



VIETNAM

I found Vietnam very interesting. We were there in October and mostly had perfect weather except for a few thunderous rain showers. But they quickly passed and actually added a nice variety to the usual hot days. We started in Hanoi. Big cities never do excite me, so we stayed in the Old Quarter. We had a palatial hotel room for less than \$40 a night. Oh my....the noise and activity on every corner is as exciting as it is scary. This is a super crowded place to see. People live,

sleep, eat and sell their wares in tiny cubicles. They carry everything on their bicycles or motorbikes. Kids- even in baskets and high chairs, flowers, geese, bails of concrete or other building materials, piles and piles of wares that make it hard to see the vehicle underneath it all. I even saw a pig pulled behind a motor scooter- he was in a wagon with a cage on top. Other wares are still carried on their shoulders using poles and baskets. Fish, meat, produce.....anything in need can be found somewhere in a basket. It's constant motion in every direction. Traffic is so crazy that it's almost funny to watch. They have very few cars, most there are motor scooters filling the streets. Well, filling the streets, sidewalk, doorways and even inside shops and local food markets. And there are NO traffic lights that ever stop this traffic that goes in all kinds of crisscross directions. When needed, one learns how to cross the street. The best way is to "go forward and don't stop. They will go around you." Took a bit of courage but we got pretty good at it in a short time. Actually they're very good drivers considering the lack of accidents under these circumstances. Amidst all this chaos is a rhythm that is peaceful. The people are generous and friendly while going about their everyday activities. A lot speak English and are happy to help tourists. There is beauty everywhere that seems designed for simple everyday pleasures. At a nearby lake, we saw ballroom dancing and loud speaker classical music. Other places had street dancing, music, flowers, decorations. We took a short cruise to Halong Bay.....filled with beautiful photo opportunities. Lovely and complete with bountiful feasts and even a mini cooking lesson. The people here take pride in making things pretty. There is very little litter especially considering how crowded and poor are their living conditions. And they all wear their seat belts in cars. The Internet works in most places. The people seem eager to learn and are happy to cater to tourism while accepting their own quality of life. Although you can't drink the water, even small restaurants have a "certificate" that makes it okay to eat the food there. Got sick in China, not in Vietnam. The second half of our trip was down south. We stopped over in Saigon....now HCM city. Another small hotel with fantastic rooms and helpful attendants. We only stayed one night and then headed over to the Mekong Delta. That was the site I most wanted to see while in Vietnam. The life and world of Delta living is quickly disappearing. Even the largest floating markets are half the size of just one generation ago. Increased education and progress are the main reasons for this change. Change is very much needed because unfortunately their toilets drain overboard and all other garbage goes right into the waters but with it goes the only way of life some of these people have known. For now, they still have boats of every size that sell everything needed by anybody for anything. Industrial boats, wholesale, private, big and small house boats....people live all their lives on the Mekong River. They cook, they clean, the bathe, work and socialize from the cluster of similar neighbors. Tall posts on many boats have picture flags that announce the products they have to sell. The smaller boats come forward to greet larger tourist boats and display all their wares. One can see the effect of progress. There are many houses on the edges of the Delta now. And

they line more and more of the shoreline of this mighty and fast moving Mekong River. They really are just shacks but a step up from boat living.

The Vietnamese people show a great desire to improve themselves. It has made Vietnam a modern success story. They are rapidly developing every part of their country and it shows in their attitudes and advancements. They have the Lotus flower as their state flower. It is often said to symbolize the Vietnamese people who come from poor conditions but grow tall



and strong and them become beautiful. And that is exactly what I saw during this vacation. Good for Vietnam. Their country is surrounded by resources and natural beauty. They will indeed go forward and enrich their lives.