

## Essay

# A city on steroids

Steve Harrison



The Dragon Bridge: an essential part of Da Nang's urban identity



The landmark of the old town of Hoi An: the Japanese Bridge

Source: Picture left (Schulz 2015); picture right (Harrison 2012).

It was love at first sight, an ancient town surrounded in oriental mystery, serene, enchanted and most importantly untouched by the advances and ravages of time.

Frozen in the past with a lazy river and a way of life that brought back happy childhood memories of an innocent simplicity, her people laid back, content and satisfied. The surrounding countryside with thatched bamboo huts, farm cottages and slow easy-going country folk riding rusty bicycles.

In 2003 I bought a house in Hoi An on that slow flowing river and settled back to watch the days of my life drift past at a snails pace, savouring the sweetness of every lazy moment. Content in the thought that nothing could ever disturb these tranquil days, that flowed without a care like that slow moving river.

Travelling every week to Da Nang was a dull but necessary chore and one I would postpone as often as possible. 28 kilometres north the big city was a deserted metropolis, a throng of urban industrial sprawl. The city looked like the war with America had finished only yesterday, dull, lifeless

and beaten. My wife and I would venture there along a rutted ill kept excuse for a road over a rusting crusty bridge to see her family and to buy provisions unobtainable in sleepy Hoi An. Getting back home to Hoi An was just that, getting Home to our safe haven.

So that was only 12 years ago.

Now every direction you turn is a construction site, everywhere and everyone and I mean everyone is building new glamorous homes. Roads literally appear out of nowhere overnight to newer and grander developments.

Da Nang, well, the city has shaken the sands of war off her dusty back and become an indescribably beautiful city. Golden beaches and cloud kissed mountains, new wide roads, bridges, parks, round-a-bouts, shopping malls, theatres, entertainment centres and five star international resorts abound.

Every square meter is being bought up and developed, high-rise apartments spring up overnight and the horizon is a never-ending kaleidoscope of change as far as the eye can see. Wide boulevards invite revellers and the well heeled to inhale the fragrance

of a new found success and wealth. The new bridges, and now there are 5 of them spanning the river, change colour with rainbow neons and one of them the Dragon bridge even spews out fire every Saturday and Sunday evening, for pure entertainment, a show that brings the traffic to a complete standstill and delights all who see it. Da Nang lights up like a Christmas tree, every night.

Yes change has come, modernization has pervaded but Hoi An, despite it's evolution, is still a place for lovers and dreamers and every year draws more and more travellers from the far flung corners of the globe to marvel at this beautiful pristine jewel of South East Asia.

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