



XICH LO

NEWS

The newsletter of Vietnam and Friends
No.4, 1st February 2012



Happy New Year our friends!

First, the VAF would like to say to all friends Happy New Year, happiness and we wishes for you all lucky in 2012.

Hanoi is still passionate in the air of spring, the holiday season, the Lunar New Year holidays. A new spring makes the landscape and people around are more beautiful. Tet is the festival that everybody always waits for in Vietnam, from young children to the elderly. This is a special holiday to celebrate the New Year with good will to all people. If you are in Vietnam in Lunar New Year, you will see the highlights traditional culture of Vietnam. In the cold weather, people prepare for the holiday together. The peach flowers, apricot flowers blossoms brilliantly. Everything makes the air becomes bustling. Viet Nam has many special meals in Tet such as *Bánh Chưng*, *Nem*...These dishes are the unforgettable memory with international friends.

In this newsletter, we would like to send you information about the activities of the VAF occurred in recent time. The end of year is the time we summarize the projects, review the performances of the project during the past year to improve performance in next year. Besides, in this newsletter, we also have article about interesting trips of volunteers with Blind children in Nguyen Dinh Chieu School. Specially, Pascal, one volunteer will has a small article about the time in Vietnam. These feelings are sincere and good will of international friends of Viet Nam and we hope to have more articles like that.

Mix with the air of spring, we invite you to see again culturalist Hu'u Ngoc with an article about the Tet. Through this article you will learn more about the traditional beauty culture of Vietnam during Tet. I am sure that you will love Tet in Viet Nam with so many activities that characterized in East Asia.

Let VAF share moments of a good new year with Xich Lo News – No.4

Best regards,

Dang The Lam

(lam.vietnamandfriends@gmail.com)



Activities

MICC meeting in Berlin



In December, 2011, VAF has flight to Berlin, Germany to attend a meeting with ...to prepare for MICC School, that will carry out in April, 2012 at Poland. We met many organizations that also join in this project. They come from many countries around the world such as Germany, Slovenia, Netherlands, Afghanistan, South - Africa, Uganda. We discussed about the content of MICC School and make frameworks for these students who will join MICC school. All representatives of all organizations worked focused to prepare the best for project. This is occasion for all coordinator met, exchanged, made friends and have good time in Berlin together. VAF look

forward to carrying out this project because it's very good change for Vietnamese students can access to the new knowledge.



Berlin, 8th - 12th Dec 2011





Activities

Christmas activities – Ngoc Son Temple (The diary of Tam, ex-coordinator)



“The trip to Hoan Kiem lake was very funny and successful. There were 15 students and 14 volunteers went together, so almost one of us could take care of one of the kids. The small girls (9) and 2 local volunteers went there by taxi cause some of them are so little and it is safer. The rest took a bus to the lake. We need not pay money for the bus because the bus driver saw that we were taking care of the blind kids.

Actually there are 3 boys seemed not enjoy this trip (every time when we have activities like this they do not like: Tung, Frank, and Peter). But on the other hand, it is very good, because it is me to follow them during the trip, so that I could really talk to them about everything and I could really talk to Tung about his private life.

I felt so good when 4 of us went together and Frank put his arms over my shoulder and we were going like the very close friends....

About Tung, before that, I had talked to him many times at the BS, but I never thought that we are close enough to share his story. So, I was a bit surprised when he shared this story with me, and listened to my ideas, advices...

We visited Ngoc Son temple first. We divided into 4 groups and went around the temple, met again at one point. The kids seemed to be very eager with the calligraphy (Chinese letters). And Minh (Harry), Pascal, Tung and me got one. (We collected a little bit money for the people who wrote this for charity and we got his wish.

Tung got the word: "happiness" (in Chinese). He looked very serious to ask the writer this word, so I think he really hopes this every time. And I got the same word then his.

The girls are more eager to visit the temple. When one local volunteer read for them the meaning of the Chinese words, the history... they listened to in a very lovely and serious way. After the temple we had ice cream at Trang Tien ice-cream. So good!!! All of us were really enjoyed it.

Then we went to visit Ly Thai To statue. It is the most interesting and meaningful time to be here. The 3 boys (Frank, Tung and Peter) were very happy with kind of motorbike race (with many big motorbikes...)

There is a big group of amateur guitarist sitting in the yard in front of the statue playing guitar.

Our small girls started to sing loud for fun amazingly. Then we brought them inside the guitarist group and they played guitar and we sang together.... Everybody came more and more crowded to join and to experience this moment that the integration is so so good. The crowd sang together around 30 minutes, and then we had to go back to BS... Back to school, after the kids came back to their room, we were sitting in Mr. Thang's room. (he was so happy for the first time having 14 volunteers sitting in his room, talking a lot, joking a lot, (and eating a lot also hehe). And volunteers were happy also to know each other more and more and making a lot of fun.

At 7pm, we left the BS, finished such a great day with a lot of smiles, happiness and discovering..."





Activities

Final evaluation of the
Supporting blind people project.



In occasion the the first semester of the school year 2011-12 is finished and the atmosphere of the Tet-holiday is coming, VAF - Vietnam and Friends - is holding its final evaluation of the English project in Nguyen Dinh Chieu school.

On behalf of VAF, we would like to inform you about our activities of the past semester, as well as to present our ideas and plans for 2012.

Right now, we have a team of 2 international and 14 Vietnamese volunteers, but in the whole year of 2011, we had a total of 14 international and 19 Vietnamese volunteers. We would like to thank all the international volunteers

for making this project possible and we are also very proud of our local volunteers, motivated students that spend their freetime supporting this project. With this team, we teach 11 different classes at different times of the day, every week form Monday till Friday. The total number of students in all these classes is about 100 and their ages go from 11 to 30 years old.

Although we have only taken over this projetct for a short time, we can already be proud of some achievements such as : designing and printing an English book in Braille, organizing the summer courses, raising a scholarship fund for the students...

But the most important thing is that VAF is developing towards the aim of this project: Improving the English level and communication skills of the students. Some sudents can already communicate with the international volunteers comfortably, with little help of local volunteers. The students give up their noon nap to come to our classes. This is a motivation for us to put more effort into this project every day. Thanks to the board of his school, as well as social organisations, (NGOs), donators, volunteers and some specific teachers we can make this acheivement.

Besides that, this project also has some weaknesses, such as: lack of rooms and loud teaching conditions due to the construction in this school, some students are very shy in the classes and talk too little, students don't often take time to review the lessons...

In order to bring valuable lessons to the students, we are trying our best to overcome all difficulties we meet e.g. we had a casting to find new volunteers and had them commit to coming responsibly and regularly. Further we had a training with all volunteers in which we discussed about teaching styles.



That's all about the Evaluation of 2011.

Finally, we hope that this Evaluation will be successful and we all wish you health and success.

According to our evaluation, we would like to present you our plans and goals for 2012

First of all, we want to maintain all the classes that we have. We hope that all students to continue making progress in their English every day. Because we already have so many classes, we have now reached our limit, so we don't plan to open many new more classes, but instead want to focus on the students that we already have. We hope that with the casting of new volunteers and the training that we had, the local volunteers will come continuously for a long term so that they can build up a close relationship with the students.

Second, we want to restart the Customer Service Class. If we have enough international volunteers. In this class we train job-related skills with the students, so they have better opportunities to get a job in the future.

Third, Because learning material is very important when learning a language, but there is not much English material for blind students yet, we want to continue to produce material for the blind students to learn with: recording the English book, printing a vocabulary book, writing a user guide for the teachers and others.

And finally, we want to continue to do outside activities like going on trips, in order to give the students diverse experience and strengthen their relationship with the volunteers.

Now that's all about the plan for 2012. We will try our best to carry out well our plan and we hope when the construction of the school is done that we will have enough rooms for all the classes.



Dear reader, dear Vietnam's friend,

Activities

Dear reader, dear Vietnam's friend,

I'm Pascal, a French guy 33 years old. I've spent 2 months in Hanoi teaching in the Blind School. I was in charge of different levels: the English club, the C2, B, A classes and the mixed class. It was a real chance because I could have discovered different ways to teach or manage a lesson: with a book, with funny tools (games, audio listening), or also with topic like "the Internet", "the chocolate", or "French pastries". For these topics, I bought real examples and it was a great experience to see Vietnamese people tasting some "croissants" or some "pains au chocolate".

During the first weeks, I have learnt to read Braille with my eyes and, at the end of the year, I was able to write it...but not so fast. I'm still impressed the way that students read it with their fingers and the speed that they write it.

It was also a great pleasure to see their performances during concerts or music competition, or to visit the ceramic exhibition in the Vietnam Fine Art Museum realizing another time how some of them are really talented!

So, as I could have expected, it was one of the best experience in my life. It was so amazing to meet all these students, discover their way of life, their bedroom, and to help them during several weeks. I have lived so many things, events, feelings, and stories that, today; I could just say, "It was too short".

I quickly started to like the everyday life in Hanoi. Of course, traffic jam and the pollution are not the best part but there are so many beautiful places (I've visited so many pagodas or temples, walked so many hours in different quarters...) and the Vietnamese people is so friendly when you are not in the most touristic places. After the mission I spent several weeks to discover Vietnam and different cities (Saigon, Mekong Delta, Mui Ne, Dalat, Nha Trang, Hoi An, Huế), but during my free time in Hanoi I also had enough time to go to the Perfume Pagoda, Literature temple and to the Halong Bay. Even in winter, with fog and cold weather, it was so incredible.

I had also the great chance to be invited by Tam's and Lam's families for the 2 different new year celebration (Western and Vietnamese one) and to discover their hometown: some of my best memories. My only regret: I was not able to tell their parents in Vietnamese how grateful I was and how I enjoyed these days in their house.

For sure, I will never forget all the students' smiles, their incredible sensibility and skills, their shyness and their happiness. The music performances and competition, the celebration of the teacher's day, the Christmas celebration in the school and in the VAF's house, and the visit of the Ngoc Son temple with several students will also stay in my mind in a special place forever.

I don't know how to thank all these people... and for some of them new friends: students, members of the English club, teachers, school's staff, Laura, Amrey, Joris, Kato, Tam, Lam, and M. Thang. Despite the language barrier, during several weeks, I have felt as at home and I have been so happy to be a member of the VAF's team.

As I could, I will try to continue to help them and to stay a member of this team.

I wish you a happy new year, full of success, love, health, wealth and joy.

Chuc mung nam moi !

Pascal





Tết in old Hà Nội - Hữu Ngọc.



Hoàng Đạo Thuý , the father of the boy-scout movement in Việt Nam and the Signal Corps of the Vietnam People's Army, died at the ripe old age of 97. He knew Hà Nội like the back of his hand. Here is how he briefly evokes Tết in the capital city early in this century, at a time when the newly established colonial administration had only blurred the traditions of this highly popular festival with an archaic charm.

A spring drizzle falls on the pink peach blossoms and the white petals of apricot flowers. The children relish the foretaste of the joys of Tết. They will wear new clothes and eat as much as they like of Bánh Chưng loaves, port fat, and salted shallots. They will set off firecrackers. No more school. They can look forward to generous gifts from their parents and grandparents.

But the adults wear a rather worried look.

Impecunious families in particular are frightened outright. Their creditors are merciless in claiming their loans back before the end of the year. They send bullies who do not shrink from taking away the sacred vessel on the ancestors' altar in which incense sticks are planted at Tết and on anniversary days, or else urinating into it failing repayment of the debts.

Even families not finding themselves in such strange conditions are disturbed. Grandpa has a concerned look, but he can't say what he is worried about. In fact, it is grandma who bears the burden of things to be done. As early as the beginning of the 12th

moon, the last month of the outgoing year, she has to go to a rural market to buy some glutinous rice at a reasonable price and a few chickens to be fattened. For six kilos pig, she shares the cost with a small group of neighbors. Then she has to buy some fish, a bundle of dong leaves in which to wrap the Bánh Chưng, which are to be cooked in a big copper cauldron, which of course has to be borrowed from someone. And so on...

The children are impatiently repeating their refrain: "Ma, don't forget about my new clothes!" The mother sits up late at night, cutting and sewing surrounded by the little ones, who fall asleep at last. Her elder daughter whispers to her sleepily: "Don't bother making a new dress for me, mine is still serviceable." But her mother simply says, patting her head: "Go to sleep dear!" and goes on with her needlework.

Also early in the 12th moon, Grandpa has gone to buy from a Chinese shop-keeper three narcissus bulbs, which are left to soak in a vessel filled with water. The Grandpa sets about making cuts in them, before putting them in water again. Next, each bulb is put in a large bowl and exposed to the sun for several days. Meanwhile, care has to be lavished on the bulbs and the shoots, which soon start sprouting. It is an art to cause the flowers to open (the word used on the occasion is: to smile) on the morning of the first day of the New Year.

Another concern of Grandpa's is the purchase of a pen brush and of some paper with a floral design for the ceremony of "opening the pen brush" (khai bút): the scholar and the student will trace the first ideograms at the start of the New Year. Grandpa will also remember to buy some red paper on which to pen couplets expressing good wishes for Tết.

If the courtyard affords enough space, one will plant the Tết pole (cây nêu), a bamboo pole of 5-6 meters on top of which hangs a bamboo circle from which are suspended little clay gongs, carp, and "gold" ingots made from paper. On the ground, traced with slaked lime, is a set of bow and arrows with the aim of frightening away evil spirits. When evening comes, groups of poor children will stop in front of people's closed doors and sing ritual songs, marking rhythm by tapping the ground with a bamboo cylinder containing a few coins: "Sir, if there is still light and fire in your home, please open the door... On the upper bed a dragon lies while on the low

er one, another pays tribute... You will have children as beautiful as pictures... Please give us a string of fire crackers..." The mother will open a little window and slip a few coins into the children's bamboo cylinder, whereupon they will immediately go away. She later distributed her wide-eyed children new clothes taken from the family's big box.

But the children refuse to go to bed. They will stay up until the moment of Passage to the New Year, at midnight. It is then that the whole town is shaken by the thunder of

firecrackers. The father lights incense sticks on the ancestral altar, where is laid a tray of food offering to the manes (spirits of the dead). Later the tray is taken down and the entire family partakes of the Tết meal. If the weather is fine, the parents will leave for the pagoda where they will pick a twig from a tree growing in its grounds which the believe will bring them prosperity (hái lộc).

The following morning, the first day of the New Year, one stands in wait of the first visitor, in the hope that he will bring with him propitious portends. In many cases arrangements are made in advance for the visit of a man favored by fate with wealth, honors, a long life and numerous descendants. Meanwhile, family members exchange best wishes among themselves.

If Grandpa is living with his eldest son, father, who is the youngest, brings him the most beautiful narcissus. Mother and the children come with him. When all are about to kowtow to Grandpa, he waives that ritual mark of respect, then spreads on a table a large piece of red paper with silvery spots on which father, who is good at calligraphy, traces four ideograms: Filial piety, Respect for one's elder brothers and sisters, Loyalty to the country, Faithfulness. Grandma takes from betel box shiny coins wrapped in red paper and gives those symbolic gifts to father, mother and the children. Incense sticks are lit and all prostrate themselves before the ancestral altar.

The family then pays visits to the maternal family, the children's teachers, to the family physician, to friends and acquaintances. At each visit, much overdrawn wishes are exchanged. For instance, to a newlywed couple, one would say: "May you have a son early in the year and a daughter toward the end of it." There are so many people to visit and to receive that father and mother have to take turns: both of them by turn will be "on duty" at home.

Often a visitor will stay only a few minutes, long enough to kowtow to the manes, exchange wishes with the host (or his wife), drink a cup of lotus scented tea, taste some candied fruit or perhaps a bit of Bánh Chưng.

Women go to temples to consult the "oracular paper" (xin lá số). Kneeling before the altar, each will shake a vessel filled with bamboo sticks until one jumps out. The stick gives the number of the "oracular paper" whose content is to be interpreted by the soothsayer.

On the fourth day of Tết, a farewell meal is offered to the spirits of the ancestors. Paper votive offerings are burnt. Each resumes his or her normal activities after performing "opening ceremonies".



Notification of Change office

VAF is pleased to announce that from March 2012 we will move office:

From : No.2, lane 26, Xuan Dieu Str., 124403 Hanoi

TO NEW ADDRESS : NO.65E, LANE 399, AU CO STR., 124020 HANOI.

