



July 2013

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A journey I will never forget



My time here in Vietnam is coming to an end. I remember when I took a choice in January to not continue on what I was doing because I simply didn't like it. Instead, I decided to go on a journey I will never forget. Honestly when I first arrived here in Vietnam, I was scared. I was scared thinking I had done something terribly wrong and this wasn't the right way I should spend my time. I was wrong. It took me at least 2 weeks before I had really settled in and was ready for my journey.

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VOLUNTEER STORY

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Honestly when I first arrived here in Vietnam, I was scared. I was scared thinking I had done something terribly wrong and this wasn't the right way I should spend my time. I was wrong. It took me at least 2 weeks before I had really settled in and was ready for my journey. Being a teacher was something completely new for me and so was Asia. The language, people, the culture... It was all a bit too much and laying in



bed the first night, I was already missing home. The days went by and I got more and more comfortable with Hanoi. The teaching experience has taken me places «spiritually», you could say, I didn't know existed in my body. For a person like me who hated standing in front of class speaking to people, I thought this would be a nice way to challenge myself. Because that's what it is all about right? Challenging yourself in life. I want to lay in bed on doomsday and say to my-



self; «Well, at least I did what I liked and what I wanted.» A loser is one who has never dared to fail. The clichés are there for a reason, people! Anyway, being in the classroom got just better and better. Having 50 students was at first a little bit of a shock, but I got stronger and stronger standing in front of that board with people watching every move I made. It is like you get into your zone. You distract yourself from everything and suddenly those 50 eyes staring at you, becomes flowers in the middle of a lush field.

Moving on.

“...Having 50 students was at first a little bit of a shock, but I got stronger and stronger standing in front of that board with people watching every move I made. It is like you get into your zone...”

VOLUNTEER STORY

(...continued)

I have also met some great people while I have been on this trip. It's funny to think about, equal people often meet at the equal places. I mean, I am surrounded by mostly outgoing and open people and it's easy to get to know each other, both good and bad. Going on different trips, to Sapa, Ha Long Bay, Da Nang and Cambodia has also been amazing. One advice to new volunteers out there is that Sapa, Ha Long Bay and if you got some free time (4-5) days, go to Cambodia and Siem Reap. The nature in all places is so different and so beautiful. It was really amazing even for a guy from Norway to see such spectacular nature.

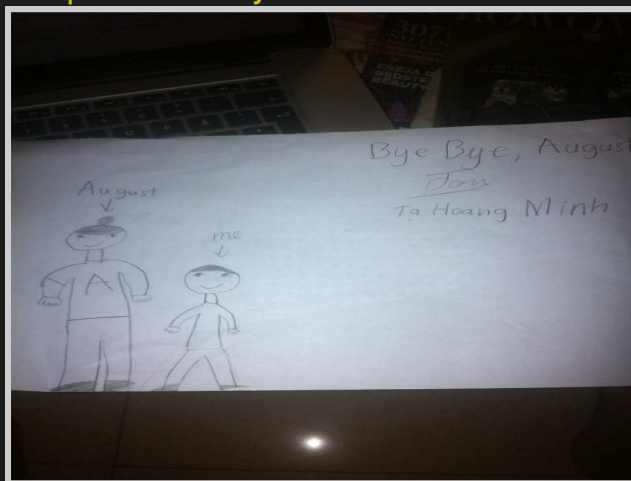


Sapa



Halong Bay

Let me say no more and you can see yourself at these pictures. To wrap this up, all I have left to say is if you are already here or thinking about it, go and make the most of it. It will be a great memory and you will have a great time if you are open and understanding to this different culture. If you want to check out more pictures, maybe you even speak Norwegian, go to www.opdragvietnam.wordpress.com .ENJOY



The painting August received from a student, as a goodbye gift.

August Torp, Teaching volunteer, Norway

VOLUNTEER CORNER

My weekend trip to the amazing Ninh Binh



Made it to the weekend! Up at 4.15am this morning to catch local bus at 5.30am to Ninh Binh. It turned out to be the 5.10 bus in the end but all to the good! We sat five across at the back. The Vietnamese sit right across the bus on moveable aisle seats and the bus conductor is boss, ordering people into the right seats. I had a nice seat by the window. Got the rising sun but no problem as the buses even have curtains and there is aircon too.

Out the window I finally saw some Vietnam: heading south, Industrialised suburbs of Hanoi give way very quickly to rice paddies with huge advertising billboards rising out of the middle of them, some in poor condition. Saw people already in the fields, lanes and irrigation tracks leading off into the distance with single motorbikes on them and oxen, mid-chestnut brown in colour, with humps. Later on I saw one of these pulling a cart through the centre of Ninh Binh, gravel filled, with old man standing steering, the ox swishing its tail past all the scooters and motorbikes.

Then further afield villages started to flash past. These have more unique houses, similar build to hanoi but somehow either in better condition or you could just see more of them. Some very pretty, with balconies, bougainvillea and painted yellow or blue. Some of the balconies, stone or wood, are carved. Usually two story, but the larger house can have four or five floors - in the villages further out. There was also the odd compound - walled areas, possibly pagoda temple complexes but if so, not large ones, and no actual pagoda buildings. Surrounded by banana plants and palm. There are also many of those classic thin flag banners everywhere, that flap furiously in the breeze. Wonderful scenes.

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VOLUNTEER CORNER

My weekend trip to the amazing Ninh Binh

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As we got further from Hanoi the amount of grain spread on the roads, obviously drying, increased. Very neatly arranged so that the traffic, including huge construction trucks, could breeze past. It had just been the rice harvest. The roads themselves were mostly Tarmac or concrete. Even the smart Tarmac roads however have huge bumps in them - my bum did leave the seat on one occasion! We got off the bus in the main street of Ninh Binh under the amused gaze of many locals and managed to flag a Mai Lin taxi. The Ninh Binh Legend hotel is found along a completely abandoned stretch of new laid concrete, like an airstrip, with palms and the mountains beyond. Stunning scenery in fact!

We then spent all of the rest of the morning (it was about 7.30am) poolside. Sunbathed until it got too hot (38 degrees I think). We checked in proper around 12pm and then headed out for lunch. Taxi again through that stunning, bald scenery around the hotel, into town to a trip advisor recommended spot. It was a roadside family run restaurant. They were absolutely sweet and it was absolutely boiling. As usual crispy fried spring rolls were by far the safest option. We bought cornetto types from corner store, then wandered along the wide streets. The air is much better out of Hanoi, clearer and the quality of living must be better accordingly. The trees line the roads and there is much less traffic off the main roads. Very hot so we gave up 4.30pm and headed for the hotel.

Sunday we took a tour that the hotel had available, with local guide and headed for Tam Coc, Bich Dong and Kenh Ga. We set off with Thao, our local guide, who sings songs by Sting. The schedule changed immediately on set off. We were to go to Bich Dong first so as to walk when it was cooler. Bich Dong was set in an exquisite valley surrounded by sheer limestone carst walls. The village had an echo. There were hawkers on the path to the pagoda but not many people. The entrance was over a natural stone slab built bridge. Over the bridge, under the mini pagoda entrance, along the fig tree lined path next to the limestone walls, to the first temple, built into the rock walls. We saw an intricately carved, shaped rock on a balance, that when struck rings out. The monks use it to wake the village. Also saw a memorial ossuary to the founding monk. Made it up to the middle pagoda, lovely view somewhat obscured by trees. I got some nice shots of the roof tiles and dragon gargoyles on the temple below. Unfortunately the path to the top was not possible as it led right through the mountain and there were no lights.

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VOLUNTEER CORNER

Our trip to the amazing mountainous Sapa

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After lunch we headed for Kenh Ga. Kenh Ga is a village on the river. When the water levels get high enough the villagers take to the water on floating islands and stilt houses. Apparently. The hotel reception had led us to believe we would see this, however it seems it is too early in the rainy season, so while we did see the villagers from the water, we were on a boat and they were most firmly on land! It was a nice afternoon none the less. Took a hot, narrow, metal motorboat, with a shade and chairs to sit on. Saw a great floating bridge contraption that opened the way to Kenh Ga by land or sea. Saw sluice gates, levees, buffalo and there was apparently an osprey in the area but we did not see it. At the furthest point of our trip there was an island used for Christian worship with a full sized marble replica of the Michelangelo Pietas statue (have I got that right?) in St Peters. Pretty stunning to suddenly come across that.

Turned and headed for home. On the way back Thao took us for a sugar cane drink, which was quite good. Took final showers at the Legend before heading back to Hanoi in the same minibus for \$15 each. Worth it for a peaceful trip back on sunday evening. Got home around 7.30pm. We were out of time.



Fiona Campbell, teaching volunteer, UK

VOLUNTEER STORY

Catholic University of America graduate spends one month in Vietnam gaining a different view on medicine

“Volunteering means discovering, introducing and understanding” – this definition fits perfectly with the volunteer experience of the young graduate Timmy Le (22). Having always wanted to experience volunteering, Timmy signed up with Projects Abroad and travelled to Vietnam where he participated in their Medical Project. His placement was at the paediatric cerebral palsy department at The National Acupuncture Hospital where he had the opportunity to learn about interesting Eastern medicine and treatment methods.

A typical day at the hospital started at 7:45am. As soon as he put on his white coat, Timmy began his work, which would range from removing acupuncture needles from patients, placing the electrodes for electronic acupuncture or drawing medication up for patients. Later during the day, he also gave advice to the patients’ parents on how to stretch their children’s muscles, so that the muscle fibers would not be spastic.

Having grown up with cerebral palsy himself, Timmy was able to understand what the paediatric patients and their parents were going through. One of the biggest motivations and sources of delight for Timmy was his patients: “I absolutely loved seeing my patients every day and the excitement on their faces when they saw me. The hospital environment is very professional and at the same time, it feels like everyone is family because everyone wants to help each other out when their children are receiving treatment, which is a characteristic of the Vietnamese culture of communistic rather than individualistic that we have in Western culture.”



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VOLUNTEER STORY

Catholic University of America graduate spends one month in Vietnam gaining a different view on medicine

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Since acupuncture is a foreign healing practice to Western people and the complex concept has such a long history, Timmy had to put a lot of efforts into communicating with and learning from the local doctors and observing and understanding the way acupuncture works. During his one month, by always staying serious but friendly, diligent and open-minded, Timmy's performance was highly appreciated: "Timmy was very hardworking and serious. We love the way he quickly learnt and absorbed the new things. Also Timmy was always helpful and friendly to the patients and their parents; they really liked Timmy." said Timmy's supervisor.

"My work experience in Vietnam will be of great value for me as a physician because The United States is very diverse and you have to be able to work with everyone regardless of cultural differences. Also, being culturally competent adds value to you as physician because it allows you to understand your patients better and therefore you can treat them better."

In addition, this voluntary time brought Timmy another important benefit: "I have gained a new perspective on medicine because when I think of medicine, I think of Western medicine, but never Eastern medicine, which is something I have been learning about the past month. This placement in Hanoi has broadened my worldview and developed me to be more open-minded about how different cultures view medicine."

We hope this inspiring story encourages others to help Projects Abroad continue to make a difference, and by doing so, learn something themselves along the way.



Duong Pham, Information manager

VOLUNTEER STORY

Volunteering wholeheartedly - Creating real differences

What can be greater for a young person who opts to contribute and explore in a developing foreign country then the experience exceeds her expectations and the most wonderful thing is, the volunteer can really make a difference in the lives of some destitute human beings in the destination she goes to?

It is believed to be the story of Cora Brauner – a German physiotherapy volunteer who selected Vietnam as the destination of her 2-month long worthwhile journey. The twenty-four year old university graduate who volunteered under Projects Abroad PRO – the program designed especially for skilled and qualified volunteers - sincerely shared her interesting motive: “After four years of studying and working at the same time I needed kind of a ‘time-out’. I wanted to go to a foreign country to explore something totally different from my normal daily life. Projects Abroad gave me the possibility to combine my own personal adventure with gaining more work experience which was just perfect for me”. Cora thought of this



volunteering time as a transition phase between her academic study which was finished in January 2013 and her full-time occupation as a physiotherapist, also a unique opportunity to explore the local culture of the destination and to improve her language skill. Thanks to the information offered by Projects Abroad, Cora decided that Bo De pagoda would be her placement. Bo De is a place of Buddhist worship providing shelter, food and basic care for hundreds of infants and children (mostly are orphaned); there are children of different disabilities (celebral palsy, down syndrome, deaf, mute, limb deformities) growing up alongside with the normal children here . With a high motivation and great enthusiasm to bring the trained physiotherapy skills to help the needy, despite the poor condition of the place and the daily difficulties she had to face at the placement due to some occasional objections from the nannies, everyday Cora went to work diligently with a strong belief that her efforts and sincere care will bring positive changes to the handicapped children's life.

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VOLUNTEER STORY

Volunteering wholeheartedly - Creating real differences

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Cora had had to start from these small steps: “Of course it was not that kind of physio-therapist work I knew from Germany. But it was what these kids needed the most. My daily aim was it to get these kids out of their rooms, to try to improve their motoric skills in a child-friendly way and just to give them the possibility to have a few hours a day when they can have a good time with the other kids and also the care volunteers” before some



real positive differences started to be seen: “After three weeks I got aid from Paula from Australia. This was the best thing what could happen to me and of course to the kids! Thanks to her my daily working routine got some more structure and we could create a place for ‘our’ disabled kids and over the importance of that! Thanks to Cora and Paula’s daily practice and continuous encouragement, a disabled girl who had not been able to walk now could stand up on her own and a boy found his bright smiles again. These significant improvements in the mobility and happiness with these unlucky kids are something that only be brought when the volunteers work with all their hearts and a full hope towards a brighter and happier future for the deprived children.



So what Cora received in exchange of the great devotion she gave to the kids? Let’s hear what she shared, “It was really hard for me to see kids living in such conditions. There have been so many things which did not make my work easier. But on the other hand it was just amazing to work with the kids and all the other volunteers. It is unbelievable how much they can give you back although they really have nothing. It was an amazing experience and I could just benefit from this time- in a job-related and also in a personal way.” Cora also hopes that there will be more and more physiotherapy volunteers opting for this worthwhile project because these children really need the help in order for them to continue their difficult life more independently and positively.

DIRTY DAY REVIEW

For several weeks, care volunteer Jack Harris and assistant country manager Sally Shephard had spent a great deal of time and efforts planning a big total cleanup day to get rid of scabies for the orphans at Bo De shelter. Thanks to the kind financial donation from volunteer Remi Levinson as well as good quality scabies medicine brought from Germany by care volunteer Gerwitt He, great support from hotel Intercontinental Hanoi Westlake with the clothes washing and from ToHe Social Enterprise with running a craft workshop and amazing manual support and labour from nearly 100 volunteers (Projects Abroad and independent foreign and local volunteers) as well as from Projects Abroad staff, the big cleanup event took place successfully last Saturday from 6AM to 4PM. The volunteer team washed the babies and children; cleaned and sprayed the rooms, belongings, kitchens and toilets; had all the clothes boiled and washed while entertaining the children and nannies with different activities.

We all hope that this initiative will have a positive long-term effect on the well-being of the people and the children at the shelter. It was a long and exhausting day for everyone who got involved, but at the same time it is, we believe, a real worthwhile and memorable day.

**Photo by volunteer photographer Tim Barker (<http://www.timbarker.com.au>)*



Duong Pham, Information manager

TWO WEEK SPECIALS PHOTO REVIEW



What's On: August 2013

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1 Karaoke event	2 Aymeric & Benjamin arrive	3 Colm and Christopher arrive
4 Tiphaine arrives	5 Debroah arrives	6 Miriam arrives	7 Monthly workshop	8 Shamain & Eman arrive	9	10
11	12	13 Cuisine event: Vietnamese beefsteak	14	15	16 Margot arrives	17
18 Leonie arrives	19	20	21	22	23 Gardening Day at Bo De	24 Ditte's birthday
25	26 Samuel arrives	27	28	29	30 Pottery village trip 8AM	31 Nadia & Linh Le arrive

Aug 1 — Who fancy having a fun karaoke night for a social outing? Let's meet at XMen karaoke for an exciting and fun evening.

Address: 408 De La Thanh

Time: 8:30PM

Cost: 100,000-150,000VND/person

Aug 7 - Monthly workshop. More information to come!

Aug 13 - Cuisine event: Vietnamese beefsteak.

Meet at: Projects Abroad office

Time: 6.30PM

Cost: 80,000-150,000VND/pax

Aug 23 – Gardening Day at Bo De placement: cleaning up the garden, plant trees and flowers -> Bring a green and clean space to the shelter people.

Meet at: Projects Abroad office

Time: 8AM

Aug 30 - Pottery village trip: Discovering pottery - a traditional craft type of Vietnam

Photos of the Month

Hello from Vietnam



Care volunteer Catherine Campbell spent time playing with an orphaned child



Teaching volunteer Orlaith Healy instructed her students to do English exercises



Working a bit far away from Hanoi, care volunteer Kirsten still enjoyed her time with the kids



Care volunteer Federica Tamborrino thought the time she was with the autistic children was a really memorable time



The group of UK physio volunteers dedicated their skills and time doing the massage work for the homeless elderly people



US volunteer Evan Teske has learnt a lot of interesting things at his placement—Acupuncture hospital

Contact Us

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Projects Abroad is the leading global organizer of overseas voluntary work placements. Our wide range of projects, including Teaching, Care, Conservation & Environment, Medicine & Healthcare, Sports, Culture & Community projects and Journalism, are designed specifically for the needs of the communities in which we work, whilst giving our volunteers the very best experience of volunteering abroad.

Based in Hanoi, Vietnam, volunteers can work on a variety of projects, including care work with disabled and orphaned children, physical therapy at local hospitals, and teaching either English or French in both primary and secondary schools. The latest projects to be opened is Community Village project and Occupational Therapy project. If you are interested in volunteering in Vietnam with Projects Abroad then please log on to www.projects-abroad.net for more information.

