



S5 Grand Tour Report

Topic: Appreciation of Cultural Differences

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Contents

Introduction	3
Reflection.....	4
Day1	4
Day2	7
Day3	11
Day4	15
Day5	19
Cultural Differences.....	24
Conclusion	26

Introduction

A few years ago our school launched a brand new exchange program – Grand Tour. The idea is based on the trip which young English and American from rich families to travel around Europe as a part of their education. Our Principal, Dr. Yang encouraged us to save \$2 every day from Form one so as to prepare for the trip and develop a regular saving habit. This is already the fourth Grand Tour held by the school.

Focusing on the trip to Vietnam, we tasted the local shopping culture by visiting Han Market which is located in Danang. We can not only broaden our horizons on foreign culture but also experienced the daily lives of locals. Other than shopping, we also visited sites of World Heritage like Tomb of Khai Dinh and Hoi An Ancient town. One of the highlighted activity is riding the cyclo around The Citadel. Our school organized voluntary work for us to experience when visiting Action for the City.

Reflection

Day1



It was the first day of our trip to Vietnam. This is a remarkable experience for us as we spent the following five days with our classmates. At 3 pm, we gathered at the Hong Kong International Airport. Our excitements could not be described by words.

At around 7 pm, we arrived at Danang International Airport. Compared with Hong Kong, the weather of Vietnam is hotter than Hong Kong, all of us could not adapt to the weather. Then, after we took our luggage, we went to Sanouva Hotel by the "fancy" coach. That night, we had our first Vietnamese meal in the hotel.



This is the class photo that we took on the first day at Sanouva Hotel. All of us showed the happiest and joyous face.



The dish is curry siroloin. The curry is slightly different from the Indian one, as it uses the traditional spices of Vietnam, making the dish more mouthwatering. In Hong Kong, we usually take it as a dish. However, in Vietnam, the residents there take it as a soup, and taste it with baguette. It is new to us as we do not eat it in this way.



Shrimp chips with Vietnamese chicken salad are the appetizer of our dinner. The waiter recommended us to mix the dish with fish sauce. At first, we thought it was weird, but after trying it, it tasted good. The dish next to the appetizer is French style deep fried prawn. The food in Vietnam is deeply influenced by France as she was once a colony of France. France ruled over Vietnam until she broke out of Vietnam War in 1965.

Day2



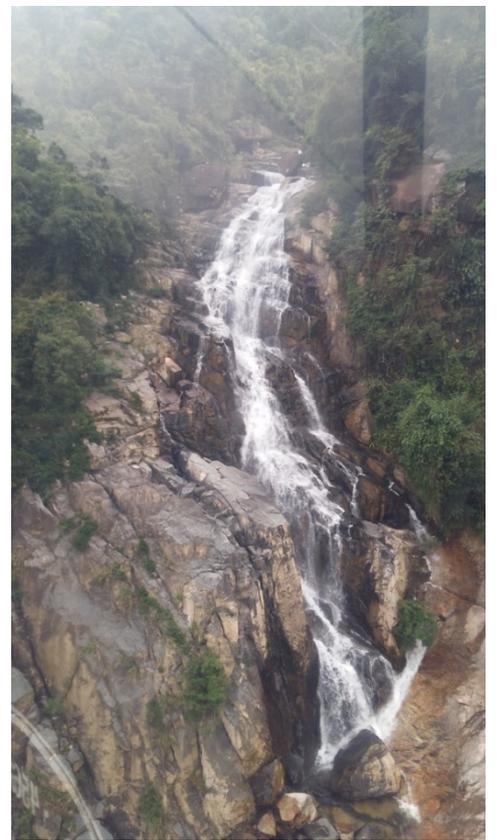
On the second day, we went to Ba Na Hills in Danang. The altitude of Ba Na Hill is 1387.27m. Thus, when we arrived, we were shocked by the coldness. Before we went to Vietnam, we thought that the weather was so hot that we would have sunstroke. However, the weather was around 14 degree Celsius. The weather was so different from Hong Kong that we doubted whether we were in Vietnam. First, we rode a cable car which took 20 minutes, it is the longest cable car in the world. In that 20 minutes, we were amazed by the scenery. There are plenty of trees and waterfall, these sceneries are not so common in Hong Kong. It is indeed a new experience to all of us. Then, we spent a half day in Ba Na Hill enjoying the entertaining facilities. At around 4, we left Ba Na Hill and went shopping at Big C Supermarket. Due to the currency rate, all the products are at low price, so most of us purchased a myriad of souvenirs for our friends and family. At night, we had our dinner at Blue Whale Restaurant. It therefore marked the end of supercalifragilisticexpialidocious Day 2.



The cable cars varies in different destinations .The above is the one we took to the Fantasy Park. The view along the side was blanketed by the fog. We could barely see the surroundings. However, we still enjoyed the ride.



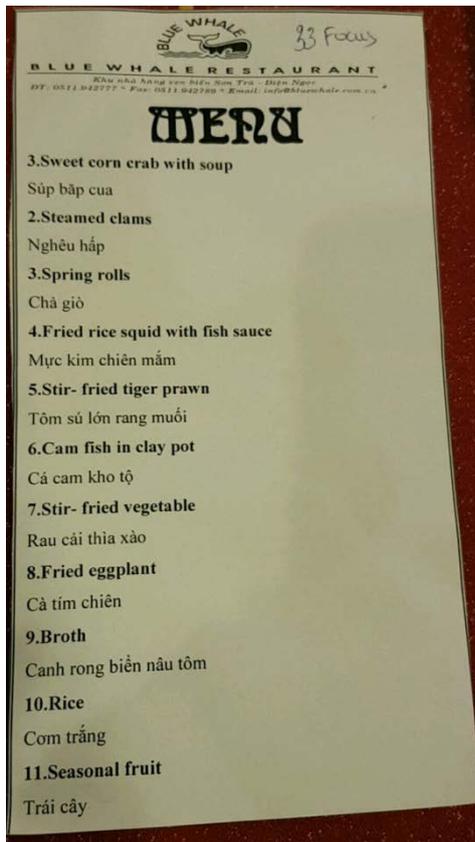
Here are some of the facilities in Fantasy Park, thrilling ride and merry go round.



The extraordinary landscape is stunning, the waterfall and the forest are a feast to the eyes.



We, the shopaholic, went to Big C Supermarket to buy souvenirs, especially coffee and Pho.



Delicacies in Blue Whale Restaurant

Day3



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Snap shots in Tomb of Khai Dinh

On the third day, we visited sites of World Heritage like Tomb of Khai Dinh, Thien Mu Pagoda and The Citadel. One of the highlighted activities is riding the cycle around The Citadel. Although we could not communicate with the drivers fluently due to the language barriers, we still took tons of photos with them and they tried to be nice and explain the scenery as clear and detail as possible. At night, we went to the restaurant, Tropical, to have our dinner. We tried the Bún bò Huế, which is a popular Vietnamese soup containing rice vermicelli and beef in Hue. The dish is greatly admired for its balance of spicy, sour, salty and sweet flavors and the predominant flavor is that of lemon grass.



Tomb of Khai Dinh





Cycle in The Citadel

The ride was full of excitement and danger as it was the first time we took the cycle as a transport tool. Also, throughout the journey, motorbikes were surrounding us and the drivers kept surpassing those motorbikes. It was quite frightening but new to us. We learnt the difference in transportation between Hong Kong and Vietnam as well.



The left photo was taken at Thien Mu Pagoda. The car was driven by a monk and his 10 believers to protect freedom of religion, the monk self-immolated at last. The above photo was taken at The Citadel.



This is Hai Van Quan, one of the 50 places of a lifetime chosen by National Geographic.

Day4



On the fourth day, we went to Hoi An Ancient Town and visited a primary school to have service. There are a slew of historical buildings in the town, including the Cau Nhat Ban and Historical Cultural Museum Of Hoi An. Also, we visited the Cantonese Assembly Hall. Then, we visited Chinese All-Community Assembly. In the assembly, there were 13 heroes. They sacrificed themselves to fight against Japanese invasion of China. After lunch, we went shopping. The

weather was disappointing, it rained heavily, which was a bit chaotic.

The last event of the day was going to a primary school to have service with the volunteers from Action of City. The aim of this NGO is to bring people together for a livable city. They teach pupils about soil agriculture rather than aquaculture since most of them are from farmers. Due to soil erosion, the lives of farmers become tough from now on. They teach students to plant traditional medicines instead of going to pharmacy. On that day, we planted different traditional medical herbs around the campus accompanied with the helpers from NGO and local students. After all this , we realized that we should not take our lives for granted since not everyone is born in such a high quality living standard.



We were listening to the teacher about the duties that day on the left photo. On the right photo, we were singing the song "I Love You" with the students.



We were planting medical herbs with the students.



Our classmates enjoyed the moment with the students. This is love.



Since there is no tuck shop in the primary school, the students will go to the tress to buy the snacks from the hawkers.



We miss each other, thanks for giving us a precious memory in our youth which will be imprinted on our mind eternally.

Day5



On the last day of our trip, we went to the Marble Mountain located in Thuy Son. There are total of five mountains which represent the five elements metal, wood, water, fire and earth.

Afterwards, we headed to the Museum of Cham Sculpture in Danang which were established in 1915 by French scholars. This museum is regarded as the largest and the most beautiful collection of Cham sculpture. The tour guide had

introduced us three sculptures .They are Ganesha, lord of wisdom, Tara and Shiva.

Then, we had our last Vietnamese meal in a restaurant nearby. Although the dishes were more or less the same, we finished the whole meal without any leftover with relish as we all knew that there may be no chance for us to taste the authentic Vietnamese cuisines.

The last spot of our trip was Han Market which is a conventional market in Vietnam selling both wet and dry goods. We had looked forward to shopping there for a long period of time because we can buy a raft of local specialty. Since the retailers targeted the tourists, the products were usually overcharged. However, we found that if we insisted on bargaining with the sellers, we would eventually buy the products with an acceptable price.

After going on a shopping binge, the most unpleasant moment came. We had to leave Vietnam. At around 3 o'clock, we arrived at the Danang International Airport. Getting into a plane landing in Hong Kong marked the end of our memorable and extraordinary Grand tour.



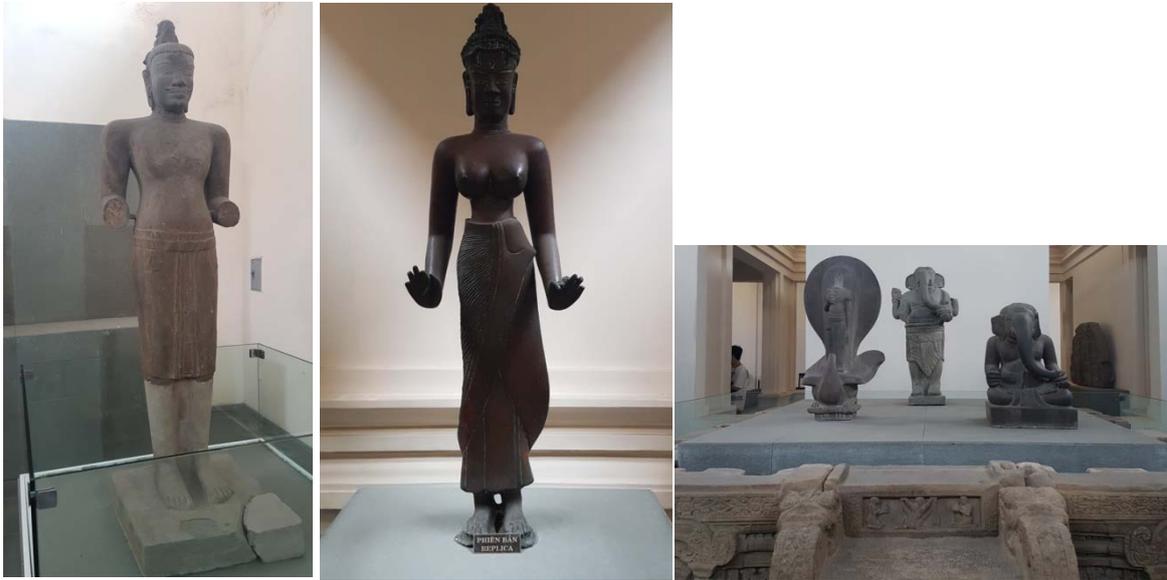
This is the bird view of Thuy Son from the top of Marble Mountain.



This is the Buddha inside the cave in Marble Mountain.



It was taken in the Marble Mountain.



These are the three sculptures the tour guide introduced to us. They are, from the left, Shiva, Tara and Ganesha. Shiva is the god of creation, destruction and regeneration. Meanwhile, Tara is a dancer and Ganesha is the god of new beginnings, wisdom and luck.



This is the dessert of our last meal in Vietnam. It is called lotus sweet soup. At first, we thought it would be like red bean sweet soup in Hong Kong but it is certainly out of our expectation.



This is Han Market. There are 2 floors, the 1st floor contains local food and the 2nd one is full of clothes in folk style and shoes made in Vietnam. Staying there for one and a half hour, everyone enjoyed the last day.

Cultural Differences

After experiencing a five-day trip in Vietnam, our group found out that there are huge cultural differences in culinary, transportation and education.

In the aspect of culinary culture, Vietnamese loves flavoring the dishes with spices like lemongrass, ginger, mint, Vietnamese mint, long coriander, Saigon cinnamon, bird's eye chili, lime and Thai basil leaves.

Also, Vietnamese likes adding fish sauce to cuisines to enhance the taste. When comparing with Hong Kong food culture, Hong Kong local food does not contain many spices. The flavorings are mainly salt, sugar, vinegar, shaoxing wine and oyster sauce which are commonly used in other countries.

Other than that, the transportation in Vietnam varies from Hong Kong as well. In Vietnam, the major transport is motorbike which can be seen everywhere. Moreover, the rules are loose there, as no traffic light was seen there. We crossed the road very carefully in a group of people so as to avoid accidents. In Hong Kong, the majority takes public transportation like buses, MTR and minibuses as their daily commuting practice. Most of the Hong Kong citizens strictly obey the traffic rules, the number of traffic accidents is comparatively low.

Last but not least, the culture of education differs from the Hong Kong one. Take the primary school we visited in Vietnam as an example, the schedule there is freer. Students there learned about agriculture by experiencing planting. Also, the recess time is extremely long, about 40 minutes. During recess, they can play slides, swings and other facilities. However, in Hong Kong, the tight schedule forces students to learn everything in three years under great stress in order to get an ideal result in DSE. The spoon-feeding education is the method that Hong Kong students are experiencing. Hence, Hong Kong students usually forget most of the contents after having examination. This is obviously not the greatest education for children but we still have to face the reality.

All in all, there are many other cultural differences between Vietnam and Hong Kong. We may like some of them or dislike some of them, but as a global citizen, we still have to respect all of them.

Conclusion

Though the fantastic trip has ended, all of the memories are kept in our minds forever.

This tour gave us precious lessons on many aspects including inter-personal relationships and independent skills.

To start with, the journey taught us how to get along with each other. As two to three of us shared the same hotel room, we spent most of the time with our roommates. Although we can choose the most familiar one to be our roommate, there are many unknown habits of them. Those habits can be good or bad but we have to accept all of them so as to have peaceful nights throughout the trip.

Besides, if there are arguments, communication is the best remedy to reach a consensus. For example, since we have to submit a report about the tour afterwards, discussion on the project occurred every second during the whole trip. Sometimes, one would like to focus more on historical architecture but others may want to write more about food culture. Thus, arguments happened. Whenever we encountered this situation, we calmed down and exchanged our thoughts with each other. Eventually, this report was written with integrated ideas of our members and huge effort of us.

Moreover, travelling to an exotic place, some people may feel unwell due to different weather or food. One of our groupmates had fever on the 3rd day of the tour. Fortunately, with the good care of her other two roommates, who are our groupmates as well, she felt better and was able to catch up the schedule on the next day. This was really grateful to us.

Other than getting along with others, we learnt how to be independent as well. Youngsters in Hong Kong usually carry the label of "Kong kids" who never knows how to take good care of themselves. They are regarded as self-centered and too dependent. Nevertheless, after having this meaningful trip, we can break the label of being Kong kids. In this trip, there was no parent to spoil us and arrange everything for us. Waking up according to the schedule, packing luggage neatly, washing the dirty clothes and so on, we had to finish them all by ourselves without any help from parents. We used to sit on sofa and watch mums doing housework but now, we are independent and take initiative to help parents and take care of ourselves. We are no longer the Kong Kids.

The trip not only taught us precious lessons but also made us realize how lucky we are. Take learning environment as an example, in the school that we visited, there was no air conditioning and bright lighting. The classroom is simple with few fans, old wooden desks and chairs but students still enjoy the lesson. In contrast, there are well cooling and ventilation system, hi-tech teaching tools

and comfortable seats in Hong Kong, the students were reluctant to learn. Once, one of our members asked a student there to give a comic book in the drawer to him. The student took out the book reluctantly. The book is old and without cover. This illustrates that the student treasures the book very much even it is old and broken. However, we are used to have a new one instead of trying to fix it when something is broken or we just simply dislike it. We do not know what cherish means. Besides, when we gave our little gifts, pencils and notebooks, to the students there, their smiles and happiness impressed me a lot. If we, Hong Kong students, receive pencils and notebooks as gifts, will we feel as happy as them? There is no doubt that we will not as we are wealthy enough to purchase whatever stationery we need. We never know the importance of being grateful. Hence, after visiting the primary school, we finally realize we are blessed with everything we need. Everything we are having now is not a must, so we should not take things for granted anymore.

Lastly, the trip to the passionate city, Vietnam, gives us not only an unforgettable and joyful journey but also a lifelong lesson which make us to grow up and be mature.

