



## May 2013

### THE EXPERIENCE OF A LIFETIME

#### Inside this issue:

Feature story	1
Volunteer updates	2
The experience of a lifetime	3
Lettre à Bo De pagoda d'une volontaire	9
CaTru comes back - Traditional Vietnamese music restored	11
Staff Update	13
Dirty Day review	14
June Calendar	15
Photos of the month	16
About us	17



Vietnam was my third destination with Projects Abroad and I was ready for a new adventure... which is exactly what I got! I am only 18, so when I was offered the opportunity to live in the tiny rural village of Mai Chau, as the sole western volunteer, I was a bit unsure. With this placement being such a new placement, I had no idea what was ahead of me and what to expect, and no idea how I would react. Little did I know that I had absolutely no cause for concern. Little did I know that I was about to set off on the most incredible trip I have ever been on, and would meet the most inspirational people I have ever met...

(continued on next page)

## The experience of a lifetime

*(continued from Page 1)*

I travelled with Tam from the Projects Abroad office who came to settle me in, and my translator, Hung (nobody speaks any English at all in Mai Chau, and I speak no Vietnamese, so I needed someone, to translate and help me teach and communicate with people), with whom I became very good friends during my stay.

I stepped out of the bus after a hot and bumpy four hour ride, tired and hungry, and feeling a little unsure. However, all feelings of doubt evaporated in an instant as soon as I took one look at what lay before me. It really was a sight for sore eyes. Ahead of me were endless paddy fields, so green they could have been in a painting, beneath rising mountains which stood magnificently over the land. Deco-



rating the countryside were many little bamboo houses on stilts. The sun was shining and the day was hot. There was a slight breeze, and the air was clean and fresh, filled with the delicate scent



of flowers without the thick stench of car exhausts. It was so quiet. More quiet than I describe. I am a country person, having grown up and lived all my life in quiet English countryside, so I instantly felt at home. Far more at home than I ever did in Hanoi. I was suddenly itching to get started and begin my adventure!

It was a short walk to my home stay. We passed the odd cow or buffalo just wandering around, and the occasional conical-shaped hat moving throughout the rice fields. When we reached the house of my host family, we were shown our room. It was a room on stilts, with nothing but a little standing-up fan and a few bed sheets inside. There were just holes as windows, and you could see through the floor. I took one look at it, and was filled with excitement! It was so charming!

*(continued from Page 1)*

## The experience of a lifetime

*( continued from page 3)*

After Hung very kindly lugged my huge suitcase up the stairs to the room, we went to explore. We set off through the undergrowth, cameras in hand. We found a leafy path that took us under some trees, to a lake dividing two paddy fields at the foot of the mountains. There was a wizened old woman squatting beside the lake, back hunched, dropping branches into a huge basket that sat beside her. The only noises that filled the air were those of insects and birds, there was not a car engine to be heard. A week later we visited this place again and swam in the river. The water was so cold and fresh. I was soon to get used to walks like this, which would take me along secluded paths and through paddy fields, without a soul to be seen. I did go on some beautiful walks during my stay, and saw some incredible places. One particular walk I remember, took me to an area where loads of little white butterflies were feeding off something on the ground. I had never see so many beautiful butterflies all together in one place at one time. As I walked past they all flew up, surrounding me. It was the most magical feeling- like stepping into the pages of a book! I have never seen such beautiful butterflies as I did in Mai Chau, and at night, fireflies darted through the air like little sparks. I also saw some very impressive insects, and I have never seen such huge spiders! Any fear of insects I had before I went to Mai Chau, quickly vanished. You just couldn't be scared of insects there, because you had to live with them!



*“...As I walked past they all flew up, surrounding me. It was the most magical feeling—like stepping into the pages of a book! I have never seen such beautiful butterflies as I did in Mai Chau, and at night, fireflies darted through the air like little sparks...”*

*(continued on next page)*



## The experience of a lifetime

*(continued from page 4)*



There was a little village a 10 minute walk from my home stay which I loved to visit, simply because the walk was so beautiful. Here they sold all sorts of handicrafts and souvenirs. In the weekends, the village was buzzing with tourists, however during the week, it was much quieter. I loved to buy a coconut ice cream or a sugar cane juice (which I be-

came addicted to! It is so delicious!!), and sit in the sun. There were a few little cafe-type places that had free Wi-Fi, which was very useful for keeping in contact with the outside world! On one of my trips to the village, I saw a woman bashing the trees



with an enormous stick, causing a shower of leaves and twigs to fall to the ground. She then produced a pair of giant wooden tweezers and started picking things off the ground, and dropping them into a little pot of water. Upon closer inspection, I realised she was collecting stink bugs from the ground, that had fallen from the trees. Hung and I joined in to help her for a little while, which she found very amusing. Hung explained to me that the woman was collecting the bugs to fry and eat. At first I couldn't quite believe him, however to my horror, the very next day I woke up to see my host family knocking stink bugs out of the trees near the house, and lo and behold, that evening for dinner, a plate of fried stink bugs was served up as part of the selection of dishes!! I didn't want to be the lily livered westerner, too pathetic to try one, so I did. To my surprise, it wasn't as bad as I had expected – a little bitter and crunchy perhaps, but not as disgusting as it looked.

*(continued on next page)*

## The experience of a lifetime

*(continued from page 7)*

As well as the stink bugs, I witnessed many other interesting dishes being placed on the table during those two weeks! We had snails (do not try – slimy, grisly and absolutely disgusting, I'd rather eat a stink bug any day!), pigs eyes, and about every other part of the pig, (I couldn't bring myself to eat the eyes, although Hung couldn't either, so I felt a bit better about that!) and cow intestine (which I also couldn't eat- it was rubbery, furry, and green!!). Everybody would watch in amusement, as my face turned each time they set these delights down on the table. They then however, would bring out a few plates of edible food (that were delicious), and put them down next to me, making gestures to explain to me that this was my food. They had realised that I wasn't too keen on eating those types of foods, so they would very kindly cook me something different. Another key part of the family's diet I noticed, was the vast amount of rice wine they would drink. They drank it for breakfast, lunch and dinner. To show their hospitality, they would also force it upon me every time I ate with them!! Most nights, this resulted in me stumbling my way back to the room after dinner - it is strong stuff!!

Despite all of these amazing new experiences, by far the most unforgettable ingredient of my trip was the incredible people I met, especially the three ladies I taught. Their names were Lien, Hien and Hung (not to be confused with Hung my translator). Lien and Hung were in their late twenties, and Hien was the same age as me (18). Both Lien and Hien had lost their left leg, and Hung had a back condition. They were each so lovely, and three of the happiest, most hilarious people I have ever met. Not one of them let their disability get in the way of their enjoyment in life. All three of them were such inspirational people.



*(continued on next page)*

## The experience of a lifetime

*(continued from page 6)*

We sometimes had neighbours and locals also come and join in for a lesson to try and improve their English as well. There was a little girl who lived next door, who would come and sit on our laps and watch the English lessons. By the end of the two weeks, she had learnt how to count to ten, and was so proud of herself! Every time we saw her, she would start counting to ten to show off!! It was great to see everybody so keen to learn English, and it made me realise even more so, that we were really making a difference.



Deciding to go to Mai Chau was the best decision I have ever made. I had two of the most incredible weeks of my life there. I met some very special and truly inspirational people, and learnt so much about a culture and way of life so far removed from my own. I also lived in the most beautiful surroundings I have ever seen.

I was made to feel so welcome, and although nobody spoke a word of English,

we still managed to communicate quite effectively, using big arm gestures, and exaggerated facial expressions! We must have been quite a sight! I think they must now think that all westerners are completely crazy! It is amazing how much you can get across using just sign language! I got on extremely well with the grandmother of the house, despite the fact she didn't know a single English word. She was absolutely lovely, and her wizened old face would always break into a huge smile every time I saw her. She would keep telling Hung that it was about time I was married, and that I am to let her know when I do get married! Like many other members of the older generation in the rural areas of Vietnam, she had a set of completely black teeth. This is not due to the fact that their teeth are rotten. Much of the older generation chew betel, which is a mixture of different types of leaves, nuts and other ingredients. The constant chewing of the betel turns their teeth black- and although it doesn't look it, apparently it actually helps to prevent tooth decay, and makes their teeth stronger!

*"...Deciding to go to Mai Chau was the best decision I have ever made. I had two of the most incredible weeks of my life there. I met some very special and truly inspirational people, and learnt so much about a culture and way of life so far removed from my own..."*

*(continued on next page)*



## The experience of a lifetime

*(continued from page 7)*

Not once did I even feel slightly lonely whilst I was in Mai Chau. There was too much to do, too much to see, and too many new things to discover. Hung (my translator) was great at helping me to involve myself in everything I could, learn about the culture, and get to know the locals. Two weeks was not nearly long enough! Saying goodbye to all the wonderful people I met, was the hardest part of it all. We had all become so close. I am already planning my next trip back to Mai Chau!



To anyone that is considering going to Mai Chau, stop thinking about it, and go!! You will have the experience of a lifetime. The more you put in, the more you will get back, and it will be such amazing, rewarding adventure. I can guarantee you will absolutely love it!

My email is [jazwat@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:jazwat@yahoo.co.uk) if you have any questions about the project. For example what to bring and how much money to take (you need to bring cash – there are no ATM's or banks anywhere near).

**Jasmin Watson, Community Development volunteer, UK**

***“...To anyone that is considering going to Mai Chau, stop thinking about it, and go!! You will have the experience of a lifetime. The more you put in, the more you will get back, and it will be such amazing, rewarding adventure. I can guarantee you will absolutely love it!...”***

## VOLUNTEER CORNER

### Lettre à Bo De Pagoda d'une volontaire

Nouvelle-Calédonie, le 01 mai 2013

Mes bien chers Nannies, maîtresse Xuan, amis de Bo De et moines de Chua Bo De,

J'ai passé un mois avec chacun & chacune d'entre vous à l'orphelinat de Bo De et je vous en remercie du fond du coeur.



Je n'ai pas eu assez de temps ou d'opportunité pour discuter avec vous mais vos visages, vos sourires... sont gravés dans ma mémoire. Car j'ai pu vous observer et vous écouter durant mes 4 semaines de mission humanitaire car je comprends très bien le vietnamien mais ne le pratique que très peu.

Je m'appelle Nathalie MAI, de parents vietnamiens mais tout comme moi nés en Nouvelle-Calédonie (de nationalité française).

A ma naissance, mes parents m'ont donné un prénom vietnamien et aujourd'hui je les remercie de tout mon coeur. Car durant ce séjour au sein de l'orphelinat, tout le monde m'a appelée Thuy et je me suis sentie avant tout Vietnamiennne.

*(continued on next page)*



## Lettre à Bo De Pagoda d'une volontaire

*(continued from page 9)*

Je peux vous dire après cette expérience que je suis fière d'être Vietnamiennne et d'avoir eu un grand-père de Nam Dinh et une grand-mère de Linh Bin. Ils ont su transmettre une éducation, une religion et de vraie valeur de la vie.

Le langage n'est qu'une barrière car quelqu'un m'a dit un jour "Is easy love someone when you can feel your soul and your energy". J'ai trouvé au sein de vous cet amour que mes grands-parents ont su me donner alors que je n'ai jamais parlé vietnamien avec eux.

J'ai toujours eu le grand désir de travailler dans un orphelinat et il était normal pour moi de rendre ce service à mon pays, à mon peuple. J'ai choisi de vivre ce temps à Hanoï car c'était pour moi une certaine façon de remercier mes ancêtres de celle que je suis mais de mieux me comprendre car je suis entre une éducation française et vietnamienne.

J'ai compris le silence, la dureté des mots, des actes... chez les Vietnamiens mais au fond de tout cela, il y a une grande leçon à en tirer. Si je suis celle que je suis actuellement c'est grâce à cette éducation et à cette force qui m'a été donnée durant toute ma vie.

Vous avez une valeur inestimable en chacun d'entre vous et une force qui vous aide à avancer et à toujours garder la tête haute. Sachez transmettre ces valeurs aux enfants qui sont dans cet orphelinat et merci à vous pour ce geste d'amour.

Apprenez à dire ce que vous avez sur le coeur, exprimez-vous auprès des étrangers qui viennent vous aider. N'hésitez pas à être faible lorsque vous avez besoin de soutien ou de réconfort.

J'aime Hanoï car j'y ai de la famille et j'y reviendrai pour mes parents qui n'y sont jamais venus mais aussi pour moi car j'ai une grande famille à présent qui m'attend.

Là où je suis, je prie pour chacun et chacune d'entre vous. Gardez confiance et espoir malgré les moments difficiles !

*P.S. : Un merci tout spécialement à mes soeurs Lan & N'Ga & Minh et enfants. Vous m'avez donné au-delà de mes attentes.*

**Nathalie Mai, Care volunteer, France**

## VOLUNTEER CORNER

### Ca Tru comes back - Traditional Vietnamese music restored

On Saturday 23rd March 2013, I went with an Australian volunteer, Ann Marie, to a very special music performance: Ca Tru Comes Back. The music is played by CATRUTHANGLONG, from the Vietnamese Folklore Association. This music group brings new life to the traditional Vietnamese music with unusual musical instruments.

The music was very distinct. First there were three drum battles on a wooden drum with a bladder over the top. That was the invitation for the musicians to come and play their music. Then two musicians arrived, made a subdued bow and sat on the floor gracefully. One of them had a kind of 'stretched'



guitar with a long neck and the back is open near the resonance box. She explained that in one hold, the strings can be played to produce a high and a low note. Don't ask me how it is possible, but she showed it can be done.



The other musician only used a wide batten as her instrument, with two sticks in her right hand and another, a little bit thicker, in her left hand, all three made of bamboo. The sticks reminded me of the chop sticks that are used to eat with. Maybe that is how it started, because it was explained that in the past the chop sticks for the children were thinner than the ones for the mother, and that was how they produced different sounds. This tapping of the sticks with a different rhythm gave a very nice effect and the sound was tight, wooden and high.

There was also another musical instrument that was used, a kind of cither with a sound that reminded me of a harp. The sound of the musical instruments was already distinct, but the singing was even more distinct. A number of females were singing a few songs with different subjects; about a girl who wrote a letter to her boyfriend, but the letter never arrived, and that is why she was waiting for him in vain. About a sad afternoon, where an old man is telling about the love he feels for a young girl. And many more like this. There are about 36 old-time Vietnamese songs that have been saved and these musicians have revived them. The voices had different sounds than the ones we know: high, nasal, stretching, plaintive and melancholic. People who do not like this kind of music would call it 'caterwauling', but I could appreciate this music very much. Because even though I could not understand the lyrics, I certainly could feel the desire and the pain in the songs.

*(continued on next page)*

## VOLUNTEER CORNER

### Ca Tru comes back - Traditional Vietnamese music restored

*(continued from page 11)*

It is an old tradition in Vietnam that, when you like a piece of music very much, you throw a little bamboo stick in a metal bowl. People sitting in the front row had been given bamboo sticks, so sometimes you could hear the loud resonance of the stick on the metal bowl. Sometimes even three sticks were thrown at the same time when it was a very nice piece of music. A little bit confusing and noisy, but the musicians did not raise an eye brow at all.



On YouTube I have once seen a little movie about this type of music. It is certainly worthwhile to listen to, because of the sounds that we will find difficult to imitate. Not only that they are very high pitched sounds, but they are also sung very much from the throat and it looks like the breathing supports the singing. Also the rythm with the sticks will be difficult for me to imitate, but will be a challenge for any drummer. My grandsons Joris and Bram would like to drum with the sticks on the table, but the parents would certainly have objected if I had bought a music instrument like that !

The evening after the concert, I got an invitation from Lan, a volunteer in the Community House, to come and listen to a different kind of traditional concert. This was also a Ca Tru musical group. It was less refined in gestures, in singing and in music, but the group had two female dancers who formed a beautiful addition.

And this is a colourful picture of myself with this wonderful company. On my right is one of the dancers. The woman in the licac colour and with the metal ring around her neck is the leader of the group. She is singing very professionally and she gives also singing lessons for Ca Tru songs.

**Nicolette Verkleij, PRO International Development volunteer, Netherlands**





## STAFF UPDATE



Full name: Bui Duc Hung

Date of birth: 11/04/1990

Zodiac sign: Aries

Favourite activities: listening to music, swimming and working with kids

Studying status: third-year student, English major at Hanoi University

Languages: Vietnamese, English and Chinese

Hello everybody, I am a new member of Project Abroad Vietnam. I am doing an internship here for four more months and I am three weeks into it. My work is to support the permanent staff at the office such as welcoming new volunteers at the airport, partly taking care of the Bo De Project and running the Two Week Special programme.

Actually, I worked at one project of Projects Abroad Vietnam in Mai Chau – Hoa Binh for two weeks with a beautiful girl named Jasmine, from England. We really enjoyed our time there by many activities, not only working at the project but also discovering attractive surrounding sides. We came there to give English lesson to disabled staffs of a social protection centre called Thuan Hoa. The students picked up English really fast and after two weeks, they can use English for selling hand-made products at the shop of the centre. Jasmine and I were so proud of them; however, I want to give a big thank and a big hug for her contribution to the project. Besides teaching, we also experienced the landscapes and local foods here. Every day, after teaching we spent time to walk through a peaceful rice field to approach the Lac village I, a touristy place. Sometimes we went to a stream to swim with local boys. After that time, I could feel that I changed my lifestyle somewhat. Hopefully, we will soon have new volunteers.

Working at the orphanage of Bo De pagoda also brought a big surprise to me. I used to work there before and it is clearly that the situation of kids was improved. In the past, there is only a small and low-equipped kindergarten and now it has replaced by a bigger one. The kids even have a full-time Vietnamese teacher as a normal kindergarten and their behaviour is really nice. Furthermore, the kids are freer; they can play in the kindergarten and be taken out easier for outside activities. For example, they were brought to an ice-cream shop and they seemed to be so happy with that. I hope that the project will be run well like this and be developed more.

That is my pleasure when I have a chance to work for Project Abroad Vietnam and be a member of this team.

I wish that I will fulfil my vow of work: “contributing for learning”.

## DIRTY DAY REVIEW

Hanoi is stepping into its hot and humid season, but despite the sweating and sticky feeling and the sunshiny morning, our volunteer team spent a whole morning contributing their creativity and enthusiasm to drawing and painting a colorful and children-inspiring wall of the kindergarten classroom at Bo De placement - where our care and physio volunteers have been working.

The theme of the decoration is the flying hot balloons of various sizes and colors. It's pretty easy so the volunteers can design and paint their own hot balloons themselves, just needed a pencil to sketch on the wall, mix the colors from the 5 basic colors provided and start their painting. We also repainted the foot of the wall which had been dirty. Care volunteers Louisa also had an excellent idea of getting the kids' colorful handprints stamped on the wall. Let's check out some good photos we had during the day:



# June Calendar

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
					1 Children's Day	2 Fiona arrives
3 Sara and Ian arrive	4 Timmy arrives	5	6 Cuisine event: Grilled fish pie	7	8	9 William arrives
10 Sebastian arrives	11 Maren arrives Lykke's birthday	12	13	14 Waterpark Trip 9am	15 Eleanor arrives	16 Marie-Ambre arrives
17	18 Carrie arrives	19 Natalie & Kylie arrive	20 Caroline arrives Cultural workshop	21 Nina's birthday	22 Orlaith, Catherine and Remi arrive	23
24 Hannah and Dannica arrive	25 Ferne and Evan arrive	26	27	28 Remi arrives Hannah's birthday	29 Dirty Weekend at Pediatric Hospital	30 Sumaiya & Siu Ying arrive

**June 6 - Cuisine event.** We are discovering a traditional specialty of Hanoi: La vong grilled fish pie.

**Meet at:** Projects Abroad office      **Time:** 6PM      **Cost:** around 130,000VD/pax

**June 14 - Water Park trip** - Do you fancy a cool morning in the water park in this hot and humid weather? Meet at office at 9am then we will head to the park.

**Meet at:** Projects Abroad office      **Time:** 9am      **Entrance ticket:** 120,000VND/ person

**June 20 - Monthly workshop** - This month's workshop will be a cultural workshop where volunteers can exchange their ideas and opinions about Vietnam culture. More information to come!

**June 29—Dirty Weekend at National Pediatric Hospital** - We are going to decorate the physiotherapy room of the hospital to make it look more children-friendly. You are very much welcomed to contribute your creativity and physical labour to this meaningful event.

**Meet at:** Projects Abroad office      **Time:** 8am—11am



# Photos of the Month



**Physio volunteers work with a disabled child at Bo De pagoda**



**Great smiles of care volunteer Sandrine and a little girl at her placement**



**During the Francophone festival, French teaching volunteer helps her students with French performances**



**Speech pathology volunteer Amanda is enjoying her work at the National Pediatric hospital**



**Sport teaching volunteer Arthur has been giving fun and interesting sport lessons to his students. Great job!**

## Contact Us

### Address:

Apartment No. 103, Building B4  
Van Phuc Diplomatic Compound  
298 Kim Ma Street  
Ba Dinh District  
Hanoi, Vietnam

*Projects Abroad is the leading global organizer of overseas voluntary work placements. Our wide range of projects, including Teaching, Care, Conservation & Environment, Medicine & Healthcare, Sports, Culture & Community projects and Journalism, are designed specifically for the needs of the communities in which we work, whilst giving our volunteers the very best experience of volunteering abroad.*

*Based in Hanoi, Vietnam, volunteers can work on a variety of projects, including care work with disabled and orphaned children, physical therapy at local hospitals, and teaching either English or French in both primary and secondary schools. The latest projects to be opened is nursing project and Occupational Therapy project. If you are interested in volunteering in Vietnam with Projects Abroad then please log on to [www.projects-abroad.net](http://www.projects-abroad.net) for more information.*

