

# Beautiful Vietnam

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On 11<sup>th</sup> April, 2019, I went on a holiday to Vietnam. It is one of the most beautiful countries in the world, very picturesque and pristine with friendly people around. I travelled to both Ho Chi Minh City and Ha Noi and the highlight of my tour was the Ha Long Bay cruise. I loved the country and its people and came back with many happy memories.

We were familiar with the name of the country from our childhood. In our young age all we knew of the country was the war that was going on between America and Vietnam. We learned bits and pieces about the country when our parents were discussing the war in Vietnam. Those were the days in the early 60s. Little did I know that one day, some 55 years later I would have the opportunity to travel that country.

I arrived in Ho Chi Minh city on the morning of 12<sup>th</sup> April. My flight was good. The plane was full of tourists, mostly from Australia. The Airport service was good. I took a taxi to my hotel. After checking in I went to my room. Later I came down for breakfast and the reception organized my tours for the next few days. The rest of the day I relaxed and went for a swim in the hotel swimming pool.

The next morning, at 8 a.m., I was picked up from my hotel for my day tour. The name of the tour was “Classic Mekong Delta”. The tour was very enjoyable as well as educational. We were 10 in the group including the driver and our guide. Our guide, Long, was a wonderful person and so was everyone in the group. I was the seniormost in the group and the tour guide called me mama (mum). Everyone in the group was very kind and caring towards me. We were driven to a place 70 km from the city in a minibus. It took us about 2 hours. I enjoyed the beautiful drive. It reminded me of my trip to Kanchanaburi from Bangkok. I took a private car from the hotel and went to Kanchanaburi, 300 km from Bangkok, to see the famous bridge on the river Koi.

Our first stop was a place where we bought some refreshments. I took my coffee mug with me and bought my coffee which I could drink while traveling. We had a short 20-minute break to take some photos.



The canals were full of Lotus leaves.

Our next stop was at Vinh Trang Pagoda. The place had a beautiful garden with nice, scented flowers. I loved it. I went around and took some photos.



Vinh Tran Pagoda



Golden Buddha

After seeing the Pagoda, we were driven to another place. We were in a boat ride along the Mekong River. The river is one of the large rivers of the world (4500 km) starting from Tibet and going through six different countries. I always love cruises and enjoyed it very much.



The boat ride on Mekong River



We were given the local fruits which I loved. After tasting the fruits, we walked for a while for sampan ride along the canals.



Our Sampan ride

We walked a lot going from one place to another taking many different boat rides. Going in and out of those boats was pretty challenging and I was very well looked after, not only by the tour guide but everyone from the group. It was so sweet of them.



Sampan ride along the canal

After our sampan ride, we were taken to another village where we saw how candies were made from coconut and maple syrup made from sticky rice. It was very interesting and educational for me.



Shredded coconuts were tied in bundles and squeezed to bring the milk out.



The milk is then cooked with maple syrup.

Then it was time for lunch. We were taken to a riverside restaurant and a enjoyed everything, the place, the food.



This is an amazing thing, something I have never seen anywhere in the world. This ball is made of rice flour and is just like a balloon. Later it was taken away, cut to pieces, and stuffed with sweet sticky rice. It was so tasty and we enjoyed it so much that I forgot to take photos. We had a wonderful lunch there.

At the end of the day, we were dropped off at our hotel.

The next day, my guided tour was a trip to Cu Chi tunnel, a renowned place for the war torn Vietnam. Our tour guide's name was Typhoon. On our way we stopped to a place where handicrafts are made by handicapped people, mainly the victims of war and their generations. We all know about the sad effects of agent orange. They suffered a similar effect of bombing in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The handicrafts were beautiful. Photography was not allowed in the show room so I couldn't take photos there.

From there we were taken to visit Cu Chi tunnel. During the Vietnam war, which lasted for 20 years, this underground tunnel housed 18000 people. By the time the war ended only 4000 survived! What was gained? Nothing. The tour guide was explaining sadly, and I felt in the same way. When we were growing up and were school students, we heard about Vietnam war and obviously didn't understand much. In that 20-year period we started learning and becoming politically aware, mainly when my parents were discussing it. I felt very fortunate to get this opportunity to be here.

War always makes me feel sad. I don't care whether they are Vietnamese or American, people killing people is always a very sad feeling for me. They are someone's son, someone's husband or someone's father. Today we were shown how cleverly Vietnamese faced and killed the Americans. The tunnel was amazing. It had a unique architectural structure, with several floors and branches like a spider web, more than 250 km long. It had places for dining, living, meeting, and fighting.



Getting into the tunnel



After spending the day at the Cu Chi Tunnel centre we were dropped off at our hotel.

The next day, I went to visit the War Remnant Museum in Ho Chi Minh city. My heart was full of sadness. Vietnam had to suffer 20 years of war, so much killing and atrocities went on, but for what? I have seen this all over the world, in Uzbekistan Timor Lane killed 15 million people, all over Europe, I heard the history of beheadings, and these are never ending. I was sad yet thankful to Almighty for giving me this opportunity to be here and experience it. Many of the photos of Agent Orange victims looked to me like the victims of thalidomide. I sighed and sighed.



In Front of the museum



This is the writing at the front of the Museum-

**" We behold this truth to be self- evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness ", The US Declaration of Independence adopted on July 4, 1774.**

I had an evening flight to Ha Noi, and I came back to my hotel after visiting the museum.

I reached my hotel at 10-45 p.m. and after checking in, went to bed after a cup of herbal tea.

The next morning, after breakfast, I went to reception to book my tour for the next day. The lady at the reception showed me the places of interest around the hotel and I went out for a walking tour.

My hotel was conveniently located near a famous lake called Hoan Kiem Lake, which was only a few minutes' walk. When I asked at the reception about a good place for lunch, they suggested one, a lakeside restaurant. I started walking, found the lake and then was looking for the restaurant. I saw a couple sitting on a bench and asked them. They told me where it was. We started chatting and within a few minutes we became good friends. They were from UK. I told them that my son lived in Edinburgh, his wife is a Scottish lady and I have a beautiful granddaughter there. Anyway, after chatting for a while, I took off, found the restaurant, and had a lovely meal.

After my lunch I started walking and kept taking photos. It was a beautiful place. The sky was overcast but it didn't rain. Temperature was in the low 20s and there was a nice breeze. I loved the walk. From time to time I crossed the road to go and see some places of interest. Crossing the road was an experience. The roads were all one way. There were pedestrian crossings, but no one stopped. Initially I was a bit concerned but I followed others.



I walked along the lake and yes, I completed the full round and was very proud of myself.



At the centre of the lake is a tower called Turtle Tower. The next day, I took a day trip. I was picked up from my hotel in the morning. It was a beautiful day.

The whole tour was a dream come true experience. I saw Vietnam, just the way I wanted to see- picturesque, pristine and pure nature.

I was the senior most in the group and everyone was so nice, sweet, and caring towards me. I walked many kilometres and climbed hundreds of steps. One of them had 150 steps of rocks. The view from the top was spectacular. I am glad that I did it while I was still fit and healthy, Alhamdulillah.



My travel companions, A family from Philippines.



The tunnel behind joins the two sides of the mountain.



We walked through the tunnel to go to the other side of the mountain.



It was so pristine and peaceful.





Our very relaxing sampan ride

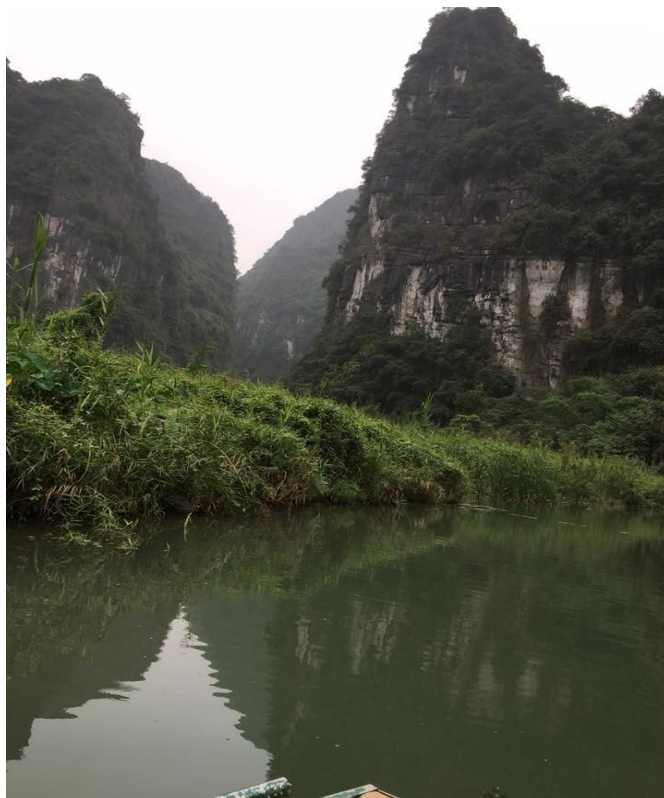


The highlight of today's tour was the sampan ride for nearly three hours, stopping at three different places to see the temples and going through three different caves which were very low. Sometimes we had to duck to

save our heads. The first cave was the longest and it took us nearly half an hour. The other two caves were 400m and 150m long. I have done similar things in Vienna and In New Zealand but not this low. It was an experience.



Inside the cave







Indigenous people of Vietnam



At the end of the day, I was dropped off at my hotel. After dinner I went to bed.

Next morning, I was picked up from my hotel at 4 a.m. for my two-day Ha Long bay tour. Everything was very well organised. It was about 3-hour drive to the Bay. On our way, we were taken for breakfast in a restaurant. At the cruise centre everything was very well organised. After all the formalities, we headed for our boat. I loved my cabin and settled there very quickly.



My cabin on Ha Long cruise



View from the balcony of my cabin.

Soon it was lunch time and I headed for the dining room.



Enjoying my tea sitting in the balcony of my cabin.



The view from my cabin. It was breath taking.

In the afternoon, we were taken for our shore tour.

Our first shore tour was Tien Ong cave.

We went inside the cave. The Stalactites and stalagmites looked so beautiful. I was very careful while going down.



Beautiful stalactites inside the cave.





I loved to be surrounded by stalactites and stalagmites.



Climbing up those rocks was challenging, however, I did it alright. On my way down two lovely ladies offered me help. They said, “you stay between us”, and they offered their helping hands. So sweet of them. I got down very cautiously.



Back to our small boat

After that we went to see the floating village in small boats. It was an experience.



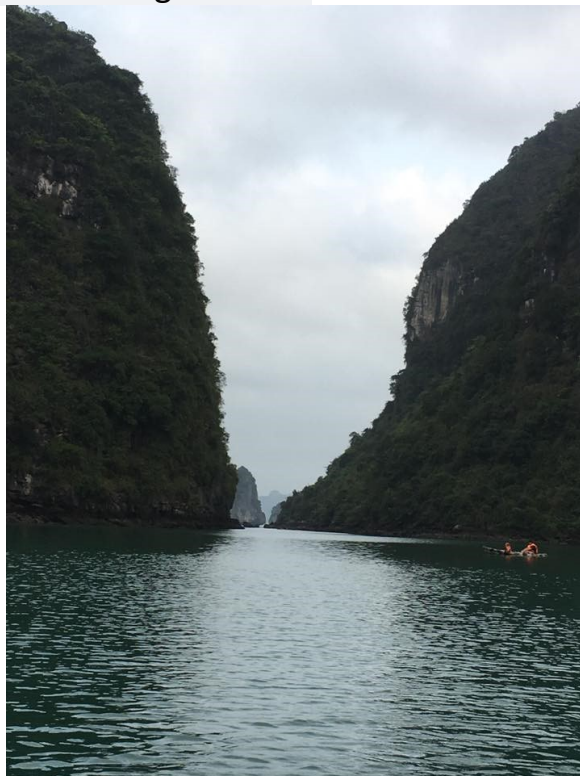
With two lovely ladies who were my guardian angels.





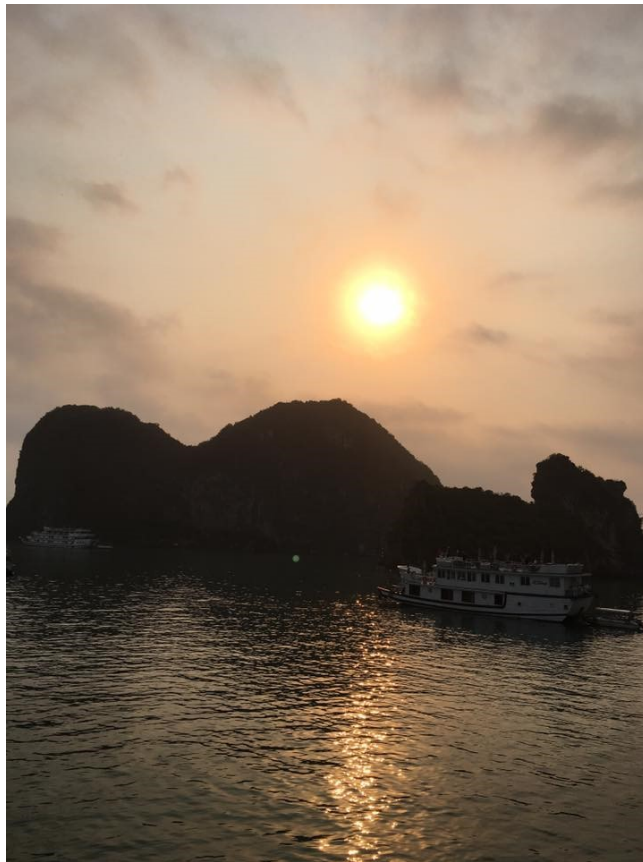
Floating Village

Those houses were built on top of drums. They live there, catch fish. People come and buy fish from them for markets. People come and sell goods to them called floating markets.





Next morning, I went to the top deck for a Tai Chi session. I was 15 minutes early and relaxed on the deck chair.



Beautiful sunrise from my cabin.



Last few photos from our cruise ship. We were a group of 16. Everything was very well organised. I had table for one, another couple, of about my age had a table for two, a group of four had a table for 4 and two families traveling together with 4 children had a table for the group. The food was excellent and so was the service. I enjoyed my Tai Chi session which was very similar to the yoga I do.





After Ha Long Bay tour, I was brought back to my hotel. After some rest, I went for 90 minutes massage in the hotel SPA.

The next day, it was time to leave Vietnam. It was a memorable trip for sure. The landscape was so unique. Mountains always fascinate me. I have seen mountains in all six continents of the world. They are all unique in their own way. I have seen the mountains of Norway, Austria, Switzerland, New Zealand, Malaysia, volcanic mountains of Hawaii, Rainbow Mountain of Peru, mountains of Patagonia, of Easter Island and Galapagos islands. I am happy to be able to add the memory of Vietnam, another one to treasure. What a wonderful world.