



What About Vietnam – S4-10 - A Foodie's Paradise – Part Two

SPEAKERS:

Kerry Newsome, Corrin Carlson

Kerry Newsome: 00:18

Xin Chào and welcome to "[What About Vietnam](#)." Sometimes when you travel light with an open mind, and you're not tied down with any commitments that can't be changed, the world can truly open up as your oyster. Let me begin today's program with some background to my guest. It started with a working holiday, I'm told, starting in New Zealand, moved on to Asia, then to Hanoi for a month, then that led to three months and ultimately would you believe to three years. As you will soon find out, this is only the tip of the iceberg for my delightful foodie guest on today's show, Corrin Carlson, who found her heart and passion for food in Hanoi.

01:26

Corrin is a delightful American girl, who is using her acting and education to share her travel journey throughout Asia with her next stop being Europe in September 22, one to definitely watch out for. You may have seen Korean on her very popular "The Fat Passport" [TikTok](#) and [Instagram](#) pages. As she shares her "Plates of Hanoi" with her followers. Her personality and knowledge really shine through in her posts. And I think she does the same in this show. You tell me. While Corrin was visiting her friends and family in the US just recently, I was able to hook up with her to record the show. Being such a wealth of information about the food localities in Hanoi, and some really great experiences, I just knew one episode wasn't going to cut it. So, I've expanded it into a two-part series. That way you get the full picture of some of her great finds, and she certainly got some super-duper tips via stay in Hanoi. Without further ado, let's welcome Corrin to the program.

02:47

This is **part two** of the series talking with Corrin Carlson, please welcome her back to the program. So, Corrin, maybe for everybody. Let's talk about some of those most asked questions. We discussed the question of dog meat before, maybe you could address some of the questions you've been asked about food in Vietnam that just can give everybody some peace of mind.

Corrin Carlson: 03:17

Yeah, absolutely. Something else that I'm frequently asked about is people ask me all the time:

- Have I had food poisoning?
- What's the water like?
- What is safe to eat and what isn't?

I'm really happy to say that pretty much anything that you are going to find is served to you is going to be completely safe to eat. And I understand I might have a stomach of steel at this point. But I have only gotten food poisoning in Vietnam one time, and I have had food poisoning in the US way more than that. So overall food you're going to find is very, very fresh. People go to the market every day to buy their ingredients, both at home and for restaurants. And then also, people are very curious about water and the drinking water in all over Vietnam, but especially in Hanoi.

04:09

So, what you're going to find is that no one drinks tap water. So Vietnamese people and foreigners are all going to drink bottled water. And so, when you're out at the restaurants, when you're in someone's home, even if it's just a little street food restaurant, you'll often find a big tub of bottled water and the dispenser, like you would find in an office in the US or in Australia. And this water dispenser is what everyone drinks out of, and this water is actually quite cheap in comparison to what we think of a bottle of water costing, definitely less than 50 cents for a small bottle and for a big one, maybe \$2. So, it's not expensive to drink good water.

04:53

Sometimes when you're at restaurants, the water that will be in broth or maybe even in tea, sometimes that comes from a tap every once in a while. But we're not really worried about drinking water that's been boiled or consuming broth because it's been boiled and cooked. Typically, there's nothing bad in this anyway, it's just you don't really want to drink it too much, because there might be some metals or calcium in it. It's not that drinking a glass is immediately going to make you sick. For example, we brush our teeth with tap water, that's absolutely not a problem. If you're showering and get a little bit in your mouth, that's absolutely not a problem. Also, then any fresh fruit and vegetables. I don't worry about it so much being peeled or unpeeled, boiled or unspoiled. If it's washed in a sink, it's going to be okay for me to eat.

Kerry Newsome: 05:44

Really good point. I got really close with a chef in Vietnam. One of the things that she pointed out to me was that even when they do cook, they have on standby, in their kitchens, bottled water. So, on most occasions, they are pouring that bottle of water into whatever they're cooking, if they need to add it to a source or they need to add it to make the broths and things like that. So, they are very cognizant of the water situation, but they will use it to wash their dishes. But as she said, likewise, they're very particular about using the sun sometimes to dry the dishes. And of course, anything that has heat to it, that cooks out or burns out any kind of bacteria, or things like that, that people are concerned about.

06:42

I'm the same as you Corrin, I have never got food poisoning. I have had a little bit of an upset tummy when I first arrived. But that's more about the flavors. And I think some of the herbs are much richer than what we would buy in a supermarket. I don't know whether you're the same. But I think that's just the richness out of the food because it is so flavorsome and it hasn't been through all the processes, or whatever that you would find in your typical supermarket in Western countries. So, I just want to warn people out that may be taking something for an upset tummy, diarrhea, tablets, or things like that. It's just handy to have. And if you need it, you need it. If you don't, and you have a cast iron stomach like Corrin does, or seems to have, then you're going to be absolutely fine. Because I don't want people to be put off. I want people to go with the open mind and try things because there's just so much there to try. You be crazy not to, don't you think?

Corrin Carlson: 07:50

Absolutely, I agree. And what you're saying is so right. Sometimes when I go to a place new that I haven't been before with flavors or ingredients I'm not used to, I will bring calcium tablets or like Pepto-Bismol tablets. And I'll take one to two before each meal, at least for the first couple of days when I'm in that transition mode. And then I'm fine after that.

Kerry Newsome: 08:12

Yeah, and I sometimes take a probiotic before I go, just to get all those things right in my tummy because I want to be able to eat everything when I get there.

Corrin Carlson: 08:22

yeah, absolutely. I would love to talk about some of the more sit-down restaurants and higher-end places so that people can have a whole idea of what they can eat when they're there.

Kerry Newsome: 08:39

Yes, please.

Corrin Carlson: 08:40

Awesome. So, a couple places that I really love. I'll put up some options that are both in the Hoàn Kiếm area, and they're also in the Tây Hồ area. Even if you're staying in Hoan Kiem, it is so easy to get a grab or a taxi and take it over to Tây Hồ, it will cost you three to five US dollars for your trips. So, I don't want you to think that you're in one area and you can only eat there. Starting at the Hoàn Kiếm area. Some places that I really like would be, there's this lovely French restaurant owned by a couple. The husband is French, and the wife is Vietnamese, and they have this restaurant called Fabrik. F, A, B, R, I, K, and it's right on the cusp of Hồ Tây and Hoàn Kiếm. Absolutely lovely French food.

09:24

It's not super high-end, but you can certainly walk in there in your street clothes after a day of walking around, but you'll be treated to a wonderful meal for lunch or for dinner, steaks, burgers and typical French cuisine as well as those things. Highly recommend it. Another great spot in Hoàn Kiếm area that I like, it is called The Hanoi Social Club. Again, not high ends and they serve meals from breakfast all the way till the evening, they have a great bar as well, kind of Australian-American food. The owner is Australian. And it's actually in an old villa. So, it's about three or four storeys with these beautiful rooms, lots of antiques. It just looks like quintessential old Hanoi. So, the menu- the owner has traveled a lot. So, he has lots of dishes from around Southeast Asia. And then a couple, like I said, American and Australian style dishes as well, especially for the French foods. So that's a great place to go and just hang out, even if it's just for a drink or for coffee.

10:39

If you like afternoon tea, which is something that I'm such a fan of, you find a couple spots that in Hanoi that do it but the one that is quintessential Hanoi, is that you can go to the Hotel Metropole, the old French hotel that's right in the middle of Hoàn Kiếm, and is a stunning place. I'm not going to compare the afternoon tea to something that you would find per se in England or in France, because the flavors are not quite as perfect as they are there. But the presentation is lovely. And you're out in the pool house, which is covered in palm fronds and it's just a like a slice of history. So that's such a joy to get to do and one I would certainly recommend if that's up your alley.

Kerry Newsome: 11:24

Wow, I've added it to my list but yeah, keep going.

Corrin Carlson: 11:28

Excellent, and as we're moving over to towards the Hồ Tây, the Tây Hồ area, I have a couple of recommendations as well just depending on your vibe. There's this lovely little Vietnamese

restaurant called Chảo Bọn, and the owner is Vietnamese French and he recently moved back to Vietnam and opens this adorable French bistro style restaurant but with a Vietnamese menu. So, you're going to find lots of typical Vietnamese dishes but done in an elevated way. And everything is done to perfection. I'm getting chills just thinking about it right now. [laughter]

Kerry Newsome: 11:32

The food is so good.

Corrin Carlson: 12:07

It's a great date spot. It's great with a small group of friends. For dessert they have an *AMAZING* banana cake that is the owner's mother's recipe that you cannot go without getting you have to have that banana cake. Another place I really like in Hồ Tây is Pépé La Poule, another French name, but it's actually going to be a French Japanese fusion restaurant, and they have actually a really nice tapas menu as well. This restaurant is actually about like five storeys and at the very top, they have an open rooftop bar area with tables that you can make a reservation for. And they have a great Happy Hour with two for one drink and it's right on the lake. And this is a place you can dress up for a little bit if you want. They have Prosecco and they have these great sharing tapas. I think it's a wonderful place to start out you're evening before dinner, or you know what, sometimes I go there and then I just end up spending my whole evening there because it's lovely.

Kerry Newsome: 13:12

Oh, that sounds wonderful.

Corrin Carlson: 13:13

Yes, super good. My last one that I'm going to recommend in the Tây Hồ area is called [KOTO Villa](#). And this is actually a partnership with an Australian organization. And KOTO means '*Know one, Train one*'. So, it's actually a training restaurant.

Kerry Newsome: 13:30

Oh, this is Jimmy Pham. Yeah, I've had Jimmy on the program. [crosstalk]

Corrin Carlson: 13:34

Amazing, okay, so you've heard about this restaurant?

Kerry Newsome: 13:38

I go every time. Yes, it's fabulous.

Corrin Carlson: 13:41

Great food. They just moved this past spring to a new Villa location. So again, you have that historic, beautiful house with beautiful high ceilings and great artwork. The servers are very endearing, often very shy, but it's such a lovely meal. It's great to hear about their stories, too.

Kerry Newsome: 14:03

Yes, it's a social enterprise. So, the staff are actually kids that have had hard lives and opportunities haven't fallen their way. And under the KOTO scheme, they learn to become chefs, and the hospitality industry training gives them new opportunities out there. So, it's a wonderful organization. It has been going on for a very long time. Jimmy Pham has done a wonderful job to steer that for these kids. The restaurant is just a lovely experience always.

Corrin Carlson: 14:40

Yeah.

Kerry Newsome: 14:47

Maybe at this juncture, to maybe just talk about the evening, and rooftop bars now. It is a thing, isn't it? In Hanoi and there are some really lovely ones. Do you have any favorites?

Corrin Carlson: 15:02

Yeah, it definitely is a thing. My favorite is Pépé La Poule, the one that I mentioned, though, that's like a little bit more high-end, though their happy hour is a very good deal. If you walk over, if you're in the Hoàn Kiếm area, there is a street, you can Google it on Google Maps, called Beer Street. It's a street full of basically beer shops with snacks. And often those restaurants, the ones that are tucked back behind the street level, will have rooftop bars. A lot of the hotels around Hoàn Kiếm will have rooftop bars as well. So often when I've had friends come to stay, I've met them at their hotel, and we'll go up to the bar and have a great view and great drinks.

Kerry Newsome: 15:47

Yes, yeah. Sometimes it's worth when you are Googling your accommodation, check out to see whether they have some gallery images, which show and depict the rooftop bars, because sometimes, the stairs, to climb up the top, but they just give you such wonderful views of the lake area and the Old Quarter. So, they are definitely handy if they are in your own hotel, so to speak.

Corrin Carlson: 16:18

Yeah.

Kerry Newsome: 16:19

Do we talk here about Bia Hoi, or we can't not?

Corrin Carlson: 16:30

Yes, we have to. Yes. So, while you are in Hanoi, you are going to see these big signs that say Bia Hoi across them, usually they're red, or they will be yellow, with basically a back of background that looks like beer. And this is something that's really common in Vietnam, but mostly common in the north, it's a big part of the culture there. Beer is a huge part of the drinking culture. In Vietnam, the secondary one would probably be rice wine. So, if you're seeing people around you, taking shots, that's what it's going to be. You can walk into one of these Bia Hoi's, and you can get a pitcher of beer, or you can get bottles of beer, and you can just have that. But also, these places will have full menus, like in the States, you go to a bar and there's a bar menu, and it's like burgers and fries and this and that. When you go to a Bia Hoi, they have all of their typical dishes as well, usually fried tofu, maybe fried chicken, steamed vegetables, sometimes you'll find hotpot at these places.

17:34

What you were saying before is, when you were looking at places and seeing large menus, how that kind of helps you understand the place. Actually, when you go to be Bia Hoi street, you will see huge menus, they will be very, very large. And often these places are very busy so that they can keep most of these items in stock. But when they're not, I don't even worry about it too much. Because there's been times when I've gone to a Bia Hoi, and I've been like,

"Okay, I would like to have this, this and this",

and the waiter will say,

"Well, we're out of that, that, that, but I can give you these instead."

So sometimes you'll see a big menu, you'll be excited about it, and then you have to change your idea about what to order. But you're going to find a lot of things on there that maybe you wouldn't have eaten before, like frogs' legs, snails, it can be a little bit daunting. A lot of the

organs that are eaten, you'll find that on these Bia Hoi menus. So, if you have questions, I always ask the waiter for something safe.

Kerry Newsome: 18:32

Yes, you're right. There's a myriad of different Bia Hoi places, isn't there? Because there's the original Bia Hoi place where they make the brew for the day. And literally, once it's gone, it's gone. It's in plastic, some very small cups, and it's not necessarily cold. They will sometimes give you ice to put in it if you want to. But it's as cheap as chips, isn't it?

Corrin Carlson: 18:33

Yeah, it's like tops 50 cents US a glass. It is very cheap.

Kerry Newsome: 19:10

Yeah, preservative free. It is made with natural ingredients. You drink it pretty much on the day that it's made. So, it's super fresh. But yes, and I'm not sure about the alcohol content. Do you know?

Corrin Carlson: 19:26

It's pretty low. Yeah, it's going to be lighter beer, certainly. And it's not free hoppy at all. I would compare it to whatever standard cheap light beer you have in your own country or your own hometown. That's the equivalent of it, but it does end up kind of adding up, if you're not eating with it.

Kerry Newsome: 19:46

Yeah. Did you come across any craft breweries, craft beer?

Corrin Carlson: 19:53

Yeah, actually, craft breweries are growing right now in Vietnam. Last year, I went, and I visited one of the breweries in Hanoi that makes some of the craft breweries, they come in and make their brews in these breweries and ship them out around the country. So, a couple good ones, you're going to find more in the Tây Hồ area, near West Lake. Two, I can recommend would be [7 Bridges](#). So, there's a pizza place on Xuan Dieu, it is great New York style pizza. And then the beer is not brewed there. It's brewed elsewhere. But they have all of their own beers on tap, and then a wide selection of other craft beers as well. If you want to go to a brewery, also in Tây Hồ, right on the lake, you can go to Turtle Lake Brewery, they have a great food menu as well. And you'll also see the huge casks where they're brewing, and you'll find a number of their own beers on the menu. It's a great place to hang out, and they have wing nights once a week. And they have that information on their [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

Kerry Newsome: 20:53

I just did a show on craft brews and taprooms and things, only published last week, and the 7 Bridges is originally from Da Nang. They have a taproom and bar in Da Nang. I'm glad you mentioned the Turtle Lake, because it's another one that we talked about. And there's a blog on the website for everybody, you can go and check and get a list of the craft breweries and places to visit across all of Vietnam. So, Saigon, Hanoi and Da Nang and Nha Trang. So, it's good that you mentioned that Corrin, terrific.

Now, can we move into fine dining? It's just that the restaurants that we've covered here, or is there another set above these? Because I've been to some really quite fancy places in Hanoi, that I would say were a real cut above.

Corrin Carlson: 22:01

I would say, you can find some really nice steak restaurants. And some of those I've been to around Hanoi, but I personally haven't been to the super classy, fine dining restaurants myself.

Kerry Newsome: 22:15

Okay, we had a special show that we dedicated to 'Fine Dining'. I was quite surprised at some of the really outstanding chefs that are coming through Vietnam and bringing new flavors, that really beautiful Asian fusion, to fine dining in Vietnam. So, I'll make sure that I reference that also in the show notes. I got some serious show notes to do here Corrin, you're really giving me a lot of content.

22:51

All right. Now, can we talk a little bit about cooking classes? Did you go down that route in Hanoi?

Corrin Carlson: 22:58

Yes. And I personally did not take any cooking classes. But I would be happy to talk about a coffee class that I did take.

Kerry Newsome: 23:05

Yeah? Wow!

Corrin Carlson: 23:05

I think it's a really great idea. I love cooking classes, and I love getting to go to them. And no matter what country I'm in, it gives me a greater understanding of the food. But what I find is that, especially when I'm in Asia, taking a cooking class, when I come back to the States, and I'm trying to cook for my family, it does not go well. The ingredients just don't transfer so well. But coffee is something that travels well and is also pretty easy once you know how to make it. It's like a great bang for your buck. And it's also very impressive.

23:37

So, I took a coffee class, and I can send you the name of the woman who runs it. But if you're looking on [Hanoi Beautiful](#), which is a group on Facebook, I definitely recommend for recommendations around Hanoi, things to do, things to eat. If you search in that group 'Coffee Class', you'll find this ad for this coffee making class where they can host it or they can come to you with all of the ingredients. So, this was super fun because Vietnamese coffee is a quintessential part of Vietnamese cuisine. And it's so much fun to learn about. So Vietnamese coffee beans are roasted often with butter, or with some other flavorings that give the richness that you taste in it and made with very, very little water. So, the coffee is much thicker than what we're used to in the States or in Australia.

24:27

Then with that, you could have your classic Vietnamese coffee served on ice, served with condensed milk, but something else I really love is coconut coffee. And this is a fabulous drink that you're going to find in Vietnam. Coconut cream is blended with ice and sweetened condensed milk and then a shot of Vietnamese coffee is poured on top of that. So, a coffee making class is a quick class. It doesn't take up your whole day especially if you're just traveling around Hanoi for a day or two. But it gives you a really good idea about the culture and a good idea about the coffee side of the country because coffee houses and cafes are our meeting places. They're places where people hang out, they are places where families go, we're friends go. So, it will have this class, it will give you a better understanding when you're checking out cafes around the city.

Kerry Newsome: 25:25

Yes. Did you try egg coffee?

Corrin Carlson: 25:28

Yes, of course, you have to go to that, it's quintessential, the original, egg coffee spots in Hoàn Kiếm. It's so famous. And the story is that when the French were in Vietnam, there was a milk shortage. And so, there was a chef in a hotel. And he was trying to figure out what to mix into

the coffee for his French customers when he was out of milk, and he didn't really know what to do. So instead, he whipped up eggs with sweetened condensed milk, and he whipped it and whipped it until it created this frothy cream. And he topped the coffee with that. And now it's a very famous part of Hanoi coffee culture. And it's also something that you can make in these coffee courses as well.

Kerry Newsome: 26:15

Gee, I've never heard that explanation. That's a really good story.

Corrin Carlson: 26:21

Yeah, and when you go into the original spots, in Hoàn Kiếm, they have pictures of the guy who started it, up on the wall, and they have some of his story there too. So that's a great place to check out.

Kerry Newsome: 26:39

Lastly, one of the other things that I found fascinating in my trips to Hanoi, was shopping, and just different kinds of shopping for me and a little bit more boutique. A lot of Korean, a lot of Asian designers and designer boutique shops, etc., especially around the Old Quarter. But just keen to know your experience of shopping, be it that, you're a tourist and then you got to live there. So yeah, any point is on shopping for Hanoi.

Corrin Carlson: 27:17

Yeah, certainly, if you're starting in Hoàn Kiếm, and the touristy areas, as you're circling the lake, that's where you're going to find most of the souvenir shops. You'll also find art shops, clothing stores, a lot of silk shops where you can buy silk items or have things made. And that's all really fun to do. But, again, a little bit more touristy. If you're going to travel over to the West Lake area, if you're going to be in Tây Hồ, you can go down Xuan Dieu where there's lots of restaurants and things, but you'll find lots of boutiques on that area as well. Personally, I like shopping for locally made clothes in that area because they are often tailored to fit Western body frames, rather than sometimes walking around Hoàn Kiếm, trying to find clothes that fit is a little bit difficult.

Kerry Newsome: 28:06

Challenging.

Corrin Carlson: 28:06

Yes, I would definitely recommend looking around there. And especially recently, there's lots of very cute boutiques popping up that will be owned by Vietnamese people or by foreigners, with locally made clothes and household items, like makeup and fun haircare and skincare products and jewelry as well.

Kerry Newsome: 28:29

Yes, and I've been to some of those boutiques. There's a famous one. Have you been to [Chula](#)?

Corrin Carlson: 28:36

No, I haven't been there.

Kerry Newsome: 28:38

Yeah, it's a beautiful store. And I think she's got a couple of- but she originally came to Vietnam and started up this design, but they employ local Vietnamese people who are part of the design process, and these people might have some handicap of some degree. I think 75% of their staff are, but their designs, literally feature on some of the famous catwalks around the world. So, her brand is quite strong. So maybe that's one I can share with you for your next visit. So, Chula, C, H, U, L, A. I'll put the links to their stores. Beautiful silk dresses, stunning designs

quite famous. And their store is- I think their main one is near West Lake, that's where I saw it.

29:44

Just wanting to finish off with 'best time of the year to visit'. I mean you mentioned and you're right, that they do have four seasons in the north. So, very clear Summer, Winter, Autumn, Spring. But when would you say is that a really good time of year to visit Hanoi so that you can visit a lot of places and do a lot of things?

Corrin Carlson: 30:07

Yes, whenever anyone asked me this, I say November, hands down, that is the best.

Kerry Newsome: 30:11

November. Interesting, okay.

Corrin Carlson: 30:14

So, in the north, and really in the whole country, monsoon season, rainy season is late summer, early fall. So, it starts sometime in August, and then it extends to sometime in October, and it stops in October, then you have beautiful weather, but this past October, it rains literally every single day in Hanoi. So, I don't recommend risking October, instead, November is very, very pleasant. Temperature is going to be still warm. Like as a tourist, you'll probably be walking around in shorts, but everyone else will probably be walking around in pants, because it's a little bit cooler for them. But nice and dry, and also not so sticky. So, it's a great time of year if you want to be walking around and seeing a lot of temples, and a lot of the street life of Hanoi.

Kerry Newsome: 31:06

I didn't think about November as a best time. But now, the way you speak about it, it is a very good time. I have been in the winter. And it's been freezing. And that was a bit of a shock to my system. I thought, hang on a minute here. I mean, Vietnam is not supposed to be cold, is it? But guess what? In the north, it's definitely cold. So, something to be aware of for everyone, that there are months of the year where it does get very cold. And if you go up into the mountain areas in particular, you can get- over January. You can get snow in Sapa.

Corrin Carlson: 31:42

Of course.

Kerry Newsome: 31:43

Crazy. Hey, look, Corrin, really grateful to have you on the show. You've given everybody some great tips, great food. Just a big thank you for being on the show.

Corrin Carlson: 31:56

Yeah, it's my pleasure. I'm so happy to talk about this city that I love. And I hope I inspire people to go and also to eat some great food when they're there.

Kerry Newsome: 32:05

Absolutely. All right. Thanks again.

Corrin Carlson: 32:08

Yeah, have a great day.

Kerry Newsome: 32:10

Before we let you go, I thought I would introduce you to a new [Cooking Class and Market Tour](#) that's now featuring on the [WhatAboutVietnam.com](#) website. It's based in Hanoi. So, after we've been chatting about Hanoi and some of the great foodie experiences, I thought this was

a great one to remind you about. What's wonderful about this is, the class is with Chef Duyen. I've done the class with her she's absolutely fabulous, great personality, what she doesn't know about cooking our food, the markets will just blow you away. What's exceptional about this tour and the opportunity to learn from her is that she brings her class now into her own home. So, you get to meet her family. You get to just hear about how food is a big part of Vietnamese culture, their family life and social upbringing. You should try all kinds of cooking classes in Vietnam, but I hope you're going to enjoy this one in Hanoi with the Chef Duyen. Please check it out in WhatAboutVietnam.com, on the Offers [page](#). Until next time, I wish you happy travels in Vietnam.