

Tuesday, January 2, 2007

We woke up late and missed breakfast so we went out for lunch. We went to Pho 24 with Ha, Phong, Heng, Andy, and Helen. After that we went to Ha's house where Casy and Helen finished up the slide show for the wedding. Phong and Tron went for a massage while Heng and Phoung went shopping to get something for Heng's girlfriend. Several times the local guys asked Newton if he wanted to go out for a massage. Massage parlors are quite common in the cities in Vietnam, with probably one every couple of blocks. Many are often part of beauty salons, and most are located in prominent places, and not in back alleys or out of the way in seedy parts of town. Young women usually staff these places. Men are always the customers, and a good percentage of them are fronts for prostitution.

At 2 PM Ha took Andy and Helen to a travel agency so he could change his return flight to Indonesia from January 4 to January 7 and Helen to make a visa from Vietnam to China. Helen had flown to China first. She needed a visa to return to China so she could fly back to the US. They got back at 4 PM. Ha and Casy then went to deliver the last wedding invitations. Newton, Andy and Helen waited at Ha's house. They got bored and decided to walk around to get some bakery cakes but they could not find the store. They returned to Ha's house at 5 PM just as Casy returned with Ha. Casy knew the streets of Hanoi better so she took them to a nearby bakery store. Newton spent 69,000 VND for 7 pieces of cakes. Helen and Andy bought 4 boxes of cakes. Andy spent ~200,000 VND for his cakes, and shared some with Casy for taking him there. We sat and chatted for an hour in the bakery, then went back to the hotel and dropped of our cakes in our rooms.

Figure 1: Hanoi has many public spaces and parks where locals can relax, play, or just sit in the shade.

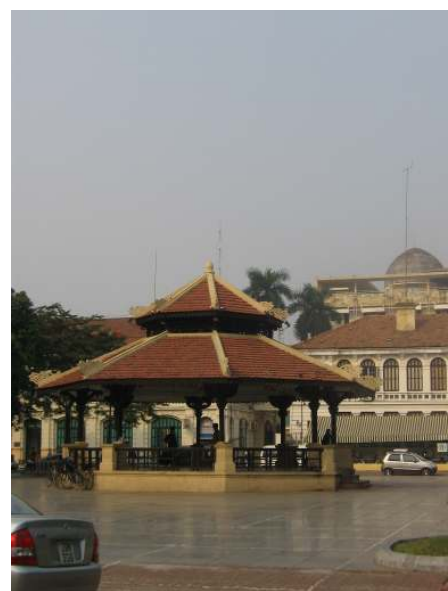


Figure 2: There is a construction boom all throughout Vietnam, with a lot of new housing going up.



Figure 3: Like in many other developing countries, few citizens of Vietnam pay income taxes. Therefore, the government resorts to other ways of funding itself, one of which is road tolls. Every freeway we drove on has road tolls, and most are quite advanced, with separate lanes for trucks, cars, buses and motorcycles.



Back at the hotel, Ha told us that John invited us to come to her friend's restaurant which served American food like pizza, burgers, hot dogs, lasagna, etc along with Vietnamese dishes like Pho, fried rice, and egg rolls. At 7PM, we took a taxi to this restaurant for 30,000 VND. Beside it was a small grocery store that sold American stuff like medicines, magazines, potato chips, etc. We bought some cough drops for our sore throats and some magazines for Newton to read. For dinner, Casy ordered vegetarian Lasagna with lemonade and Newton ordered chicken with rice with watermelon juice. We paid 50,000 VND for dinner. This was one of John's favorite restaurants as he, like many other young Vietnamese, were infatuated with American food.

Figure 4: Dinner at John's favorite restaurant. At top is our party minus Newton who is taking the picture. At bottom is the lasagna Casey ordered.

