

VIETNAM

By Randy Witt, CGCS
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One of the benefits of working and living in Hong Kong has been the ability to enjoy one of my favorite pastimes of being able to travel. For many people, the thought of spending 12 hours on an airplane is not pleasant, but for me that period of time has never been an unpleasant issue. I've always been an avid reader, so time on an airplane provides me a nice uninterrupted period to read. Here in Hong Kong on a daily basis I receive the following newspapers: South China Daily News, the International Herald Tribune, and the USA Today. Weekly I receive the Time magazine publication. I also watch Fox News programming to maintain a political balance between the Left and the Right. Being raised on a dairy farm afforded a black and white television that provided three channels of viewing on a clear evening, so reading became a good pastime. Today the Internet provides me the opportunity to view the local newspapers from Green Bay and Milwaukee as well as listening to the Milwaukee radio station that I listened to regularly back in Green Bay. But, back to travel. While in Hong Kong I have been fortunate to travel into China to see the Great Wall and Tinnemann Square as well as attend the China Golf Show; experience seeing elephants on the streets in Bangkok, Thailand, the white sand beaches of Phuket, Thailand, and the beautiful city of Singapore. Closer to home, exploring the gambling capital of the world of Maccau, China. Looking forward, I plan on attending the Australian Turf Grass Conference and Trade Show in Hobart, Australia in mid-July.

One of the most interesting trips and experiences was an adventure in mid



Crowded streets in Vietnam

November into Vietnam to Ho Chi Minh City, previously known as Saigon. The major world happening in my teen years was, of course, the War in Viet Nam. Some of my high school classmates never returned from their service in Vietnam. Having grown up so to speak with Viet Nam, I was curious about the country today. Thus, I was fortunate to travel into and experience the country in a time much removed and different from the '60s.

One tip that I've learned when traveling in Asia is to arrange for a vehicle and driver ahead of your arrival into an Asian city. Life is much simpler and less stressful with having a driver and transportation waiting upon one's arrival. An unsuspecting, bewildered looking foreigner can be an easy target upon exiting an airport looking for transportation to a hotel. Greatly elevated fares can be paid by a tourist in a foreign country in search of transportation to one's hotel, along with the task of finding a taxi driver that is able to understand any English at all. The overwhelmed tourist may end with an

unplanned citywide tour with a fare to match. After meeting the driver and loading luggage, we departed for our hotel. Upon exiting the airport, we were greeted with a sight that was beyond description. The 6-lane wide street was an enormous parking lot of motor scooter and mopeds with a few cars and trucks sprinkled in for variety. Mass confusion was a description that came to mind along with amusement. Never in my entire life had I ever seen or experienced anything like this before. Anything and everything was carried on

the scooters. Mothers carrying babies strapped on the mother's back, mom, dad, and two children on one scooter, businessmen in suits, children of all ages, almost anything imaginable was somehow carried by the driver on the scooters. Stoplights and stop signs were tolerated and many times ignored. At some busy intersections there were police attempting to direct traffic-usually to no avail. Adding to this amusing scenario was the dress of the police - a Dreamsicle immediately came to mind. My youth revisited thru the Dreamsicle. Through all this mass confusion the traffic surprisingly did move in somewhat of a controlled chaos. If the street is full of traffic, the sidewalk becomes a route of choice. Traversing the sidewalks requires one to be aware that a scooter could easily appear. On our first venture out for a walk, crossing a street appeared to be impossible. One soon learns that you just begin a slow walk across the intersection at a constant pace. This slow movement makes it possible

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venture out for a walk, crossing a street appeared to be impossible. One soon learns that you just begin a slow walk across the intersection at a constant pace. This slow movement makes it possible for the traffic to judge your movement so you are less likely to become a human front fender. One quickly learns not to stop or tries to judge the oncoming traffic - the traffic will judge you. Keep the slowly, steady pace and you emerge on the opposite side of the street in one piece. Initially this is a bit scary, but soon it becomes the comfortable and only way to safely cross the street.

Accommodations and all related expenses in Ho Chi Ming City are extremely cheap; 4-star accommodations can be had for less than \$60 US a night with most all hotels providing a full buffet breakfast included in the accommodations. Asian hotels normally provide a full breakfast with both western foods and the traditional foods that are part of that particular country's normal food fare. The heavier, greasier American foods are in a sharp contrast to the lighter-based Asian foods. Most upscale hotels will also have lounges for enjoying a refreshment, but those of European descent will usually frequent these as many Asians do not partake of relaxing and enjoying an evening refreshment as is the Western or European custom.

Taking a day trip to the Mekong Delta was enjoyable and good way to see the Vietnamese countryside and, of course, a constant flow of scooters and bikes. Small villages, rice patties, small plot of land that a family will live on and grow some type



The number of golf courses in Vietnam are limited.

of crop as a way of life composes the countryside. The standard of living for most of the Vietnamese people is very poor. One morning, while reading the local newspaper, I came across an article that contained the information that government workers would be receiving a weekly pay increase of \$5 U. S. bringing their regular monthly pay to about \$400 U. S. Government jobs are some of the best paying jobs within the country. For a large

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An Adventure in Life-

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segment of the Asian world, having a food to eat and some type of roof over one's head is the focus of daily life. Nothing else really appears to matter. The two-hour trip to the Mekong Delta provided a brief view into the rural Vietnamese lifestyle. A boat trip on the Mekong River was like traveling on a stream of Hershey's chocolate syrup without the wonderful chocolate smell.

One of my reasons for traveling to Vietnam was to see what, if any, lingering effects from the Vietnam War would remain or what the attitude of the people towards an American. We found the people to be very gracious, pleasant and extremely polite. The only visible reminders of the War were the exhibits and history of the War in the various museums located throughout the city. The War Remnants Museum is one of the most popular of the museums. As the name reflects, much of the museum is devoted to physical remnants from the War. A very solemn and moving exhibit is the Requiem Exhibit, which shows the war through the eyes of photographers from the countries involved in the war.

Surprising to me was the fact that the

museum presented facts, photos, etc. from the war with no biased slant. Many of the photos brought back a flood of memories of having viewed the War on a daily basis via the television. I found myself leaving the museum filled with a sense of sadness and bewilderment. The question that persisted in my mind was: was the War necessary and was it worth all the bloodshed and hardship?

The number of golf courses in Vietnam is limited. Today courses are being developed in the northern part of Vietnam in the Hanoi area. There are about six courses located in the Ho Chi Minh area. A course we chose to play was located about an hour's drive north of the city. The 27-hole course was less than 10 years old, having been built on reclaimed land that once was populated by rice paddies. As one would imagine, the main hazard was



Randy Witt with two friends

some type of lake or pond on just about very hole. To be able to reclaim the land for a golf course, a multitude of water features had to be built to drain off and hold the water. Even with the extensive drainage system, the golf course played wet. It was amazing to see and experience how fast a predominately dominated algae surface could putt. Just another experience in an Adventure in Life.

The MGCSA Fall Mixer Set for the Horse & Hunt Club in Prior Lake

"Trading Sticks for Guns"

To create a "spice" or "change" of venue, we've decided to change our traditional fall mixer golf event with a friendly sporting clay shoot. This will be held on Monday, October 5 at the Horse and Hunt Club in Prior Lake. We will still have our educational segment as in the past.

I am writing this to each of you as a "heads" up so when the sign-up sheet comes around you will have had time to allow yourself to hone in on your shooting skills. A couple of informational bits are as follows: field event (sporting clay shot) will be limited to the first 50 participants, more than 50 can of course join the educational and meal portion of this event. This event will have a \$10.00 charge at the time of pre-registration (same as Spring Mixer). Additional costs include ammunition, along with gun rental if you or your team cannot provide a gun. Suggestion would be to purchase your ammunition prior to coming to the event at your local gun supply store. Our goal is to have at least one experienced hunter in each group. Speaking of teams, we will have 10 teams of five shooters. Only one gun (if you're willing to share with team) is needed per group.

Pre-registration is going to be very important for this event to allow for equitable team formation. We encourage all to join in this fun event as we feel this will capture those who are looking for a change from the golfing events of the past. This is "our" association so, as always, if you have any suggestions, we'd love to hear from you.

- Tom C. Proshek
MGCSA Arrangement Ch

MGA and MPGA Announce 2009 Hall of Fame Inductees

The MGA and the Minnesota Section of the PGA are pleased to announce the 2009 inductees into the Minnesota Golf Hall of Fame.

The 2009 inductees are: Don Berry, Nancy Harris Blanchard, John Cook, Bill Israelson, Mike Schultz and Dick Tollette.

This group joins the 56 members inducted since the Hall of Fame was established in 1987.

(Editor's Note: Please go to www.mngolf.org/press_release.cfm?id=2904 for more information.)

