

Reaction Essay (Trip)

Day1 (08/07/19)

Today was the first day of our trip, we took a flight from Don Mueang airport to Nakhon Phanom and cross the border to Laos by vans. We visited Savan-Seno Special Economic Zone in Savannakhet which is the 'gateway to global market,' it is the first SEZ in Laos and also the centre hub for investment, trade and service. Their main objective is to create employment and promote various business sectors, such as, agriculture, electronics, tourism, logistics, finance etc. We had a tour around and, in my opinion, the zone is still quite small comparing to other ASEAN countries but it is a good start because the warehouses consist of different types of businesses, for example, cosmetics, eyewear, camera and many more so it is easier to expand.

However, having no sea access could be a problem for them so they built a 'dry port' to facilitate export and import even though the logistic cost may still be higher comparing to other countries. Human capital is also one of the problems in Laos but they are currently trying to develop that by enforcing a policy to create labour which matches the needs of the business investing in Laos to improve efficiency.

At the end of the day, we had dinner at Lao View restaurant next to Mekong river, the view of the sunset was stunning as well as the food. Laos food is very similar to Thai food and some menus are even exactly the same, maybe because it is next to the border of Thailand, many of the waiter and waitress could speak Thai.

Day2 (09/07/19)

On the second day, we spent most of our time on the van, travelling from Laos to Vietnam. Once we arrived at Vietnam, we visited the Vinh Moc Tunnel and the demilitarised zone where Vietnamese people sheltered during the Vietnam War. Mr. Phupha, our guide,

told us that the tunnel could hold around 300 people which mostly consisted of women, children and the elderly. He told us that Vietnamese people call it the 'American War' as they still mourn for families who has passed away and that we should not really mention about it.

Many of the information was not new to me because around six years ago, I came to Vietnam on school trip to study about Vietnam War and also went into the tunnels. However, it gave me a different kind of feeling because the people are also different!

We then spent our evening on the beach, just hanging around and watching the sunset. There were definitely some culture differences as some of my friends wore bikinis and the locals while wearing just t-shirts and shorts and it could tell by their looks that it is not something that they are used to. Vietnam was colonised under China for 1,000 years, France for 100 years and the U.S. for 21 years, it can be noticed that some of the buildings had European style but the cultures may not be absorbed that much.

Day3 (10/07/19)

Today was the busiest day of the trip! We departed from the resort and headed to C.P. Vietnam Corporation in Hue where we were introduced to CP's core businesses in Vietnam. CP was established in Vietnam 25 years ago where they split their business into two areas, land animal business and aquaculture business. Land animal business focuses on chickens and pork and aquaculture business focuses on shrimps and fishes. CP's strategy is vertical integration and traceability meaning that it acquires all the supply chain, from feeding, farming to processing.

The factory in Hue focuses on shrimp as it is close to the ocean so it would take less time to transport and the quality would be the best possible. We were taken on a tour around the factory, it can be noticed that the system is very well organised and systematic, for example, every worker's uniform has to be completely tidy and each worker wear different

coloured hats for the field that they work on. It doesn't really surprise me because, CP is one of the largest corporations in Thailand so it would be normal for their branches to absorb the management style and culture.

The rest of the day we went sightseeing, we visited Thien Mu Pagoda and Royal Tomb of Khai Dinh King which underneath the beautiful architects lies so many mysterious histories of the emperor, this makes me want to read more about it!

After that we had dinner at an Italian pizzeria and went sightseeing, again, along the night streets of Hue. There are so many cute cafés and bars in Hue, many of them are decorated with sparkling lights in a unique way, it can be noted that Vietnamese people spend a lot of time at café, even really late at night, the coffee shops were still crowded!

Day4 (11/08/19)

There was some change of plans today. At first, we had to meet with the CEO of CAC Co., Ltd but instead Ajarn took us to a mall in Da Nang and gave us a task to observe product/service and consumer trend in Vietnam. The mall is pretty small compared to the ones in Bangkok, however, we have not been to the larger cities so it is quite inaccurate to just compare them. There were not many shops in the mall, mainly just restaurants, cafés, a supermarket, some clothing stores, an ice rink and home product stores. It seems like the mall is not a place for teenagers to hang out, in contrast with Thailand. Despite that, teenagers do study and read books in cafés just like Thai teenagers. In Vietnam, teenagers usually hang out at a café along the street or sugar cane shop which can be seen in every city we visited!

Once we arrived at the hotel, we were given another task to buy souvenirs under the budget of 400k dong at the Han Market. Comparing this with a Thai market, it would be a smaller Sampeng market! Every store here sells similar products, there were not many varieties, our group brought Lotus seeds and each picked a shirt that would represent our

favourite memories of this trip. The thing that surprises me is that it is actually harder to bargain the price with a Vietnamese seller, at first they seem really friendly when persuading us to buy their stuff but when we were not interested, they changed to a totally different person, but I guess that is the same in most countries around the world.

Day5 (12/08/19)

Began the day with an amazing breakfast at Satya Hotel and went sightseeing at Linh Ung Pagoda, we spent only half an hour there as the sun was scorching and everyone just wanted to be in the bus even though the air conditioner on the bus doesn't function quite well. After that Ajarn took us to a supermarket and let us observe products and consumer behaviour, our task was to think if we were to invest in a business in Vietnam what would it be.

What our group have observed is that there were so many products from countries such as, Thailand, Japan and South Korea. The products come in many forms such as, snacks, drinks, shampoos etc. Vietnamese people also prefer to consume tropical fruits flavoured products such as, mangos, mangosteen, pineapples, peaches and many more. So, this gave us an idea of investing in a Bingsu business as the Korean trend is booming there, Vietnamese people love refreshing desserts and we did not notice any Bingsu shops there yet, only bubble teas.

Thereafter, we visited SCG-CBMV (Cement Building Materials in Vietnam) and were warmly welcomed by a Thammasat alumni who introduced us to the cement industry in Vietnam and digging into SCG business goals and strategies. SCG gave great importance to their quality, brand positioning and doing a great deal of research before actually implementing strategies. This has showed me that large corporations function differently from smaller ones in the sense that they focus on a wider picture and is more systematic.

Day6 (13/08/19)

Many of us ran out of energy today as it was approaching the end of the trip and we had to check out of the hotel extremely early in morning. Today we visited Ba Na Hills, a really famous theme park in Da Nang. We had to take a cable to get to the theme park as it was located on top of the hills, the weather was at first boiling but when we got to the top, the weather was actually quite chilled with some sunlight. The place was crowded with tourists from all over the world, it can be noticed that tourists from Asia usually come as a tour group but from Europe or America usually come by themselves. What we did all day was basically visit the arcades and took photos of different scenery.

Our dinner was at a Korean BBQ place, it was not a good experience for me because the electricity went off for so long and the positioning of the seats was not well-organised as the air conditioner did not reach every table. This had me thinking that the electricity sector could be a good opportunity for investment as there are still many rooms for development!

Day7 (14/08/19)

Last day of this trip, I couldn't believe how fast time had flew. We didn't do much today as we checked out of the hotel at 11.00 and had lunch at Pepper Lunch. I feel like this branch was not quite well-managed because some of us had to wait for an hour for the food but at the end, the food had cheered us up. After that we visited Da Nang Museum of Cham Sculpture which was full of collected artifacts such as, the three statues of Vinsu, tympan of dancing Siva and decorations from Cham temples. There were brief descriptions under each sculpture on their history, however, with a limited amount of time and because there was no air conditioner in the museum, we had to leave early.

From my point of view, this area should be promoted more to attract more tourists and if the facility was improved more, this could go further because I believe that there are many tourists, including myself, who would love to learn more about Vietnamese history but never had the chance to!

After the museum, we went to a place where precious stones such as, emerald, ruby, opal etc. were sold, all we did was look around because it was too expensive! Finally, we headed to Da Nang airport and departed for Thailand.

Summary

Overall, one of the things that impressed me most is definitely Vietnamese food and coffee! Vietnamese food has similar flavours but less spicy, comparing with Thai food, there are always bowls of vegetables on the table which I really like and the menus are so exotic. Although, the coffee is quite different, one of my favourite was the coconut coffee which is sold in almost every café as it is one of the signature drinks here.

As there are so many opportunities to grow and from what I observed, there are so many tourists in different cities, I believe that in five to ten years both Laos and Vietnam will become more connected to various countries in terms of logistics, exporting and importing products, sharing cultures and many more. One of the famous routes connecting Mudaharn with Laos and Da Nang is the R9 which is the shortest route for transportation, this so far has been successful in terms of facilitating trade among the countries, however, the officers will need to be more thorough when checking identities or packages when crossing the border, for example, when we crossed the border from Laos to Vietnam, the process was so quick for Thai people, the officer just counted if the number of people matches the number of passport without actually looking at our faces. Logistics is also one of the main areas that businesses

in Laos and Vietnam should pay attention to as the cost is quite high so if a firm has some kind of mechanism to reduce this cost, this will definitely give them an advantage!

Accordingly, starting a business in either Laos or Vietnam is one of the possibilities for my future career because many businesses are not at the matured stage yet. Many people said that Thailand and Laos or Vietnam are so similar in cultures and traditions but I disagree to some extent, for example, there are not many traffic lights in Vietnam so at first it was quite challenging when crossing the street and people always honk their cars to warn which will be hard for me to get used to!

Needless to say, this trip was without any doubt one of my favourite trip! Not only has it given me new knowledge on so many things, many unforgettable memories were also created. I really appreciate all Ajarns for organising such an amazing trip and also all classmates for being a part of it!