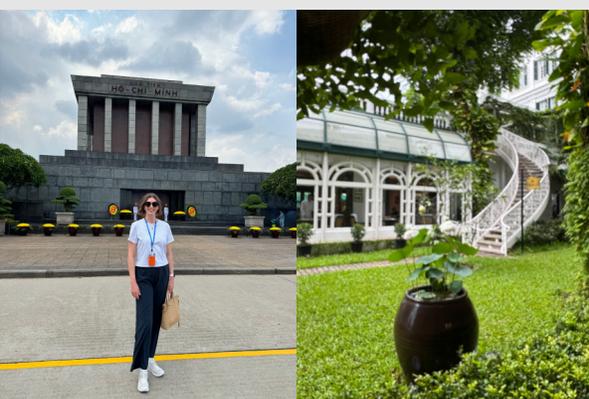




SEE YOU THERE

January 2025

Photo Summary



I am extremely excited to share this trip to SE Asia with you to inspire your 2025 travel wishlist and beyond. Also in this issue is my short but very sweet trip to Australia.

I feel like I am a little spoiled at this point with Singapore Airlines still topping my list of favorites. Airlines remain competitive with often scary pricing but with demand as high as it is, improvements and advancements continues to roll out.

I started in Hanoi, Vietnam working south and then across to Cambodia. There has been a consistent theme of perfection by the incredible architect Bill Bensley with the last several trips I've been on. Client feedback is always a 'wow' post stay and if you have stayed in one of his creations, you will know exactly what I am talking about. Capella Hanoi is around the corner from the Opera House and the opera theme is carried throughout the hotel with little touches.

Hotel Metropole has rich history, lush gardens with two distinctive wings. Heritage - in the original three-story Metropole building has a 1920's French, Indochine glamor with dark hardwood floors, vintage illustrations and art-deco marble bathrooms. The neo-classical Opera Wing opened in 1996 in a seven story building which has a slightly more modern feel with contemporary touches. Elegant service and a wonderful option for clients.

I visited the Vietnamese countryside, Ninh Binh and went on a row boat seeing waterfalls, limestone karsts and Tam Coc (3 grotto) caves. Visiting my first temple of the trip, Thai Vi which is a beautiful sanctuary built in 1258 with exceptional stone carvings across 3 levels in the mountain.

Hanoi is known as the cultural heart and capitol of the country whereas Ho Chi Minh city is the financial capital. I thoroughly enjoyed both cities with very different feelings, architecture and offerings.



SEE YOU THERE | January 2025
Melissa James | 408.775.9506 | melissa.james@vwti.com
@melissajamesic
www.seeyouthereflc.com

More on... Vietnam



Not too far from Hanoi we boarded a small cruise boat to visit a UNESCO World Heritage site, Ha Long Bay. It is truly a natural phenomenon.

Together with neighboring Lan Ha Bay and Bai Tu Long Bay, this beautiful region allows you to visit centuries-old caves, lagoons and floating fishing villages that can be explored by kayak or rowboat.



Fun fact, this is also where the movie King Kong was filmed. I had to get myself in photos to be sure you would believe me that this IS real and I was there :)



Continuing on my time in Hanoi...

Apart from exploring the city, we touched on some on the history about the country involving the war. We visited a Vietnamese war veteran, Nguyen Hong My who earned the Order of Ho Chi Minh after being the first to shoot down a U.S. fighter jet. Incredibly interesting learning from him first hand (with a translator), his personal stories about his experience in aerial combat and his pivotal role in the war. He ended up becoming friends with a U.S. pilot who he shot down in combat! Doing this in My's home, exploring his wartime memorabilia and seeing his book he wrote was fascinating.



Next up, contemporary art... who would have thought?!

We met with Suzanne Lecht who has built a beautiful art gallery which doubles as her home, with a traditional pagoda-like structure with ethnic architecture. She was inspired by Hanoi's Gang of Five who were considered the early pioneers of contemporary Vietnamese art. The art director, originally from Montana has been living in Asia since 1984. She showcases her own art as well as the nation's top up-and-coming artists with emerging trends. Spending time with an American living in Asia for so many years provided an opportunity to get a lot of my curious questions answered.



SEE YOU THERE | January 2025
Melissa James | 408.775.9506 | melissa.james@vwti.com
www.seeyouthereflc.com
[@melissajamesic](https://www.instagram.com/melissajamesic)

& more on... Vietnam



Hoi An

Another UNESCO World Heritage site, Hoi An! A picturesque old town on the Thu Bon River is a small town definitely worth a visit. Rows of bright yellow traditional houses, the town flourished during the 16th and 17th centuries as one of Southeast Asia's most prosperous port towns. The diverse influence of Chinese, Japanese and European traders can still be seen today in the town's eclectic mix of architecture, where a Japanese bridge, a Chinese assembly hall, grand merchants' houses and French colonial villas are some of the highlights.

Lanterns are visible all over town so I was very excited to get hands on to design my own!



I am pretty sure everyone reading this owns some clothing made in Vietnam or at the very least, fabric, more specifically silk from Vietnam.

Tucked around the corner is a silk factory! Seeing this process literally from start to finish gave me new appreciation for my silk clothing items.



Left to right was a tray of silk worms at their various growth stages and then their silk oval balls. I have some videos of the staff handling this step by step. The balls get soaked in lukewarm water to make handling easier before it is manually drawn out to a wooden contraption that aids to create strands of silk. The strands then get divided for sale or to the next stage, creating fabric sheets and rolls. From the silk strands, another wooden machine combines the strands vertically and horizontally and pushes to condense them into a sheet (like fabric). They mix colors and cleverly create patterns.

Next door, tables of ladies are doing embroidery with millions of strands on fabric to create pictures. They looked like photographs they were so detailed! Through another door, shoppers paradise... all kinds of clothing, mens and ladies, children's... Lots of options and if you find something you like but would prefer a different color, style or size... no problem. They measure you and deliver it to you within just a few hours! Someone in my group did this... and it was perfect!



SEE YOU THERE | January 2025
Melissa James | 408.775.9506 | melissa.james@vwti.com
[@melissajamesic](https://www.instagram.com/melissajamesic)

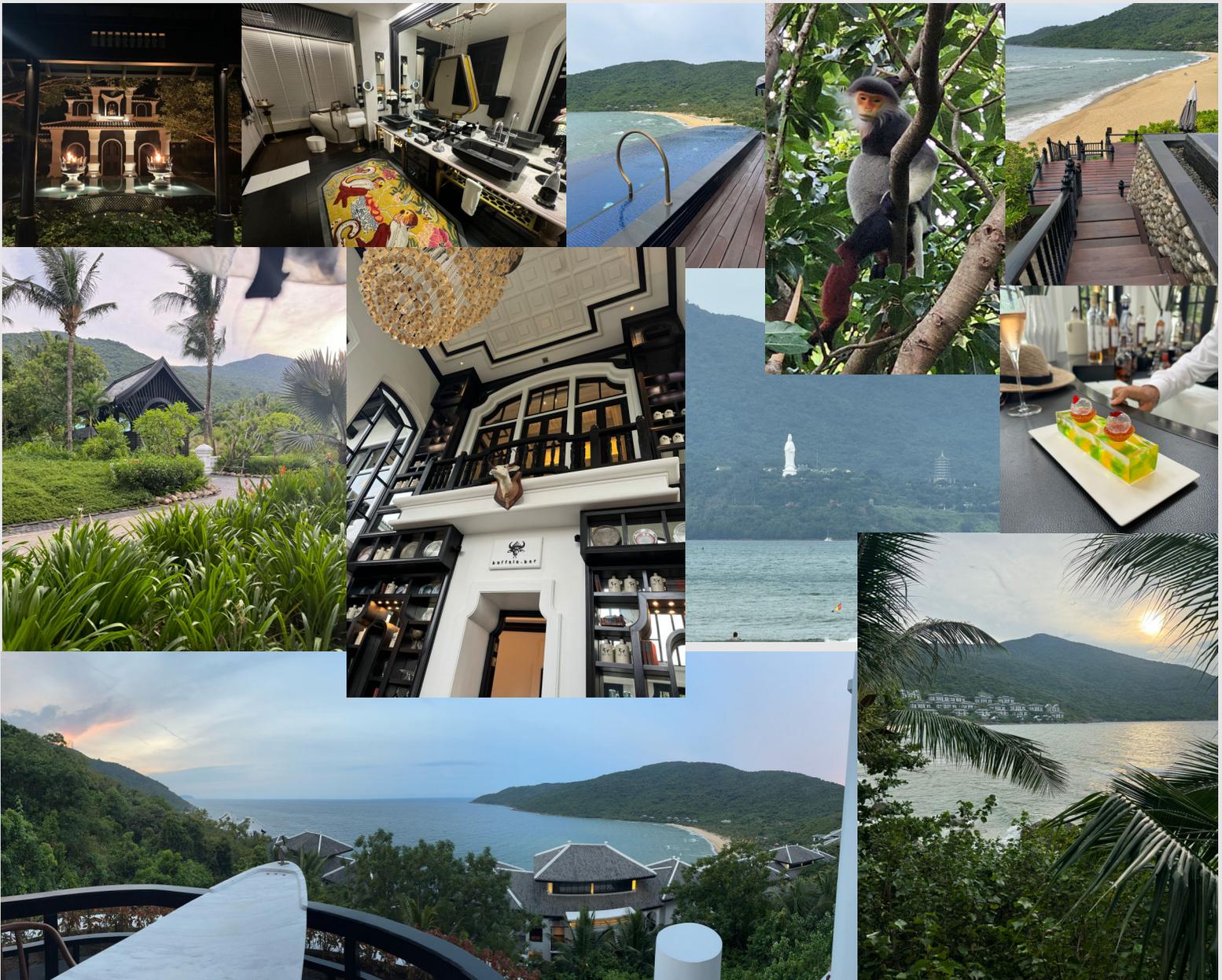
www.seeyouthereflc.com

Continuing on in... Vietnam



I was not entirely sure it was worth the short flight to include Da Nang in my trip but I was 100% certain it is a MUST afterwards.

You've already covered my summary on Hoi An on the previous page but let's talk about Da Nang. First of all the town is cute, beautiful beaches.. the real ones, not rocky ones that hurt your feet. Great dining and lots of character. A hotel that slipped under my radar is nestled on the gentle slopes of Da Nang's lush Son Tra Peninsula Nature Reserve, the InterContinental Danang Sun Peninsula Resort. An award-winning private beach resort inspired by the traditional architecture of Vietnamese temples and villages with a contemporary, dramatic flair. Here is a name you'll recognize...designed by architect Bill Bensley! The ocean views are stunning as you will see below in my photos. The critically endangered red-shanked douc monkey is found here and I was fortunate to see some doing their thing in the beautiful lush landscape during my stay. About 2,000 of the primates live in the peninsula.



SEE YOU THERE | January 2025
Melissa James | 408.775.9506 | melissa.james@vwti.com
www.seeyouthereflc.com
[@melissajamesic](https://www.instagram.com/melissajamesic)

Wrapping up... Vietnam



Ending in Ho Chi Minh City commonly known by its former name, Saigon...

Is a bustling and vibrant city, full of contrasts known for its cosmopolitan vibe and energetic pace. Old French boulevards and colonial architecture stand beside traditional temples and modern skyscrapers, revealing a city of captivating diversity and charismatic charm. To match the city, you can find a hotel to meet this same diversity. An over the top example here:



One of the region's most well-known wartime landmarks is the Cu Chi tunnels. The intriguing network of underground tunnels provided shelter and an effective source of infiltration for the Viet Cong during the later years of the Vietnam War.

Unbelievable to experience in real life, you can see just how small, dark and quite frankly scary these tunnels are. You can choose to crawl the tunnels if you choose, I opted to view above ground with a nervous grin of just the thought of going inside. A series of caverns which consist of storage rooms, make-shift hospitals and sleeping quarters. There is a gun range area here where you can fire AK47's and hearing this in the background certainly adds to the reality of what war must feel like.



Part night excursion, part street food adventure, I experienced an authentic taste of Ho Chi Minh City's buzzing nightlife. On the back of a vintage Vespa with 26 year old Harry as my driver, we set off to various stops up and down side streets and alleys in the city as I ate, and ate, and ate until finishing with cocktails at an intimate live music venue mingling with locals, listening and singing along to some of my favorite songs. An unforgettable fun evening. Harry had a lot to share en route about day to day life and the various stops ranged from trendy to more formal and super local. Not a tourist in sight.



SEE YOU THERE | January 2025
Melissa James | 408.775.9506 | melissa.james@vwti.com
@melissajamesic
www.seeyouthereflc.com

Gold Coast



Gold Coast is a gorgeous city south of Brisbane with the most incredible long sandy beaches, surfers paradise, and intricate inland canals. The beaches are really a highlight but this city has a brand new "HOTA" Home of the Arts

which showcases all kinds of art along with a cinema, theatre and performing arts. With a great roof top restaurant you can enjoy great food surrounded by the arts and great views. Considering it was winter, we enjoyed fabulous warm sunny weather minus any crowds.



Summarizing the trip, Australia appeals to adventure seeking travelings, art and cultural lovers, animal lovers, foodies and is perfect for your next trip. Getting you around safely and comfortably with Qantas and staying with the Langham hotel options, you are in great hands to make the most of your time away!



VIRTUOSO
MEMBER

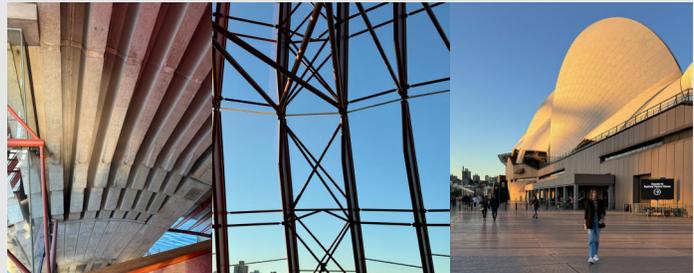
Valerie Wilson Travel
THE POWER OF ACCESS®

Spotlight on... Australia



I was thrilled to be invited on a luxurious quick trip down under in June 2024. The incredible team at The Langham and Qantas know how to travel in style.

We started in Gold Coast and ended in Sydney and I can't wait to get back. A few things really stood out to me about Australia. People are warm and friendly, it ranges from pretty clean to spotless in the city and safe in general. A bit of a no brainer but they speak english! How many times are we traveling speaking to a server or someone on the street trying to signal with hands to get a basic answer. Kind of refreshing! 100% a family friendly destination.



Getting there... we were able to experience the Qantas A380 aircraft (which is quite spectacular) along with other smaller aircrafts. Australia is a big country so a trip there will undoubtedly include air travel to reach all of the fun and diverse cities. It is so worth the longer flight to be able to see, taste, touch and live these great things. The Opera House does not disappoint and doing a behind the scenes private tour allows you the opportunity to see rehearsal rooms, the MANY stages within the theatre - yes... multiple events happen simultaneously here. Understanding more about the design was fascinating.

Especially since it was a first of its kind really pushing the limits with engineering. Jorn Utzon and Peter Hall made history with this modern architecture.



Qantas First Class lounge in Sydney is stunning. Views, delicious dining, spa...



SEE YOU THERE | January 2025
Melissa James | 408.775.9506 | melissa.james@vwti.com
@melissajamesic

www.seeyouthereflc.com