

**Friday, December 29, 2006**

We awoke late today after last night's late night out, so we missed the hotel breakfast. Ha and Casy went to a salon to get facials. They rode on Ha's motorcycle. After that, they went to a flower shop to decide which flowers to buy for the engagement party. Next, they took some of the wedding clothes to a dry cleaner. Andy and Newton walked downtown sightseeing. They had breakfast for 119,000 VND at a small restaurant. Newton wanted to take Andy to the Temple of Literature, but got lost, so instead they went to a French bakery and loaded up on cakes and pastries. Newton spent 120,000 VND and Andy even more. That night, we had dinner at Pho 24 with Phong, Ha, Heng and Andy. We paid about 100,000 VND for our food. This being a developing country, most locals do not drink the tap water, and tourists are actively discouraged from doing so. As such, hotels provide bottled water for a small charge. We discovered a small convenience store right beside the hotel that sold bottled water for a much cheaper price. Casy suspected that the hotel just bought their water from this store, and then sold it to their customers, like us, for a profit. We started buying our water here instead of from the hotel, as it was 15,000 VND for a gallon, while the hotel sold water for 10,000 VND for a quart. We bought one gallon today. We had nothing scheduled for tomorrow, so we decided to take the tour to Halong Bay. This was \$27 a person and Newton paid \$81 for Andy and the two of us. The tour was organized through the hotel so we paid this to the hotel.

That night, Newton bought some grapefruits (20,000 VND) and ate it at the hotel cafeteria with Phong, Heng and Andy while gossiping. Casy and Ha went to the airport to pick up Helen at 10PM. Helen is one of Ha's friends from college, and she now attends the University of Arizona in Tucson, Arizona. Her flight was delayed for an hour, so they got back to the hotel around midnight. Ha had also booked her a room in this hotel.

**Figure 1: The hotel cafeteria, with a bar at left.**



**Figure 2: This picture is taken from the back of the hotel cafeteria and looking towards the hotel lobby. Notice the small hallway at left connecting the cafeteria (front of picture) and the lobby (back of picture). Hallways, like many other things in Vietnam, are small by American standards.**



**Figure 3: This poster inside the hotel cafeteria describes the different tours that hotel customers can go on. The brick wall is visible at bottom. In Vietnam, most buildings constructed from the 1900s onwards are made of brick, concrete or marble. The heat, humidity and rainfall levels make wood buildings short-lived.**



**Figure 4: Land for buildings seem to be a premium in Vietnam, both in the countryside and in the cities, as most private lots are quite small in area. As a result, many buildings are taller than they are wider, as seen in this shot of a typical street in Hanoi.**



**Figure 5: Motorists waiting at a train crossing down the street from our hotel. A red and white gate separates the train tracks from the motorists. This gate is on wheels, and is folded up on the side of the street. When a train is about to cross a road, police officers extend this gate out to block traffic from crossing the tracks. The officers stand and wait until the train passes, then they close the gates and street traffic resumes.**

