

Lipman: Black and blue, but sans regrets

Published: 09:06 a.m., Friday, March 12, 2010

HOI AN, VIETNAM -- Those who knew me before I began my trip around the world would say I generally play by the rules and err on the side of caution. I was never a big risk taker, and only occasionally acted completely on impulse.

Planning for the trip, for example, came somewhat on an impulse after I lost my full-time job and financial aid for graduate school.

However, since being away from home in foreign lands, something has changed internally. I no longer have the same fears about trying new things and am more willing to take risks and step outside of my comfort zones -- the whole point of this style of travel.

Currently, I am reading "The 4-Hour Work Week," by [Timothy Ferriss](#), recommended by a few Americans I met who were living an entrepreneurial, location-independent lifestyle in Bangkok. The book urges people to grasp their lives and live them, seeing and doing what they want when they want, as opposed to saving it for retirement.

It's a self-help book that reads more like a textbook and applies to certain "types" of people, of which I was told I fall into. The book is broken into a four-letter acronym (DEAL) for the steps to gain control of your life and join the "new rich." The cliché aside, there was a section about facing fears and trying new things -- urging readers to try one thing every day that scares them. I found it applied to my experiences thus far and has convinced me to step further and further out of my comfort zone.

Since leaving home, I've trekked through the jungle, taken an introductory scuba-diving course and eaten a cricket. Just this past week, I rented a motorbike and drove down the coast of Vietnam from the northern city of Hue to the central coast city of Hoi An.

I had never driven a motorbike, and had not even ridden a regular bicycle since I was 11 years old. But I was encouraged by a group of seven new friends and our hostel owner insisting it was the best way to really see Vietnam. On the morning of our departure, I was nervous to the point of nausea. After a few practice runs up and down the street, we were riding into Vietnamese motorbike traffic, possibly one of the most chaotic scenes I've witnessed.

After about a half hour of straight road, I eased into the idea of operating a motorbike, slowly gaining confidence and taking in the beautiful scenery and adrenaline rush. It wasn't until about midway through our trip, when we left the main road for a swim in a village spring, that I got a little too far out



of my comfort zone.

The roads in the village were filled with gravel, sharp turns and hills, making it much more difficult for my beginner self to navigate by bike. During one sharp turn and a fairly steep downhill, I crashed into a boulder, nearly flipping myself into the springs.

My bike couldn't be driven again, having a flat tire, and broken back brake, and being out of alignment, and I was forced to ride on the back of another bike for the rest of the afternoon. My left knee is slightly sprained, I suffered a bit of whiplash and both legs are bruised ugly shades of black and blue, but the accident could have been a lot worse.

Since arriving in Hoi An, friends and strangers ask whether I regret making the trip by motorbike, to which I reply "absolutely not."

The scenery was stunning; it felt like I was seeing the "real" Vietnam and not just the usual tourist traps. Better yet, the thrill of doing something completely petrifying and out of the ordinary -- and knowing that I could do it -- made every second worthwhile.

I would do it all over again in a heartbeat.

Sarah Lipman is documenting her travels around the world. Visit her blog, Passport: The World, on The Advocate Web site. To read Sarah's blog, go to <http://blog.ctnews.com/lipman/>.

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