

LESSONS FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA



I would like to share with you some reflections and memories of a very special trip we recently took to Southeast Asia.

The main reason for the journey was to celebrate Maricarmen's 80th birthday. All 20 of us—children, daughters-in-law, son-in-law, and grandchildren—traveled together with the desire to bond, learn, and explore a region of the world so rich in history and culture. It was a deeply moving experience to see us so united, enjoying and discovering new places together.

We visited Cambodia, Vietnam, and Singapore, all members of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), which comprises 11 countries in the region that maintain cordial and commercial relations with much of the world.

Some of the lessons I took away—which could serve us well in Mexico—include their sense of organization, the cleanliness of their streets and public spaces, and the respect for the



law in everyday life. I was also impressed by the infrastructure: modern and efficient highways and airports. Singapore's airport, in particular, is in a league of its own.

Cambodia was, without a doubt, the country that touched me the most. The history of suffering endured by its people during the civil war and the poverty that still persists is striking, yet one can sense a path toward recovery. I was marveled by the ruins of Angkor Wat, surrounded by lush vegetation. But above all, I was moved by the words of a Jesuit in Siem Reap (near Angkor Wat) during Christmas Mass. He shared how he lost a fellow Jesuit friend to a landmine explosion, and said that despite this tragedy and so many others, every day we must live in the present and mindfully repeat: "Here we are."

Vietnam surprised me with how it has moved forward after suffering through several wars. In many ways, it reminded me of Mexico: the traffic, the bustle, the building facades, and the contrasts between the modern and the ancient, all with a distinct Chinese influence in its culture and cuisine. One of the most beautiful sights was Ha Long Bay, with its rock islands that look like sculptures emerging from the water.

Singapore is in a category of its own. Today, it is the world's fourth-largest financial center—after New York, London, and Hong Kong—and one of the leading container ports globally, handling over 41 million containers a year.

I will close these lines with deep gratitude for my health and for the opportunity to have taken such a trip, surrounded by my family, celebrating life and learning together.

I send you and your families my best wishes for health and peace in this new year.