

## Squiz the World goes to... Vietnam

Each week, we give the world globe a spin, and see where we land. Then we take the kids of Australia on an audio excursion to visit that country and its people.

I'm Amanda Bower, and today on Squiz the World we're visiting Vietnam—our Asian neighbour to the north west. If you love noodle soups and spicy sandwiches, you're already a fan of Vietnamese cuisine. But there's so much more to know about this country of 96 million people.

So strap yourselves into the Squiz Kids Super Fast Supersonic Jetliner as we take off and take a squiz at Vietnam ...

### Just the Facts

If you take a look on a map - I'll pop one in your episode notes - you'll see that Vietnam is shaped like the letter S. The top of the S starts up near China, curves around past Laos, and tucks back under Cambodia. Its capital, Hanoi, is in the North. Its biggest city, and a former capital, is in the South... it used to be called Saigon, but since 1976 its official name is Ho Chi Minh City.

That's because there was a long war between North and South Vietnam from 1954 to 1975. The North was communist, and the South was capitalist. America and Australia sent many thousands of soldiers to try to help the south, and the war here is known as "The Vietnam War". But in Vietnam itself, it's called "The American War." Despite all those foreign soldiers coming to help the south, the north won in 1975... at a total cost of more three million lives on all sides. I'll put a link in your episode notes to a video of a kid explaining this history.

Many South Vietnamese people escaped when the North took over Saigon and renamed it after their first leader, Ho Chi Minh. A fair number of them came to Australia as refugees. A refugee is a person who is forced to leave their home country and find safety, or refuge, in a new country. We made a Squiz Kids Shortcut all about refugees - a link to which I'll stick in the episode notes. In Australia today - about half a million Aussies were either born in Vietnam, or have family who were.

Nowadays, the government in Vietnam is still communist. What does communist mean? It comes from the word 'community' - and in the case of countries, it means a place where individual people do not own land, factories, or machinery. Instead, the government or the whole community owns these things. Sounds good in theory, but in practice it doesn't always work so well—in Vietnam for example, the government controls the state, military, and media, and it is the only legal political party in the

country. That means that when this country of 96 million people goes to vote at elections, they have no choice for whom they vote. Human rights and freedoms in Vietnam are considered very poor.

But Vietnam has opened up to tourism, and reestablished a relationship with the United States... so it is possible to visit and see what's happened there since the war ended.

And whenever you travel, it's important to learn a few words in that country's language. It's a great way to show respect. So, let's....

### Learn the Lingo

In Vietnam, the official language is Vietnamese. It used to be written using Chinese characters, but since the 1920s it had its own alphabet, which looks like the one we use, but with 29 letters, and five special markings that can go above and below the letters to change the tone. For example the word for chicken is Gà, and the word for train station is ga. When I travelled to Vietnam as a journalist, locals got a good laugh out of me ordering train station soup!

Squid Kid Selena speaks fluent Vietnamese, and she's going to help us get the basics right. Take it away, Selena!

Cảm ơn, Selena! Now that we can communicate a little bit, it's....

### Time for School

Primary school in Vietnam has gone through a big change over the past two years... and for once, I'm not talking about coronavirus!

Schooling in Vietnam used to be very old fashioned - teachers gave lectures, students memorised the information, and were then tested on it.

But the government realised that students needed to practice what they were being taught, so in 2020, teachers were required to teach a new way, giving primary school kids practical experiences, group projects, and opportunities to learn and build social skills at school. So—a lot like how you probably learn now.

Kids in Vietnam have to wear uniforms, which usually consist of a white shirt and black or blue pants, with a red scarf around your neck for kids in year 3 to 9.

And do you know how lots of kids get to school? On the back of a motorbike! Most families in Vietnam don't have a car, but they do have a motorbike... I'll put a link in your episode notes to a video showing you what it's like to zoom around a busy Vietnamese street! And if you want to cross the road on foot... do NOT wait for a break in the traffic.

You'll grow old on the side of the road. You have to take a deep breath and start walking. The motorbikes will move around you... but you need a lot of courage!

When people visit Australia, there are lots of natural features of our landscape that they want to visit—the Great Barrier Reef, Uluru, the rainforest. In Vietnam, something amazing was discovered in 2009...

Believe it or Not

Back in 1991, a man called Ho Khanh was walking through the forest near the Vietnamese border with Laos, about half way along the curve in that "S". He was looking for agarwood, a valuable timber, when he spotted the entrance to a cave. He wanted to explore it, but was discouraged when he heard rushing water and felt strong winds. A few years later, he was talking to some British cave explorers, and mentioned it. They asked him to help them find the entrance... and what they found rewrote the history books!

Son Doong is the biggest cave in the world. It's wide enough to fly a Boeing 747 through ... it contains a fast-flowing river... it stretches on for 9 kilometres... and apparently, some of the cave's chambers are big enough to fit an entire block of New York City skyscrapers!

In a couple of places, the roof of the cave has collapsed. Trees, plants and wildlife fell into the hole and kept on growing... they now reach over 30 metres high and have created their own ecosystem. I've put a video into your episode notes showing this incredible cave—very few people have hiked through the jungle to get to it.

Phew! I've learned a ton about Vietnam, and now I'm starving! I think it might be...

Dinner Time

Well, actually... it's breakfast time. The national dish of Vietnam is a noodle soup with beef broth called Phở. It's written p-h-o, and lots of Aussies will call it pho, but the o has one of those accents we talked about before... so if you want to be authentic, say phở.

You might be used to eating noodle soup for lunch or dinner, but in Vietnam, phở is the national breakfast. Phở is heavy enough to get people who work in the fields through the morning, and light enough that it won't weigh them down or make them sleepy.

When you travel in Vietnam, you'll see little shop fronts with small plastic stools out the front. That's where you go to get your phở. You sit at a stool, and slurp up the warm broth and noodles.

The people who run those shops have been up since 2am, to get their fresh ingredients—because most of the shops don't have fridges—and start their broth. The shop opens around 6 a.m., sells out by around 10 o'clock.

The good news is, you can sleep in and make this for dinner instead! I've put a recipe in your episode notes.

The S'Quiz

This is the part of the podcast where you get to test how well you've been listening.

Question 1. What is the Vietnam war called in Vietnam? (The American War)

Question 2. When do most Vietnamese people eat phò? (Breakfast)

Question 3. What do Vietnamese kids add to their uniform in year 3? (A red scarf)

That's all we have time for today. Thanks for staying curious about the world, and joining me on this incredible trip to Vietnam.

Now get out there, and have a most excellent day. Over and out.