



THE CHALLENGE

Crossing the street in Ho Chi Minh City

— Why did the tourist cross the road in Ho Chi Minh City? Because they wanted a delicious banh mi. The crosswalks of this dynamic city are notoriously busy but Justine Lopez is determined to get to the other side smiling. Can she do it? —

★ ROAD BLOCK
PEOPLE 13 MILLION
BIKES 8 MILLION
CARS 700,000



HEM 120 TRAN HUNG DAO "The Tranquil Alleyway"

> If I'm going to survive and thrive in Ho Chi Minh City, I need to be able to cross the road. It's not easy but sometimes there are steaming bowls of pho or iced Vietnamese coffee drinks on the other side of the bitumen and I want them. I have decided it's best to start small. After all, you can't conquer a marathon without some training runs. "This one will be easy", I think, as I enter one of Ho Chi Minh City's mazelike hems (alleys). I can easily touch the buildings on both sides of this alley with my outstretched arms, so I presume I'm safe from motorbikes here. I'm wrong. I don't make it more than 10 paces before a man on a scooter zips down the alley. I plaster myself flat against a wall as his bike emits a piercingly loud honk and speeds away.

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Biggest obstacle Squeezing past motorbikes and women pushing banh mi carts.

BUI VIEN STREET

"The Bustling Backpacker Street"

> I emerge from the relatively quiet lane and find myself smack-bang in the middle of Bui Vien Street (the party-centric backpacker area). Neon signs flash, music thumps from clubs and oversized SUVs barrel down the narrow road. It's 5pm and rush hour is in full swing. The sidewalk is crowded with parked motorbikes, banh mi carts and tourists drinking beer on plastic chairs. I have no choice but to walk in the street where SUVs come within inches of grazing me. I'm stuck behind a Vietnamese man selling dried squid, which hangs on a rack on the back of his motorbike. The smell is pungent. The moment I see a break in traffic I dart across the road.

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Biggest obstacle Dealing with sensory overload while trying to remember to not get hit.

NGUYEN THI NGHIA

"The Chaotic Intersection"

> I've reached the end of Bui Vien and that's when I see it – one of those wild intersections that gives Ho Chi Minh City its chaotic-crossing reputation. The thoroughfare is a rushing river of motorbikes, cars and buses that weave wildly between lanes with no apparent rhyme or reason. As I prepare to cross the street, the American tourists next to me are taking videos of the spectacle with their phones. There are crosswalks at the intersection but as the pedestrian light switches from red to green, the traffic doesn't really stop. The young Vietnamese man next to me steps off the sidewalk. I trail him so closely I might as well be clutching his shoulders. A stream of motorbikes is headed towards us. I mimic his movements, walking slowly but without hesitation and the vehicles magically part around us.

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Biggest obstacle Motorbikes come from every direction, even from the sidewalk.

NGUYEN HUE STREET

"The Walking Street"

> As I make my way from the chaotic Bui Vien area towards the Saigon River, the madness subsides and the roads become less clogged and more pedestrian friendly. I step onto Nguyen Hue Street – one of the only streets in the city that is completely traffic-free.

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Biggest obstacle Getting in the way of Vietnamese teens snapping selfies.

DUONG TON DUC THANG

"The Terrifying River Street"

> The traffic along the riverfront is dense, fast moving and never lets up. That's probably because there's not a crosswalk or a traffic light in sight. The mission is to cross the street and get to the riverside – but it's daunting. I've learned that in Vietnam, as long as I move slowly, make no sudden movements and put my trust in the drivers, traffic will go around me. But this street is a different beast. Vehicles are packed so closely together I wonder how I can even fit between them. I step foolhardily in front of an oncoming motorbike, which lurches to a stop and honks at me. I let my nerves take hold and start walking rapidly and recklessly. I've completely disrupted the flow of traffic. I scamper to a barrier in the middle of the road to regain my composure. For the remaining stretch, I abide by the rules and before I know it, I'm walking on a blissfully motorbike-free path along the breezy Saigon River.

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Biggest obstacle Avoiding buses. The motorbikes will go around you but the buses will not.