

Market life (left to right)

Sellers keep their stalls in perfect order at the markets in Cần Thơ; sun and shoppers emerge following a downpour.



Vietnam's bounty

Photographer Emma Byrnes discovers Vietnam is at its finest in the early morning light »





Catch of the day (left to right)
Rearranging freshly caught fish.

Fishing boats cluster together
in the village of Duy Vinh.



Caught in a web

A fisherman paddles over to check his haul after cranking his net out of the water with a hand-powered winch.







Waterways of wonder

Venturing out into the rivers of Vietnam by dawn proves fruitful for photographer Emma Byrnes

WORDS NIKOLA SARBINOWSKI

Floating islands of mangoes, jackfruit and rambutans fill the waterways at Càn Tho, a city at the mouth of the Mekong Delta. Every minute the archipelago shifts as sellers paddle their produce to the next potential customer.

In Vietnam, the Mekong is known as the Nine- Dragons River, and the network of braided rivers empties into the South China Sea from the country's southern coast. The delta that it forms nourishes the food bowl of the nation.

"There was a feel that it was the source – that there was this extra special bounty," says Australian photographer Emma Byrnes, whose background in broadcast and photojournalism helped hone her fly-on-the-wall style photography.

"The floating markets were so deliriously dynamic," Emma says. "The boats attach themselves to you like pilot fish. They offer you all sorts of goodies."

On land, market stalls offer yet more produce; deep purple mangosteens sit in tidy stacks and spiky durian add texture to the scenery and pungency to the air. At 5am the streets are already busy,



and the rising sun creates the perfect lighting for photography.

"The colours and the textures – things are just amplified there," says Emma, of travelling in Vietnam. "There's so much chaos that you can't help but be stimulated."

"So much of the commerce happens from daybreak until about seven o'clock," she explains. "As soon as the sun comes up above the horizon you can feel the intensity of that heat."

Similar routines take place across the country. In the tiny fishing village of Duy Vinh, near the famous town of Hội An, a man stands on the street feeding blocks of ice through a machine. Frosty peaks form on the concrete

and condensation coils in the golden dawn light. He scoops up the shavings and shovels it into bags, ready to chill the fish that will soon be hauled up by the fishermen who keep watch over enormous nets.

"It felt like they were so in tune with what was going on," Emma explains. "You'd see them sitting, looking out into the water and they were obviously seeing something that I wasn't. Then they'd all start moving their winches up and down."

By 6.45am the fishermen sit on dry land, playing cards in hand and the morning's catch glistening in woven baskets. When the heat of the day fades, they'll return to their posts and start the pattern all over again. ✈



About the photographer

Melbourne-based lifestyle photographer Emma Byrnes has been wielding a lens since high school. These days, she loves working with people to tell their stories through photography. Her agency, Heartland Projects, helps brands develop a visual language. emmabyrnes.com



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