

What a week its been!! I survived my first week in Hanoi and first week at work. After a delayed flight out of Sydney Monday morning, I arrived in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) at 5pm, with just under an hour to process through customs to get [Vietnam visa on arrival](#), collect baggage and transfer to a domestic flight to Hanoi. With the help of airport staff, I was able to get to my next flight's boarding call in record speed. How so?

Airport staff whisked me through the airport in a wheelchair. Even though I was in Ho Chi Minh for a short time, I felt the humidity and heat (32°C) outside when I transferred from international to domestic terminals. I arrived in Hanoi around 8:30pm local time, and was met by the Projects Abroad staff driver, who safely delivered me to my new home in Hanoi.

My first impressions of Hanoi - I was first struck by the Vietnamese driving and motorcycle habits. They drive on opposite sides of roads, u turns are legal and are done with incoming traffic coming up the back of you, many text or talk on phone whether driving or motorcycling and honk their horns continuously. It seemed chaotic and crazy at first, but now starting to consider this normal.

Hanoi is a motorcycle city, there are more motorcycles on roads than cars. It is a prime mode of transport and you can bypass traffic easily on a motorbike. It is quicker to get to places in Hanoi on a motorcycle. And yes, I rode on the back of one in my local area on my second day. It was fun and safe.

Crossing roads in Hanoi seemed scary at first, but you have to be quick to cross. There is not a moment where the road is safe to cross, you just have to cross and the incoming traffic will go around you. They don't stop, instead they weave around you when you cross road.

Our volunteers got a crash course in cultivating their physical and psychological well-being at our weekly social event. This past Friday we gathered in the Hanoi Botanical Gardens to unwind from the week and learn how to relax. Our teacher, Đặng Văn Hà, taught us the basics of the ancient art of tai chi (TIE-chee), which uses gentle flowing movements to reduce stress and improve health. Tai chi is a noncompetitive, self-paced system of gentle physical exercise and stretching. To do tai chi, you perform a series of postures or movements in a slow, graceful manner. Each posture flows into the next without pause, ensuring that your body is in constant motion. There are many forms of tai chi, but all forms include rhythmic patterns of movement that are coordinated with breathing to help you achieve a sense of inner calm.

What made the event even more spectacular was the setting. A hidden oasis in the middle of the big city, the botanical gardens or what many locals call the "the park with hundreds of trees" is a place for locals and travelers to escape the hustle and bustle of the city. A temple, two ponds, a small island, sculpture garden and minuscule zoo, which includes monkeys and peacocks, can be found throughout the 50 acres of lush landscaping.

One nice thing about living in Hanoi is that when you need to buy dishes for a new apartment, there's a 600-year-old pottery village right next door.

Bát Tràng village (the word Bát means "bowl"; Tràng means "workshop" or "guild") lies on the bank of the Red River, about 13 km. from Hanoi. To get there, you cross the Chương Dương bridge out of central Hanoi, turn right onto a dilapidated, heavily pot-holed road, and try to avoid being hit by the buses, trucks, and motorcycles that jockey to overtake each other in both directions. Before long, the city's urban streetscape gives way to a surreal blend of building settlements, old temples, and dime-sized rice fields that characterizes so much of suburban Hanoi. Bát Tràng lies less than 30 minutes away.

The historical record places Bát Tràng's origin around the 14th or 15th century, though folklore places it much earlier. An abundance of white clay made the area suitable for ceramics production. There are various theories as to how the village developed its craft; quite likely it was, like so many Vietnamese traditions, imported from China, then given a local twist. At its height, Bát Tràng pieces were prized by the Imperial Court, and shipped as far as the Middle East. Centuries of pottery production eventually exhausted the local clay supplies, but white kaolin clay still gets shipped in from nearby provinces, helping the village maintain an annual export trade worth around US\$40 million.

Source: [Get Vietnam Visa](#)