



# Welcome to our world.

It is a great pleasure to write a little more about our life and travels. Each year we spend six months or so away from Ireland. We do this in order to make the best use of our retirement years and to enjoy the company of fellow travel enthusiasts. Those of you who have read the earlier episodes will by now be familiar with our lifestyle. To sum it up for new readers let me say that we value our life too much to waste even a single day. Travelling in Asia during our Winter months we are assured of : sunshine, good food, low costs and above all great company wherever we go. Our plans for the year ahead include revisiting Thailand, Bali and a very exciting trip back to Southern India and I hope to bring you with us month by month as we travel.

Last year we spent some time in Vietnam and what a wonderful experience it was ! Our journey began in Ho Chi Minh City, so named by the new regime at the end of the Vietnam



War. The fact that the locals still refer to their city as "Saigon" highlights the differences in outlook which still exist between North and South. The city struck us as being bright and open with wide boulevards and a French ambience. Patisseries and restaurants with crepes on the evening menus are commonplace. The markets are timeless places where colourful traders sell their wares as they have done for generations. It is easy to feel at home in this lovely city, as the people are so helpful. Nowhere was this more evident than when crossing the street in Saigon. This task, which in our organised society is a

simple one, becomes potentially disastrous in a city of eight million people and almost as many motorcycles. Eight or ten lanes of traffic are commonplace and nothing stops ! Therefore in order to cross the street one must venture into what appears to be a suicidal situation. One foot in front of the other you edge your way across the street whilst every imaginable mode of transport weaves around you. On at least two or three occasions we were surprisingly escorted across the street by smiling uniformed police who seemed intent on keeping us alive.





In the gigantic Central Market of Saigon, it is possible to buy anything and everything at incredibly low prices. In addition, large areas of this wonderful place offer "fixed price goods". This ensures low low prices without the bother of haggling. Museums and lovely architecture are to be found throughout the city and indeed a day tour which visits most of the sites of interest is almost a must and costs very little.

Extremely high quality accommodation can be had in the small government hotels which abound throughout the centre of the city . The Saigon Mini Hotel where we stayed is an example of how a hotel should be run. Spotlessly clean with a staff who could not do enough to help and advise. Nothing was too much trouble and with such a low price too.

Tours outside the city were arranged by our hotel at a much lower cost than in the travel agencies . These included trips to The Mekong Delta and also the amazing wartime tunnels. Being used to reading about the Vietnam War, we were brought back to reality by the Vietnamese people who speak of "The American War". How true !



**We were really loath to leave Saigon, but needed to move on up the coast and decided on Nha Trang as our next destination. What a good decision that turned out to be!**

**Nha Trang is a wonderful beachfront city some 400 kilometres from Saigon. It can easily be reached in about seven hours by train which is highly recommended for comfort and safety.**



**Some travellers express concern about road safety and refuse to use the night coaches for that reason. We unfortunately cheated and flew to Nha Trang, thus missing the coastal train ride.**

**This lovely city of half a million people is a gem. The scuba diving centre of Vietnam also offers motorcycle tours on the Ho Chi Minh Trail as far as Hoi An. For these tours you sit on the back of the bike and are taken to otherwise inaccessible places by experienced driver guides, at low cost.**

**sat smoking outside and breakfast was served French Style in the rear garden will long be an abiding memory for us.**

**Breakfast in a wonderful French Style cafe, where a group of men**



**Many people, particularly seniors, worry about safety as they travel. Not surprising perhaps in the world in which we live today. We had no such fears in Vietnam and always felt very safe. Admittedly there is crime in any country and more so in big cities, but we never felt threatened at all. Life is, of course, full of threats and we all deal with them as a normal part of our life. It is when we become a little paranoid and see a threat in everything that the problem begins. It is far preferable to choose the lifestyle which best suits us and plan**

**accordingly, than to worry about what may or may not happen.**



**To end on a lighter note, I thought you might enjoy the outdoor plumbing which we spotted during a stop off on one of our tours. Not quite up to European Health and Safety standards, but of course that is one of the real joys of travel. Next time we will continue travelling North towards Hanoi and hope you will enjoy joining us.**

