

Post



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# Happy April Fool's Day! - April 1, 2023

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## ***SUMMARY***

Took a sampan to Sa Dec village, visiting Cao Dai Temple and the home of "Romeo" in the Vietnamese version of the story: *The Lover*. Toured the enormous, covered fruit/vegetable/fish market dodging motorbikes in narrow aisles. I swear, they go everywhere! Back on our boat for lunch and traveling further downstream to visit the prosperous town of Cai Be and a family-run rice factory to sample, among other things, their version of rice crispy treats. Afterward we were rowed by elderly women on small wooden boats through a beautiful canal filled with water hyacinths. Dinner on the boat with more dancing and tequila late into the evening. - Karen

### ***DETAIL***

Today is the first of the month, so we again say "Rabbit, Rabbit" first thing, for good luck. Per the calendars (that we're seeing in the local temples) it is the 1st day of the 11th month of the year, April. We agree with the April part, not so much that it's the 11th month, but whatevs. It's almost New Years here, so we guess that makes sense.

Today is again pack-jam with activities. Step one is to go to the market, the fish market, the vegetable market. We climb aboard our sampan and again don our life jackets. These waters are apparently regularly patrolled by maritime authorities, and so we follow the rules.

We've been on the Mekong River since we left Cambodia. What's different now is that we're coming into the delta of the river, where it meets the [something], definitely NOT the South China Sea (if you ask the locals). It means the river widens out, slows down, drops it's fertile silt and makes the area very productive. Some call this the rice basket of Vietnam, others call it the rice bowl of the world. What we do know is that they grow (and process) a lot of rice.

On our way 'in to town' on our (not so) little sampan, we see other big boats transporting mountains of unprocessed rice, bags of processed (hulled) rice, and mountains of light, empty rice hulls, on boats with big gauzy netting holding the mountain of rice hulls. At the processing plants we can see the rice going into the buildings, the bags of processed rice coming out and the hull being piped into the huge net boats. Amazing.

In Alaska, where we aren't, they have so many words for snow. Here? It's Rice. At least five different words to describe rice. One each for uncooked, hulled, cooked, broken, brown, flour, etc.

Off our sampan we walk towards town. We get the standard admonishment about crossing the street. Slow, constant pace. Do NOT change your mind mid-crossing. We all survive (this time). We visit a Chinese church with it's fish, bonsai trees and burning incense. They have hanging coils of incense maybe 3' tall that burn for a month, we're told.

Walking into town proper it's hustling and bustling. There are shops and services. One of the services, spilling out onto the sidewalk, is repair. So we see a guy disassembling someone's remote control and looking at the printed circuit board. Not far away is a soldering iron, a broken blender, coffee maker, toaster.

We pass many brick and mortar businesses. They, too, invariably spill out onto the sidewalk. We're told that the local equivalent of Amazon is putting these stores out of business. In five years Khanh thinks they'll all be gone. Sad.

The market's amazing. We see all the various types of rice for sale, so many vegetables, in every state and volume desired. At the fish market they try to keep the fish alive to the last minute (no fridge at home) so most of the fish are in shallow pans with water and a bubbler. The fish are splashing around, confused. We see a couple types of amphibious animals for sale. Frogs [ask me later!] and some amphibious fish. They can walk on land, so there's a net keeping them from just walking away!

We visit a church where they've mixed all the religions into one. Much easier that way. There's a painting that includes some famous Chinese religious figure from the 14th century, a local religious head, and of course, Victor Hugo. Hm.

We visited a fascinating atelier (studio/workshop) where they take rice and make all kinds of products: rice wine, rice cakes, rice paper for spring rolls, etc. They have to pop the rice so they do it in black sand! It's heated in a wok, using (what else, rice hulls), the rice doesn't stick to the sand because they add oil. It's fascinating. The rice wine is tasty.

We were supposed to visit the floating market (see earlier blog post about a similar market in Thailand). One problem here. There is no more floating market. Roads with bridges, motor bikes, and home delivery makes this non-sensical.

We did take a ride on another boat, a very small wooden craft and in each three of us, plus the rower, a not-young, woman. She stood and had one long oar in each hand, criss-crossed over the boat. We crossed a fairly wide island via a natural canal. There were flowers and houses, workers repairing the banks with dark mud, a couple of young kids swimming while mom looked on, bridges, a bar playing loud music and a patron, from same said bar, peeing into the narrow canal. He was as surprised to see us gliding by as we were to see his privates. At the far end, where we re-emerged from the canal to stealthily creep up on our bigger ship, we felt like Katherine Hepburn and Boggie at the end of The African Queen.

Back on the boat Jakob tells us of a radio station that did a few good April fools pranks on their listeners over the years. In one they had a warning news item explaining that there was a small Russian submarine that was currently in the tidal basin in Copenhagen where the little mermaid statue is. People shouldn't swim there for now, and they should keep their kids out, too. Problem? The water is about 6' deep, so it could never happen.

There was a good one another year by the same radio station about the Danish treasury issuing a call for anyone with a 2 kroner (euro?) note to check it for a misprint. Apparently the bird pictured only had one leg. Everyone knows all

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the bird, maybe like a stork, of course is just standing on one leg. April fools. The banks were inundated by the trusting Danes. They didn't know what to do. This radio station is precluded from any more April 1 pranks.

After dinner the oh-so-sweet crew danced for us, and later with us. We ended the night with more dancing with just us passengers and our crazy music.

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### Photos



A Vietnamese Mr. Fixit



Month-at-a-time incense



A bonsai tree at the Chinese church



The actual house of the couple that inspired the book and movie *The Lover*



A church of the religion that combined all the religions into one



A puppy dog (puppy-doodle?) guarding  
the potatoes and beets



You've heard of the headless horseman?  
This is the body-less duck and hens



Snake head fish. Ate many of these while here (more cooked)



Walking fish (with protection to keep them from just walking off)



Making yummy rice cakes



Making (presumably) yummy rice paper wraps for spring rolls



Vietnamese lady rowing three of us  
through a natural canal



Back to our more reasonably sized sampan



Some of our ship's crew doing a traditional Vietnamese line dance



Us doing a less traditional I-don't-know-what (wink)

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