

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER

For Projects Abroad Vietnam 



WHAT'S INSIDE?

- 01 Medical volunteer story
- 02 Host family story
- 03 November Calendar

Follow us on:

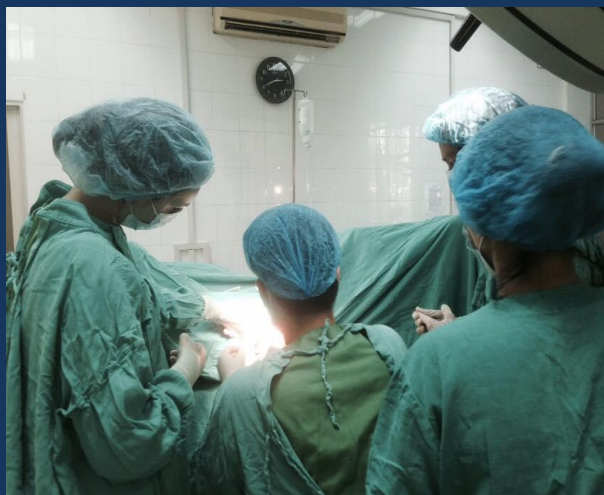


www.projects-abroad.net

ProjectsAbroad

VOLUNTEER STORY

Three weeks of volunteering in Surgery department



Today was my last day as a volunteer in the surgery department at the National Hospital of Traditional Medicine. Three weeks ago I knew almost nothing about proctology, hemorrhoids, or even what it was like to spend a day in the life of a surgeon. Luckily for me the head of the surgery department, Dr. Cuong, helped me gain knowledge and experience in all three categories. While proctology wouldn't be my first (or even second, third, or fourth) choice for a medical field, I ended up finding it to be much more interesting than I had expected. From the first day I began in surgery Dr. Cuong, as well as many of the other doctors, welcomed me into their department with open arms (like most Vietnamese do).

A regular morning consisted of following the nurses around while they gave injections, infusions, and a variety of herbal medicines. Most days, there were also sixth year medical students who spoke English really well and we're always looking to improve by speaking with a native English speaker. Most of the time this worked out really well for me as I could ask them questions about the patients and different methods of treatment. During the lunch hour, Dr. Cuong would take Sophie, Aldo and I to lunch at a local street vendor around the corner from the hospital. The food there was slightly different each day; consisting mainly of a large plate of rice topped with your choice of meat, veggies, and miscellaneous other (sometimes unidentifiable) options. The woman who ran the shop was a sweet old woman who I believe made all the food.

After lunch we headed to a small coffee shop where we had Vietnamese coffee (the most delicious coffee I have ever had in my life), helped Dr. Cuong practice his English, and pestered him with an array of questions about Vietnamese culture and way of life. Most days we had enough time to head back to his office after coffee- where I could have a quick nap on a makeshift bed made out of four chairs before we had to head into surgery. Following the lunch/ coffee/ nap break we headed into surgery where Dr. Cuong and his surgical staff usually performed about 3-6 operations a day. A majority of the surgeries were for haemorrhoids, anal fissures, or anal fistulas- as this surgical department specializes in proctology. The first week I only observed during the surgeries, but the second and third week I was given the opportunity to scrub in and assist. In my final days, to my surprise, I was even allowed to cauterize and cut on my own under the supervision and direction of the surgeon and I'm happy to say that all of the patients survived. Working in this department was definitely the highlight of my experience, despite my uncertainty about initially volunteering in a surgical department. I am so lucky to have had such a wonderful opportunity with such welcoming and accommodating staff!

(continued on next page)

VOLUNTEER STORY

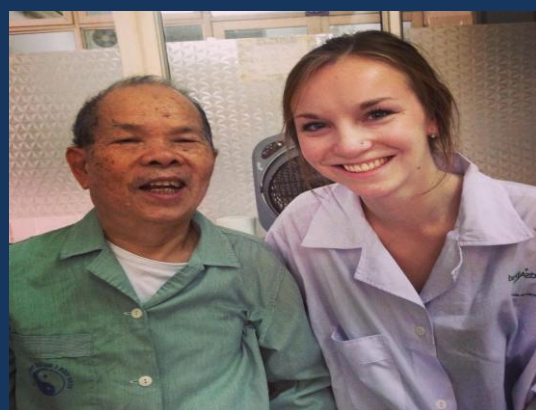
Three weeks of volunteering in Surgery department

(continued from page 2)



In addition to learning about proctology, I also learned a lot about the cultural differences between Vietnamese and American people, especially in regards to their views of medicine. For example, in the US much fewer surgeries are needed for haemorrhoids because people tend to seek treatment much earlier before the haemorrhoids have reached grade three or four. This is not the case in Vietnam, where some patients waited as long as 27 years to seek treatment for their disease. Dr. Cuong believed, and I agree, that this is most likely a result of lacking public education about preventative healthcare and a fear of seeking medical care (either because they will have to take time off work or they worry that it will be painful). Another very interesting cultural difference that I noticed was the involvement of family and friends in the medical treatment process. A majority of patients (especially in the acupuncture department) had a family member or friend who stayed with them and played a role similar to that of a nurse in the US. It was often difficult to tell which patients were related to which visitors because they seemed to all care for each other as if they were family. In this way, the hospital had the feeling of being much homier than what I've seen in hospitals back home. Additionally, the patients all seemed much more open and comfortable with their bodies than people are back home. Doctors would insert catheters, change anal bandaging, or give anal exams openly in a room full of twenty other patients, visitors, and students. It didn't seem to bother the patient, the doctor, or anyone else in the room. There are so many other interesting contrasts between the cultures, but I will save sharing those for another time! Chao, tam biet!

By Nicole Taplin, Medical volunteer, USA



VOLUNTEER STORY

My host family in Vietnam



Yes, everything has really exceeded all expectations, and everyone I've met is really nice.

When I first arrived at the family's home we ate a little, and then the children left the family for English lessons. Everyone in the family is eager to learn. Two children of aged 13 and 9 years old are super talented and this makes the communication with the host mother much easier. So after a little nap and a shower I was ready for a birthday party! It was the children's birthday with a whole bunch of children and parents joining!

A little about the family I am living with: there is the mother, the father, a 13-year-old son and a 9-year-old daughter. They are incredibly cute! Tin Tin, the son, is a really typical 13 year old child: he jokes around with his mother about her poor English; he sings and howls sounds. Ling Ling is also super cute! She likes to arrange and fix things, giggles and laughs all the time. The family is very concerned about their children's education, so the children takes piano, singing, English, literature and art lessons outside of school hours. The host mother works for the police ministry and the father for a railway company. I must not forget the maid who works for the family a few hours each day!

How do I live? It is a typical Vietnamese house I think: narrow and is four storeys high. I live in an alcove above the kitchen and living room. It's really open, and covered with little of substance. My room has no bed but a mattress on the floor. The living room of the house is also where the family parks the scooter and moped.

The street where the house is located was a bit scary at first, but not anymore. It is narrow and dark, but actually quite cosy.

(continued on next page)

VOLUNTEER STORY

My host family in Vietnam

(continued from page 4)

Right by my house there is a small lake with a path around it. Along the entire way there are small cafes; which suit me perfectly. I've even ran around the lake, who would have believed it?!?

All in all it comes out as a beautiful living condition, it is very different to what I'm used to, of course, but certainly is good.

The breakfast today consisted of self-made spring rolls. After breakfast I took with me a few hundred thousand dong and went shopping in the old town with Lan (my host mum). She is as fond of shoes as I am, so we were a good match there. There were no shoes for me this time, but I needed a new handbag, so we headed to a market which was absolutely fantastic! I'll probably go back and get some more. Then we walked around the old town. The streets are jumbled with people and traffic, but the atmosphere is lovely! I even dared to cross the street several times now.

It rained quite a lot in the morning, so we stopped to drink some tea and wait for it to stop. A very good day it has been indeed.

By Ida Hansen, Care volunteer, Norway



“...All in all it comes out as a beautiful living condition, it is very different to what I'm used to, of course, but certainly is good.”

WHAT'S ON: NOVEMBER CALENDAR

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
					1	2
3 Deven and Kimberly arrives	4	5	6 Care Workshop	7	8	9 Keiralee arrives Run for Chil- dren event
10	11	12	13	14	15 Tayla, Alana and Lauren arrive Monthly com- munity event	16 Margot arrives
17	18	19 Medical Workshop	20 Cyril arrives Vietnamese Teacher's Day	21	22	23 Noémie and Marinette arrive
24	25	26	27 Social Dinner: street barbeque	28	29	30

November 6 –Care Workshop: Understanding and Working with intellectual-disabled children.

Time: 4.30PM

Venue: to be informed later

November 9 –Run for Children event: Join this annual event to help raise fund to support sick and poor children

Time: 8AM – 10AM

Meet at: Reunification Park - Hanoi

November 15 – Monthly Community event: Renovating at Phuc Tue center for children with disabilities. Stay tuned for more information!

November 19 – Medical Workshop

November 27 – Social Dinner: Street barbeque. Discover this interesting way of having barbeque while socializing with other fellow volunteers!