cam Chau, Quang Nam 560000. VIETNAM

The postal service in Vietnam is much slower and less reliable than what we are used to, and it may take up to 7 weeks for a small package to arrive! In sending a letter, if the envelope contains more than a letter, it should be sent as a registered letter.

#### **Cost of living**

The cost of living is modest in Hoi An. It is possible to buy a Vietnamese meal for 3 Euro, or to spend a few more at the many western oriented restaurants in town. A bike can be bought for around 120 Euro and will make travelling around the town very easy. Taxis are also cheap, and can be used in the evenings or for longer distances. “Grab” (like Uber) has become popular here with motorbike taxi, cheap and efficient.

#### **Tipping**

You will soon notice that many people are doing a remarkable job for us. As a sign of appreciation, tipping the staff now and then is good manners. The wages in Vietnam are very low and they truly deserve tip. Instead of waiting until the last week, it is a good rule of thumb to tip smaller amounts every two weeks.

#### **Bicycles and traffic**

It is very practical to buy a bicycle on one of the first days after arriving in Hoi An. This will give you the freedom to travel back and forth from the university, study center and beach as you please. It is a Kulturstudier tradition to donate the bike to a Vietnamese friend, organization, or an orphanage upon departure. This is, of course, voluntary. Don't buy the cheapest bikes, as they break down very quickly: choose more reliable brands like Martin or Asama.

As you will soon see, the traffic rules in Vietnam are quite different from what most of you are used to. We ask you to be constantly careful when you are riding your bicycle. There are many small accidents on the road every day, so please be alert. There are many road accidents

in Vietnam each year. Traffic accidents are in fact the second most common mortality cause in Vietnam. We thus encourage all students to buy and use a bicycle helmet whilst in Vietnam.

The road between Hoi An and Da Nang, and from Hoi An to My Son are especially dangerous and have accidents every day. You are therefore not allowed to travel on these roads by motorbike, bicycle or moto (motorbike with a driver). If you want to go to Da Nang, you must travel by local bus (which departs from Hoi An regularly) or by taxi.

### **Mopeds and motorcycles**

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 or staff disregards the law this affects our relation with the police and authorities in Hoi An (they do notice when Kulturstudier students are driving motorbikes and will stop you and check). Accidents are very common. One of our former students was seriously injured in a moped accident.

### **Drugs**

All kinds of narcotics are strictly forbidden in Vietnam, and the penalty is harsh if you get caught with any kind of drugs. Anyone who ever set foot in a Vietnamese prison knows that just to spend a week there would be unbearable. The Vietnamese government is particularly harsh on tourists if they are caught with drugs, and quite a few Westerners serve long sentences in Vietnamese prisons after being charged with possession of illegal substances. In spite of it being illegal and in spite of risking long time in jail if getting caught, smoking marijuana and hash is common among certain groups of people in Vietnam. Someone will probably offer you marijuana, and might tell you that the police don't care, or that you can bribe your way out of a situation if you get caught. This is simply not true; the local police do care, and they have a lot of knowledge about dealers and the general drug situation. Kulturstudier does not accept that our students use any kind of drugs. Kulturstudier has been present in Hoi An over a long period of time, and everyone, from the people on the street to the authorities, pay particular attention to what we do. The police are very helpful towards our students and us when we need their assistance, and maintaining our good reputation is important for our good relationship with the local authorities. Breaking the law in any way would be very damaging to Kulturstudier's business/work in Hoi An, and could threaten our very existence in Vietnam. We will not hesitate: students who use drugs will be expelled, and told to leave our premises.

### **Bank and post**

There are a number of places where you can withdraw money on your Visa card in Hoi An. The maximum withdrawal amount in the automatic teller machines is normally 3 million dong, but there are also ATMs where you can take out 5 million dong (around 180 Euro). 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 Visa card in your home country. You can also withdraw US dollars.

The post office lies on the corner of Ngo Gia Tu and Tran Hung Dao.

### **Internet and phone**

Most students are used to reliable, high-speed Internet access, and they are disappointed when they find that Internet is slow and frequently off-line in Hoi An. This tends to generate much frustration and complaints. We recommend that you bring a lap-top computer, but we cannot promise good internet access.

You are expected to buy a Vietnamese SIM-card to put in your cell phone so that people can reach you and that you can call others if you should need it. Pre-paid SIM cards are both cheap and easy to administrate. You can get 4G Internet in Hoi An and use your phone as WIFI for your computer. Currently you get 6-8 gigabyte data for 10 USD per month.

### **Personal Safety**

Hoi An is considered relatively safe for foreigners, particularly during daytime. However, some precautions are advised. 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 in a safe place on your person (e.g. neck or belt pockets). Never ride with your bags or wallets in the bicycle baskets where they could be snatched. This has happened to our students in the past. Bicycles get stolen occasionally, especially downtown. Hoi An at nighttime can be more dangerous. Mugging and sexual harassment, though rare, have been known to occur in recent years. You are therefore strongly advised never to go home alone at night, neither by foot nor by taxi. This is especially relevant when leaving bars and clubs after a night out. Always leave such places in groups and make sure no one is left behind. Some of the taxi drivers are predators on drunken tourists.

### **Staying well**

It is inevitable that some people will become sick during the semester. You are most likely to be affected by an upset stomach sometime during your stay. There is no sure formula for avoiding this, but a good start is to wash your hands often and to be careful with food that is not cooked (e.g. raw vegetables, lettuce etc). However, do not let anxiety prevent you from trying out new food. As you will soon find out, Vietnam has a splendid culinary tradition! If someone invites you to dinner, you should accept, because the best Vietnamese food is often served at home.

In a tropical climate, it is very important to drink enough water, at least 3 litres a day. This may seem like a lot in the beginning but you will soon get used to it. Remember that coffee, tea and beer do not have the same effect as water, but rather drain your body of fluids.

Different fresh juices are also recommended for you in hot days, and ice severed in Hoi An is generally safe. If you feel weak and unwell, you may have not had enough water to drink. Tap water is not safe to drink, so you should buy bottled water. At the pharmacy, you can buy electrolyte powder, which is similar to what you get in sport drinks. This is mixed with water and is useful to drink if you have diarrhea.

You should pay special attention to open cuts on the skin. Make sure you clean the open cut every day with a disinfectant and that you cover it with band aids. It is much easier to get an infection here than in colder climates. Also, remember to use a mosquito repellent at night. Sunburn is a big health problem since students often underestimate the intensity of tropical sun. Always use sunscreen to protect your skin from the sun. Sunscreen with SPF 15-30 is highly recommended, and if you want to have a good quality sunscreen or have a special brand, bring it along. If you spend too long in the strong sun you can get sun stroke which makes you feel ill and tired. You must then stay out of the sun, rest and drink plenty of water in order to recover.

There are many stray dogs in Hoi An. Most often they are friendly, but if a dog bites you, you must consult a doctor and get rabies vaccine.

### **Look after your roommates and housemates**

Roommates and housemates have a special responsibility to look out for one another when someone is sick. Make sure the person who is ill has sufficient food, drinks and medicine. And follow them to the doctor's office or to the hospital. If someone is so sick that he/she cannot attend classes, the seminar leader should be informed. It is also a good idea to notify the field manager. Worried relatives often contact the insurance company and Kulturstudier in Oslo, who can only answer questions if you have notified us and we are aware of the illness.

### **Medical Services in Hoi An and Da Nang**

**Pacific Hospital** has some English speaking doctors and staff and can provide good hospital service for small injuries and illnesses. Pacific Hospital can be contacted on (+84) 235 3921656

There are a few doctors in Hoi An who speak English. We recommend **Dr. Ho Huu Phuoc** who, amongst other things, is a specialist in tropical medicine. He works at the hospital in Hoi An. His visiting hours at his office in 67 Hai Thuong Lan Ong are:

*Weekdays 11:00am--12:30pm and 17:00pm--19:30pm*

*Weekends 07:00am--12:30pm*

Dr. Phuoc can also be contacted for consultation on his mobile phone **+84-903-5830-13**. If someone needs medical attention outside these hours, Dr. Phuoc will also make house-calls, for example if someone gets sick during the night.

**Family Medical Practice** is an international medical practice **in Da Nang**. Here you can meet **Dr. Ross Bernays** from Australia and **Dr Jocelyn P. Nava** from the Philippines. The practice can be found at:

50-52 Nguyen Van Linh Street, Nam Duong Ward, Hai Chau District, Danang.

24-hour Tel: 0236-3582-699\700

24-hour emergency Tel: +84-913-917-303

email: danang@vietnammedicalpractice.com

www.vietnammedicalpractice.com



## **5. Vietnam: experiencing a new culture**

### **Conduct and custom in Hoi An**

Please remember to fulfill your promises to the local people who have helped you in your daily lives or in group work as research respondents. It is easy to promise to email, send photographs, or send a copy of your paper -- however it often happens that back in your country you get busy in everyday life and Vietnam seems far away. Do deliver what you have promised, it is just a small step for you but can be of great importance/joy for your Vietnamese contacts.

Efficiency is different in Vietnam than at home, so patience is sometimes a virtue! Communication problems are also bound to happen. You should try to keep in mind that it is not the locals who should speak better English, but we who should speak better Vietnamese. The language barrier can be very challenging and frustrating and may lead to misunderstandings. Getting angry will most likely further escalate the problem and may contribute to the Vietnamese “losing face”. This is a severe offence in Vietnam so try to avoid it. You will notice that it sometimes is more difficult to be patient and sensitive to things that takes time or are difficult to understand. This is often called a *culture shock*.

### **Culture Shock**

To stay in a foreign country for a long time is usually a wonderful experience, but you should expect some difficulties during your stay. Some people go through phases where they feel very positive and happy and then other times when they are low and irritated. This phenomenon is common enough to have its own term, *culture shock*. It may be a good idea to share these experiences with your co-students, so you can help each other to see your reactions in a bigger perspective. Culture shock is often divided into 3 phases:

**Tourist phase** - you have just arrived in the country and everything is new and exciting.

**Sentencing phase - the reaction phase** - What is new and different is not that exciting anymore, so you are more vulnerable to the frustration of the things you are not accustomed to - the language is difficult, there are differences in behavior and ways of thinking, customs seem unusual. You may begin to feel tired and sad and less sociable and to be homesick. This may lead to you being less patient and more irritable. **Reorientation phase** - you start to get used to and accept cultural differences. Instead of criticizing, it is easier to appreciate the differences and understand how to navigate in the new society.

### **Reverse culture shock**

It sounds strange, but after having lived overseas for several months, one can often experience a reverse culture shock when returning home. You had finally become familiar with life in the

host country, and then when back home, everyday life feels different. Things have changed, or you have been given a new way to look at things. You may feel that you have difficulties fitting in. It is often hard to share your new experiences with family and friends as they do not really understand what you have been through. It can be useful to keep in contact with the other students so you can share experiences and discuss the personal challenges of living at home and abroad.

*For more tips on how to behave in Vietnam, please read the memo called “Vietnamese etiquette – the do’s and the don’ts” found on your personal Kulturstudier-page.*

## **6. Communication with Kulturstudier**

We appreciate suggestions from students during the semester. It is important for us to make sure that suggestions and grievances are communicated to us while there is still time to make changes. This includes issues with the academic program, housing, food, welfare and other aspects of the program. After many years of experience there is usually a reason for the way we do things. And if you ask us we can give you the reason. There is always room for improvement and reminders, so please voice your suggestions.

### **Emails and facebook**

Check your email and the Facebook group frequently in order to be up to date about academic programme and free time activities. The seminar leaders Ha My and Binh have each their own email address, but usually you should use the email account that they both read ([vietnam@kulturstudier.org](mailto:vietnam@kulturstudier.org)) so that both of them get the message.

### **Compulsory Tuesday meetings**

Every Tuesday right after the lecture, all students and staff gather for a weekly meeting. The purpose is to share information and to discuss problems and opportunities. These meetings are compulsory. If you for some reason cannot attend, you are responsible for obtaining the information from fellow students.

### **Talk to us**

If you need help with something it is important that you let us know. Do not take for granted that your suffering is obvious and visible to everyone. Use your voice and contact us.

### **Student representatives**

During the first or second week, we will ask the students to elect their representatives. The representatives typically meet with members of staff every second week. It is their job to be an intermediary between students and staff, to help make sure that staff know what the problems are and together with students can work together to solve them. For specific occasions, trips, happenings, etc, separate committees can be formed. These will be responsible for planning and carrying out the activities.

### **Suggestion box**

At the study center you will find a suggestion box where you can put your suggestions and comments.

### **Final evaluation form**

At the end of the semester you will receive an extensive evaluation form where you are expected to give us your feedback and help us improve.

### **Complaints**

If you have tried the above, and feel that you are not satisfied with the response, 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. If you decide your complaint is not treated properly by Kulturstudier, and you want to further your complaint beyond Kulturstudier, you can contact the university.

### **Ethical conduct**

In Kulturstudier there is no tolerance for harassment or bullying. We also expect everyone to avoid using swearing and offensive language in their communication with each other. Harassment also includes sexual harassment from staff towards students. If you experience sexual harassment from Kulturstudier staff or lecturers you should report to [alarm@kulturstudier.org](mailto:alarm@kulturstudier.org), which will be treated confidentially. Staff and teachers are informed that sexual attention towards students is strictly prohibited. We expect staff and students to socialize together, but drunkenness or drugs is not accepted. Neither is drunk driving.

## **7. A final thought - be an explorer!**

This is Kulturstudier's twenty-ninth semester in Hoi An. Just as the students of the past, you are to a great extent, participating in shaping how the locals in Hoi An perceive us. Thus it is important that you behave respectfully to their culture and ways of doing things. It is easy to just stay close to the student group, or in a backpacker bubble. However, if you are to experience Vietnam, you must be adventurous and actively seek to make friends with the locals. With a little effort and creativity you can find local friends and explore local culture on its own terms, taking care to respect local norms and regulations.

### **Help yourself**

Kulturstudier is an organization run by academicians. And we see the academic educational part of your stay as our main task. We view our students as responsible adults and believe that each student should take responsibility to create a good life for him or herself in Hoi An. Kulturstudier has no travel guides who watch over you and help solve every small problem you may encounter in Vietnam. You learn more about Vietnam if you do things yourself – independently. This means that, for example, if your luggage does not arrive with you, you must contact the airline and sort out the problem for yourself; if you need to see a doctor, you

will go to the recommended doctor by yourself or with a roommate; if you want to go on a weekend trip, you must find out when the bus is leaving; if you have problems with your visa, you must contact the local immigration authority. In summary, we expect you to act the same way you would have acted if you were travelling on your own.

This being said, our local representatives in Hoi An represent a safety net for you. If you are having problems or something serious occurs, you can ask us for help.

**“What you get out of it depends on what you put into it.”**

Studying with Kulturstudier is, at its core, much the same as studying at any university; what you get out of it depends on what you put into it. This goes for the academic work as well as recreation. You can fail your studies and learn nothing – or you can be academically inspired and find out what you want to do for the rest of your life. Our students are diverse in their backgrounds and priorities and, wonderfully, tend to find friendship and respect amongst each other. We look forward to seeing you!