

REMINISCING ON A WORLD CRUISE



HONG KONG/VIETNAM

HONG KONG

Overnight to Hong Kong, the very choppy seas prevented us from getting much sleep and we were very bleary eyed the next morning. We arrived here in the cold and damp to enter a fascinating harbour packed with junks, sampans, ferries and foreign cargo ships. The morning saw us clambering aboard a tiny sampan in the driving rain, with the water lapping perilously high, to take a thoroughly spellbinding



journey around the Aberdeen area of the harbour, a renowned floating fishing village which is home to thousands of people who spend their entire lives on sampans and fishing vessels. Later we visited the



Man Mo traditional style Temple, the oldest place of worship in Hong Kong. A great canopy dominates the temple with huge hanging coils of burning incense donated by those making offerings to the Taoist gods of literature (Man) and war (Mo) which are represented by statues at the main altar. Gold plated sedan chairs are used to carry these statues around the streets. It was absolutely packed with devotees lighting bunches of incense and intermittently banging a large gong which resounded throughout the small temple. It was quite dark inside, lit only by the burning joss sticks, the smoke and smell of which was all pervasive. The

dominant colour of the décor and carvings was deep red and gold, bowls of fruit as offerings abounded and the atmosphere electric. Wow and wow again!!!!

Unfortunately, when we then drove up the winding roads to Victoria Peak which overlooks the city, the view was virtually non-existent due to the murky weather. In the evening we took a very wintry two-hour trip around the vast harbour on a junk to view the many neon lit skyscrapers, some of which have vast roof-top laser beams scanning around the bay providing a stunning and colourful display. To end the day we dined luxuriously in the Sheraton Hotel, at a table overlooking the harbour. The ship sailed away at 1am and we just about managed to remain vertical 'til then.

GOOD MORNING VIETNAM!

Another extraordinary and fascinating experience awaited us today as we stepped ashore into yet another culture. Around 50% of the population of The Socialist Republic of Vietnam, one of the few remaining communist countries in the world, is under the age of 20. The average Vietnamese is 5 ft 1.5 inches tall and weighs 7.5 stones. We spent some time in Da Nang where the streets are an experience in themselves with literally hundreds of mainly young people, riding pushbikes, motor bikes or scooters, flying about with no regard for other road users and with no space between each rider, packed tightly together like bees swarming from a hive. There appears to be no highway code or rights of way at crossroads or roundabouts. No-one slows down when approaching a junction. They just aim and ride on, weaving in and out of other traffic, on any side of the road that suits. There are no traffic lights and no-one stops for pedestrians, who just have to take a chance on getting to the other side alive. This evident mayhem is accompanied by the constant and raucous sound of hooters but miraculously we saw no collisions and it is obviously a skill that has been learnt by them as a necessity. Interestingly the faces of these riders appeared incredibly calm and serene with no sign of anger or frustration. It truly is a sight to behold. However, despite the obvious dangers, John and I each hired a Trishaw (modern day version of a rickshaw) and with the driver safe behind us, set off on a hair-raising journey, thrust forward among the hoards of traffic, an experience which I filmed for the entire journey. Strange though it may sound, it was great fun and thoroughly enjoyable with no sense of fear on our part even though there were a few near misses! Interspersed among the young, one sees the occasional elderly person on a pushbike wearing a coolie hat or carrying loads across their shoulders. We later learnt that one of the ship's passengers was unfortunately involved in a collision with a rider which resulted in an injury requiring hospital treatment. The ship's departure was delayed while an ambulance was awaited and their luggage off-loaded.

Ancient covered
Japanese bridge



We also journeyed to the ancient town of Hoi An where a walk around the old lanes, houses and bridges took us into a another world. The covered bridge is thought to have been built by the Japanese in the 16th century.

The old quarter along the waterfront of the Thu Bon River features genuine Vietnamese architecture, although the Chinese influence is also very apparent.

Fishing boats
Hoi An
Vietnam





Enjoying a game of Ma Jong in a Temple Foyer

Hoi An abounded with glorious temples featuring stunning colour schemes and architecture. Naturally we had to visit and film them all!



Temple Altar

We also visited a silk worm factory and were fortunate enough to be invited into a large private house for a refreshing cup of green tea.

The main street of Hoi An was an open market consisting mainly of crouching women in coolie hats selling vegetables. However, one of the most incredible sights we have ever seen beheld us when we entered the covered section of the market (which bordered the Thu Bon River). A vast undercover area, it was wet underfoot and packed with crouching chattering women surrounded by vegetables and wet fish of all descriptions which they were preparing for sale. It



was an absolutely astounding sight and impossible to adequately describe the noise, smells and atmosphere. Unfortunately by this time we had run out of camcorder disc, although we were able to photograph the scene, albeit just a section at a time, which unfortunately fails to convey the scene anywhere near adequately.

Vietnam was an unforgettable experience and definitely one of our top destinations.

Our magical mystery tour now takes us to Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Thailand, Sri Lanka and then on to India.

Maria Dillon