

Monday, January 8, 2007

We woke up and ate breakfast at the hotel. Ha came by and we took a taxi to the post office by Hoan Kiem lake. We wanted to ship our wedding portrait back to the USA instead of carrying it on the airplane. Casy and Newton were not sure as to the reliability of the mail service in Vietnam so we went to the Fedex store next door and shipped it from there. It was \$188 and the clerk said the shipping would take 3 - 4 days. We did not want the package to arrive before we got home, so we told them to ship it on January 10. Afterwards, Ha had left to run some errands while we walked around the city by ourselves.

Figure 1: We stopped at Fedex to ship our wedding portrait back to America



We walked around the lake taking pictures of some sites. One of these is a bronze statue of Ly Thai To, a famous Vietnamese military commander. Behind it was a concrete wall with carvings of dragons on it. Dragons figure prominently in Vietnamese culture and folklore, just like in other East Asian cultures. We then came across a statue commemorating the Communist Party, or it could have been put up by the Communist Party to commemorate the Vietnamese people; we were not sure. The statue was big and white, and featured three young adults, a man holding an electric socket to represent industry, another man holding a rifle to represent the military, and a lady holding a scythe to represent agriculture. Newton posed in front of the statue while Casy took his picture. A street vendor passed by carrying a sling with lemons in it. She noticed Newton and gave her sling and hat to Newton to wear. She hinted with her hands that this would make a good photo shoot. Newton put these on for fun, and Casy took a picture. The street vendor then asked for \$50 for all the lemons. Newton quickly gave the sling, fruits and hat back to her and walked away amazed at the trickery of the locals. Next, we found a bookstore and went in. Casy bought a children's book for the son of her friend, Marina, for 30,000 VND. We then went to Highlands Coffee Shop to rest for an hour. We shared a caramel coffee with cookies and tea latte (56,000 VND). Next, we stopped by the Hanoi Museum of Fine Art. This was a brown wooden building that looked like a Buddhist temple.

Inside were paintings and pictures by Vietnamese college students from around the country. The museum was quite small and sat alongside the road. Along with one Western tourist, we were the only visitors there.

Figure 2: Ly Thai To Statue at left. Behind is a concrete wall with carvings of dragons on it



Figure 3: At left, a street vendor tricks Newton in front of the Communist Party statue. At right, Newton poses outside the Hanoi Museum of Fine Arts



We walked back to our hotel, stopping along the way at various souvenir shops. We found one shop that sold a fan with two dragons engraved on it (160,000 VND). The engravings were made out of ground oyster shells and so

were shiny in appearance. We got back to the hotel at 3 PM and looked over the stuff we bought. Ha then came by at 4PM and we took a taxi to the Sun and Moon store (22,000 VND). This company specialized in making paintings, portraits and household objects out of rings of paper. Ha told us the owner of the store had learned this trade while attending college in America, and brought the secret here to Vietnam. He started up this company, and has been quite successful. We bought a painting of a dragon (400,000 VND), and two rings holders; one for Newton's mom and one for Casy's friend (80,000 VND). We took a taxi back to the hotel for 40,000 VND.

Figure 4: We stopped by the Sun and Moon shop to buy some souvenirs. At top left is the storefront. At top right a shop girl puts one of the paintings we bought into a glass frame. At bottom left, Ha haggles over prices with the store clerk. At bottom right are the ring holders, two of which we bought.



Figure 5: Some of the paper items sold at the Sun and Moon store included a fully functional chess set complete with storage box (at left) and a stool (at right).



Phong's parents were going back to Arizona tomorrow so Ha's parents invited them over for a small dinner party at their house. We went to Nguyen Son Bakery and bought a Tiramisu cake for 179,000 VND for the party. We brought this over to Ha's house just in time for dinner. After dinner Casy, Ha and Phong walked his parents back to their hotel and spent ½ hour inside their room talking. Casy, Ha and Phong came back to Ha's parents house and we all spend another ½ hour chatting and looking over the pictures from Ha and Phong's wedding. Newton and Casy went back to the hotel at 11PM.

Figure 6: Dinner at Ha's house. Young people are at left and old people are at right

