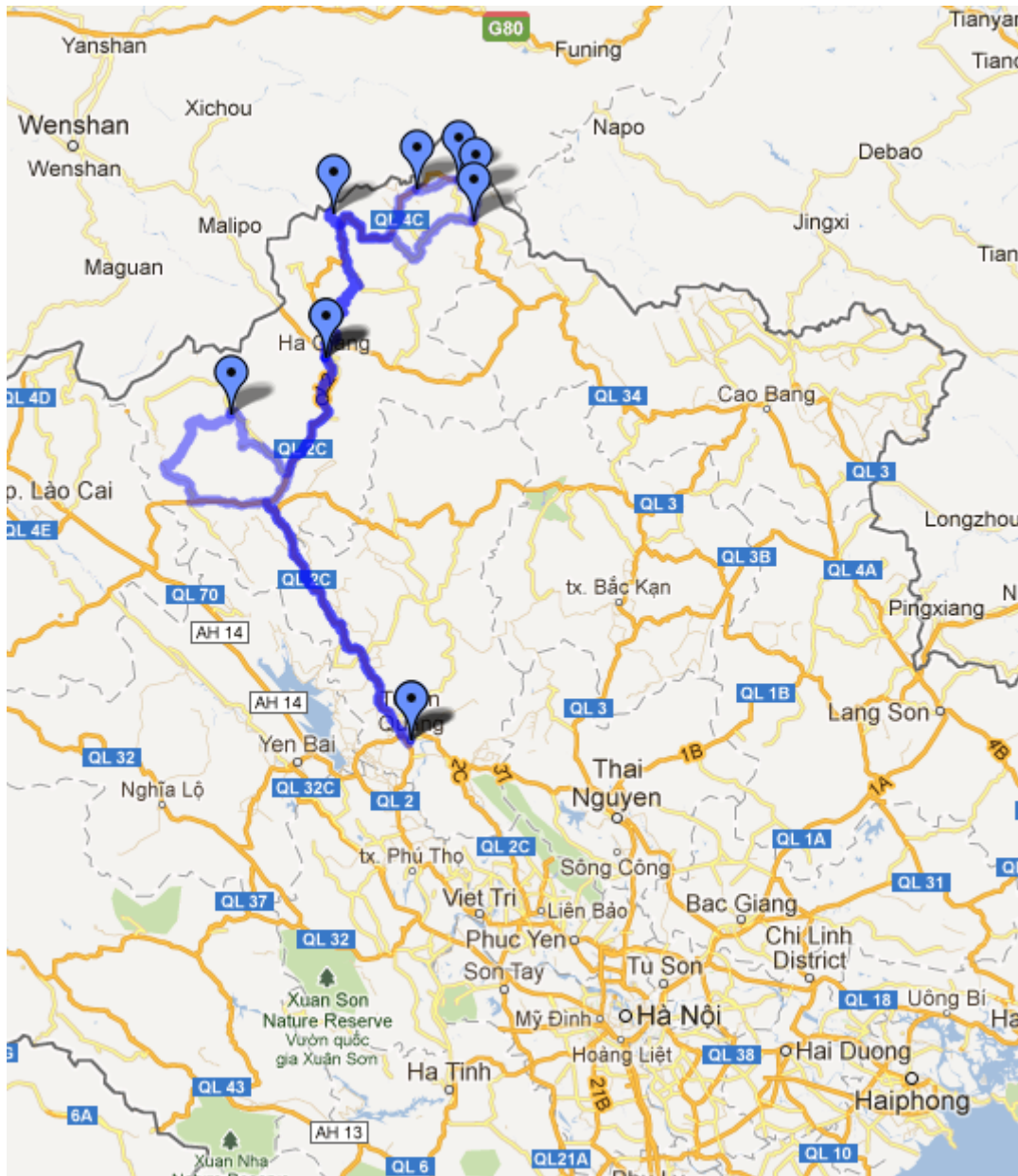


# Ha Giang Hill Tribes & Mountains Motorbike Tour Vietnam

Date: 8<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> May 2012

Cast: John & Simon Kennedy, Loi Odore and Ted Ashton.

The Route:



NB: Loi and John had an *interesting* trip to Hanoi, involving as it did three overnight stops: these were in Darwin (Bayan View YWCA), Singapore (Ambassador Transit Hotel) and Ho Chi Minh City!

# Ha Giang Hill Tribes & Mountains Motorbike Tour Vietnam

**8th May 2012 – Ho Chi Minh City (aka Saigon)**



We arrived at different times in HCMC: Ted a couple of days earlier, Loi and John in the morning and Simon in the afternoon. We all met up at the Kim Yen Hotel.

Loi and John took the opportunity to take a tour of the Cu Chi Tunnels (about 1.5 hours out of town), which were where the Vietcong dug-in during the Vietnam War. These tunnels had proven to be just about impregnable



In the evening we went to a local restaurant (where John managed to cut his big toe badly on a broken tile ☹) - the food was delicious, plentiful and cheap.



**9th May 2012 - Ha Noi**

We arrived at Hanoi airport as a team, to be greeted by our wonderful guide, Nhing, for our week on motorbikes. Nhing took us to the Hanoi Club Hotel, which was our base for the tour. This is a lovely 4 star hotel in a beautiful location on the banks of a lake.



The traffic is really crazy in Hanoi!

In the evening we gathered together with Nhing for a welcome dinner and pre-trip briefing.





# Ha Giang Hill Tribes & Mountains Motorbike Tour Vietnam

10<sup>th</sup> May 2012 - Ha Noi - Ha Giang - 310km



An early morning departure, taking the bus with the bikes on a truck for the first 150km.

At Tuyen Quang we jumped on our bikes for the final 160km ride to Ha Giang.



This is one of the poorest and least populated provinces of



Vietnam and has extremely rugged but scenic mountainous topography. 90% of the population is from 22 ethnic minorities, including 2 of the rarest ethnic groups with a population of less than 400 each.

We stayed overnight at the Huy Hoan Hotel - strange place with a drive-through Reception! Amazing beds as well - i.e. solid wood with only a VERY thin mattress on top - not much sleep for John this night!



In the evening we were taken by our guide for a very different massage followed by our evening meal.

We were already finding a same-ness about the food after leaving the large cities: basically chicken (stringy and tough), beef (ok), pork (lots of gristle and bone) and green *stuff* for every meal.

# Ha Giang Hill Tribes & Mountains Motorbike Tour Vietnam

## 11<sup>th</sup> May 2012 - Ha Giang - Dong Van - 150km



Travel to Dong Van via Sa Phin, the site of the former residence of the Hmong kings of Ha Giang province., with a visit to their Palace.

This scenic journey winds its way through harsh mountain landscape (including Hell Gate Pass), where hardy minority families diligently farm the unyielding land, and then down to the lushly contrasting valleys with cool rivers and sweet smelling crops.

The Hmong Palace was interesting, being constructed primarily of teak, but not very old (early 20<sup>th</sup> Century) and the kingdom seemed to be all about the drug trade!



Overnight in the ancient town of Dong Van (at the Cao Nguyen Hotel - aka Rocky Plateau Hotel), famous for its historic architecture and preservation of age-old customs and habits, intangible cultural values of the ethnic minority groups.



Not much to do in this town, watched a bit of a local football match, wandered around. However, after dinner, we found a coffee shop that was happy to sell us beer for as long into the evening as we liked - Simon and John were the stayers ☺



## 12<sup>th</sup> May 2012 - Dong Van - Ha Giang - 150km

A truly spectacular journey through imposing rocky mountain scenery where we received the friendly greetings from the ethnic children wherever we stopped on the ride through Meo Vac and Lung Phin.





# Ha Giang Hill Tribes & Mountains Motorbike Tour Vietnam



The Ma Pi Leng pass is devastatingly stunning and regarded as the most beautiful pass in Vietnam. The road runs on the sides of black limestone mountains, which are typical features of Dong Van Plateau.

There are children everywhere and so, so, friendly - some have to walk two hours to get to school (complete with Barbie backpacks ☺)



## 13<sup>th</sup> May 2012 - Ha Giang - Hoang Su Phi - 105km



An easy ride through terraced rice paddies to the remote resort of Pan Hou where we were able to relax and enjoy a soothing massage.

Simon found this a very hot ride, and needed to freshen up under a waterfall at a mountain stream.



The ride was quite high-up, and twisty with an interesting rope & wood bridge to cross at the entrance to the resort.

This oasis of tranquillity recharged our batteries and give us a well-earned rest ☺



The food was very good here (despite Nhing advising us the food was "so-so!"), with a very tasty Masaman Curry.

# Ha Giang Hill Tribes & Mountains Motorbike Tour Vietnam

## 14<sup>th</sup> May 2012 - Hoang Su Phi - Ha Noi - 320km

We only had a 50km ride out of the Hoang Su Phi then back on the bus at Tuyen Quang for the return journey to Hanoi, back to the hustle and bustle of the big city. Overnight at the Hanoi Club Hotel was again most enjoyable.

After another interesting massage, we were taken out for our final meal (of the motorbike part of trip) by Nhung in Hanoi. We had requested (?) to try dog: We were taken to a district the specialised in dog, and whilst we thought we'd be having a sample, we did in fact have a dog banquet with sausages, chops, steak and I don't know what else. Let's just say that once will be enough!



## 15<sup>th</sup> May 2012 - Ha Long Bay

We had an early pick-up at the hotel by our old driver Nhoong for the 3 and half hour drive to Ha Long bay. This was a mostly boring, and certainly uncomfortable ride.



We were welcomed aboard the, 34 cabin, Halong Jasmine and set sail through the bay while lunch was served. Passage into the magical bay, where thousands of sculpted limestone islands rise from the waves like dragons' teeth.

After lunch, Loi & Simon took a short trek to a nearby summit

for a panoramic view of the bay dotted with golden sails, whilst Ted and John more sensibly watched the world go by from the comfort of a deck chair on the beach.



Later afternoon we visited an interesting fishing village, with all the "houses" floating.

Back on board and time for John and Loi to enjoy another (!) massage before watching sunset and followed by the restaurant for a lavish dinner and drinks before retiring for the night.

# Ha Giang Hill Tribes & Mountains Motorbike Tour Vietnam

## 16<sup>th</sup> May 2012 – Ha Long Bay – Ha Noi



Loi and John greeted the day with a morning Tai Chi exercise with an opportunity to view the sunrise over the bay.

After light refreshments we visited some limestone grottos followed by back to the boat for brunch and a final glimpse of the Halong Bay while cruising to the dock in the city of Halong around Noon.

Nhoong had slept overnight in Halong City and was ready to take us "home" to the Hanoi Club.

Our final night in Hanoi, we went to the up-market H4 restaurant to try some local delicacies: crispy crickets, crocodile ribs, frogs legs, pigeon, and coconut prawns 😊.

Followed by, yes again, another massage.

And so to bed .....



## DAY 9 – 17 May 2012 – Departure day

After overnight at the Hanoi Club, we were picked up late at our hotel (which did nothing for John's blood pressure!) for the transfer to airport for the flights home.