

# Exchange in Vietnam SS24

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## 1 Preparation

Applying for my exchange semester at Foreign Trade University (FTU) in Hanoi, Vietnam was an easy and straightforward process. The university provided clear instructions for the application and the necessary documents. I had to fill out the application form for the academic year 2023-2024, which needed to be completed by October 31, 2023. After filling out the form, I submitted the following documents to their email:

1. A copy of my valid passport, ensuring that it would still be valid during my entire stay in Vietnam.
2. An enrollment certificate issued by my home university.
3. A general medical check-up report in English, which I obtained from a local clinic.
4. Since I was a nominated student, I included a nomination letter from my home university.
5. A photo of my English Language Certificate. Since my studies are conducted in English, Mr. Mauger was able to issue this certificate for me. Otherwise, you will need to take a test like IELTS 5.5, TOEFL iBT 65 or equivalent.

FTU was responsible for processing my student visa, and I was later included in a list of exchange students approved for visas.

Upon arriving at Hanoi's airport, the process was quite smooth. I simply showed the printed list of approved students (though a digital copy on my phone worked fine), provided a passport-sized photo of myself, and paid the visa fee in cash (they accepted it in Euros as well). After this, my visa was issued on the spot, allowing me to stay in Vietnam from January 1, 2024, to August 15, 2024.

## 2 Accommodation

One thing to note is that FTU does not provide on-campus dormitories for exchange students. However, the university does offer assistance with house hunting if needed. In my case, I found my apartment through Facebook groups where housing is regularly advertised,

particularly for foreigners. The two most helpful pages were *Hanoi Expats* and *Hanoi Massive Housing*.

I was fortunate to have my Study Buddy visit the apartments on my behalf to ensure everything was as expected. I later heard from a friend who had been scammed through another platform, so it's crucial to verify the details before making any payments.

Most exchange students chose to live near the university, which is about 20 minutes from the city center (Old Quarter). However, I decided to rent an apartment between the Old Quarter and West Lake, a location I highly recommend. The area is lively yet peaceful, and the commute to FTU was only 15-20 minutes by scooter.

My apartment cost around €300 per month, including a weekly cleaning service—a common arrangement in Hanoi. This was roughly the average rent for most exchange students, for single apartments with furniture. FTU also created a WhatsApp group for exchange students early on, allowing us to connect and even team up for house hunting, which was a great resource for finding roommates and shared apartments.

### 3 Transportation

Getting around in Vietnam is both affordable and convenient, with multiple options available for students. One of the most popular transportation services is *Grab*, which offers both car and scooter rides at low prices. For example, a ride from the airport to the city center costs around 300,000 VND (approximately €11), while a scooter ride from the Old Quarter to FTU is only 1-2€, and a car ride is 2-3€. *Grab* can also be used for food delivery, making it a versatile option. Other similar apps, like *Gojek* and *Be*, are also widely used and provide reliable services.

After my first month, I decided to rent my own scooter, which cost me 3,000,000 VND for four months, with a 2,000,000 VND deposit. I rented it from *Minh's Motorbike*, where the process was straightforward. The staff speaks English, and they even helped me out when my tire was flat. The payment had to be made in cash, but they also accepted US dollars. Gasoline is also inexpensive, with a full tank costing around 70,000 VND, which lasted me about a week. Parking at FTU is convenient and costs only 3,000 VND per day.

Everything related to transportation is generally cheap. For instance, fixing my flat tire at a nearby repair shop cost just 20,000 VND. While buses are available in Hanoi, most exchange students preferred using scooters or ride-hailing apps. However, for traveling across the country, buses and trains are great options. VIP sleeper buses, in particular, are very comfortable and affordable. The *Vexere* app is popular among locals and travelers for booking buses, offering the best deals and a wide variety of routes.

## 4 FTU

Foreign Trade University (FTU) is recognized as the top university in Vietnam, where only the top 10% of students are admitted. As a result, the English proficiency of the students is generally quite high, making it easy to connect and communicate with them. The academic semester at FTU is divided into two periods. The first period ended in late March, with exams held two weeks later. The second period began in early May and concluded with exams in June.

FTU offers a wide variety of courses in English, giving exchange students plenty of options to choose from. However, one challenge is that it's not always clear at the beginning whether all the courses will be held. The first two weeks can be somewhat chaotic, as students aren't always notified if a class has been canceled or if there is a room change. I recommend attending as many classes as possible during this time to ensure you select the best courses and secure the required number of credits.

Each course at FTU is worth 3 Vietnamese credits, which equals 6 ECTS credits. To meet my 30 ECTS requirement, I needed to take 5 courses. I enrolled in 3 courses during the first period and 2 in the second. It's important to note that you must take at least one course per period, as failing to do so could result in your student visa being revoked.

The workload is similar to what I experienced in Germany, with 10% of the grade based on attendance, 30% on group work, presentations, or midterm tests, and 60% on the final exam. Course materials and other information are shared through *Zalo* (a messaging app similar to WhatsApp), where the class monitor creates a group chat after the first lecture. Make sure to download *Zalo* before the semester begins to stay updated.

FTU also hosts a variety of on-campus festivals. For instance, we celebrated *Tet* (Vietnamese New Year) with traditional clothes, games, and food, which was a fantastic cultural experience. The university usually offers Vietnamese language classes as well, though unfortunately, due to low enrollment, it was canceled during my exchange.

## 5 Life in VN

Hanoi is a vibrant, loud, and somewhat chaotic city, but it has its own unique charm. The sidewalks are often used for parking scooters or as extensions of restaurants, so navigating

the streets can be an adventure. Parks, on the other hand, are lively spaces where locals gather to dance, play badminton, or exercise.

One of the best aspects of living in Hanoi is the abundance of affordable cafés and restaurants. As a vegetarian, I found it easy to find delicious food, especially near the pagodas (temples), where there are many options due to the influence of Buddhism. Even though English isn't widely spoken, the locals are incredibly friendly and helpful. For example, whenever my scooter broke down, at least three people would immediately offer assistance.

The Vietnamese students at FTU were also very welcoming and eager to meet exchange students, which made it easy to form connections and make friends. Vietnam's culture of bargaining is something to be prepared for—you'll often end up paying a "foreigner price" despite negotiations. However, everything is still extremely cheap, and you can enjoy excellent meals for as little as 1€.

## 6 Climate

Vietnam's tropical climate can be a challenge, but Hanoi is fortunate to experience four distinct seasons, unlike southern cities like Ho Chi Minh, which only have dry and rainy seasons. When I arrived in winter, the weather was pleasant, with temperatures around 20-25°C. However, we experienced an unusually late cold spell in February, where it dropped to 8°C. Due to the high humidity and the lack of heating or warm clothing, it felt much colder than it would in a drier climate. Thankfully, this kind of weather is rare in Vietnam.

By April, the temperatures started to rise, and the heat became intense, averaging around 30-35°C. Combined with the humidity, it made daily life quite sweaty. Luckily, air conditioning is widely available, and you'll appreciate it in both homes and public places. Summer also brings frequent but short rain showers. These are heavy downpours that usually last only 30 minutes to an hour, so they don't disrupt the day too much. Classes are often delayed if a rainstorm begins, and once it stops, the sun usually comes out again.

Winter tends to bring more smog, as the air is drier. Some days, the visibility can be reduced to just a few meters due to the pollution. This is something to keep in mind, especially if you're sensitive to air quality.