

Post



Scott Farnsworth

May 1, 2023 · 5 min read

# 30 minute ear cleanse? - May 2, 2023

Updated: May 4, 2023

## ***SUMMARY***

Our sea cruise became a river cruise this morning. We arrived in port in Ho Chi Minh City, way up the Saigon River from the South China Sea. In the afternoon we had an excursion which was supposed to be a 3.5 hour 'Colonial Walking Experience'. Because of the extreme heat and humidity (feels like 106F) they wisely turned it into a Colonial Bus Experience with only a 1/2 kilometer walk. We toured the area that had a lot of buildings left from the French colonial occupation. From there to labyrinth that is the Ben Thành Market. More opportunities for shopping! Finally, a stop at the beautiful Grand Hotel for Tea. Back on the boat we

had time for dinner and swim/soak before re-boarding a bus for the scheduled AzAmazing evening. It's a visit to Binh Quoi Village for a performance of all things Vietnamese -music, dance and regional costumes. - Karen

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### ***DETAIL***

I snap awake at 7 am and the boat is listing to one side and groaning slightly. Out the window I can see we're in a narrow river negotiating a sharp bend. This had been promised. We're in The Saigon Slalom, the 50 miles zig-zag from the South China Sea to Ho Chi Minh City. Today's run started a few hours ago in the dark. Thankfully they'll be repeating this at a more reasonable hour (noon-ish) as we head back out towards Singapore.

Despite the early hour it's already a warm 80°, and feels even warmer in the bright sunshine. The outlook is for a "feels like" temperature high of 106°. We're not looking forward to our 1 pm excursion: a walking tour through the city.

We watch the boat slalom all the way upriver to Saigon. The boat does a tight 180° pirouette before snuggling up to the dock on the starboard side. Our cabin is on that side, so we can just look down and see the setting up the gangway and bringing on of more food and beverage. Karen notes that by turning around now we won't need to do it when we leave.

At 1 pm we join our excursion, thankfully starting out on an air-conditioned bus. Our short, middle aged, not thin guide, Ho, introduces himself. Like "Ho, Ho, Ho" he says. We hear about the city, including that the north calls it Ho Chi Minh City and the south still sticks to the Saigon name.

We drive the short distance to the heart of the city. The traffic is light, which Ho attributes to the holiday. Lots of people moved to the city for the jobs and the money, and on long holidays like this they head back home for a visit. We walk one of the main streets looking at the French colonial architecture. Lots of the buildings are quite new, but some wouldn't look out of place in Paris.

We're off and on the bus. We see the opera and a big statue of Ho Chi Minh. It's warm and the traffic doesn't seem to care about us as we try to cross the street. There's the famous Notre Dame Cathedral, which sadly (or maybe happily) it's undergoing a much needed seven year restoration. All we see is scaffolding.

As we wander about we note that the writing doesn't look like Japanese or Chinese. The lettering is the As, Bs, and Cs that we're used to (albeit with accents). This is thanks to the French who were in charge for close to 100 years. We see the impressive French consulate and what used to be the US embassy (now the US consulate, with the embassy now in Hanoi).

Walking is a bit difficult with all the motorbikes parked on the sidewalk, lined up one after another ad infinitum. Ho explains this is totally illegal, but the businesses and buildings in front of which their parked know the riders probably have business there, so they look the other way. Similarly the businesses aren't allowed to spill out onto the sidewalks, but they do and again everyone looks the other way. "You're making money and I'm making money... it's all good."

We walk past a massage parlor with it's menu with prices. Ho does the math for us and the prices are dirt cheap. The item of a 30 minute ear clean out both catches my eye and turns my stomach. I don't want anyone in there for anywhere near that long. Ho explains that most of the money doesn't go to the masseuses and thus 100% is an appropriate tip, more if you want a happy ending. He laughs and we're a tad shocked at his frankness.

At the under cover, open air central market we're set loose, on our own, for an hour. We've been told that if they ask for 100 that we should offer 30, and go from there. There's lots of shirts, pants, fabric, pots and pans, watches and sunglasses. In every small booth there's a bored sales lady who really wants to talk to us. They have what we need and are going to make us a really good bargain. We smile and quickly walk on. Many of the tee-shirts look familiar, but the Starbucks and Patagonia brands have been altered to make some cute Vietnam or "Saigonia" pun.

I hear about the timing of Vietnam realizing that communism (where all farmers get the same salary, regardless of how hard they work) was a bad idea. The big Economic Reform here coincided with the fall of the Soviet Union (and Vietnam's pivot to neighbor China). At the same time Bill Clinton lifts the embargo against Vietnam and Vietnam recognizes the success China is having toying with capitalism. The rest is (business) history.

After an early dinner most of the ship piles onto a dozen or more buses for the 45 minute drive to a small rural village (Binh Quoi). We're having our AzAmazing evening (trademark Azamara Cruise Line). There's food and drink, crafts and music. Karen and I try our skills at the dance with the long bamboo poles being clapped rhythmically together then on the ground, coming away unscathed but out of breath.

It was warm and humid but fun. Apparently they thought we were all deaf as the music was very loud. They played songs on traditional instruments and had a fashion show of the traditional costumes of the country. We're glad we went but were ready for bed by the time we got back. As we walked up the gangway Karen realized she'd shed her boarding card somewhere earlier in the evening. And the Cruise Director, who played the lead in so many Broadway shows, was giving a show from the 5th deck. It was fun.

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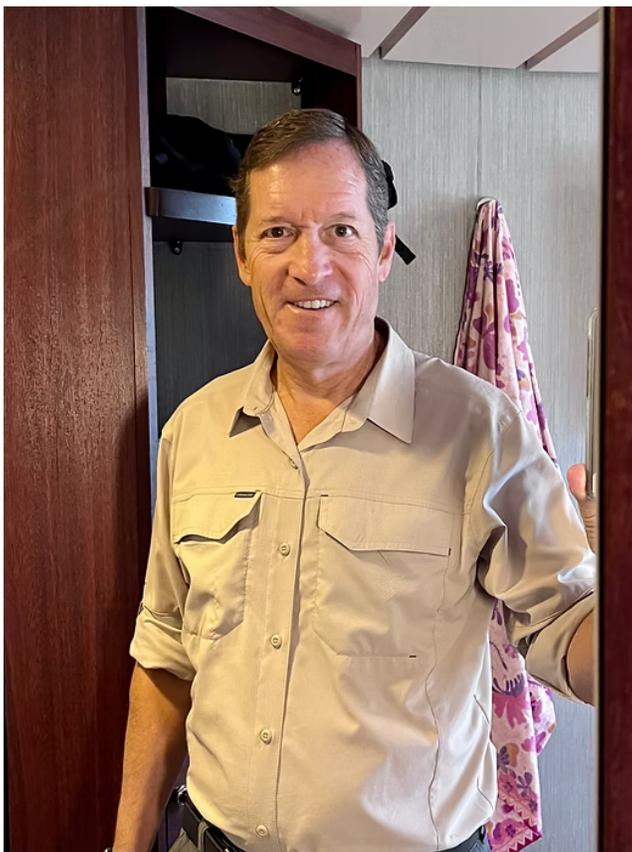
## Photos



Cruising into downtown Ho Chi Minh City/Saigon. Beautiful (albeit hot) weather.



Many boats have eyes. A few also have teeth.



Double checking how well my shirt hides the beer gut I've somehow acquired during the trip :-/



There shall be no scurvy on this ocean  
going vessel.



Our tour guide Ho



Colonial French architecture



The settled, untouched dirt, enhances the realism of this sculpture holding up the doorway.

**TIBI**  
**HABANA SPA**



**SHAMPOO & HAIR DRYER (30min)**  
シャンプー&ヘアドライヤー:30分  
**210.000 VND**

**CLEAN OUT YOUR EARS (30min)**  
あなたの耳を一掃:30分  
**210.000 VND**

**FACIAL REFLEXOLOGY + HEAD MASSAGE (60min)**  
フェイシャル・リフレクソロジー+ヘッドマッサージ:60分

Only 200,000 Vietnamese dong (plus tip)  
for someone to route around in your ears  
for a half hour



At the central market, the shopping aisles  
go on for ever and the pestering never  
ends



FARNSNIENTE



Scott, Karen, and a smiling Ho Chi Minh



y Durian. So stinky!



A few of the many illegally parked motor bikes.



Proud reminders of how Vietnam kicked out the Americans, French, Chinese, Lao, etc. etc.



Afternoon high tea



After our tour we cool off in the pool.  
Everyone's ashore or in their air  
conditioned cabins. We have the pool area  
almost to ourselves.



Part of our AzAmazing (tm) Evening.



The type of dancing we did. We were successful if not graceful.

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