

## HOW TO JOIN A CHAT TRIP

### Extended version for those not used to travelling into Vietnam

*Welcome - Our volunteers are very important to us. CHAT recognises and very much appreciates the time, effort and costs incurred for each volunteer joining a CHAT trip.*

*Our Mission is to provide dental services and oral hygiene instruction to the very poor and needy children and their carers at orphanages, institutions and schools in provinces south and central Vietnam.*

*A CHAT experience is a very special, interesting, worthwhile and rewarding experience.*

*It offers a unique opportunity to combine volunteer professional services with seeing the beautiful Vietnamese countryside, meet the warm, friendly people, see and experience their culture and enjoy their delicious foods. Vietnam is a charming country.*

*Our volunteers are very important to us and your help and support is greatly appreciated.*

### PROCEDURE FOR JOINING

- Express your interest to our Secretary, Melanie Chen – [secretary@chatinc.org](mailto:secretary@chatinc.org) or telephone: (08) 9271 3953 / 0491 719 680 (texts only) – you need confirmation that a vacancy exists.
- After receiving a reply email (and on proviso a vacancy exists), please complete our [Membership/Trip Application Form](#) preferably online on our website: [chatinc.org.au](http://chatinc.org.au)
- Or ask the Secretary for a hard copy form.
- Read our Disclaimer/Waiver.
- Your payment of \$300 [\$20 membership & \$280 ground costs] is due at this time. Please deposit directly into the CHAT bank account (details on the form). NOTE: CHAT has no credit card facility. Include documents required (as stated on the form - all volunteers must provide a copy of their passport photo page; PLUS clinicians/health practitioners must also provide a copy of their qualification, registration certificate and proof of professional indemnity insurance.
- Our policy is to fill/confirm positions on a ‘first to pay’ basis. Unless payment is received, positions are not confirmed. Receipt of your \$300 payment confirms your placement, subject to quotas for different roles on teams (dentists, dental assistants, etc).
- You must have a current passport.
  - The expiry date must be at least 6 months past your trip date.
  - If you require a passport, an application form may be filled out and printed, but not lodged online at: [www.passports.gov.au](http://www.passports.gov.au) or visit an Australian Post outlet, an Australian Passport Office or ring the Australian Passport Information Service on 131 232 to ask for an application form to be mailed to you. Your passport application form must be lodged in person at an Australia Post outlet – contact the office to make an appointment. Once your passport application with supporting documentation (as listed on the form) is lodged, allow 10 working days for it to be processed.
  - For current and recently expired passport holders, you may be eligible to lodge a passport renewal form, available online or contact the Australian Passport Information Service on 131 232 for a form to be mailed to you. Only applicants themselves can request a renewal form and your identity must be confirmed before a renewal form is provided. Renewal forms (a one page form) are issued with your personal details pre-filled, they are NOT available from Australia Post outlets. The completed renewal form should be lodged in person at an Australian Post outlet, together with two recent coloured passport photographs of you, plus your current/previous passport.
- A visa for entry to Vietnam is **essential**\*. You will require a ‘tourist visa’ / your purpose of entry is as a tourist.

Allow 3 working days for your visa to be processed (does not include postal time).

\* NOTE:

- If you're a Singapore or Malaysian passport holder, you DO NOT require a visa for entry to Vietnam.
- Citizens from the UK currently enjoy exemptions for stays no longer than 15 days.
- Some other countries may be exempt. Please check.
  
- We recommend you apply for your visa through the Vietnam Embassy or a Consulate, within Australia. (Your travel agent can do this for you, otherwise arrange yourself).
- Canberra volunteers can go direct to the Embassy at 6 Timbarra Crescent, O'Malley 2606, ACT. Tel: 02 6286 6059/02 6286 8465.
- Perth volunteers can apply directly at: Vietnamese Consulate Office at 8th floor/16 St George's Terrace, Perth WA 6000. Tele: 08 9221 1158.  
Office hours: Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30 pm; 1.30pm-5pm.
- Sydney volunteers can apply directly at: Consulate General of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam at: Suite 205, Level 2, Edgecliff Centre, 203 - 233 New South Head Road, Edgecliff, NSW 2027.  
Tel: 02 93271912 / 02 93272539.
- You may also apply for your visa online on official Government of Vietnam websites.
- NOTE: The Australian Government has received reports of scams and personal details being made public involving online visa applications and for a 'visa on arrival' approval letter. Due to these risks, the Australian Government recommends you apply for a visa for Vietnam directly from your nearest Embassy or Consulate of Vietnam.
  
- CHAT highly recommends each volunteer has comprehensive travel insurance, including Covid-19 cover. (Your travel agent can do this for you, otherwise arrange yourself).  
Check your travel insurance covers for loss and damage and medical expenses for accident/injury whilst doing volunteer work and when travelling with CHAT.  
Be clear on what circumstances and activities are not covered.
  
- You need to make air travel arrangements.  
Your travel agent will do this for you, or you can organise this online.
  
- Please allocate \*minimum 10kgs of your luggage for carrying CHAT materials/supplies from Australia to CHAT HQ in Ho Chi Minh City.  
If you travel with a budget airline you MUST purchase a minimum extra 10kgs weight - this is over and above the luggage allowance for your personal items. (NOTE: It's cheaper to book/pay for this weight initially, than to purchase more weight when boarding/afterwards).  
\* If you depart elsewhere than Perth and are not carrying any dental equipment/supplies to Vietnam for CHAT you are requested to pay a \$50 fee in lieu OR can bring 10kg of non-expired toothpastes/ toothbrushes.  
Each volunteer's share of CHAT supplies can be collected after 3 weeks prior to departure date of trip, from Dr. Gabby Ly's surgery at: Stirling Dental Clinic, 11 Victoria Street, Westminster. If you wish to call the clinic beforehand, please telephone (08) 9344 7420; or call direct the practice manager, Hoang Bui on 0403 970 124 or email at: honagbull@gmail.com.  
  
NOTE: On your return journey, no need to allocate any luggage/weight allowance for CHAT.
  
- Consult your doctor or a specialised travel clinic to discuss your immunisations for travelling to Vietnam and working with CHAT.

- Advise your doctor the type of work you'll be involved in with CHAT i.e. providing or assisting with dental treatment for children and adults at orphanages/other institutions in Vietnam. Our work environment presents a high risk of contact with Hepatitis B. Let the doctor know CHAT works in rural/remote areas of South or Central Vietnam. Ask the doctor about avian and other flu types, mosquito borne diseases and other diseases such as rubella, whooping cough, chickenpox. Immunisation for rabies is recommended only if working with animals (which CHAT doesn't do).
- CHAT highly recommends immunisation against Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Typhoid, Tetanus and Measles – for all our volunteers i.e. medical/dental clinicians, dental assistants, helpers, handyman and interpreters. If previously immunised against Hepatitis B and 5 years post vaccination has passed, please discuss with your medical or travel doctor the need for blood retest to check immunity.
- Covid-19 virus vaccination (full course) is mandatory.
- Check Smartraveller for advice/information - <https://www.smartraveller.gov.au>. This website contains important information on matters such as health, safety, laws, etc.
- Accommodation on arrival in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) until departure for our work location (usually Sunday morning) MUST be booked by you.
  - CHAT recommends Tuong Vi Hotel in District 10 (across the road and a block from CHAT HQ). The hotel is clean and tidy and equivalent in Australia to an approx. 2-3 star rating.
 

**Address:** 111 Trần Thiện Chánh, P.12, Q.10  
(Near Hai Do Villas cul de sac)  
Phone: 84 97 438 90 17
  - You may make other accommodation arrangements e.g. staying with family or at a more upmarket hotel.
  - If you don't stay at the Tuong Vi Hotel, then you MUST be at that hotel lobby/or CHAT HQ, on the first Saturday morning at a specified time, set by your Trip Leader.
  - Volunteers are requested to travel/arrive in Ho Chi Minh City on Friday if possible, so to be well rested to start CHAT work on Saturday.
  - The CHAT team usually travels away from HCMC on Sunday morning for 5 days work at a rural/country location. Accommodation at country locations is usually but not always booked by CHAT and all volunteers must stay together.
  - Accommodation for your return to HCMC (Tuong Vi or other hotel) on Friday evening, MUST be re-booked by you.
- A pre-departure meeting of volunteers for each team is organised approximately 2-3 weeks prior to departure. This meeting is an opportunity to:
  - 1) meet each other
  - 2) get answers to any questions you may have
  - 3) be given advice on what to expect during your CHAT experience
  - 4) be allocated your share of CHAT supplies to carry into Vietnam, and
  - 5) reminder to purchase items required – as indicated in relevant Handbooks.

This meeting is usually held in Perth – if you live outside of Perth, check if we are videolinking our meeting.

- Prior to departure, volunteers will be sent by CHAT secretary extra relevant information e.g. Handbook, website document ‘Your Vietnam Adventure’, ‘Checklist’ & more.  
It’s very important our volunteers are well informed and prepared for their CHAT experience.

Please allow round 3 hours reading time for your pre departure information.

- CPR training must be current – i.e. last training within 3 years.
- Clinical Practice: We expect clinicians to practise according to the same Government and National Registration Board (AHPRA) rules and standards we work under in Australia. There is NO exception to this rule. All dental, medical and other health related clinicians who are registered with AHPRA MUST supply a copy of their qualification and their current and ‘unconditional’ professional registration. If you log onto the AHPRA website [www.ahpra.gov.au/Login.aspx](http://www.ahpra.gov.au/Login.aspx) there is a link to a PDF copy of your registration certificate.  
Vietnam Government officials request this information and may visit our workplaces in Vietnam to watch our work and request to check qualification and registration documents.
- Professional Indemnity Insurance: All dental and medical clinicians MUST have indemnity insurance that will cover them whilst working in a voluntary capacity with CHAT in Vietnam.  
Final year dental students joining CHAT (from UWA & La Trobe Dental Schools) have indemnity insurance covered by their university.  
Dental assistants and dental assistant helpers are covered by the indemnity policy of their supervising dentist.

CHAT requires you to be in Ho Chi Minh City and available for CHAT work from Saturday morning (at the time advised by trip Leader- about 8-9 am) until 3 pm the following Saturday, i.e. 8 days inclusive. On the first Saturday, check equipment and supplies in preparation for the working week at headquarters, then travel (Sunday) to our country location, 5 days clinical work Mon-Fri, and time at the end (2nd Saturday) re-pack, check and sort equipment, materials etc in readiness for the next trip.

We recommend you arrive Friday in order to start early on the first Saturday.

Prior to and following this time with us, you’re free to do your own thing. Why not arrange a tour or holiday and make the most of your travel to Vietnam?

NOTE: Usually we travel by bus to our country work location on Sunday. Sometimes the bus doesn’t depart until early morning on Monday (can be as early as 5 – 6 am). In this event, Sunday is a free day in Ho Chi Minh City. If our work location is a long distance out of Ho Chi Minh City, then air travel (on Sunday) may be an option to bus travel.

Don’t stress – each CHAT team has proved over and over again to be truly friendly, supportive, and to have a great team ethic and a positive, professional attitude. Don’t be concerned with any language barrier – we have interpreters join each trip and of course, good old body language always works well. We have word charts listing words most commonly used in a dental clinic i.e. how to pronounce English words and phrases in Vietnamese.

Permission to have photos taken or used by CHAT: You MUST let your trip Leader know if you have any objections to a CHAT photo with yourself in it being used by CHAT – such as on our website, Facebook.

A Certificate of Appreciation is issued to each volunteer following their CHAT trip.

The certificate includes a section on clinical hours worked. This is filled in for clinicians only, who may use this for credits towards recognition of their professional development and permission to gain registration with AHPRA (Australian Health Practitioners Registration Agency).

CHAT realises volunteers give many hours of their time to CHAT, however, the hours worked as shown on the Certificate of Appreciation is restricted to clinical hours only (which is relevant/applicable for AHPRA).

- **General Information:**

CHAT first visited Vietnam in May 2005. We send 4 teams per year – normally April, July, September and November. A CHAT team comprises approximately 16 volunteers from Australia, consisting of dental clinicians, final year dental students, dental assistants and helpers, handyman, interpreters and a medical doctor. We provide general dentistry, minor oral surgery and dental health education. We usually treat children/carers at an institution, school or community centre; and as such our dental equipment is portable and all our dental requirements are taken with us by bus onto location. We determine a suitable room or out on a veranda to set-up our dental clinic.

CHAT in the main provides dental services and oral health education to poor and needy children and their carers in Vietnam. However, whom we see is determined by local health authorities.

There is a great need for volunteer health/dental services to people in developing countries such as Vietnam. The people in Vietnam are most grateful for the free service we provide their children and carers.

We have our base in Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC), and we most often travel by hired bus to work in other areas/country provinces in South or Central Vietnam.

Updated April 2023