



What About Vietnam - Series 1 - 5

What are the best forms of accommodation in Vietnam?

What is a Homestay? How long should I stay in each place?

When looking for accommodation in Vietnam I want to offer you some rules to follow - to ensure you get the type of stay, and value for money you want:-

- Always check the location and proximity to city centre or places of interest - Hanoi best to be near Hoem Kiem lake in the old quarter - Hoem Kiem lake
- Hoi An - walk to old town or at the beach.
- Either is ideal but if it says 2-4 kms away, that's too far. Less than 1 km is ideal.
- In Hoi An - I have been known to move from a hotel because it was falsely described as close to a particular area I wanted to be. Being stuck out somewhere too far away can be annoying and when you know you don't have to pay that much more to be closer why put up with it.
- Always check size of room. 15- 20sqm is very small. For a middle size room for 2 people start at 25sqm. I never go for less and possibly I'll go for 30 for a long stay.
- Check it has a window. Some people may find no window claustrophobic. I know I would.
- Check any mention in reviews about construction noise and cleanliness. This is very important. Roosters crowing and being close to city centre noise often can't be avoided, but cleanliness can.
- Check if it has a 24 hour manned front desk. Or if not make sure you have communicated with someone who can let you in that speaks English. I have had a flight delayed and cab couldn't find location and no one understood where the new bungalow was, I was trying to find. It took the driver getting his mate to drive to us who spoke English to get the info and then him to wake up the guy sleeping on the floor, to let me in. When you are tired and just want to get settled, it's the last thing you want to happen.

One thing about Vietnam. It has lots of tiny streets, alleys, battle axe blocks and some roads are not accessible by car, so be sure,..... prior to arrival, you save as a screen shot the map location and full address on your phone. Based on the fact

you may not have a sim card so cannot access Google maps, to get details to find your hotel.

You may also want to think about the level of stay you want.... prior to booking. Let me explain values and gradings so you know what I mean.

Let's talk 2 star - These are most likely best suited to budget travellers or long stay persons, as their facilities certainly in cities, may not be at a standard acceptable in western societies. However, in outer regions you can get great value. Mostly will be homestays and it will feel like you are part of the family. You can only go by the reviews in these cases.

3 star - These are the ones which are hard to make a general statement about. I have had the fortune to stay at some amazing places that are classified as 3 star because their facilities fall short of the grading system. So don't dismiss them so easily as I stayed in a very cute place in Can To, that was absolutely divine with a rustic charm you just wouldn't get anywhere else. Furniture made by local woodcarvers,room had an outdoor shower, beautiful beds with mosquito nets draped over them.... snuggled into a hidden location close to the Mekong river, but it only had one thing on the menu.

A dog would walk me to my door each night after a few beers. It was a very authentic experience and that's where Vietnam is great, as you can mix up your stay with these kinds of accommodation options. You can make your next stop a 5 star resort if you like.

4 star - Hotels, are very popular in Vietnam. There was a shortage about 5 years ago, but now this gap is well and truly filled with very nice hotels starting from around \$40USD. From anywhere up from there, the only difference you are paying for is location. You will pay more in this category the closer you get to the city centre. If you are prepared to take taxis to everywhere, then you will get great value, but you may make up the cost in taxis, so give it some thought.

In Hanoi especially, in the Old Quarter you can get some great 4 star Boutique hotels with rooftop pools. With the only thing being it may be noisy with street noise, so just ask for a room at a higher level. It's worth it, to be in a nice place and close to the action and have access to boutiques, and restaurants in easy walking distance. Plus the lake is divine at sunrise and sunset. On weekends they shut off the streets to traffic and people dance and walk around it as the sun goes down.

5 star - In this category, you will get all your famous brands, massive land areas, mostly out of town, mostly close to beaches unless you are in district 1 of HCMC, where they go UP instead of out. Typically the prices are conform to their brand. You can however find a few brands that may not be well known to you, these may be owned by Chinese or Koreans and therefore they may typically be the predominant guests. Which is fine, it will just influence the food and style of accommodation to suit.

Homestays - Is a unique kind of accommodation, that began with humble kinds of expectation where a family had extra rooms they would rent out and bring the guests into their family for meals and help them with their travel plans. These still exist, but they are dying out sadly. They tend to exist in more remote regions like the Hills

districts in the north and places like Sapa. Due to the fact you get what you get, as in don't winge about the bed bugs, they are cheap.

Guest houses - these have kind of morphed into a version of a **Homestay** and a Homestay has kind of morphed into a boutique kind of Pension or bed and breakfast.....The kind of place run by a family. Often they are just like over sized homes with lots of bedrooms - all upstairs. And more stairs.... Some now have pools as owners have seen that a pool draws customers.

So before you know it, you might think you are booking a homestay, when in reality its a small hotel, and there is no family cooking meals at all, they have a kitchen and you can help yourself to teas and snacks.

Read the fine print with your bookings to make sure you aren't disappointed. Or check with your travel agent.

Vietnam has never really cottoned onto the Villa concept like places like Bali or Cancun for example. They do exist, but to me the ones I have seen don't quite hit the mark as they don't tend to be self-contained. Just big rooms opening out to pools or lush grounds or paddies. But knowing Vietnam that could change moving forward, especially as we travel post the Covid-19 Pandemic. Accommodations that offer self-isolation of a kind as in self-contained may be the preferred small group or family stay.

Lets stay tuned for that one.

Airbnb - Once Airbnb got a foothold in Vietnam. It went crazy. There are lots, especially in the private room category. They offer very good rates for long stays. These are your best bet if you want some kind of self-contained option with some cooking and refrigeration options to eat in.

Not many will offer car parking and there is a reason for that, as they don't expect you to drive yourself in a motor vehicle. If you do decide to hire a bike they will have a safe parking area for bikes.

Your host, or hotel staff can arrange almost anything.

I was staying in a hotel one time in Hoi An. I was bringing the girls I sponsor into Hoi An for a visit, and a swim. The hotel agreed on the basis they had swimmers. To my dismay, both girls had never been in a swimming pool nor did they own a swimming costume. So I asked one of the girls at the fornt desk to help. The next thing I knew I was on the back of a girls bike and we were off to a shop to buy the swimmers based on the fact I would guess their sizes before they arrived.

The story has a happy ending it that the swimmers fit perfectly, but the girls were terrified of the pool, so we sat in the baby pool end and had a lovely day together.

So, dont; be afraid to ask. In Vietnam, anything is possible.

Finally a couple of things, that go as a pretty standard practice.

- Handing in your passport at reception. Usually, they will keep it as by law they need to. Don't worry you will get it back when you pay the bill, some take a photocopy and give it back to you straight away.
- Most places include breakfast
- Not all hotels have lifts - so if you have lots of luggage and you are a big group, you may want to check before booking.
- Camping and camp sites are not common, you can do it mostly in National Parks, but don't expect to check into a Caravan park or log cabin stye of place with all mod cons and plug in electricity. NOT available I am afraid.

- You might like to check out a guy who does a lot of this style of accommodation as he gets about on a bike, called The Rusty Compass. I'll put his contact link in my notes. He's got the best tips and maps to help you if this is your gig.

So as your trip planning starts to crystallize the biggest question you are going to have to ask yourself is what will your length of stay be in total.

I have seen people say, its only a small place so we only need a night here and a night there, but by the time they have flown from where ever...into Hanoi or HCMC, settled in to their hotel, their one night has not afforded them any time to explore the region and truly immerse yourself in the local culture.

It can really taint your view of a location by being tired, or rushed or exhausted from heat due to trying to fit too much into a day.

Please if you do one thing from my podcast, think carefully about how long in each place, as it will impact your enjoyment factors. If I may, I'd like to share with you some recommendations for main city locations.

Hanoi - min 2- 3 nights which includes the night you arrive, and dependant on if you want to take a day tour to Ninh Binh, which is 4 hours from Hanoi. Something you will want to do.

HCMC - 1 - 2 nights -

Halong Bay - 1.5 overnight stay

Hoi An - 5 nights - as a place to relax and so much to do and best done at a relaxed pace

Danang - 1 night plus

Nha Trang - 2 nights

Dalat - 3 nights

Sapa - 2 nights min

Hue - 1 night

Phu Quoc - 2-3 nights relaxation. Flop and drop.

Please use this as a guide, it really all depends on how you are going to get around, train plane or automobile??

Activities take time, they eat up days...the heat adds another level of exhaustion and you can fund yourself in bed early after a morning climbing Marble mountain or visiting the Golden hand at Ba Na hills.

Time flies, trust me..

My last piece of advice here is:- afford yourself more time, in less places. And come back another time.

So in wrapping up this session, covering _ booking accommodation. There are of course many ways to book, online, via travel agent or direct. With the advent of Online TA's like agoda etc, booking.com etc, sometime going direct is not the cheapest option, but sometimes you can get extra value built into your price so always check both options. I know one hotel in HCMC that is now my stock standard favourite include airport pick up free if you stay 2 nights. You don't get that through Booking.com and its same price. So there are deals to be had.

Please check with the Episode notes for any links mentioned and feel free to contact me anytime.

I look forward to paving the way for you to have a magical time in Vietnam as I share more trip planning tips over future episodes ...

...stay tuned for more to come in the super 6 series, What about Vietnam – traveller Insights

Thanks for listening.