

Trip Essay

After a long journey on the van crossing the border, I finally arrived in the Savan-Seno Special Economic Zone. It was divided into 5 zones. Zone A, called Savan City, was about tourism business such as hotel, restaurant, and amusement park. Zone B and B1 were called Logistic Park. Double A logistics, a Thai company, invested in this zone. Zone C was called Savan Park. It was about small to medium size industry. Zone D was called Resettlement. Laos government invested in this area for residence to support moving people out of Zone A. However, I did not have a chance to visit all zones. I saw that there were many empty lands waiting for more of investment opportunity. It was very stunning that Laos had done this special economic zone for a long time and still had a plan to expand the zones. Leaving Savan-Seno, I arrived at Thai consulate. I saw 3 to 4 Thai students doing internship here. However, I spent quite a few minutes here. The next stop was the night market near Mekhong river. The place was very calm and quiet. This market accepted Thai Baht and shopkeepers understood and could speak Thai. Beer Lao Dark was just 40 Baht here. There was a little open area for community's activities. I found Ho Chi Minh statue near the river. My dinner was set on the Mekhong riverside. The restaurant occasionally played old Thai songs. The dinner was difficult for me since the food was made of vegetables and spicy. Travelling throughout the day, what I had observed was that the infrastructure was still bad and underdevelopment. It was like countryside of Thailand. Laos alphabets and words were easily understandable. The casino hotel was the end of the first day. The casino also accepted Thai Baht and I lost many bets to the roulette. Staffs spoke and understood Thai. I also saw a hidden black limousine car in this casino hotel surrounded by poor communities. In my opinion, Laos people preferred Thai stuffs such as Thai currency and Thai music. The food and alphabets were not that different according to culture sharing in the past.

Waking up to get dressing and breakfast, I was going to leave Lao PDR and spend the rest of the trip in Vietnam. Crossing the border this time was not that easy. I noticed that it took me so long before crossing and the guard counted the number of people in the bus whether it matched the number of passports he held or not. Now, my vehicle was changed to a bus and I had a guide for the entire Vietnam trip. Vietnam had a strict rule about speeding, so I spent a long time on the bus. While I was on the road, I saw that almost all houses put the Vietnam flag on the pole. Finally, I arrived at my first tourist place in Vietnam. It was Vinh Moc Tunnel and Demilitarized Zone. This tunnel had the real history behind. It was the place for people to live during the Vietnam War. Around the entrance, there were only plain and tree because the villages were eliminated by the bombs. When the bombers spotted the tunnels, they dropped the bombs to close down the entrance and people living below were buried alive. I had a chance to go down into the tunnel and felt how hard it took to survive the war. It was very narrow and dark despite the fact that it was relatively bigger than the other tunnel. There were 3 floors. The first floor was the battle zone. The second floor was operational and living zones. The third floor was the arsenal. This place was one of the saddest stories I had ever had. I could feel how painful it was to live without sunlight and fear of the bombers. Leaving the war memorial place, I arrived at the hotel. The hotel for tonight was near the beach. However, I prefer taking a nap before dinner to taking picture. The dinner for this day was sea food near the beach. I observed that the restaurants in the beach were so identical but many of them had already closed since it was the night.

The third day had a whole day trip. In the morning, I visited CP Vietnam Corporation or CPV. It had a warm welcome here. CP had a stable business in Vietnam. It used Exemplary agricultural production model. This strategy did not only focus on profit of the company, but also the well-

being of Vietnamese agricultural agencies in order to develop the production system. CPV specialized in shrimp industry and had the biggest market share. CPV provided modern technology and recommendation to shrimp farmers to guarantee the quality since CPV owned all kinds of shrimp products. This technology could eliminate the common problem such as white spot. I also had a tour on the factory. The workers were like robots to be honest. They kept doing the same thing over and over again. They were easily replaced by a machine. However, this would not happen because CPV wanted to cooperate with the local people by giving them a job. After the tour, CPV let me test its real shrimp products. The taste was very good and easily to eat. In the afternoon, I visited another tourist spot. It was the tomb of the 12nd emperor of Vietnam. This emperor was outstanding because he revealed the location of his tomb which violated the rules. Normally, the tomb was not revealed so as to prevent the emperor's stuffs getting stolen and building the tomb when alive was the bad fortune. In the tomb, there were daily stuffs of the emperor such as table. The ceiling was painted as the sky full of dragons. Many things were influenced by Chinese culture. The picture of the emperor was also in the room. In the picture, he was very white and had a medium black hair. In my opinion, this emperor was very interesting and modern as he had not feared of breaking the rules and cultures. In the evening, I arrived at Alba Spa Hotel. I had a little bit of night life here. Beer was easier to drink and cheaper when compared to Thailand. The bars and restaurants closed at 12 p.m. People left the night club when the time was about to reach 2 p.m. Perhaps, the laws were very strict and could not compromise.

I spent the morning on the road from Hue to Da Nang. In the afternoon, I visited a shopping mall owned by Vingroup. I observed many stuffs here. The tower was quite short. It had only 3 floors. The third floor had ice skate stadium in the center. Many people were here because it was the

summer break for Vietnamese schools. Boba tea was also popular here. The massage chair was also popular in Vietnam. There are one or two corners of every floor reserved for massage chair zone. Korea was one of the biggest investors in Vietnam, so Many stores and restaurants were from Korea. In the supermarket, many products were from and identical to Thailand, but the price was cheaper. The cinema located in the third floor. It had only 3 theaters, but still can afford 3D movie. However, the price of watches such as G-shock and Mido were not significantly cheaper than Thailand. I arrived the hotel in the evening. Da Nang was not like the other places I had stayed. I had a walk across the river and it felt really good. This was the first time I saw Starbucks Coffee in Vietnam. Moreover, Novotel also located in Da Nang.

Waking up in the fifth day, I still spent time in supermarket in the morning. From my survey, the prices were not much different to the day before, but frozen food, which I did not observe yesterday, was significantly cheaper than Thailand. There was a food court near the supermarket. Like Thailand, it used a card to deposit money so as to buy food. From what I observe, this supermarket was different to the one from yesterday in term of customers. Many customers here bought a large amount of goods like they prepared to relocate their residence. In the afternoon, I was at SCG Vietnam. I learned many stuffs here. For example, the economic size of Vietnam was just a half of Thailand, but its growth rate was double, so it might catch up Thailand in the future. Vietnamese people were young and competitive so that Vietnam had a very strong work force. The market SCG facing in Vietnam was monopolistic competition. In addition, SCG introduced itself in Vietnam by taking over a Vietnamese company because the Vietnamese government did not approve any new license in this business SCG was interested in. Therefore, SCG took over a company holding that license. In the evening, I arrived at Hoi An. This city had many Korean

restaurants and when crossing to the other side I was on walking street. The weather was hot here. Moreover, people preferred traditional way of life. They still did not use air conditioner.

Here was the last night on Vietnam, I was on the way back to Da Nang. This day, I visited Bana Hills which was like Universal Studio or Disneyland of Vietnam. It was designed in western style. Actually, Bana Hills was the residence of the French when they ruled Vietnam. However, I needed to take a cable car to the hill. The route of cable car was very long and fascinating that I could see how far I was from the ground. In fact, this cable car route was the longest and tallest in the world. I was very relaxed here. The weather was very good despite the strong sun light. The activities were common for other amusement parks except I need to take a cable car to another zone sometimes. Moreover, the instruction and a map were written in Korean language. The food hall during lunch was crowded. I also saw one couple doing pre wedding content here. The tourist spot here was the golden bridge. Although the activities were not much outstanding, I had so much fun on this day and it fulfilled this trip. In the evening, it was the second night on Da Nang. I went to Korean buffet restaurant. The electricity ran off twice and the air conditioner was like heater.

In the last day in Vietnam, after finishing my bag, I and many people missed the breakfast, so we went to the restaurants. It was pepper lunch. This meal was easiest to eat from the whole trip excluding the breakfast from hotel. Next, our stop was the museum. This museum gathered many historical stuffs of Vietnam. Many of them was related to Buddhism. However, this museum did not have any air conditioner, so it was very hot inside. Before going to airport, I went to marble shop. The marble shop sold jewelry and jar made of marble. I saw one necklace which had a price

of 200 million dong. Lastly, I arrived at the airport. I saw many Thai people here taking the flight back to Thailand. The airport was small but very clean.

Discussion

What surprises/impresses you most during the trip?

The most surprised me during the trip was the tourists. I saw many Korean people here, especially at Da Nang and Bana Hills. Many Korean people also travel to Thailand, so this can imply that Vietnam can compete with Thailand in tourism business for Korean people.

How do you see East-West economic route?

I did not see much of potential currently. The one I noticed was the problems. The infrastructure is not so good that it can attract foreign investors. The next problem is the language. People do not understand English, so it was the language barrier for foreign investors.

How do you see Laos and Vietnam in the next 5-10 years?

I do not have any clear idea about Laos, but it should be better in any aspects according to the expansion of Savan-Seno Special Economic Zone. For Vietnam, it should be the next competition of Thailand in the future. The growth rate was 5 to 7% every year. The labor force was very large. The wage was cheaper to Thailand. Moreover, the cost of living was significantly cheap. Recently, Vietnam government signed Free Trade Agreements with EU. Therefore, Vietnam could compete with Thailand in the next 5 to 10 years.

Can you imagine yourself working/living in Laos and/or Vietnam? Why/Why not?

Yes, I can imagine myself living here for some reasons. The first reason is to enjoy spending in Vietnam since the price of products are very cheap and Thai Baht is still strong to Vietnam Dong. The second reason is being an entrepreneur setting a business here. Vietnam economic health is very attractive with high growth, strong and efficient labor force, and government supports. The last reason is to imagine myself working as an investment banker to support the investment project in Vietnam.

Feedback for the trip

I do not know how to say about this trip except thank you for all staffs. It was so good. This trip widened my point of views towards CLMV countries. I can see how hard the staffs worked for us. Moreover, my responsibility improved during the trip. For example, I needed to wake up very early before my roommate to take a shower and pack my bag otherwise we were both late.