

Thursday, February 9, 2006

Was it a good choice?

I never thought this expedition would be as hard and demanding on people our age. My daughter and son in law encouraged us to take this opportunity and try something different. Well it certainly is. Leaving noisy Hanoi we thought we would have a bit of peace but the overnight train ride was something else we never imagined.

The first overnight train we took from Bangkok to Chiang Mai was heaven and acceptable, as we had our own semi-private compartment sharing it with two others. But this filthy episode of a cattle car with six unknown locals in a compartment heading from Hanoi to Hue for thirteen hours was something I too must share with you. We took it in stride and laughed -- I even took snapshots of the toilets and other accommodations. Nonetheless, it was an experience to realize again how fortunate we are in the West to have the modern world at our disposal and to take most of it for granted. We were not punished and no harm done to us as we observed how others live and what their sad normative and plight is. We arrived this morning in the beautiful city of Hue in the middle of Vietnam and visited the Royal Palace and the forbidden city, the front gate to the empire setup by the French colonialists in the beginning of the nineteenth century. We visited the place where the king handed over the throne in 1945 to Ho Chi Min or as he affectionately is referred to as "Bac Ho" Uncle Ho.

What was a colourful and amazing sight in Hanoi was the excellent Ethnological Museum describing the fifty-four minority ethnic groups of this country. Every aspect of their life was demonstrated in full-size outdoor module exhibitions. Houses and community buildings of the present time show how these groups still live and how their ceremonial and lifecycle events take place. We in the West cannot appreciate the diversity of this colourful country.

I am so grateful for all these adventures and experiences given to me.

Until later, I am yours,

*Beny*