

Earn \$2,000 a Month in Tropical Vietnam

By Sharyn Nilsen

My husband, Tim, and I decided long ago that a life of travel is better than the 9 to 5 grind. After a lot of research, we abandoned our jobs, sold our house, obtained our teaching English qualifications and hit the road. We were 44 and 49 when we left Australia in 2010 with a plan to travel for a year then work for a year. Six years, and many adventures later, we're semi-retired and teaching English in Vietnam for the third time.

The big bonus for us is the amount of free time we have to pursue personal interests—I'm writing books, building a freelance writing business and running two websites. Tim is busy planning our next adventure.

Vietnam has been good to us, and has played a big part in us achieving our dream lifestyle. We've now been to 130 countries and have no plans to stop anytime soon. Following the Silk Route from Shanghai to Istanbul via Tibet and 10 months "overlanding" Africa (Think large trucks with a multinational group of people, camping and cooking as a group.), are just a few of our favourite adventures.

Our first stint in Vietnam was in 2011. After travelling around Asia for a year, I applied for and obtained a three-month summer school position at a private language school in northern Vietnam. Tim picked up work once we got there by simply asking around.

When that contract ended, we moved to Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC). I emailed my CV around to the bigger schools and had four interviews within a week. For the job I accepted, I had to do a simple one-hour teaching demonstration and attend an interview. I was invited to sign a formal contract almost immediately.

We've just returned to Vietnam from our latest 12-month adventure (cycling through Scandinavia and Eastern Europe and sailing in the Caribbean) and signed up for our third contract in five years. Because we've done the right thing by our school in the past, we can come back at any time. Knowing we have jobs waiting for us when we return, we can kick back while we're on the road.

You need a work permit to teach legally in Vietnam. It's a bit complicated but our school helps us through the process. Both work permit and visa rules change on a regular basis, so having that support is a bonus. Currently, you need an authenticated degree; an Australian Federal Police check, a medical examination completed at an authorised facility here in Vietnam and an ESL teaching qualification. I completed a basic TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) course in Brisbane and then completed additional studies online. Tim has the TESOL and a CELTA (Cambridge English Language Teaching in Australia) completed here in HCMC.

I have two years' experience, teach about 17 hours a week and earn around \$2,000 per month. Tim has slightly less experience



Teaching English to locals is a rewarding experience for Sharyn Nilsen.

and earns around the same for a few more hours. We live well and still manage to save all his salary. Best of all, we're not spending our savings or income from our Australian investments which are mounting up to finance our next adventure.

Rents vary enormously across town. It pays to rent short-term (at least a month) when you first get here and have a good look at what's on offer.

Our spacious, modern two-bed apartment is fully furnished and air-conditioned. We live in a quiet, secure neighbourhood, within walking distance from the city centre. Our rent is less than \$900 per month and includes Pay TV, WiFi, a cleaner two days a week, a gym and secure motorbike parking. Electricity is our next biggest expense at around \$130 per month. We're home a lot, so our AC runs almost continuously.

Eating out in HCMC is cheap. We rarely cook because it's not worth our time and effort to shop, prepare and cook something when there's a smorgasbord right outside our door. We can easily eat for less than \$10 a day if we choose local Vietnamese food. And, if we decide to stay in, over 600 hundred local restaurants deliver to our door, serving any cuisine you can imagine. Australian

steaks, Tex-Mex or Afghani. It's all here.

We like to treat ourselves at least a few times a week. A nice meal in a medium-priced restaurant rarely costs more than \$30 for both of us, including a couple of beers each. If we head to the movies, a ticket costs less than \$6.

Transport is very cheap. I rent a decent motorbike for less than \$55 per month, and it costs me about \$2 a week to run. A taxi across town is rarely more than \$4 to \$6.

Vietnam, especially HCMC, is growing and changing so rapidly. It's exciting to be here and watch it happen. Infrastructure is improving daily.

We also love HCMC's central location. There are hundreds of direct flights from HCMC every day. Regional budget airlines make it extremely affordable to take regular short breaks and explore new destinations.

Direct flights to Australia take less than nine hours. With a short stop-over, we can be there in less than 12 hours. We have ageing parents and lots of weddings coming up, so that's important to us.

We've found people from HCMC to be open and welcoming and have made many new friends. A thriving expat community creates plenty of opportunities to socialise.

We've been lucky enough to have this amazing experience thanks to teaching English in Vietnam. It's even funding our next big adventure to North America on a 12-month cycling tour through the U.S., Canada and Cuba. ■

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