

Wednesday, January 10, 2007

We awoke early and ate breakfast at the hotel. We walked to Ha's house to hang out. We were leaving tomorrow so we wanted to treat Ha's parents to lunch. Ha had to do some errands with Phong so we took a taxi (22,000 VND) to the restaurant with her parents. Phuong and John were already at the restaurant waiting for us. The specialty of this place was pigeon, and we had been to this restaurant before with Ha and Helen. Ha's parents ordered pigeon, steamed fish, fried shrimp, chicken, squid, stir fried vegetables and we ordered stir fried egg noodles and stir fried rice noodles with vegetables and chicken. The total lunch bill was 528,000 VND for Phuong, John, Ha, Phong, Ha's parents and us. We had a quick lunch as Ha's parents and John had to go back to work. After lunch Phuong took us to Quan Thanh temple. We rode a taxi there for 135,000 VND.

Figure 1: Quan Thanh Temple: Entrance at top left, main altar at top right, and gift shop at bottom.



Admission to Quan Thanh Temple was 2,000 VND/person. Inside the complex was a wooden building containing a big black statue of Buddha. Vietnamese people like to come here and make wishes. As we stood by the base of the statue, Phuong told us the legend about this place. Supposedly, a faithful person could come here and make certain wishes come true by rubbing the feet of the statue. For example, if you wanted to be rich, you rub Buddha's feet, and then rub your pants pocket using the same hand. If you wanted to be smart, you rub Buddha's feet, then rub the top of your head. If you wanted to be healthy, you rub Buddha's feet, and then rub your chest. Newton thought it was the right time of his life to have children so he rubbed the statue's feet and then rubbed his crotch and Casy's crotch. Casy slapped Newton and Phuong burst out laughing. Photography is not allowed inside the altar.

After that we took a taxi to another temple that sat by a lake. No cars were allowed to enter the complex so the taxi stopped about 1 mile from the temple and we walked the rest of the way. A lot of wealthy people lived in nice new

houses around here, and they were different from the houses in Hanoi. Closer to the temple were many seafood restaurant. Phoung told us this temple is the biggest in Hanoi, and many people come here during weekends, Buddha's birthday and Chinese New Year. After services they eat at one of these restaurants. But today was a regular weekday and the restaurants were all empty. We walked around the inside of the complex taking pictures. Like all Buddhist temples in Vietnam, all the writing was in ancient Chinese script, with just as many English signs as Vietnamese signs to help visitors.

Figure 2: The road to the temple by the lake passed by many seafood restaurants (top left) and houses of wealthy families (top right). Inside the temple were several buildings, large trees, potted plants, and a bronze bell (bottom left and right).



Figure 3: The front entrance of the temple complex, as seen from outside (left) and inside (right) the complex.



We left the temple by 2:30 PM and took a taxi to Flag Tower but it was closed by the time we got there. Beside it was a military museum that was also closing so we walked around the outside and took some pictures of some of the displays, which included a tank, a jet fighter and some artillery pieces. Newton decided to go to the Art Museum. Casy and Phoung did not like this choice but we still went there. The admission was 20,000 VND per person. The museum was quite big, built like a French chateau. There was construction work going on the front façade. While Newton walked around the museum, Casy and Phoung sat down and chatted.

Figure 4: At left is Flag Tower and the army museum. At right is Flag Tower as seen from across the street.



The museum had both paintings and other types of art such as sculptures and embroidery. As this was a weekday, there were very few visitors here. Phuong said that in Vietnam, art appreciation is not that high and few people go

to art museums except for students and academics. We left the Art Museum at 5 PM and went back to the Flag Tower to have coffee at the Highland coffee shop beside it. Coffee and snacks cost the three of us 144,000 VND, which Newton paid for to thank Phuong for taking us around today. She had to go home for dinner with her family so she walked us back to our hotel.

Figure 5: Casy and Phuong pose in front of the army museum (left). In the square opposite the museum was a large statue of Lenin gazing to the future (right).



Figure 6: Art museum; front door at left, and work on expansion at right



Along the way, Newton saw a guy with a weighing machine. Few locals own their own weighing machines, unlike in America where everyone has one. Instead, a guy walks around the city pushing a scale on wheels. If someone wants to weigh herself, she flags down this guy, pays him some money and weighs herself on the scale. We flagged him so Newton could weigh himself. When Newton stepped on the scale, the guy asked for his height. Through Phuong's translation, we told him Newton was 5'11". The guy input this data on the scale, which uttered something loudly in Vietnamese, and then printed a receipt. Phuong, the guy, and people passing by on the street laughed. Phuong was so happy she paid the guy. Casey asked Phuong what happened, and she said the machine told Newton he is too fat and needs to exercise. Newton was stunned. Back at the hotel, Phuong took a taxi back to her house. We went inside the hotel and asked the receptionist lady for our hotel service bill like laundry, lunch and water, all of which came to 581,000 VND. Newton then asked the lady questions about her dress and at the end we tipped her 100,000 VND and went up to our room to pack up our luggage.

Figure 7: Newton weighs himself on the talking scale at left. Casey poses with the hotel clerk at right. She is wearing the traditional Au Dai (pronounced aw tzai).

