



Vietnam, youâ€™re good to me

Description

Vietnam is good to me so far, even though it brought us through a hellish border crossing. Something extremely tough.

After two days in the touristic town of Kep, Cambodia and thoughts on delaying the border cross for a couple of days and wait so we can do it with a nice French family we met. Their visa to Vietnam began only on December 30. We nevertheless decided to cross the border as planned.

Vietnam visas do not begin to be counted on the day you enter the country but rather on the day that you request the entrance in the application form.

When we filled the application form, in Phnom Penh, we wrote December 25th, mostly because we hated every minute in Phnom Penh (well, almost every minuteâ€¦ well, mostly I did) and did not want to feel stuck in a place we donâ€™t feel like staying.

At the end, it was nice in the countryside homestay (two nights) and in Kep (two nights) it turned out that our Vietnam visa has started running and we decided to move on.

We wanted a night bus from Ha Tien, next to the border of Cambodia, to Saigon, but we did not find an option to go to the border crossing in the afternoon. There were minibuses only in the morning, and we got into a long, hard, stressful and unpleasant day.

Did I say day ..? More than a day is what I meant, and that includes: a delay in our pick up from the guesthouse, driving on a surreal dirt road to the border that made us think we were going to be trafficked instead of legally crossed. Honestly, I was alerted all that time, expecting that at any moment the driver with the Cambodian police vest (really !!!) to shout at us in broken English to duck and cover us with fish-smelling old jute bags.

Cambodia side of the border included the driver stepping out of the car with his fake police vest, peaked cap and pack of lemon flavor chewing gum he obsessively chewed all ride long, toward the booth of passports control, with all of our passports in hand, then came a complete disappearance of him to a period of about an hour. Just disappeared. Dissipated. Gas. And our passports abandoned in the hands of God-and-Buddha-only-know. And they say Cambodians believe in karma!

At some point the driver came back, and transferred us to the responsibility of someone else who led us towards the booth of passports control in the Vietnamese side. There again we waited, without knowing why and without our passports, for a long time. Perhaps two hours. Eventually we managed to get to the central station.

All that time, what was reassuring for us was that luckily we have not paid them yet, the Kep travel agency, so there was no way they would just leave us because they did not yet get a penny from us. In the bus station, we were dropped off in one of the agencies offices that offer bus to Saigon. Nobody speaks a word in English there. The time of the bus was not clear. Suddenly it became unclear to us even if itâ€™s sleeping bus or a regular bus, and yet we are talking about 9 hours rideâ€™! To make a short story, there were shouts and at one point I literally stopped with my body the driver who took tickets fare from us (\$ 100, mind you) and was about to leave. I did not let him go until I have received my sleeping bus tickets at hand on time. When everything was over, I simply broke into tears from all the tension and stress of all those hours and The Natives comforted me a lot.

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When you need to unwind tension and you burst into tears and your children gather around you and place a pleasant hands and hug you and do not ask too many questions but only support and present, you may think to yourself “ wow, did I do one thing right.

And then a whole afternoon and evening to kill in Ha Tien, a sleepy town with nothing, absolutely nothing, to do in.

And a 9 hours night bus.

And reaching Saigon at dawn.

And a taxi to the guesthouse (Vietnam taxi drivers know their work and actually navigate and know where things are! After Cambodia we do not take it for granted!).

And hours of waiting for check-in time in the guesthouse only to find that the room is without a shower and toilet. It was certainly not what we ordered. We were transferred to another guesthouse, a taxi at their expense, fourth floor, narrow alley straight out of a Chinatown movie, Downtown, awesome location, lousy room, but we do not complain because there is magic in the air!

Saigon is so totally new levels of coolness. I mean it!

Just absolutely great vibe in the air. I am on fire. I am so happy that we will be here in New Year’s Eve.



As a matter of fact there is no need to get out of our alley at all. It’s so cool!

There is a tailor (finally we fixed the bathing suit of our Central).

There is street food and tiny restaurants and a wonderful Indian restaurant and smoothies bar and

small funny grocery stores and even prostitutes.

But we did get out of our alley. We toured around the city, we played in the park, crossed roads (quite an experience!), drank good coffee, went to visit Cu Chi war tunnels, oh my these Vietnamese know how to dig ! We experienced the New Year's Eve extremely bustling streets of Saigon's. It was just thrilling!



Excellent Vietnamese coffee



Cu chi tunnels, about an 1.5 hours bus ride from Saigon

Last night we arrived in Mui Ne. A seaside village which have not yet seen much of but we are already happy here.

Vered and David from Karkur our hometown are here for a month already. They have made us a warm and charming welcome, including Vered with two of her charming kids dropping by to our guesthouse not long after we arrived to give a hug and show us where to find something to eat and where to buy milk and cookies for coffee, including a proposal to take their motorbike to search for a guesthouse and a pleasant morning talk and another hug. Eventually we decided to take a room in the same guesthouse, which has a shared kitchen and a cool yard and located ten meters from the shore, and from the next day we set up a new colony, Pardes Hanna-Mui Ne, at least for the coming month.

In the meantime, the current guesthouse, our smiling and charming landlady brought us a wonderful fruit plate in the morning. This has never happened to us so far!

Phnom Penh

The capital city of Cambodia is not a big attraction in itself. Even by the standards of Southeast Asia it is poor and dirty, the sidewalks are for recommendation only and the roads are packed with motorcycles and beggars. We paid a €œvisitâ€• to Vietnam embassy where visas can be issued for a land pass (not cheap!) and to the Chabad House where we celebrated Hanukkah. We had a half day trip to the silk island (Koh Dach) where we saw silk weaving by traditional looms. The local people are very nice and in broken English tried to sell their merchandise from the moment we were there. The prices are not cheap but when you see the poverty in which they live one can figure

out how desperate they are.

Meas Homestay

We found Siphon and Mach somehow through Google. They offer hosting in their Cambodian family homestay in a small village named **Angk Ta Som**. The place itself is very nice and features 3 excellent meals a day. They are both teachers and also operate a night school for high school students on a voluntary basis. As part of the visit they ask (not demand â€!) to pay some time to meet their students, so they will be exposed to foreign people and cultures and will be able to practice their English. Guests from Israel were a special attraction for them. We paid \$ 75 per night (the price includes accommodation and meals).

You can contact them and make a reservation by email. The village is located on the road from Phnom Penh to Kempot. We hired a taxi both ways (\$ 35 from Phnom Penh, \$ 50 to Kep). Obviously the price for go out of Angk Ta Som turned much higher because of its not-too-accessible location.

Kep

An old resort town on the Gulf of Thailand. Although it is mainly a tourist town is not loaded or gives a sense of overcrowded with tourist traps. The city has a strip of clean and sandy beach without too much shade.

About half an hour away by boat (30 \$) we got to the Rabbit Island where we found a very nice and quiet beach. The island itself is a home for a number of restaurants, massage parlors and numerous huts and hammocks. Apart from the small tourism the island residents make their living mainly from fishing and known for the seafood and crabs in particular. Crab meat lovers reached heaven here. In Kep we stayed in a nice guesthouse called Visal Sak. It is cheap and nice but a bit far from the center and the beach. A tuk tuk was required for every going and coming.



Rabbit Island, Kep, Cambodia

Ha Tien

We entered Vietnam through the southernmost land border with Cambodia in the city of Ha Tien and it is not particularly welcoming gateway to Vietnam. We were debating between buying a tourist bus package deal from Kep to Saigon and between making the journey independently in several segments (Kep â€“ border crossing â€“ Ha Tien â€“ Saigon). We decided to go for a package deal, although it costs a little more.

Cambodia side of the border crossing was relatively easy, although it lasted about an hour or so in which we had no idea what was going on. The Vietnamese side took about two hours, during which we paid 4\$ baksheesh to some â€œdoctorâ€œ, we handed over our passports in the hope to see it again sometime and we landed at the end of the process at a bus stop located about 5 km from the city itself tired and hungry.

Ho Chi Minh City / Saigon

All official signs refer to HCMC but I can use Saigon. We arrived at Saigon by night night (20\$ per person) after a trip of about 9 hours from Ha Tien. The bus is quite comfortable, though not as a train or a hotel bed, but still comfortable. Perhaps a bit less comfortable to taller fellas.

We lodged in Saigon in a guesthouse in district 1 which is excellent in terms of access to parks, markets, restaurants, cafes and more. The area is full of tourist agencies that offer tickets and tours to places in South Vietnam and Cambodia. We decided to visit the **Cu Chi** tunnels area from the notorious Vietnam War in which both sides suffered heavy losses after a brutal guerrilla war took place largely underground burrows dug by Vietnamese guerilla mostly by hands.

Category

1. Vietnam

Tags

1. mui ne
2. vietnam for families
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