

Post



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# Goodbye, Mekong River - April 2, 2023

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## ***SUMMARY***

Sadly, it's our last morning on the boat. This has been my favorite part of the trip so far, primarily because of our shipmates. They're all so nice and fun! We are bused into Ho Chi Minh City where we say goodbye to everyone but Grith and Jacob with whom we ride to the airport. We arrive in Hanoi and are picked up by a rep from our hotel. We go out exploring and looking for a place for dinner. I found myself not liking Hanoi. It is very dirty, littered and uber crowded with crazy drivers, sidewalks completely blocked with parked motorbikes and people sitting on short stools smoking and chatting. Happy to be leaving early tomorrow! - Karen

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### ***DETAIL***

We have our normal wake-up: coffee, and breakfast, but today we're also packing. We've been aboard The Lotus Navigator for seven nights, so our stuff is pretty much everywhere. We find it all, hopefully and put it back into it's respective packing cube, toiletry bag, or back pack. For us, too, there is (again, hopefully) an ATM. During the trip we had success at one or two, and failure at the most recent one. When they do work we get our some number of million in local currency. We think this is a lot, only to find out it's US\$65 or some such amount, which we go through fairly quickly.

We ask if we're allowed off the boat and are assured it's OK. My Tho, where we are, is a thriving city, undoubtedly helped by the nice port here. It is the river port for Ho Chi Minh City, previously Saigon. My cell service and GPS point us towards a few ATMs. Crossing the somewhat busy streets we hold hands and hope for the best.

At one point a young local stops us and provides us with unsolicited directions to the beautiful park that everyone is looking for (who have skin and clothing such as ours). We thank her and push on towards our ATM. Apparently there are ATMs, but many are inside buildings, out of the sun and rain, but also out of reach for us, it being Sunday. At one building, which also houses an office for Vietnam Airlines, the nice lady at the desk offers us a room for the night. Google Translator helps us ask our question. She says banks are closed, since it's Sunday. ATM? Yes, straight down this wide street.

We follow her directions and soon we have a few million more in our pocket. Back on the boat we find our party friends from the previous night and settle up for our portion of the tequila shots. Soon we are all getting off the ship, flanked on both sides by the wonderful staff who have made the trip so enjoyable. At the bus we ID our luggage and climb aboard.

Khanh narrates along the way, sadly the microphone cut in and out and was eventually abandoned. There's so much to see and agriculture, industry, and ancestral burial sites everywhere, along with vehicles and motor bikes on the toll road. At the rest stop we all beg off and end up not stopping. We want to ensure everyone gets to the airport on time. At our drop point most of the group (after goodbyes) head inside to start their days here in Saigon, and four of us hope in an arranged, tight taxi to the airport.

Our check in goes smoothly. Yes, we may carry on our luggage. They weigh it and change their minds. Grith and Jakob have some long delays in their check in. We surmise that maybe we need to go help and explain that, yes, Denmark is an actual country and yes, airplanes do fly there.

Through security we search for and find Le Saigonaise Lounge. Both couples use our special credit cards to get us in and we all settle down for the wait. There's lots of food and beverage, including alcohol. Groan.

Eventually both couples are on their respective planes. Ours is a Boeing 787 wide body heading for another city in Vietnam: Ha Noi, as they call it. Upon landing the windows immediately totally fog up on the outside. The plane is well chilled and it's maybe 200% humidity out, having rained recently.

Luggage back safely in hand, we find the man with the "Aira Hotel: Farnsworth" sign. It's a 30 minute ride to the hotel and there's lots to see. There are also tons of motor bikes. We learn that the car horn is used quite a bit here, mostly by cars asking motor bikes to get back in their lane. It wasn't raining when we landed but restarted shortly thereafter. Some of the motorbike drivers did stop to put on ponchos, but many just squinted. Passengers put plastic bags on their heads. This isn't their first rain shower.

Our hotel is lovely and since we're just staying a single night they've upgraded us. It's a big, nice room. The extra instructions for tourists we're given doesn't mention durian but does explain how to cross the streets with all the motor bikes, and how to limit the impact of the pickpockets. We head out, find another ATM, and look for a suitable (hopefully French) restaurant for dinner.

We find another 'in city' train route with an impossibly narrow space for the actual train. Apparently this is a big tourist draw and many exasperated local police try to keep everyone safe. What we don't find is a good way to walk on the sidewalks of any of the streets. Motorbikes are parked, one after the other, taking up the entire sidewalk. That it is Sunday evening, we figure, has more people home at once than usual. Where the sidewalk doesn't have motor bikes, it has the merchandise of the adjacent shop artfully spilled out into the onetime walkway. It's not fun or easy to get around.

We buy water and wine for our cruise on the Lan Ha Bay the next two nights and settle into the Xofa restaurant. It was well reviewed on Trip Advisor and it has dozens of young Japanese women there taking Instagram pictures with their drinks and food. The Fettuccini Carbonara is really good, as is the salmon and vegetables and beer accompaniment.

Eventually we risk our lives on the streets one last time to get back to our room for bed. Big day tomorrow.

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## Photos



Back to the ship for the last time, after our ATM visit. Sniff.



Driving into Hanoi (here Ha Noi). One set of lanes for cars, another for motor bikes. How civil!



Amazing buildings in Hanoi. We're excited to be coming back (on the cruise ship from Japan to Singapore)



How to get kids to wear helmets. Make them look like Pikachu



At the airport lounge. More food!



An in country plane. A giant 787 in a 3-3-3 configuration!



Looked out the window upon landing to check the weather. Yep. Humid.



And later rainy. The three ladies on a motorbike are using plastic bags to keep their hair dry... and I think the driver is keeping her eyes closed.



With every hotel checkin over here. Fresh squeezed juice. Also very civilized.



FARNSNIENTE



Train coming through soon. No one worried.



Dinner at XofA, is it a restaurant or a math equation?



Trying to walk on the side "walk" on the way home. Argh.



Store stuff overflowing onto the sidewalk,  
screaming "buy me!"



Er ma gerd! Your dead ancestors would  
just LOVE these!

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