

VIETNAM:



« Day Twelve – The Royal Tombs of the Nguyen Emperors, Hue

Day Fourteen – Hoi An, ancient international port town »

Day Thirteen - Zen and the art of motorbike riding Vietnam

June 25th, 2007 by ben

Motorbike riding in Vietnam is an art form. An art form I'm, in all honesty, not entirely comfortable with. An inner peace is required, an ability to go with the flow. But fundamentally an embracing of chaos, in body, mind and soul is essential.

Today I hired a motorbike and braved the streets of Vietnam for the first time. My location: Danang. Destination: Hoi An, only 30 kilometres away. My passport photocopied, the dodgy character on the sidewalk, to whom I was introduced by my motorcycle taxi rider, gave me a run down of the basics of his Honda 100cc. I was required to demonstrate my facility with the machinery by taking it for a whirl. This involved executing a ride around a busy roundabout then cruising down the street awhile.



So, um, no one stops in Vietnam. Roundabouts are relatively easy, you're moving into a unidirectional flow of sorts so my little performance was okay and I was granted use of the thing for the next 3 days. It was when I was on my way that the trouble started. Major intersections require the strength of will to push forward into non-stop multidirectional traffic and an ability to yield to those whose will is stronger. Approaching the busy Le Duan Street that leads onto Song Han Bridge, with a mind for turning left, my strength was there and I moved into the chaos. I slowed down, and virtually stopped when necessary but then a speeding up a bit, a girl (wearing a cap and face mask – the skin of her arms covered by long silk gloves) had a will far stronger than mine and almost slammed into me.

The narrow miss shook me up a little but finding my inner peace I continued. Le Duan makes a b-line for the ocean and I was soon turning right and riding south beneath the palm tree lined road that straddles the 30 kilometres of China Beach, famously the R & R location for US soldiers during the Vietnam War.

Not a bad place to escape the horrors of war, really. All the tropical beach paradise ingredients are here in full colour. I say here 'cause I didn't actually make it Hoi An today. On the train from Hue I met John, an artist from San Francisco. We got along and he invited me to join him for a bit of a swim and relaxation on My Khe Beach, a northern part of China Beach 5 minutes from the Danang, once I had my bike sorted. It was so nice: the palm trees, the parasols, white sands, blue skies and

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GALLERY

VIDEOS

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Archives

July 2007

June 2007

SEARCH

clear blue water that I decided to stay. We got ourselves some ice-cold bevy's from his hotel mini-bar fridge and proceeded to swim and drink on the beach.



Then, low and behold, out of the water comes Astrid. I couldn't believe it. I thought she was going back to France after her Halong Bay trip. Astrid joined us for a drink, on our deck chairs under thatched parasols, and advised that her tour was shorter than she expected so with extra time on her hands, she'd headed to Hoi An. Unfortunately her flight from Danang back to Hanoi (and then onward to France) was leaving in 2 hours. So we drank and chatted then, sadly, she had to leave.

The train ride from Hue to Danang this morning was, as the guidebooks advised, spectacular. The train line follows the coastline much of the way, affording amazing views of the ocean and coastal rocks. While attempting to photograph the scenery, three little girls became enamoured with my camera – well being photographed by it anyway. Almost an hours worth of crazy little dances and funny faces ensued.



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