

Hanoi Herald

IT'S BEEN A MONTH OF CULTURAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL CONTRASTS. ONE MONTH AGO I LANDED IN DILI, THE CAPITAL OF EAST TIMOR FOR A TWO WEEK STAY. SUN, SAND AND EXCELLENT, WARM WEATHER (30 TO 35 DEGREES CELSIUS). FROM THERE I HEADED TO TASHKENT, UZBEKISTAN WHERE I SPENT TWO WEEKS. LIMITED SUN AND VERY COLD (HOVERING ON EITHER SIDE OF FREEZING). AND NOW, I'M BACK IN ONE OF MY FAVOURITE CITIES, HANOI. THE WEATHER IS SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN. DAYTIME TEMPERATURES DURING THE WINTER RANGE FROM 17-22 CELSIUS, WITH OVERNIGHT LOWS DROPPING DOWN TO 10...AND BELOW. SURPRISINGLY COLD FOR A PLACE I'VE ALWAYS CONSIDERED BEING IN THE TROPICS. I GUESS IT'S JUST FAR



Early morning commute.

ENOUGH NORTH, AND INLAND, TO EXPERIENCE A REASONABLE SWING IN TEMPERATURES.

I'm putting in one week in Hanoi, followed by one week in Vientiane, for the ADB project I've been working on since May 2002 — the Community Action for Preventing HIV/AIDS project (<http://www.jfpr-hiv.org>).

Most of my work in Hanoi has been following up on the BCC (Behaviour Change Communication) component of the project for which I'm responsible. I've been spent running around town, attending meetings with local and international NGOs that we've partnered with to carry out social marketing of condoms, introduction of needle-exchange programs, and organisation of peer education among high-risk groups such as sex workers and injecting drug users. (see *Hanoi* — page 2)



One of Dr Manh's neighbours digging into fido.

Dog Day Afternoon

One morning my friend Dr Manh asked if I'd like to try dog for lunch. "Dog? Yes, ok, I'll give it a shot." Shortly after noon I was at a table in Manh's home in edgy anticipation of canine cuisine. Manh, watched with amusement as his wife placed a platter of grilled dog meat, daintily sprinkled with fresh coriander and roasted sesame seed, in front of me.

Being a good sport I dug in. "Woofed" it down so to speak. Man's best friend recalls a gamy variation of beef, a tad tough, and with a deeply smoked flavour. I wouldn't cross the street for it, but it seems to me no worse than what passes for notoriously unhealthy fast food in the west. It's a matter of cultural conditioning — all in the mind.



Hanoi: All things considered, activities are moving along, and positive results are becoming apparent. That's not to say that no problems exist. But given where the project was a year ago significant progress has been made. Sex worker peer education is being carried out in all five provinces the project operates in (Lai Chau, Quang Tri, Dong Thap, Kien Giang and An Giang), a needle exchange program has been established in Lai Chau province which has the largest number of injecting drug users (nearly 40% of whom are HIV positive), print and electronic health promotion materials are being developed, distributed and broadcast, and the social marketing of condoms in all provinces is well entrenched. On the down side, however, HIV infection rates continue to rise in Vietnam. We're still in the "explosive" phase. Hopefully in the next few years we'll start to see a downward trend. Given the amount of time, money and technical expertise being brought to bear on HIV/AIDS in Vietnam positive change it bound to happen.



The happy couple – Duc and Huong – on their wedding day in Haiphong, 9 December 2003.

Of course all work and not play result in a short and dull life...fortunately my visit to Hanoi has coincided with the wedding of my work colleague and good friend Dr Duc. On the morning of 9 December, together with the entire staff of the Ministry of Health AIDS Division, I made the two hour trip to Haiphong to attend Duc's wedding banquet.



Some of the AIDS Division staff attending Duc and Huong's wedding banquet: from left to right, Mr Nguyen, Ms Phoung, Ms Doung, and Mrs Phan.

The wedding ceremony took place earlier in the day at the home of Duc's parents (Duc, originally from Haiphong has lived in Hanoi for the past several years). The wedding ceremony was attended by close relatives. The banquet, held in one of many halls specifically set up to celebrate weddings and other auspicious occasions, was attended by several hundred friends of the family.

This was the first time I met Duc's bride, Huong; while Duc has worked in Hanoi she has remained in Haiphong where she teaches English at a university. She will join Duc in Hanoi next week following several days of wedding related functions.

While in Hanoi...Visit the Army Museum

The Army Museum concentrates on historical events relating to the Vietnam People's Army and its fight against foreign invaders. The collection includes weapons, maps, documentation of strategic and field decisions and models of major attacks against French colonialism, Japanese fascism and American aggression. Many objects and documents concerning the war with the United States are on display including SAM rockets which were used against the US Air Force, simple bamboo spikes, the tank of which rolled through Saigon to liberate it on April 30, 1975 and numerous "propaganda" posters most of which feature Ho Chi Minh urging Vietnam on to victory.



Ho Chi Minh