

Journal Entry April 6, 2025 | Hanoi, Vietnam

By Helena Trifillis

I'm having emotions on the street again.

I read the foreword of Patti Smith's "Just Kids" where she describes Robert Mapplethorpe's final moments in the hospital and tears are welling.

I'm a big believer in public display of emotions, being a repeat offender myself.

I'm sitting curbside at a cafe on a busy walking street in Hanoi. The menu happens to be behind my head so the frequent passersby glance first at the menu then at me, red-eyed trying to suck my tears back up the ducts while each of the following sentences I read is sadder than the last. There's live music coming from somewhere close by. Multiple stringed instruments keeping a staccato rhythm, bouncing with the pace of an Irish jig. I believe they call this style of music Ca Huế. I see a sign that says "HAPPY CLOTHING." I have a rule with myself: Every time I see the word "happy" or "smile," I smile. So I smile and remind myself that I am, in fact, happy.

Everyone smokes cigarettes here. Smoke wafts from each table into the street where it is swept into the greater air by many swerving motorbikes.

A little boy with a long rat tail walks by, holding hands with his mom. He sticks his tongue out at me then giggles, hiding his face in his mom's hand.

The kids are expressive here. So are the adults.

Today I bought "Just Kids," a purple pen, a tofu wrap, 2 pairs of 94% cotton underwear, and 2 matcha lattes. I also got a facial at one of those fancy spas that scans your face and gives you a full skin analysis. The scanner told me I have significant UV damage and the employee read my results and typed into her translation app, "You have weak skin." I think she meant "sensitive" skin which I scored in the red danger zone for. I do however, have below average wrinkles and virtually no dark circles, which I take to mean I am quite stress-free.

The employee asked if I have a skin-care regimen and I told her I use only natural products like bar soap made from mineral mud and coconut oil. She frowned and said, "This is not enough."

I decided not to care too much about my skin analysis.

Maybe on a cutaneous level I'm not doing so great, but mentally I'm the most consistently happy I've ever been, despite the odd "crying in public" situation. And I mostly cry in public because I'm moved by the beauty of nature or I'm reflecting with gratitude on the many travel and growth opportunities I've had thus far.

So they are happy tears.

A large group of Indian tourists stroll by the cafe and the front half is singing and waving to everyone as they pass. I smile and wave at each of them vigorously like a maneki-neko cat toy gone haywire.

A group of Vietnamese fashion girls is celebrating one girl's birthday a few tables over. Each of her friends shows up to the table with a cake for her.

She now has 4 cakes.

I finally step in the sauce spill from my tofu wrap that I had been so narrowly avoiding.

Life is good.