

MindStormPhoto Cambodia & Vietnam 2011



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Cambodia and Vietnam 2011

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Cambodia – Montezuma was a world traveler?

Cambodia – Montezuma was a world traveler?



I had always been taught that the Aztec king Montezuma never left Mexico. Well, I now have plenty of proof that the history books are wrong. He clearly made it to Cambodia... or at least his revenge has... Evelyn says that I have always had an iron stomach, but it appears to be developing some rust spots.

Friday we visited Tonle Sap Lake, which has a floating village. It seemed strange to see a floating village flooded, but the flood was pretty severe. They have electric wires going down their "main street" which is in the large lake. We were not able to go down most streets because the water was so high that the power lines were within a few feet of the water surface, and our boat would have surely electrocuted us and killed the power to the town.



Cambodia – Montezuma was a world traveler?

Most of the homes are actually on poles rather than floating. Their floors are normally several meters above the water surface, but the floods had risen into their homes. They coped by simply raising the floor higher and higher to keep their belongings out of the water. The flood was so high though, that their floors were now within 4 or 5 feet of the roof, so they could not even stand up inside. We had initially planned on having lunch at a restaurant there, but it was flooded to the point where they could not serve food.



We had also originally planned to go out onto the main lake to watch the fisherman, but the winds were too high and we were told it was too dangerous, so we had to abort that portion of the tour.

The children in Cambodia all have free elementary school. However, there are so many people that the schools cannot handle them all, so they each get only half a day education, going to either a morning or afternoon session. On the lake, we saw boat after boat leaving the school with kids in their starched white uniforms rowing home, usually 3 to 5 kids per boat.

Cambodia – Montezuma was a world traveler?



Driving towards Phnom Phen, we stopped for quick snack --- of roasted tarantula.



They barely look like the spiders you think of when the word tarantula is spoken. They are black, shriveled, and piled high. Hundreds in a single vendor's pan. You have to choose which of three varieties you want, as each has a different texture and taste. I let our guide choose mine. When you order one, they roast it again so you can eat it warm. Yum... not... Tasted like burned toast. One of those things I am glad to say I tried once, so I can politely decline next time... I was also offered roasted cricket and roasted cockroach, but I decided I really wasn't all that hungry...

Cambodia – Montezuma was a world traveler?



Traveling on, we took a small detour to a historic bridge, where we found half a dozen teenage boys jumping into the river. Seeing our cameras, they turned into instant hams and jumped over and over from the bridge, each trying to outdo the other in their comic jumps. As hot as it was, I was sorely tempted to ditch the camera and join them, but we had to get moving again.



Cambodia – Montezuma was a world traveler?

Saturday morning we visited the central market in Phnom Penh. It was just the kind of local food market we like to visit around the world. Mountains of chickens, beef, fish, fruits and vegetables all being sold to the locals for their daily meals. Some of the food was unique to Asia, with fish squirming on the ground, being picked up, then beheaded when a customer chose one to assure fresh fish.



And then there were the frogs. Something we had never seen before. One vendor had three large piles of skinned frogs, sorted by size. He had to keep grabbing them and putting them back because they were still hopping around! They reminded me of cutting off the head of a chicken on the farm as a kid and watching the body run around the yard until it finally fell over. These were skinned, and their heads completely cut off, but the bodies were still hopping like they were running from my net (I used to go down to the creek as a kid and catch frogs -- much to the dismay of my mother at the time).

Cambodia – Montezuma was a world traveler?



We were there in the morning when piles of everything were high. I asked our guide what the vendors did with any leftover food, and he assured us there is almost never any food at the end of the day. As the market closing nears, the vendors start bargaining fiercely to sell the last of their product at whatever they can get. People that want the best choice and are willing to pay "top dollar" (meaning \$1 for more food that you could possibly eat in a meal) would come in the morning. Those that wanted to save money and were willing to take the leftovers came later in the day.



Cambodia – Montezuma was a world traveler?

80% of Cambodians live below the poverty line and are living hand-to-mouth, so saving 50 cents really is important to many of them. While you can see the poverty everywhere you look, it is still sometimes hard to remember that fact, because the Cambodians we met were so universally friendly and seemed happy to all outward appearances. Of course, we don't speak Cambodian, and weren't able to interact with very many more than polite exchanges when the camera was pointed, but we certainly never saw any indication of the hopelessness that seems prevalent among the poor in American cities.



We then visited S21, which was an interrogation center of the Khmer Rouge. We have been to Dachau in Poland, but this was far more depressing. It is almost amazing just how depraved people can become and reminds us that we are but a short history from our violent animal past. There were 7 million Cambodians when the Khmer Rouge came to power. When Vietnam finally invaded and liberated the country (the term every Cambodian we talked to used), the population had dropped to 4 million less than 4 years later (1975 to 1979). The Khmer Rouge had killed 40% of the entire population in their short reign. They made the Nazis look like amateurs both in the volume of killing and level of sadism. I ended up asking the tour to be terminated halfway through, as it was simply too distressing.

Cambodia – Montezuma was a world traveler?



Warren -- our favorite vagabond guide -- took us out to the Foreign Correspondent's Club in Phnom Penh for drinks and then out to dinner at a local restaurant, Empire, owned by an English expat friend of his for spicy pasta and his favorite red curry noodles.

Though the floods have caused several of our original planned tours to be cancelled, Peace of Angkor (the company we used to organize this trip) has been instantly responsive to setting up replacements. Anyone wanting a personal tour of Cambodia and/or Vietnam will be happy with this group.

Vietnam – Off with his beard!

Cambodia – Montezuma was a world traveler?



Sorry for the long delay between posts. Between nights with no electricity, nights with no internet, and simply nights with no personal energy, a week has gone by since the last mailing. I wrote dribs and drabs here and there, but am many days behind. Let's see how far we can catch up tonight, though I can't send it out till tomorrow at the earliest, since we are at a homestay up in the hills of North Vietnam, with one lone electrical plug that I have to scoot all the furniture to reach, and no internet. This is easily my longest post to date, since it covers the longest period so far.

I thought the progression of guides thus far was an interesting review (for me) of where we have been so far:

1) **Dave** was our first guide in Cambodia. He is a Brit, so speaks flawless English. He is also an expert photographer that knows just where to go for the best photographic images, and gives good ongoing advice on composition and how to look at things.

Vietnam – Off with his beard!

2) **Sorn** was our local guide in Siem Reap, while Dave was the photography guide. Sorn was able to tell us how to get around floods to reach otherwise inaccessible areas, and helped interact with the locals. Most of my interaction during this time was with Dave, though it was clear that Dave often relied on Sorn for these aspects.

3) **Warren** isn't an official guide, but he has come into our trip a couple times for drinks and dinner, and he is the one that arranged our Vietnam itinerary. Another Brit, with flawless English and an excellent knowledge of the region, plus a lifetime of fascinating vagabond stories.

4) **Ta** was our next guide. A native Cambodian, he spoke excellent English, and had innate photographic talent. He first took us to a typical tourist site, but when we explained that was not what we wanted, he shifted gears quickly and understood just what we wanted.

5) Once we crossed over into South Vietnam, we met up with **Mai**. A native Vietnamese, she has advanced degrees in both English and Russian. She was a joy to travel with over a period of 4 days. Again speaking flawless English, and quickly gaining an understanding of the types of images we were interested in making. The only "training" we had to do was to convince her to order less food. (see below)

So far, our guides have been nothing short of outstanding, with every one an expert and joy to be with.

Now, back to the beginning...

Vietnam – Off with his beard!

[Travel] Vietnam Day 6 - Off with his beard!

[Travel] Vietnam Day 6 - Let it Pour, Let it Pour, Let it Pour

[Travel] Vietnam Day 6 - We are Millionaires!

[Travel] Vietnam Day 6 - The High cost of Vietnam

[Travel] Vietnam Day 6 - Too Much Food!

[Travel] Vietnam Day 6 - The Mekong River is Disappearing!

So many titles. I couldn't choose which to use, so am giving them all!

Monday, Oct 17:



We are now in South Vietnam. (Yeah, I wrote that a week ago...) Our local guide, Mai, commented that I looked like Santa Claus with the white beard. OK, that was enough -- off it came! Evelyn wanted me to keep the mustache. I am not convinced it looks good, but Mai commented the next morning that she likes guys with a little hair on their upper lip. With two women ganging up on me, what am I to do but follow orders?

There is no flooding going on in the Southern region of Vietnam, where we are. Each afternoon, the skies start to darken though, and the wind starts to blow. Within minutes, rain starts. The locals rush under cover, or bring out their makeshift tarp covers while the sky opens and rain falls by the bucketload. Time to find a nice bar, order a fruit smoothie and watch the torrents unfold. Within half an hour, and sometimes less, the rain stops, the tarps are folded back, the windows unshuttered, we finish our tea or smoothie and continue our wandering. The air is fresh, the sidewalks are washed, and you realize what a good idea these daily quick thundershowers are.

Vietnam – Off with his beard!

In Cambodia, everyone wanted US Dollars. When we entered Vietnam, Mai (our local guide) told us that locals mostly wanted Vietnam Dongs and that we should convert some money. We went to the hotel desk and gave them a \$100 bill, asking for change. Imagine our surprise when we were given a fat stack of bills totaling 2,000,000 Dongs. Turns out the exchange rate is 20,000 Dongs for \$1, so that 100,000 Dong bill is really only \$5. Oh well, at least we are millionaires in Dongs...

We were warned about the high cost of living in Vietnam, compared to Cambodia. Whew, were they ever right! Dinners that cost us \$2 in Cambodia were now double the price. We had to pay up to 80,000 Dongs for a dinner now. Oh yeah, that is \$4. Even a doubling of the price still makes it a bargain by any home standards.

A bigger problem is the Bigger Food though. Every meal results in almost as much food on the table for the 2 of us as Evelyn's parents used to supply for a family of 14 -- and I always said her parents supplied too much food back then. Invariably the host comes by and wonders why we didn't like the food, when just one of the 6 or 7 dishes would have been more than enough for a complete meal for both of us. I fear we finally had to just stand firm and insult our hosts and tell our guide that we were not going to eat that much, and *PLEASE* do not order so much food. We have finally made progress on that front, since today's meal (lunch in Saigon) was only *twice* as much as we could eat.



Vietnam – Off with his beard!

The population of Vietnam is exploding, and there simply is not enough land to support everyone. We have taken several private boat tours along the Mekong River over the past few days. A common element is to see homes along the banks building retaining walls out into the river. They build these walls, then dredge the river to provide landfill as they turn the banks of the river into more arable land. The new land is very fertile and is perfect for small farms and nurseries. There were places we saw where this had been done 2 or 3 times already, with another barrier in the process of being built further out. I fear that if this is not controlled, the Mekong will turn into a creek, probably with disastrous flooding consequences.

We went to an the Phung Hiep floating market in Can Tho. There were numerous semi-permanent large houseboats that made the core of the market. They tended to be roped together 2 or 3 or 4 wide. We were told those were the boats of an extended family, with a son's family in one boat and daughter's family in another.



Vietnam – Off with his beard!

Many of the boats had a bamboo pole sticking up from the bow, with the item being sold tied to it. So we saw one pole with a potato, and sure enough, they were selling sacks of potatoes. Another had a watermelon on the stick, or pineapple (we had a pineapple-on-a-stick as a snack) or cabbage, or... pretty much any food you could want. Smaller boats were zooming around as floating bars (selling drinks) or smaller amounts of odd foods. Other small boats were the customers, and they would buy supplies, then later go down the tributary channels and blow their horn to let the locals know their floating supermarket had arrived.



One surprising thing we saw back on land was that many woman wore full masks over their faces while riding their scooters. Mai pointed out that many of them also had full length sleeves and long pants to avoid sun exposure -- all in an effort to maintain a fair skin. The Vietnamese standard of beauty is the fairest skin possible -- very much like a Caucasian. Mai told us that her skin is no longer fair, and that she feels she is not as pretty as the other girls that have gotten skin-whitening or were born with fairer skin. I assured her that the natural olive complexion of SE Asians was considered highly desirable in America.

Vietnam – Off with his beard!



After the water market, we visited a market on land. Food was the primary commodity, with the same skinned frogs (though not hopping this time) we saw in Cambodia -- this time on the tray right next to live frogs with their legs banded. The customer could decide to take home the live frogs, or have a "prepared dinner" with the frogs already skinned.



Vietnam – Off with his beard!

Other items were for sale there too though. One thing we bought was a thick stack of \$100 US bills -- for about 20 cents. They are a surprisingly good representation, though the paper was clearly wrong. If you looked close though, the back had the "In God We Trust" along with a Vietnamese phrase that translated to "The Bank of Hell." Darn. Guess I won't be passing those around home anytime soon... These are used by locals at funerals, where they burn (fake) money so the deceased will be able to buy stuff in the afterlife.



We had the afternoon to ourselves, and walked down to a recommended restaurant. After lunch, we decided to walk around town. Before we had gone a block, the wind whipped up and the sky opened, so we dashed under a near overhang.



Vietnam – Off with his beard!

After standing under that overhang for a few minutes, we decided to retreat to the lunch restaurant. Dashing the block through the torrents, we returned to our seats and ordered a fresh round of fruit smoothies, and watched the show unfold. About then the waiters started dropping tarps over the edge of all the open areas to shield the tables from the storm. We stopped them from closing us in, so we could watch the storm rage.

As expected, about 30 minutes later the rain suddenly stopped -- you could literally see it recede down the street as the rain moved on to clean other areas. The waiters rolled the tarps back up, the world went on its now cleaner way, and we sauntered off to buy our last Vietnam purchases -- some belts and a new wallet. (We aren't much into souvenir hunting these days)



We continued to be amazed by just how friendly everyone is. Even the occasional person that signaled "no photo" was smiling and polite when turning away, and they were the exception. Most people would laugh and allow us to photograph. We would then show them their picture on the back of the LCD, and they would laugh some more and call over their nearest friends. The others would then be even more cooperative in letting us shoot their photos.

Tuesday, Oct 18:

Vietnam – Off with his beard!



Tuesday found us traveling along the Mekong River again. First stop was a brick factory. I had rather expected to be bored there, since I had seen brick factories in other countries. This one was fascinating though. The scale was much larger than others we had seen around SE Asia, with 100,000 of a mold being made in a single batch, and the surplus 5,000 or so (these places always make extra in case of spoilage) being stored in a huge warehouse that was fun to wander through. We also walked into a huge empty kiln, and the size was impressive. Seeing another kiln in the cooling process, with the huge mountains of bricks with several hundred per layer, and at least 100 layers deep for a single batch really made you realize the size of the operation.



After a brief stay at the Tam Ho bonsai nursery (with bonsai trees reaching 10 feet tall?) for lunch, we headed to our first homestay.

Vietnam – Off with his beard!

Turns out that "homestay" in Vietnam is what we would call a Bed & Breakfast in America. We had expected more the "stay in the village elder's home" as we did in the hill tribes of Thailand 10+ years ago. This was downright civilized in comparison. Mai said it was "pretty basic", but we were pleasantly surprised to discover we had a private room with electricity, a private shower/toilet, and even running hot water. Wow -- that is "luxury basic" compared to what we were expecting.



While there, we were invited to help prepare dinner. We shredded the vegetables, I sliced the crinkled potatoes that would become french fries (though the chef overcooked them for our taste). I then learned how to make spring rolls. I must brag and say that the spring rolls I made that night were the best such rolls either of us has ever eaten! (Seriously, they were quite good, and I'm sure it must have been my wrapping that made the difference...)

As we were eating dinner, boats continued powering down the river, with a major accompaniment of racket. Mai said they were heading home after a day of working with tourists or doing their market sales. She didn't say they would end soon, but we both thought it was implied.

Vietnam – Off with his beard!

NOT! All night long, at least once an hour, a **HUGE** boat would come powering right into our room. Or at least that is what it sounded like. The racket was amazing! In the morning, Mai told us that boats that were running overloaded would often run at night when the police did not patrol the river, so they could carry more than was legally allowed. Sure enough, while eating breakfast, one late runner came by with the water up to the gunnel, at risk of swamping if another boat came past the other way and created too large a wake.

Wednesday, Oct 19:



Wednesday we continued down the Mekong, and stopped at another interesting factory -- this time making pop-rice. I had never heard of it before. We have popcorn at home, of course, but this was pop-rice. Sure enough, they heated a huge wok (maybe 4 feet across) with some oil in the bottom. When it was hot, they tossed in some rice, and started stirring. Within seconds, you heard the familiar pop-pop-pop, and could reach in and pull out some pop-rice as they continued until the popping slowed down -- again, just like with popcorn. They then put it in other woks to combine with various flavorings, another wok to add something or other (I missed the name) that glued the rice together, then cut it into blocks. From there it was wrapped and sold, looking much like the rice cake we see in America, though not quite tasting the same.

Vietnam – Off with his beard!

This factory also made snake wine (aka rice wine) -- with a twist. Their cheap bottles just had the wine, but the (slightly) more expensive bottles had a real cobra in them, with the head expanded in the strike position. The bottles have tiny top holes, like you would see in a water bottle, so how the heck did they get the cobra in there?

They first fill the bottle with some water. Catch a live cobra and get it to crawl onto a stick that has one end in the bottle. The cobra will crawl down the stick and right into the bottle(!). It then gets worried about the water and rights itself with head up, so the head is out of the water. Next they put a mouse in front of the bottle, which causes the cobra to expand its neck into the familiar striking pose, as it prepares to eat. At that point, they put a cork in the bottle, and the cobra suffocates. Once it is dead, they drain the water, and put in the rice wine. They sometimes then insert a freshly killed scorpion and place it with tweezers into the the cobra's mouth, to finish the tableau.



I bought a bottle to take to work when I get home...

That day we also visited another floating market (Can Bo), though this one was smaller and we didn't spend much time, a bee farm that made honey, and a coconut candy factory. Then it was onto a flight to Hanoi in the North.

Vietnam – Off with his beard!

Vietnam – Avoid the Golf Hotel

We were generally very happy with all our hotels throughout Cambodia and Vietnam, with one very glaring exception. This post is really only of interest to anyone considering going to Can Tho, Vietnam, and is a warning to avoid the Golf Hotel.

This is the letter of complaint I sent to our trip organizer. Warren (the vagabond organizer we mention frequently in the blog of this trip) was very surprised we had this much trouble, and promised to have it translated and forwarded to the Golf Hotel management.

We have generally been very happy with this tour so far. The guides have all been excellent, and the accommodations quite nice -- with the single exception of the Golf Hotel. I would never recommend that hotel to any future guest. I expect that Mai has already told you of our unhappiness with them, but I thought it best to communicate the reasons directly.

We are pretty flexible in our travels, and don't mind basic and noisy accommodations when that is what is being paid for, as was the case last night with the first homestay. However, when I am staying in a 4-star hotel, and *paying* for a 4-star, I do not accept service more appropriate for a 2-star, which is what we got.

On first appearance, the Golf is a fabulous luxury hotel. The rooms are spacious and look very good. This is definitely a "beauty is only skin deep" situation though. I can't remember the last time we were in a high end hotel and had this many points of contention upon checking out.

Vietnam – Off with his beard!

1) Noise. Unbelievable for a hotel of that type. This disco is cranked up so loud that, even several floors away, it was going thump-thump-thump through the walls and floors. You could not hear the music, only feel it reverberating. Until 2AM Sunday night! Neither of us was able to fall asleep until they finally turned the boombox off at 2AM. The next day they explained that it was really not their fault and that there were 3 weddings that night, and the weddings were supposed to close at midnight, but kept going, and really this will not happen again, because there is no disco on Monday night.

2) Noise round two. They lied. There was disco Monday night again. It was quiet when we left for dinner around 8:30PM. When we returned at 10PM, the thump-thump-thump was back. We figured they told us the disco closed at midnight, and I really didn't want to go to the trouble of changing rooms for 2 hours of noise, so we let it go. Besides, we walked the halls and found the difference in noise was not that great from one end to the other. Lie #2 -- it did not end at midnight. It lasted again until almost 1:30, when it was finally turned off.

3) Breakfast. The poorest breakfast of any hotel we have stayed at yet. No selection to speak of, and the guy making my omelet walked away to do something else while it was cooking, leaving me with a very dry omelet. This 4-star had 1/10 the breakfast as the 3-star in Siem Riep or Phnom Penh.

4) Water. Promised 2 bottles per day, but did not replace them. We found no bottles Monday, so went into the fridge. Then they wanted to charge us for the mini-bar water. I told them to stuff it and refused to pay.

5) Shampoo and soap. Not refreshed. Because there was about a quarter bottle of each left on Monday morning, they chose not to replace them. That meant that Evelyn barely had enough for her shower, and I had no soap at all. Was forced to just rub water on my body to get as clean as I could.

Vietnam – Avoid the Golf Hotel

6) Toiletries in general. For supplies that were completely used up, they replaced them. We had one Q-tip left (out of 4), so that was not refreshed either. Seemed we needed to hide the remnants of the prior day if we were to get replacements. I have never had that happen in a 2-star hotel, let alone a 4-star.

7) Massage. Evelyn had a foot massage Sunday night. The woman spent the time watching a horror flick on TV, giving Evelyn nothing more than muscle memory response. The woman paid no attention to Evelyn's response when something was uncomfortable, or when she wanted more attention somewhere. The disco was also booming so loud it was definitely NOT a relaxing experience. Then, when Evelyn gave the woman a \$2 tip for a \$10 massage, the woman actually asked for more. Evelyn declined, but frankly I would not have given any tip at all for service like that. I had planned on going down later for a back massage, but chose not to after hearing her experience.

I was not taking notes as this went on, and there were probably other things that also went bad, but this is what I remember Wednesday morning when writing this. Again, when I pay for a 4-star hotel, I do not expect these problems. It is fairly common to have one or even two things that do not go right at a hotel, but this is the first time I have had this many complaints from a single 2-night stay at a 4-star hotel.

I recommend you remove them from your accommodation list. They simply do not come even close to living up to their 4-star billing. If we send friends to Vietnam for vacation, you can be assured we will tell them to avoid this hotel like a plague.

Vietnam – Avoid the Golf Hotel

Vietnam – Should Have Stayed in the South

Hanoi - evening of Oct 19:

We are not really fans of big cities, so that has to be taken into account for our reaction. We only stayed in Hanoi for a little over a day, and were glad to leave it behind.

For starters, we arrived to find nobody waiting for us. Our last piece of luggage was the very last one off the plane, which had us worrying a bit, then we went to the waiting area to find it empty. Everyone had already been met and left by then. Before giving up, I went over to International, and found our guide waiting there. For some reason he thought we were coming in from Singapore rather than Saigon, even though he had the flight number right there on his board.

As we left the airport, our eyes stung, and we realized we could not see the sun even though it was the middle of the afternoon. This is harvest time and the surrounding farms burn their rice fields after harvest, which fills the air with acrid smoke. We got up for a sunrise photograph from the hotel roof the next morning, only to find there was no sunup. The sky gradually got lighter, but we never saw the sun all day. No clouds. Just lots and lots and lots of smoke...

Thursday, Oct 20:



Vietnam – Avoid the Golf Hotel

After an excellent breakfast, we led out on Thursday for a tour of the city. We commented on not seeing tuk-tuks in town, though they were swarming in Cambodia. Our guide ("Q") told us that only disabled vets were allowed to run them, and that others had to have traditional car taxis. His explanation for this was that tuk-tuks take too much traffic space, but he seemed unfazed with the fact that the cars that replaced them took a lot more road room (the first of many times we wondered about his deductive powers, or how much of his talk was based on knowledge vs guessing).

I noticed that every scooter rider (of which there are 1,000,000 in the Hanoi city of 3,000,000 people) wore a helmet. Q told us that the fine for not wearing a helmet was 5 times the cost of buying the helmet. I noticed though that the helmets are pretty useless. They look like hats, with only a small amount of padding. They would never be legal in America. In fact, many people continue to wear their helmets as hats after they have parked their bikes.



Vietnam – Should Have Stayed in the South

Q is a True Socialist Patriot, and we got The Party Line all day long. We were told of the heroic deeds of Ho Chi Min, and shown the monument to where they shot down John McCain. He considered it a major success to have shot McCain down and captured him right in Hanoi. Q was proud of keeping McCain for so many years. When I mentioned that Americans considered torture to be an act of barbarity that gained nothing, but was reminiscent of the Khmer Rouge the Vietnamese had kicked out of Cambodia, Q clearly did not understand a word I was saying. We were also told of the glorious act of disbanding the "parties that caused disunity" and replaced them with The Peoples Party, which "only believes in harmony."

That night we went to a Water Puppet show. Q told us that the actors had to learn to be really good at holding their breath, and had to time each act so they could get behind the curtain in time to take a breath of air. Right... It was pretty obvious in watching the show, that the puppets were controlled by wire rods from behind the curtain. In fact, in the final scene, all the puppet controllers waded out with puppets over their heads, and the water didn't even come to their waist (with dry torsos) -- pretty obviously not deep enough for a puppet master to have hidden, even if that were a possibility up to that point.



Vietnam – Should Have Stayed in the South

By then we had also heard that “Vietnam has no unemployment, no crime, and people are very polite and stop to let pedestrians cross the street.” Since all of those were so obviously false, we already understood that we needed a very large grain of salt for any “fact” that Q gave us. We were never able to get him to really understand that we were not interested in standing in front of a mausoleum and lining up with the others to take another picture home to toss. Basically Hanoi was a mostly throw-away day.

Oh yes. Then there was the train from Hanoi to Lo Cai. We had first class tickets, and Q insisted that all our luggage would easily fit under our beds. Not in a million years. If we had known just how small and cramped the quarters were, we would have left most of the luggage behind in Hanoi, since we will be returning through there in a couple days anyway. Instead, we were stuck 4-to-a-**VERY**-cramped room, with luggage that would not fit under the bed even when fully disassembled. Fortunately we were with a young couple from Israel who said it was OK to leave 2 bags in the middle of the floor, even though the luggage then blocked half the aisle.



Vietnam – Should Have Stayed in the South

This was our first time on a sleeper train. We thought it might be interesting. Not like an American train at all though. Rough, back-and-forth rocking, air conditioning turned to freezing and out of our control (just like the Cuban trains in that regards), and tiny bunks that I just barely fit in, with both head and feet touching walls, even though I am only 5'10". Obviously designed for shorter Vietnamese, even though the 1st Class cabins are exclusively used by foreigners. Oh well, one night isn't too bad, and I was surprised that I slept better than I feared (though Evelyn said she did not sleep well, and was watching the hours go by on her watch).

Friday, Oct 21:



We were met by Ziang in Lo Cai, and were taken to breakfast in Sapa, which was quite good. The drive from Lo Cai to Sapa was 20 miles that climbed from 1000' to 6000' in the hills. We started in heavy tulle fog, where we could not see across the street. Finally around 5000' we climbed above the fog and had a brief look at a beautiful landscape -- which was soon swallowed in smoke. Sure enough, harvest is just finishing here too, and the fields are all being burned. The smell of smoke is in the air, and you can't see more than a hundred yards before everything becomes obscured by the smoke. Too bad, because it really looks like this could be glorious scenery if there was a sun that could pierce the smoke.

Vietnam – Should Have Stayed in the South



Ziang's command of English is pretty basic, but he pretends to understand more than he does. I quickly learned that if I asked the same question twice, I would get two completely different answers. We were trying to figure out what to do today, and he said we had to bring all our luggage that we would use at the homestay tonight. But then he said we only needed our cameras and hats. The next sentence said

we needed it all again. After 5 requests for clarification, I thought he said we needed it all, but Evelyn thought he said we didn't. We gave up... and hauled our computer and overnight clothes over a 5 mile cross-county hike that ended up right back at the hotel -- meaning we could (should) have left it there until later and picked it up when we resumed with a car.

Turns out we really did need to carry the full packs for the last segment of the road that afternoon. The confusion appears to be that we did **NOT** need them in the morning, but **DID** need them in the afternoon. Ziang could not make that clear, or did not understand my questions (I really tried to use very basic words, as I learned in the TESOL program I finished last month). The result is that he sometimes told me I needed the pack, and other times told me I did not need the pack, and never once said one was in the morning and the other was in the afternoon... so we did a full pack all day...

Vietnam – Should Have Stayed in the South



We went through several villages in the Muong Hoa Valley with different minority tribes, including the Black H'mongs, the Tay, the D'zay and some 53 ethnic groups, and I am afraid the names kinda melded together for me. I know we went through Sapa, trekked to Cat Cat and I think we are now in Tavan village after a 5-hour trek up and down rice fields and along rivers, but I am not really sure. We are somewhere in the North Vietnamese hills as I write the end of this blog posting though.

Though the people were interesting in appearance, they were somewhat disappointing in another way. There are signs all over the villages (in English) saying "Tourists welcome" with many variants and expansions. Yet, the most common response to a camera was "One Dolla" or "No mony, no piktur!" We were also followed by an entourage of girls (boys don't work in these towns) hawking wares, and literally following us for miles, then complaining "you took my picture, you have to buy or pay me for picture." The last time we were that badly inundated and hounded was in Tibet in 1988. Similar costumes too, making the similarity all the stronger.

Vietnam – Should Have Stayed in the South



In the end, this was an interesting leg of the trip, that resulted in some good photos. The difficulty in conversing with our guide, coupled with the incessant hounding of the local beggars made it rather unpleasant though. I will be glad to be back with a guide that I can talk to, and in an area where I am not constantly hounded by beggars posing as vendors (selling trinkets that have no value whatsoever other than to disguise the begging).

Heading off to bed now. Can't send this until we reach a hotel with Internet, but am wrapping this one up, or it will never go out.

Vietnam – Should Have Stayed in the South

Vietnam – Beep, beep, beep!

Saturday, Oct 22



We did two hikes through the mountains and villages surrounding Sapa, ending with a homestay in Tavan that night, guided by Ziang. This was considered a moderate hike, but carrying everything for an overnight stay, including computer and cameras, left us with sore knees by the time we arrived at the home we were staying at. The hike could have been enjoyable, except that we were hounded the entire time by Black H'mong (the primary minority of the region) who wanted us to constantly buy trinkets whose only purpose was to extort \$1 from every tourist within miles. Every time we pointed a camera anywhere, we heard "One Dolla" or "No mony, no pikta." The locals have been destroyed by too many tourists to beg from. I fear we were here 10 years too late.

Vietnam – Should Have Stayed in the South



While at the homestay, we met a local guide who spoke good English and struck up a conversation with her. She looked at some of our photographs and said

"oh, I know that woman. She got really lucky a couple years ago. A couple from California had pity on her and bought her a water buffalo and gave her money to build a house. They came back this year, and discovered the woman still begging and with no house."

We also discovered that the families send out all their girls (not boys) to beg from tourists. The girl that is the best at begging is then taken out of school and required to beg full time.



Vietnam – Beep, beep, beep!

The homestay itself was pleasant, with a cute little kid that Charlene played with for hours. Charlene was another guest who was on tour for 3 months, and was being treated with a local stinky concoction of banana leaves and herb for a twisted ankle. Unfortunately, the general village experience was such that we could not recommend others follow that particular section of the tour.

Sunday, Oct 23



We woke to a city shrouded in fog. Between the fog and the rice field burning, we were never able to see a sunrise or sunset until the very end of our Vietnam trip. The city was like all of Vietnam in another way too -- **NOISY!** Beep, beep, beep! Constant horn honking as cars and scooters run almost at random in every direction and nobody gives an inch in trying to move forward at the fastest possible speed.



Vietnam – Beep, beep, beep!

Vietnam – Beep, beep, beep!

Everyone has a cell phone too, and nobody has heard of the concept of vibrating mode. Phones are ringing constantly, including drivers who are often texting while driving -- even when driving scooters one handed through the middle of hordes of pedestrians. Yes, there is no concept of a pedestrian area in Vietnam. Go through crowded markets where you can barely walk for the people on all sides, and you will still see a steady stream of scooters powering right through them...

We went to the Bac Ha market today, which was a cacophony of noise and color. This was the first local market we had seen with numerous live animals for sale, along with the more expected butchered meat and dry goods. There was a section selling pigs, chickens, cats, dogs (young pups sold as pets for kids, older dogs sold as food), water buffalos and goats. Ziang (our guide with minimal English) kept telling us to come to the House Market. We didn't know why we would want a house market, but we followed. We took a shortcut and found ourselves in an area selling place mats and cups. OK....



Vietnam – Beep, beep, beep!

"No! Come to House Market!" ??? We followed, and finally found ourselves at a Horse Market... We tried to teach him to say 'horse', but he kept saying "yes, house..." Ah well, an interesting addition to the market regardless.

We noticed that the women all wore traditional colorful clothes, while the men all wore Western clothes. We also noticed that the women did pretty much all the work, while the men stood around or played cards or drank. One woman told us (through a local interpreter) that she had a "good husband. He doesn't gamble or come home drunk." When I asked, it does appear that this is the definition of a "good husband" in this region.



As we were finishing the trek part of this tour, we saw a very old woman coming towards us with a huge basket of wood on her back. As we watched, a flock of tourists came up and started to video her. She turned her back, obviously not wanting to have her picture taken. When we see that, we move on.

Vietnam – Beep, beep, beep!



This group instead started to mock her, making fun of her burden and acting like monkeys. Meanwhile, other tourists -- *And Our Guide* -- started laughing at the old woman. The woman finally put down her basket and these goons picked it up and played "strong man" to their camera. I told our guide he was a crude barbaric moron and walked off. He caught up with me and said "some foreign tourists don't treat the locals well." I shouted at him that those were Vietnamese tourists, as I recognized the language, and he agreed. I made it clear that I considered such barbarity completely unacceptable and was an indication of how little Vietnamese respect each other (something I saw over and over in other circumstances too).

Over all, I found this couple of days rather distasteful, and soured my feelings towards much of North Vietnam. Though there were colorful scenes that were certainly different from home, and even some that produced good photographic images, I was very glad to leave the people of this region.

Vietnam – Beep, beep, beep!

Vietnam – The Junk

We spent last night on the sleeper train from Sapa back to Hanoi. "Sleeper" is a bit of a misnomer, as it is pretty hard to get much sleep while being nearly tossed out of your bunk each time you pull into or out of a station, which happens a couple times an hour during the night.

We were met at the door of the train by Qyuet ("just call me 'Q'"), the True Believer who had led us in Hanoi earlier. While other tourists were forced to navigate the rather awkward way back to the station on their own, it was nice to have Q there, helping us with our (way too much) luggage around the other trains on the tracks, and finally into our waiting car.

If you remember, Q was giving us The Party Line so solidly in Hanoi that I quickly began to discount most "facts" that he told us (Vietnam has zero unemployment, zero poverty, perfect health care, and its people are always kind and stop for pedestrians crossing the street, etc). After leaving the train, we immediately left Hanoi for Halong Bay, several hours drive from the city. As we left Hanoi behind, we seemed to also leave the True Believer. To my surprise, we started hearing a more believable story of the country from Q.

First, Q apologized for the condition of the trains (before we said anything about how rough the ride was), explaining that they were made "during the French period" (a phrase we heard a lot, which meant before 1954, when Vietnam was a French colony), and has not been maintained since. He then also told us of a project he did in college in the hill country (where we had just left, and which I found largely distasteful), in which his team taught them how to create homestays, and how to create an economy that would build for the future. He helped teach them the importance of education for advancing the family and the village.

Vietnam – Beep, beep, beep!



He then said that after a few years of project completion, he went back and saw they had reverted to their old ways, and had mostly lost the benefits of the training. He lamented that the hill people were only concerned with "making the most money today" while ignoring "the value of building a stronger village for the future." Unfortunately, that coincided very closely with what we saw the prior two days up in the hills.

He also told us that all kids went to school in the hills. However, he said most kids wait for the morning snacks that are given free, then immediately leave after being fed, having no interest in actually learning anything.

We stopped at an artist workshop manned entirely by disabled people, and found the work to be absolutely astonishing quality. We are not in the market for anything like this, but there was stunning statuary, embroidery, lacquer work, and fabrics. We watched women creating embroidery of photo-realistic images that I would have been proud to produce with my camera.

Tuesday, Oct 25

Vietnam – The Junk



We went to Halong Bay and spent the night on a junk named Hsiong Hai. The food was gourmet, and looked as good as it tasted. Only after the fact did we realize we should have been photographing the food. It was a treat for the eyes as much as the tongue. After missing photographing both lunch and dinner, we decided we would bring our camera to breakfast. Unfortunately, that meal was more 'normal' and not really much of a photographic topic, though it still was quite delicious. Opportunity missed...

The tour description had said we would visit a "fishing village" the next morning, and I had several images in mind that I hoped to capture, of fishing boats with nets extended, and fishermen throwing their nets. Unfortunately, this was one of those cases of poor translation. It was not a "fishing village" but rather a "fish farm" with a couple dozen 'holes in the water' where different fish were being farmed for restaurant consumption. Very little to photograph. Kids came up on boats and then rubbed their fingers together to indicate they wanted us to pay them. Begging even here out on the water... (Something we only saw in North Vietnam -- never in South Vietnam or Cambodia)

There was also to be a "large cave walk." I guess 'large' is a relative term though, as we have walked through much larger and more impressive caves elsewhere in the world. That walk did not result in any 'keeper' photographs either.

Vietnam – The Junk



All in all, it was a pleasant overnight on a boat with excellent food, but pretty much a loss for photography. We were told that the actual fishing boats have been gone for years as the tourist boats have made the local waters no longer good fishing grounds. Another example of where it appears we are a decade too late for visiting Vietnam.

While on the junk, we asked the manager for suggestions on where to stop on the way back to Hanoi, since we were looking at several hours waiting at the airport if we just drove straight there. We could not get him to give any suggestions, and instead he kept saying he wasn't sure what our guide had arranged. We didn't really understand the issue until later. When driving back, we told Q that we wanted to stop by a village to see rice farming, since the crop was being brought in that day.



Vietnam – The Junk

That was when it finally became clear -- we were not allowed to visit any village or store unless we first had clearance and permission from the government. We hadn't even realized up until then just how constrained our travels had been. As we later confirmed with other guides, the Vietnam government only allows foreigners in select locations, and any deviation requires advance permission from the government. Quick reminder that this is a fully Socialist government, with the same restrictions we saw in Russia, China and Burma in the past...



I asked Q about the odd shape of most homes we passed. There were wide fields with lots of land available, but the homes were very narrow. They went deep, and were often several floors high (2 or 3), while only 16 feet wide (4 to 5 meters) at most. Seemed bizarre from American housing standards. Turns out the homeowners have to pay a home tax based on the width of the house. Not on the livable space, but on the width. Thus, people make their houses as narrow as possible. Another humorous example of unintended consequences, and how people will always find a way to minimize taxes, regardless of where in the world they live, or under what government structure.

Vietnam – The Junk

Vietnam – Hue



We flew from Hanoi to Hue last night, and were met by Lan, our final Vietnam guide. The Gerbera Hue hotel was rated 4 star, but felt more like 5 star, and had a river front view. One surprising feature was the shower, which had a large glass window separating it from the bedroom, giving me have a nice view while Evelyn showered...

We were two blocks from a large city lake, and right in the downtown area, perfect for evening strolling. Unfortunately, we arrived nearly at midnight and had an early morning start, so we went right to bed. Checked out the next morning, so we really didn't get as much time here as we would have preferred -- one of the hazards of trying to fit two countries into three weeks.

Vietnam – The Junk



This morning Lan took us to The Citadel first. Lan has no photographic experience, but was a quick study in what kinds of things we wanted to see. She is also quite beautiful and not camera shy. It was only after I got home and reviewed the photos that I realized I had not used her as a model as much as I should have.



Hue is in Central Vietnam, but was south of the DMZ during the war. After Hanoi, it felt positively quiet. The incessant beep, beep, beep of Hanoi had been left behind. The scooters were still everywhere, but they were not honking incessantly. When I commented to Lan about entire families riding on a single bike, she explained that it was legal for kids under 5 to be on the bike with their parents without a helmet. That 5 y/o age limit is surely flouted, but seeing up to 5 people on a single scooter was always an amazing sight.

Vietnam – Hue



In the afternoon we drove to Hoi An, where we would spend the next few days. Enroute, we passed through Danang. We had asked earlier where Dog Patch and the CAP school had been -- both of which figured large in the Vietnam war (or, as they call it, the American war). Both those locations had been completely obliterated though. There was a monster Crown Plaza resort there, as well as a Hyatt, a Greg Norman golf course, casinos and other chain golf resorts. Only the American airstrip remained, behind a high fence. We were told that land had been purchased recently by Korean developers and construction will soon begin on yet another golf resort there.

When we arrived in Hoi An, we saw a small demonstration of rice farming done by a wizened old woman of 90. She went around the display showing how the rice was planted, harvested, processed, etc using “the old ways.” It’s the kind of show I normally sneer at, but it was oddly interesting. It was also apparently this woman’s sole income.

Vietnam – Hue



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We were taken to a very nice restaurant for dinner, but it was much too loud for our tastes. We were not able to hear instructions from Lan and, once she saw this, immediately arranged for us to move to a different table. The restaurant set up a table on the patio for us, which was perfect in the warm evening. It was only later that we realized the table had been set up just for us, and that they normally do not even serve out there. That was typical of the type of service and instant response we saw throughout South Vietnam.

Vietnam – Hue

Vietnam – Models!



At Hoi An, we stayed at the Palm Garden Resort, a 5-star hotel. We had a very nice room with a view of the beach. It was perfect in almost every way. Unfortunately, it was also way out of town. The taxi ride was only \$5 each way, but took about 20 minutes and meant you had to really plan to go into town. Though it is nice to end in luxury, we usually put being in the center of a walking downtown as a higher priority. Had we known the location was so far out, we would have changed hotels ahead of time.



The hotel location also reinforced the idea that we should have come to Vietnam 10 years earlier. It was near the end of a very long stretch of luxury condos and resorts that made us think we were driving down Miami Beach. Of course there were also lots of signs for new resorts still being built, so it will only get worse.

Vietnam – Hue



It did make us glad that we travel off peak season though, as I shudder to think what the city would look like with all those places full. One benefit of traveling when we do -- and risking the occasional bad weather -- is that there were not very many other tourists around. We were certainly not alone, and the behavior of the locals (particularly in North Vietnam) made it clear that they were used to people like us invading town. However, we only rarely came across busloads of other tourists, and could usually make a hasty retreat when we did stumble across them.



Vietnam – Models!

Lan took us on a tour of the Hoi An Old Town (a UNESCO world heritage site) in the morning, which was interesting. We wandered among the street vendors, and Evelyn finally bought the Vietnam Red Star hat she had been looking for over the past two weeks. My head is too big to fit most Asian hats -- it took several vendors before we found one that would do more than perch on top of my hair (my mother always warned me my head would swell up, but I insisted it just needed to be this big to hold all those brains -- how else could I excel at World of Warcraft?).

We had the afternoon off, and walked along the beach to find a restaurant for lunch. As usual, the food was excellent. Afterwards, we started to wander the beach front exploring the round coconut-shell shaped fishing boats... and almost immediately saw the wind start to whip up a fury, followed within a few minutes by a few raindrops. We ducked into a nearby beach restaurant for another of now habitual fruit smoothies, just as the sky opened and the gods dumped a full bucket of water on us. As usual, it all cleared up in less than half an hour, and we continued our beach walk.



That evening we linked up with Etienne Bossol, a professional French photographer who now lives in Hoi An. Along with his professional local photography, he leads photo tours. I would definitely recommend him if you ever decide to visit this part of Vietnam and want a photo tour, complete with local models and very helpful instruction:

Vietnam – Models!

<http://www.hoianphototour.com/>

<http://www.hoianphototour.com/our-tours/customize-your-tour>



He took us around town for the evening tour. He would go up to an old woman with an interesting face, talk to her in Vietnamese (he claimed to only have primitive language skills, but I never saw any sign of them not understanding him), and get them to model for us. He would always pay them a small sum at the end, and demurred when I asked how much he was giving them.

The result was that we no longer had to do grab shots of these people. They were now willing models. The downside was that these people had no concept of modeling, and tended to freeze up in front of the camera. Etienne helped overcome that by talking to them and getting their mind off the cameras, resulting in some of our best people photographs of the trip.

Vietnam – Models!



In one interesting scenario, Etienne convinced a very beautiful girl in an art gallery to pose for us. It took him awhile to convince her, since she was nervous and did not consider herself sufficiently good looking to model. Etienne finally won her over, and she moved into the doorway that Etienne had suggested. Just then, the young woman's husband came in and she froze saying (in Vietnamese) "I can't do this. My husband is here and does not want people taking pictures of me." Sure enough, the husband was adamant that no pictures were to be taken. Even though Etienne knew the husband and had done work for him before, the man was determined that nobody take his wife's picture. Moving on...

Vietnam – Models!

Vietnam – 15 cent Beers!

Posted Oct 28, 2011



Etienne picked us for before dawn for another photo tour this morning. We started by taking a local ferry across the river. The ferry was an experience in itself, filled to overflowing with scooters and people, it recalled images seen in news images of overladen boats capsizing in Thailand or elsewhere in Asia.

We survived the trip and wandered through some tiny villages we would never have found on our own. Everywhere, Etienne knew people and would get them to pose. In a couple of cases, his pictures were on the walls of the homes we entered, as the occupants allowed us to photograph them. Etienne told us his secret is to come by many times, take photographs while alone, then later return with prints of the best images to give the locals as gifts. The result is they then are more receptive to him bringing in his small tours for more photographs.

Vietnam – Models!



Unfortunately, we had decided to get some custom clothing while in Vietnam, and Hoi An is famous for its tailors. We went, we fitted, and we were severely disappointed...



Well, Evelyn was happy enough with her new suit. My two shirts and slacks were a disaster though. The tailor clearly had absolutely no idea how to tailor clothes for someone not of the Asian slim build. I am 30 pounds overweight, and they tried to tailor clothes for me as though I were underweight. They hung so badly it was not even a joke. They were nowhere as good as I can get off the rack anywhere in the States, even though they cost more.

Vietnam – 15 cent Beers!

They said they would fix the problems and to come back later. We did, and the result was no better. After much shouting and threats, they finally refunded my money. Had it not been for Lan (our guide), they would have stiffed me completely, claiming it was my fault the clothes did not fit. I would not have even bothered putting that junk in our suitcase to take home for Goodwill. It just plain looked terrible. No other way to begin to describe it.



This was a very unfortunate way to end our trip, as it put a final sour taste in my mouth. If you ever venture this way, and have a few extra pounds on your frame, avoid Thang Loi tailors like a plague.

Warren took us out to dinner for our last night in Vietnam, again to a small local restaurant where he was friends with the owners. One of the highlights of the menu was the “Fresh Beer.” It is a local blend that has not been fermented very long (I forget just how long they said), which tastes quite good --- and costs 3,000 Dong per mug. In case you forgot the conversion, that means 15 cents per mug... The excellent dinner with 2 mugs of beer per person cost \$12 for the three of us.

, October 28, 2011

Vietnam – 15 cent Beers!

Vietnam – Back Home Again

Saturday, Oct 29



We took a predawn flight from Danang to Saigon (now called Hoi Chi Mihn City, but I still find Saigon rolls off the tongue better), then a quick tour of the Chinese wholesale market. We have been to local markets around the world, and seen wholesale food and flower markets before, but this dry goods market was unique to our experience.



Rows and rows of hats in one stall, motorcycle helmets in another, and shoes in another. We saw Doc Martin shoes there. Or rather knock-offs of Doc Martin. While the real thing might cost \$100 per pair, here they could be had for as little as \$10 per dozen...!

Vietnam – 15 cent Beers!

Our earlier Saigon hotel now provided a day room for us to shower and rest for a bit before our flight. This was very welcome, as we were about to change from the tropics to San Francisco and needed to shift our luggage and attire accordingly.



The flight home started near midnight, and took 24 hours, including a 9 hour layover in Seoul, Korea. The leg from Saigon to Seoul was crowded, cramped, and had no entertainment system to speak of. 5 hours of reading and waiting...



While in Seoul, we paid for the use of an airline lounge, which made it a lot more comfortable. Buffet meals, along with beer, wine, ice cream, and just about anything else you would want were included in the lounge. We also had internet access, so I was able to catch up on some of these blog postings during that interlude.

Vietnam – Back Home Again

A British couple sat near us, and we started talking. Turns out his wife is from Borneo, and they had just come back from a semi-annual trip there for a month. After talking to him, we had all but decided that Borneo may be our next major trip destination. We still need to do a bit more research before finalizing those plans, but you may see us writing from Borneo in 2012.



On the 13 hour flight from Seoul to San Francisco, we sat next to a Vietnam War vet who was returning from two weeks in Vietnam. He told us he was traveling with a friend that had been shot down during the war, and had reconnected with the North Vietnamese pilot that had shot him down, and they had written a book together. Made for some interesting conversation.

When we asked him about Danang, and Dog Patch plus CAP, he also said they were long gone and well forgotten. No trace of them remained, and no Vietnamese wanted to remember those places.

The Asiana inflight entertainment included a screen on the seat in front of us, with a list of a dozen on-demand movies. By the end of the flight, I had knocked 5 movies off my Netflix DVD list and had very sore red eyes.

Vietnam – Back Home Again



We finally made it home, unpacked, caught up on the mountain of mail (most of it junk that got tossed without opening), and generally settled back in. The next day I went shopping at the local grocery store, and almost went into shock!

After three weeks of walking around where everyone was thin, and round bodies were nearly unheard of, I was suddenly back in the land of Super Size Me. I had to do a double-take to realize this was real. Nearly everyone around me was at least double the size of anyone I had seen in the past three weeks.



Oh well, America is a big country, after all...

Now I have to get down to editing those 10,107 photographs sitting in my Adobe Lightroom catalog from this trip. *That will take awhile yet.*

Vietnam – Back Home Again

Vietnam – Back Home Again