



## What About Vietnam – S5-E17 – Motorbike riding in Vietnam: Safety, local tips and Epic Adventures

Kerry Newsome: Xin chào and welcome back to the What About Vietnam podcast. I'm thrilled to have you join me today. Before we jump into this episode, I wanted to address a new connectivity feature that initially I was really excited about because it opened up the door for what I thought would be a great way for us to interact more. However, it's not quite working out as I'd hoped. You may see at the beginning of the show notes in the podcast channel that you're listening from some words that say text me a message. It's a great idea. Don't get me wrong. I love hearing from you. And, you know, whether that's your thoughts on the episodes, some questions, messages of appreciation, you know, I just, I just love the feedback. It's really great. However, I feel it remiss of me to, A, not thank you for them, but to be not be able to respond directly to you. So if you have sent me a question and I've got lots and you haven't heard from me, there's a really good reason why I actually don't have the ability in the technology to respond to you. They kind of expect that you would or I would answer the questions in the form of a show and there's just kind of too many and I just think it's just too personal not to do it that way. So I wanted to alert you to the fact that if you do send me a message through that connection option, I'm not going to be able to respond to you directly. So, if you do have a question, and it is time sensitive, or you want to send me any kind of message, can I suggest the following two ways? One, send me an email to [whataboutvietnam@gmail.com](mailto:whataboutvietnam@gmail.com). That is the email address that I have the most constant access to, and I will aim to get back to you ASAP. Secondly, if you go to the website for the podcast, which is [whataboutvietnam.com](http://whataboutvietnam.com), if you scroll right to the bottom, there is a chance for you to leave a voice message. Now, in that voice message, I can respond to you equally with a response in voice. So if you want a quick response, that's your next best way. But I just wanted to get this into the show, make you aware of this as it really is becoming problematic. And I've just got too many and I can't kind of go naming people

and answering each question. That's just a little bit silly. So if you have sent me a text message before and you're waiting on a message back as a response, I'm so sorry. I cannot do that. But if you want to send the question again, I'd be more than happy to answer. Just in the lead up to this episode, I thought I'd give you a little bit of context. Firstly, I've asked Ben Mitchell to come back on the show. I was able to have the opportunity to talk with him while I was in Fong Nah, and we were able to sit down and have a really frank and open discussion around motorbikes and travel around Vietnam on a motorbike. And, you know, for people who are thinking to come to Vietnam and have that experience, I just think this is one for you. This is one that I really encourage you to listen to, to give you some real context of what that actually would mean for you as you visit this amazing country, which as he calls it, a motorbike nation. In addition to having been on the show, I got the opportunity to ask my friend Chris Pantelli to come on. And his story is even more fresh, I guess, in my mind and certainly in his, as I got to share the story after he just finished a five-day trip in northern Vietnam in the Yen Bai province. Now, if you've been listening to my shows, you would have heard me put up a show about Yen Bai, but a totally different experience to the motorbike journey off-road and on-road that Chris Pantelli and his son did together in April of this year. So, stick with us, folks. It's a really meaty show. It's got a lot of great tips and hints. I'm going to put all the links to some of the companies that are mentioned, so you can go there, check them out for yourself and, you know, enjoy Vietnam if you're a motorbike rider, but don't come to Vietnam for the first time or any time if you're not an experienced rider and just jump on the bike. It's better to get on the back of someone else and let them take you around rather than take that risk yourself. It's just not the country to learn how to ride, it's the country to experience as an experienced rider. Anyway, let's jump into the show and let's say hello to Ben.

Kerry Newsome: Hi, Ben. How you doing?

Ben Mitchell: I'm good. Hi, Kerry.

Kerry Newsome: What are we going to be talking about today? Motorbikes.

Ben Mitchell: Motorbike, motorbike travel, motorbike tourism in Vietnam.

Kerry Newsome: Do you know what? I reckon that's a really good topic to talk about as it comes up a lot. And, you know, there's some crazy things that happen with motorbikes.

Ben Mitchell: Yeah, well, it's a motorbike nation, the Vietnam. The people of Vietnam are all on a motorbike. You can put anything on a motorbike. You can put a large amount of people on a motorbike. As you travel through Vietnam, you'll see motorbikes being used in all sorts of different ways. As far as travelling in Vietnam by motorbike, it's very, very exhilarating. It's a great way to see the country.

Kerry Newsome: All right. So let's let's dig a bit deeper into the different ways you can do that. And what do you need to know up front before you make that decision to ride a motorbike as part of your trip or part of your travel plan in Vietnam?

Ben Mitchell: Well, there'll be many different ways that you could experience Vietnam involving motorbikes, I think the first thing we should talk about is safety. And yes, the elephant in the room, there is motorbike accidents in Vietnam. That is an issue. So, you know, if you're going to ride a motorbike in Vietnam, it's good to be able to ride a motorbike.

Kerry Newsome: And can I interject and just say, That when you say you need to be able to ride a motorbike, do you mean that in the country you come from, you have ridden a motorbike and you have a motorbike licence? Is that what you mean?

Ben Mitchell: I reckon that would be a very good start.

Kerry Newsome: Right. A very good start or a minimum standard, Ben?

Ben Mitchell: Yeah, minimum standard. I think learning to ride a motorbike in Vietnam is fraught with danger. Yeah. I think

Kerry Newsome: I think it's probably not a good idea if I'm going to be... Let's say that really out loud because I hear a lot of people who decide to come to Vietnam for the very first time and get on a bike and think this is just easy peasy and it's not. Let alone the traffic, just learning to ride a bike.

Ben Mitchell: I've been working in tourism for 15, 14 years here in Vietnam. And how many times I've heard, yeah, my first motorbike experience was riding out of Saigon or riding out of Hanoi on a motorbike I just bought earlier that day and off we went. And yeah, often there's an incident somewhere between there and when I meet them that involves a fair bit of skin off and they've got a bit of skin off at that point. And that's so yeah, just to sort of say that understanding how to ride a motorbike and having some experience in riding a motorbike would be a very good idea prior to coming to Vietnam and riding a motorbike.

Kerry Newsome: Yeah, I'm going to still put it in my minimum standard category because, you know, people say, you know, oh, it's managing the traffic. You still have to know how to ride a bike.

Ben Mitchell: Effectively, yeah. Not a scooter, a bike. I'd say in the country that you're from, go and get a motorbike license and learn to ride a motorbike prior to coming to Vietnam would be a minimum standard. Yeah, correct.

Kerry Newsome: Okay. So you've done heaps on a bike, let's face it. So what would you be recommending for your first time traveller to Vietnam as an experienced rider? So they know how to ride.

Ben Mitchell: Well, you've got a few choices. You can rent a motorbike and you can ride Through Vietnam you can rent a motorbike and ride through a segment of Vietnam on multi-day trips. You can travel from place to place through Vietnam and in most destinations, well all destinations that are set up for the tourist to visit in Vietnam, you can rent scooters and motorbikes for the day. and go out and explore the area. So some destinations in Vietnam are set up for people to rent a bike and go around and visit as a tourist. For day trips, some destinations you would be rented a motorbike for multi-days to visit the area. And then there's also the market of people renting motorbikes and riding through the country. People buy motorbikes in Saigon. They sell them in Hanoi. There's companies that will buy them and sell them from you. They buy them off other travelers and sell them to other travelers. And then there's the idea that you can go on a tour. And there is some really good reputable companies that provide motorbike tours. Tours can be a day trip, tours can be, you can do a tour for an evening, doing a food tour around Saigon. You can do tours in certain regions of Vietnam that might include a lot of cultural stuff and

being way off the beaten track. A good way to get way off the beaten track in Vietnam is to travel by motorcycle. And then there's the way that I haven't really mentioned yet, and that is the easy rider. There is Vietnamese, normally men in most areas of Vietnam, that take tourists on day trips on the back of their motorbikes. or they take people on multi-day trips through segments of Vietnam, whether it be the South, the Central Highlands, Central Vietnam or the North, and they take people on the back of the motorbike. Now, for someone who is not a motorbike rider, to experience Vietnam in a very unique and amazing way, I would highly recommend EasyRiders as a great way to do it. You know, for instance, we get at Phong Nha Farmstay where I live, we get a lot of single female travelers staying with us. And I often say to them, are you heading south? And they're like, yeah. And I'm like, are you on a time restraint? And if they say no, I'm like, well, have you thought about doing a two-day trip from here to Hue via the Ho Chi Minh Trail through Khe Sanh on the back of an Easy Rider? And if they're up for it, it's a great way to get off the beaten track. probably their best opportunity in Vietnam to get off the beaten track with someone we trust to send them with. And they always send me an email at the end of the trip just saying, wow, thanks, that was amazing. So motorbike tourism is not just about being a competent motorbike rider and taking off on your own. You can experience some of the best of what Vietnam's got to offer. And you don't know how to ride a motorbike, but you can go on the back of a licensed local.

Kerry Newsome: I feel very comfortable with that. I like it because out of the two of us, I know they know more than me and they know where they're going, they know how to manage traffic, they know the regions, they know the customs and they know the language. So that is a distinct advantage over anything I could offer to the situation.

Ben Mitchell: Yeah, and it's unique and they often know some great places that no one else knows.

Kerry Newsome: Hideaways. Yeah, absolutely. So they know the good food spots. They know where the potholes are. They can kind of navigate around and it's a really pleasurable experience. Ben, is there any kind of best times of the year to do this, you know, if people were planning ahead?

Ben Mitchell: Yeah, if you break Vietnam into sort of three regions, the South, the Central and the North, there's better times to be in any one of those regions. If you were going to ride from all the way from up near the Chinese border down to the bottom of Vietnam at any time, you would probably find at some point along the way some uncomfortable weather, wet, hot, cold, given the time of year. Another way to look at Vietnam, as far as motorboat travel goes, would be to look at what part of the country is best for the time of year you have available to travel. I would personally say, and I've been told by the experts and I've experienced the North in October, September, October, amazing in the North. Yeah, you get a bit of light rain occasionally, but it's harvest time, so it's actually dry. The rice harvests are amazing to see, the countryside's amazing to see in September and October. Having said that, it gets cold up there January, February, and it gets hot up there in the summer, but it's great. any time of the year with the right preparation. And if you're an experienced motorbike rider, you'd know that having the correct gear is important for the time of year that you're traveling. Central Vietnam can be very wet. I often meet people traveling through central Vietnam during our wet season, which centers around October

and early November. and they're discussing how amazing it is to ride in extreme rain conditions, which I wouldn't recommend, but another thing about traveling in central Vietnam by motorbike during that period is to be adaptable. with your time. If you need to change direction, if there's a storm, weather event, you need to change direction. Typhoon, yeah, typhoon. Typhoon's not good for motorbike riding. Very short-lived and often cause extreme flooding, but yeah. And then you've got the South, which is very, very hot in the summer and humid, but amazing in the winter. So, you know, leaving Central Vietnam in January, it can be 10 degrees Celsius. And then you can be down as far as Quang Ngai and you're 25. And so, yeah, spread out over two and a half thousand kilometers. What's the best time of year to travel in Vietnam by motorbike? That would be very regional.

Kerry Newsome: Fair enough. And, you know, I'm a bit of fan of having my own gear. like my own boots, my own jackets, you know, I know that gear fits me well. Do you recommend people bring their own gear?

Ben Mitchell: Yeah, certainly. Like if you're coming in to travel through Vietnam, I recommend you bring your own gear. If you want to buy gear over here, you'd probably find that gear is a lot cheaper here than it is in countries like Australia, where I'm from. You know, companies in Saigon, in Da Nang, in Hanoi, they have the right gear. Saigon motorcycles, Da Nang motorcycles, they sell a wide range of safety equipment at much more reasonable prices than you would get in Australia. But typically, when I travel, I always carry my own gear.

Kerry Newsome: What's your average size of bike that you're going to be getting, especially for a long, like what sizes of bikes are we talking? Are we talking tourers? Are we talking off-road bikes? Are we talking on-road bikes?

Ben Mitchell: For people that are just renting a bike to do day trips out of an area and around an area, typically they're going to ride scooters. People that are going to get a motorbike taxi or a local rider around an area on day trips, they're often on scooters or small motorbikes. There has been a big increase in Vietnam in options for bigger motorbikes in the last few years. Typically, you want to talk about 15 years ago and before that, most of the tourists that were coming through would ride old Russian Minsk. That chain, they're a 125cc bike that was bought out here during the Soviet era. They've gone out completely now. People went through a phase of riding cheap Hondas. Nowadays we see a lot of people riding like XR150s, little like sort of mixed trail road bikes. and scooters still, but there has been a big increase in the amount of companies running tours and renting out CB500s and other bigger bikes nowadays.

Kerry Newsome: Yeah, I've seen more bigger bikes on the roads than I have before and that's getting back to that, you know, riders with proper licenses and maybe speak to everyone listening just about licensing, insurance and how strict Years ago I can remember being on a bike with my husband and we got pulled over and asked for paperwork and we had to kind of find a way around that at the time. I'm not sure that's still happening, but just what's the score there?

Ben Mitchell: The licensing situation here in Vietnam is a little bit complicated for foreigners because There's different international license agreements like 1945 and 1968. Countries that signed the 1945 one and not the 1968 one are technically not recognized here in

Vietnam. So you might have an Australian, a British or an American license in the country you're from, well that typically is not going to be legal here. Here in Vietnam, they have two different types of licenses for motorbikes. They have Class 1 and Class 2, or A and B. The A license is for under 175cc and the B license is for bikes over 175cc. What you really need here is an international driving permit. which is obtainable. Well, there is I know one company that can get them for you here in Vietnam prior to your arrival. That's Saigon Motorcycles. If you contact them, they can they can apply for that. If you've got a motorbike license, though, from Australia or America or England, most companies will allow you to do a tour and most companies will rent your motorbike. Where it's mainly going to affect you is in the instance of a fatality accident or something like that. Or an incident. Or your insurance.

Kerry Newsome: Yeah, so let's talk about insurance because to be honest that's probably been the biggest deterrent for many and there's not many companies that do give you the option and if they do it's quite expensive. Have you got anything to share there because I think that would be of great interest.

Ben Mitchell: Yeah, if you can apply for and get the international driving permit here prior to coming and you can get travel insurance that covers you for motorcycle, well then you should be legal.

Kerry Newsome: My experience with the people on bikes that have fallen to incidents, let's say, some of that has got to do with maybe not being traffic aware or understanding of the road systems. Like in my country, as you would know, you only overtake on the right. You don't overtake on the left. where here people just move out of each other's way and, you know, there's some real grey areas as far as I'm concerned, as far as road rules are concerned. Can you talk to us a little bit about that?

Ben Mitchell: Yeah, it's very different. We're very rigid in our thinking and we're very strict with our road rules in the West. Here in Vietnam, it's all very fluid. It's basically a very different mindset as to the list of responsibilities that you have as a driver over here. It's very different and it pays to actually talk to someone prior to jumping on the bike and heading off about getting some of the key points with that.

Kerry Newsome: Yeah, and fluid's a great word, Ben. I think that's the kindest word I've heard described. There's no road rage. That's the one thing I have noticed.

Ben Mitchell: No, they don't have much road rage. I have noticed a little bit more tension on the road, though, as more and more people buy cars. Cars, yeah. There was a period here where cars were very rare on the road. True. And there was a lot of motorbikes on the road. And nowadays, each year, there's more and more cars and that is causing some tension situations on the road. But as far as looking at the way that everyone works on the road, people try not to stop. So they're driving in a way that limits the amount of physical stopping and They accept people pulling out in front of them and expect it, whereas we don't expect it, so we find it very difficult to understand. And people are always commenting from overseas about how, well, and the guy just pulled out in front of us. And we had to slow down. And that in itself is something that we just find hard to get our heads around. And the Vietnamese drive in a manner that is about keeping on moving, not about this stopping and starting and rigid behavior. Yeah. And very, very, very different ways of thinking.

Kerry Newsome: Yeah, and in some ways it's got a lot of politeness and give way. It actually does. It really does. We could learn a bit about that.

Ben Mitchell: Yeah, and even the horn beeping, we instantly in our Western way see the horn as an aggressive comment. Whereas here, it's quite the opposite. It's a warning. It would be considered very rude to come up behind someone and not bite your horn.

Kerry Newsome: Correct. Yeah. Do you know what? Only a few days ago, I got asked by a traveler of mine who came in, and she said, I just felt so sorry for all those people that they bit the horns at. And I said, do you know how appreciative those people are of those horns? Because they've just been told that there's a truck that's up their bum that is going to want them to move aside. So they take that hint as guidance to move out of the road and let the truck through. So it's not being rude or aggressive on the road at all.

Ben Mitchell: Yeah, it's actually politeness.

Kerry Newsome: What's the rules then, Ben, around drinking and driving?

Ben Mitchell: It's highly illegal to drink and drive. Is it zero alcohol? They've got a zero alcohol.

Kerry Newsome: Do they actually do breathalyzed tests?

Ben Mitchell: They do. I got pulled over recently actually.

Kerry Newsome: Tragic accidents with people that have been drinking and driving?

Ben Mitchell: There has. One of the big causes of it has been the increase in cars. You know, everyone on motorbikes traveling around in Vietnam, especially in their local communities, they all put around Maybe, yes, there is a history of people having alcohol and riding their bikes and they'd putt around and they'd putt home and they'd... At 40 k's an hour. Yeah, and sometimes they'd bump into one another and they'd put their feet down and apologise and move on again because they're all going so slow. But then things have changed with the cars. There has been some big accidents with the cars and the government has brought in a zero alcohol policy and they are breathalysing. Enforcing that. And they do have some huge fines and they confiscate your car for a period of time. And you do go to jail for drink driving. They're very, very strict about it.

Kerry Newsome: I'm really glad to hear that. I think the concern I have more is the new traveller, the young traveller that, you know, first time on a scooter, is hooning around, has had a few beers under his belt and doesn't understand the road rules or the the organized chaos, as we sometimes call it in the West, and then falls prey and has a tragic accident. So, you know, for everyone listening that is considering about a motorbike trip, I think what Ben is telling you here is really good to know about. But please learn the craft of riding a bike before you get here.

Ben Mitchell: Yeah. And people that are sort of on a long unlimited amount of time or they can come through the country slowly and take it all in. Or they can be on the back of an easy rider bike. Or on the back of an easy rider. And people that have got good riding experience, they've got a limited amount of time and they want to get the most out of what they can get in Vietnam. I would highly recommend considering a tour, a motorbike tour. And there's a multitude of companies that do the motorbike tours. There's some companies that don't

specialize in the north. There's companies that do all the way through the country, like Adrenaline Rush Trails. Up in the north, you've got some of the older ones, Flamingo and Kung's Motorbike Adventures. Down in the south, there's different operators. Based on the time of year, going with a professional company, safety levels are pretty good. Those tour companies, they know what they're doing.

Kerry Newsome: Ben, thanks for coming on and talking about this subject as it's something I think we kind of skim over, comes up a lot as far as touring around Vietnam. And, you know, it is a bike culture here with trillions of them still on the road, even though cars are coming through. So I think great advice. Thanks for coming on.

Ben Mitchell: Thanks, Kerry. Thanks for today.

Kerry Newsome: Thanks very much, Ben. Now we'll jump into that interview I got to do with my friend Chris Pantelli about the ride he just did in April this year. You're going to love his ability to really put you in the picture of that ride with his son, Nicholas, and just some of the aspects of the trip that really hit home for him. Let's join up with Chris now. Okay, so here we are. Chris, thanks for coming on the show.

Chris Panteli: My pleasure, Kerry.

Kerry Newsome: Chris, before we jump in, I thought for everybody I'd just give a little bit of context on, you know, how I know you, how we found ourselves together in Vietnam, and a little bit about your bike riding experience. So, just two secs. So, we did a trip, quite a long trip this time in Vietnam, and I brought my husband. And this is about kind of March, April, and we got to meet up with Chris, his wife Danielle, and his son Nicholas in Hoi An. Chris and Nicholas had just come back from a four or five-day bike ride in northern Vietnam. So, you know, to say that they were pretty high after that would be an understatement, but I'll let Chris tell you a bit more about that. But I've asked Chris to come on because he's an experienced bike rider. He was traveling with his 25-year-old son, and they chose to do this ride in northern Vietnam. And I just thought Chris could bring to the show for you some real insights that are very relevant to undertaking this kind of experience in Vietnam. And certainly, he's going to be able to talk about that area and just give you some tips and hints to make it as hassle-free as possible. So maybe Chris, tell us Why did you choose this company? Because you chose a tour company, and I know you had a few reservations about that to begin with, and we spoke about that separately. But what was it about this company that made you say, yes, I want to go with this company called ADV Motorcycle Tours and Dirt Bike Travel?

Chris Panteli: Oh, thank you. Look, it was, I guess, one of those moments where you're diving into a place that you don't know. The reason why I selected ADV was more so just from the assistance, the direction, I think their professionalism. Everything's sort of done through bank transfers, as you're aware, which is quite foreign to what we do. So, being a sceptic and not sort of, I don't know anybody in there, it was just a good feeling from the beginning, just in the way that everything's set up. So, immediately, it was more personal than business and that showed through from the beginning to the end. So, from the initial introduction, payments, to scheduling the plan, adjusting the plan, doing the ride, it was just comfortable from the beginning. So I had another few companies that I was looking at and I didn't feel as comfortable. So ADV was definitely our choice and a good choice in the long run.



Kerry Newsome: Okay, so I think for everyone, it's key for you to give time, effort and put some thought into researching the right companies to work with. That is kind of primary and I want to start with that. And I'm happy to answer any questions if you want to come to me direct to recommendations. I'm going to put a link in the show notes to ADV because of Chris's great experience and he'll probably expand a bit more on that as we go. Chris, what was it about the area you chose? Because maybe talk a little bit about that northern region that you went into and what spoke to you and said, hey, that's where we want to head, that's where we want to go.

Chris Panteli: Well, we were starting in Hanoi, so we were sort of destined to be either to the north or the south and we decided to do it just based on what ADV had I just sort of linked on their website in areas, tours, day tours and the like. We ended up doing a four-day tour. It was meant to be five, but my son was a little ill and again, ADV just adjusted. So we did a four-day massive tour, which was fantastic. We started in Hanoi, which was Amazing. The whole ride itself, I should probably say, is off-road and on-road. We were on WR250s, semi-motocross bikes, and we started off bustling through Hanoi, through to Tak Ba, which the scenery, by the way, was absolutely sensational. The guide that we had, Charlie, he's actually a tourist guide as well, so a wealth of knowledge, young kid, absolutely brilliant. But, you know, there was time to enjoy the scenery. It was, you know, amazing riding. There was boat tours, there was swimming, there were homestays. It was just absolutely spectacular. The riding was about 180 k's a day, so eight to 10 hours, you know, from Hanoi to Tak Ba, and then we went from Tak Ba to Bep Tam, and then from Bep Tam near the Lao border, and then from there back into Hanoi. But the scenery was spectacular. In fact, everything about it was spectacular. The organisation, the homestays, it was just sensational.

Kerry Newsome: And you have chosen, without you even realising, one of the most scenic areas in northern Vietnam for sure. And I can back you up totally, because my husband and I went there a totally different way. We obviously weren't on the back of a bike, but we went up into the Yen Bai province. And for everyone listening, I did an episode on Yen Bai just recently, so you can flick back to that if you'd like to experience Yen Bai, but maybe not on a bike. But it is scenery at levels and expansiveness and kind of the rice fields, Chris, you would say, the ingenuity of them cascading down the mountains. Unbelievable, hey?

Chris Panteli: It is so picturesque. It's exactly what you see in the guides and the tourist type, you know, magazines and the like. I think some of the spectacular things were what they chose a journey that was so memorable. For my son and I, it was memories and a life experience that you would never, ever be able to replicate again. I think when we do it again, as you know, we're booking again very soon. We'll be in touch. It will never be the same. That first experience, and especially where Charlie took us and the route, the scenery, the path, the engagements, even the dinners. Every night there was a special dinner or whatever it may be. It was absolutely spectacular. So I don't know what the rest of Vietnam's like, but I can tell you, you planned out our last trip. So we know we did Ha Long Bay and then all the other places. But that part for that motorcycle tour was absolutely sensational. Yeah.

Kerry Newsome: So in, in a kind of getting to nitty gritty kind of things, talk to us a little bit about, um, your gear, the bike itself, like feeling safe, the road, you know, like how, how

good were the roads to, to travel on and even off road. Did you kind of feel like that you were in an environment with your guide and the tour company kind of, they knew what they were doing and you were in good hands kind of thing. So talk us through some of those aspects for people.

Chris Panteli: Well, from the beginning, um, sort of, uh, lie in, uh, picked up, but we were basically picked up and taken to where ADV headquarters was. Um, you went through, had a similar on the bike, the box with our both WR two 50s. So goodbye. So not, not, not rubbish, um, and well-maintained and the like. So very, very happy and I'm a very fussy person, um, and very particular. Um, so. On that part, we started well with the gear. We did bring some of our own riding gear, so helmets. I think that's a good idea. Yep. Yep. So we didn't bring boots. So if we could have got everything from ADV, but it wasn't a hassle. I think if you're a bike rider, bring your own helmet, the rest you can take on your own. But from there, it was based introduction, put your gear on, get familiar with the bike, adjust levers and all that sort of stuff, make sure it's all good. A bit of local knowledge on what's what. Once you're committed, you're committed in Vietnam and you're riding. Very, very different too. So it's first time for me. I've been lots of places in the world, but not into Vietnam. So it was very, very different. I guess, aspect in how people drive, their awareness, how everything just merges nicely. We are not used to those things. But from there, it was gear on, and we started off with a tour. There was a set time that we needed to get to certain places. I would say, even if you were a beginner rider, ADV would be able to put a tour appropriate to your skill level. um you know to achieve something that we would uh we were quite advanced and i think charlie enjoyed that you know nick and i've been riding for a long time he's been riding since he was a small kid as well he's 25 now um that we were quite advanced so i think charlie enjoyed um taking us to some of the more difficult areas um but it was always safe well guided so when we're driving through and i think that's an experience riding through vietnam hanoi peak hour um like that is amazing. But Charlie even made that very, very, you know, obviously we're on big bikes, so we stand up over most of the scooters and the like. So, Charlie, we had hand signals, you know, to speed up and slow down. It was just perfectly safe. In some of the off-road, some of it was quite difficult. Some of the bridge crossings were quite, you know, not impossible. Yeah, you know, average conditions. And, you know, some slippery, we were lucky the weather was perfect for us. So it was, you know, perfect in that April period for us. You know, there were boat tours, ferries, like it was just very, very well organized. And it would suit most levels, even beginner levels of riding.

Kerry Newsome: I think covering off the things like gear and the quality of the bikes and, you know, good guides taking you to places that they know that you can handle. And because you were an experienced rider, they can kind of take you into places where, you know, somebody new to, to bike riding, uh, would be, you know, not, not the right thing to do. Would you say, Chris, you know, in, in planning that trip, what would you do? differently? Like, is there anything that you would do differently?

Chris Panteli: Look, to be honest, I'd probably do a longer tour next time with maybe shorter days.

Kerry Newsome: Yeah, it's a long day. Yeah.

Chris Panteli: 180Ks a day. And Nick and I can ride and we love riding. And I'll tell you what, um, you know, you would get to the end destination and, um, you would just want to relax.

Um, what I would not, what I absolutely, what I would not ever do is do that on my own. So some of the places that we went to were just so remote, just so beautiful, but have no idea where you are at all, like even crossing borders into other regions and stuff like that. Things change. It's crazy. So I really wouldn't change anything on the tour. I'd make it a little longer and maybe some shorter days, so duration longer, maybe shorter days. I would never attempt that without a guide. and we will only use ADV now, but I would, I think the importance of having someone organize something, even though stays, I'll send you some photos, but even where we stayed, the homestays, the rooms, the dinners that we had, it was just a cultural experience. So that's probably, I probably wouldn't change anything, maybe the duration and maybe, you know, maybe some shorter days.

Kerry Newsome: Yeah, and I think that's a good point. You know, Vietnam is such a big country and people get there and sometimes I just think they just try to pack in way too much, too quickly. And the advantage of a company like this is it's got that flexibility. And what I liked most to hear from you when we caught up was just, you know, what happened with Nicholas, you know, having, you know, an illness kind of very early on in the trip where you had to make some adaptations, maybe talk to everyone about that because, you know, It's very easy to talk and gloss over and say when everything's perfect, you know, it all goes rosy and you only hear those stories. But I think it's actually good to hear a story where, you know, things, you know, happen that aren't planned and yet they can be easily managed or can be better managed. So talk to us about poor Nick.

Chris Panteli: It was most unfortunate. So a couple of friends of ours from Canada come down, so we ended up going into beer corner and all that sort of stuff, probably crazy light the day before we're going for a ride. Maybe we were also told not to eat communal peanuts and all that sort of stuff, but anyway, that went to the wayside. To say that Nick had probably the worst bounty gastro I've ever, ever seen, including anything on any of my tours or anything like that as well, is an understatement. He wasn't looking well. Everything was not well at all, you know, in bed, everything, you know, happening. So it was quite catastrophic. But I rang Min, and Min's the operations manager from ADV. And this is the guy that I was dealing with from the beginning. So I told him what happened and said, hey, listen, mate, I don't think that we'll be able to start the ride. Nick's got really bad gastro. Probably think I have to take him to the hospital. Anyway, Min, like normal, providing the best advice that he can. told me exactly what I needed from the pharmacy, exactly what he asked for. If they didn't understand me to call them, you know, call him, give him the phone and basically said, start taking these. And if he's not feeling, you know, much better in six hours, I will come and grab you and I'll take you to hospital. True to his name, it did work out. Nick was a little average on the first day. But again, you know, if we didn't have that person, obviously I could have called you, Kerry, but If I didn't have men on that part of it, it would have been catastrophic. We would have had to cancel. But also, we changed the five-day ride to a four-day ride and still did almost 180km a day. It was just sensational to have someone to give you correct advice, knowing, and it's happened before, how to get over it and overcome that illness.

Kerry Newsome: cannot say more strongly how much it gives people that peace of mind. Just throwing yourself into Vietnam at times, I think people really underestimate the heat, the change in the foods, you know, people say, oh, am I going to get, you know, barley belly kind of things? Well, yeah, you might get that. Just purely in the way that, you know, the

soils, some of the food types. And yeah, if you go to, you know, and maybe enjoy Bee Hoi and You know, but it's all part of the adventure, but it's really about how it's managed. And I've had a similar experience to you, Chris, you know, where, you know, the Vietnamese will just really step out, uh, in ways that in certainly in Australia and, and most Western countries would not do. They would not offer that kind of service to. You know, come and get you if it didn't work out, take you to the hospital, manage the language barrier, blah, blah, blah. You know, so I'm really glad to hear that because I think, you know, we talk about stories where everything goes great most of the time and, and that's wonderful. But, you know, on the occasion when things go awry, I mean, I saw Nicholas when you arrived in Toi An after he was beaming, looked the picture of health, was raving about the trip. So, you know, all power to ADV for helping you manage that, get you still involved in the tour and, you know, coming out the other side all smiling. So good to hear, Chris.

Chris Panteli: And you know what, it sort of resonated through the whole trip as well. We had bunches, Charlie fixed it on the spot. We had a couple of breakages, he found parts. There was support crew if we needed it. So it was the whole thing was just taken care of. Couldn't have been in better hands. On your own though, well, I think it would have been a total different story.

Kerry Newsome: Yeah, and just, you know, even that, you know, those few days that I had in Yanbai, you know, something that I really had to take note of was just the fact that in those regions, because of their remoteness, the language is another challenge. Not every place has good Wi-Fi, so once again, you can't get onto Google Translate to help you out there. And, you know, having someone to say, look, hey, go here. This is where this happens. You know, you're going to be fine. Just takes all that worry away, gives you back that sense of control. And, you know, you can really enjoy it without having to worry about the things that, you know, you shouldn't have to worry about it on a holiday because it is a holiday. So, have we inspired you, Chris, to come back to Vietnam, like with this trip?

Chris Panteli: Oh, you already know that's happening.

Kerry Newsome: We will be back. Well, I'm trying to go. What have I got to do to get you back? But no, that's right. You are coming back. Yeah.

Chris Panteli: Yeah. So, Tash is going to do a placement in Cambodia Nursing, and well, the family's going to come for another holiday. So, we'll be back. Yeah, so we'll do something different on this one. Last one was brilliant. And yeah, Vietnam, you're right. I think everything will be disappointing in Asia outside of Vietnam, but who cares now? It's a beautiful place, so we'll be back.

Kerry Newsome: Fantastic. Chris, is there anything we didn't cover that we should have covered about this trip? Is there anything I didn't ask or whatever before we wrap up?

Chris Panteli: I just think if people are going to take on and do that on-road, off-road, so ours was combined on-road, off-road type thing, really consider who you're going with. I wouldn't recommend doing it on your own. I'm quite adventurous and so is Nick, but it's just not something we would do. The other thing is, if you happen to break down in some of those places, You would really need local knowledge to get yourself out of that, make yourself safe, be able to... And the other part was as well, everywhere we went with Charlie, Charlie was like a little rock star. So you almost got VIP service in all the restaurants and villages and kids running next to you and jumping on your bikes and stuff. I would just look at the value. It's not expensive, my goodness. It costs four times as much to do the same

thing in Australia. But look at what you're going to get for it. I strongly recommend going with something like an ADV. I couldn't recommend them more. It's just for peace of mind and everything will be smooth. So that's probably it, really, Kerry.

Kerry Newsome: Okay. Thanks very much, Chris, and I look forward to chatting with you again soon.