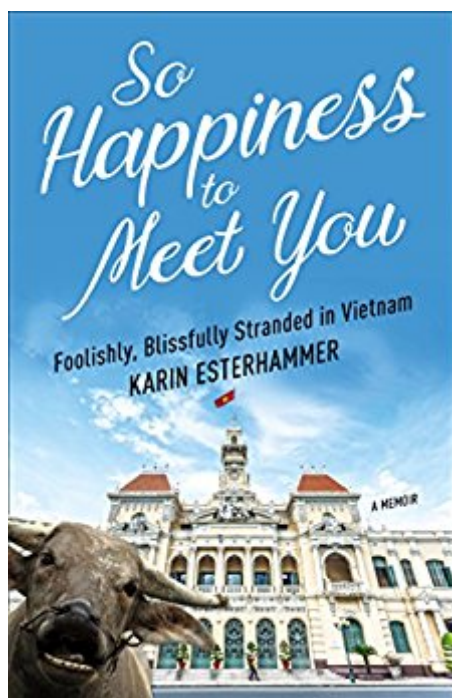


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# So Happiness To Meet You: Foolishly, Blissfully Stranded In Vietnam



## Synopsis

After job losses and the housing crash, the author and her family leave LA to start over in a most unlikely place: a 9-foot-wide back-alley house in one of Ho Chi Minh City's poorest districts, where neighbors unabashedly stare into windows, generously share their barbecued rat, keep cockroaches for luck, and ultimately help her find joy without Western trappings.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

An engaging read from beginning to end. I learned more from you than I did during our two trips to Vietnam. It's one of those books you don't want to end.

When Karen Esterhammer lost her job, and her husband's business was going nowhere, they decided that they needed a financial reset. So they chose the obvious route: pick up roots and move to Vietnam. Okay, maybe not that obvious. But they had fallen in love with the country on a visit a few years before, and knew they could live there very cheaply. Their reset year grew into two and then three, and we get to read about their adventures in *So Happiness to Meet You: Foolishly*,

Blissfully Stranded in Vietnam. True to their goal of paring down expenses, they moved into a poor neighborhood with nary an expatriate in sight. It didn't take long for their family, despite their blonde hair and blue eyes, to fit right in with their Vietnamese neighbors. In their tiny houses and wide-open ground floor living rooms, neighbor visits were frequent and few secrets were kept. During their time there, Karen fell "head over heels in love with Vietnam." She writes that she "began to experience more moments of euphoria than I'd had in my entire life. Every day I'd throw open the doors and want to run down the street, leaping and yelling, 'I can't believe I get to live here!' I wanted to grab people off their bikes and hug everyone. My neighbors were in our lives daily and I loved them as family." It wasn't all roses. Some of their financial woes followed them to Vietnam, stretching their planned one year stay. They struggled with renters of their house in LA, and the major repairs the house demanded. Her husband's plan to teach English to support their family didn't work out as well as they'd hoped. But the low cost of living and their delight to be in the country outweighed all the woes. She doesn't write a lot about the politics of Vietnam. In fact, she deliberately avoids it. But she couldn't help but be a little surprised at how unequal this communist country was. When she found out that families have to pay school fees, she was shocked. "'School isn't free here?' I asked incredulously. I'd always assumed education was free in a Communist country. Wasn't that the whole socialist point?" In fact, markets thrive, but the culture of bribery thrives even more. So Happiness to Meet You is a delight to read. Her enthusiasm for Vietnam is infectious. I'm not too sure about whether her strategy for a financial reset would work for me or most people. It certainly worked for her, in more ways than one, and tempts me to give it some consideration! Thanks to Edwelweiss and the publisher for the complimentary electronic review copy!

I usually read fiction, but saw the notice about a book signing and looked the book up on . I found the synopsis interesting and thought I'd give it a try. The author is amazingly good. She draws the reader into her family's precipitous move to Vietnam with the sights, sounds, smells and wonderful personalities in her newfound neighborhood. She stays humorous about how precariously her family is balanced financially and how she copes in a country where she doesn't speak the language. Hope Ms. Esterhammer can write screenplays, because this story would make a great movie.

Captured the essence of an American family truly accepting the culture of a foreign country and in the end being accepted by the people met in that country. I felt like I was there too. Great job!

I'm so glad I bought this book! I actually bought two, one for me, and one for my mom. I just

received it in the mail a couple days ago and I am already halfway through it. I can't put it down. It has me laughing out loud and is giving me all the good feelings. The author really portrays the essence of Vietnam and has officially given me the travel bug! She is honest, insightful and incredibly relatable. It's a great airplane read, beach read, late night read....everything read. I highly recommend it!

If you've having a bad day I highly recommend that you do yourself a big favor and get a copy of Karin Esterhammer's outstanding memoir: "So Happiness to Meet you." Start reading the book and you'll immediately notice how my advice is a direct ripoff of Esterhammer's marvelous opening sentence, which leads to a spectacularly well-written paragraph, which never lets off until the end, rewarding you with exquisite prose interspersed with sparkling wit, good natured humor, and prescient observations. Though Karin may disagree, the LA Times did us a huge favor by letting her go, freeing her to move her nest to an impoverished neighborhood in Ho Chi Minh City where she could absorb all the sweetness and idiosyncrasies that comprise the Vietnamese character, then use the writing skills she honed at the Times to bring us all the taste and smells and sounds of this warm and bustling culture that had once been our enemy. It is a healthy antidote for those of us who spend far more money than Karin and her family did, sequestering ourselves in air conditioned five star resorts while missing out on the culturally rich and potentially life altering experiences offered by mingling with the natives. Here are three randomly chosen samples, in case you still need them after savoring the book's witty, aptly chosen title, then reading the opening paragraph. Commenting on her self-admitted Type A personality (page 69): "For someone who simultaneously uses the toilet and applies makeup, who does biceps curls with cantaloupes while grocery shopping, and who strokes a cat with her foot while typing, squandering time was one of the Seven Deadly Sins." On how she dealt with the challenge of trying to master the complexities of the Vietnamese language (page 124): "Vietnamese has a Latin alphabet, a fact that triggered a peculiar reflex whenever I picked up my textbook with the portrait of French Jesuit Alexandre de Rhodes on the cover: I genuflected." And in a more serious vein, rendering social commentary with grace and sensitivity, this is how Esterhammer soothed her Vietnamese friend's anguish, putting the woman's extreme poverty into perspective by offering the tradeoff we Americans pay for our relative affluence (page 85): "Not everyone in America is rich. Some people are very poor, like here, like everywhere in the world. Plus, Americans don't have the strong family bonds that the Vietnamese have. Here, it's as if the whole neighborhood is one big family. I admire

that. Americans are more isolated, with six-foot fences and the curtains drawn. It can be lonely. So buy the book and read it. I guarantee that your day will magically improve, and you definitely won't be lonely.

I loved this book. I laughed, sat slack jawed, felt sad, and rooted for everyone including Karin and her family in their new home. The community in Vietnam was full on loving, giving, and kind spirits. I am so glad Karin shared her experience in "So Happiness to Meet You".

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