



TOURS OF VIETNAM

SCOTT LADERMAN

War, Travel Guides,
and Memory

TOURS of VIETNAM

AMERICAN ENCOUNTERS/GLOBAL INTERACTIONS

A series edited by Gilbert M. Joseph and Emily S. Rosenberg

This series aims to stimulate critical perspectives and fresh interpretive frameworks for scholarship on the history of the imposing global presence of the United States. Its primary concerns include the deployment and contestation of power, the construction and deconstruction of cultural and political borders, the fluid meanings of intercultural encounters, and the complex interplay between the global and the local. American Encounters seeks to strengthen dialogue and collaboration between historians of U.S. international relations and area studies specialists.

The series encourages scholarship based on multiarchival historical research. At the same time, it supports a recognition of the representational character of all stories about the past and promotes critical inquiry into issues of subjectivity and narrative. In the process, American Encounters strives to understand the context in which meanings related to nations, cultures, and political economy are continually produced, challenged, and reshaped.

TOURS of VIETNAM

War, Travel Guides, and Memory

SCOTT LADERMAN

Duke University Press
Durham and London 2009

© 2009 Duke University Press

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of
America on acid-free paper ∞

Designed by Heather Hensley

Typeset in Monotype Janson by
Keystone Typesetting, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-
in-Publication Data appear on the
last printed page of this book.

FOR JILL

CONTENTS

ix	PREFATORY NOTE	The Nomenclature of the Vietnam War	
xiii	ACKNOWLEDGMENTS		
xvii	ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS		
INTRODUCTION	History, Tourism, and the Question of Empire		1
1.	Tourism and State Legitimacy in the Republic of Vietnam		15
2.	Educating Private Ryan: Tourism and the United States Military in Postcolonial Vietnam		47
3.	“They Set About Revenging Themselves on the Population”: The “Hue Massacre” and the Shaping of Historical Consciousness		87
4.	The New Modernizers: Naturalizing Capitalism in <i>Doi Moi</i> Vietnam		123
5.	“The Other Side of the War”: Memory and Meaning at the War Remnants Museum		151
EPILOGUE	Tourism and the Martial Fascination		183
189	NOTES		
249	REFERENCES		
271	INDEX		

PREFATORY NOTE

THE NOMENCLATURE OF THE VIETNAM WAR

Language is political. This may especially be so with the Vietnam war.

As a case in point, consider that last sentence. Should we, in fact, call the state of conflict in Indochina before 1975 the “Vietnam war”? Vietnam, after all, has engaged in a number of wars, and the conflict in question was also fought in Cambodia and Laos. To refer to the “Vietnam war” is to thus reveal a certain bias. Should we therefore call it the “American war,” which could help to distinguish the conflict from the earlier “French war”? This, too, presents problems. American support for the French before 1954—financial, military, diplomatic—was considerable. And in using these terms, which denote only the principal Western actor in that phase of the conflict, the Vietnamese themselves—the majority of the combatants and overwhelmingly the majority of the casualties—seem to undergo a linguistic process of erasure. So, too, do the Australians, New Zealanders, Koreans, Filipinos, and other foreign nationals involved in the conflict. Given the extent to which American culture and memory have reimagined the war as a uniquely “American tragedy,” to borrow from the title of two well-known American works, this presents a considerable problem.¹

Some Vietnamese refer to the conflict as the “anti-American resistance war for national salvation.” Others prefer the “war against Communism.” Yet both of these are fraught with pitfalls. The former overlooks the substantial southern Vietnamese role in the war (a reminder that itself elides the fact that many of those in the south who supported the Saigon government were originally from the north), and the latter overlooks the nationalist fervor that inspired many Vietnamese to take up arms against France and the United States. To refer to the conflict as a Vietnamese civil war, or as a “North–South War,” which is how Lonely Planet frames it, falsely implies a comparable legitimacy among the competing parties and a

uniformity of opinion in the northern and southern zones. Some scholars, hoping to avoid these linguistic traps, employ the terms First Indochina War and Second Indochina War. This sort of compartmentalization, however, tends to obscure the temporal continuity of the Vietnamese anti-colonial struggle and the American commitment, beginning in the 1940s, to combating it.

In short, there is no getting around the many problems inherent in all of these terms. With much trepidation, and fully aware of their shortcomings, in this study I most often use the terms “Vietnam war” and “American war.”

The question of nomenclature with respect to the various Vietnamese parties is—in the most important cases, at least—a much simpler matter. Countering their characterization in an untold number of contemporary accounts, throughout this book I generally refer to the forces of the National Liberation Front and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam as the “insurgents” or “revolutionaries” instead of the “Communists”—or as the NLF and People’s Army of Vietnam (PAVN) instead of the “Viet Cong,” “vc,” “North Vietnamese Army,” or “NVA.” (I recognize that the military units of the NLF were popularly known as the People’s Liberation Armed Forces, but I have opted to designate them simply the NLF to avoid even greater confusion.) The word “Communists” not only retains a pejorative and overly broad connotation in the United States, but it is also misleading with respect to the composition of many of those fighting in Vietnam. Although this fact has too often been overlooked since the war officially ended in 1975, there were many non-Communists who resisted the Americans, although the Communist Party in its various incarnations was arguably the most effective and certainly the most dominant segment of the revolutionary movement, often wielding considerable influence or control over southern insurgent decision making.

The terms “Viet Cong” and “North Vietnamese Army” obfuscate far more than enlighten. It is little wonder that the governments in Saigon and Washington found them such useful propaganda contrivances. “Viet Cong,” or “vc,” predates the formation of the National Liberation Front and originated as part of an effort by the Ngo Dinh Diem regime to portray the war as one waged, in the words of the Saigon authorities, by “communists, traitors, and agents of Russia and China” seeking to “turn Viet Nam into a colony and the Vietnamese into the slaves of Red im-

perialism.”² Not only does “Viet Cong” overlook the broad-based opposition to the Republic of Vietnam government and the opposition’s origins in the anticolonial movement that opposed the French, but it more easily collapses the Vietnamese revolutionaries into the supposedly bipolar Cold War struggle pitting the “free world” against Communist totalitarianism. And it is simply not true, as several recent guidebooks either imply or directly state, that “Viet Cong” or “vc” — abbreviations for *Viet Nam Cong San* — literally means “Vietnamese Communist.”³ In fact, *Viet Nam Cong San*, which is grammatically incorrect, is a dehumanizing term more closely akin to “Commie.” In Vietnamese, a literal translation of Vietnamese Communist would be *Nguoi Cong San Viet Nam*; *nguoi* gives the term its human dimension. Nevertheless, it must be noted that, in spite of its origins, “Viet Cong” in the years since 1975 has lost some of its pejorativeness among many former insurgents and has in fact been appropriated by numerous individuals for various reasons.

The appellation “North Vietnamese Army,” which like “Viet Cong” was a propaganda concoction, was — and often remains — a means of representing the war as an invasion of a country called “South Vietnam” by a country called “North Vietnam.” This mythical construction, which may be more widespread among Western tourists in Vietnam than any other myth today, disguises not only the geographical origins of many of those resisting the Americans, but also the fact that among the soldiers of the People’s Army of Vietnam — again, what guidebooks casually refer to as the “North Vietnamese Army” — were many southern volunteers who traveled north to be trained, armed, and organized to fight more effectively for Vietnamese independence and reunification.

For several reasons I avoid using “North Vietnam” and “South Vietnam.” Having interviewed over 170 tourists during two research trips to Southeast Asia, it is abundantly clear that far too many Westerners believe the war to have been one fought principally between these two entities — so much so that many of those I interviewed were unaware that a southern insurgency even existed. The “Viet Cong” were “North Vietnamese,” they told me. In other words, that “South Vietnam” fought “North Vietnam” meant that the southern Vietnamese people fought the northern Vietnamese people. The reality, of course, was far more complex. Yet the tourists’ beliefs are emblematic of the widespread ignorance that historians must constantly confront. The crucial southern role in the revolu-

tionary struggle has become so overlooked since 1975, in fact, that even iconic markers of the southern struggle, such as the famous Cu Chi tunnel complex, have become, according to promotional materials for a 2002 trip organized by the Alumni Association of the University of Michigan, “the tunnels the *North* Vietnamese used during the war.”⁴ Scholars were hardly immune to such misconceptions. One historian, for example, referred in a recently published article to the “National Liberation Fronts of Algeria and North Vietnam.”⁵ With the emergence of Vietnam war video games, it was inevitable that comparable confusion would arise at a mass level. It did so with “Vietcong: Purple Haze,” which promised opportunities to “run reconnaissance missions deep into the jungles of Northern Vietnam to track the Vietcong.”⁶

In an effort to sidestep this popular ignorance, I have used not “South Vietnam” and “North Vietnam” but both “southern Vietnam” and “northern Vietnam” and the territories’ formal designations: the “Republic of Vietnam,” or “RVN,” and the “Democratic Republic of Vietnam,” or “DRV,” respectively. Of course, this also presents problems. The governments of both considered themselves the legitimate authority in all of Vietnam. And my use of “Republic of Vietnam” implies a political legitimacy for the Saigon-based entity that, I believe, was neither justified nor widely embraced. Nevertheless, I believe the inevitable shortcomings in employing these official designations are fewer than those of using “South Vietnam” and “North Vietnam.”

Finally, I have not used the diacritics of the Vietnamese language, and, with the exception of the map, I have opted for the American spellings of Vietnamese words (for example, Saigon rather than Sai Gon and Hanoi rather than Ha Noi). In the case of the latter, exceptions appear when I have quoted materials that use a different version; unless otherwise indicated, I have quoted the Vietnamese words in all documents and other sources as they originally appeared. The same applies to the issue of capitalization. When quoting documents or the secondary literature, I have retained the original capitalizations or non-capitalizations, as in “communists” and “Communists.”

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project, which began as a Ph.D. dissertation, would not have been published were it not for the tremendous assistance I received along the way. It was my good fortune to work with a community of scholars who consistently provided encouragement, sound criticism, and warm friendship. My indebtedness to the faculty and graduate students in American Studies at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, is great. I especially thank my co-advisers, Elaine Tyler May and Patricia Albers; the additional members of my dissertation committee, Hazel Dicken-Garcia and David Noble; and, as an outside member of the committee whose assistance was truly invaluable, H. Bruce Franklin of Rutgers University, Newark. I am grateful for the support offered by my colleagues in the Department of History and the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Minnesota, Duluth.

I was fortunate to have met numerous scholars at other institutions doing work on Vietnam and the wars in Indochina, and I have profited from their knowledge and camaraderie. Ed Martini, who read the entire manuscript, was a valued colleague and critic. Jessica Chapman and I struggled and laughed together as students of the Vietnamese language. Victor Alneng, a Swedish social anthropologist who does work on Vietnamese tourism, provided thoughtful critiques of my study from the other side of the planet.

A great many scholars have provided invaluable assistance by reading and commenting on portions of my work at various stages or by patiently answering my questions about areas in which they hold expertise. Some of these people have already been identified. Others I gratefully acknowledge include Mark Bradley, Christopher Endy, Brett Gary, Jessica Gienow-Hecht, Fabian Hilfrich, David Hunt, Lisa Lowe, Matt Masur, Edwin Moise, Ngo Vinh Long, Viet Thanh Nguyen, Gareth Porter, Richard Price, Emily Rosenberg, and Jeremi Suri. For the instruction I received while studying the Vietnamese language, I thank, from the South-

east Asian Studies Summer Institute at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, Bac Hoai Tran, Dung Thi Dao, Hoan Cao To, Nguyen Linh Chi, Nguyen Thi Thuan, Nguyen Thi Thuy Anh, and Nguyen Trong Hoa. From Chua Phat An in Roseville, Minnesota, I thank Dat Nguyen.

My research in Southeast Asia and the United States was enabled by various sources of funding at the University of Minnesota. For their generous financial support I thank the Graduate School; the College of Liberal Arts on both the Twin Cities and Duluth campuses; the MacArthur Interdisciplinary Program on Global Change, Sustainability, and Justice; the Departments of American Studies and History on, respectively, the Twin Cities and Duluth campuses; the Institute for Global Studies; the Humanities Institute; and the Institute for Advanced Study (IAS). The staff and fellows of the IAS merit a special word of gratitude for their support and feedback as this project was undergoing its transformation from dissertation to book. I also acknowledge the Committee on Institutional Cooperation for two summer scholarships supporting my study of Vietnamese.

The research I undertook was made much easier because of the help I received from numerous people at numerous repositories and institutions. I especially thank John Wilson and Regina Greenwell of the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library in Austin; Richard Boylan, Susan Francis-Houghton, A. J. Lutz, Wilbert Mahoney, and Donald Singer of the National Archives in College Park, Maryland; Ty Lovelady and Justin Saffell of the Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University; Snowden Becker of the Academy Film Archive and Barbara Hall of the Margaret Herrick Library, both of which are affiliated with the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences; Haden Guest of the Warner Bros. Archives at the University of Southern California; Stephanie Zeman of the University of Wisconsin, River Falls, Area Research Center; Michael Church of the Kansas State Historical Society in Topeka; Bill McMorris at the Oakland Museum of California; Loraine Baratti of the New-York Historical Society; and various staff members at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library in Boston and the Minnesota Historical Society in St. Paul.

In Vietnam, I sincerely thank Nguyen Van Kim, Nguyen Quang Ngoc, and Nguyen Lien of the Faculty of History and Vu Van Thi and Nguyen Thanh Hai of the International Cooperation Office in the College of Social Sciences and Humanities at Vietnam National University, Hanoi; Dang Hoa and Trieu Van Hien of the Museum of Vietnamese Revolution

in Hanoi; Trinh Thi Hoa of the Museum of Vietnamese History in Ho Chi Minh City; Huynh Ngoc Van, Dinh Van Lien, and Tran Bao Ngoc of the War Remnants Museum; and the staffs of the Vietnam Development Information Center and the United Nations Library in Hanoi. For their assistance as interpreters, I am grateful to Le Quang Canh and Hoang Minh Tien.

A special word of gratitude is owed the interlibrary loan staffs at the University of Minnesota campuses in Duluth and the Twin Cities. Tracy Ellen Smith created the map that appears in this book. My thanks to Valerie Millholland and Mark Mastromarino, my editors at Duke University Press.

Finally, my family. My parents-in-law, Bernadette Torhan, Karen Rae, and Ernie Torres, provided constant support, help around the house, and, perhaps most important, crucial hours of babysitting. My brothers and my sister, Mark, Greg, and Mary Ann, kept me human and, through their example, reminded me that there is more to life than coursework, teaching, and writing. My mother showed me how to be a compassionate and impassioned person. She was also a reliable interest-free lender, coming through with emergency next-day loans whenever they were needed. For my entire life she has offered me nothing but unqualified love. I hope she realizes how much her encouragement has meant to me. My father, who remained furiously in love with my mother until the very end, passed away while I was in graduate school. We often disagreed — and he was always sure to let me know when this was the case — but I have no doubt that I am where I am today because of him. Those who knew him well know that there was nothing more important to him than his family. If today I am not only an able scholar but also a decent father, it is because of his fine example. I miss him.

My greatest debt is undoubtedly owed to my partner and friend, Jill Torres. For her love, her support, and especially for bringing me Izzy and Sam, I dedicate this book to her.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AFV	American Friends of Vietnam
APU	Asian Parliamentarians' Union
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam ("North Vietnam")
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FDA	Food and Drug Administration
GVN	"Government of Vietnam" (of the Republic of Vietnam)
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRC	Indochina Resource Center
MACV	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
MIA	Missing in Action
NLF	National Liberation Front ("Viet Cong")
NSCVV	National Student Committee for Victory in Vietnam
NTO	National Tourist Office
NVA	"North Vietnamese Army" (People's Army of Vietnam)
OAFIE	Office of Armed Forces Information and Education
PATA	Pacific Area Travel Association
PAVN	People's Army of Vietnam ("North Vietnamese Army")
PBS	Public Broadcasting Service
POW	Prisoner of War
RVN	Republic of Vietnam ("South Vietnam")
TIED	Troop Information and Education Division
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USIA	U.S. Information Agency
VC	"Viet Cong" (National Liberation Front)
VNAT	Vietnam National Administration of Tourism
VVAW	Vietnam Veterans Against the War



History, Tourism, and the

Question of Empire

On Pho Hoa Lo in the central section of Hanoi, wedged tightly between Pho Hai Ba Trung and Pho Ly Thuong Kiet, stands what is today a richly complex symbol of modern Vietnamese history. Built by the French in 1896, the Maison Centrale was for years the largest prison in northern Indochina, housing thousands of France's imperial subjects in the decades of colonial exploitation that followed. An important relic of Vietnam's political history, it emerged in the early and mid-twentieth century as an informal school of sorts for the nation's burgeoning revolutionary movement, many of whose members spent years incarcerated between its thick, imposing walls.¹ Within the facility an untold number of Vietnamese were tortured. Some were decapitated by guillotine. One of the machines, in fact, remains today on the prison's grounds as a carefully preserved reminder of this gruesome past. Following the 1954 Geneva Accords that put an end to French suzerainty in Indochina, Hoa Lo Prison, as the institution was called by the Vietnamese, fell under the authority of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the independent Vietnamese state proclaimed by Ho Chi Minh in September 1945.

Apart from its obvious political significance, the structure serves as a powerful emblem of the nation's recent economic history. Much of the prison was razed in the 1990s to make way for a high-end business and residential complex that towers over the site, symbolizing the extent to which the government's fe-

verish embrace of capitalist principles has periodically come at the expense of Vietnam's oft-venerated past. No site, it seems, is safe from the march of progress. For visitors looking over the prison's remaining courtyard walls, another modern high-rise, this one a block away, now dominates the skyline: the luxurious Melia Hotel. Not intended for the bulk of the Vietnamese people, for whom its nightly tariffs remain far out of reach, the hotel has housed thousands of foreign tourists and businesspeople who have arrived in Vietnam seeking either holiday pleasure or financial reward. As with much of Vietnam's recent economic development, the building spotlights not only the disparity between host and visitor but also, perhaps less obviously, the mushrooming inequality within one of the world's last avowedly socialist states. A minority of Vietnamese can afford a night at the Melia; the overwhelming majority cannot.

Finally, the prison—and the museum it now hosts—remains a divisive marker of modern international history. To countless tourists in the twenty-first century, the site is known not as the Maison Centrale or Hoa Lo Prison but, unaffectionately, as the “Hanoi Hilton.” The widespread Western employment of this moniker suggests the extent to which a narrative of the United States has been placed at the center of Vietnam's recent past. From 1964 to 1973, which constitutes but a temporal fraction of its century of existence, the facility held a number of American captives, most of them pilots whose planes had been shot down over northern Vietnam. Yet these nine years remain seared in American memory. The experiences of the pows have fascinated millions of the prisoners' compatriots. They were touchingly dramatized in *The Hanoi Hilton*, a 1987 film by the right-wing Hollywood director Lionel Chetwynd that sought to honor the men while almost entirely ignoring the context of their capture: the waves of American aerial bombardment that placed their aircraft in harm's way.² The pilots' stories have appeared in dozens of memoirs, print histories, and television documentaries, and rescue tales of pows in Vietnam constituted a major filmic genre in the 1980s. So enthralled have foreigners been with this element of the American past that, in Vietnam's leading turn-of-the-century travel guidebook, the small museum at Hoa Lo commanded the volume's longest entry of all of Hanoi's museums, surpassing even the entries for the seven national museums found in the city and its surrounding environs. Yet the fascination with Hoa Lo is not with the harrowing Vietnamese experience under the French. Most of the guidebook authors'

attention was devoted, rather, to the relatively brief Vietnamese imprisonment of the Americans.³ The effacement of Vietnamese history by a narrative of American suffering thus appears to be nearly complete.

In this sense Hoa Lo Prison has come to exemplify a fascinating reality of contemporary Vietnamese tourism: Many Americans travel to Vietnam to learn not about Vietnam but about the United States. At its various historic sites and museums they hope to make sense of their country's earlier, but still contentious, intervention in Southeast Asia, and they wish to heal the emotional pain about the conflict that has come to characterize postwar American life. Some arrive genuinely curious about how Vietnamese have constructed their national past. Others protest the public Vietnamese narratives that invariably fail, unlike nearly the entire scope of American popular culture since 1975, to situate the United States at their center.⁴

Vietnamese tourism, both historical and contemporary, thus provides an opportune lens through which to examine a multitude of phenomena, from war and American national identity to what the cultural historian Raymond Williams would have termed—had he been writing about the United States—America's "selective tradition."⁵ In this book I examine several of the multiple intersections of tourism with transnational Vietnamese and American history. I address how, for example, the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) embraced tourism as a means of furthering its disputed international legitimacy while at the same time establishing a discursive framework that appealed to American foreign policy ideals. I explore the U.S. Department of Defense's concurrent marketing of the promise of exotic travel as a selling point for American service in Southeast Asia while embracing travel literature as an effective means of indoctrinating its military personnel. And I illustrate how Western travel writers—in particular, guidebook authors penning instruments of instruction—elided or rationalized French and American imperialism throughout the twentieth century.

But my focus is not solely on the period before the war's official end. Since 1975, too, tourism has been a significant feature of Vietnamese life. While only a minor phenomenon in the 1970s and early 1980s, since then millions of foreigners have arrived in Vietnam seeking historical knowledge, cultural enlightenment, coastal relaxation, and, for some men, the illegal pleasures of youthful prostitution. Accompanying this influx has been an explosion in travel writing, both creative and referential. While

such literature has not typically interested historians of American foreign relations, the vastly growing distribution of these publications, as well as their influence in shaping perceptions of the United States as an international power, begs for scholarly analysis. Travel guidebooks, for example, have performed a critical role in mediating tourists' understandings not only of recent history — particularly of the American war — but also of Vietnam's location within the hegemonic expansion of late-twentieth-century global capitalism.

Yet it is not only diplomatic historians who have overlooked guidebooks as important primary sources. Significant attention to the publications among scholars more broadly has been, at best, fleeting.⁶ From their European origins in the nineteenth century, modern guidebooks — especially since the economic conditions following the Second World War allowed for greater American travel abroad — have enabled millions of people to navigate a world that has seemed at times alternately daunting and exhilarating. Their provision of lodging and restaurant information; their advice on local customs, ground transportation, and when to tip and when not to; and their assistance in overcoming the linguistic hurdles that confront non-native speakers in much of the world have provided a degree of comfort to nervous Americans during their occasional jaunts overseas. By 2000, guidebooks covered nearly every inch of the planet. Even Mars and the moon enjoyed travel publishers' attention.⁷

Guidebooks are hardly uniform or interchangeable, however. They possess different personalities and appeal to different demographics. Some, such as those published by Fodor's, are clearly associated with middle- and upper-middle-class travelers. Others — especially since the arrival in 1973 of Lonely Planet's *Across Asia on the Cheap*, a volume that built on the earlier success of Arthur Frommer's *Europe on \$5 a Day* and, even more pertinently, the *Hitch-Hiker's Guide to Europe* published by Pan Books in 1971 — have targeted what Lonely Planet's co-founders, Tony and Maureen Wheeler, dub “independent-minded travelers” or “this huge subversive travel market.”⁸ These “backpackers,” who have taken to Vietnam like a previous generation took to Thailand, often view themselves as a unique and enlightened subculture; they are “travelers,” they insist, not “tourists.” The latter grouping, in their view, is to be unsparingly derided. Ranging from the benighted masses who stay in chain hotels to those “coach tourists with glazed eyes” who, in the conceited characterization of one guidebook to

France, “obediently plod through a number of over-restored Gothic chapels,” these hordes of sheepish “tourists” ruin the apparently more authentic experiences of the armies of non-tourist “travelers” toting a Lonely Planet or a Rough Guide.⁹ Or so they claim. It is with a considerable degree of irony, then, that in Vietnam single- or multiple-day tours organized by local travel agencies or cafes (which were often one and the same) had become, by the late 1990s, a preferred method among backpackers of seeing the country.

Probably no single outside force exercised greater influence on late-twentieth-century tourism in Vietnam than the Australian publishing house Lonely Planet. By the late 1990s, its brand was ubiquitous. Employing exclusively American writers throughout that decade, the outfit, by the first years of the twenty-first century, had published not only its standard guidebook for Vietnam but also a volume for Southeast Asia that contained an abridged version of the stand-alone Vietnam guide; separate guides to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City; a “world food” guide on Vietnamese cuisine; two phrasebooks (Vietnamese and “Hill Tribes”) for non-native speakers; and a guidebook specifically for bicyclists touring Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. It is not without foundation that a journalist for the *New York Times* dubbed Tony Wheeler the “trailblazing patron saint of the world’s backpackers and adventure travelers.”¹⁰ Indeed, by 1999 Lonely Planet’s website was reportedly receiving three million hits per day.¹¹ Yet it is not only for touristic reasons that Lonely Planet guidebooks have been scrutinized. Several Western authors, for example, have used the volumes on Cameroon, Colombia, and Iran to get a “feel” for the exotic locales in which their novels were set. And in a remarkable illustration of the publisher’s perceived authority, when the United States invaded and occupied Iraq in 2003, the team accompanying the administrator Jay Garner used Lonely Planet’s volume for the Middle Eastern state to compose its list of historic sites to be protected from bombing and looting.¹²

Within Vietnam, unaffiliated businesses have done their best to associate themselves with the brand. The Lonely Planet Cafe had opened in Hanoi by the time the third edition was published in 1995. In Hoi An, a travel agency calling itself the Lonely Planet Office was operating when I was there in 2000. That same year in the central Vietnamese city of Hue, restaurants proudly touted their inclusion in the guidebook’s listings. The Mandarin Cafeteria featured a sandwich board and a billboard with a

photograph of the Lonely Planet volume (as well as several others), both of which displayed an enlarged excerpt of the guidebook's positive comments about the restaurant's food and gregarious English-speaking owner. A large sign above the business proclaimed, "Lauded in Lonely Planet and the *New York Times*," suggesting a prestige consonant with what is arguably the world's most important daily newspaper. The sign outside the nearby Xuan Trang Cafeteria, as well as the establishment's business card, prominently acknowledged that it was "Listed in the Lonely Planet." "Check the 1999 (5th Edition) of the Lonely Planet," the sign instructed passersby. "They love us[.] We hope you will too." The News Cafe next door seemed modest by way of comparison: "Has Been in the Lonely Planet," its sign casually informed potential customers.

Businesses in Ho Chi Minh City, like their counterparts elsewhere, have recognized the power of the publishing house. Sidewalk vendors sell pirated copies of its titles to not just Vietnam but also to other Asian and Pacific destinations. The women and children who peddle books in the restaurants of the Pham Ngu Lao backpacker district invariably carry, alongside Graham Greene's *The Quiet American*, the latest Lonely Planet wares. And in the city's Linh Cafe, a tour guide from the highland town of Dalat was advertising his services in 2000 with a sign listing, by edition and page number, where the writers for Lonely Planet had said nice things about his business. The words "Lonely Planet" were by far the largest on the sign, and they were the only ones in color.

Whereas Lonely Planet has worked hard to cultivate its image as a progressive outfit for conscientious travelers — in every guidebook, for example, the editors tout the company's contributions to aid projects, human-rights campaigns, and wildlife conservation — its volumes for Vietnam have remained wedded to only the most conventional interpretations of the American war.¹³ While perhaps an improvement over the remarkable explanation of the Let's Go guidebook for the basis of U.S. involvement — "With the withdrawal of the French came the arrival of the Americans, who assumed responsibility for the survival of democracy by providing financial aid and military advice to South Vietnam," the New York-based publishing house asserted — Lonely Planet's framework has nevertheless remained deficient by the standards of contemporary scholarly opinion.¹⁴ Understanding of the Vietnam conflict has been forcefully contested for decades, yet no such debates appeared within the pages of the Lonely

Planet (or its competitors). Shunning the view of many scholars that the United States was engaged in imperial aggression, the publishing house opted for a bland, unreliable narrative framed within a mythical construct. The conflict was a “North–South War” in which eventually “enter[ed] the Americans,” its Vietnam volume maintained.¹⁵ Given the guidebook’s origins, this is perhaps not surprising.

The author of the second through fourth editions, Robert Storey, described himself in an interview as “very anti-Communist” — although this was not disclosed to Lonely Planet’s readers — and believed that the war was “absolutely not immoral or even wrong.” It “was a mistake because we lost,” he claimed, “[b]ut it would have been immoral to have done nothing . . . to have sat back and watched [Vietnam] taken over.”¹⁶ The maintenance of such a framework is important. The little scholarship that exists on guidebooks has focused largely on how they present tourism sites and local peoples or contribute to “travel cultures.” The recollection of a writer for the *New Yorker* would seem to provide an excellent primary source for this genre, for example. “In the late nineteen-eighties,” wrote Tad Friend, “I traveled in Asia for a year, and the Lonely Planet guides were my lifeline.”

I ate and slept where they told me to, on Khao San Road in Bangkok and Anjuna Beach in Goa; I oriented myself by their scrupulous if naïvely drawn maps; and on long bus rides I immersed myself in the Indonesia book’s explanation of the Ramayana story. The guides didn’t tell me to wear drawstring pants and Tintin t-shirts or to crash my moped — I picked that up on my own — but they did teach me, as they taught a whole generation, how to move through the world alone and with confidence.

I learned to stuff my gear into one knapsack; never to ask a local where I should eat but, rather, where *he* ate; never to judge a country by its capital city; never to stay near a mosque (the muezzin wakes you); how to haggle; and, crucially, when I later went to Mongolia, to shout “*Nokhoi khor!*” — “Hold the dog!” — before entering a yurt. When you spend months with a guidebook that speaks to you in an intimate, conversational tone, it becomes a bosom companion.¹⁷

Yet while studies of the relationship between guidebooks and tourist behavior are vitally important, almost entirely neglected has been the

volumes' influence in constructing or shaping historical consciousness and memory.

It is undoubtedly true that people read guidebooks in different ways and are capable of problematizing their narratives. However, interviews in Vietnam with dozens of tourists reveal that the guidebooks' representations of the past, while perhaps too brief, are by and large considered reliable and reasonably "objective." "I love Lonely Planet," exclaimed an American investment banker in his mid-twenties during a two-week holiday in 2002. The guidebook's synopsis of the Vietnam war was "pretty unbiased" and "informative," he claimed.¹⁸ A thirty-four-year-old American businesswoman living in Hong Kong felt similarly. She "always" relied on Lonely Planet when traveling in Asia, she disclosed. And given the independence of perspective demonstrated in its "good summary" of the American intervention, she was certain, but was mistaken, that it could not have been written by one of her compatriots, who undoubtedly would have revealed a bias.¹⁹

The comments speak both to guidebooks' ability to present themselves as trusted arbiters of historical truth and of the extent to which the Vietnam war—at least prior to the Iraq invasion of 2003—had become divorced in popular consciousness from the possibility of U.S. imperialism. While guidebooks do not, of course, provide "objective" accounts of the past for their readers—a seeming impossibility, Peter Novick has asserted—their power of signification resides in their *appearance* of objectivity.²⁰ As straightforward recollections of the past, according to many tourists, the guidebooks assume unusual importance to foreign travelers whose only other source of information may be the ideologically charged narratives at Vietnamese museums and historic sites. In this way, the socially constructed nature of the guidebooks' accounts is elided, and their efficacy is enhanced. Historical "reality," at least as conveyed in the travel literature, therefore demands scholarly analysis.

Whether in assessing guidebook narratives or examining the touristic experiences of contemporary Western travelers, Vietnam's late-twentieth-century emergence as a major tourism destination raises a host of questions. What can Vietnamese tourism tell us about American memory and national identity? What is revealed by historicizing this social and cultural practice? With tourism and travel writing a "contact zone," to borrow a term from Mary Louise Pratt, what happens when popular American nar-

natives of the war collide with the quite different narratives constructed by Vietnamese?²¹ What are the implications of this collision of nationalisms? And how have Vietnamese constructed their tourism sites to accommodate the expectations or desires of American visitors?

The chapters that follow seek to answer these and other questions.

WAR, TOURISM, AND THE UNITED STATES IN VIETNAM

This book was written at a time when we have again been reminded that the Vietnam war is not merely a distant chapter of the American past. The war's inherent imbalance—its pitting of the world's most powerful industrial state against a developing nation of peasants and workers—was reflected in the emotionally charged trade disputes over Vietnam's exportation of catfish and shrimp. Its memory dominated the 2004 U.S. presidential contest, a race that, for the two major parties, pitted a blue-blooded (onetime) antiwar veteran who saw combat in Vietnam against a wealthy oilman who sought to escape the front lines as a (sometime) member of the Texas Air National Guard. At the level of intellectual culture, the Vietnam war's relevance and "lessons" were being passionately debated as the United States, three decades after evacuating Saigon, again found itself mired in two bitter land wars in Asia.

Yet, since 1975, much has also changed. Perhaps most significantly, Americans, following the war's official end, had been subjected to a popular culture offensive that reimaged the Vietnamese conflict as one of U.S. victimization at the hands of inscrutable Southeast Asians. Within the seeming blink of an eye, the Vietnam war of *Hearts and Minds* (1974) had become the "Vietnam"—a war, not a country—of *The Deer Hunter* (1978) and *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985). In the wake of this cultural shift, an increasing number of young Americans began traveling to Vietnam, especially after the early 1990s, to see something of the country for themselves. They arrived carrying not just backpacks and cameras but guidebooks and ideological suppositions. They were not seeing Vietnam for the first time; they had seen "Vietnam" already. It had been on the big screen dozens of times and had been discussed ad infinitum by political leaders and the media as a "syndrome" to be overcome or a history to be forgotten. Nor were these intrepid travelers touring the country without direction. They had their trusted guidebooks to help show them the way.

Unbeknownst to most of them, they were blazing a trail that had, in fact,

already been blazed many years before. While the 1990s marked the first time that Vietnam began to attract hundreds of thousands of foreign visitors for reasons other than war, the country has a relatively long history of tourism. In the early twentieth century, Europeans and Americans often used Saigon as a point of departure for the Angkor ruins in Cambodia. The city, according to a 1920s guidebook for French Indochina, seemed a “natural halting place at the crossing” of “two of the world’s great touristic currents,” one of which ran from Europe through India and Java and the other of which ran from the United States through China, Japan, and the Philippines.²² As the post–World War Two emergence of a broad American consumer class and, in the late 1950s, commercial jet travel made Asian tourism more accessible, the government of the Republic of Vietnam entered the business, publishing guidebooks and pamphlets, sponsoring hotel construction, and attempting to improve the region’s primitive infrastructure.²³ The southern state, officials claimed in a promotional pamphlet, was ideally suited to serve foreign tourists as “an ‘all year round’ vacation land.”²⁴ Of course, this effort, which began in the mid- to late 1950s and continued for over a decade, coincided with the escalation of the American political and military commitment, and the two inevitably became intertwined. The roads that would be necessary to transport tourists were the same roads subsidized and used by the U.S. military. The international-standard hotels built to lodge scores of foreign travelers were quickly occupied by American officials and companies. And the Vietnamese countryside that was central to the south’s touristic charm emerged by the early 1960s as a site of widespread insurgency and devastation. All of these affected the once promising tourism industry. War became, in every sense, the principal barrier to Vietnamese travel. Decades later, its memory would ironically serve as one of the country’s principal attractions.²⁵

Departing from the extant literature on the Vietnam war, this book traverses the intersections of history, tourism, and memory by examining how the West—and, most specifically, the United States—experienced Vietnam as a site of Cold War touristic pleasure and, after 1975, as a “cartography of memory” on which an important chapter of the American (and, of course, Vietnamese) past was written.²⁶ In doing so, it argues that tourism has been (and, in important ways, has continued to be) intertwined with the projection of American power. I show how tourism’s attendant literature—guidebooks, pamphlets, brochures, et cetera—has

historically served both to construct contemporary ideological realities in the minds of travelers as well as shape their understandings of the very recent past, almost always in ways favorable to American global ambitions. I contend that, historically speaking, the narratives attached to tourism practices and publications are consistent with an American “selective tradition” evident at the level of popular discourse that since 1975 has largely precluded considerations of the United States as an imperial nation. The book is thus more than just a (very partial) history of American tourism in Vietnam. It is, in a broader sense, a focused case study of history writing. Drawing on twentieth-century travel documents for that country, *Tours of Vietnam* examines the ways in which historical reality became identified and, often, circumscribed for thousands of Americans and other Westerners experiencing Vietnam as a tourism destination.

I take as a starting point two basic assumptions. First, as the Haitian scholar Michel-Rolph Trouillot has persuasively argued, I assume that power and the narrative construction of the past are inextricably linked. The “production of historical narratives,” wrote Trouillot, “involves the uneven contribution of competing groups and individuals who have unequal access to the means for such production.”²⁷ I maintain that travel writers, whether official or civilian, have possessed the power to define historical knowledge for thousands of tourists who are generally ignorant of the Vietnamese past other than the discourses deduced from Hollywood films and, in fewer instances, long-ago school study. And second, I assume, as do many diplomatic historians, that the United States is not an exceptional global power. It has, in short, been an imperial actor—one concerned, like others before it and since, with the management of a vast, if at times informal, overseas empire.²⁸

Travel and tourism, I believe, provide an excellent interpretive lens for addressing larger issues of ideology and the construction of history. Through tourism we can analyze how states and peoples have crafted historical narratives, how travelers have experienced landscapes riven with memory, and how battles over remembrance can erupt among tourists exposed to alternative stories of the past. Operating at a level that we might call experiential historiography, tourists have debated and embraced various narratives of “Vietnam” just as vigorously as have professional scholars. By addressing these touristic encounters, this book seeks to explore not only the power of the war to notions of American identity thirty,

forty, or fifty years ago, but also its continued potency three decades after the conflict officially ended.

I am by no means the first historian to take up international tourism as an issue of academic concern. In *Cold War Holidays*, for instance, Christopher Endy showed how tourism was employed to serve the interests of both Paris and Washington in the years following the Second World War.²⁹ An official component of the Marshall Plan, American travel to France not only delivered dollars to rebuilding states in need of foreign exchange but, importantly, was intended to help develop a sense of transatlantic solidarity in the emerging Cold War. That tourists themselves often shunned this sort of politically purposeful travel—unless, that is, it was tied to consumerist impulses—inevitably frustrated elites in the United States. Yet in addressing tourism’s location within the framework of diplomatic relations, broadly conceived, Endy invaluable drew attention to the ways in which international travel was imbued with ideological meaning. So, too, did Neal Moses Rosendorf. Taking as his focus the efforts by the Franco regime in Spain to use tourism as a means of obtaining dollars and improving its troubled reputation—apart from its dictatorial nature, Madrid had essentially been allied with the Axis during World War Two—Rosendorf skillfully outlined Spain’s desire to transform itself from fascist collaborator to holiday paradise after 1945.³⁰ Cooperation with Hollywood and American travel boosters offered an important means of doing so. While perhaps not as closely associated with the United States as was the Franco regime’s campaign in Spain, Nazi Germany also drew on tourism’s diplomatic potential, believing it could be used “to improve international relations in Germany’s favor,” wrote Kristin Semmens. By witnessing the accomplishments of the “new Germany” for themselves, the regime believed, travelers would discover “the truth” behind the negative images “evoked” by what Nazi tourism officials termed the “malevolent press abroad.”³¹

Whereas this earlier scholarship focused on the United States and Europe, however, my concern is with American travel in the Third World. The Republic of Vietnam, like a number of European states, employed tourism as a means of furthering its international legitimacy. Several dissimilarities, however, distinguished Saigon’s position from those of Paris, Madrid, or Berlin. The issue of nation-building that was so central to the