

The Real Viet Nam

How many Americans does it take
To travel around without a break
By bus, plane, and ferry, and bus once more
From delta to delta, from cliff to shore,
In order to learn about Viet Nam
And find some truth they can hold in the palm
Of the hand when they ponder past events
While trying of war and peace to make sense?
It takes twenty-nine with ties to old Mac
Plus one Norwegian to take up the slack.
All proved quite gifted in city hopping;
Many showed comparable skill in shopping
For silks and marble and jewelry and art
And all such stuff that is needed to start
Our virtual Viet Nam in the States,
Only lacking the traffic and twisted gates
From the President's Palace in Saigon town
Which two tanks in '75 mowed down.
There were thirty people and five hotels;
There were mega-breakfasts and sights and smells
And multi-course dinners and thrills and spills,
Along with gastrointestinal ills.
Water buffalo, geckos, dogs and cats,
To each of these creatures wetipped our hats,
But sorry to say, we steered very clear
Of chickens and ducks who filled us with fear,
Though our Mr. Dung proved himself bolder;
He let a monkey pee on his shoulder.
This is the year of the rooster it's true,
So let's give three cheers for avian flu.
Bags out at seven, we boarded at eight,
Except in Ha Noi, when it was our fate
To rise before scooters had filled the street,

All of us mostly asleep on our feet.
We lunched on a vessel in Ha Long Bay;
We stormed up the Citadel walls in Hue;
Distracted some school kids outside Da Nang,
Into whose lives we arrived with a bang.
We bobbed our way through the market that floats
In two rather touristy motor boats,
Then journeyed along the hot macadam
To folks who did not know us from Adam.
We ate their rice cakes and used their toilet,
And baby's nap, we managed to spoil it.
We drank in the garden with Uncle Yo
Who's already lived six years longer than Ho,
And crawled through the Cu Chi tunnel system.
If someone got lost there, nobody missed 'em.
We hit the streets of Ho Chi Minh City,
Hot on the scent of the real nitty gritty.
We longed to write home, like all the great bards,
But couldn't find anyone selling post cards.
Through all of these trials we found ourselves blessed
With a leader of tours who met every test.
He has redefined the adjective "great";
We'd hire him no matter what his weight.
But now we trust he'll enjoy this year's Tet,
Escaped from the latest tourists he's met,
While those very tourists board a plane home,
Which brings us all to the end of this poem.
Just as every river flows to the sea;
Just as after daytime the night must be;
So too every trip must draw to a close,
As each of us present certainly knows.
We of Macalester thus bid farewell
To a lovely land that has cast its spell
On all in our group who now sadly part,
Though each gives these days a place in the heart.

A poetic offering by Robert Warde, in memory of The Great Journey,
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