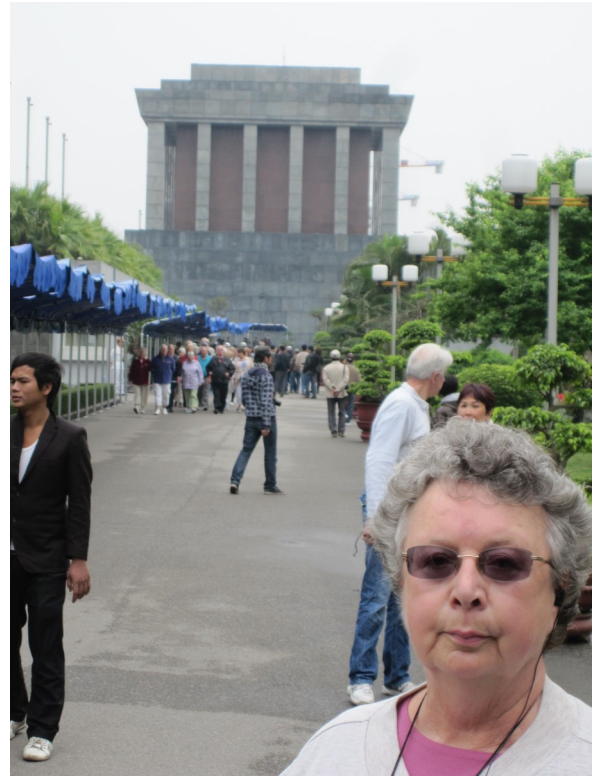


Wednesday March 30

We were up about 7 and had breakfast in the hotel on an overcast but dry morning (it was raining hard when we arrived last night) and the temperature was probably around 60F. We left at 8:30 for a full day of sightseeing.

The first stop was at the Mausoleum of Ho Chi Minh. The site and the square around it are very reminiscent of the Mao Tomb in Beijing. On this tour, however, we were taken to see the embalmed body. We were in a queue for probably 20-30 minutes and kept in a strict two by two line and as we approached the mausoleum itself, white suited-honor guards were at frequent intervals to remind us to stay in line, take off hats, keep hands out of pockets and at your side and be quiet. The procession moved rather quickly - no one slowed down at the body – and was generally very orderly, although a few in our group got reminders on the etiquette.



The Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum, Hanoi

Ho Chi Minh is revered (as was Mao) by all Vietnamese people, it seems, regardless of whether they were in the North or South during the conflict. Their impression is of a kind, considerate and gentle man who only wanted a unified country. When we visited his homes, which are quite close to the mausoleum, it was pointed out how simple they were and how much in contrast to the nearby presidential palace (built by the French) which Ho declined to use. The palace and a number of government buildings around the square are very fine buildings built by the French about a hundred years ago.



The Presidential Palace and the Home where Ho Chi Minh chose to live.

Below: Grounds around the Palace



After the mausoleum we visited the *“Literature Temple”*. This is a Buddhist temple dedicated to the teachings of Confucius and we were told how students were tested in his philosophy as they progressed through life. The temple itself is very colorful and beautifully laid out and the final pagoda contains an oversized statue of Confucius.



The Literature Temple (Above) and some possible future graduates? (Left)

After a very pleasant lunch in the hotel we were driven first to the Ethnology Museum which is a presentation of the living styles of the various groups (of which there are 54) throughout Vietnam. These range from the most populous (Viet) to

some much smaller minority groups which may have only a few hundred population. Each had (and to a large extent still has) its own unique style of living and housing and the outside exhibition in particular was interesting in that it contained reproductions of many of those homes.



The Ethnology Museum



Tough front steps →



Our final stop on the tour was at the “Hanoi Hilton”. This had been a very large prison built by the French and apparently had a reputation for torture before the more widely known (by the West) events of the Vietnam War. As with the museum in Saigon, the videos, pictures and exhibits tell the story from the side of the victors and was generally regarded by American visitors as a propaganda museum. While the bias is obvious, and undoubtedly some of the photographs of American pilots “enjoying” Christmas Dinner or playing pool were staged, we tend to forget just how divided the home country was during that war and how many demonstrations and killings took place in the US as a result.



**SOME PICTURES AND OBJECTS
OF UNITED STATES PILOTS IN HOA LO PRISON**

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT CARRIED OUT A SABOTAGE WARFARE BY AIR FORCE, AND NAVAL FORCE AGAINST THE NORTH OF VIETNAM FROM 05 AUGUST 1964 TO 15 JANUARY 1973.

THOUSANDS OF PLANES WERE SHOT DOWN, HUNDREDS OF UNITED STATES PILOTS WERE ARRESTED BY THE NORTH ARMY AND PEOPLE. SOME OF THEM WERE IMPRISONED HERE.

DURING THE WAR, THE NATIONAL ECONOMY WAS DIFFICULT BUT VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT HAD CREATED THE BEST LIVING CONDITIONS TO US PILOTS FOR THEY HAD A STABLE LIFE DURING THE TEMPORARY DETENTION PERIOD.

UPON THE AGREEMENT ON WAR TERMINATION WAS CONCLUDED IN MARCH 1973 IN PARIS, ALL THE ARRESTED US PILOTS WERE RELEASED TO US GOVERNMENT BY VIETNAM GOVERNMENT.

SOME OF PICTURES AND OBJECTS ON THESE TWO EXHIBITION HALL SHOW SOME DETAILS OF US PILOTS' LIFE WHEN THEY WERE TEMPORARY IMPRISONED AT HOA LO PRISON.



*The
Hanoi
Hilton*

In an April, 2000 visit, Senator John McCain offered an acidic commentary on how the Vietnamese portrayed life inside the prison. Alongside the pictures of Mr. McCain and his fellow prisoners, a plaque declared: "Though having committed untold crimes on our people, the American pilots suffered no revenge once they were captured and detained. Instead, they were treated with adequate food, clothing and shelter." Shaking his head, Mr. McCain muttered, "That's entertainment."

On the way back to the hotel we were taken for a 30 minute walk in the old town where streets specializing in silk, silver, etc., etc. are located. We didn't get chance to do much even in the way of window shopping, let alone buying, as our guide set quite a pace and with the horrendous traffic (mostly scooters) our major concern was survival, especially when crossing a street. Nevertheless it provided an up close look at the local life here in the capital city.



Tonight we had a farewell traditional Vietnamese meal at a very nice restaurant about a ten minute bus ride from the hotel. We said goodbye to our tour guide and to many of our fellow travelers but joined a small group in the hotel bar for a late night drink.

***Last night farewell
drink with Gordon,
Jay and Llynda***



Thursday March 31

After a leisurely late breakfast in the hotel we picked up a map of the area and went for a two hour walk. The hotel is very central to the main downtown area and is only about a 15 minute walk from a small lake that has a walking trail all the way around it. It's about a 1 ½ kilometer walk all the way round and on a pleasant sunny morning we thoroughly enjoyed it. Although the lake is right in the middle of town and the walking trail and the water are very attractive, the city traffic is still very much within earshot and provides a reality check to an otherwise peaceful setting. We crossed several streets at great risk but managed to survive the weaving scooters, motorbikes, buses, taxis and rickshaws and arrived back safely at our hotel around noon. We made one stop at a coffee shop kiosk right at the lakeside for a mid-morning Americano and cappuccino.



Ha-



After returning to the hotel, packing and checking out, we walked once again to the lake and then to the Water Puppet Theater. This unusual show, done entirely in a 20' by 30' pond depicts various life activities (horse racing, farming, dancing, etc.) through the use of puppets manipulated by operators standing in the water behind a screen that hides them from the audience. The 45 minute show was interesting and amusing and provided another glimpse of Vietnamese culture; one that had originated in the rice paddies of the country hundreds of years ago.



Finally we returned to the hotel for afternoon tea and a farewell drink with new-found friends, before leaving for the airport by taxi. The ride there was interesting – if not a little scary at times – but the process of check-in, immigration and security went smoothly and we had a couple of hours in the Korean Air lounge before our slightly delayed flight to Seoul.

By the time we had transferred terminals in Seoul, we still had three hours before our next flight to Tokyo. This was spent in the Korean Airlines lounge, which was very quiet at this time of day – now early to mid-morning. The next flight was less than two hours to Tokyo where we had just over an hour in the lounge before the long (almost 13 hour) leg to Detroit. This went surprisingly quickly and we both managed to get a few hours of sleep as the day (now Friday) progressed.

Unfortunately the final flight to Cincinnati was delayed by 1 ½ hours but we made it along with our luggage. We arrived home about 7pm (34 hours after leaving the hotel in Hanoi) but were perky enough after a shower to go out for a meal to cap off another very interesting and enjoyable trip to a wonderful part of the world.

