

Ten¹⁰

While rental agents are a great help in finding a property, sometimes it makes sense just to cut loose and do it on your own. Words by Will Peach.



1 Set your requirements: House or apartment? Location?

Getting a picture of what you want makes your search easier. Do you want the large space of a house? Or do you want the 24-hour security and convenience of a serviced apartment? Consider location. District 1 and 3 are more expensive but closer to the city. Further out you may be able to find greater deals, getting more for your money. Consider Districts 4 and 5, close enough to the centre of the action, but considerably cheaper. The best thing to do is to draw up a list. Separate it into three categories: essential, preferred and bonus. If you own or rent a motorbike then a priority for the house will be space to park your bike indoors. Check if the apartment complex has its own parking lot for residents and if it is accessible 24 hours a day. Not only will it help you find exactly what you're looking for, but it also means that less time is wasted viewing unsuitable properties that don't fit your criteria.

2

Work out your budget: The average house or apartment usually has hidden costs

If any housing advertisement is worth its salt it will list the price. Up against all those fluctuating numbers you need a ballpark figure of what you can afford. Have you taken into account monthly utilities like electricity, sanitation pick up and water? Some landlords will include electricity and water in their rental prices, but most do not, so get it in writing if they do. What about satellite TV and internet bills? There are a vast number of costs to be incurred outside of the listed price. Using your requirements you must best evaluate where your budget lies and make allowances still. Things like parking, cleaning services, postal charges and even furnishing essentials can stretch a weakly planned budget to perilous extremes.

3

Know your sources: The internet and message boards around town

Without an English language newspaper with a section dedicated to rentals or a good internet resource, finding out where there are places up for rent can be tough. Get on a computer and surf through the expat orientated sites and their message boards, usually there are sections devoted to house and property. Sites like Craigslist and Facebook even have sections and groups dedicated to finding property in the city and many people are now posting rentals on Facebook group sites like The Word. Doing your homework online and seeing what's out there also helps you with steps 1 and 2. Also check out popular expat haunts like Chi's Café on 40/27 Bui Vien, Underground, internet cafes and teaching centres for postings, you never know what's lying

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Grow some social grace: Talk to friends

If you're an anti-social hermit then it's time to snap out of it. Talking to people and letting them know you're looking is a time honoured method of securing a place. Let people know at work, in your guesthouse, in the bar or wherever. Make contacts and ask around. Ask friends who rent or own properties to see theirs, hell, just go around uninvited if necessary. Get a sense of what's out there and what they are paying. It doesn't hurt to do a little prying.

5

Begin your physical search

Use a trusted Vietnamese speaking friend to check out local newspapers and their classified sections. Use them to negotiate with landlords and interpret for you and begin your search by scouting out the areas you want to live. If you have transport this is easy. Lookout for rental signs (in Vietnamese the signs read *Nha Cho Thue*), ask residents around the area, even put wanted advertisements up in local hangouts (in Vietnamese and English). Call any promising leads and ask politely to view their properties. But beware, some local 'friends' like to sneak in a 10 percent finders fee. This is fine as long as it doesn't mean your rent increases by 10 percent.

6

Arrive in style and ask the right questions

In Vietnam, you are judged by your appearance. Roll up like a disgusting bum and its likely landlords won't want to do business with you. Make friends with them or the current tenants - it helps with gaining a second viewing. Check all the rooms and facilities, the shower, the stove, the bed, the cabinets and basins. Check things like water pressure, furniture, where the meters are and sound levels. If language barriers persist use a local friend to ask questions; is there hot water? Is there a backup generator? How much are typical bills? Where does the garbage go? What security does the property have? Is there a washing and dryer machine? Can I have friends stay over?

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Use a checklist: Are there better alternatives?

In conducting some research, asking around and finding some leads, check back against your original requirements. Are they still the same? Do you have to alter them? After a few days of furious hunting, update your list. Things you may have first deemed necessary might not be anymore. Do you really need a double bed if you're always going to wind up lonely? Do you really need satellite TV so that you can spend hour upon hour indulging in Fashion TV? Haven't you got work to do?

8

Bargain like your life depends on it

If you haven't been honing your skills down at Ben Thanh Market, now's the time. Haggle like a man with a loose mouth. Don't assume the listing price is fixed. As a foreigner, the perception will be that you are prepared to pay more for your accommodation. Landlords set their prices higher because of these assumptions. With a bit of staunch bargaining, prices can drop down almost five to ten percent. You may even be surprised by further reductions as the landlord won't have to pay commission to an agent.

9

The Legal Stuff: Arm yourself with the knowledge

To acquire property you'll need a valid six-month business visa to sign any legal contract. You may be asked to sign two contracts - one for the equipment and one for the house or flat. Contracts are usually in both English and Vietnamese, but the Vietnamese version takes precedence. So, use a friend to make sure the translation is done correctly. The potential tenant should tell the landlord exactly what changes are required to the house prior to the contract sign-off and before any money is transferred. Insist on a break clause in case your house isn't as promised or you need to swiftly leave the country. This also protects you from your landlord throwing you out at short notice. Make sure you register with the local police in the area you choose to live, its mandatory. And, when making any agreement, make sure it's in Vietnamese dong and not in dollars. With the exchange rate fluctuating, don't get yourself caught short if the dong drops to VND20,000 to the dollar.

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contacts

Allo Expat Vietnam Housing Forum

www.alloexpat.com/vietnam_expats_forum/vietnam-housing-relocation-in-vietnam-f98.html

Craigslist Vietnam Housing and Apartments List

www.vietnam.craigslist.org/apa/

Essortment House Hunting Tips

www.essortment.com/all/apartmenthuntin_rfek.htm

Expat Advisory

<http://www.expats-advisory.com/vietnam/ho-chi-minh-city/>

Expat Saigon Group

www.facebook.com/group.php?sid=f610c6c1307ab1af5926f61fbafd1df9&gid=39259741517

Expat Vietnam Classifieds

www.expatsvietnam.net/

ILA Housing Group

www.facebook.com/home.php#/group.php?sid=cfc5a3260418898ac99c3c7619b74ab&gid=88524070520

Realtor.com House Hunting Tips

www.realtor.com/basics/buy/looking/hunting.asp