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Vietnam  
January  
2026



# THE ARCHITECTURE EXPERIENCE

Train Street, Hanoi

AN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING COURSE ON  
THE JOURNEY OF VERNACULAR  
SUSTAINABILITY IN VIETNAM



One Pillar Pagoda, Hanoi

# VERNACULAR SUSTAINABILITY

Vietnam has, in recent years, become an exemplary example of a developing country that has forayed successfully into contemporary sustainable architecture by marrying its rich heritage to modern-day developments in architectural practice. Today, Vietnamese architecture features modernist layouts, forms, and building systems, but realised with local materials and incorporating traditional techniques, while maintaining a holistic bond with the environment. The resulting products are sustainable utilitarian buildings responsive to the tropical climate, economical in budget and generating employment of local skilled labour – a perfect blend of art and science.

## Why Vietnam?

Young architects could benefit exponentially from observing contemporary Vietnamese architecture as the pros and cons architects deal with in Vietnam are largely similar to those in developing countries and emerging economies. Issues like high population density, space premium, harsh climate and limited financial resources. Likewise, advantages like abundant natural material resources, readily available labour and traditional know-how in construction are common to both. Vietnam has produced an innovative yet feasible architecture that is aesthetically pleasing and functionally efficient. Budding architects would benefit from experiencing architecture that intelligently blends the best of the old and new, the built and the open.



# THE ARCHITECTURE EXPERIENCE

Wind & Water  
Cafe. Photo by  
Hiroyuki Oki

The best approach to growing as an architect is to learn from experiencing and observing. The **Architecture Experience** aims to do just that – to take an existing project proposal and enhance its core architectural values by incorporating the ideals of Vernacular Sustainability studied on this tour.

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**9 DAYS,  
20 PARTICIPANTS,  
2 CITIES**

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These visits will focus on observing and learning about the importance of site sensitivity, different architectural techniques – active and passive, the importance of material selection and other aspects vital to sustainability. The visits will foster a deep understanding of building with nature with an inclination towards local materials and techniques, while working on an existing project will illustrate the immediate applications and impacts of Vernacular Sustainability ideals on contemporary architecture.

# IMPORTANT PLACES VISITED



Bat Trang, a village renowned for its ceramics since the 11th century, boasts a unique porcelain style developed over generations. Most households still engage in crafting these high-quality ceramics. The Bat Trang Pottery Museum, by 1+1>2 Architects, celebrates this heritage by showcasing artisans' work, village history, and pottery-making techniques.

The architects collaborated with experts and locals to create an open, community-supported space with commercial functions. This museum aims to preserve the craft's cultural significance and ensure its continuity.



This multipurpose space in a natural setting hosts local cultural events. It emphasizes using local bamboo materials in a traditional way, making them insect-proof and heat-treated for structural use.

The design comprises two radial volumes: a cantilevered bamboo-covered exterior resembling bird wings and a partially buried stone-clad volume housing auxiliary facilities, all crafted from natural and local materials. Visitors can also see and walk through a koi pond in the restaurant space.

# IMPORTANT PLACES VISITED



**DE LA SÓL WORK AND EXHIBITION SPACE**

A versatile space blending exhibition halls, a cafe lounge, retail areas, and a client experience center. The design preserves the historical villa's facade while introducing a modern two-story steel and glass structure connected by a striking loop staircase. Kinetic sculptures serve as shading and landmarks. During renovation, the villa's rich history, seen in layers of paint, arch gates, and diverse brick types, was uncovered, highlighting the city's cultural heritage in every brick.



**OLD QUARTER - HANOI**

Hanoi's Old Quarter, situated near Hoan Kiem Lake, is a historic commercial district featuring colonial architecture, Buddhist temples, and pagodas. Its ancient streets, named after original businesses dating back 1,000 years, now offer modern goods and services. Preserved shop-houses, constructed over a century ago, feature narrow designs to avoid high taxes.

These buildings have street-facing trading areas and inner courtyards for families. Today, the Old Quarter is a vibrant area with cafes, bars, restaurants, boutiques, and art galleries amidst its rich history.



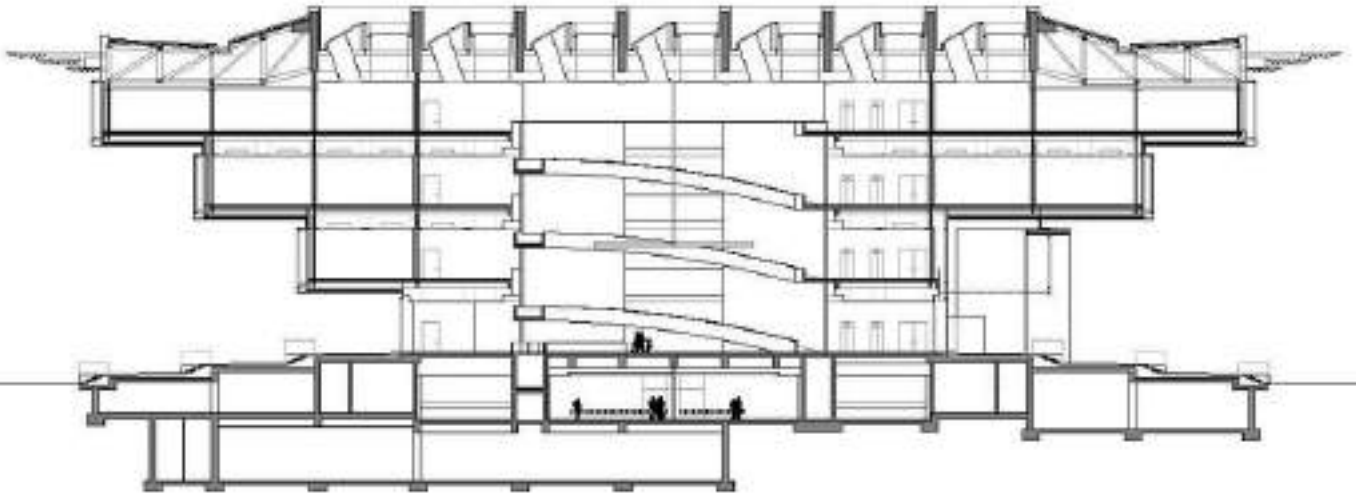
Project work by the  
October 2019 batch - A pop  
up pavilion design

# CAPSTONE PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Architecture Experience is designed with the intent of enhancing architectural understanding. To this end, a short project is included as part of the experience. The idea of the project is to refine an existing project with the ideologies of Vernacular Sustainability.

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**PRE-TOUR  
ASSIGNMENT,  
ON SITE  
OBSERVATIONS,  
PROJECT REVIEW**  
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This project will include a pre-tour assignment. Participants will be given an existing project in which they will have to conduct a basic SWOT analysis and identify areas that could be enhanced by ideologies of Vernacular Sustainability to become more sustainable. When on the tour, participants will review their on-site notes and observations and highlight important aspects that could be relevant to adapting and improving their own projects. At the end of the tour, participants will prepare and present a conceptual revision of the projects which will then be discussed and reviewed by the curator. The discussion will cover the feasibility and impact of their design modifications and how to proceed post-trip.



Section 1 of Hanoi Museum by gmp Architects.

## WHAT IS IN IT FOR ME?

Participants get to understand Vernacular Sustainability as a concept, and how to apply it in an urban context, with the aim of being more sustainable in their solutions.

From a learning perspective, participants get to understand how their domain of interest approaches sustainability, and how they can work towards Sustainable Development Goals in their projects.

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**RELEVANT  
PROJECTS,  
INTERNSHIP  
OPPORTUNITIES,  
UNDERSTANDING  
OF VERNACULAR  
SUSTAINABILITY**

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At the end of the Experience, participants will have an improved practical understanding of what they study in college or practice in their professional life, and learn how to implement these strategies into their own projects, enhancing their portfolios.

Participants also get internship opportunities from our partners, and the more innovative their design proposal is, the better the chances of getting the internship.

# EXPERIENCE OVERVIEW

## DAY 1

**Morning arrival** in Hanoi, Vietnam.

**Orientation** on the structure of the tour visits and project. Finalisation of teams and the participants' individual roles and responsibilities within the team will be defined.

**Places to visit:** Ho Chi Minh's Stilt House, One Pillar Pagoda, Temple of Literature, Vietnamese National Assembly and Mausoleum of Ho Chi Minh (outside visit), Cua Buac Church.

## DAY 2

**Topics of discussion:** Sustainable building materials, contemporary innovation in architecture and construction technology.

**Places to visit:** Hanoi Museum, Bat Trang Pottery Village, studio visit.

## DAY 3

**Topics of discussion:** Architectural influence of Vietnam and its relevance in contemporary design, the fusion of traditional and modern design.

**Places to visit:** Dong Xuan market, Hang Dau Water Tower, Pizza 4PS, Thang Long Imperial Citadel.

## DAY 4

**Topics of discussion:** Traditional architecture of Vietnam and various external influences.

**Places to visit:** Museum of Ethnology, Hanoi Old Quarter and Hoàn Kiếm Lake, St. Joseph's Cathedral, Hanoi Train Street.

## DAY 5

**Free Day**

## DAY 6

**Free Day**

**Late evening arrival** in Ho Chi Minh City.

## DAY 7

**Topics of discussion:** Landscape elements - the use of water, rock gardens and traditional flowers in spatial design.

**Places to visit:** Wind and Water Cafe.

## DAY 8

**Topics of discussion:** Influence of natural environment and the socio-economical situation on architecture.

**Places to visit:** Saigon Central Post Office, HCMC Book Street, De La Sol Work & Exhibition space, studio visit.

## DAY 09

**Topic of Discussion:** Pre and Post World War 2 influences in Vietnamese architecture and modern influences.

**Places to visit:** Saigon Opera House (Outside visit), Cafe apartments, Nguyen hue Street, Chidori Coffee in Bed Cafe, Ben Thanh Market.

## DAY 10

**Free Day**

Culmination of the tour, brief on submission of Capstone project.

**Departure** to India or home country.



**Curator -**  
**Ar. Rachita Bhonsle**  
**(B.Arch)**

## **CURATOR & TOUR LEADER**

The Architecture Experience Singapore is curated by Rachita Bhonsle, who will also be accompanying the participants on the tour. Rachita is a senior architect at a private firm which specialises in high-rise buildings and high-density residential communities. She has a background in environmental policy management, sustainable design, and energy-efficient planning.

Rachita has worked mainly in the residential, hospitality and educational sectors. She is passionate about climatology-based design, the environmental impact of built spaces and sustainable site planning. These principles have driven her work for the last decade.

### **Timeline**

- 2007-2012 B.Arch, MS Ramaiah Institute of Technology, Bangalore
- 2012-2014 Vishwannath Associates, Bangalore
- 2015 Graduate Certificate Program in Environmental Policy and Management – Major in Energy and Sustainability, University of Denver, Colorado, USA
- 2016 Rogue Architecture, Wheatridge, Colorado
- 2017-2023 Poornakriti Architects, Bangalore
- 2021 - Sustainable Site Planning, MITx
- 2024 - How to use Biomimicry in Architecture, Eduwik
- 2024 - Sustainable Building Design, MITx



**Curator -**  
**Ar. Atul Saraff**  
**(B.Arch)**

## **CURATOR & TOUR LEADER**

The Architecture Experience Vietnam is co-curated by Atul Saraff, who will also be accompanying the participants on the tour. Atul is a practising architect based in Bangalore and also currently teaches at CMR School of Architecture. He has 12+ years of experience in the field, working with firms such as Mistry Architects - Bangalore, Mozaic - Goa, and Total Environment - Bangalore. Atul is an IGBC-accredited professional and focuses most of his effort on creating and teaching about environmentally conscious designs. Most of his experience is focused on the Residential and Hospitality sector.

Atul is an Alumnus of MS Ramaiah Institute of Technology, Bangalore.

### **Timeline**

- 2007-2012 B.Arch. MS Ramaiah Institute of Technology, Bangalore
- 2012-2014 Mistry Architects, Bangalore
- 2014 IGBC Green accreditation
- 2014-2015 Mozaic, Goa
- 2015-2021 Total Environment, Bangalore
- 2021-Present - Design Principal at Saraff and Sharalaya Design House
- 2021-Present - Assistant Professor at CMR School of Architecture

# ALUMNI TESTIMONIALS



**AYUSHI MADAN**  
4th Year, Wadiyar  
Centre For  
Architecture, Mysore

**Participant - The Architecture Experience Vietnam (Feb 2024)**

The trip allowed me a very holistic experience of the cities, which is a first for me despite having been on quite a few “study” trips. It encompassed everything from contemporary and historically relevant site visits to vibrant day and night markets, offering insights into various aspects beyond architecture- food, culture, history, and so on. To our surprise and joy, the lively local New Year celebrations added a dynamic dimension, revealing various facets of the city's essence. It was encouraging to see studios and practices using sustainability and adaptive reuse as forefront agendas in a relatable urban context. I enjoyed seeing the variety in the typologies and languages of architecture within the same city. Would definitely want to explore more into the observations and learnings from Vietnam. There were a lot of spontaneous discussions encouraged and initiated by Atul Sir, that made me look a few more steps beyond just the surface and helped me catch onto certain aspects in a much more simplified way. He was really a great mentor to have on this trip!



**SARAH SULEKHA**  
Architect

**Participant - The Architecture Experience Japan (July 2023)**

The learning experience was not only with regards to architecture, it also included learning about the social and cultural environment. I loved how I got to experience both contemporary and traditional cultures in parallel and also get the opportunity to interact with architects like Florian Busch as well as with the locals. Hats off to Rachita for being so patient and positive in every situation. She made me feel very comfortable . The team was very enthusiastic and comfortable to work with. The accommodation, transportation and every other basic need was very comfortably organised with the cost in consideration.. The team was very enthusiastic and comfortable to work with. The accommodation, transportation and every other basic need was very comfortably organised with the cost in consideration.



**TANUSHREE  
MURKIBHAVI**  
3rd Year, BNCA, Pune

**Participant - The Architecture Experience Singapore (Feb 2024)**

We learned a lot about urban planning, city-scale development, and how planning and sustainability go hand in hand. We visited exhibitions that reinforced those ideas and later got time to explore our ideas in the form of projects. The trip was a balance of both fun and academics. Rachita made the entire learning process more fun and carefree, which allowed us to explore more around the core concepts. Overall, I had an amazing time with her and am glad that she was our mentor. An Amazing experience, I understood new ideas and concepts from a new perspective. Site visits were the best, I got to learn a lot and also saw real-life applications of concepts related to urban planning.



**SHHRRUTI JAIN**  
Architect

**Participant - The Architecture Experience Sri Lanka (October 2019)**

Studio and site visits were very well organised but what I loved the most were the interactive sessions that we had with various artists and architects in Sri Lanka. Conversations with them were an extremely enriching experience. I got a better understanding in material selection, and the integration of nature in the landscape was eye opening. Prithy and Kshitija curated the experience extremely well and I got to learn a lot from them. About the places as well as the field in general. It was a great experience altogether! Very well planned especially keeping in mind the fact that we were here for a decent number of days and have almost covered everything ranging from the historic places to the modern ones. This trip was worth the money and will definitely influence my design in the future.



# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

All our Experiences are aimed at implementing and solving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals set by the UN.

Goal no. 17, Partnerships for the Goals, is key to our Experiences, since we work with a global team of experts to be able to add value to the learning of the participants.

The Architecture Experience focuses on 3 of the Goals primarily -



**Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation**

- Develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, including regional and transborder infrastructure, to support economic development and human well-being



**Goal 11: Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable**

- By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing
- By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement
- By 2020, substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters



**Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns**

- By 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources
- Support developing countries to strengthen their scientific and technological capacity to move towards more sustainable patterns of consumption and production



# THE HAPPY LLAMAS

At **The Happy Llamas**, we curate Experiences for participants to show them how their domains work in the real world, and how they approach sustainability. Why?

We believe that the world has a lot to offer, and only on going out and engaging with different cultures in different corners of the world can one get a holistic view of life, and evolve personally and professionally. We also feel strongly about the need to make this planet, the only one that we have, more sustainable.

Keeping these two thoughts in mind, we work with domain and subject matter experts to co-curate Experiences where we inspire today's youth on how to make this world a better place to live for themselves and their peers, and creating positive global impact in their domains of interest.

We invite you to join us in this journey, and be a part of an inclusive and global community of changemakers!

## Contact Us

[ankit@thehappyllamas.com](mailto:ankit@thehappyllamas.com)  
**+91 8310 58 5352**  
[www.thehappyllamas.com](http://www.thehappyllamas.com)





WE ADHERE TO WORK TOWARDS THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



The Apartment Cafe on 42 Nguyen Hue  
Photo by Alyshia (A Girl En Route)

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A building can only be understood by moving around and through it, and by experiencing the modulation, and feel the spaces one moves through - from outside into verandah, then rooms, passages, courtyards. Architecture cannot be totally explained but must be experienced

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**GEOFFREY BAWA**