

Its all about people



Vietnam, a narrow, stretched country, south of china and east of Thailand. The Country offers mountains, the mighty Mekong Delta, beaches, bustling cities and one highway that everyone travels on, either southbound or northbound. The last fact gives you lots of chances to bump into the same people on more than one occasion which is kind of unique when backpacking in this part of the world.



Traveling in Vietnam is really all about the people, the guides you hire, the locals you encounter and the fellow tourists you bump into (in Vietnam numerous times).

The country's recent history (the Indochina war against France and then the Vietnam War against America) has given Vietnam plenty of touristy places to display war monument and present history relics. All this war on display makes it sometimes difficult to take in and admire their culture and history pre occupation. The present history might also be an explanation to why I was not always feeling that I was welcomed. It was not often but it happened, especially in and around Hanoi.

Our Journey started (as it almost always does) with a late flight to the destination, Saigon in this case. We landed at around midnight, got into a taxi having the driver promising us he would use the meter. He drove about 10 meters before he started to ask us for a fixed price or at least for us to pay for the toll gate (his price was 10 USD while the toll was 30 cent). After about 200 NO's in different intonations he finally got the message and took us to our destination. We decided on the spot to head out of Saigon first thing in the morning. After 4 hours and an ok breakfast we were on our way to Mui Ne, a beach town 5 hours drive east of Saigon. The bus turned out to be a sleeping bus with very comfortable seats/beds to stretch out in .. mmm.

Mui Ne has a beach, a lot of resorts, hotels and hostels varying from 3 – 100 USD per night. If you like sports that includes wind and water Mui Ne is the perfect place for it

since its windy as hell. After enjoying a couple of relaxing days here we continued north on a local bus to Nah Trang.



Nah Trang is portrayed as a beach party town with scuba diving opportunities. We came, we hooked up with a dive shop and off we went on a day cruise with two dives. On the boat was the normal crowd of dive enthusiasts. There were of course the photographers who spend the whole cruise either comparing tools and cameras or looking at blurry pictures on tiny clown fish or Murray eels. Then there were the snorkeling ladies who are just there for the tan. There was also the strange old guy who looked like he came straight from the bar and probably hadn't done any diving since J Cousteaus days. Then there were of course a bunch of normal people (to whom we categorize ourselves) who just wanted a relaxing day with some close encounters of fish. The diving was alright, not fantastic but with some cool swim troughs on the morning dive made the trip worth the bucks we paid for it.

Nah Trang's reputation as a party town came down on us at 2 am when a group of intoxicated britts tear our hotel apart during 40 painful minutes. The last thing we heard from them was when one of the musketeers vomited violently. We left for Da Nang shortly after.

The train to Da Nang is a truly wonderful experience, if you buy the right tickets that is. Having purchased the luxurious soft sleeping bunks we got ourselves a room of our own. We read, slept, played cards and occasionally took some photos while some of Vietnams green hills slowly passed us by on the outside. At Da Nang we quickly got into a taxi and head out to Hoi An, one of the absolute highlight of the trip.

After choosing carefully from the numerous hotels available we spent the evening having dinner with friends from Mui Ne and Nah Trang and the day after was spent just walking around in the picturesque settings of downtown Hoi An with a mix of Chinese, French, British and Vietnamese architecture. The warm light on the yellow walls is just perfect for photos.





After a day in Hoi An we headed north to Hanoi. We were disappointed; the guidebook promised us a cozy bustling city with charm and character. We found tons of mopeds and people giving us nothing but hard times. Having just arrived in Hanoi's old town we went into the first hotel we saw, it turned out to be too expensive and we asked the receptionist if there were any other hotels around. She answered no, not really. We asked so where should we go to

find a hotel. She then directs us away from the other hotels (that were right around the corner). Same thing when we want to hire a guided tour to Halong bay, we found it very hard to know what we actually were buying and if the price was correct. Its all about the people and Hanoi certainly has some improvements to do here. Off we went on our Halong bay tour de luxe and it started off fairly well with a nice lunch and a nice visit to one of the caves .. then we spent the evening on the boat, playing cards and after breakfast the next day we set sail and basically went back to Hanoi again. Again its all about the people and the cruise crew did nothing to make us feel at home.

People, if the Vietnamese, with a few exceptions themselves did nothing to make this trip worthwhile remembering the people we met on the road sure did. In Mui Ne we bumped into Maryelse from Alaska on her around the world trip and in Hoi An we were happily surprised to run into her again together with Patricia, a schoolteacher from UK that we went scuba diving with. We were then blessed with Patricias presence for the remaining part of our trip and together we experienced the haggling in Hanoi, Halong bay, Hotel hunts in HCMC and Mekong Delta happenings.

At 5.20 am (after being woken up by drunken britts) we met Peter and Else, teachers from Canada currently working in Hongkong. They made our stay in Hoi An very memorable and overall School teachers seem to be indeed on the road during Christmas. We also encountered a bunch of German ones on the Halong Bay trip.

We picked up Chris at the Hanoi airport, he was traveling through Asia for three months and happily joined our Taxi to the old town. He then joined our Halong bay entourage



Vietnam is a nice country, if you know where to go! If you are a tourist with just a little bit of time who wants to see the best South East Asia has to offer then do not bother with Vietnam. There are better beaches, nicer people and cozier places elsewhere.

Been there done that .. now can I have my #S%#\$% t-shirt?