

The Road to Saigon:
A FAMILY JOURNEY
THROUGH SINGAPORE,
KUALA LUMPUR &
VIETNAM

A Photographic Memoir by Michael Graham

GUARDIANS OF THE JOURNEY

About This Journey

Travel, as any wanderer soon learns, isn't about ticking boxes or chasing the perfect photograph. It's about the quiet surprises, the laughter that drifts across a food stall, the kindness of strangers who appear just when you need them most, and the way even a crowded airport or a sleepy village can leave a lasting mark on the heart.

This book follows one family's journey across Southeast Asia, through colour, heat, noise, and those rare moments of stillness in between. There were discoveries, a few detours, and more than one lesson learned the hard way, but always a sense of wonder at the world and the people who make it so extraordinary.



Cat Cat Village, Sapa, Vietnam

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Contents

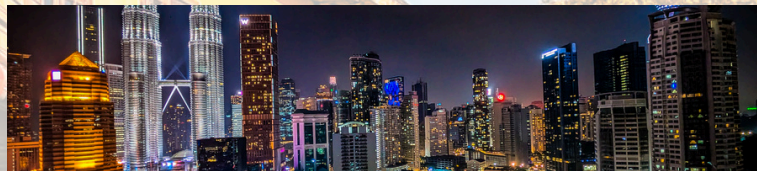
5 PLANNING AND DEPARTURE



10 SINGAPORE: THE FIRST STOP



17 KUALA LUMPUR: TOWERS AND TEMPLES



24 RETURN TO SINGAPORE — IF ONLY BRIEF



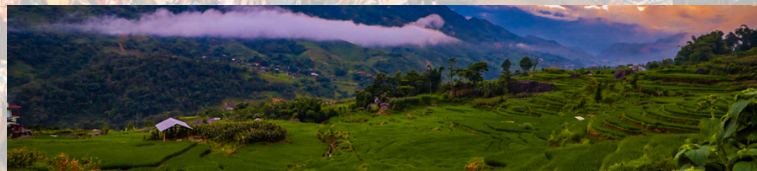
28 HÀ NỘI: HUM AND HUSTLE



34 NINH BINH - PEACE AMONG THE KARSTS



40 INTO THE MOUNTAINS OF SAPA



49 A SHORE THING - AN BANG BEACH, HỘI AN



63 SAIGON — A RETURN TO OUR SECOND HOME



80 THE FULL CIRCLE TO HOME



84 UNPACKING THE JOURNEY





**A journey is never just the places we see, but the ways it
reshapes the people we are and the memories we carry.**

Su Pan Weir, Sapa, Vietnam

A Journey for the Heart

A year earlier, Singapore had been nothing more than a layover. Just another terminal: fluorescent lights, echoing announcements, rows of duty-free perfumes. Yet something about it lingered. Beyond the glass walls, the city seemed to breathe—flavours and colours just out of reach, rhythms pulsing faintly through the concourse. A quiet seed was planted that day.

Twelve months later, the seed pushed through. A routine browse online unearthed a Singapore Airlines Christmas fare, absurdly low. Within hours the price leapt by €500, but by then the booking was already made. Fate, it seemed, had nudged us firmly eastward. Europe's vineyards and winding mountain roads were set aside. Instead, Asia called.

That deal became more than a change of destination. At home in Ireland, memories have always mattered more than things, and travel was our way of gift-wrapping time. This journey promised something richer still: a chance to share the world through the eyes of a child, to stitch family moments across landscapes and cultures.

The story that follows is not a guidebook. There will be no lists or checkmarks. It is instead a tapestry of small discoveries: fireworks shimmering on Singapore's bay, the steel of Kuala Lumpur's towers gleaming at dusk, mist drifting over Sapa's hills, the chaos and charm of Saigon's streets. A camera recorded the pictures. The heart carried the story. Together, they unfold here.



Planning and Departure

Lifting Off

Embarking on a month through Southeast Asia with a young family requires less bravado than choreography. Budget, energy, logistics — all had to be lined up before the curtain could rise. Flexibility was part of the act, but the backbone was solid planning.

The Art of Planning Ahead

For families, timing is everything. School holidays turn fares into runaway numbers, particularly in Vietnam, where prices climb by the week. Booking flights and hotels early gave us room to breathe. Free-cancellation options became our safety net, letting us pivot when a better idea (or bargain) appeared.

Accommodation was juggled between Airbnb, Booking.com, and Agoda, each offering its own strengths. For example, the original plan in Singapore was to stay in Geylang, close to the MRT. Then, as if Singapore itself was intervening, a last-minute Airbnb deal popped up in Chinatown: The Rest Collection — compact, clever, and central. For a family, proximity to hawker stalls, supermarkets, and train lines meant less stress and more satay.

Flights were chosen with equal care. The hop from Singapore to Kuala Lumpur was a prime example. On paper, low-cost carriers seemed cheapest, but once seats, bags, and extras were tallied, Singapore Airlines emerged not only competitive but better: €90 return, 25 kg luggage included, and free family seat selection if you travel with children.



A bus between the cities was once romantic, but the thought of carrying heaving bags through border checks with a seven-year-old made the choice simple.

Within Vietnam, Vietnam Airlines beat VietJet by the same quiet logic. The fares were slightly higher, but 23 kg of luggage and a reputation for punctuality were worth every euro.

Lesson learned: when travelling with children, the cheapest option is rarely the best.



Departure Day

The morning of departure carried that peculiar blend of excitement and nerves. Closing the front door felt like stepping off a ledge — months of planning finally surrendering to reality.

Bags were packed with military precision. The hand luggage carried the true survival kit: colouring books, toys, snacks, a tablet loaded with cartoons. Grandparents provided the final send-off, their hugs lingering as the car rolled toward Dublin Airport.

Check-in offered the first hiccup. As the Aer Lingus leg to Frankfurt was a feeder for Singapore Airlines, online check-in had been impossible. At the desk, the news came: seats scattered throughout the cabin, an impossible arrangement with a child. A gentle plea to the staff worked. Two seats together, 7C and 7D — aisle apart, not ideal but workable with my wife pinned to 28B. Security cleared, there was time for a farewell meal in T2: Pad Thai for the adults, burger and chips for the youngest traveller. Comfort food for a leap into the unknown.

Dublin to Frankfurt

The first hop to Frankfurt revealed what travel kindness looks like. The attentiveness and friendliness of the airline crew shone through as they kindly asked passengers to move two rows up so we could sit together. I overheard the crew offering them a free cup of tea for their kindness — a small gesture that spoke volumes. (Already, kindness was making its mark on the journey.)

The 1 hour 45 minute flight passed uneventfully. The weather was beautiful,

showcasing Europe from below, and we tried to pick out cities such as Amsterdam along the way. Landing on time, with a 1 hour 45 minute connection, it took about fifty minutes from disembarking to reaching the Singapore Airlines gate. The adventure of the transit included buses, long walks, the SkyTrain, and another brush with security — friendly, warm smiles, taking their job seriously but willing to engage with us.

When booking, taking note of connection times and terminal changes is important for stress elimination and unforeseen delays.

Then, waiting at the gate, the scale of the real adventure became clear: Singapore Airlines' A380, a double-decker giant gleaming on the tarmac. Boarding was efficient, though the cabin crew showed some signs of stress and eagerness to get going.

Frankfurt to Singapore

Take-off lifted us into a streak of orange sky, the lights of Frankfurt glowing from below as we banked right to head eastwards. Not long into the flight, the cabin crew, now settled, became very attentive and relaxed. Dinner followed — prawn pasta with a glass of wine for courage — before the inflight entertainment took over. Hours passed watching films, occasionally sneaking a peek out the window, reading, and a few fits of restless sleep.

