

Adventure in Vietnam and Cambodia

A group of nine mostly retired international educators from different parts of the US and Australia went to Vietnam and Cambodia in February 2015. The travel committee had selected Travel Indochina as our tour agency, and our guide Nghia was fantastic. He was with us throughout Vietnam. We started in Hanoi where we visited the Ho Chi Minh quarter (Mausoleum, One Pillar Pagoda, and Royal Palace), the Temple of Literature, the Fine Arts Museum, Military History Museum and the “Hanoi Hilton.” We also attended a Water Puppet performance. Although it wasn’t a tour of the Vietnam War, it was difficult to do or see much without bringing into the equation the “American War” in Vietnam. Nghia was very forthcoming in describing the recent history (last 100 years), and no subject was unapproachable.

Next was a trip to Halong Bay. We spent the night on a junket boat. While on the Bay, we hiked through the caves and took a smaller boat into the lagoon. The fog never lifted, so it had an eerie feeling but absolutely beautiful and so peaceful. We returned to Hanoi the next day and enjoyed dinner with a local family and students from the University of Hanoi.

Then we flew to Danang and took the motorcoach to Hoi An, a small pedestrian, tourist town. We visited the Chinese Assembly Hall, Japanese Covered Bridge, Tan An Market, and Ancient House of Gia Dinh. After two nights in Hoi An, our bus took us by China Beach and Red Beach, back through Danang and over the Hai Van pass to Hue. Hue had seen a lot of action as the Communists took over. We visited the Citadel, tombs of several emperors, Thien Mu Pagoda, and then took a Dragon Boat along the Perfume River.

From Hue, we flew to Saigon or Ho Chi Minh City. All of us were questioning at this point just what was communistic about Vietnam. Supposedly it is one of the five Communist countries still in existence. It appeared that there was free enterprise, people owned their own businesses, there was no free education or health care, people voted in elections (even if there was only one party running), so what was it? Nghia had a difficult time explaining to us, but they cannot travel freely and there were still some restrictions on free press. Nghia has been to Cambodia but nowhere else in the world.

We had a fantastic walking tour of Saigon, then a Cyclo tour through the streets. A Cyclo is a bicycle with a carriage in the front. Our drivers would cycle out into the traffic with all the motorbikes, cars, trucks and buses. It felt like a carnival ride!

One day we went out to the Cu Chi Tunnels to see what life was like for the Viet Cong during the war. Can you imagine living for 4 years in a tunnel? They were quite cunning and inventive. Then the next day, we took a speedboat down the Mekong River, stopping at markets, temples, pagodas, and getting a feel for life on the river.

All too soon, we were saying good-bye to Nghia and flying to Siem Reap, Cambodia. In three days, we visited 11 temples, each just a little different but all spectacular. Everyone hears about Angkor Wat, but just as impressive were several others with intricate carving, statues, and seeing how they were taken over by the jungle but now reclaimed by man.

I've prepared a slide show to present at one of our meetings this fall. I hope you will all

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