

My internship at the FEC JOINT Stock Company



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On the 6th of September at around 08:40 I left my house to start my long journey to Vietnam where I was going to do an internship. I took the train to Zürich, had a meal at my university and went to the airport. I arrived there a long time in advance to be sure not to miss my flight. During that time, I went on an observation platform to observe the airplanes taking off and landing and was thinking about where there were flying to. At this place on the floor, there were many arrows, which each pointed to a different direction. They showed the direction and distance of many cities that can be reached from the airport of Zürich. No city in Vietnam but Bangkok, where I was first going, was there, and I realized that it's one of the cities furthest away. I looked in the direction of this arrow and was trying to see Bangkok, but of course impossible to see, it's too far away. The picture below is the last picture I took in Switzerland, and it is the airplane I was about to take. At that time, I was a bit nervous because I didn't know what to expect, and I was also thinking if I may have forgotten something. Do I still have my passport? Let's check. And visa, is it there? Let's check. The plane ticket, do I have it? Yes, it's there. Maybe my passport isn't there anymore, let's check again... I entered the airplane, and the plane took off shortly after 19:00 Swiss time for Bangkok. In the plane, I met a couple from the Netherlands. They were going to Thailand for 3 weeks holidays. They told me that Southeast Asia is beautiful, but also that everything is different from my country. Furthermore, they wished me good luck for my internship. I tried to sleep a bit in the airplane. After about 10h30 of flight, I landed in Bangkok the next morning.



Picture 1: Departure at the airport of Zürich.

One of the first thing I saw in Bangkok was a weird object moving in my direction. It was a robot that walked around the airport to clean the floor, something I had never seen before. I had more than 5 hours to spend in this airport before taking another flight to Hanoi, so I just walked around, ate some food and had a coffee. Surprisingly, I didn't even feel tired. I took my second flight, but this time it was only for 2 hours. During this flight, I got tired and felt asleep. Around 18:00 Vietnam time, I finally arrived at the airport in Hanoi. At that point, I was already traveling for 28 hours. I passed through the immigration and was happy to see that my luggage followed me from Zürich without getting lost. Then I tried to find the person of the company that picks me up at the airport, which was challenging because I didn't know how this person looked like. Fortunately, we quickly found each other and went to drink a bubble tea. We could then introduce each other. Her name was Jolie, she told me that she did an experience abroad in Morocco and was even able to speak in French with me. After this, we met the other guy who was also starting the same internship at FEC Group and his mother who was flying back home. His name is Frederik and he is from Slovakia. It is nice that we were two students doing the same internship and he looked friendly. We took the car and drove to Bắc Giang, our final destination. Bắc Giang is located around 50 km north of Hanoi, and it took us around 1.5 hour to arrive there. I managed

to sleep a bit in the car. When we arrived in Bắc Giang, the driver drove around the city center, so that we can discover the city where we would live for the next three months. The city was decorated with many colorful lights, so I had the feelings that it was Christmastime. We decided to eat something at the restaurant. I got a pho which is kind of a soup with meat, herbs and more, and it's a traditional dish in Vietnam. I didn't eat much because I was more tired than hungry at that time. Fortunately, we planned to go to the place where we were supposed to sleep, so I finally after now 30 hours of traveling could sleep in a bed.



Picture 2: First dinner in Bắc Giang.

Things turned out a bit differently, as it was not a bed but a floor with a thin carpet for the two of us. Vietnamese people are used to sleeping on a hard surface, whereas Europeans are used to sleeping on a soft surface. On that night, I was tired enough to sleep also there, but I woke up several times. The next day Frederik and I decided to look for another accommodation as this one was also dirty and far away from the company. Thanks to the help of Jolie, we quickly found another accommodation which

was good. On picture 3 can be seen the accommodation of the first night on the left and the other one on the right.



Picture 3: Accommodation in Bắc Giang.

On that day, it was also the first time we went to the company, where we were supposed to do our internship. It was the men's day and therefore the company was decorated to celebrate this. We could meet our future colleagues and drank some beers with the people from the company after work to celebrate the men's day.



Picture 4: First day at the company.

I was surprised by the good atmosphere in the company, and I was looking forward to doing my internship there. On the next Monday, we started to work properly at the company, and I was assigned to work in the marketing department. My job consisted of creating a LinkedIn and Twitter account for the company and to help translate the company's website into English. Every lunch, all the company ate together. I realized that they all eat very quickly, and they were already finished when I didn't even eat half of my meal. I was wondering why everyone was eating so fast until I saw that everyone had a nap after lunch. It means the quicker they eat, the longer the nap would be. This is different from my country where it is not common to have a nap after lunch, but I was thinking that it is actually a good idea, as everyone has more energy for the afternoon without having to drink a coffee. Usually, I eat slowly in Switzerland, but I managed to eat quicker at the company, and now I eat as fast as the Vietnamese people. There is a good atmosphere in the company, sometimes we all order drinks to drink them while working. Sometimes we go for a snack with some colleagues, and it's always delicious as they are local and know the best places to eat something. The first time we had a snack with our colleagues is illustrated on picture 5. The sausages that can also be seen on the picture reminded me of "Cervelat" which is a traditional sausage in Switzerland and the taste was also not much different. The main difference is that in Vietnam, they eat it with a spicy sauce.



Picture 5: Snack after work.

The company organizes many events for their employees. As can be seen on picture 6, the company organized a birthday party followed by a karaoke night, a barbecue on another day and even a football tournament. This is nice as we get to know better everyone in the company.



Picture 6: Birthday party and barbecue organised by the company.

During my internship at FEC Group, I had the opportunity to visit a wastewater treatment system, and they explained to me how it works. Moreover, I could do some air quality measurements. Both are shown on the pictures below.



Picture 7: Visit of a wastewater treatment system and air quality measurements.

I worked mainly with the marketing team, but sometimes I could also join the monitoring team. I went for a 4-day trip in the north of Vietnam to take some wastewater samples. Through the journey, we passed through beautiful landscapes and had to drive through mountain roads. Some of these mountainous landscapes had some similarities with Swiss mountain landscapes, even though the vegetation wasn't the same. We drove through Sapa which is an appreciated place from the tourists, and we also stopped at Lai Chau. Below are illustrated some landscapes that can be seen in the north of Vietnam.



Picture 8: Landscape in the north of Vietnam.

To access the areas where we had to take our water samples, we had to drive through some mountain roads. The landscape there was different, and I had the feeling that I was in the jungle. We had a good car but as it can be seen on the pictures below, the road was difficult to get through in some areas. The tire of one wheel broke three times, but fortunately the driver managed to repair it again. On the picture on the right, we had to stop at this location because the road became too dangerous. Luckily, my colleague could continue with a motorbike to take the water sample and in the meantime, I could enjoy the nice view. My colleague found it funny that I was putting sun cream on my skin, because most Vietnamese people don't need it, apparently. This is an example of something that is common in Switzerland but not in Vietnam. During these days with the monitoring team in the north of Vietnam, I saw many beautiful landscapes and therefore enjoyed this trip.



Picture 9: Mountain roads in the north of Vietnam.

After the trip in the north of Vietnam, I took the bus to Ninh Binh to meet the other students doing an internship in Vietnam and to discover the hometown of the IAESTE coordinator in Vietnam. The long-distance buses in Vietnam are awesome. They are equipped with beds, so that passengers can sleep during the journey. This is something that doesn't exist in my country, maybe because in Switzerland we are more used to traveling by train instead of the bus over longer distances and also because the country is much smaller than Vietnam.



Picture 10: Long-distance bus in Vietnam.

Ninh Binh is located about 1.5 h by car south from Hanoi. We could sleep at Ms. Huong's (the IAESTE coordinator for Vietnam) house and meet her family. On the next day, we went to visit a beautiful landscape on small boats. Below is a picture of all of us. Our group was very international with people from Tunisia, Germany, Switzerland, Vietnam, Slovakia, Saudi Arabia and Poland.



Picture 11: Group picture in Ninh Binh.

The first activity we did in Hanoi was a tour on small boats, like can be seen on picture 12. The drivers of the boats are farmers of these regions. They drive those boats a few times per month to gain some money. I was thinking that it must be tiring to drive the boat so long, because the tour took about 2 hours. The landscape was like from a postcard. We saw the hills where the King Kong movie has been filmed, we drove in caves with the boats, and we stopped several times to visit some pagodas.



Picture 12: Tour with the boats

In the afternoon, we went to another place to visit some pagodas. They were so big and beautiful. Also, from the inside, they were well decorated and looked beautiful. The pictures below show 2 pagodas we have seen during our trip. On the one on the left, we even went to the top. It was a pain, so many stairs..., but it was worth going up because the view was amazing from the top!



Picture 13: Pagodas in Vietnam

On the following day, we went to visit a Christian church like the one on picture 14. It still looks different from how churches look like in my country.



Picture 14: Christian church.

In the afternoon, we went to see again some beautiful landscapes.



Picture 15: Landscapes in Ninh Binh.

Picture 16 illustrates a dinner we had in Ninh Binh. It is called hot pot. Ninh Binh is known for its goat meat. On that evening, we were eating “hot pot” and cooked ingredients in a hot liquid. It made me think about “fondue chinoise” which is a dish we have in Switzerland on special occasions. It is a pot with broth, and we put thin slices of beef or chicken meat inside. In Vietnam, it’s not a broth, but another liquid, and we put tofu, different types of meat (in Ninh Binh also goat meat as it is the specialty there), vegetables and more. It was delicious and I ate a lot.



Picture 16: Food in Ninh Binh.

On another weekend, Frederik, some other IAESTE students and I went to Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam. Frederik was nice and showed me the most important places in Hanoi. He knew the city already a bit, because he has been there with his mother some weeks before. On picture 17, we can see that Hanoi was colorful. One reason for this was that it was mid-autumn party. I visited quickly, the temple that can be seen on the picture on the left. Hanoi is a big city, and I was impressed by the amount of motorcycle riding there. Frederik told me that on normal days there are even more motorbikes, because the traffic has been limited on that day for the mid-autumn party. Also, many girls were taking pictures of themselves in the street. I learned that they do many pictures on these days because the city is more colorful and therefore suits particularly well for making new profile pictures for Instagram, Facebook, ... We also visited the main monuments and buildings of the city, visited a war museum where we learned about the history of Vietnam and visited the pottery village. In the evening, we were invited to join a party on the rooftop of somebody’s accommodation. This was fun; we met a lot of people and got to know an American girl who was also doing an internship in Bắc Giang. Hanoi was different from any European cities I have seen before in my life. The only thing I liked less was the quality of the air which was quite polluted and dusty from all this traffic, but hopefully we had some face masks.



Picture 17: Hanoi, capital of Vietnam.

Concerning the food, we ate Bun Cha which consists of fried pork with rice noodle, salad, herbs, soy sprout and more. You roll everything in a rice sheet. It is my favorite meal in Vietnam, together with Nems. The latter were like the “spring rolls” we have in Switzerland but tasted better in my opinion. The Bun Cha can be seen on the picture on the left and on the right, there is a “croissant” and an egg coffee. The latter isn’t a coffee with an egg inside but rather a coffee with a cream similar to a “tiramisu”. I found it delicious, almost a dessert. Croissant would be something I miss from my home country because it’s not common to eat it in Vietnam, so I enjoyed it too. Vietnamese people are more used to eating pho as breakfast.



Picture 18: Food and drinks in Hanoi.

On the first day at FEC Group, there was the men’s day, but they also celebrate the women’s day. The latter was on the 20th of October, the women were welcomed by the men of the company on the red carpet and every woman got a small present. There was also a cooking competition on that occasion where several men teams had to cook a meal for the whole company. The women would then have to decide which team cooked the best dish. Frederik and I participated in this competition, and we decided to cook a European dish, so that they could discover what we eat in our countries. We decided to cook crêpes which is a common meal in Slovakia and in Switzerland. Frederik prepared sort of an apple chutney, a Slovak specialty, to have sweet crêpes and I cooked a mushroom sauce to have salty

crêpes. The first difficulty was to find all the ingredients in the supermarket, as the supermarkets here didn't sell everything that we are used to having in Europe. We altered our recipes a bit and managed to find alternatives for the missing ingredients. However, we started cooking and realized that it's challenging to cook for 80 people. Once they told us that we only have 1 hour less to cook than what we expected, we got in a rush. We managed to cook some crêpes so that at least some of our colleagues could try them. Our crêpes were soooooo good that we even won the competition! After lunch, some men could still have fun by drinking some rice wine, but the women had to clean the messy room...



Picture 19: Women's Day at the company.

In Switzerland, people usually like to go hiking in their free time. It is also something I wanted to do in Vietnam, and therefore we went on a small hike trip in the surroundings of Bắc Giang. We started with walking up many stairs to a temple that we visited. Then we walked uphill. On the way up, there were many signs which indicated to not leave trash there, but apparently people interpret it to especially leave a lot of trash at those locations. The landscape was nice, we walked through a forest and the weather was perfect, not too hot, not too cold. We managed to reach the top. As can be seen on the picture on the left, we were already at 260 meters above sea level, that means you can feel that at this altitude there is less oxygen in the air 😊. On the way back, we walked through some villages and on the background of the image on the right, we could even see a church. In the afternoon, we visited Jolie's hometown, and we could also meet her family. We went there by motorbike, but as I don't have a driving license, Frederik took me on his motorcycle. Although he was not much used to driving a motorbike because also in Slovakia like in Switzerland, people rather drive cars than motorbikes, he managed to drive very well, and I enjoyed the ride. Jolie's village was surrounded by amazing landscapes and the atmosphere there was peaceful.



Picture 20: Hiking trip in the surroundings of Bắc Giang.

Back at work, I changed the department from the marketing to the analysis department. The CEO of the company wanted us to experience every department of the company. As I didn't study chemistry at university, it was a bit challenging the first days, but the colleagues from the laboratory explained everything well so that I quickly learned the analytical procedures. In the end, it was not too difficult, and I appreciated this job. For instance, I had to analyze the phosphor of some wastewater samples by coloring the samples. According to the coloring, they could deduce the amount of phosphor in there. I don't know much about the results because once the water is colored, I bring them to another laboratory who takes over and get the results. Afterward I had to clean all the equipment I used and there is also a clear procedure for this. The job in the laboratory is much closer to what I study compared to the job in the marketing department. I enjoyed my job in the laboratory and the colleagues there were really nice, so there was a great atmosphere there.



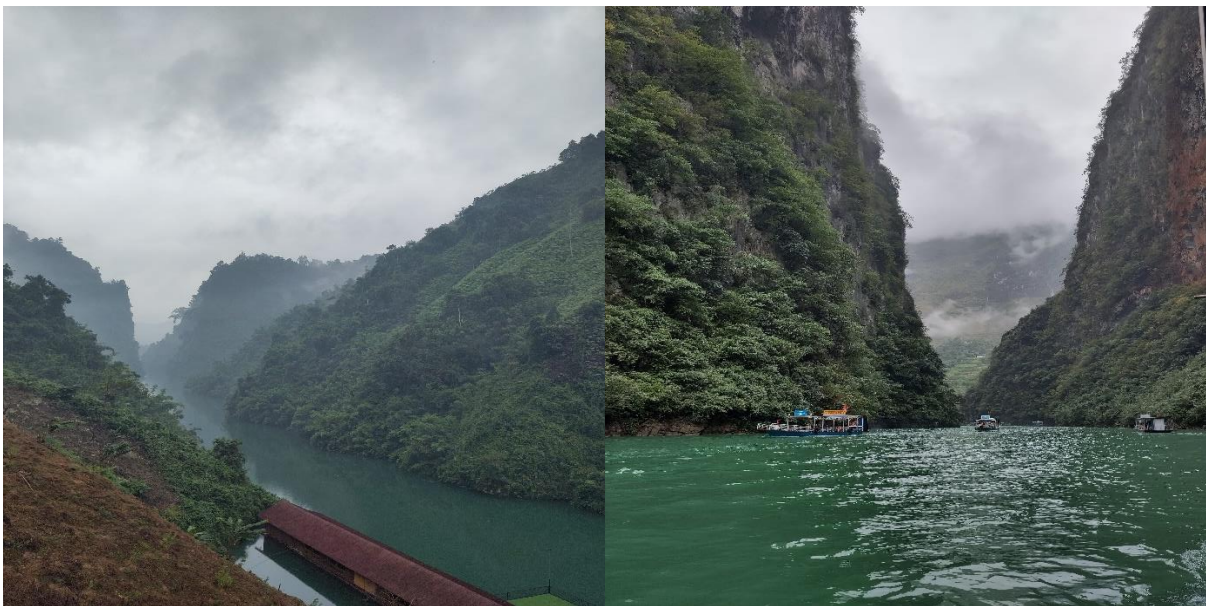
Picture 21: Work at laboratory

Next to the many activities organized for the employees, the company organized a charity event and collected warm clothes that would be distributed to poor people in Ha Giang. On one weekend, we drove to Ha Giang to distribute the collected clothes and some food to the poor people, as illustrated in the picture below.



Picture 22: Distribution of warm clothes and food to poor people in the North of Vietnam

The trip was also an opportunity to see some beautiful landscape, the most beautiful ones I have seen so far in Vietnam. Ha Giang is worth to visit!



Picture 23: Landscape near Ha Giang

When we were visiting the landscapes of Ha Giang, something caught my attention but didn't do to all the others. It was a weir. I studied environmental engineering with a major in hydraulic engineering, therefore I was interested in this weir.



Picture 24: Weir near Ha Giang

The internship was organized by IAESTE and there were also other students doing an internship in Vietnam, but most of them were located in Thái Nguyên. We spend one weekend there to visit our friends and the headquarters of IAESTE Vietnam. We visited a temple to remember the soldiers who died in the war. In the afternoon, we went through an ancient village where we can see beautiful houses and try some local food, tee and alcohol. The latter was conserved in big glasses, as can be seen in the picture below. I was surprising to see in what the alcohol was conserved, many different things were used, even a snake!



Picture 25: Alcohol in glasses

In this region, green tea is produced. We decided to visit the tea plantation and the tea factory. The plantation was big, and they explained to us which leaves give the best green tea. The tea is sold in different quality ranges according to which leaf is used. On the picture below is illustrated the tea plantation and the factory. It surprised me that the tea is produced on the floor, this would probably be different in my country. Of course, we could not leave without trying some tea.

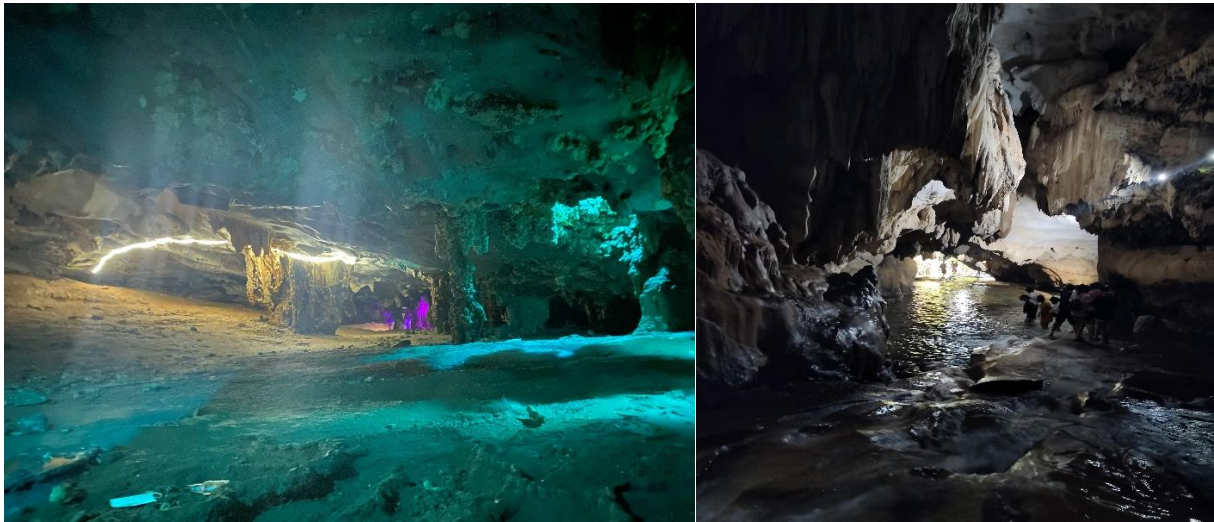


Picture 26: Green tea in Thái Nguyên

In the evening we discovered the nightlife of the city and went to a club. It is somehow similar compared to clubs in Europe, but there were some differences. There was not really a dance floor, but rather round table and people were close to their tables. The reason for this is to have a place

where to put the drinks. Also, the music was different as it was mainly Vietnamese music which I didn't like too much, but otherwise it was a good experience.

On the following day we drove to the countryside to visit some caves. It was challenging because we had to go over many stairs to reach the entrance of the cave and not everyone was used to it, but everyone managed to reach the top. It was worth walking up as the scenery was outstanding there, as can be seen on picture 27. At some places it felt like from another world. After visiting the cave, I had to give an interview and they were filming me, something that never happened in Switzerland.



Picture 27: Cave near Thái Nguyên

We are slowly approaching the end of the internship in Vietnam, but before there was still the trip to Sapa that we did together with the other students doing an internship in Vietnam and the colleagues from the laboratory. We travelled there with the night train as I like trains, I was curious of how trains work in Vietnam. I was surprised how good it was. As can be seen on picture 28, the interior was clean and convenient. The beds were comfortable, despite that it was sometimes shaky. In my opinion, this night train was better than the one I have taken in Europe. Shortly after the train started, we passed through the train street. We already had a drink in this street and saw the trains passing close to the bars, but now we experienced it also from the train. It was more exciting to be on the street and to see the train passing by close to you than to sit in the train. In Switzerland, it would never happen that trains drive in a narrow street so close from bars full of people...



Picture 28: Night train to Sapa

The first day in Sapa we decided to go to Fansipan which is the highest mountain in Vietnam. We took first a funicular, and it reminded me of my home because in my country there are many mountains and funiculars, and the cabin of the funicular was built in Switzerland. Then we had to stand in a queue for quite a while as there were many people wanting to reach the top with the cable car. But the waiting was also entertaining as they were dancing in beautiful costumes to make the waiting time feel shorter. I think that's a good idea, and it should be done also in Switzerland. During the ride with the cable car, we passed over a big forest and could enjoy the view. The cable car holds two world records, it is the longest non-stop three-rope cable car worldwide and also the three-rope cable car with the greatest elevation difference. On picture 29 are shown some monuments that can be seen on the way from the cable car arrival at the top of the mountain. I was surprised by the size of the Buddha.



Picture 29: Monument on the Fansipan mountain

After some stairs up, we finally made it to the top of the Fansipan mountain at an altitude of 3147 meters above sea level. It was fresh and windy up there, and the clouds moved quickly.



Picture 30: At the top of the Fansipan mountain

Sapa is a beautiful city in the day but especially also in the night, as the city is illuminated by many colorful lights. After dinner, we also went to a bar. There was the game Jenga, which I used to play in Switzerland, and therefore I felt like somehow home.



Picture 31: Nightlife in Sapa

On the following day, we drove to the countryside of Sapa with the motorbike to see the rice fields and the bamboo forest. Seeing this rice terrace was a highlight in Sapa. Rice is not only delicious to eat, but also beautiful to see! The bamboo forest was also worth to see, as my Vietnamese name is Lâm (which means forest in Vietnamese) and I had the impression I was in a tropical forest.



Picture 32: Rice fields and bamboo forest in Sapa

Sapa is a popular tourist destination and therefore there were many people who wanted to sell us their products. They were often friendly, but after some time it was also somehow annoying as there were

everywhere people willing to sell us something and insisting on it. But in general, Sapa is one of my favorite places in Vietnam and a good destination to go hiking. In Sapa we also saw many of our IASTE friends for the last time, so it was also a bit sad in the end, but who knows, maybe we will meet again in the future.



Picture 33: People willing to sell souvenirs.

One day we were working in the lab and suddenly a colleague entered and gave us an invitation for his wedding. This was unexpected as we never saw this employee before. I was honored to be invited. The wedding was different from how weddings are in Europe. The food was good, but we spent most of the time drinking rice wine, as many people wanted to drink with us. It also felt a bit chaotic. After one hour, we had to leave. It was short but intense.



Picture 34: Wedding

On the last weekend before the end of the internship, we decided to drive to the countryside of the Bắc Giang province to do a barbecue together with our colleagues from the laboratory. The scenery was remarkable, and the food was delicious. One thing I like less in Vietnam is that people leave a lot of trash in nature. We didn't follow this and collected our trash in garbage bags.



Picture 35: Barbecue in Bắc Giang Province

Vietnamese people are friendly and welcoming. For instance, we were invited for dinner to our laboratory colleague Duyệt's family. Her family cooked many different dishes including one of our favorite one which are the Nems. All the dishes were delicious. I thought that Duyệt's family must have had a lot of work to prepare all this food, and I felt somehow bad for that. We ate the food on a big carpet on the floor, which is common in Vietnam but not at all in my country. Also, in Vietnam everyone shares the food whereas in Switzerland everyone has its own plate with food. I like how it is in Vietnam, it feels like a family dinner as we share the food together.



Picture 36: Family dinner

Before we left, the company organized a goodbye party for Frederik and me. They cooked food for us, and we could discuss together about our experiences at the company and in Vietnam. Suddenly, one of the employees had an idea. He went to a restaurant close to the company to buy a dish made from dog meat, and he wanted us to try it. I would never have expected that I would do it, but both Frederik and I tried it. It tasted somehow like roast beef, and the spices around the meat were quite tasty. But it was a one-time experience, and I would not eat it again. Also, most of the employees don't eat dog meat. We felt also a bit bad as we saw a cute little puppy on the following day. At the end, we exchanged some presents. Frederik gave some Slovak alcohol; I some Swiss chocolates and the company offered us a typical Vietnamese hat and the Vietnamese flag which can be seen on the picture below.



Picture 37: Goodbye party at the company

I now want to share more things that surprised me in Vietnam but also about the similarities and differences between Vietnam and Switzerland. Vietnamese people are particularly friendly, and they are welcoming to foreigners. Regularly, children but also some adults said “Hello” to us as soon as they saw us in the street and wanted to speak with us. Some of them also wanted to do some pictures with us. I felt sometimes like a celebrity there, while I am just a simple foreigner doing an internship in Vietnam. There are not many foreigners in Bắc Giang, or at least not many Europeans, so Frederik and I were easily recognizable in the streets. Once, two children saw us in the park and started to speak with us. I was surprised how good they spoke English, I guess the parents in Vietnam realized that English is an important and useful language to know, and they send their kids early to an English school. The kids were not shy at all, and they invited us to go swimming. In Switzerland, the kids wouldn’t run to foreigners and start speaking with them. Also, we were offered a lot of food from the owners of the hotel, where we lived for the second half of our internship, from people in the company or in general from Vietnamese people. We would definitely not starve here in Vietnam! But surprisingly, when we wanted to offer food, some of them never accepted it. We were wondering why.

Vietnamese people wake up early in the morning. They have a big breakfast, for example pho or Bánh mì. They have a big meal in the morning to have enough energy to work the whole day. Furthermore, they also like to have snack between the meals, mainly fruits. The fruits here in Vietnam are different from the ones we eat in Switzerland. I could try many fruits that I never tried before, and I didn’t even know that they exist. They eat mango when they are still green, but I am more used to eating them when they are riper. They also have salty snacks, but they have often a meat flavor which is different

from European snacks. By the way, I had to do a snack tasting in the company, and they made a video out of it. Most of them I didn't like too much, but some of them were fine, but very different to what I am used to. As I usually don't eat breakfast in Switzerland, it was sometimes difficult for me to eat pho in the morning because of the large quantity and because I am not used to eat meat already in the morning. The coffee is also somehow different here, because they drink it mostly iced and not hot as in Europe. But coffee is more popular in the south of Vietnam and not so much in the North. Also, much food and drinks in Vietnam are made from rice, because Vietnam cultivates a lot of rice. I ate rice almost every day and sometimes also drank it through rice wine. The latter doesn't exist in Switzerland, as we make wine out of grapes. This was also surprising for me, especially because I come from Valais where a lot of wine is produced, from grapes. Vietnamese eat a lot but even that it's hot there, they don't drink a lot and sometimes drink only half a liter a day, while I need three times this amount. I guess they hydrate themselves from the fruits they eat, as they eat much of them. Then, let's speak about bananas. The bananas we can buy in Switzerland all come from South America. But Vietnam also grows bananas, they are smaller but taste better in my opinion. I will ask Coop and Migros to change for Vietnamese bananas, as soon as I'm back in Switzerland.

The way of eating is also different in Vietnam. Here they eat with chopsticks, but I expected it and I quickly learned how to use them. I am wondering if I am still able to eat with forks and knives now, or if I must learn it again when I am back in my country. In Vietnam, the different dishes are served in the middle of the table and everyone on the table shares this food. This is sometimes also done in Europe, but usually not in restaurants, whereas it is also the case in restaurants here in Vietnam. On one of the first days in Vietnam, we went to a restaurant and ordered some dishes that we would then share. But our colleague wanted us to try also other and better food. He therefore went to a street food, bought some more food and brought it to the restaurant. The restaurant even gave us plates to put on the food he bought at the street food there. I was really surprised by that, as it would be impossible to do this in Switzerland. Moreover, on many restaurants, there are only small plastic chairs. I was sometimes scared that they would break, but hopefully it never happened.



Picture 38: Chairs in Vietnam

Vietnamese like to do karaoke. We could join once to a karaoke organized by the company, but the songs were mainly in Vietnamese, so difficult for us to sing. The Vietnamese music is different from our western music, and I didn't like it too much, to be honest. But they also listen to western music, like the girls in the laboratory.

Concerning transportation, there are also big differences with Europe. Here, most people use their motorbike to move around. I am still surprised what they all manage to transport on one motorbike. We already saw a whole family (4 people) on only one single motorcycle, and sometimes they transport so much material that you can almost not see the motorcycle anymore. In Europe, people rather move with the car. There are also cars in Vietnam, but the way they drive the car is different. They beep almost all the time to show to the other road users that they are there and want to pass. Basically, the loudest one has the priority. The way of driving is chaotic, but it's still somehow an organized chaos, and it also works out because they drive quite slowly. In Europe, traffic is more organized, there are clear rules and especially in Switzerland every car systematically stops if a pedestrian wants to cross the road at a pedestrian crossing, which is mostly not the case in the other European countries and also not in Vietnam. Another big difference is that public transport is almost non-existent in Bắc Giang, and therefore it's not so easy to move around without a car or a motorbike. In Switzerland, it's completely different, public transport is well-developed, and I use it there almost everywhere I go. The city of Bắc Giang is not very suitable for pedestrians as they mostly take the motorbike and only few people would walk to go somewhere. Therefore, many cars or motorbike are parked on the pavement that pedestrians must avoid while walking. In Switzerland, pavements are free and makes it more convenient to walk.

Vietnamese people work quite a lot. Here they work also every two Saturday and in other companies it is usual to work 6 days a week. In Switzerland, working 5 days a week is the standard.

Another difference is that some Vietnamese people have two names, a Vietnamese one and an English one. Vietnamese names are difficult to remember for foreigners, and therefore they choose themselves an English name which would be easier to remember. It's only after several weeks that I realized that "Jolie" isn't our supervisor's real name, but it's the English name she created for herself. Her real name is Anh, so I was confused for some time, calling her sometimes Anh, and sometimes Jolie.

There is one thing that I didn't like too much, and it's how the trash system works here. There is no recycling at all, which means that everything goes into the same trash. This may be easy and convenient for the people, but it's not really sustainable. In Switzerland, we recycle almost everything except of plastic and in Slovakia they even recycle plastic. There is also quite some trash in the streets or in the nature here in Vietnam, which may also happen in Switzerland but much less. In some countries in Europe, the small plastic bags in the supermarkets are forbidden and in Switzerland we must pay for them and not many people use them. But here in Vietnam, the cashier is surprised that we don't want them and rather put our stuff in our backpack. Moreover, sometimes the trash and especially also leaves are burned on the street, like in the picture below. This gives off quite some smoke, and it's unpleasant to breathe in this air, and the smell of this smoke is also not nice.



Picture 39: Burning trash in the street.

Vietnamese people can make a lot with few and simple material. For instance, the car mechanic places are usually simple with limited infrastructure, and they can repair the cars with limited and simple tools. Everyone at the company ate lunch together, and one cooking lady prepared the food for the

whole company. I was surprised by how the kitchen looks like, as it is extremely rudimentary compared to a European kitchen. But the cooking lady managed to cook every day on her own for around 50-60 people.



Picture 40: Kitchen at the company

In general, I realized that the employees seemed to be less stressed than employees in Switzerland, which is a good thing because they still work efficiently. Also, they work as a team and help each other. There was a good vibe in the laboratory, and I enjoyed my time there.

I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to do an internship at the FEC Group through IAESTE and I had really a good time in Vietnam with many good memories. I therefore want to say thanks to:

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Hope to see many of you again in the future!

Lionel