

Volunteering in the Friendship Village, Hanoi

Year:2007

Project:Friendship Village, Hanoi

Work:Work camp

During January 2007, I participated in a 2 week work camp based in Hanoi. I applied to work in the Friendship village through Travel to Teach program. My time here was spent working on the organic farm at the village. I chose to come to Vietnam as a volunteer because I didn't want to be a tourist. I was looking for a cultural shock. A chance to live and work in a completely new environment. I definitely found that here during my stay. After work camp I spent another 2 weeks traveling. I have difficulty describing how much I have enjoyed this experience. I arrived with no expectations and left with a lifetime full of stories to tell. This type of "holiday" is one that can be negative for some depending on how much of yourself you are willing to give. I feel I put in a lot and therefore gained immensely from the work and lifestyle. I loved everything I saw, everything I did and nearly everything that I tasted! My least favorite foods were Bamboo and dog meat!! The most important thing about Vietnam and this type of work is to have a sense of humor and be flexible. Without humor, some people may dislike the crowded and chaotic living conditions. UnPeaceful House (aka Peace House) where I lived was a hive of activity. New volunteers doing various projects arrived everyday. There were about 45 people aged from 13-38 years speaking 5 different languages sharing 1 kitchen, 3 bathrooms, 1 washing machine and 2 computers and 1 toaster. There was always someone to talk to or help you with anything. I enjoyed constantly talking to the other foreigners, sharing cultures and feeling part of a family. In my free time I studied Vietnamese or just walked around the local area absorbing all the sights and sounds. At work, laughter could always be heard in the garden. We sang songs or played jokes on each other. While carrying manure all morning we walked around saying "Smells Good" in Vietnamese thinking it was the phrase for "smells bad". After checking the meaning with the Vietnamese volunteers at lunch, I returned and said "Doesn't smell good" instead. Their cover was blown! My favorite memory of my trip is probably spending time with War Veterans at the Friendship village on several days between work hours. I took along an interpreter and spent hours in a Progressive Tea Party in the house shared by 10 veterans staying there at the time. After finishing several cups of tea or rice wine, I would be invited into the next bedroom for another round of tea and discussion. The warmth and affection from these amazingly strong people will never leave my heart. I appreciate the hard work that the managers and Vietnamese volunteers do for the foreign participants. Having supervised volunteers in Australia, I understand what a challenging task it can be. All of the volunteers were students and continuously disappeared to attend classes, sit exams or study. The logistics of recruiting people, arranging placements, feeding and finding beds for everyone is an enormous undertaking. Thank you for everything and keep up the good work.

About the Author

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