



What About Vietnam – S5-E18 – Hanoi Below the Surface

Kerry Newsome: Xin chào and welcome to What About Vietnam. My name is Kerry Newsome and I am your host.

Hello to all my regular listeners. Thank you for joining me again and for your lovely notes of appreciation for the show and the work I put in here, a really heartfelt big double thank you.

To my new listeners, it's great to have you on board. Please feel free to reach out to me anytime if you have any questions. Best way to do that is whataboutvietnam@gmail.com. Conversely, if you'd like me to put together a trip plan, simply go to the website whataboutvietnam.com. There's a travel request form there with all the details of what I provide for you. Simply fill in that form and send that through to me and we can begin that process.

Today, however, we're going to be focusing on Hanoi. Why? I guess for many, the feedback is that Hanoi doesn't have a lot to offer. It's kind of a stepping point to other places. However, over time, I've really learned to love Hanoi and I've done that by engaging with and listening to different people and kind of looking at it from a Vietnamese's perspective. So, not as a tourist headset, but from their eyes as to how proud they are of their city and their heritage.

And I'm going to get to do that with one Hanoian and her name is Ha. Sometimes she is called Hannah. And Ha has been a very big part of my understanding and my education to Vietnam, and in particular, Hanoi, and the heritage of Vietnamese. I think we can sometimes very quickly jump to, you know, Vietnam's just all about the Vietnamese War, or the American War, as it's sometimes referred to. However, there's just so much more to it, and I think you can sell it short;

You're going to be wandering around the streets and seeing a real mix of, you know, chic cafes and boutiques and things like that. But then right alongside it, if you look up, you'll see very,

very old buildings that belong to another part of history and another part of the heritage and the evolution of Vietnam.

I want to tell you a little bit about Ha before we invite her on. Ha is co-founder of OCD Consulting, one of Vietnam's top management consulting firms. She's also the co-founder of a number of educational technology startups, including the popular one, OMT, and Kids Online.

She serves on the advisory board of CFC Vietnam, which is an NGO that promotes children's right to education. She also leads projects funded by UNICEF. She's co-founder of the Vietnam Association of Non-Public Preschool Association, VANPPE.

In 2021, she made a tiny step, as she calls it, writing a book about the generation of Vietnamese, the bridge generation of Vietnam from wartime to boom time under the guidance of her MBA professor and mentor, Dr. Nancy K. Napier. It's a great book and I'm going to put the link in the show notes that you can have a read if you wish.

Ha received a BA in Linguistics from the Crimean Federal University and an MBA from Boise State University, where she's treasurer of the Vietnam Alumni Group. She lives with her family in Hanoi.

Ha does a great job in this show to help us look under the surface of Hanoi and see it for its evolutionary process of growth and history. She will take us on a journey through its Christian background, what makes coffee so distinct, and the Doi Moi period. It will help guide you to a more refined and in-depth experience of what I consider to be one of Southeast Asia's most famous cities. Without further ado, let's welcome Ha to the program. Hello, Ha.

Dau Thuy Ha (Hannah): Hi, Kerry. Thank you for inviting me to your talk. And you can also call me Hannah, as you know very well.

Kerry Newsome: I couldn't bring you this show without a brief update on the fallout from the devastating Typhoon Yagi. This super typhoon, one of the most devastating storms to hit Vietnam in decades, fell I think about the 7th of September. But as of the 19th, it still carries a rough death toll rising to I think about 226 in Vietnam alone. Look, the economic impact is staggering. Hanoi itself had thousands of residents been evacuated as the Red River reached its highest level in two decades. The flooding has been so severe, people are getting around and navigating on boats, et cetera, as the streets have turned into rivers. The typhoon Yagi, I guess, is a stark reminder of the increasing intensity of weather events, likely exacerbated by climate change. The climate in Vietnam is definitely changing and making it very hard for us people to offer advice on when is the best time to visit Vietnam. **I have a link to Blue Dragon and UNICEF in the show notes** if you'd like to donate to the appeal. Every dollar counts and it doesn't take much to make a big difference in Vietnam. I've asked her to just give a quick local update as she felt the full force of it in Hanoi over to Ha.

Dau Thuy Ha (Hannah): So my name is Ha for a reason. I was born and raised and have been living most of my life in Hanoi and Ha in Vietnamese language means river and Hanoi actually means inside the river and by the river we mean the Red River which covers Hanoi and we have a lovely dike system to protect the inside Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam, against the

flooding that in the past happens every year, every summer and autumn time in the Red River. And indeed, Yagi was the biggest super typhoon that we had to experience during the last like 30 years. and it ravaged the northern part of Vietnam and especially schools and preschools in the northern provinces. Many places that are popular names to our tourists are actually badly damaged by Typhoon Yagi. Luckily, we Vietnamese are known as a resilient nation. We are a bunch of people who actually know that typhoons and landslides and natural disasters are kind of part of our life. So we are quick to rebuild things and I'm happy to say that my team and the educators, Vietnamese educators in other parts of Vietnam are quick to pool resources to help with the schools and preschools in the northern provinces. And we are going there this weekend to bring them money, actually cash, for them to rebuild the schools?

Kerry Newsome: Yes. I mean, working with my team and managing my clients and their visits to northern Vietnam, the experiences and the feedback I'm getting is that pretty much everywhere in those northern districts for visitors has been restored. so that, you know, roads are now open again, Halong Bay is open again, and most of the hotels and resorts are fared pretty well. However, as you say, it is more the underprivileged areas, the areas where there are, you know, small communities, they are quite kind of off the beaten track, and yet those communities have suffered quite extensively with the landslides, etc. So, whilst the fury of the typhoon kind of hit around the 9th of September, it's still having an effect on those areas due to the landslides and the clean-up because after the flooding, as you would know, those areas kind of get left with a lot of debris and mess, et cetera, that requires a whole new rebuild. So, whilst essential services are back on and people have been able to get food and everyone has been able to rally which, as you say, Vietnam is very well known to do and to do quickly. I've had a little bit to do with some of the charities involved in those areas and I'm happy to say that a lot of work has been done and a lot of people have been saved. For people who, you know, who listen to me and listen to this program, I think they're probably more thinking about you know, is this going to be something that they need to be mindful when they're planning their trips to Vietnam? And you and I had a little chat before we even came on about climate change and how it is affecting the seasons and Vietnam's not the only country in the world affected by this. So whilst we say hand on heart that we don't think this is going to be conditional around the future, we don't know. We don't know what the future will hold. This is not customary for Hanoi at this particular time of the year. Well, certainly to my knowledge and You know, I only have 14 years. You have many more years experience, but in 14 years, this would be probably the supercharged typhoon that I've ever seen to hit Vietnam and have the devastation that it had.

So, people, I think, yes, of course, in your planning, take the time of year into consideration, but don't let it, or don't let this particular event deter you to come to Hanoi and experience the North in the month of September as mostly it's about the beginning of the harvest season and it's a beautiful time of the year. So, let's see what 25 holds up, let's see how the future holds up, but I'm happy to take any questions or queries around your planning when you're considering your next trip.

Moving on, the reason why I have been able to enjoy more my time in Hanoi and understand some of the places I visit, some of the food I eat, some of the sights that I get to see, is because I get to understand a little bit more about What lies below the surface of those places? What lies below the surface or the origin of that food I'm tasting? What is its history? Sometimes I

think we can very easily think about Vietnam in terms of its wars. And whilst wars obviously bring extreme hardship and difficulties to the country, They are not the only forms of hardship that the country can experience and has experienced. And we're going to delve a little bit more into that with her, because there was some serious hardships that happened post-war.

So, to begin with, I'm going to talk to Ha about some of the things that are her favorites in her city, and that begins with churches. And I'm going to throw it over to you now, Ha, because this was your idea, this subject, and I have to admit a lot of ignorance in really understanding churches and some of the ones that I do visit and that I love, but I'm going to throw it over to you to talk about the churches that you can visit in Hanoi.

Dau Thuy Ha (Hannah): Sure, Kerry. So indeed, thank you for allowing me to start with my favorite topic.

First of all, I have to declare that I'm actually not a Catholic. I'm not a Christian, which is good in a way that I have very fresh and hopefully unbiased view about the churches in Vietnam. I normally would joke that in my next life I won't become a Christian just because I love the very unique Catholic churches of the northern part of Vietnam so much. And I can safely say that with my travel, I spent years like six years in the former Soviet Union.

So I traveled across Russia, Ukraine, so I understand and I have been to too many Orthodox churches. And then I went to the U.S. I understand and I have visited many Protestant churches. I was in Europe, I went to Catholic and Anglican churches and etc. And I went back home to Vietnam and I discovered that, okay, so I just also realized that Vietnam, among the Southeast Asia countries, I think we have the most unique, most interesting Catholic heritage, especially with concentration in the northern part of Vietnam. The birthplace of the Catholic Church in Vietnam is actually Nam Dinh and Ninh Binh provinces next door to Hanoi, right? And we have four basilicas, you know, Vatican-designated basilicas, two in the north and one in central Vietnam, and fourth in Ho Chi Minh City in Saigon. I will leave it to our visitors to find out because I won't give all the clues, but they are interesting because in many places you would be almost transposed to 18th century Europe, and you have a bit of that Europe preserved among the lush, you know, green paddy fields, rice fields of Vietnam. And you actually only need to go about 40 kilometers south of Hanoi to be there. to witness all of those. And in the territorial division of the Vietnamese Catholic Church, That area still reports, you know, still belongs to the Hanoi diocese. So to them, it is part of Hanoi, greater Hanoi.

And the churches inside Hanoi, I have sent you some of my favorite shots of the Hanoi Cathedral and the other churches around Hanoi. They are so rich with history, and we are so very lucky that majority of them actually are well preserved. despite all the wars, the bombings, and et cetera. So I do hope that there would be more and more, you know, church-only tour to Hanoi and to the surrounding area.

The next-door province to Hanoi, Nam Dinh, is not an average province in terms of size and population. And they have close to 700 churches, Catholic churches, beautiful, dotted in almost like every village. So you travel on a van, on a car, on every road in Nam Dinh province, and you look left, you see churches. You look right, you see also... Unbelievable! Unbelievable!

Kerry Newsome: I did not know that!

Dau Thuy Ha (Hannah): And they are so beautiful! No, that's why we do want to have tours for church lovers, Catholic and non-Catholic, but church lovers, because they are so rich, so well-reserved. The people are so welcoming. You ask them one question and they will answer you with, you know, with lots of stories. Going to see the churches of the northern part of Vietnam is going to be a super interesting, exciting, and surprising find for everybody. The stories behind them are so rich, so interesting. The whole basilica was built in an original swamp, and the parishioners actually pulled everything they had, and they actually built hardwood floors for the whole area, just to keep the church to be like century solid, staying on in a swamp area. That's incredible. I also don't know whether there are any other places in the world that people would do that kind of thing. And that is a designated basilica. It's belonging to the Hanoi diocese. It's Khe So Basilica, 40 kilometers south of Hanoi. So things like that, all the monasteries in Ninh Binh, it's just like you are stepping into German Gothic area, and then nearby are all Vietnamese rice fields. So it's very kind of unique. And I have been to churches in China, in other countries around here. You don't really have that concentration and the kind of density of both. Catholic Church's presence and history behind that. So I'm only, I won't leave it at here because I think people would want to find out more themselves. Just like me, when I started to discover the Vietnamese Catholic Churches around me. So start with Hanoi Cathedral, going to Co Ba Cathedral, and you go further, and I really hope, Kerry, that you will be introducing more and more specific, you know, Vietnamese Catholic tours to the churches?

Kerry Newsome: I've never thought to seek out other than one or two of the main ones, as you pointed out, the Cathedral in Hanoi and obviously the Pink Church in Saigon. That would be it. That would be the full stop after those two. When you say there are up to 700 That just blows me away because I think for people to understand, once again, that Vietnamese have a Christian or a Catholic background to them, other than Confucian and also Buddhist, that's a little bit of a revelation, I think, that everyone listening would be going, well, I never thought of Vietnam as having that kind of heritage. So, it's wonderful to know this. The expansiveness of Vietnam just continues to blow me away. But I think what we'll do, Hannah, what we'll do is we'll put some links in the notes for everyone so that they can do a little bit of an investigation. And certainly for anyone that is interested in this in more detail, happy to take your inquiries and I will certainly put some tours together so that I can get you to those places, so feel free for that.

Can we move on a little bit now and just understand a little bit more about that below the surface Hanoi and get to another subject that you and I both enjoy, which is coffee, and enjoying a lovely coffee in Hanoi would have to be one of my must-do recommendations for anyone in Vietnam. But maybe let's talk about some of the origins of coffee, where it stands in the world as a coffee producer, and then, of course, the fascination around egg coffee. Because, once again, people don't really understand the origin of egg coffee and how it came to be in the first place. So share away.

Dau Thuy Ha (Hannah): Yes, so we continue on the C letter. And so after church, of course, my second obsession is coffee. I have to say that I'm lucky on two fronts. So first of all, Vietnam has been for, I think for the last, at least last 15 years to be the number two world exporter of coffee to the world. We are only behind Brazil in terms of coffee volume export. Vietnam

is a grower of Robusta coffee mostly. That's why you don't really see Vietnam like single origin coffee in coffee specialty shops because majority of Robusta coffee goes into like... mass coffee, like instant coffee. So Nestle is one of the biggest importers of Vietnamese Robusta coffee. We also have Arabica coffee. And why I'm saying I'm lucky on two fronts, because first of all, we are a major coffee country, coffee producer country. And my father is one of the earliest Northern Vietnamese coffee export. So when, during the war, we actually have We have North Vietnam and South Vietnam. Majority of the Vietnam coffee production area are actually in Central Highland where Da Lat and Lam Dong and Dak Lak and it used to belong to so-called South Vietnam. My father is a Northern Vietnamese and in Vietnam we only grew Arabica coffee, more acidic but more fragrant, more aromatic coffee, which lower yield, higher value. And Hanoi coffee, even during the very hard days where we didn't really have much to eat, coffee shops were there everywhere. We had to recycle coffee, right? You know that Vietnam, we drink coffee the French way. We use the French drift and we put like two teaspoon full of coffee into the drift and then you pour hot boiling water on it. And so... It drips. It drips, yes. And if you only had a little bit of coffee and you want to have coffee aroma like in the morning and then in the afternoon and also on the second day, then you actually recycle that coffee in that little coffee drip, like a lot of time. It's very strong. The first drip would be strong, the second and the third, not so much. But since we want to, we had to save them, we actually would recycle it. Like me, I would be drinking, when I was small, I would be drinking the third round There are nostalgic coffee shops like the Coop Cafe chain which started in northern Hanoi actually. This is Coop. So C-O-O-P. How do you say it? Cộng means actually, it actually is a short for Cộng sản, which is communist. So communist style coffee. And you go into those coffee shops and you see the Vietnamese military.

Kerry Newsome: Yeah, they all wear the similar clothes and there's a lot of propaganda posters.

Dau Thuy Ha (Hannah): Yes, yes, because it's nostalgic of the time when we actually drank those refueled coffee. But it's part of the joy that we had. It's a very big change. It is a big chain, successful. They are now in Vietnam, Malaysia, Korea, Canada. I think they just opened one in Toronto. Maybe next to Tim Hortons. There is a reason, there is a history that we associate with coffee and that's why coffee and the likes are popular. But then we also have egg coffee, which you mentioned, and Hanoi is the origin of egg coffee, and you tried egg coffee the other time you were in Hanoi, and I think you mentioned that it's Of course, you had reservation. You said, how do the egg flavor would go with coffee flavor? And would it be like a little bit too strange a combination? Too sweet and et cetera, right? Yeah. But there is a reason that it didn't, like if it is just a concoction, then it must like pass away long time ago. But it stay on, it became kind of thing by itself because there is a recipe that actually makes it very possible and very kind of interesting. Some people, it's like durian, some people won't want to have the second cup of egg coffee but if you are addicted to it then you actually look forward to the time when you are back in Hanoi And in the cool autumn time, like September, October, November, right? And you sit in those Hanoian, old French colonial-style small houses, and you saw that the barista was very carefully making it for you. So, okay, egg coffee, there is one whole corner of the internet about the origin and all the speculation of theories about it, so please go and find out, but egg coffee is indeed a very quintessential Hanoian thing. Next, to add coffee, I would recommend newcomers to visit some neighborhood coffee because that is where they can experience how an authentic Hanoian

would go to have their morning coffee. In the past, we read newspapers, now we read the news on our smartphones, but it's the same thing over the same cup of coffee.

Kerry Newsome: My understanding, just before we jump from egg coffee, because you won't believe how many times people ask me about the origin of egg coffee. As I understand, and please correct me if I'm wrong, but I was to understand that egg coffee originally came about when there was a time in Vietnam, in hardship, where it was very difficult to get any kind of milk. So, to replace the milk or to replace where you had tinned milk or you had condensed milk, which you sometimes use, they or someone decided that they might try egg as a replacement to make the coffee. And then, because as it turned out, it tasted very good, it kind of caught on and has become this very, very quintessential Hanoi Vietnamese thing to try. But for everyone, I think that's the origin. Am I close?

Dau Thuy Ha (Hannah): You are very close indeed. So two things is true, indeed. The northern Vietnamese way to drink coffee is actually with condensed milk, which is just a little bit of milk, but a lot of sugar. Yeah, a lot of sugar. A lot of sugar. And that's why the Vietnamese traditional, like old-style coffee is both strong on the coffee side and too sweet on the sugar side. And it doesn't make foam. So we, in the past, we didn't have fresh milk and we can't do milk with a very nice looking froth. Like a cappuccino. Yes, that's indeed. The next best alternative to it is egg. And I think it caught on because we do have nice chicken eggs every day and it was not difficult to find out even during the war time. So it caught on. But the claim to fame of egg coffee of Hanoi is that it is still very difficult to make it. As you can see, there are not many egg coffee shops around, even in Hanoi, because it is an art to make an egg coffee. I can't do it myself and not many baristas can do it. So there are only a few places and they are very well trained.

Kerry Newsome: Yeah, do you remember the place we went to when we were doing the filming for VTV4? So, just a shout out to VTV4. We did a day filming where I got to spend a whole day with her and we went around Hanoi and talked about lots of things. But that particular place, and I think I've got a link and a photo and I'll share with everyone, They had been doing it for a very long time, am I right? Like 60 years. Yes, about 60 years. I was truly gobsmacked how tasty it was because as you would expect with egg coffee or people that profess to sell that type of coffee, there will be good and bad practitioners of this. But this particular shop, I've had egg coffee before, but it never left me with any wow feeling where having it at that coffee shop, you would not know about that place. It's quite hidden. It's quite old. Once again, it is below the surface of Hanoi. That's one of the places that you would definitely have to seek out to find. But wow, it was just amazing. I can hand on heart say that that would be the best egg coffee I have ever had.

Dau Thuy Ha (Hannah): That's Cafe Giang, and indeed, we won't give you more details because we are talking about Hanoi below the surface, so a lot for you to discover yourself, right? Everything in Hanoi is about a little bit of discovery for a population of 100 million in Vietnam. In total, Vietnam has over 500,000 coffee shops and the majority of them would be in big cities like in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and Da Nang. So I don't have a specific data or statistics on how many coffee shops we have in Hanoi, but I trust it's a lot. Another unique feature of Hanoi that you don't really see in many places, especially you don't really see them in Ho Chi Minh City or southern part of Vietnam, is those **collective living quarters**. In

Vietnamese, we say khu tap the. So khu means quarter, tap means area and Thê, Thê means collective, so collective living quarters. Those are actually now, by now, a little bit shabby looking areas, but that is where, and because they have been along for like 60 or 50 years, some of the oldest living quarters, collective living quarters in Hanoi, Kim Lien and Trung Tu, they were built, actually they was built in the 60s of the last century, so 60 years old. But the community, the vibe of everybody together there are still so strong now, just as before, because the people who live there, They have been there like four generations and they have kids going together to kindergarten and schools all together, doing their daily shopping, groceries in the same wet market next door and enjoying the coffee shops all together, all at the same time.

And so there are underground arts coming out from those living quarters. Interesting stuff is happening there. So I also recommend if visitors to Hanoi If they want really to deep dive below the surface, they go to Chung Tu or Kim Lien Collective Living Quarters, explore those older buildings, but with huge, big trees around, because those trees were also planted like six years ago, seeing people going around and going into some of the shops around there, which is quite like, still some of those things can remind you of the old time Hanoi, like before Đổi Mới.

Kerry Newsome: When you start to peel back the onion of Vietnam's history, you start to appreciate some of the most influential transition periods for the Vietnamese people. These go well beyond the hardships and recovery from what's known as the American War. Let's take a look at 1986, when a series of new reforms called Doi Moi were introduced. Ha is going to share with us how this period played out for her as a young woman in Vietnam, and how it shaped the country we're visiting today. These reforms had a profound impact on modern Vietnam, and understanding them helps us see the country in a whole new light. The Doi Moi period in Vietnam refers to kind of a series of economic reforms. It was a plan to raise a socialist-oriented market economy. And there's various key points about Doi Moi, and I'll put a link in the notes so that you can better understand it. But when you're walking around the buildings and you're getting a feel for the country, And in particular in Hanoi, it's more pronounced, I think, in Hanoi, you're going to register that this period is played out in how the Vietnamese adapted, how they adapted their economy, their way of business, their attitude, their thinking, their choices, their education, their entrepreneurship. It flavored everything. It changed everything. And I think this is what's going to give you some insight into Hanoi that without it you just might not get it. Anyway, Ha does a better job of it than me. So let's welcome Ha to talk about the Doi Moi period. Ha, this period of Doi Moi I know is a time in your life which was extremely influential in how it paved the rest of your life, I guess. So maybe talk to us about the Doi My period and then how that played out and how it plays out in Vietnam today.

Dau Thuy Ha (Hannah): Indeed, so for my generation, Đổi Mới is totally, you know, life-changing. We started our education and became like teenagers and then young adults under the centrally planned economy where like the government took care of everybody, took care of our education, they will allocate a job for us, you know, so that, and then you would expect to work for the government your lifetime, and then you would be given a salary, you know, subsidized housing and everything. Your children's education will be taken care of by the government. Of course, it doesn't happen it doesn't increase our productivity. Actually, it was

like the opposite, but the expectation is that, okay, you just need to be an obedient citizen and the government will take care of everything for you. So we grew up with that kind of mindset and mentality and boom. The socialist bloc was dissolved when I was in my final years of university in Crimea in the former Soviet Union. And when I graduated and went home and then the Ministry of Education at that time almost like told us that, sorry, we are not going to do job allocation, employment allocation for you because there is no such thing no longer. you are now free to do whatever you want to do. But then we didn't know what we want to do because there was only a very nascent private sector and market economy in Vietnam at that time. And majority of us Northerners were very scared because that is something totally new to us, totally uncharted waters. We didn't know about market economy. We were taught all the time that capitalism is a bad thing. It's like people exploiting people. Some people got very rich and rest would become like living slaves, that kind of thing. Now it's funny to think about that, but it was like that during the late 1980s, right? Yeah, but I think Vietnam, as in many cases, we are a rather resourceful bunch of people. We said, okay, this is our life. We have to take care of our life. You know, central planning or market economy or whatever, we will figure out how to do that, right? So the first thing that majority of us, so-called young professional or young intellectual found out that, okay, now we need to switch from learning Russian language to English language, right? Because rest of the world do not do business or do not like work with Russian language. They actually prefer English language. So suddenly English language became like a very popular Skill. Skill, yeah. And like language centers, the English language center started to emerge everywhere and everybody was doing their beginner certificate in English proficiency, yeah. And I think Vietnam was able to turn around very fast at that time. And it has to start with the mindset. And I think we, I really, I am very appreciative of the leadership of the country at that time. They were all communist party members. And they said, okay, now we have to do our version, Vietnamese version of communism. Which is very funny. So, our key leaders actually reached out to Singapore, to neighboring countries, saying that, sorry, we did not pay too much attention to you in the past, but now we want to know how you do your economy, how you help your nation. uplift your nations out from poverty. We want to learn from you. I think we did it in a rather sincere way. That's why Senior Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore agreed to become a special advisor to the government of Vietnam in 1993, and he was one for a long time, and we did really listen to our neighbor's advices, and I think we did it in a very decisive manner, and so we were able to resume normal relationship with the U.S., with the United States of America, which used to be the enemy of Vietnam for so long during the war. During late 1995 and 1996, we started to have the U.S. Embassy in Hanoi and now we don't, we didn't have to go to Bangkok to get a visa to the United States, and I was among some of the earliest batch of Vietnamese students to do an MBA in America.

Kerry Newsome: To study, yes, in U.S.

Dau Thuy Ha (Hannah): Yeah, in an American university. And we were then really shown how capitalism actually works. And we said, okay, so capitalism actually has its own merits, and it actually could work in many other different settings. There is a... you know, like a real road for us forward. And that is what we covered in our book, you know, the story of people, individuals, Northern Vietnamese like me, in the Bridge Generation book, you know, how we, as an individual, as a smaller, you know, communities, we embrace that kind of doi moi, which means renovation. Actually, it's a big transition from our mindset to make the kind of future

we want to have, first for ourselves, and then for our community and our country. And it reflects in cities like Hanoi, right?

Kerry Newsome: And I think for everyone, if I can give, and I hope you'll permit me to give my understanding and how it actually plays out in your visit and when you start to travel around Vietnam, that you will see and you will notice very quickly the old next to the new almost everywhere. So you'll see a building that is 50, 100 years old right next to a brand new cafe. you will notice in the streets still the occasion of flower vendors and sometimes people think they're a little bit lost in time, that they are still peddling, I guess, their wares the way they would have done years ago and then all of a sudden you'll see a Mercedes car drive past and you know, sometimes that contrast just, you know, blows you away. But it's because the speed in which Doi Moi, and it changed the, as I understand, the mindset of Vietnamese to have to quickly adapt from And this is actually out of the book, No Choice Soup to Choice Soup, where unconditionally people were then allowed to explore their own futures, their own education, their own entrepreneurship, and this is where the growth spurt went berserk. in my opinion. It just, like, shot up.

Because I can remember my very, very first visit to Vietnam was, like, back in 2007. And even then, I was like, this is still a country a long way away from terms of living standards and entrepreneurship and even curiosity. You know, Vietnamese were not intrinsically educated to be curious. they were educated to accept the status quo and not question. So then all of a sudden, the book was open and through Doi Moi, as Ha was a gifted student and she was able to apply her intellect and her discipline to venture further to be able to explore education even in the US and with other Western partners to be able to, you know, today she has a startup business and has had successful businesses in the past. That would never have happened without Doi Moi. Am I like, am I close to explaining it to people because this has taken me a while to get my head around over the years.

Dau Thuy Ha (Hannah): Indeed, you are very to the point on that and I think For visitors to Vietnam, if they can add that kind of curiosity to understand or to see a country so fast changing itself over the last 50 years, it would add to much more interesting angles to their two days visit to Hanoi and maybe two days in Hoi An and then two days in Ho Chi Minh City, right?

So indeed, your first time to Hanoi in 2007, that was the year when Vietnam was admitted to the World Trade Organization, to the WTO, and that is where our economy would actually start to take off because we would be able to integrate whatever industries and exports that we have to the global economy. And that is, indeed, you were witnessing the start of the take off of the Vietnam so-called boom time. Before 2007, we tried and we did what is needed to do, but it's mostly still, you know, like one-sided efforts from Vietnam. But when we were admitted to the World Trade Organization, it is bilateral and then multilateral. And now Vietnam is among some of the few countries in the world that has so many free trade agreements, FTAs. I think by now we have 17 17 FTAs with many countries and regions in the world so that Vietnamese products can be exported and also we can import things from other countries to Vietnam. So I think as an Australian, now you go to Vietnam, you see so many Australian stops around in every, even neighborhood, stores and corners, right? I saw, so I

saw, I now have Australian beef in my refrigerator. I have Australian butter, I can buy Hanukkah honey from New Zealand, also in the nearby store and etc. Australian wine is everywhere. And the Australian trade office in the Australian embassy are having, you know, like really fun time introducing even some very unique Australian products to Vietnamese market. All of that did not happen, you know, like 15 years ago.

Kerry Newsome: Yeah, and let me share just also the diversification into food because a lot of people consider Vietnamese as still only focusing on their own cuisine. That couldn't be further from the truth. Now you can go to Vietnam and enjoy Greek, Italian, The Four P's group have promoted very well their pizzas. The opportunity to have really quality Japanese, Korean, it is especially in the major cities, probably predominantly in the major cities. But that diversification is part of the origin of this came from free trade and that opening opportunity.

I think the sad part for me is I can remember in early years when I used to come to Vietnam, people used to think I was brave, that I was venturing to Vietnam because it was still unknown to the rest of the world. It had been a closed book, and it had not allowed itself or had not shared with the world really very much about itself. It was still known as Vietnam, and Vietnam was just known as a war. That was the only word that was attributed to the country name. which was sad, very, very sad. But very quickly that has come to change. But even today, even today, I will get people that will think that Vietnam is a third world country. that they will think that they're coming to some primitive place that, you know, they're not going to have the facilities or, you know, some areas of it are going to be so primitive that they're going to have to, you know, be wary of. And, you know, that's in health standards, sanitization, quality of accommodation, English speaking places, all of that. So, it is a bit of a revelation, but I'm happy to say that it's very much a country on the move, I call it. It's continually evolving. I'm mindful of the time, and I'm just wanting to see where we're going with this to make sure that we cover the real key points that we wanted to feature in this show. So, is there anything else we should be adding here that we haven't covered so far that you'd like to?

Dau Thuy Ha (Hannah): I just want to encourage visitors to not worry about the facilities and the convenience that they won't have in Hanoi. I think they would be very amazed that the internet and free Wi-Fi are almost everywhere in the city, right? All the coffee shops would offer you free Wi-Fi unconditionally, for example, right? And we have some of the highest literacy level in the world. facilities and everything are there. And it's a safe country. It's so safe, except for the traffic jam that we have. Otherwise, we are really safe, right? And Hanoi is indeed some of the most interesting place for visitors to discover, because it is a big enough city, we have close to 10 million people living in the greater Hanoi area. And it has such a long history, right? We, as a city, we are like over 1,000 years old. And the legacy that we have, we have the biggest, the strongest French colonial legacy in all Southeast Asia. And that has to do with all the Catholic churches, the French legacy in architecture and culture around Hanoi. So it makes Hanoi really a hidden charm, something for visitors to discover. Hanoi is so different, so standing out. Even in Southeast Asia, we are very different. And that is the beauty of it. We talk a little bit about below the surface, but below the surface is for each of us to discover, right? And I would like to end our discussion today on that note. Hanoi is for you to discover below the surface. And every time you come, you discover a little bit more below the surface, and it is exciting.

Kerry Newsome: I thank you so much, Ha, for coming on. I really relish the time with you to be able to explore these things. I think that we could probably do another show and talk about other things like, you know, the history behind Bun cha, the history behind Bia Hoi, All of those things are, for you as a tourist, I really encourage you to do some research, do some investigation, because that first drop of Bia Hoi will mean so much more, as you will understand the origins. Having delicious bun cha once again that will resonate with your taste buds and you'll go, I can understand why they appreciated this. Because also, the thing we haven't touched with Hanoi is it can get quite cold and that's where the heartiness of some of the food comes from because just to keep people warm, the warm broths and the thickness of the broths, etc., is very much part of their history and belongs to their background. I'm going to leave it there now. I want to say thank you again for coming on the show.

Dau Thuy Ha (Hannah): Thank you, Kerry and thank you, everyone, for tuning in to our discussion. So as a Hanoian, I would like to welcome you to Hanoi, and indeed, we hope to have more chances to speak to you about food, about the other interesting, below-the-surface things of Hanoi. Till then, bye-bye, Kerry.