

# VareseNews

## In Vietnam among traditions, spirituality and traces of the past

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*Giorgio Vanni's overland [journey continues from Sesto Calende to Australia](#). The ninth stage is in Vietnam ([all stages of the journey can be found here](#)):*

**It was the last day in China**, the departure from Kunming was at six o'clock in the morning, the passengers were crowded and the offer of fried and noodles was overflowing, what a confusion! The station was controlled not only by the police but by the army with turrets. Here in 2014 there was the bloodiest terrorist attack: twenty-nine deaths. **The train went up through beautiful mountains and pineapple plantations**. I arrived at **Heiko** station, the last one in China and I took a taxi to the border; then I walked on the bridge that divides the two nations. **Entering Vietnam was easy, there were a few questions and then we continue with the Visa**. Then I took in a rush a good bus to **Hanoi** with departure after half an hour, even with WIFI.

Unfortunately, it will only be a pleasant exception in Vietnam, the rest will be a nightmare. After four hours I arrive in the outskirts of the capital in the midst of heavy traffic and from there I took another hour to get to the hostel. **Then I had my first Vietnamese dinner and I recognize the places where I had been several times when I was in Hanoi for work**. Two days later I met **Gabriella and my son-in-law Peter, who had come from Australia to join me on the descent to Saigon**. It was a preview of when we'll see each other in Australia. We had a quick tour of the city, and then took a bus to Hailong, where some of Peter's family members live.

At first everything seemed OK: it was a big bus, which was full but regular, but after a while I realized

that it kept stopping at every corner and made people get on by putting chairs in the middle of the queues and combining three in the places for two, in short, the more they were, the better it was. The bus soon became a bedlam and there was no air. I also sat down on a plastic chair next to the driver and I bit the bullet. Knowing how I suffer from claustrophobia in these conditions, I do not know how I resisted squeezed like a sardine. Finally, we arrived in Hailong where Peter's uncles warmly welcome us. It's a good thing that in addition to Peter there was the internet translator and the good will.

In the morning we went to see his grandmother: she was quite a character. A sprightly lady of over ninety who reads without glasses and who has perfect hearing. She told us about some episodes of her life, like when she was captured by the French because, as a postwoman, she passed messages for the resistance. We would have stayed longer, but **we had to take the ferry to the island of Cai Ba, near Halong bay**. Here we agreed upon a boat ride directly with a fisherman, skipping the many agencies. The landscapes of Halong bay were beautiful and the hills that descend sheer to the sea looked like a marine version of sailing on the River Li in China. There were quiet corners and overflowing nature that we enjoyed both swimming in the bays and renting kayaks.

After that, in the end of the afternoon **we took the bus directed to the south, to Ninh Sinh**; it took five hours to pick up the passengers in the street and to put them in the middle of the rows. In Ninh Sinh we settled very well in a serene and kind family where we tasted quite a good home-made rice wine. In the following days we rented a few scooters **to visit Hoa Lu, the old capital city in the 10th century**.

Here, in the museum, we met an old lady with three girls, who told us that they had been picked up years before, when they had been abandoned in front of the door; one of them weighed less than kg 2, she has survived miraculously. We gave some money, but in the face of these situations you feel helpless. At dinner, Peter tells me that a girl had told him: "Why don't you adopt one of them? God help them...."

The day after, in the afternoon, we went to Trang An to take a boat trip but it was too late. This was an incredible luck, because we went to a lateral valley by scooter, discovering the wonderful pagoda in Bich Dong, isolated among rice fields and full of spirituality, where a monk was praying with the accompaniment of a musical instrument that was similar to a drum.

Then **we continued along the Tam Coc valley**, where there are hills like Halong Bay, ponds with fishes and rice field. In the end of the valley, there **is a hostel in a scenario similar to the one of "Apocalypse Now"**. Therefore, it was expected to travel to Hue on the night bus, starting at 9 p.m, but shortly after getting on the bus, it became clear that although we received assurances before buying the ticket, it is always the same story: the more customers there are, the better. People who sit down in the middle by heaps and blocks the exit with the bus driver and the ticket agent who split the extra money they get. So, after a quarrel we get out of the bus, getting the money back. The day after we came back to the "loved" train, that took eleven hours to take us to Hue. The old part of the city is not bad, but you can see that it has been rebuilt because it has been destroyed by the bombings of the war. Then, we shortly moved to Hoi Han, with a nice path along the ocean with glimpses of beaches and lagoons in which fish are bred. **We had a stop at the Van Pass**, the famous pass that divides geographically the north from the south and that divided it also politically in the past. Here, began the demilitarized area, that in fact was the area where the most frequent and the bloodiest battles happened. Passing Danang, we had a stop in China Beach, where in March 1965, 3500 marines landed inaugurating the arrivals in droves of the US army. This locality became then R&R locality (rest and recreation) for the licences of the war, and by this moment its touristic vocation started. Today, on the seafront, young people go around with t-shirts that have USA symbols and flags: these are war madnnesses. The next stops will be even more in the south, hoping to visit the Central Highland, where I adopted a female child. **The travel continues** but this fundraising ends very soon, do not forget it!

di [Translated by Germano & Tantari](#) (Reviewed by Prof. Robert Clarke)

