

## Joining Green Shoots

### An introduction for prospective GAP YEAR students (2020-21)



#### INTRODUCTORY NOTE

It's time to plan your GAP year. Trial exams are coming up and the IB finals are just a few months further down the line. You've got a lot to think about and not a whole lot of time!

This handbook is designed to provide you with the information you need in order to consider a GAP year at Green Shoots International School and - if we decide to join us - to reassure your family that you will be safe and well cared for during your time with us in Vietnam.

If, after reading this, you want to learn more about the opportunity, please get in touch. We are happy to answer any follow-up questions you may have so feel free to email Catherine (c.mckinley@greenshoots.edu.vn), for further advice. Catherine is our founder and director who herself graduated from a United World College (UWCSEA, Class of '89). So far we have welcomed UWC alumni from SEA, Mahindra, Dilijan and USA. We are excited to bring more UWCers to our school.

While considering your plans, you may like to talk to students who have spent time with us in recent years. We can put you in touch.

To learn more about Green Shoots, take a look at our [website](#) or our [Facebook page](#). We're also on [Instagram](#).

If you opt to join us, all contact people listed in this handbook are available 24/7 to parents and GAP students alike in the case of an emergency, although we ask you to keep non-urgent communication to within working hours.

## Welcome!



# 1 Working at Green Shoots

## The balancing act

This may be your first time out in the working world and we understand that it will be exciting, nerve-wracking, and challenging. Your GAP year is an exchange through which you offer Green Shoots your energy, ideas, and expertise, and we give you a chance to build skills and experiences. We will try to ensure that our expectations are appropriate and manageable, but ask you to let us know if you are feeling either overwhelmed or under-challenged.

Our aim is to support you as you enter the adult world but also to facilitate that transition with as little adult supervision as possible. Please think of Green Shoots as the safety net under a tightrope-wire: our staff will be there to teach you and to catch you if needed, but you will be walking the rope alone. An adventure awaits; this is your year to grow!

## Our expectations



Green Shoots is a school, established by a UWC alumni, and you will be working with children who will look up to you and learn from you. Our youngest students are just two years old and require calm, clear, and steady guidance as they learn how to negotiate with others, understand and respect boundaries, and discover their world safely within those boundaries. Our oldest students are in their mid-teens and, in our small community, have few peers, so your influence on them will be particularly powerful. Please bear this in mind as you interact with them. While you will be only a few years older than these students, you will be a member of staff and they will be asked to offer you the appropriate respect. You, in turn, must remember that you are an important role model as these students navigate their own road to maturity.

Student confidentiality is of critical importance when working in a school. Anything you hear, see, or experience in the classroom must remain within the classroom and must never be shared with other students or their families. You may, and should, share any concerns about a student's behaviour or academic progress with your supervising teacher, who will guide you if a response is needed.

You will need to be reliable and timely during your time with us. You will work from 8am to 4pm, Monday to Friday during term time and will sometimes be asked to help with after school and/or weekend events. Once a week you may be asked to oversee an Extra-Curricular Activity (ECA), which may run to 4:30 or 5pm or take place before school. Beyond these hours, your time is your own for relaxing around Hoi An or at the beach, obtaining paid evening work, exploring Vietnam, or returning home to visit your family.

## Your responsibilities

Before your arrival in Vietnam we will discuss with you your preferred role within the school, and upon arrival we will attempt to link you to a part of the school that most interests you. There may be times, though, that we have to ask you to support us in areas of more limited personal interest.

Our school year runs from the middle of August each year to the third week of June, and we ask you to remain with us for at least half of our academic year, either from mid August to mid December, or from early January to late June. If you are able to commit to a full school year this is even better!

Working with children requires a developed sense of what is deemed to be 'appropriate' in terms of social and physical contact. You will be given advice and training in this regard when you arrive at the school. It is important you take this advice to heart and see the guidance as important in safeguarding both you and the students at our school.

**Possible areas of work include:**

- Assisting in the classroom with specific students or areas of learning (eg. maths, literacy, ICT)
- Organising and/or supporting sports, music, language classes, art and drama (both within school hours and as Extra-Curricular Activities)
- Helping to organise and oversee activity workshops, community events, drama productions, and other school events
- Compiling and editing the Green Shoots Yearbook and building our Social Media presence on different media platforms
- Helping with school administration, marketing and advertising, public relations
- Contacting foreign embassies and cultural groups in Vietnam to establish links with Green Shoots and build collaboration around the development of musical and cultural events in Hoi An and Da Nang

These activities will take place during each school term and you will be expected to commit to each term in its entirety. During school holidays, you will be free to travel or relax in Hoi An as you choose. Our provisional school start, end, and holiday dates for the upcoming school year are noted below.

- Start of school year: August 17, 2020
- Autumn break: October 10-18, 2020
- Christmas break: December 12, 2020 to January 4, 2021
- Lunar New Year break: February 10 - Feb 21, 2021
- Spring break: April 24-May 3, 2021
- End of school year: June 18

## The Benefits

Your time with us will give you a range of benefits, from new friends and experiences to a level of independence you may not yet have experienced. Upon completion of your time with us, we will offer each GAP student a letter of recommendation for use as you apply for work or a university place. We will be happy to offer follow-up letters if required. Please be assured that these letters will reflect only your professional experience and commitment. If you struggle with personal difficulties during your first year in the working world (and perhaps your first year away from home), we ask you to tell us so that we can help. Any such issues will not be reflected in your end-of-year reference and we hope you will come to us if you're in need of help rather than struggle on alone.



You will also be invited to join in any relevant Professional Development training offered to our teaching staff during the year you spend at Green Shoots.

More tangibly, Green Shoots can offer a stipend of up to VND4,000,000/month (about half a monthly wage for Vietnamese staff) in addition to accommodation while you are here, delicious meals during school hours and use of a bicycle for getting around Hoi An. If you are keen to join us but are unable to afford travel to Vietnam, please let us know and we will see if we can help.





## 2 Getting here and settling in

### Before you travel

#### Health insurance

You must buy your own medical insurance before arriving in Vietnam. There are many good Expatriate insurers to choose from, and you may also be able to purchase a cheaper Travel Insurance policy that is valid for the time you are with us.

Please ensure that the policy you choose covers all in-patient and Emergency/Evacuation services at the very least. Private outpatient medical services are relatively inexpensive in Vietnam compared to other countries in the region. Some people therefore choose to avoid the cost of Outpatient coverage, which can be very expensive, when buying their health insurance policy.

#### Money

The Vietnamese dong (VND) is a non-convertible currency and Vietnam's banking system is still evolving. For these reasons, opening a local bank account is not possible unless you have a residency card, which we are not allowed to issue to volunteers, and transferring unused funds back out of Vietnam at the end of your stay is only possible in cash. ATMs are numerous and reliable (although they often empty out during the 10-day Lunar New Holiday period, so remember to stock up on cash before the holiday begins), we therefore advise you to fund your time here using cash from your stipend and a credit/debit card with which you can withdraw cash as needed from your overseas account. Alternatively, you may choose to bring (US\$) travellers checks or (US\$) cash, both of which can be stored in the Green Shoots safe until needed. Vietnamese customs authorities allow travellers to bring up to US\$5,000 in cash when entering the country. The US dollar is widely accepted for exchange to VND at banks, gold shops, and even in some regular shops. Other currencies are more difficult to exchange.

In addition to your work at Green Shoots, you may opt to take on evening or weekend work with a local business, such as a bar, cafe, or tour operator. Previous Gap Year volunteers have successfully topped up their finances using such opportunities, and Green Shoots will endeavour to connect you with members of our parent community who may be able to offer part-time work.

#### Immunization

Foreign medical service providers operating in Vietnam suggest that visitors to the country should be immunised against Hepatitis A and B, Typhoid, Tetanus, and Japanese Encephalitis B.

Only in very remote parts of the country is malaria prevalent and we advise against taking anti-malarial drugs, as these can have strong and negative side effects.

In the wet season, dengue is fairly common in and around Hoi An. However there is no immunisation against this illness, which is treatable once identified.

#### First Aid Training

Before arriving in Vietnam and beginning work with our students, if you do not already have a valid First Aid certificate we ask you to undertake a First Aid training course that will enable you to deal with the kind of minor medical issues (cuts and bruises, simple sporting injuries) that may occur while students are with you.

If you are unable to take a course before arriving, Green Shoots can arrange for you to take one through the [Family Medical Practice](#) in Da Nang at your own cost upon arrival and before the beginning of term. As these courses must be booked in advance, please let us know as early as possible if you would like us to arrange a course for you.

## English Teaching Qualification

We also ask you to consider a simple English-teaching qualification before your arrival in Vietnam. This will help prepare you for your time in our classrooms and will always be a useful addition to your skill-set later in life. There are a number of cheap and simple online TEFL courses available to students 18 years old or above.



## Getting to Hoi An

### Visas

Vietnam's visa requirements for volunteers are unclear and changing, and Green Shoots has received conflicting advice regarding permission to sponsor volunteers, although it is likely that you will have to arrive here on a tourist visa and renew this in order to stay longer than three months in the country. We will work with you to decide the best way to ensure visa access to Vietnam once we know your nationality and the amount of time you hope to remain with us.

We have been advised that arrival through Ho Chi Minh City may make in-country visa renewal easier, although if you fly directly to Da Nang it should also be possible but may be more expensive. Vietnam's three regional immigration authorities make independent decisions regarding visa extensions. The Southern authority (HCMC) is the most accommodating, with the Central (Da Nang) also fairly flexible. The Northern authority (for entry via Ha Noi) is the least likely to grant in-country visa extensions and so flights via Hanoi are discouraged.

### Flights

There are a growing number of direct flights to Da Nang, our 'local' airport, from international airports around Asia, and multiple regional and long haul flights into Ho Chi Minh City. Because of the difficulties associated with visa renewal, we advise you not to enter Vietnam through Ha Noi if you expect to need a visa renewal during your time in Vietnam.

Vietnam Airlines, Vietjet, and Jetstar Pacific all offer numerous daily internal flights from HCMC to Da Nang (of which Vietnam Airlines is the most reliable but usually also the most expensive).

Once your flight arrangements are confirmed, please send us your flight details so that we can arrange an airport pickup at Da Nang International Airport.

### 3 Life in Hoi An



#### Support from Green Shoots

As noted above, Green Shoots staff will always be on hand to help if help is needed. Know that you can – and should - ask for help of any kind at any time if you are experiencing difficulties. However, if you do not approach us for help, you will be left mostly to manage your own life outside of school hours, as this is all part of the GAP Year experience.

Key points of contact are listed below. These contacts are available to you and to your parents at any time and for any reason.

- Ms Sue Ryan, Director of Administration: [s.ryan@greenshoots.edu.vn](mailto:s.ryan@greenshoots.edu.vn), +84 (0)1203553171
- Ms Phuong, Director of Operations: [p.nguyen@greenshoots.edu.vn](mailto:p.nguyen@greenshoots.edu.vn), +84 98 594 3147

We recommend you bring your mobile phone with you for use in Vietnam. Green Shoots will help you purchase a local SIM card and top-up credit, both of which are cheap and easy to buy. If you do not have a suitable phone or would prefer to leave your expensive one at home, Green Shoots will help you purchase a basic Nokia for use while here (at a cost of around VND500,000 or US\$25).

#### Housing

Utilities bills and wifi will be provided and paid for by the school, although we ask you to be sparing when using the air-conditioning in order to limit our ecological footprint. Your residence includes access to a washing machine and a basic kitchen. The house, and indeed our whole school campus, are STRICTLY no smoking areas.

#### Dealing with emergencies and poor health

##### Emergencies

In the extremely unlikely event that you are faced with an emergency (fire, traffic accident, or other situation you feel unable to cope with alone), you should immediately call one of the contacts listed above. Your house, and each school building, contains a fire extinguisher for use if needed. There is also a basic medical kit on the campus.

##### Health

If you require medical assistance during your time here, our staff can help you reach a doctor, either in Hoi An or in Da Nang. The Pacific Hospital in Hoi An offers a limited English-language service for expatriates, and there are sometimes qualified expatriate nurses and doctors living in the area and able to make house calls. Dental services can be found at [TGM Dental](#) in Hoi An or at various dental clinics in Da Nang.



For any relatively serious or chronic medical issues, we recommend you consult a doctor at the [Family Medical Practice](#) in Da Nang, which is staffed by international doctors and nurses, or visit the [Hoan My hospital](#), also in Da Nang, which operates a well-respected international department. [Vinmec](#) is another new and well respected hospital offering English-language services. You may wish to contact these health providers before purchasing health insurance to confirm that they can offer direct billing through your insurer. We can help you contact them if you are having trouble doing so.

## Food

During school hours you will be provided with a morning snack and a full lunch, which you will eat with our staff and students. If you work in the kindergarten, you will also receive a light afternoon snack around 3pm. Your kitchen contains a fridge and a microwave so that you can bring home meals sourced outside the school or perhaps heat up school meal leftovers, should you wish to do so.



There are many cheap and delicious street foods, and as Hoi An is a tourist town these tend to be cleaner than in some other parts of Southeast Asia. Some visitors do suffer from intestinal problems while here, and worms are not unknown (but worming tablets are cheap and easily accessible), but overall the food in Hoi An is good, cheap, and clean. A growing range of Western products are available in Hoi An (cheese, condiments, breakfast cereals, etc), but are more expensive here than in the west, due to high import taxes.

## Weather



Hoi An in midsummer can be extremely hot, sometimes reaching 40 degrees C or above with very high humidity, however, these temperatures are generally reached in July and August, when our school is closed. For much of the year, temperatures hover within the 30s, and humidity levels between 60% and 80%. In winter (January - February, usually just a few weeks long), temperatures drop to the lower 20s and sometimes into the teens.

The autumn (October - December) is the rainy season, during which Hoi An may also experience major storms, some flooding, and occasionally typhoons.

There is always ample warning if a typhoon is expected and we are able to make strong and early preparations. Should a typhoon warning be issued during your stay with us we will secure your home and ensure that you have sufficient torches and food supplies should you need to remain inside for a period of time. While property is sometimes damaged during typhoons, you are at no risk of personal harm as long as you remain inside with all doors and windows closed until the storm has passed.

## Transport

There are a number of transport options, both locally and to/from Da Nang.

Green Shoots will provide each GAP student with a bicycle, which should suffice for local travel as the town is small and distances short. Hoi An's Old Quarter, a UNESCO Heritage Site, is closed to motorised traffic for much of each day making bicycles the best form of transport in that area.

Should you wish to travel further afield, or avoid getting wet during the rainy season, Hoi An has two major taxi companies: Mai Linh ('green cabs', the more expensive of the two with more available taxis), and Fai Fo ('yellow cabs', slightly cheaper but sometimes harder to find). Seven-seater taxis are marginally more expensive than four-seaters. Both can be flagged down or called by phone. The school can help connect you with a regular English-speaking taxi driver. There are now a number of internet service transport providers such as Grab, operating in the towns.

For travel to and from Da Nang, public buses run from a bus depot in central Hoi An and supermarkets in Da Nang – Big-C, and Lotte Mart – offer free shuttle bus services. Private cars with drivers can be hired by the hour for multiple-destination trips and for added comfort. Green Shoots can help you identify reasonably priced and reliable car service providers. It is not possible to rent cars without a driver.

In Vietnam, the majority of people travel by scooter and some scooter drivers offer their services as *Xe Om* ('hugging taxis'). While Hoi An is an extremely safe and welcoming town for foreigners, the *Xe Om* drivers have developed a very poor reputation, with tales of tourist muggings, especially at night. We therefore ask our GAP volunteers NEVER to travel by *Xe Om* unless the school has helped you develop a relationship with a trusted driver.

Motorbikes may also be hired on a daily or weekly basis. However, we STRONGLY advise against renting a motorbike even if you feel you are an experienced and safe driver. Traffic rules are not well respected in Vietnam and foreigners unfamiliar with Vietnam's informal 'rules of the road', even those with years of driving experience, may have accidents because they are unable to pre-empt the behaviour of other drivers. It is illegal to drive in Vietnam without a Vietnamese driving license: something that is impossible to get without a residency card, and your health insurer will not cover you if you have an accident while driving without a Vietnamese license.

## Sport and entertainment

Hoi An's main attraction is its beautiful beach, stretching all the way to Da Nang (30 kilometres away) and beyond. There is one main public beach area: An Bang (around five kilometres from the school) which offers restaurants, cafes, bars, and some beach sport options, such as jet skis, although these are fairly expensive to hire.

Hoi An is a small town and lacks major evening entertainment options for young people. Indeed, most of its residents are in bed before 10pm and are up again by 5am. However, there are cafes and bars, mostly targeting backpackers and young travellers, on An Hoi Island in the downtown area, as well as quieter beachside bars in An Bang. If coming home late at night, be particularly vigilant with your personal belongings and DO NOT take a *Xe Om*. As already noted, there are very few risks to personal safety in Hoi An or Da Nang, and very few instances of pickpocketing, so you should not be alarmed. We are simply alerting you to the few times and places that require caution.



As a tourist town, Hoi An offers myriad shopping options, especially for tailor-made clothes, shoes, and souvenirs. As these industries have grown, prices

have risen and while plentiful, many of its shopping options are surprisingly expensive.

Cheap and stress-relieving spas abound!



Da Nang offers a wider range of entertainment and sporting facilities. It boasts several Western cinema complexes, various supermarkets (such as Vincom, Big-C, Lotte Mart, and Metro), a well-developed sports centre, fun parks, and many other facilities.

Several of the resorts along the coast offer memberships that facilitate the use of the gym and pool as well as subsidised use of other facilities (spas, restaurants, etc). SuperFit, a local gym near the school, offers more affordable no-frills memberships. The school can advise you should you wish to join a gym. Alternatively, there are several cheap – but more basic – local gyms, although these are most often frequented by men and our female volunteers may feel uncomfortable joining as they will see few other women.

There are a variety of other sporting and therapeutic options such as yoga, acupuncture and martial arts. We can help you connect with these people if you wish to attend their classes or make use of their services.

## **Cost of living**

Vietnam is a relatively cheap place to live. [Numbeo](#), a comparative cost-of-living website, can give you an indication of how Da Nang compares to your current home (Hoi An is not listed).

As Green Shoots will provide accommodation and meals during school hours, as well as a bicycle for use around Hoi An, you will need money only for out-of-school meals, weekend entertainment, visa renewals, and any travel you intend to undertake during school holidays. We recommend you budget around US\$300-500/month in addition to our stipend to cover the costs of a comfortable, but not extravagant, lifestyle in Hoi An and to cover in-country holiday travel.

Examples of some likely costs are given below:

- Local meal (street food, or a cheap local restaurant): c. US\$1-6/person.
- Meal in a Western restaurant or at a Western beach cafe: c. US\$7-15/person.
- Taxi from the school to downtown or the beach: c. US\$2-4/trip.
- Daily car rental (with driver) to and from Da Nang: c. US\$25-40/day.
- Weekly shop at the local wet market (for home cooking: c. US\$20-30/week.

## **Respecting local customs**

### **Dress code**

As a tourist town, the locals in Hoi An are used to seeing foreigners in all manner of dress. Nonetheless, there are local sensitivities that we ask you to respect. Vietnamese women will almost always cover their shoulders, although as a foreigner tops with spaghetti straps are accepted. Please do not wear very short shorts or skirts, except on the beach where swimwear and bikinis are fully accepted (although g-strings and topless sunbathing are offensive to the locals working in beach-side cafes and restaurants). We ask our male volunteers to wear a shirt or T-shirt at all times other than on the beach.

You will see upon arrival that these limitations are not always respected by tourists and their lack of understanding of local custom is viewed with good humour by Hoi An residents. We nonetheless ask you to bear in mind local sensitivities while you are here.

At Green Shoots, we do not have a strict staff dress code but we ask that you dress cleanly and comfortably. We do not wear shoes in the classroom or around the current campus.

### **Displays of affection**

As above, Hoi An locals are used to public displays of affection by foreigners visiting their town but will seldom make such displays themselves and we ask you to respect their sensitivities while in public.

### **Bartering**

As in much of Asia, bartering is common in Hoi An. Generally, if an item in a tourist shop has a price tag the price is probably fixed (although you can try to barter and see what happens). In mini marts, prices are fixed. In wet markets, the central market, or if buying from a street vendor, be sure to haggle as prices may fall to as little as half of the quoted price.

**We hope to welcome you soon to Green Shoots!**

