



What About Vietnam - Series 2 - 16

[Chill out in Vietnam's most liveable city, Danang.](#)

Kerry: Xin Chao, and welcome to What About Vietnam

It's 2021 people. Hooray, we're here, we've made it. I'm so delighted to be in this New Year. It gives me such a great feeling to be entering a new year with lots of new possibilities, because let's face it, folks, 2020 was not one of the best ones.

Look, I have a real passion about this series, getting to talk to some wonderful travellers learning some information about experiences that you can have in places in Vietnam that sometimes are a little bit off the beaten track.

Sometimes they are giving you insights to just things you're not going to get in your average guidebook, you're going to meet some great people and learn some great things about things to do in Vietnam.

Today, we're talking to Jonathan Kiely, and we're going to learn a little bit more about Danang. Now, Danang traditionally has been a bit of I don't know, an in and out kind of place. But in more recent times, it's certainly become a bit of a hotspot and Jonathan's going to enlighten us to just a little bit about the, I guess community aspect about it, some great things to do.

And you know, just a wake up to what's available into Danang. Let's say hello to Jonathan, tell us a little bit about the community aspect, that's kind of warmed your heart.

Jonathan: Yeah, of course, the community is probably being I would say hands down one of the reasons I'm still here.

And you know, the reasons I'm so happy to be here and to like live here for God knows how long, but what was really attractive to me about this place is this, this health and wellness community, if you type events in Danang today, for example, you have at least 10 to 15 different events, like whether it's a vegan event, whether it's yoga, whether it's like animal flow, just whatever random, just health and well-being events, and this, it's a very Yin kind of place.

So, in terms of like, the western world where I was living, you know, to lots of doing, doing, doing, but when you come to Danang of course it has the city, but with the beach and all these place, it's a kind of relaxed place, it's a place to kind of like, carry yourself

find out who you are, you know, be creative, try new things and share it with other people. And I think when you're around a community like that it's really special.

So, I guess, for me, one of the best communities that I've found here was last year, it was just before the New Year, and there was this program called the "Happiness program". So, I was like okay, interesting. I was like, and I'm doing coaching and I love to help people remain happy, especially during these tough times. So, I said, let's try it out and I go to this course. And it is absolutely breath-taking, we ended up doing like breath-work learning, just knowledge about life and connecting again to people. It was the same experience as I experienced in Thailand when I left my country and just people who want to like to connect deeper and head like general just on a surface level, you want to go deep and connect with your heart with other people. And during a time in the world, we are right now, I think this is what people need, is what people want.

And this happiness program has changed my life and many of my friends who have joined it and the community that we have here, you know, once a week we'll meet & we do some breath-work. Then on Thursdays we meet we have like this jam session, meditation and sharing of Indian food, which is magnificent. Thank you to the volunteers who hosted it and who gave up their lives to come here and help us and basically, I think a lot of people will get here like I did, and I can't say enough about this place and how it's been so beneficial in making a beautiful community here in Danang.

Kerry: I think I might know one of the volunteers that work at that happiness program. So, yes, I have heard amazing things about it. And like people would not normally think of going to Vietnam, going to a place like Danang and even contemplate thinking about a wellness or a happiness program to go and do. But as you say, as a different experience to keep your mind open to explore your own creativity, to chill out, to relax, it's probably an ideal thing to do. I mean, I maybe should do it myself, next time I go there.

Jonathan: Yes.

Kerry: Okay, moving on. I want to talk just a little bit now that you've been living there and getting out and about, like is it expensive to live, or drink, get around that sort of thing? Talk to us about that.

Jonathan: Yeah, honestly, is it expensive to live really, I would say NO, because it depends what you want, you know, and I've experienced like I've eaten in some of the really nice restaurants, upscale restaurants to like some of the most local restaurants. And, again, for me, it's about, you the atmosphere, the friendliness of the people who work there, and the taste and quality of the food. And everywhere I eaten in these places, it's always been a beautiful experience.

Because, it's just being with the Vietnamese, you know they're so friendly, they're so open, they want to learn about you, they're interested in your ways, you know, I have been to other countries.

And maybe, sometimes you don't get that kind of safety, kind of friendly environment. So, in terms of eating in Danang, like most people would eat out often because like you can have a simple Cau Lau dish, for in my country it be like maybe one to \$2 you know, and you get your nice salad and things like that. And again, then we have like, if you're looking for more like a western kind of restaurant, there's a beautiful restaurant here in Danang called Roots. And it's a lot of people when they come to the name they stop here and it's all like, fresh quality food like you can get your coke drink, smoothie bowl, and your coffee, and then you have your like, cashew butter toast on charcoal bread. And that works out at about four euros. So, like, when you compare that to back home, you know where I live anyway, you definitely spending more for that. Yeah, it's very affordable to live in Vietnam to live well and to, you know, keep on exploring your passions and get what you need to get done while having fun in a stress-free environment, you know.

Kerry: Do you have a favorite coffee shop?

Jonathan: A favorite coffee shop, well that's a good question. My favorite coffee shop is actually one that I recently found, and it's directly across, if I'm being honest, from probably my favorite restaurant. So, my favorite restaurant here, so the thing with Vietnam and its beautiful benefit has been predominantly plant based now. So, what that is like vegetarian, vegan food for those of you that don't know it and there's a post called Loving Vegan, and over there, they have just all the local dishes. But they've kind of westernized in a small bit and it's in English and the staffs speak really good English. And there are just some of the most amazing Vietnamese food I've had there.

So, then across from that, there's this beautiful coffee shop. And the guy there he also holds Vietnamese lessons for English foreigners, and they have like a group thing going on there and it's called Hosting Cafe. And it's just really simple Vietnamese Americano, or Vietnamese coffee, Cafe Den that's what they call it here. And they have, like lots of different ones. You know, if you're someone who has a sweet tea, you can get the cappuccino or things like that, but they really have everything you need. And they go beyond to serve you and give you a good experience while you enjoy your coffee looking out into the street.

Kerry: And so, have you ventured kind of around Danang, maybe up Hai Van pass, Son Tra, can you tell us any of your experiences around those areas?

Jonathan: Yes, so the first day I came to the Danang we went up to this place called Son Tra, which is basically a jungle road, once you leave the beach, you go up the hill, maybe 10, 15 minutes and you're in the jungle. So, imagine that like you're in the city beside the beach, but then a 10-minute drive and you're just in the jungle in nature completely away from the city and just completely immersed with the animals and the flowers and everything, whatever is there.

Kerry: And the monkeys.

Jonathan: The monkeys yes, the monkeys everywhere and the fresh air is amazing. So, once you get up there, you know, there's so many different places you can just leave your bike and first of all you have like Lady Buddha, which is this huge statue that's there with all these temples and Pagodas. And many people go, you can go praying, you can meditate or even just look, the energy that's there is just so peaceful and calming.

You know, sometimes even for myself, I would just go there on a Sunday morning just to chill out before the week ahead and it's really beautiful. And then if you continue to go up there is just some of the most spectacular scenery, you get up to the, side of the mountain, and then you can look down onto Danang from, you know, up in this sunshine, this forest jungle. And again, you've all these little random cosy, nice coffee shops where you meet real local people there, again, just out there to help you and offer you food or if you want to go to a nice secret location, they will help you out. And it's just so authentic and beautiful.

Kerry: Yeah, and some of those places, not a lot of people know about certainly Son Tra as is only really just kind of snuck out and snuck into the guidebooks etc.

But I was fascinated, because it's also, I think, an ex-military base, as well. And I think, because there's lots of closed gates and you know, like serious looking military people that don't let you in in some of those places. But great food, as you say, restaurants with little red chairs, but food like the seafood is just to die for I've had some amazing meals on the on the beaches around those places.

There's a few lovely hotels, I know the Intercontinental is there. Not that I could afford that any time soon, but it is spectacular. And then there's a couple of kind of smaller ones, etc. And I can put some links to those in the Episode Notes.

Look, tell us you know, like you've obviously done some traveling your time and you obviously have you favorite chill out places. I mean, how would you rate Danang? Is it one to note, what your favorite chill out place or is Danang, you chill out place now. I mean, Thailand's got a lot, you know, Philippines, Bali, like where does Danang fit into that realm?

Jonathan: Yeah, so like, since I've been a teen, I would have always been intrigued by travel. So, I have been to a lot of places in Europe, and most recently around Southeast Asia. And honestly, I can say yes, like, if I'm to ask myself that question right now, I would say, the best place that I have been to, and the best place that I have talk... because I like to ask this question to many people as well to come here.

And some of the people who have travelled even more than I would agree that like Danang is like one of the most special places. Honestly, I would give it a 10 there's nothing like I can't knock it for any reason. Like between fun and community and traveling you know, hopping on your bike and just going for a journey and finding something beautiful every day.

And the way they handle COVID like the safety of this place, you know like never once ever felt, you know, uncomfortable or something might happen, it's just a real safe, friendly place. And of course, the people, as I've mentioned already, the people smiling all the time, you can't help it.

Kerry: All the time I know, and I tried to say to people when I go to Vietnam, always when I come home, I just noticed that big shift in energy. As soon as I get off the plane, and I land in my country, and I love my country, don't get me wrong, but the shift in energy is just. In Vietnam, everything seems easier, doesn't it? Like people, you know, it's easier to smile, it's easier to help somebody, it's easy to welcome you. They are so giving, it's just an energy, if I could put it in a jar and bring it home I would for every person I love but it's just hard to explain and you sound sometimes like a bit of a tossed

when you talk about it like that, because they will think oh, you know, she's just talking it up and I go, oh, look, you got to go experience it yourself, am I right?

Jonathan: Oh, 100% like again and when I was even in Hoi An and I always hear people go and say yeah, it's really cool place, you got to check it out. And, again, I would hear people talk about it, but it's until you go to these things and experience it yourself, that's when you find out the magic of this place.

Kerry: Okay, so give me three things, just limit it to three, three things that you love to do in Danang? Just let's kind of finish on that so that I can walk away and go, okay they are his favourite three.

Jonathan: Well, that is a tough question, because limiting to three things is hard. But okay, let me be as honest as I can and try to put this to three.

The first thing I would say that I really, really enjoy here and most of the people enjoy is being able to SURF. So, I had no idea that when you go to Asia, back when I arrived in Danang I see waves, and I see big waves. Right now, there's some good swells here. And just being able to rent abroad and go for a surf in Asia and the beautiful weather like this, it's one of my favourite things to do. And I like to do it anytime, you know, the big swells with all my friends. Yeah, that would be my number one thing.

Number two - would be like going to, for example, like meeting up with your group of friends, getting on your bike, and just traveling up to the lakes of Son Tra, Hai Van pass, bringing a camping tent, some gear, some food, some whatever you want, and lighting a big fire and just hanging out with your mates in the middle of nowhere looking out to the sea, in the middle of nature. Yeah, it's one of the best things that I've done here, for sure.

And the third on - , or the last one, I would say possibly, yeah, I've been very lucky for the first time in Danang, I met these amazing people here. And we set up a men's circle here, and we meet on a weekly basis, and we meet in different locations around Danang. So, we'll go up into Son Tra and meet beside the river and look down unto Danang, we'll meet in some nice restaurants and meet up there. And that's been one of the best things I've done in my life so far. Because yeah, just being able to connect and being vulnerable with other guys, it's something that I needed big time coming from Ireland. And it has really, really changed my life. So, yeah that's been beautiful as well.

Kerry: So, Jonathan, just to clarify, so that's like a men's only group.

Jonathan: Yes, basically it's a men's circuit where we meet up once a week. And we've been doing this every week for a year and a half. And yeah, throughout all the ups and downs of the last 2020 has been very, very special. And yeah, we're also like helping create more of those groups in Danang for other guys that want to.

Kerry: To join.

Jonathan: Yeah, to join.

Kerry: That's exceptional, well; I'm going to make sure that I put your Facebook page and your Instagram page, because I know you do your coaching thing. I'll put that in the Episode Notes for everybody.

Look, it's been great to talk to you, I've learned more about Danang, I certainly knew the community side of it, but not to the level that you talk about and it's great to know that it's great to know that Danang has got that depth to it, that it's not just a city with mad bicycles and people running around crazy. It's got a heart and a soul and that that's really important. Thank you for coming on the program, Jonathan. And I look forward to talking to you again soon.

Jonathan: Kerry, thank you so much. And I really appreciate you having me on and have a wonderful day.

Kerry: Thank you so much, Jonathan, for being on the program. Boy, you've certainly opened my eyes to Danang. I mean, whilst I have visited, you know, quite a few times. Just to find out a little bit more about that community aspect, I found that really interesting and, you know, let's be reminded that you can surf there like that's probably something we don't say loud enough.

I mean, surfing in the Southeast Asia is not that common, as you say. Lovely to have you on the program. Folks, I've put all of the links from Jonathan and that he's mentioned in today's program. Please rate the program anytime you can it's so much appreciated and pop in a review, I'd love to know your thoughts. You can find me at what about vietnam.com and you can also find me on my Facebook page what about Vietnam. Look forward to talking to you again with some great stories from our travellers in Vietnam.