

## Nha Trang, Vietnam – Day 30 Oct. 27:

The day started for us when we went out on deck to see the pilot boat for Nha Trang harbor approaching. There were a lot of people on the boat so it probably contained Vietnam immigration officials as well as the pilot for the harbor. We have noticed in



Russia and China the attention to the administration of passports and immigration issues has been much more intense and time consuming than in prior cruises through these waters. The same is probably true for Vietnam.

The location of Nha Trang on the world map is shown on the left.

There had been predicted rain but at this early hour it looked promising for a nice day to tour Nha Trang. The Amsterdam docked and we got a view of Nha Trang harbor area as shown in the photo below.



Pauline had organized a tour of the Nha Trang area and we as well as about 10 other Cruise Critic followers had signed up with her. We met in the Atrium on Deck 3 and Pauline led us off the ship as soon as the immigration officials had finished their routine. Instead of passports we carried “Landing Cards” that identified us and met the requirements of Vietnam Immigration people. We took the block long hike along the pier. Along the way we got a view of a barge-like vessel that was undergoing some hull repair by simply rolling it over to expose the work area. This was a big come-down from the dry dock we

saw on the approach to Shanghai on Day 22 but it seemed to be working, as shown on the right. Some workers were submerged in the water near the blue tarp. As



testament to the efficiency of these hearty souls the boat appeared to be repaired and floating normally when we returned later in the day, as shown on the left.

We met up with our tour leader whose name was “Nick”. We boarded Nick’s van and headed out for our day’s tour of the Nha Trang area. The tour was to consist of visits to the following sites: an embroidery factory, a Pagoda orphanage, rice paper food mill, conical hat factory, a Vietnamese home for a fruit snack, lunch at a lakeside restaurant and a town market. In the process of traveling to the various sites we would pass through a wide variety of Vietnamese farming areas and village streets. The tour had cost only \$50USD per person and at the end we were very happy with what Pauline had organized. We would recommend the tour operator to others: Global Travel Co. Ltd.; Mr. Dung, tour operator, email [nhatrangrivertour@yahoo.com](mailto:nhatrangrivertour@yahoo.com) and URL [www.nhatrangrivertour.com](http://www.nhatrangrivertour.com) .



Our first stop was the embroidery factory known as XQNHA TRANG Arts and Crafts Centre ([www.xqhandembroidery.com](http://www.xqhandembroidery.com)) . We had been to this center in 2007 and were attempting to purchase one of their art pieces when our credit card malfunctioned and we walked away empty handed. This time we were armed with multiple credit cards in case we saw something we liked. There was a lot to like here as the beautifully dressed ladies in the shop showed us around.



The picture shown on the right was not created with traditional paints but was painstakingly built up by laying individual threads side by side until the picture emerged as embroidery on cloth.

The tour took us through a room where women were sitting side by side working on large rolled up cloth pieces much like an old fashioned quilting party. Only this was no party for these hard working and skilled ladies.



They were in the process of creating a large tapestry portraying a forest of bamboo stems.



A more detailed view of the work is shown on the left.

It was not possible with our camera to show the beauty of the work displayed in the showroom. However, this embroidery picture on the right is an attempt. The picture shows exotic fish swimming and it can be viewed with equal pleasure from both sides of the framed piece. The gauze-like cloth was transparent and the effect was beautiful. One admiring person in our group who knew embroidery was mystified by the fact that no thread knots were visible.



Needless to say, we were able to find an embroidered picture to our liking and made a purchase on the spot. What we got was an embroidery picture showing a beautiful fall forest scene reminiscent of what we see in the fall around our home in East Tennessee. We took a picture of the framed picture as shown below.



Barbara proudly clutching her new treasure can be seen with a sales lady on the right.



From the embroidery center we drove about 15 minutes to the Pagoda

Orphanage. Before we went in, Nick explained how the charitable orphanage operated and how the children may have been orphaned by the death of parents or in some cases



abandoned at the Pagoda because the parents or single mother simply couldn't afford to support the child.





We filed into a room with colorful mats on the floor and 15 or so small children who scampered around their teacher. After assurances from their teacher they approached us like they are doing with Pauline in this photo on the left. It had been suggested that we bring little gifts for the children so many people gave them candy which they gladly accepted. Later we learned that our Cruise Critic friend,

(BARBTHEHAPPYWANDERER) in another tour group today gave a large donation of crayons and school supplies. Teachers coping with the kid's sugar highs after we left probably appreciated that more practical gift.

The children were very friendly and unafraid of us. At one point grandpa ("Pops") Orlin couldn't contain himself any longer and hoisted one of the little guys up for a view from up on high. This turned out to be a popular sport for some of the others but luckily it was time to leave before Pops got worn out. It's been a few years since our grandkids were that size.



From the group of small preschool children we went across a courtyard to a row of class rooms where older children were being schooled. The shoes of the kids could be seen lined up on the steps to the building. The windows were wide open so we could look in.



Inside the rooms some of the kids were singing songs to us or teachers were waiting patiently for the tourists to leave.







We departed the Pagoda after Nick introduced our group to the person in charge of the operation who is shown on the right. Note the under garment with the traditional Buddhist yellow color.





We left the Pagoda Orphanage and drove through the countryside on dirt roads to our next stop at the huge White Buddha. Nick didn't seem to notice the detracting heavy duty electric power lines between us and the Buddha so we took a picture and moved on. Nick said that a large Pagoda building was behind the White Buddha and they wanted to show their wealth by building the big White Buddha out here in the countryside. A short while later after visiting the rice paper factory we stopped to get a picture of some water buffalo and caught the white Buddha in the distance as shown below. It was really huge.



The next stop on the tour was at a factory that produced a material used to make a spaghetti-like food out of rice. Nick, the guide, called it rice paper. It was called rice paper because at one stage in the process the rice food is in the form of a thin (1/8 inch or 2mm) thick translucent and flexible sheet that locals compared with paper but to us seemed more like a plastic.

Our first view of the “rice paper” was in the alleys and fields around the factory. There we saw woven racks of reeds or bamboo holding the rice paper that was put out to dry in the sun, as shown below.



Inside the factory we were greeted by a scene of hurried activity as workers brought in empty woven racks and placed them under the outlet of the machine which was spewing rice paper out at a rapid pace. One was reminded of an old Charlie Chaplin or Lucille Ball movie where an assembly line output overwhelmed the workers. However, in this case the worker, shown on the right, kept the woven racks coming and the rice paper never got ahead of her.



The rice paper comes in two colors, yellow and white. The yellow color comes from an artificial dye that is added to produce a color preferred by some Buddhists. The white colored rice paper is made for people who don't want artificial colors or prefer not to be associated with Buddhism. Apparently there is no difference in flavor or consistency.



The most dramatic part of the operation was at the head end where a barrel containing the mixture of rice paste and water poured its contents onto a moving conveyor belt that passed through a furnace. Workers kept the furnace fueled with scrap wood from a nearby sawmill. The conveyor belt carried the liquid rice paste through the furnace where it was quickly cured and dried sufficiently to become a solid but flexible sheet of edible rice food. It then passed on to the outlet where it was dropped on to woven reed racks for the final drying process. The head end of the process was awesome with features that



bring up images of Dante's Inferno, as shown on the left. In this picture the worker on the left is tending to the barrel of liquid rice solution that is pouring its contents on to a conveyor belt passing over the fire. The intense heat quickly cures and

sufficiently dries the rice solution so that it has the consistency of wet noodles. The continuous ribbon of material then falls off the conveyor belt onto a waiting woven rack as it exits the furnace.

The so-called rice paper product is dried out in the open air of the streets and fields around the plant (no extra charge for the road dust and debris that may be deposited during this process). The picture on the right shows a worker processing the rice paper into the final noodle-like product that will be found on the store shelves.



Our next adventure on the tour was a visit to a home where some ladies made traditional Chinese style conical hats out of reeds. The ladies did not speak English and Nick provided all the translation as we observed and learned about that product.

He said that most people nowadays buy cloth hats and the traditional conical hat is worn primarily by poor people who can't afford cloth hats. However, there is enough of a market to keep these ladies making hats.

In the picture on the right one lady has made the basic conical structure out of sticks and is adding strength to the assembly by threading a flexible reed into notches cut into the sticks.







Other ladies in the assembly line shown on the left add reed leaves that provide the sun and rain protection to the wearer.

Nick said that each lady could make about 2 hats per day. Several of the people in our group, including Barbara, bought hats for the \$1.50 USD selling price. The symbiotic relationship between the tour guide and the people in the places we visited was evident throughout the day.



Before we left, Mike and Pauline had some fun with a little puppy that was nibbling on Pauline's finger.



We left the hat factory and headed to our next stop for lunch. Before we got there we passed some water buffalo grazing in field, as shown on the right. Nick said that with the improved economy many farmers are shifting to machines to work their fields and water buffalo are becoming rarer.





We had lunch at a countryside restaurant where the dining room was built out over a lake with tropical foliage in abundance.



We had a nice lunch consisting of several courses of spring rolls, soup, rice and rice noodles. The spring rolls were a real favorite and the cold beer was excellent at only \$1 USD extra per bottle. What looked like some sort of a fishing pier was built out over the lake next to the dining area.



After lunch we went to a factory where mats were made from reeds. Mats are popular in Vietnam where people use them primarily on the floors. Nick said they are great for sleeping on because they were cool in summer and helped to keep you warm in the cooler winter months.



At the mat production factory we met some ladies who demonstrated how the mats are woven one strand at a time from reeds that have been dyed different colors.

The mats came in various sizes from small dinner place mats to large floor mats like those shown below.

We bought 6 of the dinner mats for \$2 USD each.





After seeing the mat factory Nick took us to a town market that he called The Dam Market. It was about half filled with fruit and vegetable vendors and the other half was dedicated to clothes, watches, jewelry, and the usual odds and ends of open air tourist markets. The most remarkable thing we saw was a collection of spiny blow fish arranged in a hanging decoration, as shown on the right.



After the market visit we headed back towards the Amsterdam. However, we first stopped along the way so Nick could show us the famous beaches of Nha Trang. People from all over Southeast Asia are now coming to Nha Trang to vacation and just hang around the beautiful beaches.



The view on the left shows the beach in front of the Nha Trang Sheraton Hotel.

We were dropped off at the Nha Trang harbor where the Amsterdam was docked. Barbara spied the sign for the port area and instinctively grabbed her library card for a quick picture documenting the visit of that wandering little piece of yellow plastic.



We then had to retrace our steps down the long pier that was now lined with souvenir vendors displaying their wares.

The Amsterdam got underway about 4:30pm. We enjoyed savoring the delicious

balmy tropical air as we walked the deck and sailed out of Nha Trang harbor.

We have a day at sea tomorrow as we make our way to Singapore, the next port of call.