



Photo: Independence Palace

From Saigon with Stories Strangers who become family

YZU IEM Summer Trip: 23 - 28 June 2025 | S1138904

Imagine stepping into a vibrant city where French colonial architecture meets bustling street markets, where every corner holds a new discovery - academic, cultural, or culinary. That's exactly what 17 students from Yuan Ze University (YZU) experienced during their unforgettable 6-day journey through Saigon, or now we call it Ho Chi Minh City.

The participants are a mix of Taiwanese and international students - undergraduate, master, and Ph.D students. The group was led by Professor Nguyen Thi My Hanh (Sherry) from Vietnam, alongside Professors Chen Pei-Wen, Chen Yun-Xiu, and Ms. Li Bi-Lian. Together, we embarked on an adventure that blended academia, industry insights, and cultural immersion in one of Southeast Asia's most exciting cities.

Let's travel back with me!

Day 1

A Sweet Welcome in the Heart of Saigon

The journey began with a smooth arrival at Tan Son Nhat International Airport. After checking into their comfortable city-center hotel, the group had free time to explore. What is a better way to start than with coffee?

Our first exploration is the iconic **Café Apartment**, a multi-story haven where each floor houses a different café. Sipping on coconut milk coffee and daringly delicious durian coffee, we soaked into the local flavor with panoramic city views before strolling past the elegant **Saigon Opera House**, a lotus pond **Bùng Bình Cây Liễu**, the **Statue of Ho Chi Minh**, and its surroundings.

The evening's welcoming dinner with Van Lang University (VLU) was initially a shy affair since many had just met! But as plates of steaming Vietnamese dishes were shared, so were stories, laughter, and newfound friendships.

**The photos presented in this article are courtesy of the participants.*



Photo: Arrival at Tan Son Nhat International Airport

Day 2

Academic Exchange & Unexpected Tastes

We kicked off the day with a visit to **International University (IU)**, part of Vietnam National University HCMC. As Vietnam's first public university to teach entirely in English, IU was the perfect place for lively discussions and cultural exchange. Our own YZU delegates, Billy and Nick, introduced our campus and IEM department confidently. We played the game that IU students had prepared, and even exchanged souvenirs—a small but meaningful bridge between Taiwan and Vietnam.

Lunch at IU's cafeteria introduced the group to **Vietnamese pennywort juice**, a refreshing herbal drink, and **coconut milk-based ice cream with banana and jackfruit** - an unexpected humble delight!

The journey continued to **AHRD Agriculture Company**, an agriculture-tech company redefining orchid farming with innovation, and we learned about sustainable agriculture practices. Who knew orchids could be grown on such a massive scale?



Photo: Café Apartment



Photo: Landscape surround the Statue of Ho Chi Minh

Day 3

Ports, Universities & a Surprise Concert

Morning brought us to one of HCMC's major sea ports, revealing some mechanisms and operations behind container shipping, complete with plenty of "Oh!" moments as students grasped the scale of global trade. In the afternoon, at **Van Lang University (VLU)**, the group



Photo: With the team of International University



Photo: Mung bean and coconut milk Vietnamese pennywort juice



Photo: Inside the AHRD Agriculture Company



Photo: The heritage reception room of Van Lang University



Photo: Final round of SLOG Challenge 2025



Photo: Cocoon company for fabric and Mekong River exploration

attended a talk related to circular economy in agriculture and continued to witness the final round of **SLOG Challenge**, an international student competition where teams tackled real-world business cases. The energy was electric, and the night ended with an unexpected highlight: a live performance by **Vietnamese rapper Trần Lả Lướt (@dangrangto)**. The university hall? Instantly transformed into a concert arena.

Dinner was a steaming bowl of **pho** enjoyed in the rain, followed by a **snail feast** (courtesy of VLU) and—yes—more durian. A truly Vietnamese culinary experience!



Photo: Different snail local dishes

Day 4

Mekong River Magic & Snail Feasts

The next day was all about local craftsmanship and flavors. A visit to a **cocoon company** showcased exquisite silk, bamboo, and charcoal products, perfect for the alternative material of fabric.

Then came the awaited **Mekong River boat tour**, where students explored community-run tourism spots. They tasted fresh honey, sampled artisanal chocolate, and indulged in tropical fruits—dragon fruit, pineapple, mango, jackfruit, and sapodilla. Ever tried organic durian straight from the tree? We did, and it was unforgettable.



Photo: Buying local durians

Day 5

History, Markets & a Farewell on the River

In the final full day, we deep dive into the local culture by visiting the historic **Independence Palace**, the charming **Saigon Central Post Office**, the literary **Book Street** with so many books along the street, and a visit to one of the city's oldest **Mazu temples**.

Since we are tourists, it would not be complete if we did not visit the **Ben Thanh Market**. Students hunted for souvenirs from Vietnamese coffee to snake liquor before boarding a **classical wooden boat for a farewell dinner** along the **Saigon River**. Glittering city lights, delicious food, and heartfelt goodbyes made it a night to remember.



Day 6

Goodbye for now, Saigon

Before heading home, the group took a ride on the **Saigon Waterbus**, savoring our last moments in this dynamic city.

This was more than a trip, a shared story

This trip was more than just sightseeing. It was about bonding, learning, and stepping out of comfort zones. From academic exchanges to durian and local adventures, every moment was a chance to grow closer as a family. And yes, the only two male students on the trip became the best of brothers! Their bromance might just be legendary. We laughed, explored, supported each other through every step, and came home with not just souvenirs, but stories.

We really experienced that time flies, but memories last forever.

Will you be part of the next adventure?



Photo: Strangers to brothers



Photo: Independence Palace, Saigon Central Post Office, unique liquor at Ben Thanh Market, farewell dinner with the VLU team, and waterbus



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