

Reflections on our trip to Viet Nam

My daughter Natalie, was adopted in 1994, when she was two. Our homeland trip, sponsored by New Beginnings, was our first to Vietnam in all these years. The intensity of this experience will always remain close to my heart, as this was my first trip to this mysterious country - that of my beloved daughter's birth. The physical beauty and peacefulness of Viet Nam struck me the moment we arrived. This followed soon by the obvious struggle of so many to make a living.

Our tour included a walking and pedi-cab tour of Hanoi; an overnight on a junk in Ha Long Bay; a two day trip out to Vinh Phuc - both to visit the children and meet with orphanage and government officials; then winding up with three luxurious nights at a resort on the beach beside the China Sea in Hoi An. Our tour guide, responsible for our varied and thrilling experiences, was an amazing combination of an accomplished history professor and a kind and caring relative! Our trip was planned with great care in conjunction with the wishes of Barbara Graffeo, our fearless leader, and soon we were joking, laughing, and telling stories as though we'd all known each other for years.

In Viet Nam, my daughter was finally able to experience living as one of the majority and see her Caucasian mom as the minority. Everywhere we traveled people resembled her, for a change. To see it all through her eyes was a true gift that I allowed myself to enjoy. We were not able to meet any of her birth family on this trip which disappointed Natalie, but perhaps that very fact enhanced every other aspect of our adventure. She soaked everything up – the smells, sounds, sights, history, food, voices, laughter, and communicating with local people.

While socializing with the children who lived in the orphanage in Vinh Phuc, Natalie was glowing. She sat on a mat with the little ones in the children's room and giggled with them, taking their photos and showing them how they look through the eye of the camera. They screeched with delight, hollered for more and would not allow her to stop. As I reviewed my videotape of that event last evening in our living room, I was awed by Natalie's expressions. She glowed with love and connection with these little children, she was one with these little ones. She gave joy and gave love to those tiny, screeching beauties with her presence, her camera, and her heart. They in turn, overwhelmed her with their attention and love and clarified for her, her reason for being there.

This was truly the trip of a lifetime for us but not our last trip to Vietnam. This experience opened a wide door for my daughter. Her country is now part of her story, an important element of who she is becoming as a young adult. She came home from this trip with a deeper understanding of herself, perhaps of me, and most certainly of her birth country and our obligations and respect towards others. Natalie is planning a return trip to give of herself in the future. She became an adult in Viet Nam.

By Priscilla Gray
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