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YOUR GUIDE TO A GREAT GIRLS'
GETAWAY IN HOI AN



Looking for a fun, kid-free girls' weekend getaway, AMY GREENBURG and her friends hopped on a plane to Da Nang and checked into **Anantara Hoi An Resort** in the charming, historic town of Hoi An, a UNESCO World Heritage Site situated on Vietnam's central coast.

Though Hoi An can most definitely be done with a child in tow, it's a completely different experience going with a group of girlfriends for a kid-free weekend. Here are our top highlights.

#1 Fashion fun

After quickly settling into our two adjacent rooms at the charming Anantara Hoi An Resort, the four of us made a beeline for Yaly Couture (358 Nguyen Duy Hieu) to have all of our favourite tops and dresses copied in different shades and patterns. From the countless tailors lining the streets in the city, we chose Yaly as it came highly recommended by the hotel staff, who had called ahead to tell them we were on our way. It's a little pricier than the hole-in-the-wall tailors, but it was worth it for the service and selection.

And what a vast selection it was! Unlike most other tailors

in the city, Yaly is massive, with different sections dedicated to custom handbags and shoes, jewellery, and clothing for men, women and children. With endless rows of fabric to browse, we were in heaven – a shopping girl's dream (and definitely the dream of anyone who ever wanted to be a fashion designer!).

A staff member was assigned to each of us on arrival for a truly customised experience. After whipping out garments to replicate, as well as photo print-outs for added inspiration, we had our measurements taken and browsed the entire fabric selection with our assigned staffers.

As for me, I was after an off-the-shoulder dress that I'd seen in a popular fashion retailer and brought along a picture of; the real deal hadn't fit properly, so I showed them the picture, found a similar fabric, and *voilà*, my bespoke dress was on its way to becoming a reality – along with a ton of other pieces.

The next morning, we came back for our first fittings. Seeing the progress that had already been made got us even more excited, and we proceeded to place orders for extra items. This meant we needed to return later in the afternoon for fittings for the additional pieces – but, hey, we had no set schedule and were happy to oblige!

So, in between roaming the streets of the Old Town and eating our way through the city, we busy girls had fittings to attend – and we loved every minute of it. (I'm sure you can imagine the fashion shows that ensued.)

In the end, we loved all of our finished pieces. Anything that we wanted tweaked at our final fitting was delivered to the hotel just before we left for the airport. Amazing.

In addition to getting clothing and handbags made at Yaly, we did stop into other tailors in town to get some swimsuits made. Let's just say we now all have matching one-pieces in different hues...



#2 Exploring the Old Town

Hoi An has managed to keep its traditional charm despite the tourists that throng the streets daily. Sure, there are loads of souvenir shops everywhere you look (and yes, “elephant-print backpacker pants” galore), but the colourful, French colonial buildings remain intact, and the riverside wet market still bustles with locals buying fruits, veggies, flowers and fish – definitely a sight to see. There’s also nothing quite like the colourful lanterns hanging in the streets, making it seem as though you’re on a movie backlot.

With nowhere we had to be and no kids to tend to, we wandered through the shops for hours, haggling over ceramic salad bowls and other local handicrafts, and weaving in and out of art galleries, before visiting the famous Japanese Bridge and walking back along the picturesque Thu Bon River, filled with boats and floating lanterns.

We loved the fact that the city is small enough to get around on foot and that the Old Town was within walking distance from our hotel – a leisurely 20-minute or so stroll. Compared with Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, Hoi An has a much calmer vibe, making the experience more of a vacation than a “go-go-go” city excursion.

#3 Wishes on the water

While ambling through the Old Town one evening, we were beckoned by an old woman to board her small boat. Boy, were we glad we did. For a very small fee, she took us on a ride along the river, filled with colourful, candle-lit lanterns, creating a magical feel all around us. She handed each of us our own little lantern, and we took turns making wishes before setting them free in the water. The entire activity only took around 20 minutes, but it was memorable.

#4 Eating our way through town

When we weren’t in fittings or putting on fashion shows, we were indulging in *pho*, spring rolls and other Vietnamese favourites, and trying out traditional dishes we’d never heard of (and lots of wine, too, of course).



Melissa, Amy, Niki, Jody



Our Recommendations

For dinner

Mango Mango Restaurant
45 Nguyen Phuc Chu

For a leisurely lunch with wine

Mai Fish Restaurant
45 Nguyen Thi Minh Khai
themangomango.com/mf

For hole-in-the-wall pho

Pho Cu (*gotta love the name, right?*)
332 Nguyen Duy Hieu Street

For coffee

The Hill Station
321 Nguyen Duy Hieu Street

For breakfast

Mia Coffee
20 Phan Boi Chau Street



More Activity Inspiration

Cycling in style

We had a grand plan to take bikes around the city, but didn't get to it because of the on-and-off drizzle. Also, we only had limited time, so we chose to give up the bike idea and go by foot. Still, a ride would have been lovely, especially in such a charming city as Hoi An. Anantara offers complimentary bicycles, a city map and recommendations for interesting routes – cycling past rice paddies or along the river, for instance.

For the foodies

Many hotels, including Anantara, offer cooking classes where you can cook Vietnamese dishes with the hotel chef, then enjoy eating your creations. Or, step out of the hotel and opt for one of the many classes offered throughout the city. Green Bamboo Cooking School and Café has excellent reviews on TripAdvisor, as does Gioan Cookery School.

Fancy pampering

Spa time is always a good idea, especially on a girls' getaway. I snuck out for a one-hour massage and enjoyed every minute of it. Anantara's spa features beautiful treatment rooms, each with its own bathtub. In addition to massages, it offers other treatments such as mani-pedis, facials, mud wraps and body scrubs.



Accommodation

On the edge of the Thu Bon River, Anantara Hoi An Resort has everything we wanted from a hotel in Hoi An: colonial charm and a fabulous location – a tranquil hideaway just a walk away from the Old Town. The hotel has 93 split-level rooms spread across multiple French-colonial style buildings, with a beautiful pool located in a lush courtyard.

During high (and dry) season (March to September), room rates at Anantara start at US\$225 per night; during the low, rainy season (October to February), rooms start from \$181 – both rates include breakfast. For more information, or to make a reservation, email hoian@anantara.com or visit hoi-an.anantara.com.

Getting There

Both SilkAir and Jetstar have non-stop flights from Singapore to Da Nang (2 hours, 35 minutes); we chose the 9am SilkAir flight. Once in Da Nang, it's a 40-minute drive (35km) from the airport to Hoi An – easy peasy! We arranged transport through the hotel, and it was a smooth process from start to finish.

Visas

This year, Vietnam introduced an electronic visa system as an alternative to the visa-on-arrival option. The e-visas, which take about three days to process, cost US\$25 (plus a \$15 processing fee) and are granted for single entry visits for up to 30 days to nationals of 40 eligible countries. For more information, visit vietnam-evisa.com. ✉