



# Vietnam Today

Newsletter of the Australia Vietnam Friendship Society

No. 3 June - July 2012

## Travels and prospects for friendship

Australians are travelling in record numbers and members of the Australia Vietnam Friendship Society are no exception. The relatively high exchange rate of the Australian dollar and more affordable flights to South East Asian destinations have lessened the distance between Australia and Vietnam for many. In this issue of our newsletter we have travel notes from Society President Paul Noack and Treasurer Ron Hall. We are adding to our knowledge of Vietnam and the region all the time. We have also been helped by the explosive growth in the use of electronic communications in Australia and Vietnam.

Our Vietnamese student friends from VISA are back and forth from their homeland and maintain a hectic program of activities in Adelaide. We saw them again feeding hungry marchers at the conclusion of this year's May Day march at the Torrens Parade Grounds. Their traditional costume and cuisine really added to the event.

We are still working to unfold the ambitious program devised at the meeting of the AVFS National Executive held in Adelaide at the end of March. There is a chance we will be visited by a delegation from our Vietnam Australia Friendship Society counterparts in August during a national tour. We are really looking forward to that. It will be quite an honour.



VISA students feeding the workers on May Day 2012



AVFS President paul Noack in Cambodia recently

## 2012 Vietnam Laos Friendship Year

I recently travelled to Laos. This is a small country with a strong history of struggle, and is now developing a socialist alternative.

Their struggle for independence, together with the struggle of the Vietnamese people, has led to a strong bond between the Vietnamese and Laotian people.

Vietnam wants to foster cooperation with Laos in various fields, including national security and defence, education and training, trade, and infrastructure, said State President Truong Tan Sang.

Mr Sang made the statement while receiving Lao Minister and Chairman of the Presidential Office, Phongsavat Boupva, in Hanoi on March 30.

The State President highlighted Mr Phongsavat's ongoing visit to Vietnam, saying that it would help strengthen the traditional friendship, special solidarity and comprehensive cooperation between the two countries. The visit is of great significance as Vietnam and Laos are celebrating the 50th anniversary of their diplomatic ties and the 35th anniversary of the signing of the Vietnam-Laos Friendship and Cooperation Treaty, he added.

President Sang highly valued the effective cooperation between Presidential Offices of both countries and called for a closer relationship for mutual benefit. Two-way trade between Vietnam and Laos has increased steadily, reaching US\$700 million in 2011. The two countries are striving to raise the figure to US\$1 billion this year and US\$2 billion by 2015, he said.

Mr Phongsavat affirmed that President Sang's official visit to Laos early this year opened up a new chapter in bilateral relations and marked the 2012 Vietnam-Laos Friendship Year.

The same day, the Lao guest was received by his Vietnamese counterpart Dao Viet Trung, who also witnessed the signing ceremony of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on the two Presidential Offices' cooperation, in presence of Mr Sang and Mr Phongsavat.



*Bev and Ron Hall meeting with representatives from the Vietnam Australia Friendship Society. Mr My, Professor Nhuong, Dr Hong and Ms Thuy, enjoying some excellent Vietnamese cuisine.*

### **Meeting with Vietnam Australia Friendship Society**

During their family visit to Vietnam, Bev and Ron Hall, committee members of the Australia Vietnam Friendship Society took the opportunity meet with the Vietnamese counterparts. Among the topics discussed were the relationship our society has with students from Vietnam studying in Australia. The Australian

Government's generous offering of scholarships to Vietnamese students was warmly acknowledged and the increasing number private students noted. Reference was made to VISA (Vietnam International Students Association) and the close relationship that AVFS had been able to maintain with VISA. Visiting Australian families and practising spoken English were raised as some of the expressed wishes of the Vietnamese students in Australia.

Trade was raised another area for potential development whereby our society could make our membership aware of products from Vietnam that are available in Australia. Although business activity is more the province of chambers of commerce, our society could promote Vietnamese goods through our membership, including some supportive unions. Tourism, likewise, was considered particularly as Ha Long Bay has become recognised as one of the outstanding tourist sites not just in Southeast Asia but in the whole of Asia as well. The possibility of an Australian by a Vietnamese visit during 2012 was also raised.

### **Vietnam Revisited – A family journey...**

*By Ron Hall*

Our son was adopted from Vietnam nearly forty years ago and when my wife was invited to return to Hanoi by an early childhood education research institute as a consultant, it provided a great opportunity for a family visit. Some educators and parents in Viet Nam desire programmes to give Vietnamese children the best early start possible. My wife had carried out research there for her doctorate fourteen years previously along with providing curriculum and methodology support. Our younger son and his three children joined us, making a contingent of six en route to Vietnam.

Hanoi had changed greatly since we were last there together, teaching and carrying out research. Motorcycles had virtually replaced bicycles as the preferred mode of transport along with a great increase in motor vehicles, a large proportion of which are taxis including 8 seaters! The same traffic pattern can be seen in Ho Chi Minh City where wider streets mean much less traffic congestion. Luckily, we did have a chance to see any changes in the countryside on trip to Lang Son near the border with China and visit some Buddhist temples.

It was evident that there had been a considerable increase in living standard. Many new houses had been built during a recent housing boom which had been followed, unfortunately for some, by a sudden down-



turn coinciding with the global economic crisis. High-rise apartment blocks surround Hanoi, some appearing more like five star hotels.

In fact, our stay in Hanoi was spent on the fifteenth floor of a more modest apartment tower, giving us splendid views of Hanoi's suburbs and popular West Lake. Our son's visit brought back to him many memories although we were unable to find the orphanage from which he was brought to Australia. In addition, it was valuable for his children to discover something their heritage. They got to meet and play with a number of children, some of whom learnt English at school.

This was of some significance as my wife was there to advise on the methodology of commencing the teaching of languages, and not only English, in early childhood. Because of Vietnam's fifty-four minority groups who speak Hmong, Thai, Chinese and a host of other languages, there is a need to learn Vietnamese as a second language. So this methodology also becomes very relevant in more rural and remote areas where the majority of these cultural groups live.

Through our contact with the Vietnam Friendship Societies we learnt that Vietnam is planning to establish their own United Nation Association and that Professor Nhung, chairperson of this group, plans to visit Australia soon. We also learnt that George Burchett, of son of Wilfred Burchett, was living in Hanoi. He had just moved there from Australia with his wife Inez to make a documentary about his famous father, who apart from many other achievements, was the first Western journalist to visit Hiroshima after the dropping of

the atomic bomb in 1945, and who also visited Ho Chi Minh during the Vietnam War (or American War for the Vietnamese people) to report from the other side. Both George and Inez are artists and quite coincidentally studied at the same art academy in Sofia, Bulgaria, as our eldest had done some ten years later. (It is her works depicting themes of peace and war that are on display in our UNAA office). George seemed as surprised as we were about the things we had in common. I explained that I had read Wilfred's autobiography *At The Barricades* some years ago. To our great pleasure George presented us with his book, a photographic study he had compiled from his father's collection.



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