

Ethnobotany on a Roll!: Access to Vietnam

My Lien T. Nguyen, Ph.D.

Department of Botany

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Abstract: This article describes the research and experiences of an ethnobotanist with a physical disability working in Vietnam. Due to a spinal cord injury, the ethnobotanist uses a wheelchair and walking canes to explore the bustling food markets of Vietnam. Information and recommendations are provided for equipment and traveling to and in Vietnam, particularly for those interested in conducting scientific research and for travelers with physical disabilities. Success is largely due to the mutual respect and kindness shared by people along the way, and by accepting and accommodating to given situations. Appendices of resources for travel in Vietnam and educational granting sources for people with disabilities provided.

Key Words: Vietnam, traveling, ethnobotany

Introduction

Conducting field research requires tremendous planning and organization. One must plan ones research agenda and schedule, obtain research permits, and if the research is to be carried out in a foreign country, establish contacts or collaborations and apply for the necessary visas. When the paperwork is finished, one needs to consider and pack field equipment and supplies. Finally, there are the mundane personal requirements of lodging, food, and clothes. For the researcher with physical disabilities, the tasks and supplies previously described are only the beginning of a myriad of other logistics to be worked out.

I am an ethnobotanist. Ethnobotany is the scientific study of dynamic relationships and interactions between cultures and their botanical resources. I am also an “incomplete-quadruplegic.” This means that in addition to packing my plant press and clippers, I also pack tools to fix my wheelchair, my canes, and enough anti-spasmodic medication to last the entire research period abroad.

The invitation to write this report was by the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (an earlier version of this report is available through their online archives). Their intent is to attract a broad range of scholars to the study of Southeast Asia by increasing awareness of the field to all, especially under-represented groups in the field. People from different backgrounds enrich the field by bringing to it their unique perspectives and strengths. In this printing of the report, I encourage those working in disability culture to consider Vietnam (Việt Nam) as a future research site. There are opportunities for studying a disability culture that is shaped by the past circumstances and new opportunities of an incredibly fast-developing country.

The following report describes my experiences traveling and conducting research in Vietnam from November 2003 through March 2004¹ specifically as a person with a

physical disability. I provide a range of information, from general travel (e.g., visas and transportation options) to specifics regarding scientific work in Vietnam. Although the information is from the perspective of work in Vietnam, I am hopeful that it may serve as well to assist those considering fieldwork in other Southeast Asian countries or anywhere in the world, with or without disabilities.

Establishing Foreign Country Contact, Collaborations and Visas

My research involves the ethnobotany of Vietnamese people in Vietnam and diasporic Vietnamese groups abroad. In the U.S., much of my research has involved the Vietnamese immigrants in Honolulu, Hawai'i. In Hawai'i the field research consists of going to peoples' homes to conduct interviews or participate in community cultural events and make botanical collections from the Chinatown markets. I have a vehicle that allows me to be independent and very mobile. When I have finished a day of collecting or interviews, I bring the specimens back to the lab to prepare them for drying in a plant press, or go to the computer to enter new ethnographic data. The building where the lab is located is wheelchair accessible, equipped with an elevator, and I have my prepared lab space. While working in Hawai'i, perhaps the main logistical problem for me to consider is finding a parking space where I can easily and safely pull my wheelchair in and out of my van.

Working in the U.S., and practically in my own back yard, I do not have to search out collaborations or obtain visas. In contrast, Vietnam is a country where contacts are very important. Additionally, following the ethical standards in ethnobiology² and CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora)³, one must establish host country collaborators and obtain the appropriate visas and necessary permits. I was very fortunate to be introduced to Dr. Jack Regalado, a scientist from the Missouri Botanical Garden (MBG) working in Vietnam. MBG, along with the Institute for Ecology and Biological Resources (IEBR) of the National Center for Natural Science and Technology (NCST) in Hà Nội (Hanoi), Vietnam, collaborate on the Vietnam Botanical Conservation Program (VBCP). Upon contacting Dr. Regalado, I was directed to send my request of research dates, my curriculum vita and passport information so that IEBR could begin my application for a research visa.

Once IEBR completed the visa request in Vietnam, they faxed that request to the Vietnamese Embassy in Washington, D.C. IEBR provided the Vietnamese Embassy with the official "invitation" and proof that I had formally established contact with them, but I still needed to apply for a visa through the ordinary visa application process. This application can be obtained through the Internet World-Wide-Web-site of the Vietnamese Embassy. As a visiting scientist, I was directed to apply for a business visa. Under these conditions, my request for a six-month visa was granted. Otherwise, as a foreigner with a tourist visa, one would receive only a one-month visa, and as a Vietnamese-born person living abroad, one could obtain the maximum of a three-month tourist visa.

Things to Consider Before Going to Vietnam...

...Or anywhere else in the world traveling as a person that uses a wheelchair or that has a mobility impairment.

Wheelchair - I highly recommend a lightweight, FOLDING chair. While many wheelers now use the “rigid” frame chairs (only the back folds down to the seat), you will gain access to many more places with a folding chair because it can fold narrower. A folding chair is also easier to store away on small rickshaws and various watercraft.

Wheelchair tires - Go Solid – no flats. I am not talking about the heavy inserts that go into an outer wheel. Rather complete solid tires that fit onto the wheel rims (e.g., Mako® brand tires). I began using solid tires in 1992 when I was living in Paris. Considering all the many curbs over which I had to hop up and down, my solid tires held up stupendously and I never had to worry about low air tires or flats slowing me down. Solid tires are available through wheelchair supply companies; both can be found through an Internet search.

Tools for fixing your chair - Bicycles are a main form of transportation in Vietnam, therefore it is possible to find a bike mechanic to fix your wheels. However, I recommend becoming self-sufficient with general cleaning of the tires and brakes to keep you rolling and doing research.

Wheelchair gloves - Bring extra pairs. Wheeling down the streets, through markets, and back hamlet passages of Vietnam, you want to protect your hands, just like rolling in the U.S. My work in the markets finds me rolling through everything from the juices of fruits to fish, gasoline, potted asphalt, and mud. Gloves provide protection and cleanliness. I use weight lifting gloves instead of bicycling or “wheelchair” push-gloves. Weight lifting gloves can be found in general sporting goods stores and should be made of durable leather, with a double-layer in the palm area.

Canes - I use a wheelchair, but I am able to walk slowly. Using collapsible hiking canes provided access to places a wheelchair did not fit. I traveled with my canes collapsed and tucked on the side of the chair. Leki ® makes telescoping walking canes that are strong and light. I have been using this type of cane since 1998 and find them safer, more efficient and versatile than the elastic cord folding canes sold by medical supply companies.

Large bag - A bag that can hang from your wheelchair is better than a backpack. I use a large canvas bag that hangs from the push handles of my wheelchair. This type of bag allows me to collect many specimens from the markets and carry them without them being crushed inside a zipped-up backpack. Some people are concerned that the bag might get stolen or people will steal items out of the bag from behind without my knowing. Looping the bag straps a couple of times around the handles of the wheelchair will keep it secure. As for having items taken out of the bag, this is not something I worried about and my vegetables always came home safely.

Personal care needs - While there are many people with disabilities in Vietnam, my experience is that they have adjusted to their abilities with whatever local resources are available, just as we do in the U.S. – except that they are tougher! Consider your personal care needs, but have an open mind and be willing to adjust, have less, and do things differently.

Bathrooms - Accessible bathrooms – forget about it. All right, there are accessible toilets in newer buildings, for example the public library in Biên Hoà, and the Hà Nội-Nội Bài (Hanoi Noibai) Airport. In most cases, however, the toilet facilities, often labeled “WC” (short for Water Closet), are up a few steps, and, if you can squeeze through the doorway, are in the style of squat toilets (similar to a urinal, but on the floor). Even if you are lucky enough to find a sitting toilet (usually more modern public facilities or modern private homes) the doorways are too narrow for a wheelchair to enter. Be prepared – carry provisions, be creative, wear pads, ask a friend to shelter you while you do your business. While living in more rural areas, at “*nhà quê*” or countryside homes, where most homes have only squat-toilets that are usually located away from the house, I fashioned a chair that could be used as a toilet. The “toilet chair” was made from a plastic 4-leg stool with a large hole cut out of the seat into which a plastic “potty” could be placed. It was very light, easily transportable, and could be placed wherever was most accessible (and appropriate!) for me to use. The “potty” bowl could also be lined with a disposable plastic bag or just washed out.

Medications - If you take medication daily, calculate what you will need, then bring extra in the event that you remain in the country longer than expected. Pack them separately just in case you lose your luggage. My health insurance company had procedures for medical care outside of the U.S. Research what is required and follow the procedures to ensure you will be covered. There are many therapies in Eastern medicine that I have been offered to alleviate my “condition.” There is no doubt that you will encounter the same; exercise caution and use commonsense.

Last word - Even the most “physically functional” researcher encounters discomforts in the field. It is often about how far out of your “comfort zone” you are willing to go, not about what you are able to do. Cliché it may be, but “where there is a will, there is a way” still holds. Actually, being away from the amenities of the First World can be quite liberating and you may be happily surprised with what you learn about yourself.

As John Hockenberry, former NPR correspondent and wheelchair user told me, “There’s no reason to stay home.”

Getting to Vietnam - Airplane Travel

I make my flight reservations for Vietnam through Pacific Ocean Travel, Inc. (808-522-0990). Pacific Ocean Travel is a Honolulu-based travel agency that specializes in travel to Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries. They can also do the paperwork for a “tourist visa.” However, as I described earlier, one should determine what type of visa they will be traveling with, tourist or business.

I usually inform the airline company at the time I purchase the ticket that I use a wheelchair. Airports and airplane personnel are prepared for wheelchair users. When traveling from the Honolulu Airport to Vietnam, for example, airport attendants will assist wheelchair users to get to the gate and even handle your carry-on luggage. Interestingly, I think that most people who use wheelchairs and travel by airplane are those that have a disability due to their advanced age. They often use the airport wheelchair, and then appear very dependent on the assistance of others. By contrast, younger people with a disability travel with their personally owned chair and are very independent. This is based on my observations and interactions with the “wheelchair” attendants at airports, who always want to push my chair for me because they are not accustomed to my independence.

On the positive side of all this attention, having an attendant escort you to the gate can save you much time by passing long security check lines – I am usually wheeled right up to the front of the line (the attendant doesn’t have time to wait either!). In many older airports, the main route to and from boarding gates is non-accessible and the alternate routes require you to go through locked doors, freight elevators, or back corridors. This is where an escort by the airport attendant is essential. My advice: sit back (or politely and patiently state that you would rather push yourself) and enjoy the ride through the security checkpoints and other “authorized personnel only” access ways. You will get to your plane on time.

Earlier, I briefly mentioned the need to pack medication and additional tools for ones wheelchair. This packing of the “extra” personal necessities is an important point to remember due to weight restrictions for luggage on planes. Equipment and supplies needed for fieldwork and books are heavy. On one occasion when I arrived at the Honolulu airport, one of my bags was overweight. Fortunately, I had grams to spare in the other bag and could transfer items. This is when it occurred to me that a large part of what I needed to pack was related to my spinal cord injury and included items a fully ambulatory researcher probably would not pack. Ideally, the person with these needs would be allowed a certain weight exemption that is not counted as luggage, as in the case with personal wheelchairs.

The Taipei International Airport, in Taiwan, and the Hà Nội-Nội Bài Airport have wheelchair accessible restrooms. I am uncertain about the international airport outside of Hồ Chí Minh City (HCMC). When flying domestically, the airport near HCMC has an accessible bathroom, but it is on the second floor and I was told there is no elevator.

At the time of this report, the flight between Honolulu, Hawai‘i and Hà Nội, or HCMC, Vietnam requires an overnight stop in Taipei, Taiwan. This is referred to as a “transit.” If one flies on China Airlines, there is no extra charge for the shuttle bus, meal, or overnight stay at the Airport Hotel. The shuttle bus is not wheelchair accessible. I could walk onto the bus. I was told that someone who could not walk would be carried on. Likewise, the Airport Hotel does not have official wheelchair accessible rooms, although the entrance into the hotel is ramped. However, unless ones wheelchair is very

narrow, it will not fit into the bathrooms, and one will also have to accommodate to the high-walled bathtub. Fortunately, it is only for one night.

One last piece of advice regarding stopovers and wheelchairs: Unless it is only a one-hour stop, never agree to have your wheelchair checked all the way through to your destination. I agreed to this once during my international travels and my wheelchair was lost to another plane when mine was rescheduled due to bad weather. You need to be comfortable and independent, especially when you are faced with uncertainty about accessibility. Airport wheelchairs are over-sized and difficult to maneuver when you are accustomed to pushing around a 14-inch lightweight wheelchair. Additionally, personal wheelchairs are hot-ticket items in the developing world where there are people with physical disabilities limited to ground level-wheeled carts for mobility.

In Vietnam

At the time of my most recent visit to Vietnam last year, the country was in preparation for hosting the upcoming SEA Games (Southeast Asian countries sports competition), followed by the ParaAsean Games. Due to these events, Vietnam was in a frenzy of infrastructure improvement (e.g., roads, sidewalks, ramped curbs, especially in tourist areas). Unlike the poorly broadcasted Para-Olympics by the U.S., the ParaAsean games were well televised and celebrated in Vietnam. Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries are very interested in improving conditions for people with disabilities. The coincidence of the timing of events and my being a wheelchair user added another interesting perspective to my research. My reception as a person that uses a wheelchair was different from my first visit to Vietnam in 2000. First, many people thought I was a wheelchair athlete taking part in the games. Second, people were much more aware of the great athletic abilities of their fellow Vietnamese with disabilities. Both of these contributed to my feeling a higher level of respect and recognition. I believe the ParaAsean games were important in helping to change popular conceptions of those with disabilities.

Contact Period in Hà Nội

The main purpose for my entry into and exit from Hà Nội was to formally meet and thank the collaborating scientists at the Institute for Ecology and Biological Resources (IEBR). The IEBR building is located on the campus of the Vietnam National Center for Science and Technology. There are 3 to 4 steps into the IEBR building and there is no ramp. I walked up the steps using my canes while my wheelchair was carried up. The building is equipped with an elevator. There are restrooms with sit-down toilets, but the entrance into these is too narrow for a wheelchair to enter.

While in Hà Nội, I stayed at the Missouri Botanical Garden's (MBG) house. This is the residence of Dr. Regalado, the MBG scientist working with IEBR. Guests of MBG or the Vietnam Botanical Conservation Program (VBCP) often stay at the house while working in Hà Nội. This turned out to be an ideal situation because the house has a guest room and bathroom on the first floor. There are a couple of steps to get into the house. I

believe that if I were unable to walk, Dr. Regalado would have worked out access. Please see the end of this report for information on commercial accommodations in Hà Nội and of Hồ Chí Minh City.

The MBG house is located near a market; making it convenient for breakfast, shopping, and an initial look at the markets of Vietnam. Both the MBG house and the market are located on Linh Lang Street; where there are either no sidewalks or they are very narrow. I wheeled in the street, however, relatively safely, as this is not a main traffic road and is in good condition. Shopping at the street market is very accessible. Vendors lay out their food items at ground level, so all the fruits, vegetables, leafy greens, fish, clams, flowers, herbs, etc. are visible. Under the covered market area where prepared foods are sold (i.e. soup and noodle vendors), the paths are wide enough for a wheelchair.

Research Period in Biên Hoà

Biên Hoà City is located in Đồng Nai Province in southern Vietnam. It is approximately 30 km northeast of HCMC, making it a convenient location to do research in an average size city with less tourist influence, but with relatively easy to access larger institutions in HCMC.

Biên Hoà is also my place of birth. Most of my extended family who lived in Biên Hoà immigrated to the U.S. between 1973 and 1990. I left in May, 1975. Currently, only my eldest aunt, her husband, grown children and their families live in Biên Hoà. During most of my four months in Vietnam, I lived with my aunt in her newly built house. It is not wheelchair accessible, but accommodation could have easily been made if I was completely non-ambulatory.

The Biên Hoà district, like much of Vietnam is developing quickly. Everywhere one sees new infrastructure (e.g., new, larger water pipes, street widening). This in turn leads to the demolition of old houses and the building of new, taller ones, as well as new shops, dance clubs, and cafes. All this demolition and building also means that many sidewalks are crumbled or completely impassible. Where the sidewalks are new or intact, they are often used as parking areas for motorbikes, and therefore still impassible. When I used my wheelchair, I usually traveled in the street. Wheeling in the road was often dusty and noisy but commuters were generally very aware of their surroundings and I never had an accident.

Research and Transportation

My two market research sites consisted of a small, neighborhood market close to my home and the large Biên Hoà market farther away. I went to the small market using my wheelchair, hugging the side of the road. There are newer sidewalks at the market but vendors use these areas to display and sell their products, so I found myself out on the street anyway. The covered area of the market has narrow passageways of bare-packed dirt that are quite pitted and muddy from rain and other liquids. I could still enter them, much to the chagrin of other shoppers vying for the same space as they squeezed past

with their bicycles and motorbikes. Similar conditions are found at the larger Biên Hoà market, but the passageways are generally paved, though this does not mean they are smooth!

Going to the larger and more distant Biên Hoà market required my hiring transportation. This was in the form of a “*Xích-lô*” (pedicab) or a “*Xe-ôm*” (motorbike taxi). I hired *Xích-lô*'s when I needed to have my wheelchair with me. I would fold up my chair and climb into the seat, and then the chair would be placed in the front area of the *Xích-lô* where I placed my feet. After some experience, I knew how to secure and hold the chair so that it was not too uncomfortable. The convenience of being able to fold the chair in this situation is one of the reasons I recommend the folding style wheelchair. *Xích-lô*'s are the cheapest form of hired transport, usually a few thousand Vietnam Đồng (VNĐ) per kilometer. The price is always negotiated, with the foreigner usually paying more than the local person. They are also very popular with shoppers because it is possible to transport not only the shopper back home, but also many bags of food items. For this reason, *Xích-lô*'s are often found in convenient locations at markets ready to peddle a shopper home. An added positive note is the fact that because they are pedaled the ride is slow and leisurely, allowing for sightseeing. Although I climbed into the *Xích-lô*, I think they could still be accessible if the passenger was not ambulatory. The pedaler lifts the back of the *Xích-lô* so the seat is low in the front to allow the passenger to climb in. If one is adept at wheelchair transfers, it would be possible to transfer into the *Xích-lô* seat. If one is of small stature, there may be an offer to lift one into the *Xích-lô*, as I sometimes experienced.

When I did not need to bring my wheelchair, my preferred transportation was by a *Xe-ôm*. These are men on motorbikes whom you hire for rides. The term *Xe-ôm* literally means “hugging vehicle.” These are a little more expensive than the *Xích-lô*, but considerably faster (and potentially more dangerous). They too establish a regular waiting area where their customers can find them.

If you need regularly scheduled transportation, you can arrange scheduled pick-ups with one *Xe-ôm* driver. However, only pay per ride. I had a regular driver who picked me up three times a week to go to a local pool. Of course, both a *Xích-lô* and a *Xe-ôm* can be waved down for hire; sometimes they solicit you if you look as though you need a ride.

Taxis or a car with a driver are better for further distances. Both taxi and car hire companies can be located by calling directory assistance, and taxis often congregate at strategic locations (near tourist areas, museums, bus stations). I used taxis when I needed to travel with my wheelchair beyond Biên Hoà City. Depending on the distance or duration of the trip (i.e. numerous days to different provinces), car hire is the better option. When I traveled into HCMC from Biên Hoà (+ 60 km round trip), it was cheaper to hire a driver for the entire day. One trip I made to HCMC, leaving Biên Hoà in the early morning and returning in the evening cost 350,000 VNĐ, about \$23.00 US.

Buses are also available. In contrast to the price for car hire to HCMC, a one-way bus ticket between the two cities cost 20,000 VNĐ! Local city buses are not available everywhere; for example, there is no local city bus service in Biên Hoà. In Hà Nội, and I am told in HCMC, there are city buses, but they are not wheelchair accessible. When I lived in Paris, I would routinely take the non-accessible buses, folding my chair, and pulling it up the bus steps. From what I observed in Hà Nội, this is not as easy in Vietnam. I once considered taking the bus in Hà Nội. I sought out a bus stop but its placement and design made it impossible for me to wait in front. When the bus arrived, the mass of motorbikes in the street kept the bus from stopping near the curb. People descended and boarded the bus through the maze of motorbikes. I waved down a taxi instead.

Other forms of vehicle transportation available in Vietnam include multi-passenger vans and longer-distance buses. The vans travel longer distances, picking up additional passengers along the way. While these are cheaper, if one can afford the price, I feel that hiring a car and driver is the best option for research travel purposes. For my own work, the greatest advantage to having my own car and driver is the option of stopping wherever there is something of interest to photograph, research further, or just to relieve myself.

Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to travel by train – next trip. From my inquiry on the Internet, the trains do not appear to be accessible.

Airplane flights are available between many larger cities in Vietnam. My flights between HCMC and Hà Nội cost on average 1,450,000 VNĐ or \$100.00 US.

An added interesting note regarding motorbikes: there are three-wheeled motorbikes available. Vietnam has many people who are physically disabled due to war-injuries, polio, birth defects, etc. Since the most common, and cultural form of transportation is by motorbike, many people have modified motorbikes with two wheels in the back and hand-clutches. In fact, I met a whole club of three-wheelers and spent a few afternoons touring the countryside as a passenger gaining a completely different awareness of people with disabilities in Vietnam. If I were to live in Vietnam for an extended period of time, perhaps a year or so, I would definitely research this option.

Other Venues in Biên Hoà

To my delight, the newly constructed community square includes a grand library that is fully wheelchair accessible. The library personnel are also very friendly, and the receptionist has a physical disability herself. Again, I was treated with great admiration as a person with a disability carrying out research in Vietnam.

Shops and services, like the post office, vary regarding accessibility. Many small shops are completely open and level to the street so I could just walk or wheel right into the shop. Others may have a few steps, while others are completely closed with large

staircases. I believe this is common anywhere one would travel. From my experience, whenever I truly needed assistance, it would eventually be available.

Research Assistants

It is possible to hire local people to assist with various aspects of research. I did not have a regular assistant, but instead employed a family member when needed. However, I was advised to hire assistants at \$10.00 US for a full day's work. This is a considerable salary compared to the usual wages of laborers in Vietnam.

Hồ Chí Minh City Research Contact

IEBR, my collaborating institution, is located in Hà Nội, but my work is in the south. For a southern Vietnam research contact, I was introduced to the Institute of Tropical Biology (ITB), also a division of the National Center for Natural Science and Technology. ITB is the location of the National Herbarium (NH), an important place to deposit a set of my plant specimens from the markets. I was given an official letter of introduction from the director of IEBR to deliver to the keeper of the herbarium. Letters of introduction are extremely important in Vietnam. They are highly regarded and you risk not being seen if you arrive unannounced without one.

The herbarium is not wheelchair accessible. There are two steps to enter the building. The herbarium is on the second floor, the office area and library is on the third floor and the bathrooms are on the first and third floors. There is no elevator. However, the herbarium and library are rich with plant specimens and publications left by the French and other foreign scientists. The keeper of the herbarium, Ms. Trinh Thị Lâm, and her assistant are very kind, and I believe if I was not able to access the collections that they would have assisted me by bringing them down to the ground floor.

Housing

Housing is the biggest difficulty for a foreigner with a physical disability who plans to remain for an extended time in Vietnam. I am very fortunate to have family, friends, and the ability to walk. That enables me to have greater choices in my housing. Hotels are usually not wheelchair accessible, except for those that are newer and more expensive. I found information on hotels through an Internet search for "Vietnam hotels wheelchair accessible" and similar searches (Appendix 1). As I stated above, wheelchair accessible hotels are usually the new, expensive ones, especially in Hà Nội (4 or 5 star hotels starting around \$60 US), with slightly more options in HCMC (2 star starting at \$42 US up to 5 star for over \$100 US). Obviously, at these prices, hotel stay is not an option for long research periods.

I am unable to comment about rental housing. I do know that almost anything can be worked out if one truly tries. I recommend highlighting this difficulty and requesting additional funds to pay for accessible housing when applying for grants to do field work in Vietnam or other international locations (See Appendix 2 for funding sources).

Conclusion

The experience I have described of conducting research in Vietnam as a person with a physical disability is unique to my abilities, familial and professional contacts. I have made recommendations that I believe would assist those interested in traveling to and in, conducting research in, or living in Vietnam, especially for people with disabilities. I feel that I have been extremely fortunate with my experiences traveling as a person that uses a wheelchair or canes in Vietnam and elsewhere in the world. This is due in part to accepting and accommodating to different situations, but I believe it is largely attributed to the kindness that people have shared. As an ethnobotanist, one of the first teachings is respect and sincerity for all people and cultures. I strive to follow that teaching and believe I have been treated the same.

Everyone has different abilities and experiences at home and abroad. We cannot know exactly what will occur in either place. Thus, with regard to conducting research in Vietnam as a person with a physical disability, I reiterate the earlier cliché, “Where there is a will, there is a way.”

And, again, I pass on John Hockenberry’s statement to me, “There’s no reason to stay home.”

Acknowledgments: I acknowledge and respectfully thank Dr. Nguyễn Tiến Hiệp, of the Department of Botany, Institute of Ecology and Biological Resources (IEBR, Viện Sinh Thái và Tài Nguyên Sinh Vật), of the Vietnam National Center for Natural Science and Technology (Trung Tâm Khoa Học Tự Nhiên Và Công Nghệ Quốc Gia) in Hà Nội, Vietnam, and Dr. Jack (Jacinto) Regalado (formerly with IEBR and Missouri Botanical Garden’s Vietnam Botanical Conservation Program), Ms. Trinh Thị Lâm, curator of the Herbarium at the Institute of Tropical Biology (Viện Sinh học Nhiệt đới) in Hồ Chí Minh City, Mrs. Nguyễn Thị Gai and Mr. Nguyễn Đức Minh, my key informants and mother’s eldest sister and brother, respectively, other family members and vendors of the markets of Biên Hoà city for facilitating my learning and dissertation research in Vietnam.

My Lien T. Nguyen, Ph.D. was born in Vietnam of Vietnamese and American parents. In 1975, she immigrated to the United States with her mother, uncle and younger brother. As an ethnobotanist that specializes in the interactions between food customs, plants and the (re)construction of cultural foodways by immigrants, she has explored the markets and foods of Asia, Europe, North Africa, South Pacific island nations, and the United States. Nguyen firmly believes in a “Strong Body – Strong Mind” ethic and has been involved in many programs supporting athletics for people with disabilities, particularly skiing and horseback riding. Contact: mylien@hawaii.edu or mylien_n@yahoo.com, www.mylientnguyen.info.

Notes

1. Prices quoted in this report are from the period of November 2003 to March 2004.

2. Ethnobiology Working Group. 2003. Intellectual Imperatives in Ethnobiology: NSF Biocomplexity Workshop Report. Missouri Botanical Garden: St. Louis, Missouri.

3. CITES, The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) is an international agreement between Governments. Its aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival.

Appendix 1: Resources for Travel

1) World Hotel Guides

<http://www.vietnam-hotelguide.com/>

Advanced Search allows for “Rooms for Disabled” and for Hà Nội returns:

Horison Hà Nội Hotel
40 Cat Linh Street
Tel: 84-4-7330808
Hà Nội

2) Boots n All

www.bootsnall.com/hostels/asia/viet/han/sunway.shtml

Lodging listed as “Wheelchair Friendly”:

Sunway Hotel
19 Pham Dinh Ho
Hai Bà Trưng Dist
Hà Nội
\$42 US
Manh Dung Guest house
No. 2 - Tam Thuong
Hà Nội
\$10 US

Legend

2(A) - 4(A) Ton Duc Thang St. Dist. 1
Hồ Chí Minh City
84-8-8233333

3) Internet resources for accessible travel

www.disabilitytravel.com

emerginghorizons.com

www.newmobility.com/links_view.cfm?link_type=community&link_category=Trave

Appendix 2: Granting Sources and Information

The following are a few organizations that give grants or provide information especially for people with disabilities for education. An Internet search is also helpful.

- 1) Foundation for Science and Disability. This is a group of scientists, with and without disabilities that give \$1000.00 grants to graduate students with disabilities in the sciences.

Chair of the Science Student Grant Committee:
Dr. Richard Mankin,
503 NW 89 ST
Gainesville, FL 32607-1400
www.as.wvu.edu/~scidis/organization/FSD_brochure.html

- 2) Venture Clubs of America: Student Aid Award
Contact local Venture Club chapter or
Venture Clubs of America
ATTN: Venture Coordinator
Two Penn Center Plaza, Suite 1000
Philadelphia, PA 19102-1883
(215) 557-9300
Venture Club of Honolulu
P.O. Box 235137
Honolulu, HI 96823

- 3) Mobility International USA
www.miusa.org

MIUSA works in four main areas to provide programs and services including:

- National Clearinghouse on Disability & Exchange (NCDE)
- International Development & Disability
- International Exchange and Leadership Development
- International Women with Disabilities Leadership and Networking Projects

- 4) The National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange (NCDE). The goal of NCDE is to increase the number of people with disabilities in international exchange programs and to assist people with disabilities to have successful international experiences.

NCDE link is available through MIUSA website.

- 5) Michigan State University Libraries database:
www.lib.msu.edu/harris23/grants/3disable.htm

