



The street food in Vietnam looked delicious and the ingredients appeared to be fresh, but would my tender Western stomach be able to handle it all? Should I miss out on this vital part of Vietnamese life, or forge ahead and risk earning a first-class ticket on the “Imodium Express?”

I found the perfect answer in the town of Hoi An, the charming old town known as the culinary capital of central Vietnam. I signed up for a Taste of Hoi An, a combination food tasting and walking tour around the town. Run by [Dulichso](#) of TUN Travel, this street food [Vietnam tour](#) takes up to six guests for a stroll through the back streets of Hoi An. A local nutritionist has personally inspected all the stands they visit to make sure they use sanitary cooking practices and fresh ingredients. During the four-hour tour TUN share anecdotes about Vietnamese food and markets.

We stopped at local fresh markets, small “one dish” restaurants, and many of those street stalls that are so intimidating to a newcomer. Among other delights, we slurped the ubiquitous pho, trying to make as much noise as the locals. TUN taught us a few tips on selecting the best markets and street stalls:

1. Find food-only markets

The best food is found in markets where people come specifically for food.

Many towns have markets that carry a little bit of everything, or a lot of t-shirts and other tourist-related trinkets. Locals don’t shop here, any more than you would go to a touristy place in your hometown to buy vegetables.

2. Avoid the flies

Forget the prejudice that Asian open-air markets are steamy, smelly and fully of flies. The truth is most of the small street markets in Vietnam are scrupulously clean, and the food very fresh. Meats are slaughtered, butchered and sold within four hours. Vendors bring only enough food to sell in one day. If there are no flies and no nasty odours, you have found a good market.

3. Go early

The market closes when all the food is gone. If you want to see silvery stacks of freshly caught fish on ice, piles of crisp bean sprouts or cilantro and mounds of fresh rice noodles get there well before noon or you’ll miss the mouth-watering display.

4. Look for the trash

For street stalls, ironically, the key is to find a place with lots of papers around it. The Vietnamese keep their streets clean, sweeping in front of their shops and stalls constantly. Diners drop their order chits on the ground, where the stall owner will sweep them up at the end of a mealtime. A stall with good food is one where there are many chits on the ground - a sign that it is has constant traffic.

5. Find a one-dish spot

Many tiny storefronts (or front porches of homes) serve one dish only. They specialize and use only the freshest ingredients. Treat your dining experience

as a moveable feast: a fruit shake here, some pho bo there, then down the street to the tofu custard lady for dessert. You can eat, work off calories and sightsee all during a meal.

By the end of our morning walking tour we had more than 40 (yes 40!) tastes of Hoi An. Everything was well prepared and fresh. Some weren't to my particular taste, such as the black sesame pudding. But I'd say a hit rate of about 38 out of 40 was pretty good.