

Sunday, January 7, 2007

The conductor knocked on everybody's door at 4 AM to wake us up for the train's arrival at Hanoi. We got up and packed our luggage. The train stopped and we walked from the train station to our hotel in about 10 minutes. Back in the hotel room, Casy threw up lunch and dinner from the previous day. She was shaking, had a fever and diarrhea at the same time. After that she took a shower and went to bed. Newton was also sleepy and went to bed also. We woke up at 2 PM and went to the bridal store to pick up our pictures, DVD and the wedding portrait. We loved our pictures. They played the beginning of the DVD for us, which also looked great. The wedding portrait was much larger than what we expected, and was actually printed on hardwood with a metal frame around it. Walking back to the hotel, Newton carried the wedding portrait under his arms while Casy carried the rest. When we got back to the hotel, the lobby staff was curious as to what we were carrying. Newton showed them, and they liked it.

Figure 1: Dropping Andy of at Hanoi Airport



At 4PM, we drove to the airport with Andy, Ha, Phong, John and Phuong. Andy was going back to Indonesia today, and we were very sad. Phong and Ha were best friends with Andy and had known him for 7 years since their days together at Arizona State University. Casy and Andy had not seen each other for 5 years since he left Arizona. Andy checked in, and we then walked upstairs to a food court to talk since his flight did not depart for another two hours. Ha started to cry, followed by Phuong. Casy tried to hold back her tears but the moment they hugged to say goodbye she started crying. John jokingly wondered out loud if any of them would cry as much if he left town. An interesting thing happened when Andy lined up at the baggage check; one of the security guards pulled him over and asked if he was Korean. It turns out this guy wanted to visit someone in Korea and needed some help getting there. He thought Andy was Korean and might be able to help him. Andy told him he was not Korean, and the guard walked away embarrassed. After waving goodbye, we drove back to Ha's house. Inside the car Ha, Phong and

Casy still talked about Andy and their memories of past times with him. Today was very hard for us. After arriving at Ha's house, Casy and Newton walked back to their hotel.

Figure 2: Andy checks in for his flight at left. At right, Andy talks with Phong and Ha. Snack machines like the one behind them are still rare in Vietnam, and usually found in new buildings like the airport.



In two more days Phong's parents will be going back to America so we had dinner with them tonight, along with Ha and her parents, John, his wife and his parents. We went to a restaurant whose specialty was goat meat. Casy did not really eat a lot that night since she did not feel well. The restaurant was in a big room with one wall open to the sidewalk. Along the back wall were huge wood fire stoves where dishes were cooked. The tables were arranged in long rows with long benches alongside of them. In the middle of each table was a circular hole with a charcoal cooker located below it. The waiters and waitresses brought out grills and placed them over the cookers. They then brought out goat meat on wooden sticks like shish kabobs, along with some vegetables and other meat. We guests would then cook what we want over the charcoal pits. This restaurant was quite popular as it was totally full and we had to wait ten minutes before sitting. The wood stoves in the back of the restaurant, and the charcoal cookers on all the tables, together created a lot of smoke and the whole restaurant was smoky. Even the presence of large fans on the ceiling did not help much. This was the first time Newton tried goat meat, and he liked it.

Afterwards, we were all so full we walked the two miles back to Ha's house. We passed through some of the wealthier neighborhoods in town, and saw many large, Western-style mansions. Many of these were situated behind tall gates and had soldiers guarding their entrances. Ha's father told us that in Vietnam, many military officers use their political connections to obtain lucrative business deals, or get great prices on good properties. We noticed our clothes smelled like smoke. We went to sleep early that night.

Figure 3: Dinner at a restaurant that specialized in goat meat. At left is a view of the metal tables arranged in long rows and people sat very close to each other. All the chairs here are blue. Adjacent restaurants often use chairs of different colors to clearly distinguish one restaurant's property from another's. At right is a charcoal cooker placed in the middle of our table. The food included goat meat (dark brown), chicken (light brown), cucumber slices, okra, rice crepes (white crescents) and mint (green leaves at bottom).



Figure 4: Friends enjoying dinner and company at the restaurant. That is Coca Cola sign behind Jon and Phong in the picture at right. Coke has beaten Pepsi to Vietnam as the latter is rarely seen here. Tablecloths are a rarity in Vietnamese restaurants, and most establishments use metal or plastic tables with bare tops.



Figure 5: After the goat meat was finished, we ordered soup, which was a boiling chicken broth. We, the customers, could add spinach, tofu and various types of mushrooms in it. Ha's parents brought along some alcohol for toasts. Wooden, disposable chopsticks are common utensils at many restaurants.



Figure 6: We came to the restaurant on a busy night, and were placed at the back of the restaurant, beside empty vegetable crates (bottom left) and just in front of the restroom (bottom right). Ha's mom is unfolding a rice crepe (bottom right). Meats and vegetables are placed inside the rice crepe, which is then rolled up like a burrito, and eaten with bare hands.

