

Post



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# Evacuation Anniversary - April 30, 2023

Updated: May 2, 2023

## ***SUMMARY***

Coincidentally we are in Vietnam on the 48th anniversary of the fall of Saigon. Celebrated every year by some as Reunification Day, by others as Black Day. We just about melted in the humid heat on our shore excursion which was an all day affair. We drove through Da Nang and along the beautiful beach then turned inland towards My Son (Beautiful Mountain) and it's temple ruins (like a small Angkor Wat but made of bricks). From My Son to Thanh Ha where we watch a potter make various clay pieces the town is famous for and, of course, had the opportunity to buy! Next we boarded a boat and cruised the Thu Bon River to

Hoi An. After an 8 or 9 course lunch we headed into the pack-jammed streets of Hoi An. It is a beautiful little town filled with quaint buildings, flowering vines and Chinese lanterns but crazy busy, what with it being a holiday and a Sunday! We dodged foot, bicycle, pedicab and scooter traffic (and did I mention how hot and humid it was?) for as long as we could stand it then popped into a cute café (for adult beverages). Back on the bus for a last stop at a stone sculpting place where we had another chance to shop. Yes, I'm going to take that hideous 500 pounds Buddha home in my luggage! - Karen

[Photos](#) | [Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Index](#)

### ***DETAIL***

Compared with yesterday's sleepy day at sea, today will be busy-busy, with an eight hour excursion. Looking out from our cabin balcony the sky is blue, the seas are calm, it's 81°. We're still under power, headed for our destination for the day: Da Nang.

From what we can see, Da Nang is a very big city. It's a hilly (8,500 foot mountains close by) but Da Nang has a lot of flat area, too. Better for agriculture. We'll later learn that Da Nang is Vietnam's third largest city. It's located in the middle third of the country, being a part of the DMZ back during the war.

The city name has been on our minds for decades as Karen's dad was, for a time, the base commander at one of the auxiliary air bases nearby. We look up and see that in his day the city wasn't 1.2 million but rather 160,000. We're sure a lot more has changed than just the number of people.

Vietnamese Immigration does a much better job than the Chinese and we're quickly off the boat. We meet Lam, our guide, and climb aboard our bus for the day. Lam introduces himself and reminds us that today is 48 years (to the day) that Saigon fell. For many Vietnamese it's a sad day, for others it's a day to celebrate: Reunification Day. In our minds we picture that last Huey Helicopter on the roof of the US Embassy with people clamoring to get aboard.

Later we'll learn that yesterday was also the birthday of the first king, the founder of Vietnam, so it's a big weekend. In fact everyone has five days off (starting on April 29th each year). That's regardless of on which day the 29th falls. This year it's a Saturday, so people that usually don't work on the weekend may feel they're getting short changed.

Our route parallels a beach. To our left are big crashing waves. What comes to mind is Colonel Kilgore's quote from *Apocalypse Now*: "I love the smell of napalm in the morning". He's about to go surfing on a Vietnamese beach likely very similar to this one.

Our first stop is at an Ankor Wat-type ancient temple. We're at My Son (which means Beautiful Mountain). There are "before" and "after" pictures and the restoration is amazing. Original construction was done between the 4th and 14th centuries. The temples are constructed of bricks with no mortar. It's mind boggling. The ruins were hidden until French Colonial Officers, looking for somewhere cooler up in the hills to build, stumbled across them.

We drive on, hearing more about the end of the Vietnam war, and the Americans who said they thought B52s could do their bombing without suffering many casualties. After 34 bombers were shot down this thinking was reconsidered and many Americans started clamoring for us to get out. That didn't happen for another two years.

Our next stop is a UNESCO-recognized pottery village where the locals make pots and cups on pottery wheels on the ground. One person keeps the wheel spinning with her foot while the other forms the vessel.

We take a boat ride up a river to Hoi An, a city with a famous "Japanese" bridge and lots of tourists. Lunch is very good and includes many courses. Afterwards we tour the town, first as a group then quickly on our own. We walk down a long 'pedestrian/bike' street, with lots of both. Many of the bikes are hired 'pedicabs' on a predetermined route (so they're all going one way, thankfully). The 'insta' generation has ladies in traditional Vietnamese dress posing everywhere for photos. Karen and I get beer and wine and Karen's talked into buying some cookies from a local (for 200,000 dong, about US\$8, a fortune).

Finally, we head back towards the ship for dinner. We stop along the way at a marble sculpture studio where someone is wailing on a block of stone with a hammer and chisel. They assure us they can ship any of these 500 pound+ sculptures home for us. (No thanks)

Back onboard we have a good dinner of miso soup, sushi, and other Japanese greatest hits. Again we're in the hot tub after dinner, as the boat casts off from Da Nang. Tomorrow will be a new month, we'll be having another day at sea (our penultimate for this cruise), after which we'll be in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) where it promises to be quite hot. Our schedule there includes an afternoon walking tour (groan).

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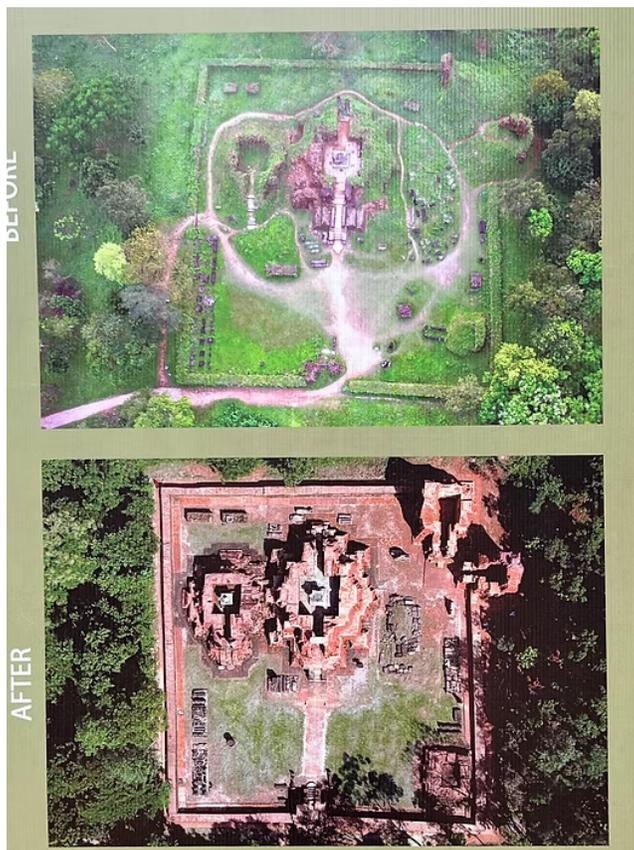
## Photos



Da Nang from a distance. The number three most populace city in Vietnam.



Once on our tour our guide reminded us that TODAY is the 48th anniversary of this event. Wow, what timing!



My Son (part of it) before and after.  
Amazing what they've done.



The end result (though the rainy season and local plants try to take it back to the way it was.



Done with zero mortar. Just brick on brick,  
very close.



We were there.



Everywhere we drove they were drying rice. Vietnam is a top producer of rice. Due to their techniques the US doesn't allow the import of Vietnamese rice (see picture).



Happy Reunification Day! (Want some wifi?)



Pottery town



We got a demonstration and were all asked if we wanted to try. All but one (neither of us) declined.



With their technique they can turn out very consistent results. They use solar energy to help dry the clay.



On the boat.



One of our many courses for lunch.  
Steamed fish. Steamed = "deep fried" in  
local parlance, apparently.



Pretty girl on pretty bridge.



The Japanese Bridge. Alas being refurb'ed so you can't really see the outside.



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Earring?



Busy streets. Holiday. Always bikes, but for this one shot.



In the covered market. The eating area. We couldn't really ID most of the stuff on offer.



The pedicabs.



Bride and groom getting wedding pictures. A bit crowded, eh?



The main bridge. Lots of humanity.



One happy buddha! They'll ship that to our house if we want.

[Previous](#) | [Next](#) | [Index](#)

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