



# Hi From Hanoi!

July 16, 2007 By [Regan Hofmann](#)

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Hi from Hanoi! Sean (my boyfriend who is traveling with me) and I arrived in sultry, sweltering Vietnam today. Though it seems impossible, it is even hotter here than in Taipei. I am having a cup of tea and my malaria medicine. Quite a nightcap!

Hanoi is an incredible mix of historical and newly emerging influences. An iron bridge built by the French that resembles a crouching dragon hangs low slung over the Red River near new multi-storied homes with tromp l'oeuil facades festooned with creeping vines. Business is booming in the newly opened country and where things are not covered in a fine dust from all the construction, they glow a deep emerald green. It is lush and mysterious and magical. We met with Angela Aggeler the cultural attache here in Hanoi this afternoon before exploring the French quarter near the Hilton (as in "Opera Hilton" not "Hanoi Hilton" as one famous prisoner of war camp was known here during the Vietnam war. The Vietnamese call it the American War.). The people here are very different from those in Taiwan. Many of them are young; about 70% of Vietnamese are under the age of 30. Those who survived the war are not, understandably, thrilled to see Americans. But, I have been assured by those who invited us here to speak about AIDS stigma that Vietnam is an open and progressive country when it comes to dealing with AIDS. Indeed, they are a recipient of a fairly substantial PEPFAR (President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief) grant as it is believed that money can actually help prevent a major epidemic in Vietnam.

As I have yet to start my program here, I'll just write briefly about the traffic. There are almost no traffic lights. No road signs. No right of way. No laws of the road. People on mopeds, motorcycles, bikes, foot, in cars, trucks, vans, and buses meet at intersections--sometimes six intersecting roads at once--and no one stops, or slows down. Like magic--everyone just slides past everyone else. Someone here likened it to flowing water: the traffic moves into any available space until it fills it and overflows into another empty space. What seems, at first, like a chaotic stream of honking, beeping, swerving vehicles and people is actually a beautifully orchestrated flow of humanity and motorized craft. It's like two rows of people waltzing coming face to face--at first, it looks like everyone's going to smash into each other and then suddenly, voila!, the rows have passed through one another and the dance goes on. Crossing the street is a leap of faith of philosophical proportions. You step off the curb and literally go with the flow. You can't stop or wildly accelerate or you'll throw off the rhythm of the entire thing and probably get run over.

I spent a lot of time at first standing on the curb waiting for the perfect moment to dash through

the traffic. I learned to just take small regular steps and somehow, that gets me safely to the other side. Freneticism turns to a calming progression just by believing it is possible. I wonder if the artform that is crossing the street in Vietnam will relate to how this beautiful country handles its HIV population of approximately 120,000 people? Time will tell...

I have to leave very early for a press conference with reporters in Hanoi - so I'll sign off for now and tomorrow I will write a recap of my wonderful days in Taipei.

I'm just figuring out the new technology so I'm going to try to post this with a picture of me at the ICRT radio station in Taipei...hope it works!

