

Vietnam Markets

Vietnam, with something on the order of 17 million inhabitants and 2½ million people living in the capitol city of Saigon, meant a wide variety of wants, needs and demands, by the residents on the types of merchandise and services required to fulfill the customers desires. In major cities merchants sold, what ever the clients and customers wanted to buy. The cities had a larger and wider selection of goods and services, not seen in smaller towns. Dealerships, selling Thailand and Japanese commerical trucks, European made autos, French and Italian motor scooters and Japanese produced Honda motorcycles were seen at the upper end of the pricing spectrum.

Flower booths were popular with a broader more diverse segment of the Vietnamese population. They could be seen in medium sized towns as well as large cities. The colorful flowers brighten many dreary lives, and priced so that much of Vietnam's society could afford them. Daffodils and gladiolus seemed to thrive in the tropical heat of Vietnam.

For those that could afford them, electronic shops sprang up. They sold mostly Sony and Sanyo products. Offering radios, 8 track tape equipment, some small appliances as stoves and refrigerators, popular electronics and musical equipment. When the Vietnamese Government got the television network on the air, sales of TV sets soared, where people had electric.

Jewelry shops were favored by the Vietnamese, but especially popular with the Chinese living in Vietnam. They preferred precious metals over paper money. Their mis-givings of paper currency can be readily understood, when put into prospective. The older generation had witnessed much turbulence in the country's 30 year recent history. The French owned the country, then the Japanese, during World War II. They saw over a dozen Coup d' etats in less than two tears, an MPC exchange and the communist threatening. Paper money just wasn't trusted. They were suspicious of what form of government, they would have tomorrow and what sort of money would be used. Precious metal jewelry was a safe haven in these troubled times.

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I mentioned MPC (Military Payment Certificate) I imagine it was introduced with the U.S. build up in 1962 or 1963, using the Series 591. With ones, five and ten dollar demoninations. I don't recall a \$20.00 MPC Note. For years the taxi cab drivers, pedicabs, bars and thousands of other merchants took the American MPC as readily as the South Vietnamese Pias-ters. This situation lasted about six years, until that fateful day in July, 1968. The Vietnamese civilian workers were locked out of military post. The entire U.S. Military was under lock down, a marshal law type situation, until the Series 591 was exchanged for Series 621. In Saigon MPs escorted floor by floor of our hotel living quaters to the local mess hall, that severed several enlisted living areas, where we switched currency to the 621 Series. The cab drivers, bar owners and thousands of other Vietnamese merchants that had suitcases and steamer trucks full of 591 Series MPC, were devastated to learn that these millions and millions of dollars worth of MPC; was now totally and absolutely worthless. I heard rumors that some Saigon bar owners committed suicide over the MPC exchange.

I had experienced a MPC exchange in Korea, and one of the very few G.I.'s that knew what was happening. After the MPC exchange the distrust of paper currency had more merit. The gold jewerly in Vietnam was a darker yellow than seen in the states. Undoubtably the jewerly was a different grade than the standard 14 and 18 carat gold Americans are use to seeing. I remember watching at a jewerly store., nothing was priced. The item was weighted and using the latest Hong Kong gold quote a price for the item was calculated.

The orientals could buy a beaded necklace or bracklet just for wearing. If troubled times arose, they could trade one or two beads for food or other necessities. They could even use gold jewerly to buy passage out of the country, if need be. A gold bracelet or necklace wouldn't prompt near as much attention compared to a pocket bulging with paper money.

In Saigon, the French had a small section of exclusive shops selling exotic and unusual merchandise. One store had elephant hide shoes, belts and briefcases etc. Another store sold python belts, shoes, purses for women made of the snake skin. One store had liquor decantors, partly covered with silver, barring oriental designs.

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Ceramic elephants about 18 inches high, by 30 inches long were in great demand by soldiers, as were the Montagnard cross bows. Black market stalls popped up in every town selling often stolen American products and combat gear. Ammo clips, mess kits, cigarettes, pistol belts and canteens could all be bought on the black market. But these aforementioned high priced merchants were not meeting the needs of the masses of Vietnamese. In a war torn country elegant lavish products were sold by only a a very few merchants. Most businesses tailored their services to the evry day needs of the Vietnamese like restaurants, pharmacy, cloth for clothes dominated far more businesses than the fancy merchandisers. Their primary concerns was the essentials, like food for staying alive, and very frugal items to exist on, including adequate housing, clothing and bus fare to get to work, if they had a job, The minimum of lifes requirements, not the max.

Since electric power outside the cities was sparse, the Vietnamese had little use for the western invention called a referigator. The only curing process was the Peking style duck, where the red coated prepared duck hunh in the open air. The same method orientals use today in any U.S. Chinatown. They had no smoked cured meats, like the indians and eskimos of the Northwest, Canada and Alaska used to preserve salmon. Rarely did one see dried fish.

Lacking refrigeration even in the city, except for the wealthiest people, and meat curing methods, the Vietnamese city dwellers shopped for food nearly every day. Many city folks haddback yard gardens,,see slide (0) to grow vegetables like their country relatives. The country farmers went to market when ever they needed items, they couldn't make or produce for themselves.

Everywhere in Vietnam fowl was sold alive. Ducks, geese and chickens were put in crates, but more commonly just tied the feet of the fowl to the bicycle and ridden to market. It was the buyers obligation to slauther the fowl for cooking. The same for fish, eels and seafood items were also sold alive. Few fish were dried.

The enclosed slides on markets are divided into two groups. The permanent positions, where the merchant incurs overhead such as rent and utilities and the second group of vendors roaming around freestyle without any overhead.

Vietnam Markets Permanent positions with overhead

1. LS market place
2. Store selling jars of candy and cookies
3. Hat vendor
4. LS. people at market place in Saigon
5. Store selling plastic containers and fabric bolts in rear
6. Lady selling peppers
7. canned good merchant
8. White mice (Viet Cop) looking a Viet female
9. Ripe and green bananas at stall
10. Brass ware store
11. Cookies, sweets market store
12. Funeral wreath store
13. Funeral wreath store
14. Funeral wreath store
15. Book store
16. Book store
17. Oranges and produce for sale
18. Rack of shoes for sale
19. Open air cafe
20. Coke cases at stall
21. Baskets at merchant for sale
22. MS shoppers at a market
23. LS central market place
24. hat store
25. Open air cafe
26. Congestion at market place, cafe on side
27. MSmarket place in Bien Hoa
28. Line of merchants stalls in market place
29. Shops closed during siesta break
30. Watermelons and cocoanuts or pandanus
31. Black market grapes for sale
32. LS Saigon central market
33. LS. Saigon central market
34. Merchant selling flags
35. Fish sellers in central market
36. Woman weights eels or fish for buyer
37. Tub of fish and eels for sale.
38. Woman vendor with tub of fish to sell
39. Woman at chinaware stand
40. Pathway between vendors at market
41. Dried fish with herbs and spices.
42. Weighing fish for sale
43. Tub of eels and other seafood for sale.

VIETNAM Markets Street Vendors With NO Overhead

44. Hammock vendors showing wares
45. Buyer checking out merchandise
46. Group of street vendors selling oranges
47. Beverage push cart moving around town
48. Doctor applying suction cup to rid evil spirits
49. Woman pick up fruit to put in basket, crops drying in background
50. Live chickens and ducks waiting to be sold
51. Basket of fruit as Viet woman makes selection
52. Woman selling bakery good on street
53. Vendor weighs garlic and other spices for sale
54. Squash or other vegetables for sale
55. Merchant awaits customers
56. Push cart cafe in open air
57. Push cart vendor next to permanent store
58. Group of women pan-handlers selling to each other
59. Street vendor awaits customers
60. Push cart beverage vendor selling drinks
61. Produce vendor selling grapefruits and oranges
62. Street vendor watching people go by.
63. Group of street vendors huddled together
64. Flower vendor on street during siesta break
65. Street saleslady (not sure what she is selling)
66. Broom sales woman on street
67. Broom being shown to customer
68. Lunch time for street vendors
69. Banana Vendor at Saigon docks
70. Banana vendor from different angle
71. Banana vendor handling down bananas to boat people
72. Grapefruits and nuts being sold by street vendor
73. Load of oranges for sale by street vendor
74. Other fruits for sale by street vendors
75. Person on street selling dolls
76. Lettuce and vegetables for sale by street vendors
- 77-78 Vietnamese riding around on motorcycles

Very few of the above street vendors ever ventured out into the residential sections of town. They sat up shop along the inner city streets. If they didn't sell much, they would pack up and move to a different location. The city people had to travel into center city to buy the daily food needed.

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Written Oct 2004