

The Mekong in the Morning

-Caroline Hooper

Asia. When you hear that word what do you think of? Chinese food? The Great Wall of China? The Terracotta Warriors? That's what I thought of too before I traveled there. This summer I had the unbelievable opportunity to travel around Asia with my best friend Andrew. Although I miss the countries we visited, including Singapore, Vietnam, and China, the culture and memories will always stay with me. It was an amazing trip packed with day tours, shopping, dining and all things 'touristy'. It was the trip of a lifetime to say the least. We were in Asia for 26 days. The most memorable experience was the day we paddled down the Mekong Delta in Vietnam. We stayed in Ho Chi Minh city, which is the largest city in Vietnam. On a beautiful day in mid-July we took a two hour bus ride with our tour group to the Mekong Delta. The long ride was well worth it given the experience that awaited us...

We walked through a small market and onto the dock; roughly twenty people, including Andrew, his mom, and myself climbed into the river boat and headed out for a day on the Delta. We traveled in a covered boat with loud motors. The day was warm and sunny, which enriched the experience as the hot sun beat upon our backs. I was grateful that the boat travelled slowly; my love of photography came to life as I snapped picture after picture, thoroughly enjoying the view along the river. The water was an earthy brown color that seemed to tell the history of the many boats that had passed before us. We crossed the river and unloaded from the boat. From there we perused local stores, browsing at a small market. We sampled tea with fresh honey and ginger cubes, and banana crisps. We around an area surrounded by dragon fruit plants. We passed through another market and ventured down to a canal connecting to the Delta. At the canal, we stepped into hollowed boats docked at the shore. There were hundreds of boats going in both directions, which reminded me of rush hour traffic on the highway, except without all the honking! The only sounds to be heard were the occasional wooden boats bumping against one another, the paddles dipping into the water, and the murmur of the locals and tourists chatting quietly. The river was just wide enough for two boats to pass each other, and the banks were covered with lush green trees. The natives on the river were wearing the straw hats shaped like wide cones to protect from the glaring sun.

After twenty minutes of paddling we saw our boat waiting in the Delta. We boarded the boat which would take us back to our starting point. We found our bus and headed back to Ho Chi Minh City. Later that night, we ate at a local restaurant, delighting in an entire fish, noodles and a vegetable soup. I learned to love most Asian food and became a master at using chopsticks. Going to Asia this summer was a once in a lifetime opportunity and I am forever grateful for it. That one day in Vietnam was an experience I will never forget, and one that I will remember for the rest of my life.