

This is not your Father's Vietnam

By Vincent Paez



I am writing this in Ho Chi Minh City, formerly known as Saigon, Vietnam. This was the headquarters for our military operations forty-five years ago. I grew up hearing stories of the war and know many veterans who served and survived. I also remember hearing about many family members of my friends who never made it back. It was a controversial time with a lot of emotion. I cannot imagine the challenges our soldiers had to face, while operating in this incredible heat and humidity. Most of all, this place is so very far away from home, which I am sure added to the challenges of our men in uniform. The city was named after the revolutionary leader, who led the Vietnamese during the war.

What a different place it is today. While the government is still communist, you would not know it from all the commercial energy that takes place here. Vietnam, like China, have developed a version of communism that allows for people to make money if they work hard and invites foreigners to enjoy tourism and even do business, the way I am doing this week. The people are buzzing around in scooters all day, living their busy lives, and also taking some time for cultural enjoyment. There are tall buildings and five-star hotels. In fact, our hotel offered an airport pickup service in a beautiful Mercedes Benz. I must also say that the service is great and the people are extremely friendly.

This is my third trip to Vietnam in seven years. My first visit was in 2010 also to Ho Chi Minh City. When I arrived, my neck was sore from the long airplane trip, so after checking in to the beautiful hotel, I decided to get a massage. The hotel spa recommended a hot oil massage, and I accepted. It was fabulous, and any stiffness in my neck was gone. I showered, dressed and went out to dinner with our company's Vietnamese colleagues. We all ordered



Vincent Paez playing a *dan tranh*, a Vietnamese string instrument.

sea snails as an appetizer and Heineken beer. After two sips of the beer, I felt the restaurant dining room starting to spin. I became dizzy and immediately thought that someone slipped me a drug in my beer. For the first time in my life, I vomited and passed out in a restaurant. When I came to, I started to feel great again. It seemed that my body just needed to expel whatever toxin it had in it, albeit in an embarrassing situation. All of my colleagues were

around me with very concerned looks on their faces. I apologized for having made a scene in a public place, and commented that it must have been the sea snails. Then, my Vietnamese colleague asked me an amazing question.

"Vincent, did you have a hot oil massage today?"

"Why yes," I replied in amazement, "but what does that have to do with anything?" I asked.

"Well, oftentimes, the first thing Americans and Europeans do, when they arrive here in Vietnam is to get a hot oil massage to recover from the long flight. It seems that the hot oil opens up your pores and exposes the body to our

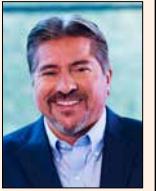
air. There is something in the air here in Vietnam that affects some westerners, when they do this, and they get ill for a brief time, like you just did," he explained.

"Amazing!" I said. "I wish they told us about that on the plane or in the guidebook."

My colleagues helped me to the car and we went back to the hotel, so that I could clean up and rest. I went on the internet and looked for any information about such an effect on Americans, but I found nothing. I also checked last week, before my trip started, and still I could find no information on this. But it happened, and my Vietnamese colleague called it perfectly.

We all had the following day off, so that we could get over our jet lag, before our busy work schedule. So, we decided to go to the Cu Chi tunnels. This is a museum, where the Vietnamese show the world how they used thousands of miles of tunnels to win the Vietnam war. Tunnels were everywhere, including running below our military bases. They built the tunnel system over thirty years, starting during the French occupation of the country. The entrances to the tunnels were so small, that only the Vietnamese could fit, preventing any American soldier from climbing inside. The museum also exhibits how they used tires from our vehicles to make their sandals, how they used unexploded American bombs to make land mines, and how they set dangerous traps for our soldiers. Most of the other tourists were Americans like me, and we

Author, **Vincent Paez** is a chemist and international businessman. He has a B.S. in Chemistry from Stony Brook University and an M.B.A. from UCLA. He speaks five languages and has lived/worked on four continents for three Fortune 500 companies. He is also a passionate musician and loves the music scene, especially in the Ocean City area. He lives in Ocean City. He has two sons attending Florida State University. ... "Go 'Noles!" He is married to a wonderful girl from Iowa, Sherri.



just looked at each other eerily, as we watched their patriotic movie about how they won the war against us.

Once that visit was out of the way, we went to tour the city. We were amazed at the number of scooters running through the city streets so close together like a school of fish, all turning the same way at the same time, and all stopping and going at the same time. Crossing the street in Ho Chi Minh City is like taking your life in your own hands. I have been instructed to just cross, when I think the time is right and not to flinch or hesitate. I have been told that the scooter riders will accommodate and go around me, but there are so many of them, that my heart jumps out of my chest every time I do it.

My second trip to Vietnam was to Hanoi, the capital. I found this a very developed city, like Ho Chi Minh City, but with even more Vietnamese culture. Our team went to see a musical show of water puppets. Imagine sitting down in a theater, just as beautiful and comfortable as any small opera theater in our country, only this theater had a pond as a stage. The music started, and, from below the water, puppets appeared and acted and sang to live Vietnamese orchestra music, while telling a story of love and adventure. I was fascinated at the complexity of the moves and the lovely music on the dan tranh, a Vietnamese string instrument, and other parts of the orchestra.

On this trip, I am staying only in Ho Chi Minh City to help organize a food safety conference. I am also a presenter. Vietnam exports billions of dollars of seafood to the USA. The US FDA, who is responsible for food imports, has new rules to comply with for such importations, and the conference will teach the Vietnamese food industry people how to comply with the new rules. I do intend to eat the local seafood and try to do some sightseeing. But I can guarantee you that I will not be getting a hot oil massage!

How to Watch *Videos in High Tide News* with the FREE APP download from get.layar.com



layar

AUGMENTED REALITY Videos in this NEWSPAPER!!

Thanks to Pokémon GO, the entire world now knows about **Augmented Reality (AR)**. And this amazingly popular game has only begun to reveal the range of possibilities that the world's newest mass media brings. A key function of AR is to overlay digital information atop the real world. And Print provides a uniquely powerful launch pad for such experiences.

Call High Tide News today to learn how AR can supercharge your reality... with videos on business cards, signs, print ads, logos. 302-727-0390 or 610-417-5066.



To view videos:

1. Download the FREE Layar App from get.layar.com
2. Open the app on your mobile device,
3. Position the APP over the ad or article in High Tide News with the mobile phone symbol attached, scan and enjoy the video! (click the video to download to your device.)

View all of our videos on the [High Tide News Channel](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...) on **YouTube**