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# A three-city, five-day whirlwind adventure in **Vietnam**

Vacation Rentals

Artist Lindsay Arakawa on her quick but rewarding trip through Ho Chi Minh, the Mekong Delta, Hoi An, and more





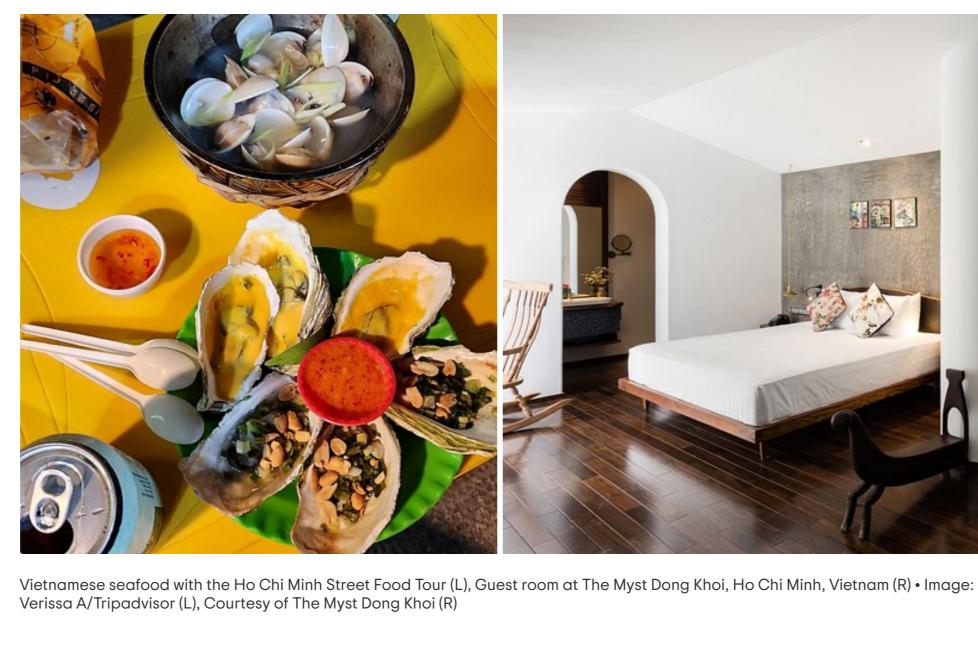
In our **Where To** series, we tag along as 12 fascinating travel influencers jaunt

Day one: Get settled

by our <u>Travelers' Choice Awards</u>. Browse all of the itineraries on our <u>Where To</u> <u>hub</u>. Japanese-American artist Lindsay Arakawa (@blindsaay) moved to Tokyo in late

around the world in search of the best meals, experiences, and more, all inspired

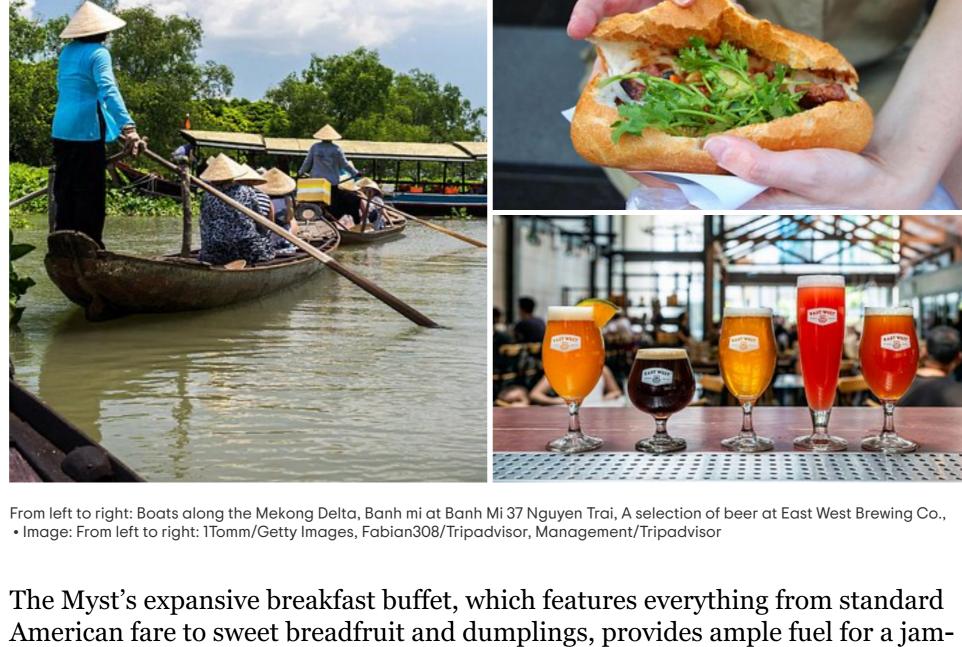
2019 with dreams of jet-setting to nearby Asian countries on the weekends. Then the pandemic hit and she had to put her international travel plans on hold. Recently, she made up for lost time with a whirlwind, three-city adventure through Vietnam's <u>Travelers' Choice Best of the Best</u> winners. Below, she shares how she managed to see the best of the country in just five days.



Starting in Ho Chi Minh City, a Travelers' Choice Best of the Best winning trending city, check into The Myst Dong Khoi, where the plants unfurling from

nearly every window on its uber-modern facade make it look more like a giant vertical garden than a hotel. Inside, the Travelers' Choice Award winner further delights with a rooftop swimming pool, spacious rooms, and minibars stocked with craft beers and fresh fruit. Spring for the Saigon Signature Room, which comes with a private balcony and outdoor tub—it's the perfect way to unwind after a flight and prepare for the flurry of activity to come. To kick off your first day and get a real taste of Vietnam's largest city, do as the locals do and hop on the back of a motorbike for a street food tour with Saigon Adventure. Your driver doubles as your guide, serving up a side of history

between snacks (<u>The Venerable Thich Quang Duc Monument</u> is an important detour that honors a beloved monk). After eating your way through 11 different courses-including grilled oysters with quail eggs, spring rolls, and bun bò hue, a savory beef noodle soup—head back to your hotel and turn in early. Day two: Explore the Mekong Delta



motorboat and take in the maze-like waterways of the Mekong River. In the famous island region of Ben Tre Province, observe how residents catch fish and

After roughly an hour-and-a-half drive in an air-conditioned van, board a small

packed <u>day trip to the Mekong Delta</u> with Asiana Link Travel.

at the <u>Ving Trang Temple</u> round out the experience.

microbrewery with beer flights and hard cider.

shrimp using nets suspended under their stilted houses. Visit a honey bee farm, sample local coconut candies and snake wine (rice wine infused with snake venom), shop for handicrafts, and try not to rock the boat as you glide along in a sampan (a traditional wooden, flat-bottomed boat). A family-style lunch and stop

Back in Ho Chi Minh after a long day on the Mekong, opt for a low-key dinner at

options, but the latter puts you in close proximity to a nightcap at <u>The Loser</u>, a

cheeky bar with neon lights and excellent cocktails, or East West Brewing Co., a

a bánh mì joint. <u>Bui Thi Xuan</u> and <u>Banh Mi 37 Nguyen Trai</u> are both great

# Day three: Take part in traditions

Grab a Vietnamese iced coffee and a breakfast-style bao bun at the airport before flying to Hoi An, another trending city among Travelers' Choice Best of the Best

Historic old town in Hoi An, Vietnam • Image: Matthew Micah Wright/Getty Images

winning destinations. Then, enjoy a glass of complimentary passionfruit juice upon checking in to <u>Villa De Campagne Hoi An</u>. Drop your bags in your room and join the Hoi An Eco Tour and Papa's Cooking <u>Class</u>. You'll get to learn about sustainable fishing practices and experience a

dance. Never heard of a basket boat dance? Picture someone in an oversized coconut shell on the water, rocking back and forth as quickly as possible, to the K-pop classic "Gangnam Style"—you could say it's a blend of the old and the new. If you're still hungry after class, try bun cha (a Vietnamese meatball dish that originated in Hoi An) for dinner. <u>Bún Chả Gia Hưng</u> has a perfectly cooked version. End the evening with a walk along the city's canals, lit by floating

lanterns, and through <u>Hoi An Ancient Town</u>. A major Southeast Asian trading

center in the 16th century, the area is a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site

hands-on cooking class, plus visit a farmers' market and witness a basket boat

—and a Travelers' Choice Award winner. Day four: Master the art of lantern making

Lantern Making Class in Hoi An, Vietnam • Image: DN/Tripadvisor

tasting and helpful teachers are enough to calm any concerns you may have about your artistic abilities. For a late lunch, there's <u>Cao Lầu Liên</u>, an under-the-radar spot named for its signature dish: Cao lau noodles (pork and greens served over rice noodles that have been soaked in lye water). You could also opt for a bánh mì from Madam Khanh, made by the self-appointed Bánh Mì Queen of Hoi An, who is also a Travelers' Choice Award winner. If you can't choose between the two, get both

If you're still thinking about those lanterns from last night, today is your chance

ancient techniques to create a bamboo lantern covered in silk fabric (which can

be easily folded to fit in your carry-on bag). An accompanying Vietnamese tea

An Full Lantern Making Class, you'll follow an 11-step process that draws on

to own a custom one—but not without some hard work. During the two-hour Hoi

(the restaurants are located across the street from one another), but keep an eye on the clock. You've got an evening flight to <u>Hanoi</u>—one of the <u>Travelers' Choice</u> Best of the Best-winning cities in Asia—to catch. Day five: Venture to Ninh Binh

## Province • Image: From left to right: Anders Blomqvist/Getty Images, Courtesy of Bespoke Trendy Hotel Hanoi, EoNaYa/Getty Images Wake up in comfort at <u>Bespoke Trendy Hotel Hanoi</u>. Stationed in the heart of the Old Quarter, it's earned high marks (nearly 3,800 five-star reviews) for its aboveand-beyond service and amenities like personal slippers and Netflix. It's tough to

leave, but the <u>Full-Day Ninh Binh Highlights Tour</u> is worth your while.

From left to right: Tran Quoc Pagoda in Hanoi, Vietnam, Suite at Bespoke Trendy Hotel, View of Trang An Landscape in Ninh Binh

Roughly two hours outside the city, Ninh Binh province in north Vietnam is a

feast for the eyes, with sweeping landscapes dotted by ancient pagodas. Bicycle

through rice fields in Tam Coc and marvel at limestone caves from yet another

sampan. For a bird's-eye view of the countryside, climb the 500 steps to the top

of Lying Dragon Mountain, keeping an eye out for wild goats—a symbol of good

The full-day tour ends where it began: Back at your hotel in Hanoi. Two blocks away, order the Vietnamese-style pizza at Pizza 4P's Bao Khanh Alley for dinner. Lindsey's picks:

Best bite of food: "The most memorable thing I ate was a chicken bánh mì

from Bui Thi Xuan [in Ho Chi Minh]. I've been trying to eat less pork and beef and this was the first time I saw a chicken bánh mì on a menu. It was really, really tasty." Biggest surprise: "My husband and I are not tour people at all, but we genuinely loved every single tour that we went on. Now, we want to do at least

Most hospitable hotel: "Even though we were only there for one night,

tour guide's arrival so we could enjoy a leisurely breakfast."

Bespoke Trendy Hotel in Hanoi stood out. They arranged car rides to and from

the airport, helped us exchange our cash for smaller bills, and kept tabs on our

# Where To Tag along as our Travelers' Choice winners come to life in curated itineraries. Read more **Tommie Ethington** Tommie Ethington is a Dallas-based freelance writer. Formerly an editor for Southwest Airlines' in-flight magazine, she continues to write about travel, design and interesting

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