

Dowling Club Visit to V



Early morning Mekong Delta

Why Vietnam? I was asked this question countless times. I first visited Vietnam in August 2000 on holiday and was overwhelmed by the beauty of the country and the friendliness of the people. Despite being a country made famous by war, there seemed to be no bitterness or hostility towards Westerners. It was as late as 1994 that the USA finally lifted its trade embargo against Vietnam (19 years after the end of the "American War") and since then there has been a steady increase in tourism. When the "red tape" surrounding our first choice, Cuba, proved just too difficult even for the redoubtable Alberto to penetrate, I thought Vietnam would be a great alternative if we could get the contacts. Here once again Terence Ryan came up trumps – (are there any foreign lands where he doesn't have contacts?) and put me in touch with the charming Mrs Tran Van Hein – a scientist collaborating with him on traditional medicine and wound healing (whose contacts included the Minister of Health downwards). Terence also found an American Vietnamese from the Mayo

Clinic, Dr Tri Nguyen, who had contacts in the main Dermatology Departments and moreover was willing to phone them on my behalf to set up initial contact. So, we were out of the starting blocks and away. Many hundreds of emails later the visit became a reality!

The basic plan was to tour Vietnam from Hanoi in the north to Ho Chi Minh City in the south, taking in Hue in central Vietnam conveniently situated near to my favourite place in Vietnam: Hoi An. Our plans for scientific meetings were also ambitious.

In all, fifty-three Dermatologists and accompanying persons made the trip.



Burns Institute, Hanoi

These included seventeen Specialist Registrars who were heavily subsidised by our friends in the Pharmaceutical industry, notably Steifel, Roche and Galderma.

The group arrived in Hanoi on a Saturday in mid February and we started off with a visit on the Sunday to the spectacular Halong Bay, a World Heritage site with its 3000 plus islands rising from the clear emerald water of the Gulf of Tonkin. We chartered two dragon boats to cruise amongst the islands for the day with a splendid sea food lunch. It gave everyone a chance to relax and get to know each other.

The next day we started bright and early (as we would most days!) with a visit to the Institute of Traditional Medicine. David Paige was our first speaker and gave an eloquent talk on problems encountered with HIV infection in the West. This was followed by a reply from the Minister of Health detailing the HIV epidemic in Vietnam. For the presenters, first problems with translation were encountered and it became obvious that we would all have to very much prune and simplify our presentations! We were treated to a display of traditional Vietnamese dancing and during our hospital visit saw cupping, acupuncture and preparation of traditional medicines in the pharmacy.

After lunch with panoramic views of Hanoi, we hurried on to the Military



Terence Ryan demonstrating physical signs Hue leprosarium

Vietnam



Cupping - Institute of Traditional Medicine Hanoi

Academy to visit the Burns Institute. Here, a good friend of Terence Ryan, Prof le The Trung, talked on the use of traditional medicine and frog skin on burns treatment (sadly they have a lot of experience because of napalm) followed by a keynote lecture by Nick Craven on management of toxic epidermal necrolysis. After other lectures we were allowed to see the burns patients first hand.

Next day a conference at the National Institute of Dermatology and Venerology was very successful with over 100 Vietnamese attending and we visited the wards seeing many interesting cases. They seem to have a preponderance of severe collagen disorders and scleroderma with few drugs to treat them. There are also still many cases of leprosy.

We held a farewell dinner (one of three!) at the Hanoi Hilton, which has great views of the Opera House – the most spectacular building in Hanoi.

Next day we visited “Uncle Ho” in his Mausoleum en route for the airport. His embalmed body is perfectly preserved.

He retires in the afternoon to chill out in his refrigeration cabinet and is sent back to Moscow for annual check-ups.

Arriving in Hue, several of our group relaxed with a massage (some got more than they bargained for!), followed by a boat trip on the Perfumed river. In the morning the Dean of the Medical School warmly welcomed us. Dr Chau, the very enthusiastic Head of Dermatology showed us many clinical cases and we also visited the leprosarium a few miles away. Here Terence held the registrars’ full attention as he demonstrated an abundance of clinical signs.



Cocktail reception Hue



Frogskin used in burns patient

In the afternoon a scientific meeting held in our hotel was again well attended by dermatologists from the Central Provinces. We finished with cocktails in the hotel garden overlooking the Perfumed river and a magnificent buffet at which a good Jewish girl in our party dined on pig’s ear mistaking it for ginger. Some carried on into the small hours at the adjacent DMZ bar.

Up early again next day to view the Citadel. During the Tet offensive (1968) an estimated 10,000 people died in Hue during fierce fighting between the USA and Vietcong who holed up in the Citadel. Severe bombing reduced the



Singapore Slings in the Elephant Bar Siam Riep Cambodia

Dowling Club Visit to Vietnam (continued)

Imperial Palace inside to rubble. As a World Heritage site it is gradually being restored. I was moved to see a group of Vietnamese female war veterans re-visiting the site for the first time.

A spectacular drive through the Hai Van pass and lunch at Lang Co beach brought us to the ancient port of Hoi An for a weekend of R&R. Hoi An was never damaged during the wars and many traditional buildings date back to the 14th century. It is a town of tailors and most of us were transformed into shopaholics as we had suits made for \$35 and silk numbers run up for less than \$10! Cries of “just popping out to my tailors for a fitting” were heard throughout the weekend.

Sadly during our stay in Hoi An, Joe Delaney died suddenly of a massive stroke. We will all remember the bravery of his wife Gill, support given by our Registrars and Terence’s well chosen words as the group got together to share our grief and pay our respects to Joe.

Somewhat subdued the group flew down to Ho Chi Minh City. On the agenda next day was a visit to 250 K Cu Chi tunnels where the Vietcong lived

underground and the War Remnant Museum, providing a stark reminder of the brutality of war.

At our final conference held in the splendid surroundings of the Legend Hotel, we were given an excellent insight into the Dermato-Venerological network of the southern provinces of Vietnam and spectrum of serious dermatological disease encountered in Vietnam.

Our final fling in Vietnam was a night in the Mekong Delta at the Luxury Victoria Hotel Can Tho and a chance to get up at crack of dawn to visit the floating market; a wil o’the wisp affair.

For a lucky thirty-five there was an extension of the trip into Cambodia to marvel at the wonders of Angkor Wat.

Our friendship with the Vietnamese continues as three trainee dermatologists are coming to this year’s BAD meeting followed by attachments to dermatology departments in Bolton, Manchester and Cardiff. Lets hope this is just the beginning!

Dr Vicky Yates

Dowling Club President



The late Joe Delaney examining a leprosy patient



Tsui Ling and Howard May under conference banner Legend Hotel Ho Chi Minh City



Presentation of Dowling Club Plaques to Burns Institute and Institute of Traditional Medicine



Girls shopping Hoi An



Megan, Susannah, Saleem Cu Chi Tunnels