



What About Vietnam S4-5 – Nha Trang

Kerry Newsome: [00:00:00] Xin chau and Welcome to What About Vietnam? Today, we are taking a deep dive into the seaside city of Nha Trang. I'm doing that with the very talented and masterful Colm Hutchinson, and I say that because he really knows Nha Trang. He's lived there for the last 12 years. He's an Irishman. He met his wife there and he and his two children have settled there and absolutely love it. Now the reason why Colm adds an extra level or depth to this is that he runs a very successful digital media company called Halo Digital Media. In that role, he is putting together video photography, virtual tours for hotels, working with resorts, tourism organisations and various brands. This gives him some really great access and insights into a plethora of places and things to do. When we originally decided to do this together, I said, you know, maybe we could come up with ten really good things about Nha Trang. I actually got 11 and we had a bit of a laugh about that, but he was able to really give some insights into the town where I visited in 2014. But because so much has happened since 2014, I clearly really wasn't up to date with everything that Nha Trang has to offer.

Kerry Newsome: [00:01:44] In those 11 things, you're going to hear about mud baths, you're going to hear about all kinds of nice day trips, island hopping cable car stuff for kids and some really great things to do. I think if you're considering going to Nha Trang, this is really the episode for you. It's a very short airplane ride from Ho Chi Minh City, so definitely add it to your list. It has suffered greatly during COVID because it really is a tourism city. So, you know, I really want you to enjoy it and get everything you can out of it. Please check out the transcript at the end of the show on the website. What about Vietnam? Also, I've got a lovely special offer that I've been able to put together at the Movenpick Cameron Resort. So you can check that out as well but let's welcome Colm to the show. Colm Welcome to the What About Vietnam podcast. Great to have you on the show!

Colm Hutchinson: [00:02:57] Hi, Kerry. Thanks for having me. It's nice to be on your show instead of listening to it.

Kerry Newsome: [00:03:04] Well, that's good to hear!

Colm Hutchinson: [00:03:06] Yeah, I've been following it for a while. I've listened to some of your interesting guests you've had on. So it's nice to be involved. Thanks for having me on.

Kerry Newsome: [00:03:18] Oh, I'll take that. Thanks very much. We're going to be talking about a place which I visited like back in about 2014. We're talking about Nha Trang, where you herald from. You know, you've been there, I understand, 12 years, and you run a digital media company and I feel really good about you being on the show because you've had 12 years in this place. You've obviously seen a lot of changes and you kind of know the environment from what it was like before COVID, and here we are sitting coming out of COVID. For me and everyone listening, I think this is going to give you a really good heads up as to the new New Nha Trang or the new Nha Trang in recovery and what it's going to look like into the future. I asked Colm if he wouldn't mind doing, I know it sounds a bit chintzy in some ways, but the top ten things to do. Let's face it, we look at a place and we think, how long do we need to spend to enjoy that place? What are the really good top things that we should choose to do? You can

sometimes waffle along and you actually miss the great places. So, Colm I haven't really asked this question of you. Are we going to start top to bottom like the top best and then to the least or are they just random?

Colm Hutchinson: [00:05:04] I think pretty random from my side because I don't really have a list to rate them according to how good or not. I guess not even so much the top ten things to do, but maybe the top ten best things about Nah Trang, from a Westerner who lives here and who sees a lot of tourists coming and going. From someone who's seen the city and the region change a lot over the last 12 years that I've been here. So I guess the best thing that I enjoy or think about most about living here is the weather. So obviously Vietnam has a nice climate in general, but not all destinations are created equally in terms of the seasons. You have some places like in Hanoi, where in the north you will get very cold and you have definitely four seasons and other places, say in Danang where you get a lot of storms and a lot of inclement weather, that's quite unpredictable. Whereas in Trang, I think we're blessed with getting a lot of sunshine and they call it the city of 300 days of sunshine per year. I'm not sure if it's exactly 300, but we do seem to get a lot and we have a very short rainy season which generally only lasts for one or two months. At the end of the year, from November to sometimes into January or October to December, depending on the season. So all year round we have a very nice balmy 30 degree temperature ranging between 28 to 35 degrees. This month, June will be the hottest of the year. So it'll actually be quite hot. We're a seaside city, so we get a nice breeze coming in off the sea and we're protected by the mountains and the bay. We don't really suffer from bad weather too much. It's one of the things I like, and I'm from Ireland myself, so we get a lot of rain back there. It's definitely a nice change of scenery for me to get sunshine all the time.

Kerry Newsome: [00:07:02] I like that because I think it gives people a wide berth of time so they can pick pretty much any time of the year. You know, Nha Trang is going to be the best place to visit. So that's good to know. Just off the bat, I think that's a really good number one. All right. What have we got now is number two Colm?

Colm Hutchinson: [00:07:24] Well, I think based on that, because we're a sunshine seaside city and the triangle is pretty famous for its beaches. We have the main beach that runs all the way along the city and is just called Naturang Beach, which is a mecca for all of the tourists who stay at any of the city hotels. They can pop down to the beach to sunbathe, to swim in the water. There's quite a lot of restaurants, dining and entertainment venues along the beach and just outside the city. We have a very small beach called Home Charm, which is where a lot of the expats would go because they kind of avoid the touristy areas and they like to sit on that small beach. There's also very good surfing there at certain times of the year, and it wouldn't be as good as the surf in Australia, but good enough for the enthusiasts over here. If you go just outside the city, either north or south, close to the airport, we have a beach called Long Beach, which as the name suggests is very long.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:08:27] Long Beach is kind of a quiet hideaway beach full of very traditional wooden, structured restaurants that serve up local seafood. It's a great place to go on the weekends just to chill out with your family and get some nice seafood. It's got a beautiful blue, crystal clear water that's very shallow. So it's a good place to bring the kids. If you go further north outside of the city, there's a beach called Chocolate, which is probably the nicest beach in this whole stretch of the province, and it's around 60 kilometers outside Trang. So it's definitely a day trip destination, but it's just an amazing looking beach. There's a couple of small homestay style resorts where you can stay there for one night and then wake up for the sunrise. There is a magical, absolutely gorgeous experience that I've done once or twice and something I'd highly recommend as a day trip. So yeah, I think the beaches are definitely another key attraction to Tuna Trang.

Kerry Newsome: [00:09:32] Can I just ask for people that are considering beaches as part of their holiday experience? Do you get things like jellyfish or sharks or, you know things like that, I know people might be concerned about?

Colm Hutchinson: [00:09:52] Certainly no sharks. I've never heard or seen of a shark attack or even sharks spotted in any of the waters. As for jellyfish, I've never encountered them on the main beach. You do sometimes get them on Long Beach and on the islands, but in very small quantities, and they're not particularly venomous or dangerous. Certainly none of the seriously dangerous jellyfish that you would encounter, say, in Australia, like the box jellyfish or the man o' war. I've seen some small jellyfish, but I've never been stung. So it wouldn't be a big concern, and certainly no sharks or any dangerous fish or animals.

Kerry Newsome: [00:10:36] Something else I remember about the water is it's always a pretty good temperature. Sometimes in Australia you can go into the ocean and it is freezing. So it's got to be really hot on the outside to make you want to dive in that water. The water I found on the beaches in Trang when I was there was kind of like a bath. It was really temperate.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:11:00] Definitely like a bath. Yeah, it's beautiful outside. Outside of the rainy season, like I said, which is October to December or November to January. The water can be a little bit cold during that season, but the rest of the year, it's like a nice warm bath. Exactly. The main beach tends to be a little waiver. The waves tend to be a little bigger than some of the other outside beaches. They are rarely so big that you can't swim there and there are no big what you call them drags or pulls, you know, riptides. There's not too many dangerous trips as well, so it's pretty safe.

Kerry Newsome: [00:11:38] I think that's also good to add in because, you know, people travelling with families I think want to know that their kids can kind of wade out and it's beautiful, nice soft sand. It's just like a giant swimming pool. That's how I felt it was anyway.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:11:54] Yeah. Particularly Long Beach or by, as the locals call it and it has a very long stretch where the water is really shallow. So it's great for kids. I guess then from the beaches, a lot of people love to do day trips and island hopping. So there's quite a few islands and islets just off Nha Trang and I guess the most famous being [Vin Pearl](#), which is basically Vin Wonderland. It started as a kind of an amusement park but has since developed into a huge complex, almost like a Vietnamese version of Disneyland or Korea Studios. It's got multiple different types of accommodation from Vin Pearl Hotel to Vin Pearl luxury, lots of villas where people can stay. Then it's got a massive amusement park and Zoo Oceanographic Museum and lots of games and activities for the kids. It's got 3-D dance shows, and the whole thing is kind of modeled on a European village or a Disneyland style village, I guess you would say. It's a place where you can go buy a ticket and take a beautiful cable car ride across the bay and then spend the whole day in Vin Pearl. Or some families will choose to book overnight or book a weekend there. I think a day trip is enough, but you can get a beautiful cable car over and then you're all entertained. It's taken care of for the day. The second island is Monday, which is where most people will go and do diving. Nha Trang isn't like the Caribbean or Mauritius or one of those places to go diving and see the exceptional, beautiful waters and lots of marine life. It is known as a place where a lot of people like to come and learn how to dive. It's kind of like trying diving, getting their first taste of life underwater and maybe doing an open water course. There's definitely a lot of nice coral, a lot of eels and lots of other wildlife, but nothing too spectacular, I'd say. It is very, very popular for people to go take a diving trip when they get here.

Kerry Newsome: [00:14:01] Can I just ask about diving? I know you have paddy divers there. I've had Jeremy Stein on the show. Yeah, there's just one thing I wanted to check. Some islands, I know certainly, are the charm islands off Hoi An. There are certain times of the year that the water gets quite cloudy. Does that happen in Nha Trang?

Colm Hutchinson: [00:14:28] Yes. The water, I'm not a very experienced diver, but I do know that visibility tends to be lower during the rainy season. Yes.

Kerry Newsome: [00:14:36] So that's around October, November, isn't it?

Colm Hutchinson: [00:14:38] Exactly. Again, because we have a very short rainy season, the optimum time for clear water diving is much, much longer here in that it's probably around nine or ten months. Whereas in Hawaii, I think the weather wouldn't be as good. So it might be that you'd have less available time to go diving.

Kerry Newsome: [00:14:56] Yeah, and they just don't operate. They shut down during those months. They just don't take you out.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:15:01] Because

Kerry Newsome: [00:15:02] It's just not worth it.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:15:02] For sure. So there's that for diving. There's some other islands such as Orchid Island, which is, you know, just an island with lots of nice plants and some animals. There are some little places to chill out on a kind of coconut style beach, do some stand up paddle boarding or canoeing. So a lot of families like to take a day trip out there. You travel maybe 20 minutes outside the city. Then there's a few companies that have these nice boats that they bring you over and canoe style speedboats and they bring you over for the day. You can just chill out there with the family, and it's a nice way to spend a day. I mean, I like to bring my kids sometimes at the weekend, just the day to get out and get off the mainland and out into the city. From the city, if you go outside and I try to go further north, definitely as a day trip, this is towards your beach, which is the very beautiful beach I told you about. On the way you can visit the salt fields, which is kind of a nice stop and something interesting.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:16:06] A lot of people don't even think about where our salt comes from and our sea salt, but just outside, not trying to have these beautiful salt fields. Where the locals will basically gather and store the salt before it's cleaned and shipped off to the salt suppliers. It's a very nice place for photographers to go to because when the sun comes up and the workers are working, they tend to start very early in the morning around 4 a.m. Just as the sunrise is coming up, you can get incredible photos of the sunrise over the salt fields with the workers in their traditional conical hats. They're covered from head to toe to protect them from the sun. It kind of creates those, I guess, iconic images you see of Vietnam. If you travel past the salt fields, maybe 20, 25 minutes, there's an island called [Diep Son](#) which I'll give you the name so you can put it on the screen. It's unique in that it's got two islands and it's got a sandbar that connects both islands. So at low tide, you can actually walk along the sea through the eye.

Kerry Newsome: [00:17:09] So it looks like you're walking on water?

Colm Hutchinson: [00:17:11] Pretty much, yeah. The water is only around two feet deep at low tide and you can walk from one island to the next. Right in the centre of the ocean, because it's, you know, it's probably a couple of kilometers off the mainland. So people love to go there just because it's unique, and it makes for great Instagram photos. It's a place I'd recommend for a day trip. If you could fit in the salt fields and maybe even your beach at the same time, it could be a nice overnight stay.

Kerry Newsome: [00:17:41] And Colm, would you? You've talked about getting to these places. You know, something's like 60 kilometers out or whatever. What is the best form of transport to do that or how should people best arrange to do that, do that with a fixed tour or just get, you know, a grab car or a taxi or what's the best way?

Colm Hutchinson: [00:18:02] That's your hotel or resort. So there are a lot of chain hotels and resorts, the big brands like the Intercoms and the Sheraton and no hotels and even the smaller hotels and resorts, they all will have a tour desk. From there you can usually arrange a trip to any of these places, and if you want something more custom, you can order a private car. So there's a lot of private cars with a tour guide that will take you out for the day and they'll all speak good English and the prices will be quite reasonable. They will take you to say, if I want to go to the Salt Fields and to Euclid Beach, you could rent the car for a day for, you know, maybe \$60, \$70 or maybe \$100 with the tour guide. They will take you out, but generally, you can book all of this at the tour desk in your hotel, and they'll arrange it all for you. This includes your tickets and transfers and takes you there at the best time of the day. So I'd probably recommend doing that if you're not too familiar with Vietnam.

Kerry Newsome: [00:18:59] I think that's worth mentioning. You know, if you've got a small family or you've got people that have got some issues with mobility or things like that. It's just best to get ahead of the curve by organizing that. As you say, the area is so used to tourists, so English is pretty well spoken. We are sitting here post COVID and whilst there's been lots of news about places shutting, the places that we're talking about, you're speaking from a level that these places are now coming back on. In other words, these tours are starting to open up again. I want to make sure that timing wise, we're just kind of keeping pace with just how Vietnam is opening and recovering.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:19:51] It's tricky in the sense that Nha Trang, I guess more so than a lot of other cities in Vietnam, is predominantly a tourist destination. So it has been very badly affected by COVID and in the sense that when Vietnam closed its borders and for over two years, we had no international tourists. Domestic tourism isn't enough to make up for the supply of hotels and tour guides and activities. So we definitely have suffered a lot. In the

last, I guess three months since Vietnam opened, I can definitely see some life returning to the city. A lot of the hotels that I work with are starting their marketing programs again and they're starting to welcome guests. We have international flights coming in this month from Korea and Singapore, and I think more flights are going to be added over the summer. I can definitely see a lot of places that had been previously closed down, such as restaurants or shops are all starting to renovate and remodel and I see new restaurants starting to spring up. So while we haven't fully recovered and the tourist area itself, which would have previously been very vibrant and active, it's still quiet. I guess you would say, not deserted, but quite lonely is all starting to kind of wake up again. It's not going to be an immediate process, but it's definitely coming online relatively quickly. The places that I've spoken about, such as a Vin Pearl resort, would be fully open. You can still do island tours and boat diving tours. You can still go to the salt fields and to your beach and you can go see Gibson Island, as well, because domestic tourism has been quite strong in Vietnam over the last couple of years outside of the lockdown period.

Kerry Newsome: [00:21:46] So the good thing about a place like Nha Trang is natural beauty, like beaches and islands and all the rest of it. They don't have an open for visitors sign on them. You know, they exist whether visitors come to them or not, don't they? So, you know, the water's still there, the corals are still there. Fortunately, the beauty is still there. Probably in some places I feel like it's kind of had some nourishment and some replenishment. You know, it kind of comes alive some of the forests and things like that have kind of reopened. So when you go to Nha Trang, sure, there might not be crowds, but maybe that's perfect.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:22:33] I would definitely agree. I mean, before COVID one of the, I guess, pet peeves of the locals and of the expats was over tourism and just the huge quantities of tourists visiting. So when you go to the beaches, they're very busy. When you go to restaurants, it's difficult to get a seat. When you go to the cultural sites, it's just throngs of people there all the time. There was a lot of traffic in the city as well from buses and taxis. One of the benefits of COVID is that reset, which has definitely increased the quality of life of the expats and the locals who live here because life is much quieter. It's definitely a good time, if you like, a relaxed holiday and prefer a quiet beach to a busy one. If you want to go see one of the temples or the pagodas in the morning and have a lot of space to move around. If you've got a young family or you're a couple looking for a relaxing week away, then it's definitely nice. I'd actually take advantage of the next 6 to 9 months before full tourism returns to China and to Vietnam. I agree that touring has never been a true active destination where you go for adventure or something truly energetic. It's always been a kind of beach getaway, relaxing, chill out place. It's just a little bit more chilled than before, which is fine for the people who enjoy that.

Kerry Newsome: [00:24:01] Yeah. All right. Now, I'm doing a count and check Colm so that, you know, we're keeping into our ten because I'm promising everybody ten things to remember about Nha Trang. So I think I'm up to around five. You might have to check me back.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:24:19] I'll take your word for it.

Kerry Newsome: [00:24:20] All right. Good. So have we covered the islands, do you think?

Colm Hutchinson: [00:24:26] I think I mean, there's a few more islands, but there's nothing particularly more interesting in one than the other. I think I've covered the main ones that I would suggest are nice to visit. All right. What's next? I guess the culture and there's some nice cultural sites that you can go to visit here and people like temples and Buddhists and monasteries and things like that. So I think the first is Po Nagar and Temple. It's the point guard pagoda, which was built around the eighth or ninth century by the Cham Civilisation, who were indigenous to the region around that time. It's a beautiful kind of terracotta and temples built on a hill overlooking the river and upon a guard was an ancient goddess that they and I think the goddess of Mother Earth, I believe she was known as. It's a very interesting site with beautiful steps that lead up to these terracotta style temples and lots of different religious insignias and carvings. These are actually from a variety of religions, not just from Buddhism, but also from Hinduism and other religions that have come through Vietnam over the centuries. So a lot of people like to go there to see the people do their dancing and to check out the temple.

Kerry Newsome: [00:25:44] It's very beautiful.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:25:45] It's gorgeous and it's particularly nice at nighttime, just as the sun is going down and the lights start coming up.

Kerry Newsome: [00:25:51] It's good that you mention this because and I guess you're mentioning it too, because you're into digital media. Capturing some of your visits on a camera at the right time of the day, it is worth taking into consideration. If you are looking at these tours and you're saying to your tour guide, when's a good time to go when you want to get that nice sunset in the background behind the ruins, etc., you know, if you're a photographer that's worth considering.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:26:24] Definitely. I think the same would apply to Long Son Pagoda, which is a Buddhist pagoda and right into the city center. It's famous because it has a giant standing statue of Buddha whose head kind of sticks out above the trees and looks over the city. So you can see him from many different places within the city. It's also got a sleeping Buddha, a very long sleeping Buddha and a big Buddhist temple where they perform, where the monks will perform their prayers and their different daily activities. It's a really nice, chilled out place to go and just take in some nice Buddhist and religious shrines and monuments. A lot of people like to go to that. I'd recommend taking a Vespa tour to go and see those culture sites.

There's also a Vespa tour where you can basically get your own tour guide who's a driver for the day, and he'll take you around. He or she will take you around the city on the back of a Vespa so you don't have to drive amongst the slightly chaotic traffic. You can kind of go around in safety and they'll take you around and see all of these sites to have some lunch and try some local food. They'll give you some history about the area, particularly these Buddhist sites.

Kerry Newsome: [00:27:39] I highly recommend the best for tours. I've done them myself. You know, whilst I originally was terrified of the traffic, funnily enough, when I'm on the back of a Vespa with a Vietnamese driver, I feel safe. I know they know the traffic and the Vespers are the model of the Vespa. Design doesn't make you feel like you've got a 250 CC motorbike under your bum. You've got it going. It goes. Roughly at about 40 to 50k's per hour at the most have at it's push and it's very comfortable and the drivers really know what they're doing. So for anyone who's thinking about this and going, oh no, I wouldn't do anything on a scooter or whatever. No, I don't suggest you do anything yourself on a scooter, especially if you're a first time visitor. Certainly if you want to do something like this with the Vespa drivers, I know they do have they're quite scrutinized before they're given the licenses to do these kinds of things because they don't want it against their name that somebody fell off or or any entanglements. I'm glad you brought that up. It's just a novel thing to do in safety of and seeing some interesting historical places.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:29:07] I think it's also quintessentially Vietnamese. You know, when people think of Vietnam, they think of the traffic and the kind of all these bikes flowing around, almost like a colony of ants. And it's actually kind of a good analogy because when you're in the middle of it does feel like a colony of ants, but yet everybody seems to know where they're going and it all seems to flow the way it's supposed to. Even if it looks like there's no order, there's definitely some order within the chaos, and it's quite organized.

Kerry Newsome: [00:29:35] Chaos is how I've described it over the years. They kind of part like the sea and they can move amongst each other and they have their own signs to each other. And, you know, who has ridden away or whatever. I've never been able to quite figure it out, but I don't care. As long as they know what they're doing, I'm happy to go along with it.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:29:55] Yeah. One thing I've noticed myself driving here for so many years is your peripheral vision really increases. My peripheral vision is so much better than it used to be. Yeah, there's just a certain intuition that people have when they're driving and they know how to get around. But it's for tourists. For someone who hasn't experienced it before, it is a little bit exhilarating. It's a little bit scary. It's quite fun. It's definitely something I'd recommend, and with the respirator writers, they're all, you know, very careful. So it's something I'd recommend just because it doesn't just give you an insight to the biking culture of Vietnam, but it also gives you a local insight to find out how the locals get around and to find out some interesting things around the city. They'll also be able to point out a lot of other things in the city as you drive past them, just to give you that local insight that you may not get if you're stuck in a car.

Kerry Newsome: [00:30:44] Absolutely, and you might never do it again. That doesn't matter. It means you can go home and you can get that photo and you can get it out and you can show people and say, that was me.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:30:55] So yeah, it's good for those Instagram moments and make a little video to show your friends.

Kerry Newsome: [00:31:03] All right. What are we up to now?

Colm Hutchinson: [00:31:05] Trang is also famous for its mud baths.

Kerry Newsome: [00:31:07] I was going to ask you about this. Yes.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:31:10] In the city, there are three I believe three mud baths just on the outskirts of the city. The mud baths are, as the name would suggest, it's full of mud. But the mud is a special mud that comes from a certain area and it's supposedly filled with many nutrients and different things that are supposed to be quite good.

Kerry Newsome: [00:31:30] For minerals.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:31:31] Minerals and calcite and various different things within the mud that's good for your skin. It's supposed to promote healing, but it's also just a fun and kind of interesting way to spend a day. So you go in and you buy your ticket, you change into your swimming clothes, and then you sit in this bath and these giant taps come on, and it fills up full of this gooey, slippery mud. It's great fun for all the family, whether it's the couple going for a nice day out or the kids want to go out and experience it. You stay maybe 20, 30 minutes in the mud and then you can go into all of these different hot springs. So they have lots of pools with some of them very hot, some of them very cold with waterfalls. I think one of them even has quite a big water park there as well. Now, the resort has mud baths, hot and cold mineral springs with some restaurants and also a water park. So a great day to go and spend from morning to early afternoon. It's got all the right mix of activity and relaxation. You can even do like spa treatments if you want to have a mud bath spa treatment and get a private area where you can have a private day with your fiancée if you're on honeymoon and the kids will love just the water park and splashing about in the mud. So that's definitely something I'd recommend because you don't find it in many other places in Vietnam.

Kerry Newsome: [00:32:54] No, definitely not. I'm really keen to find out more about that. I might talk to you about that later.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:32:59] There's three of them, so put that on your list. What else do I love about Nha Trang? I guess the food. Of course. We have to talk about the food.

Kerry Newsome: [00:33:06] We do indeed.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:33:08] I mean, Vietnam is very trendy right now in general for its food and across the world. The Vietnamese food scene is starting to become more popular and trying. I think we're definitely known as a seafood mecca being so close to the sea. We have a big seafood industry. So getting an amazing seafood buffet or seafood dinner here is very, very easy. You know, we go to an affordable place. Oh, so so so affordable. I mean for you know, anywhere from \$60 to \$100 or even cheaper, if you just go to the very local restaurant. You can go get the most amazing different types and varieties of seafood here. Of course, you have all your standards like lobster, crab and shrimp and then various different fish that are from the region, but so many different types of other shellfish that you have probably never seen before. Very famous here for abalone, which is like those sea urchins which are grown just off the coast and quite inexpensive and quite interesting to taste, very unique taste and texture to them. Also famous as a seafood dish, here is a jellyfish salad, which you probably wouldn't have heard of before, but you did mention jellyfish earlier. Not something that I particularly enjoy, but not because it's jellyfish or because jellyfish would not be traditionally what we would think of as a seafood dish. It's just for me, it's a little bit bland, but I know my wife loves it. What they do is, they take the jellyfish and they boil them in salted water for a long time to remove any of the mucus and any of the stinging tentacles. What you're left with is just basically crunchy jellyfish. Then they mix it into a

salad with lots of chili and onion and different fish sauce. Then they whip it up into this jellyfish salad and it's very, very popular with the locals. So put it on your list if you'd like to try. It's kind of unique.

Kerry Newsome: [00:35:02] The texture, is it a bit like calamari like the octopus or?

Colm Hutchinson: [00:35:06] It would be crunchier. So it's soft like calamari when you touch it. But when you bite into it, it's got a soft crunch. So it's yeah, a little not like not as soft as calamari, but definitely a unique texture, but not not bad in your mouth at all. I just don't find it to be particularly savory or flavorsome. But when they mix it with herbs and vegetables and some chili, it gets quite spicy. Vietnamese people, Vietnamese cuisine, they love texture, they love difference of texture and all of the dishes. So you've got the softness of your vegetables and your herbs with the spiciness of your chili and then the crunchiness of the jellyfish. They love that!

Kerry Newsome: [00:35:45] I think it's good to mention at this point about the food that you can go from the street food level, which you might be selecting your seafood out of small buckets on the side of the road or in the restaurant. You're sitting in little red chairs and you're eating the real local cuisine and what they can whip up and do with that. You can cook it whichever way you want. You can ask whichever way you want. It's really, really cheap and it's really, really good. If you want to maybe spend a special night or you want to kind of stay for a while and you may be on alcohol or other things. There's definitely medium to high levels of dining experiences with seafood. That you can really enjoy along the beach from what I remember. Obviously at your hotels and restaurants, do you have a favorite fine dining restaurant?

Colm Hutchinson: [00:36:50] For seafood buffet? I like to go to the [Intercontinental](#) and yeah, usually on a Saturday or Sunday they have a seafood buffet. It'll set you back, I think around \$35, maybe \$40, but it's all you can eat at a seafood buffet. Barbecued seafood, all the trimmings of a regular buffet and with the bottle of wine and I think a half a lobster as well. So if I want to treat myself, we go out of that compared to your prices back home. Yeah, there's no comparison. So the freshest seafood was caught that day.

Kerry Newsome: [00:37:22] All right. You've won me already.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:37:24] There's another restaurant I love to go to called the [Grill Garden](#). It's not street food and it's not fine dining like the Intercontinental, but it's one of my favorites because it's a tabletop barbecue restaurant. So you come in and you sit on the table and then they insert this little small charcoal and circular barbecue and then put a grill on top. Then along the side of the restaurant, they have all of the setups where you can just basically gorge yourself on all this beautiful seafood and different types of local meat, and then you cook it at the table. So you go get all your food, you bring it over to the table, and then you pop it on to the grill and cook it to your liking. You can sit there all night long trying from just regular seafood and shellfish to exotic meats. Frogs and different types of beef and pork, even crocodiles, I believe they have as well. Then lots and lots of shellfish. You can just cook it, cook it up on your table with a few beers. It's very, very interesting. Whenever my friends and relatives have come over to visit, it's always been their favourite place to go.

Kerry Newsome: [00:38:34] Well, we definitely have to bet it's got a Facebook page or something similar, so we'll have to put the link in for that.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:38:40] Sure. Yeah, I'll. I'll find the link and send it to you. Then I guess quickly, just some other native dishes to the region that they're trying to be famous for would be Bianca, which is a seafood noodle soup that locals love to have for breakfast, lunch or dinner. So it's got vermicelli noodles and a beautiful seafood soup and then seafood. On top you also have Bancel, which are crispy savory pancakes cooked up on the street and then filled with and with spring onions, with shrimp, with pork and lots of different topics. Then it's dipped in this beautiful dipping sauce of fish sauce. It's kind of a sweet dipping sauce that's just really, really beautiful.

Kerry Newsome: [00:39:26] How they get that pancake so crisp and crunchy, and yet with all those bits inside of it, and then you add the bits of salad and stuff and it's to die for, absolutely die for.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:39:38] It's definitely one of my favorite dishes. I think the secrets are getting crispy as they use rice flour. So definitely one of my favorites and something that people should try. You'll get it in any restaurant in any of the hotels as well. There's also Goi Cuon, which is traditional rice paper rolls. Inside of those rolls you put in lots of beautiful herbs and vegetables with fermented pork, but it's not particularly pungent. It's just got a nice flavor and then it's dipped into a kind of peanut style sauce. It's very quintessential Vietnamese food where you kind of build your meal at the table yourself. They bring you all the ingredients and you roll up the rice papers first. You have to put them into water to make them soft. Then you roll all the ingredients into it and dip it into all these different sauces. So it's very much a Vietnamese style eating, sharing with the whole family. Definitely something people should try.

Kerry Newsome: [00:40:35] I really encourage everybody to try all these different things, even if you just try it because, usually, in Western countries you are reluctant to because obviously each item on the menu is expensive in its own right. You can actually afford to try several of these and if you don't like it or someone else likes it more than you in your group or in your family, it's not the end of the world because it hasn't cost you an arm and a leg in the first place. So be experimental. You will be amazed at the flavors. I mean, obviously if you've got issues as far as allergies are concerned, make sure that you mention that to them like peanuts or chili or things like that. Or if you need gluten free, you're going to have to steer away from noodles, etc. But the vegetables are so fresh, you can often replace gluten. So there's many, many ways to still explore and discover Vietnamese cuisine, and I really encourage you to do so.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:41:35] On that note as well, there's no problem being a vegetarian or vegan. Oh, gosh. I mean, just as part of Buddhist culture, many of them.

Kerry Newsome: [00:41:45] Will be vegetarian. Yes.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:41:47] Well, vegetarian full time or they'll have certain days of the month when they're vegetarian. So going to any restaurant, you'll have no shortage of vegetarian dishes, particularly tofu, and mixed with so many beautiful vegetables and herbs. There's one restaurant that my wife loves to go to, and it's only vegetarian food, and they do beautiful mushroom hot pots and with lots of beautiful vegetables, some of them.

Kerry Newsome: [00:42:10] Even the names on the list as well. Colm because I know I've got a lot of vegetarians as my listeners, so I don't want to miss them out.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:42:20] I'll give you a list of a couple of them and then you can put them on to your list so people know where they are.

Kerry Newsome: [00:42:25] Are we up to number nine? We've done food, I think, and to the extent that I can't do any more meals, I'm starving.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:42:35] What else is there? I guess for people who do like a bit of activity its also become a kind of golfing region as well. So now there are three international golf courses all within, I guess within 30 minutes of the airport. So within 20 minutes of the city, basically. The first is on [Vin Pearl](#), which we spoke about earlier. They have a fantastic links golf course on the island and supposedly quite challenging. I don't play much myself, but from my golfing friends they tell me it's very, very challenging because it's on the island, so it's subject to the elements. There's [Diamond Bay Golf Course](#), which has been there for quite a number of years. Then in the last few years, there is [KN Golf Links Cam Ranh](#), which is a Greg Norman designed golf course and that's beautiful looking and you can maybe put a photo of it for the listeners.

Kerry Newsome: [00:43:28] Definitely.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:43:29] A beautiful, windswept links golf course, one of the very few links golf proper links, golf courses in Vietnam I believe and designed by a fellow Australian that the shark Mr. Norman.

Kerry Newsome: [00:43:40] Well, Greg Norman used to be the ambassador for Vietnamese golf courses and golfing in Vietnam up until I think maybe a year or so before COVID. I don't know whether he was very active in promoting golf in Vietnam.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:43:57] Golf is becoming popular because Vietnam has a very quickly rising middle class. Golf has become a very popular sport and there's some incredible courses around the country. I think that change is good in that you have three beautiful courses, all within 20 minutes of each other and another one coming online as well. The other side of the airport, I think in October, I can't remember the name of it, but if you're a golf enthusiast, you can fly in and have three or four days of amazing golf, all within 20 minutes of you on very, very different golf courses. The rates are very reasonable in comparison to what you'll pay back home. Definitely. And they're not, shall we say, Mickey Mouse courses. They're supposedly very challenging courses. So they'd suit all levels of golfer. I know it's becoming very popular for people to book a kind of four or five day package where they can get a couple of days golfing and the guys can go play golf, the ladies can go for a spa treatment or visit the mud baths or just hit on the hit the beach for a couple of days. It's fun for all the family.

Kerry Newsome: [00:45:07] Yeah, great combination.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:45:09] Then close to the airport where the golf courses are has a kind of second area called Cam Ranh. And Cam Ranh is the name of the airport that you fly into, and it's the area just outside of Nha Trang. In that region, over the last five years, a huge amount of resorts have sprung up. Along Long Beach, which we spoke about earlier, which is a beautiful beach. So a lot of people like to go there just for a tropical beach getaway, if you will, and where you can have three, four or five days just on the beach. You've got a lot of different resorts there from your international standard from Marriott and a lot of independent resorts. Some of them are very, very beautiful. You can just have three days doing nothing with the waves lapping up on the beach. All your food and entertainment and activities are taken care of in the resorts. Then a lot of people like to take just a one day trip, then to go into Nha Trang, check out the city, buy some souvenirs and see some of the sights there.

Kerry Newsome: [00:46:09] So I kind of look at it as like Nusa Dua is to, you know, Bali and the main areas of Bali. It's kind of a bit like that isn't it.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:46:19] Yeah, definitely. It's just a getaway place where you want to do nothing but relax. Whereas if you're a bit more lively or you've maybe got kids and you want to get out and do things and see the cities, then you'd go into that train.

Kerry Newsome: [00:46:31] Can you speak a little bit about the variety of accommodation available?

Colm Hutchinson: [00:46:37] Yeah. I mean, just even before COVID came, there was an oversupply of accommodation. Too many hotel rooms for the quantity of tourists that were coming in. So I think people are spoilt for choice now. When you have the airports, you have that strip from the airport coming into the city, which probably has 15.

Kerry Newsome: [00:46:56] Yeah.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:46:57] Yeah, just kind of around probably 15 and more on the way. Beautiful five star resorts and hotels and from some locally owned ones to international ones with all the top facilities and activities in that city. Then you have from Five Star all the way down to four three stars. You have homestays, you have some backpacker hostels, and then on the islands you have lots of beautiful resorts as well. So you've got Vinpearl, which we mentioned, and then there is an Inn Van Bay, which is the peninsula just across from Nha Trang, which has the very famous [Six Senses Resort](#), which has been very, very famous for many years as one of the best resorts in Vietnam. So if you're looking for something truly luxurious, I think they almost call it a six star resort. You go somewhere like Six Senses and some of the other islands on the bay have their own amazing resorts as well. So you've got family friendly, you've got a couple orientated resorts, vibrant city resorts, which are right on the beach in the centre of the city like the [Intercontinental](#) or the [Sheraton](#) or the Novotel and definitely spoilt for choice. And because of COVID, obviously the rates in hotels and resorts these days are remarkable. You know, you can stay at a top five star resort

here for \$60, \$70 a night and some of the other ones even cheaper. So definitely great value for money at the moment.

Kerry Newsome: [00:48:21] Can I put you on the spot and ask for any of your favourites?

Colm Hutchinson: [00:48:26] My favourites in the city I'd recommend are Intercontinental and the Sheraton and in terms of resorts and hotels and I like [Movenpick](#), which is close to the airport. The [Aminana](#) is a fantastic resort

Kerry Newsome: [00:48:43] How do I spell that?

Colm Hutchinson: [00:48:45] That one and am I in?

Kerry Newsome: [00:48:48] There is one called Amiana. Isn't that. I've seen some really beautiful weddings done there.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:48:56] There is, yeah. I mean there's a lot of resorts so many that I've lost track. There is Amiana, which has beautiful swimming pools and villas. I recommend it for people who like to swim. There's the [ANAM](#) and there's [Alma Resort](#), which is fantastic for kids because it's all centered around kids activities and fun for the family. [Mia Resort](#), which is a very small boutique resort, very popular with couples, honeymooners, people who just want to get to a very small, very service oriented resort. Very, very beautiful. In the city there's [Intercom](#) [Sheraton](#), a new hotel called [Potique](#), which is fantastically designed, just a very unique interior and decorations that they've used, starting with. Pol Pot Boutique where you have a very, very nice décor inside.

Kerry Newsome: [00:49:56] So these are all four and a half, five stars. What about in that three star range?

Colm Hutchinson: [00:50:04] And the three stars.

Kerry Newsome: [00:50:06] A budget traveller that wants to just come and do some diving, who wants to sort of get the beach scene, who maybe might want to spend an extended time so they want something a little bit more affordable.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:50:19] [Ibis Styles](#), which is an encore property which would be three star prices, but definitely four star quality rooms and service. Yeah. The [Havana Hotel](#) is another one that's on the main strip. There's just so many, but I think the key is value for money people are going to get when they come here. So I'd recommend paying a few dollars extra for the for.

Kerry Newsome: [00:50:44] Great. Totally, I think that's the lovely gift that Vietnam keeps giving is value for money across the board. Even before COVID, it was still giving good value for money. I think in South East Asia, it's really up there. Is there anything you want to wrap up? I've got 11 reasons to go to Nha Trang so I can turn this from 10 to 11 easily.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:51:11] It's a pretty safe city. There's no real tourist traps, I would say that you fall into as long as you know.

Kerry Newsome: [00:51:18] Book things where common sense prevails.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:51:19] Yeah, exactly.

Kerry Newsome: [00:51:21] I'm working on the theory that most people listening have got common sense for sure. Thank you so much for coming on. I'm kind of amazed at how much you know, but I guess in 12 years that's what happens. You kind of accrue all this knowledge and it's stored in your head. I'm glad we were able to extract it from you today and share it with everybody. So thanks so much for coming on.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:51:48] You're very welcome. Okay. And I hope your listeners find some interesting nuggets in there for them. If they come to ensure that they have an enjoyable trip.

Kerry Newsome: [00:51:58] I'm sure, and I'll make sure for everyone, for the places that Colm has mentioned, I'll make sure I'll put as many links as I can. There is always, always a transcript available from each show. So if you prefer to be a reader and you want to just read through the transcript, that's easily done, you can just print that off anyway. Colm, aah, look forward to seeing you on the track actually.

Colm Hutchinson: [00:52:24] Yeah. You're long overdue. A visit.

Kerry Newsome: [00:52:26] I am. Thanks, Colm!

Colm Hutchinson: [00:52:29] You're very welcome.