

IAESTE Report – Teaching English in Vietnam



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Employer: Marie Curie International Preschool

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After completing my Bachelor in Biology at ETH Zürich, I was looking for an internship to acquire some practical skills and take a break from my studies. Therefore I sent my application to IAESTE Switzerland, my highest priority being teaching English at a preschool in Thái Nguyên City, Vietnam. Only as I got accepted for the job I realised what I had signed up for; I was happy, but a bit nervous since I had never taught any subject to children. Additionally I had never been to an Asian country, I expected many new experiences to come, which was exciting and scary at the same time.

All my concerns regarding this internship turned out to be unnecessary, the whole process was well accompanied by both IAESTE Switzerland and Vietnam as well as my employer. I was picked up at the airport by my mentor and Vietnamese English teacher and brought to my new home. For 3 months I would live together with my employer and her family (husband and two daughters age 3 and 9), we would play, cook and eat together.

A typical working day at the preschool started with playing with the children. 9:30-10:30 am two English classes of 30 minutes were scheduled, then followed an early lunch for the kids. Often I would stay after class to help with the task that feeding them is. Around 11:30 lunch for all the teachers was served in the school's kitchen, while it was nap time for the kids. In the afternoon, after the children had been woken up and had a little snack, another two classes from 3 to 4 pm were taught. Those last ones sometimes were taken over by my mentor or my Swiss colleague, which meant a free afternoon for me. Some additional time had to be invested into preparing the lessons, still the workload wasn't heavy and the job well paid.

My free time during the week I would spend either working out and/or driving around with the bicycle to explore the city. My employer had lent me her bike, which was unusual since the main mode of transport there is motorbike. I only mention this so explicitly, because it was really necessary for me to get a bit of physical activity. My daily routine was not physically demanding and the huge portions of delicious food had to be made up for too.

Thái Nguyên City, lying about 60 km north of Vietnam's capital Hanoi, is compared to latter small, quiet and only offering little cultural activities. On the other side Thái Nguyên University of Technology, many English Centres and IAESTE Vietnam is located there. Every Wednesday a welcome and goodbye party was organised by IAESTE; time to socialise with other trainees and the Vietnamese volunteers while drinking freshly-brewed beer – called bia hoi – and cracking up boiled peanuts.

During the week I would choose a destination and make a plan for the weekend, sometimes traveling with IAESTE (as they organised fun trips and activities), sometimes with my employer, other trainees or on my own. Those weekends I travelled by myself were a bit more challenging in terms of organisation and communication with Vietnamese people, but nevertheless rewarding as I always reached my destination. Happily I can say that I've never felt unsafe, although I am a young, white and "Vietnamese-sized" woman.

Vietnam offers a lot of exciting destinations with beautiful landscapes, paradise for a biologist and anyone enjoying spending time in nature.

From this technical experience I have learnt – besides teaching English to children aged 2-6 years – a bit of Vietnamese, to appreciate the people and the rich culture of Vietnam and many social skills. One has to know that I am quite introverted, but I have learnt to open up and make the first step, only then one makes life-changing experiences like this.



Trips around Vietnam with other teachers of the preschool and trainees of IAESTE Vietnam.



Different impressions of Vietnam: gray streets of Thái Nguyên City, green landscapes of Cat Ba island and most colourful temples.