



PACIFIC AND ASIAN AFFAIRS COUNCIL 2011 SUMMER STUDY TOUR TO VIETNAM FINAL REPORT TO THE FREEMAN FOUNDATION

OUTCOME SUMMARY

The fifteen students selected for PAAC's 2011 Summer Study Tour learned valuable lessons about how people around the world are interconnected. Their first taste of being affected by world events happened in the aftermath of the March 2011 earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster in Japan. Interviews for the Summer Study Tour were held shortly after, when applicants were informed that the trip may be rerouted from Japan due to these unforeseen events. Students who were later accepted into the program were asked to be flexible and change their expectations of the trip: they would be traveling to Vietnam rather than Japan.

One student expressed the group's sentiment: "Originally I had wanted to go to Japan. I didn't really have any reason to want to go to Vietnam. But (after orientation), I think I would rather go to Vietnam... Since I was expecting to go to Japan, it's a totally unexpected experience, almost designed to test my acceptance of trying a new thing that is totally out of the blue."



Participants at the historic Japanese Bridge in Hoi An

Once in Vietnam, students experienced further connections: to the country of Vietnam through our shared history, and to the people of Vietnam, with whom they shared more in common than they had imagined. Through home stays and traveling to Sapa with students from Hanoi, donating school supplies and painting a friendship mural for elementary school students in Hoi An, and attending classes and staying overnight at a high school in Ho Chi Minh City, students built relationships that will forever tie them to Vietnam. Their impressions of Vietnamese people: friendly, hard-working, resilient, forgiving, and looking towards a bright future, will be passed on as they share

what they experienced with family, friends, and the community.

Judging from the students' direct feedback and reflections in their journals, it is clear that each one gained an appreciation and respect for Vietnam, and made many personal discoveries. This experience will influence their world view and lives in the years to come. Their new friendships, interest in Vietnamese language and culture, and newfound love for travel have opened students' eyes to overseas opportunities in their futures; their increased confidence empowers them to pursue these options. Many of the participants plan to return to Vietnam and participate in other travel and study abroad opportunities as soon as possible.

ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS

Students were required to select a topic about Vietnam and prepare a 20-minute presentation. Presentations were done during orientation week, and added to the body of knowledge students received before embarking on the trip. Projects were peer-evaluated and graded by the chaperones.

Before attending orientation, students were sent an 82-page Student Reader to introduce them to Vietnam and some of the places on our itinerary. Articles were selected from journals, books, and the Internet, and covered a wide range of topics including culture, society, APEC, business, and history. A copy of the Student Reader is enclosed.

We selected Vietnam, Now by David Lamb as required reading to be completed by the end of the trip. This book offers a perspective on Vietnam that spans 30 years of war and peace. The personal stories told to Lamb give an intimate look into the lives of ordinary citizens, and his observations set the stage for our students to draw their own conclusions about this country. Students referred to this book continually as they traveled and recorded impressions and experiences in their journals.

Students were required to keep a daily journal of at least 400 words throughout the trip. They were asked to use their journal to keep a record of trip events and to reflect on their experiences.

Orientation Week

A week-long orientation was held from June 7 - 11 to prepare the students for travel to Vietnam. The week began with a day of team building activities at Kualoa Ranch. Students worked together on problem-solving activities and played a cultural awareness game.

Orientation sessions throughout the week focused on Vietnamese history, language, and society, as well as practical considerations for traveling and our itinerary. Students learned about Vietnam's fascinating history, unique culture, and contemporary challenges. Speakers from the University of Hawaii and the Vietnamese Student Association shared their expertise with the group. Speakers' profiles and the orientation schedule are included in this report. Student presentations were another major component of orientation week. Topics included folklore, education, art, and religion.



Students have to communicate and work as a team to move forward.



Students break the ice by learning "little-known facts" about each other.

"At first I thought it was just a fun game, but... when we were discussing the game I found out it was about cultures... The game showed me that when you are so used to your culture, it is hard to be a part of another culture because you think your culture is right... It taught me that I should not expect that they would do the same things I would and that their traditions are different. I should just go with the flow."

“When I imagine Vietnam, I no longer think of a torn down and poor country... Now, I think of a country that has overcome adversity and that humbly built its way back up. The history of Vietnam is not only complex, but merciless as well; and yet, all that I’ve read and heard about Vietnam mentioned the kindness of the people and their forgiving nature, especially towards Americans.”

“When I think of Vietnam now... I think of the market packed streets in the city, or the dragon-like spine of Halong Bay, or the rice fields... It’s pretty interesting how my view of Vietnam has changed over the past few days. When I think of how the people are like, I think of... a trampoline. The people as a whole are always getting pressed back, by China, then China again, then France, then the U.S. But they’ve always bounced back to secure their freedom.”



Partners build trust while spotters keep them safe.

THE PAAC SUMMER STUDY TOUR TO VIETNAM

The PAAC Summer Study Tour itinerary was designed to give the students an overview of Vietnam and allow them to experience many aspects of the country, including history, urban and rural life, and contemporary issues. The many friendships they formed on this trip and the personal connections they made to Vietnam made the greatest impression on the students. Below is a synopsis of our activities and highlights from the students’ journals that captured their reactions as we traveled.

Hanoi and Sapa (June 15 – 19)

We started our tour in the north, with a visit to Hanoi and Sapa. We made stops at KOTO, the U.S. MIA/POW attachment, and the U.S. Embassy. We also spent five days with students from Cau Giay Middle School; we traveled to Sapa together, went sightseeing in Hanoi, and then each student spent a night with their partner’s family.

“When I first soaked in everything that is Hanoi, I had a film of judgment that was blocking me from truly seeing Hanoi. My first impression was that it was dysfunctional, smelt bad, and the people had no consideration for others whatsoever. As the days went by, I sort of stepped into another person’s shoes: someone who is comfortable with people bumping into them, someone who sees dysfunction as a thriving entity, and someone who doesn’t really mind the smells wafting from every building. I think the word for this is adaptation. My psychology teacher once told me the true meaning of intelligence is how well you can adapt to every environment. Therefore, I think I am a more intelligent person because of this trip.”

“KOTO, standing for ‘Know One, Teach One, is a non-profit organization with a goal to provide street children or those who are poverty-stricken with an education and starting a career. We visited a class of KOTO students, who were learning English but ironically helped us to



Learning Vietnamese phrases from a student at KOTO.

learn Vietnamese... As it was time for us to go our separate ways, Ang gave me a written note of what we covered, simple phrases, that was the back of his English essay. To others, it may seem to be a piece of scratch paper, but to me, it is the symbol of a friend who taught me the generosity, selflessness, and acceptance of the Vietnamese people.”

“Vietnam helps us with (the MIA/POW) mission, yet the reason why we have this site is because of the Vietnam War. It truly amazes me that they would even want to help find soldiers that could have killed their own kind. Their mindset about that is very admirable.”

“I found out that I had the traits- wanting to travel and learn other cultures and languages- in common (with our presenters at the Embassy). I was really amazed and (our visit) made me think about going into this job.”



Students from Hanoi and Hawaii get to know each other

“I have to say that I strongly feel that the people in Hanoi are the kindest people that you could possibly meet. All our home stay partners were so awesome mainly because they welcomed us with open arms and wanted to get to know us all on the very first day.”



Eating pho for breakfast in Sapa town

“The Hanoi students have been really eager to teach us all Vietnamese. They point out food and tell us the Vietnamese names. If they don’t know the English words we tell them. We are exchanging words and ideas back and forth and it is a lot of fun. I didn’t really expect to make friends with the Vietnamese students so easily, but I have.”

“When I was in the village...it was the first time on the trip when I was not able to connect with the world... It made me realize that technology has made my life so much easier but I need to learn how to do things on my own.. It made me learn to... put my technology fences down from time to time to witness what’s right in front of me.”

“The first night in Sapa, I was really homesick. All I could do was think about how dirty everything was. The second day in Sapa, however, was one of the best days for me. Planting trees and running down by the river was amazing. After doing fun things in Sapa, like climbing down into the rice fields, I started focusing on the potential of different things instead of focusing on the negative side.



Hanoi and Hawaii students take a break from trekking in Sapa.

This trip has really changed my way of viewing places. I am starting to look at what I can do to make my trip and future better, instead of thinking so much about negative things like dirt.”

“I was slightly taken aback by how excited Quan was to show me around the museum... When his father joined us after parking the car, I saw the same anxiousness about him as he took me around, pointing at just about everything and smiling. I can to the conclusion that the Vietnamese are proud of their history and where they’ve been, and it was this attitude that kept the museum visit alive and fun.”



Stone tablets at the Temple of Literature bear the names of those who passed the grueling mandarin exams at Vietnam’s first university.

“(The bed at my home stay) was an average bed but instead of bed sheets, there were beads... I looked around. All the beds in the house had them. It occurred to me that I could take the beads off when I go to sleep and put them back on in the morning but I didn’t. I just slept on the beads. At first it was really uncomfortable but then it was awesome. I’m going to buy some beads for my house, that’s how comfortable it was. After these experiences, I feel more open to new things, and more likely to be able to laugh at myself.”

“One thing I noticed at my home stay is how much they value relationship and education. The mom... told me how she wants to keep in contact and is hopeful that this home stay will strengthen the ties between the two countries... I would like to keep the relationship as well in hopes of seeing them again one day.”

Halong Bay (June 20 – 21)

“A natural phenomenon, Halong Bay was our last stop in northern Vietnam. The majestic limestone islands were thought to be created due to a legend of a mother dragon. To prevent Vietnam from being taken over by foreign invaders through the sea route, the people looked to a deity; the mother dragon and her sons were chosen to fly into the bay, which brought up pearls that became the islands. To this day, there are 1900+ landmasses in Halong Bay, and they are recognized as a World Heritage Site for aesthetics, biodiversity, and geomorphology.”



Enjoying the spectacular scenery aboard the boat in Halong Bay

“In the evening, we had a guest speaker who spoke about sustainability and the protection of Halong Bay. During his presentation, although I surprised to hear that such a beautiful World Heritage Site could have so many issues, it reminded me of the problems that Hawaii faces, not only as a tourist destination, but also as a growing state.”

“As more people come to the bay, more trash will also be seen in the water. This has negative effects on the aquatic life... (But) there is a positive side to this. As the bay grows in popularity, awareness of the problems of the bay increases. This will make people want to preserve the environment. After seeing the bay, I want to help preserve the environment back home even more.”

Hoi An (June 22 – 24)

In Hoi An, we donated our fundraiser money to three schools. We provided classroom books for a preschool, where we spent one morning singing and playing with the students; we painted a mural for an English language school; and we also made a special presentation of two computers and notebooks and pens for the student body at An Bang elementary school, where we spent a morning teaching English and art. It was very gratifying to know that we made an impact in this community. We also had the chance to spend time with a local family and local college students.



Working with students at An Bang school

“Seeing the children receiving the school materials... was the best thing on this trip. When we passed out the notebooks and pens/pencils that we bought at a bookstore in Hoi An, they smiled so brightly... Their eyes were opened wide as if it were gold... In America, students are usually not excited in getting school supplies because they don't want to go to school, but in Vietnam, they are excited and glad in getting school supplies because they want to go to school. I guess they value education so much.”

“I would have never thought that I could impact a place so much. Now that I think of it, I wish I could have fundraised more money to buy bags for the children because there were some students who used plastic bags and used cardboard boxes as their bag, while some had none whatsoever. It really makes me think twice about helping the community. After this trip, it makes me motivated to participate in fundraising and community service.”

“I walked out of the elementary school as a changed person... a student taught by the Vietnamese students we visited today (with) a newfound respect for public school education in Hawaii.”

“I have been inspired to help out in my community more. I like knowing I can place smiles or hope on people's faces. Although I am just one person, I learned that I have the power to make a difference in someone's life.”



Showing off the murals we designed & painted in one morning



Evening at the beach in Hoi An

“I can’t believe Hai and her family and friends just invited us into their home and fed all of us. They made homemade dishes! Not the kind you just buy in stores and microwave. I bet it took so long for them to prepare. I don’t think saying ‘cam on’ is enough for all the things these nice Vietnamese people are doing for us... I think my view on the country and the people really changed before the trip until now.”

“We had dinner and (spent time with college students in Hoi An). I thought they would just leave us alone, but they wanted to play with us and we made sand castles. At the dinner table, they tried to find common interests so we could actually talk. They could

have just left us after dinner, but instead rented a karaoke room! ... I don’t think they just wanted to have fun but get to bond with us Hawaii kids as well.”

Mekong Delta (June 25 – 26)

Our next destination was the Mekong Delta. We experienced the warm hospitality of the south through our host families and the other locals who shared their way of life with us: navigating the narrow waterways on sampans, making confections from scratch, and playing musical instruments.



Paddling around the Mekong Delta

“I think most of the economic development is good for the Mekong Delta. It’s evident in the people’s homes; they are moderately nice, and I had a comfortable stay. But there is always a downside. When something develops really fast, a lot of effort is put into developing and not the environment. People’s homes and shops are sometimes shoddily built into the water, and the engines are old and probably not built with environmental protection in mind... I think that perhaps another long-term downside is that due to more growth, there may not be as many farmers in the future, because people might want to move to the cities.”

“Just like Hawaii, some people (in the Mekong Delta) depend on tourists to make a living... it reminds me of my dad’s work situation. If people... destroy Hawaii’s beauty, there wouldn’t be as many tourists coming to Hawaii, which would cut my dad’s salary since he works in a hotel.”



Exploring our neighborhood by bicycle at sunset

“(The Mekong Delta) only seemed relaxing because of all the nice treatment we received but there is so much behind this that we don’t realize since we are having so much fun. Behind the curtain are hard-working people that make money in order to survive and provide for a child’s education... I don’t even know how hard my parents work to provide for my own family. I’m beginning to appreciate all that they do for me. I’m grateful for the PAAC program and the Freeman Foundation for allowing me to realize this.”

Ho Chi Minh City (June 27 – 28)

We ended our journey in Ho Chi Minh City. Many of the sites were reminders of the American War, such as the War Remnants Museum, the Cu Chi Tunnels, and the Reunification Palace. But we were able to see how far our two countries have come in friendship through our overnight stay at Thai Binh High School, which included class visits and a talent show.

“Innocent lives were lost, families separated, and children still feeling the effects today... They were the enemy, but they were just as human as Americans with feelings. I was so sad and angry that America, the land of hope and dreams, crushed so many and destroyed so much... America has done a lot of good, but there are also those dark spots that the government tries not to be known. I think knowing about the past is the only way to have a brighter future and not make the same mistakes again.”

“Even though the topic of the Vietnam War pops into my mind when I’m meeting people, it really amazes me how they have moved on... When I was making friends... the war did not get brought up and instead, we talked about hobbies and school. Even though there might have been conflict about our countries before, I realize that it doesn’t make who we are and what we will be in the future.”

“The students were really fun to dance with and all of their dances were awesome. It’s kind of hard to think that all these kids are under a communist government. I think that even though the government is communist, people just enjoy the freedoms they have. For example, there are all these posters on the telephone poles that say ‘Ramus.’ I asked our tour guide what Ramus means. He said that is a shampoo company on a government poster, and that no one cares about the government’s poster.”



PAAC and Thai Binh student visit the Cu Chi Tunnels together



PAAC students attend art class at Thai Binh with their partners.

“Vietnam’s youth want the same things that all kids want. They want all the newest things and they want to do better than their parents... All of the kids I have met have been hard-working and warm. If the country is going to be led by kids like them, I am confident in Vietnam’s future.”

OUTCOMES- WHAT OUR STUDENTS LEARNED IN VIETNAM

In their final reflections, it was clear that each student created tremendous value from the experiences they had in Vietnam, and are eager to return and to explore other countries:

“Now when I think of Vietnam, I think of more than just pho. I think of a growing economy, full of industrious people... I think of the people as hard working, and always looking to the future... I don’t think of them as a Chinese-influenced society. They have their own culture, language, traditions, holidays, and lifestyle. They are really one of a kind.”



“Vietnam has a lot to offer the world... The teens and kids of Vietnam have so much potential! They’re really smart, they’re hard workers, and they really care about their country... The U.S. needs to understand the Vietnam just needs a chance to show what they’re made of. Oh my gosh, my first entry was so bad, haha! I’ve come a loooooong way! From the first entry it is obvious I



didn’t know anything about Vietnam... I know so much about Vietnam now, their school life, economy, corruption, traffic, geography, food. I know how to pronounce ‘pho’! I feel so assertive. You can’t be shy in Vietnam, your life will suck. You’ll get cheated out of money, you won’t have anyone to talk to, you won’t even be able to cross the street by yourself. My mom always told me to be more assertive, now I am. I feel.... I feel great!”

“There is no possible way that I can continue to see the world just from the limited shores of O`ahu... In Sapa, I remember seeing two small girls, both covered in dirt, attempting to sell me made-made goods... There was nothing I could do to permanently alter the overall course of (their lives) for there were millions of struggling people like them throughout Vietnam. And yet



back home, I have the opportunity to strive to become whoever and whatever I wish to be... It was this specific realization that allowed my eyes to be opened to how selfish I had often been back home. Rather than complaining about school, I should be thanking teachers, parents, and country for giving me the opportunity to learn and get an education... Rather than wasting my money on unnecessary goods, I should be saving it to put less strain on my family’s wallet. There are many ways in which I can improve my life, for how can I ever look at it the same?”

“I just had the best experience of my life... Vietnam is the most wonderful and admirable place I have ever been to... The people amazed me because I have to tell you the truth- I have not been treated that nice in my whole life. I really love it and I hope we can all meet them again.”





“This was a great life-changing experience for me... I learned more about myself and became globally-minded. I learned that traveling is what I want to do in the future and that international business is the right path for me.”

“I have learned a lot of life lessons that I will keep with me forever: 1) Just because something is different doesn't make it wrong. 2) If you have trouble communicating, keep trying- it gets better! 3) Traveling is hard work but it is more than worth it in the end... I have concluded that I want to change my level of motivation, my values in general, and that I want to start enjoying life more... This trip opened my eyes to the potential I have.”

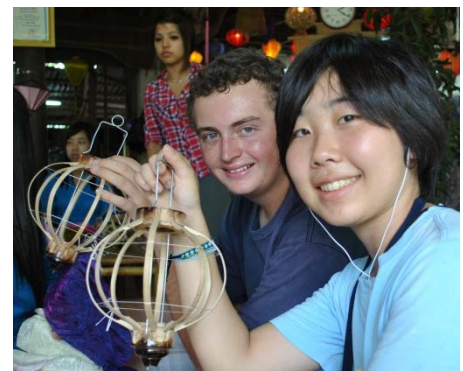


“The world looks different to me. Before, there were rich countries, poor places, with all different faces. Going to Vietnam made me see we are not as different as we



think we are. The world is changing and starting to become more intertwined... The war is a dark spot in history, but looking at how the country is now, I have hope that peace can be made and I believe that it can happen all over the world... Making Vietnam my home for two weeks has inspired me to go abroad for college... I would have never realized how much the world had to offer if it weren't for this trip. It may be 'good bye' Vietnam, but it is now 'hello' to a new future.”

“This trip has really changed my life. I can no longer go to school and think, ‘This is so boring, when is school out?’ How can I? Some of the kids in Vietnam, no, ALL, study much harder than everyone I know at my school. And they have to pay for their high school, whereas we get it for free. It kind of makes me realize that kids in Hawaii have it SO incredible easy it's not even funny. It's given me motivation to do better in school... This is reason enough that this trip has exceeded my expectations. But there's more... I think that this trip has showed me the world in a new light. I've made so many friends and had so many eye-opening experiences that I hope I can positively affect my life in and out of school. As a last few words, I'm going to strive to come back to Vietnam sooner than 10 years from now. I'm thinking next summer? Not wanting to work certainly won't be an issue now.”



“Now that this trip is finished, I would like to spread the word about this awesome scholarship and get more involved with PAAC. I want to use my newfound appreciation for the world and better myself. This was the best time of my life. I love Vietnam.”