

This is my travel blog of my first trip to Laos and Vietnam. I was very excited because it is quite a long trip taking 1 week of traveling. The trip duration is between July 8 to July 14, 2019. I enjoyed and had many new experiences that I would share it starting from my Day 1 until the Day 7, our last day of this trip.

For the first day, we have been through a flight from Bangkok to Nakhon Phanom, and then took a van to Mukdahan to cross the border to Savannakhet.

Savannakhet is a Province of Laos. It sits on the Mekong River, bordering Thailand. We had a very special chance to visit Savan Seno Special Economic Zone (SEZ) zone C - or Savan Park.

I have learned many new things from the lecture. The examples of important topics are Savan Seno SEZ background, organization structure of SEZA, promoted business sectors, the reasons why investing in SEZA is interesting, tax incentives, location, and the role of SAVAN park as one stop service center.

From the lecture, Savan Seno SEZ is the first SEZ ever established in Lao PDR. Savan Seno SEZ is located along the east-west corridor. Savan Seno SEZ is the most successful special economic zone in Lao PDR.

After this lecture, we went visiting Royal Thai Consulate-General, Savannakhet. Royal Thai Consulate can be seen as a representative of royal embassy for directly manage the affairs and accommodate Thai people in that area of the city or province. There are five main positions of Thai representative there which are the director, secretary, accountant, economic officer, and political officer. We also had a chance to take a walk near the Mekong river. And we had Lao dinner in the evening. I and my group members observed that there are some Thai products or Thai brands selling at the groceries there. My favorite part of the day is actually the food (fish dish) The taste of food was good, and similar to Thai (Isan) food.

The following day is Day 2. On this day, we needed to go to Vietnam by crossing the border between Laos and Vietnam which is called Lao Bao border. This border is bigger than in Savannakhet. And I observed there were more logistics there both from local people using motorcycles or cars, and from the industry of firms using logistics-trucks to cross the border as well.

Apart from the above issue, there was a kid asking for our snacks and money at the border. There were sellers trying to sell sim cards to us by speaking in Thai words. So I think they get used to Thai people that cross the border well, meaning that Thai people or tourists have used this route frequently.

When passing the border into Vietnam. We went to the tunnel. And there were some sellers approaching us. The thing I still wonder so far is why those sellers there in Vietnam want to exchange Thai coins to cash. I saw many sellers staying around us and asking to exchange coins to cash. Maybe they think coins are less worthy.

But the most unexpected things for me is the public toilet in the rural area of Vietnam. It was the worst, dirtiest toilet I have ever used in my life. I dare to tell for real.

We went to the beach in the evening. I think the beach we visited is not so beautiful compared to Thailand in term of sea water But the beach there has longer beach with white sand. Moreover, I think the activities and infrastructure along the beach could be developed more in the better way since it is still new for tourists.

Coming to the third day so far, from this day I could see Vietnam in a better way in terms of civilization, technology, city and tourism development. We visited Cp vietnam in Hue. At Hue branch, there are 10 thai officers, and around a thousand of Vietnamese staff.

Here I had an eye-opening experience about how they do business there in Vietnam, mostly about CP Vietnam(CPV) Hue factory, And about the frozen,fresh, and processing shrimp.

From the lecturer's presentation, I got to know about CP hatchery and farm business in Vietnam (focusing in Hue). To elaborate more, the reason why the processing plant is located in Hue is because of short transportation from the shrimp fam at the sea since it only takes around 45 minutes. The hatchery, farm and processing plant are located in the same region. The red cooked shrimp from CPV Hue has very great quality in terms of sweet taste and fresh sea smell. The factory here also export shrimp sushi to Japan which is one of its big market exports. This sounded a little bit surprising for me since I thought Japan used shrimp from domestic sea. Moreover, they have got many food safety certification including Halal. This means they have been developing to serve with the variety of markets (Muslim market).

Besides the presentation, we had a very special chance to look around in the shrimp plant quite closely. I was very excited to see how the staff there work in the plant, managing with shrimp in many processes and stations. This made us see the real working condition in CPV Hue factory plant. And for my big impression after the plant-seeing tour is to enjoy ready-cooked shrimp in various menu from CPV Hue. It was very yummy because I ate tons of them so that I could guarantee the taste and quality.

At lunch, even if I was full from CPV Hue, I really enjoyed that traditional and local Vietnamese meal a lot. Actually I forgot the name of food, but It was memorable since it was like the first completed original Vietnamese food in Vietnam.

In the afternoon, we went to some interesting Hue sightseeings where are Imperial Citadel Hue (like the Beijing forbidden palace), Thien Mu Pagoda, and Tomb of TỰ ĐỨC.

Even though the program of the day was already finished at Hue sightseeings, I and my friends did not want to stop. After the dinner, we decided to explore more of Hue city at night. We went to observe Vietnamese local and ASEAN product at Vincom Plaza where is the biggest department store in Hue. After that, we walked around the city at night, we bought bubble milk tea, and then walked further along the road to visit Trang Tien Bridge (over Huong (Perfume) River) and the walking street there. Though I faced with the motorcycles, horns, and crossing iroad problem at that night, I felt so enjoyable in Hue. I dare to say that my most memorable and favourite city in Vietnam is Hue since I was really happy all day, and I wanted to go back to Hue again.

The fourth day had arrived. This day was a chilling day since we did not have to visit any company or meet with any guest speaker. We just moved from Hue to Da Nang, and had some lunch. We just went to visit Vincom at Da Nang to observe the products and consumer behavior of Vietnamese people there. After checking-in at the hotel, my group went out to the Hàn Market to buy some souvenirs of the group to meet with what Ajarn had told to do as a mission. We walked around for a long time to see what to buy things from them. Some sellers were trying to speak price, and tell the price in Thai Baht to convince us to buy. In my opinion, the market is not that big, sellers there sell similar things like Ao Dai dress, dolls, or magnets with a little bit different in prices. But it actually was full of foreign tourists, especially Korean. I saw many Korean signs, restaurants, and even Korean minimart that sell mostly Korean products. I do not know about other cities of Vietnam, but I am quite sure that Da Nang is one of the top destinations for Korean both tourists and investors. And certainly, went out at night to walk around Han River, to see the light from the city, and the bridges along the river, especially the highlight one is from Dragon bridge. The thing that impressed me most that night is not traveling around the river. But is getting the help to cross the road from a guy who is a municipal official. I normally expect nothing from the people using the roads there, but I really appreciate for that man. And also we walked a bit further to queue up to buy some bubble milk tea again. Here in Da Nang has a lot of stand alone bubble milk tea shop with various famous brand especially Taiwanese brands like Gong Cha. And from my group's research, the trend of bubble milk tea consumer in Vietnam is increasing each year. So you would see plenty of new-open bubble milk tea stores along the road. It is like the very interesting fact for us apart from just had a stroll to have a cup of bubble milk tea in late night.

The next day is the fifth day. We were still in Da Nang. We went to Lady Buddha Da Nang is located at Linh Ung Pagoda on Son Tra Peninsula in Da Nang in the morning. And after that, we went to Big C Da Nang to buy some souvenirs and observe the products again. And in the afternoon, we visited SCG Cement Building Vietnam. I gained many new knowledge about the economy and cement business in Vietnam. And I also understand more from SCG Vietnam about the demand and supply, the business chain and market zoning in Vietnam, plant location, human development, and re-branding for launching plan for the formula. To elaborate more about rebranding, I would give an example of SCG in Vietnam. SCG Vietnam has acquired Song Gianh cement brand and rebrand it from the middle mass with low price and low quality brand to be the high quality with the top right corner brand certified by the good security of SCG cement expert. SCG changed the overall Song Gianh brand to be more modern and professional. This can boost the brand image, and increase the market share from Song Gianh. Another interesting story, apart from cement is about the fake products in Vietnam. The other Thai officer told me and my friends that Vietnamese people have the strong confidence in Thai products. So there are some of imitated brands happened by adding Thai words as logo or signs though most of them are faked and are not sold in Thailand. Even foreign famous brands selling

in the big store in Vietnam might be fake goods as well, he said to us. That fact surprises me a lot. We travelled further to Hoi An ancient town in the evening.

From my point of view, Hoi An is a small, pretty, and chilling town which is very attractive for tourists who love unique culture combining with local and international food and nightlife. The walking street of Hoi An at night is kind of romantic and fantastic with the beautiful lights from Vietnamese lanterns and mouth-watering food along the street. Actually Hoi An is not far from Da Nang (around 30minutes), but you can see the different styles between big city of Da Nang and Hoi An; the small world heritage town.

On the sixth day, we went to Bana Hills which is the biggest theme park in Danang. All of us spent almost the whole day there. I enjoyed the moment while sitting in the cable car a lot. It is so high with the hills view. And on the top, it is the theme park in castle and European village pattern. There were a lot of tourists, especially local Vietnamese people. I and my friends played a couple of amusement park ride. We think that they have too small amount of amusement park ride. They just offer beautiful spots for photo shooting. They might be beautiful for local people there. But for me, it is the same as other (Europe) stimulating places. It is quite boring. And the tourists there were too crowded. For another point of over crowd, I saw some problems from the bad management that is the queue management to get into cable car is quite terrible. They just let people gathering in many rows separately, and huddled to rush, and scramble into a cable car. So I think this can affect how tourists feel, and of course affect the image of management at Bana Hills about their too much number of incoming tourists per day has an inverse relationship with the quality of management. However, it is just my own opinion.

Finally, the last day of the long trip has arrived. On this day we would depart from Danang back to Bangkok. After lunch, we went to Cham Sculpture Museum. I saw many ancient sculpture but did not know about its details and story background since there was not any English audio or paper explanation. Also there was no air condition inside the museum, so it is even hotter from the normal weather condition. I think this problem make this museum less useful and less attractive, especially for foreigners.

In the afternoon, after visiting a souvenir shop, we went straight to Da Nang airport to travel back to Bangkok. The airport is pretty small with just a few shops and restaurants. I think the restaurant there took advantage of consumers since they sold food only the biggest size, and the price is much higher than at Don Mueng airport in Bangkok. That;s why at Da Nang airport is not attractive for spending money, just in my opinion. And of course we needed to say GoodBye to Da Nang.

- What surprises/impresses you most during the trip?

The thing that surprises me most during the trip is motorcycles and crossing the road in Vietnam. Before the trip, I could not imagine when Ajarn said just walk straight forward to cross the roads in Vietnam. But when I experienced with myself, I understand it even though I

still was not used to it so far. There a lot of motorcycles in every corner of the road, just press the horn almost every 2 second. Even if Vietnamese people are used to living in that way, I think it is extremely dangerous for pedestrians, especially in the big city.

- How do you see East-West economic route (R9-from Mukdahan to Laos to Danang) as connectivity in the region? (more potential? problems? or any issues? border crossing?)

I think there is potential to develop more of economic activity in this route since it is connected with many countries, and can be linked to the logistics of other countries near this route. For the problems, I think there might be from the different regulations and political stability of each country along the route. But as the development, or FDI in this region keep increasing, we can compromise for the best solutions.

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

I think both countries will be more developed in terms of economy, technology, and tourism. And the FDI would increase, especially from China. At the present, Korea might be the biggest FDI in Vietnam, but I believe that China would see, and seek for the opportunity in Vietnam, apart from Laos. I also thinks that business in Vietnam would increase rapidly due to high income and purchasing power of high population growth in Vietnam. Moreover, I think English language for Vietnamese could be improved. I also hope that the education in Laos would be developed more.

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

Yess, I can. I can imagine myself working in Vietnam in expanding my future business. I want to do the business about hospitality. And I choose Vietnam because Vietnam has enough potential to develop the infrastructure in the tourism sector. Vietnam still has natural resource like beach in Da Nang and also entertainment area in the big city. So I see and prefer the opportunity for the business in Vietnam.

- Feedback for the trip

I think trip trip is very useful for us. It was like an eye-opening experience for my life time since it was my first time visiting Laos and Vietnam. It was not just only field trip, it gave me a lot of knowledge from both lectures, sightseeing, and travelling by ourselves. I get to know more of the history of Vietnam and its past wars from trip, which I am never interested in it before. I dared to try more local food even if I could not eat everything because I do not eat pork. This issue caused me a little bit problem, but Thanks to ajarn for putting effort and taking care of me about food very well. I get becoming wisely from seeing with my own eyes how Lao and Vietnamese culture and ways of life are. I saw the rapid development in both countries, and can compare some parts to Thailand. And beyond anything, I feel that I love Thailand more, I missed the warmth of my home country during the trip. I want to see our country develop together with the good and kind-hearted o Thai people. Lastly, I would like to say thank you to all ajarns, staff, that creating this trip to be such a memorable trip of this summer. I appreciate a lot.