

Enjoying The Good Life For Less in Ho Chi Minh City

By Sharyn Nilsen

My husband Tim and I live in a quiet neighbourhood, walking distance from the centre of Ho Chi Minh City. Our modern, two-bedroom apartment is fully furnished and air-conditioned and for \$900 a month the rent includes Pay TV, WiFi, a cleaner two days a week and use of a small gym.

We both teach English for a couple of hours a day and I do some freelance work too, but it's definitely not a case of all work and no play. There's always something to do in Ho Chi Minh City and the prices are so low that almost everyone can afford to treat themselves on a regular basis.

We like to take a stroll downtown for breakfast and usually opt for a steaming hot bowl of delicious Vietnamese noodle soup (*pho*) and complimentary iced green tea, for the grand total of \$1.75. If we don't fancy walking, a taxi costs less than \$3. Lunch is a delicious baguette (*Banh Mi*) filled with roasted pork, salad and garden herbs for around 90 cents.

During the week we have our dinners delivered—we enjoy five nutritious dishes each for a grand total of \$35. On weekends, a tasty meal of barbecued pork, marinated vegetables and rice, from the small restaurant in our street, is around \$2. Our food bills for the entire week average around \$80.

Of course, we don't always eat street food or stay at home. How could we? The range of good restaurants in Ho Chi Minh City is mind-boggling and it's fun trying out new places. Brazilian churrasco...Mexican...Tibetan...Asian fusion...there's something for every taste and every budget. A huge meal for two of *Izakaya* (Japanese tapas) including beers and plum wine will set you back less than \$30. Or, for a treat, a three-course lunch at a top French restaurant housed in a beautifully renovated French villa is less than \$50.

If you like a drink, you're going to love Ho Chi Minh. A local beer in a small bar or restaurant rarely costs more than \$1.50. But if you're into something a bit tastier, the craft beer scene here has taken off in the last two years. An award-winning pint of ale will set you back between \$3 and \$5—even less during happy hour. Tim is in heaven.

Getting around town is a breeze. Taxis are comfortable, convenient and incredibly cheap. A 10km ride across town won't cost any more than \$10. The public bus system is efficient and quite comfortable. A ticket costs less than 40 cents. Many expats hire or buy a scooter. Mine costs \$55 to rent and less than \$5 to fuel per month.

Ho Chi Minh City is becoming a fashion hub. You only have to see the creations revealed every year at Vietnam fashion week to see the rising talent. Clothes shopping is excellent, so there's no excuse not to have a fabulous wardrobe. I splurged recently and bought three beautiful silk tops and a gorgeous silk jacket—all designer made—for less than \$250. If you haven't got the time to shop around, Ho Chi Minh City has hundreds of expert tailors who can create almost any design. Excellent quality, well-tailored suits in Italian fabric are available for less than \$400. Business shirts are less than \$40 and buying in bulk lowers the price even further. Avoid the cheap, 24-hour jobs, though. They'll likely fall apart very soon.

Indulging yourself? A manicure or pedicure will cost \$4. A deliciously decadent, 90-minute hot rock and oil massage should be no more than \$25. Even the 5-star establishments charge less than \$40, and most of these have complete three- to four-hour spa packages for under \$100.

Need a new do? If you are prepared to play charades in a local salon, you can get a great haircut for as little as \$4 and a colour for \$10. Or, as I did last month, you can find a top-notch salon with English-speaking stylists and have them do a complete makeover for under \$90. The same service in Australia would have set me back at least \$150. Men can stay stylish for a lot less. Tim gets his cut for about \$2.50.

Whatever your taste, whatever your style, Ho Chi Minh City has something for everyone...

Editor's Note: A beach house for \$417 a month...a bottle of wine for less than \$5...lunch for 89 cents... Vietnam is a warm and welcoming place where you can live large for less. We've packed everything you need to know about this bargain hotspot into our [brand-new report](#). There's also huge opportunity for adventure...fly from city to city for as little as \$18 one-way...or buy your own motorbike for \$400. There's so much to explore...and all just a few hours from Australia by air. Discover everything Vietnam has to offer you when you [get your copy right here](#).