



**The What About Vietnam Traveller Insights Podcast –
Transcript**
What About Vietnam - Series 1- 1 - Vietnam Travel planning
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Hello and Welcome to What About Vietnam. Xian Chau which means ...hello ...
My name is Kerry Newsome and I am your host.
This is the very first episode,

I am truly excited to be bringing you this series.
It's been a long time in the baking.
I fell in love with Vietnam a long time ago, and now through this podcast I get to share some of my learnings as a travel blogger and regular traveller over the last 14 years. I continue to work with travelers to Vietnam, and inspired by them, I feel confident I can bring you the information I know I have found hard to find about Vietnam before you actually book.

I hope to answer all those burning questions you have about Vietnam. Like:- When to go?
Do you need a Visa's?
Is it safe? Where are the hot spots and what are the "must do" things? I hope to bring this information to you in such a way you feel like you are there already !!
So, stick around I have lots of information coming your way.

In this session, I'd like to get your taste buds salivating about the food. I'd like to share with you my experiences with the people and maybe give you some insights into the kinds of experiences you can choose to have,..... and where to find them.
I want to invite you.... to the Vietnam I know and love
So lets dive in,

When I think of Vietnamese food, I think about fresh seafood,fresh vegetable salads,juices,noodle soups with amazing broths,..... Baguets that are filled with varieties of pork, called Banh Mi, and colour. Aromas that draw you in from the

street. But to silo Vietnamese food into one strand of flavours marked as traditional,..... you would be missing out on the fusion of Asian flavours it offers.

To get the full frontal of the basics at a street level, I urge new travellers to do a street food tour in one,.... or all of the main cities.

I have always believed that you never know a country.... or its people until you immerse yourself in its food. So, if your palette and digestive system allows, try and be open to exploration. Check out local markets, and while the smells and views of food vagrantly sitting out on benches may be overwhelming at first, ...Put your "when in Rome, do as the Roman do hat" and try some of the traditional dishes at least. A little tip here, so your tummy doesn't know what hit it with the flavours about to come its way, I strongly suggest maybe starting a probiotic, a week before you leave, and bringing with you some anti diarehea medication. The food, while fresh is grown in different soils to possibly our country of origins and often this can bring about a digestive upset for the first few days as it settles down. So precautionary only as not a biggy. Those who cannot eat peanuts, or chilli, may want to ask a lot more questions about the way it was cooked. I hate to bring this up now, but I'd be remiss if I didn't mention as I have seen to many cases, including my own, in a bit of shock when the rumbling starts....Okay enough of that, lets get stuck into those 5 delicious dishes that Vietnam is world renowned for:-

Five main foods Vietnam is known for:-

No 1 - Banh Mi -

No 2 - Pho - explain

No 3 - Banx Xeo pancake -

No 4 - Cau Lau -

No 5 - Ban cha - Bun Cha is a traditional Vietnamese pork dish that's a speciality of Hanoi. Seasoned pork patties (I call them squished meatballs) and caramelised pork belly slices are served in a broth alongside rice noodles, fresh vegetables and herbs.

And try if you can..... try not to get caught up in all the taunts about eating strange animals as it is NOT common practice, and in fact I have not gone down those streets so I can't even tell you exactly where they cook dog, which does occur in the north, or pigeon, rat, or snake. So as I'm not an authority after 14 years of travelling to Vietnam, I'll leave it there.

I will tell you that there is definitely a difference in flavours and cooking between the North and the south. Even their spring rolls are different.

And distinct to some regions will be dishes like White rose dumplings - famous in Hoi An, as is Cau Lau. Crazy as it sounds it is hard to find Cau Lau out of Hoi An.

Despite its simplicity of being a noodle dish with crunchy pork crackling bits, and a

broth that is to die for. It's everywhere in Hoi An. But you will search high and dry for it in HCMC. As a rule of thumb, with very blurred lines in the centre, The north tends to be more meaty and the south sweeter and seafood orientated.

A word of warning, if you think your kids are a bit hyper and you don't know why.....Mind the sugar, as you will find they put sugar in almost everything, even fruit juices like Pineapple, watermelon, etc But you can say NO Sugar. Obviously beach locations like Nha Trang, Danang, Hoi An, Halong Bay, and the Mekong Delta are rich in seafood which they regularly sell the days catch to local restaurants who will offer it to customers in buckets that are displayed at the front of their restaurantsso you can pick what you want to have cooked in whatever way you wish. While it may look cheap and cheerful you will usually be surprised at how good it tastes. And you can't beat that freshness. And while you have seen plenty of those Vietnam tourist photos with little red chairs. They are standard seating in very local places.

They are also part of what a "pop up" restaurant is all about. You can be walking along a street in Hoi An, and before you know it, the chairs come out and all of a sudden you will see them set up..... grilling tasty sticks of pork or skewered prawns and you can just grab one and sit on one of those chairs for less than a couple dollars.

It's the aromas, and relaxed state of being that draws you in. No fuss, no parking to organise, no booking to be made. On the other hand you can walk further down the street and see restaurants side by side touting their daily specials. Like any other country Vietnam has morphed into a multicultural society, and amongst the craziness is some amazing chefs emerging with new restaurants and bringing their culture to the table, in Australian, Japanese, Korean BBQ and Asian Fusion.

I can honestly say, I don't think I have had a bad meal in Vietnam. Sure I've had those that have not been to my liking, But for the most I am with people that guess me well or I am on a food tour and learning new tastes and dishes. I still do food tours as I love learning more about Vietnam through its food. For #Vegetarians ...you will love it, as #Vietnam has you covered well with their juices and fresh vegetables and noodles.

#Coffee is a culture all of its own. It's an outing. It's not just a drink, it's a way to say hello and make a new friend. Along with their teas, you will want to find any excuse to have a coffee or a tea possibly in a old shophouse that has been converted to a Tea House.

A very beautiful ornamental shop house in Hoi An, is also known as the Quiet American as it was featured in the film and the house is still owned by the family. I

got to visit the upstairs bedrooms one time to see old family photos on the walls dating back centuries. Just amazing to see.

Every frequent visitor has their favourites. A place called Cocobana in Hoi An is one of mine for tea. It offers foot baths while you enjoy your cup of something specially grown for them, with lots of herbs and stuff. Your feet and your senses always feel fabulous when you walk out. a great respite from the heat. And so with things like #Eggcoffee, it is not found everywhere. Mostly in the north and central districts. and not one of my fav things, but maybe if it's on the menu you should try. Vietnamese are not well known for drinking alcohol. While people love their beer, they are not traditionally big drinkers. Of course with influence from other cultures that is changing.

The best thing to try in the drinking department is #BaiHoi.

This is A beer they brew mostly in Hanoi, on the day, and you drink it as it comes (not necessarily cold) until its gone. There is a kind of ceremony thing that goes with it , with cheers and more cheers. The alcohol is said to be less alcohol (40% less) so that you can sit with the locals and drink with them all day. Easily done at around 5,000 - 10,000 Dong a glass. 0.45 cUSD there is actually a corner in the old town called bai Hoi corner, ask any guide they will show you where it is.

By the end of your drinking session, I guarantee you will have made new friends despite the fact you won't understand a word they are saying.

Its all got to go... in the day, and usually is, so make sure you get there early if you happen to stumble on a stall in the Old Quarter. They are easy to spot as the barrell comes out and the plastic glasses are handed out. The party has begun. 10am to 10 pm most days.

If I move on now to describe to you something about the people, you will need to be aware I am speaking from my experiences.... and from those shared with me from some of my travellers and the suppliers I deal with.

For a country that has experienced so much hardship I am still amazed at how gracious, kind and generous the Vietnamese are. I work with Vietnamese people and I have travelled with Vietnamese, and for the most part they are kind, caring and always willing to help where they can. They do have a bit of a fascination with us. They would like to understand us, but as we, the collective force of tourists cannot understandably all be clumped together. It makes it difficult. I get the Aussie Aussie c'mon often or Giddy mate... and thats about it! One example...

I have dropped my hotel door key card, in the middle of a market place and had the person who found it chase me to give it to me. AnotherI have been staying in a hotel in Hoi An for a long stay and before I knew it after many conversations was offered a job. I have met a lady who gave a cooking class and has since become one of my best friends who I continue to travel around Vietnam with. Vietnamese are

open, warm and slightly conservative in my experience. They aren't flashy or whimsical. They mostly follow Buddhist traditions and favour anyone who does also. Family is everything and so is looking after their older generations which is why they may have done so well with Covid as they generally don't tend to house the old in old peoples homes. In fact there are not many of these types of places in Vietnam. Mostly someone will be looking after that older person, be it some..... better than others.

History Vietnam - They are a war ravaged country and there are distinct differences between the north and the south, but for many years the voices of unrest are quietening and as the young replace the old, the dissent is almost gone, as far as how they feel about the Vietnam war, likewise the generation x don't really understand it as they don't get taught too much about their own country's political history... I am not sure if that is a good thing or not. So as a traveller and like in any city, keeping your wits about you for the those criminals you will find anywhere;- typically ...that "pick pocket" lives everywhere unfortunately,...if you stick to common sense rules you should feel very confident travelling solo as I do often.... or if you bring children and the elderly,.... other than dealing with the motorbike traffic in the main cities that will be the biggest things you will need to contend with.

While I am recording this in the middle of the Covid19 pandemic, it will be interesting to see how the country moves forward as there were reported cases in the country areas of locals being aggressive to foreigners, which is what we are called, specially us white ones, if I can say that... there were cases of aggression as they blamed us for bringing the virus to their country. Of course that is only partly true as it did come from other countries but to bundle every foreign traveler as a potential risk, was not warranted. So...I will be keen to see how that relaxes once the pandemic is under control or we have a vaccine. As I was in Vietnam right in the middle of March, I was temperature checked and at all times I felt safe amongst the Vietnamese but I did conform to wearing a mask and social distancing.

As the people differ by regions, so do the experiences you can expect to find. For simplicity I have broken experiences into 4 main categories. I am only only going to dust the surface on experiences as my next series- A TRAVELLERS GUIDE TO EXPERIENCES, will feature first hand accounts with interviews with people who have had their own experiences such as these,.... and many others and they will give you their version. Much more fun, and nothing you will find in a travel book. But as the purpose of this series is to get you set for a trip to Vietnam, the least I can do is get you excited as Vietnam, has so much to offer. So here goes -

Water - Vietnam offers so much to experience in the way of water. Beaches - there is 3200 kms of coastline for starters. Your hot spots being Danang, Hoi An, Nha Trang and if an island is your thing, then Phu Quoc is the go and Visa free. Just transit through HCMC.

The north features some of the most staggering waterfalls near the China border, and lets not forget the beautiful Phung Nha underwater caves, ... which seems to be opening up before our eyes with 12 new caves discovered only last month.

My all time favourite for off the beaten track in water, is Be be Lake, so pristine and unspoilt, mix it with the White Thai people and Hmong tribes, you will get a feeling you are lost in time. Visit magical caves by boat and take in a world of stalik might and staliktights.

And of course you must veer south if you want a taste of the Mighty Mekong: enjoy a trip up through to Phnom Penh or visit its Delta region at Can Tho where you still can see family sellers selling their wares on the waterways. Don't forget to take your mosquito repellent.

Lets get Historical and explore the culture of the country for an expereince. If you are a history or war buff, this country can take you across many countries of domination including Chinese, French, Portugese, Dutch and Japanese. If you start your historical adventure in Hanoi that will kick you off well. Divided into 12 districts, Hanoi can offer you a deep view into history through its museums and places of history, with a Woemns Museum being one of my favouirte due its amazing story telling of how women supported the country with NO glass ceiling it seems. If they could don a uniform and fightthey have just as many rights as anyone else. And you will see that many women hold roles of importance in the country and in family businesses they tend to be the entrepreneurs.

Still in a culture mindset you can travel to Hue to enjoy a treasure trove of Imperial history. Then on the Hoi An where you can stay in a 16th century old town, visit shop houses and pagodas; see live art perfomances telling you stories of love and loss over the spice trail period of time. A great place to mix up the old and new with fantastic short wave beaches, ideal for families, you can't go past Hoi An as a multi faceted stay as many of my guests in the next series will test. Adventure seekers - you need to pick your time of year if you want to avoid disabling heat exhaustion. Head to the north of Vietnam in the months between Feb and May, rug up and you will expereince some amazing vistas either visiting tea plantations, climbing mountains in Sapa, kayaking in Ninh Binh or crawling through caves in Cat be National Park: Exploring the national parks could consume your old stay, while enjoying local homestays, with families taking care of you with home cooked meals. Or maybe you'd like the on road expereince of a bike, then get the right advise from people lile Mark Bowyer at Rusty Compass and others who have made

alife doing just that. I hope to have on my show in the next series so he can tell us first hand what its like.

Now for those who are looking for

Shopping - eating - luxury - pampering - relaxing - golf

You might like to check out a shopping and appearing tour I happen to be co hosting next year, 2021 - www.shopeatloveourvietnam.com (This is currently on hold post the pandemic)

Designer shopping is now a thing in Vietnam all you need is to know where to go... I may be able to give you a steer there as I am co hosting a pamper shopping tour next year. Hanoi has the joy factor there and likewise in HCMC with the up and coming designers wanting to make their mark in clothing, gifts and sustainable wares. Eating - Oh god don't get me started on food again, but if I want to relax,..... I am always going to get out of the main cities and head to Danang as the busiest of cities and then to Hoi An for food.

However, in saying that:- Hanoi and HCMC have some sensational places to eat, from street food to rooftop bars, you can get it all. Or you might like to explore the city in HCMC on a dinner cruise, looking back over the city. If you are prepared to pay what you would back home then the food on these dinner cruises is sensational. See my notes for a recommendation.

Pampering is in abundance, 350,000 dong can get you a very nice massage and with a spa centre every 5 metres in Hoi An, it would be my recommendation....to stay.... for a flop and drop stay either,before or after.... some other adventure. At this price, you can afford to have more than one during your stay. Be like me, have one every second day, which is why in another episode I have suggested to stay 5 days in Hoi AN....go home feeling like you have had a holiday.

I mention golf in here, as there is a new trend of golfers coming in small groups and with partners. 5 courses in easy drive from Hoi An.

I brought a group over last year, they tell me the courses are first class and as you can add in the culture and food to the trip, it makes for a great round trip of enjoyment for the golfer and non golfers alike. So in wrapping up this episode,... Please check with the Episode notes for any links mentioned and feel free to contact me anytime. I look forward to paving the way for you to have a magical time in Vietnam as I share more trip planning tips over future episodes ...

Thanks for listening. Bye for now...

Kerry Newsome

What About Vietnam – the Podcast