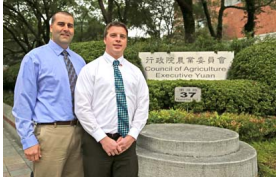


Culture shock LEAD participants experience trip to southeast Asia

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

Thursday, 14 February 2013 14:26 -



Vietnam favorite country because of friendliness, community, culture

Brandon Carter was ready to go home after he and Joe Richeson and 27 other LEAD fellows, arrived in Hanoi.

“It was foggy when we landed and the country was filthy,” Carter said. “And there were scooters and people everywhere. Controlled chaos.”

Richeson agreed, noting his first impression of Vietnam was that “it looked unsafe.”

Especially after spending two days in Hong Kong, known as one of the world’s leading financial centers.

The two Gothenburg businessmen are LEAD (Leadership, Education and Development) fellows and were part of the 2013 International Study/Travel Seminar to Hong Kong, Vietnam and Taiwan.

LEAD is a Nebraska program designed to develop agricultural leaders from Nebraska’s future generations.

However the country quickly became the favorite of Carter and Richeson whose parents remember the war in Vietnam as images from jungle warfare were broadcast on the evening news.

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Richeson said he experienced more in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) such as meeting with consulate officials and learning how financial support from the farm bill directly affects them.



Beef, soybean meal, wheat and distillers grain are imported into the tiny country and the consulate staff keeps those operations running smoothly, Richeson said.

Carter said he liked the friendliness of the Vietnamese, who seemed happy to see Americans, and observing their way of life.

Both said they experienced Vietnam culture as they visited bustling markets with live chickens, fish and other wares in a one-block span filled with people bartering for goods.

Richeson pointed out that most of the Vietnamese shop for what they need daily.

“I felt like it was 60 years behind the times,” Carter said. “I liked it. It felt more like a community feeling.”

Richeson said they were told that big shopping centers tried to make a go in the country but the people didn't like them.

Another highlight was visiting a prison where American prisoners of war, including U.S. Sen. John McCain, were kept. The Vietnamese were prisoners there as well when the French occupied the country.

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The group also saw part of the famous Cu Chi tunnels, outside of Ho Chi Minh City, that the Viet Cong used to hide in, fight from, to keep and transport supplies and where they often lived during the Vietnam War.

While in Hanoi, the fellows listened to what they described as Communist propaganda blared over loudspeakers mounted on power poles.

“The communists control all of the media,” Richeson said.

While in Hong Kong, the fellows visited with the executive chef at a Disneyland Hong Kong hotel.

There they learned that two hotels at Disneyland buy only Nebraska beef and popcorn from ConAgra.

Because Hong Kong is built on an island, most everything is imported.

From that experience, and from visiting officials in the other two countries, Carter said he learned the importance of U.S. exports.

“I didn’t realize how much was shipped overseas from the heartland and the affect we have on those countries,” he said.

Skyscrapers are abundant in Hong Kong, Richeson said, noting that more than 1,200 are part of the landscape and that 33 of the top 100 tallest residential buildings are in Hong Kong.

