

After an uneventful 14-hour flight I arrived at the Hong Kong Airport. It's the real thing—PA announcements in Mandarin, billboards in various Asian alphabets, security personnel Asian-only—meaning insistently young, businesslike, and mostly masked. I managed to ignore the odd Jingle Bells playing in the background. What I couldn't ignore (literally—watch your feet, please!) were the people-movers on the left, rather than the right. Yes, it is “one country, two systems” here in Hong Kong—the only city in China with the British system of driving and walking. It's as if a Californian would fly to Hawaii and suddenly need to drive on the other side of the road.

I wasn't expecting this, so I hadn't researched in advance: when the Chinese took over in 1997, did they consider changing the British tradition of driving on the left, or would that have been too jarring and dangerous? Do they plan to change it in the future? Or do they explain it as a living testament to colonialism? Like most progressive Westerners, I think colonialism has outlived any usefulness or legitimacy it ever had. That's why it's so sad to see China's determination to absorb Hong Kong, left-side people-movers notwithstanding. I have applied [Vietnam visa on arrival](#) online with TUN and then fly to Tan Son Nhat airport. It is really convenient and cheap.

Just A Day in Saigon – Ho Chi Minh City

Having finally settled into the luxurious Caravelle Hotel about midnight which I have booked through [Đặt khách sạn](#), I slept through the humid tropical night and awoke to the sounds of a city already on the move. Actually, this city of 9,000,000 hardly ever stops moving.

The Caravelle is quite luxurious, so the food, service, and towels are wonderful.

Vietnam is one of those countries with far more young people than jobs, so there's always someone around to do whatever you need. In fact, it takes a minute or two to get used to the constant “let me do it for you” attitude.

Are they looking at me and thinking, “oh, one of those AMERICANS”? I'm still getting used to that whole thing.

The streets of the city are filled with motorbikes—maybe 300 for each passenger car. And none of the prissy one-motorbike-to-a-lane custom we have in the U.S. Instead, the motorbikes take up the width of the street. A narrow street might have 3 or 4 motorbikes abreast. A wide street might have 6 or 8. A grand boulevard like Dong Khoi or Le Loi, 20 or 25. I am NOT making this up.

And unlike India, the traffic is fairly quiet. There's very little honking, no shouting, and no screeching of tires. In Delhi, a similar amount of traffic was deafening. Here, it's far more benign—although it takes a while to get anywhere, of course.

Everyone is so YOUNG—it's a demographic phenomenon that's absolutely unmistakable. Do the math—people in the 1960s and 70s were killed in the American War. People in the 1970s were killed in the war with Cambodia and in the famine created by the Hanoi government. People in the 1970s and 80s left in droves—remember the “boat people”? Result: a nation of 23 year-olds, with a bunch of 65- and 70-year-olds hanging around shaking their heads.

It's my last day in Saigon/Ho Chi Minh City, and it's time to talk about the American War. Evidence of the war is everywhere here—monuments, demographics, personal stories, government narratives, souvenirs. On display around the city are downed American helicopters, tanks, and fighter jets. That said, life goes on. Americans are completely welcome here, there's no bitterness in the air, and if living well is the best revenge—well, Hanoi won the war. So, they get to feel right, they get to write the history, they can afford noblesse oblige.

Today I drove 2 hours to see the Cu Chi tunnels, 150 miles of underground passageways, meeting rooms, and kitchens. The Vietnamese fighting the U.S. aerial bombardment dug the tunnels under the jungle floor to escape the continual rain of death from the sky. Now sections of the tunnel system are open to the public, and one can marvel at the low-tech ingenuity of the guerrillas: air shafts disguised by termite mounds, cooking fires operated so their smoke disappeared into the morning mist, weapons made from bamboo animal traps. The site boasts plenty of captured U.S. ordinance and an old propaganda film about “crazy American devils.”

I'm observing my own curious reaction to several days of this. On the one hand, I was actively against the war. I entered college in 1967 and, shoulder-length hair and all, spent my fair share of time protesting. On the other hand, I hate what the Communists did as they gained power—torture, revenge, concentration camps. Their collectivist ideology and disdain for the Southern political system created a famine that killed a million Vietnamese. With a government like this, who needs bourgeois enemies of the revolution?

And I cannot forgive what they continue to do—run a totalitarian system that controls how 84 million people live. Unlike North Korea's or Zimbabwe's, it's a modern totalitarian state: everyone in the cities has a motorbike and color TV. People go to university. Women are no longer property. But the internet is censored, the news media are controlled, and the words of Uncle Ho—or his ghostwriter—are on billboards everywhere.

I don't want to come off here as some patriotic sore-loser American. I'm not against the Communist government because they aren't American. I'm against the Communist government because it lies to its people and tramples free expression. I'm against that in America, and I'd be against it on the moon.