



What About Vietnam - S2-22 - Visit Danang and see monkeys in the wild at the Son Tra Nature Reserve

Kerry Newsome: [00:00:01] Hello Thanh, how are you?

Thanh : [00:00:57] Hello, Kerry, and your lovely audience. I am really well, thank you.

Kerry Newsome: [00:01:06] Ok, that is great to hear, Thanh. Now tell us something about the Son Tra Nature Education Centre and the Son Tra Nature Reserve. What can you tell us?

Thanh : [00:01:36] I believe that a lot of you have visited now the most liveable city in Vietnam. And when you are looking down to the city from the airport, you have you see something green coming up from the water and you can feel curious later on.

Thanh : [00:01:54] Upon arrival, you will see that green, lush plantation almost wherever you are in the city.

[00:02:04] Son Tra Nature Reserve was established in nineteen seventy seven and the Son Tra Peninsula used to be an isolated island before 15th century. But thanks to the accumulation of silt from rivers, the only way from the city to the peninsula has gradually formed. The size of the peninsula isn't big is four thousand three hundred and seventy hectares.

[00:02:47] And can you believe that it plays a significant role in local life? First of all, it is the frontier protecting the city from storm which come from the ocean. Secondly, it can provide oxygen for four million people, not only one million population of Danang and the people who live here or come for a visit. They can see the nature and ten minute, which is incredible. If you travel to the other places in Vietnam, that is not feasible because in Hanoi or HCMC the main city, the traffic is terrible and even the other locations are pretty far away in the remote parts.

[00:03:56] So in nature reserve is such a precious gem of the city and everybody here is blessed. Can you believe that they see the blue sky every day and fresh air is just a pleasant life experience.

[00:04:29] Unfortunately, the reserve has been threatened by human activities such as illegal hunting and poaching. But the more serious issue is the building of resorts and hotels or mass tourism development.

[00:04:53] And it was the reason why Greenviet, a local non profit organization, decided to establish St. Charles Asia Education Center in 2018 and through founders believed that education will have to save the situation before it becomes too late.

[00:05:24] And our main visitors are students or university students because they are willing to make changes. Otherwise, they are either fearful or too old to make any changes.

[00:05:51] The Nature Education Centre is spacious because. It was built on a rental space in the Sunshine District is the last available, not fully occupied neighbourhood in the city. So the housing price is insanely expensive. Can you believe the housing price is about, two fifty thousand US dollar for one hundred square meter, and it is covid price, it used to be higher. Yeah. So Greenviet doesn't have the money to buy a place.

They built a temporary education center with the hope that the city council would appreciate their effort and issue a better location. Unfortunately, since it was established in 2018, our voice hasn't been heard and we have struggled a lot, especially since the Covid outbreak has stopped us from welcoming visitors and donors. Yeah.

Kerry Newsome: [00:07:28] Just let me interject here just to give perspective for our listeners. So the reserve is located just a little bit out of Danang, isn't it? About 10 kilometers, maybe five to 10 kilometers.

[00:07:53] Kerry, the peninsula is located in the north east of the north, and if someone stays in the city center or an expat neighborhood, the traveling distance would be from 7 to 10 km, but it takes them only 15 or 20 minutes to get there.

Kerry Newsome: [00:08:24] Yes. Yes. So it's very close, as you say, and beautiful and green and lush. So for a new visitor, as you say, they arrive into Danang airport. What would you suggest for a new visitor if they would like to come and visit this area?

Thanh: [00:08:51] I want to tell you a thing, everybody can rent a scooter, a manual bike and do an exploration by himself, but he is kindly requested to pay us a visit so that he can learn about the biodiversity and what should he do or shouldn't do when he is doing his trip. Because I'm in the peninsula is home of more than one thousand three hundred individuals of restaurant langurs, the queen of Primate's.

[00:09:44] If he follows our guidance, he will have the opportunity to see them in the wild. And the other monkeys. Yeah, red langurs, early feeding monkeys. They are so beautiful that they were considered the queen of primates.

[00:10:10] So there are more than seven hundred kinds of primates around the world, rushing to the Langurs as they are the most beautiful ones. And therefore it's called the Queen. The Primate. And another name can sound funny, which is the pop monkey.

[00:10:35] The five color four refers to the pop's coat, or we have named them the Soldier Monkey because their front head looks like those soldiers hat. Yeah.

Kerry Newsome [00:11:00] Interesting.

[00:11:01] Yes. Yes, absolutely. So tell us, some of the things a visitor should know before they go into that area like so that they are respectful of the reserve.

Thanh: [00:11:18] Uh, first of all, if they want to do a trip on their own, a motorbike is a good option because if they drive around in a day, 90 km can take them a few hours already. Right. And imagine if they walk 90 kilometres, it will take forever.

The good motorbike should be equipped with a good brake and gear. Do not forget to fuel the tank or check your tires, because once you go up there, you won't see a petrol station or a mechanic shop. I myself once had to push the bike for several kilometres. Yeah, it wasn't so warm. And so they should, they should choose the proper outfits. Green or dark colours are really good because they make the large animals less afraid of strangers. Walking shoes, sandals, sneakers are much better than flip flops or high heels. Come on, you don't want to take selfie pictures there because it doesn't matter how much effort you put in.

[00:13:05] The nature is just beautiful, breathtaking, and you feel speechless. So if you try to spend time or taking selfie pictures. I highly recommend you to take pictures of the magnificent flora and fauna species which you should learn about before going so.

Kerry Newsome: [00:13:45] So let me jump in here. So do you suggest. The person go to the education center first, yeah, and then go to the reserves, so they go in with better understanding of what to look for in the flora and fauna.

Thanh: [00:14:03] Mhm. Yeah. Because my centre does organize several excursions upon requests, but we are busy doing researches and arranging meaningful activities for the society.

[00:14:24] So some people may not know about us before coming and they won't be able to join our trips so they can go to the center, gain the better understanding and then explore on their own.

[00:14:46] We will always give them several survival tips like;- do not feed the life of animals, do not stare at the macaques or some kind of safety instruction, you know, not driving fast and furious. You are not in the movie. You want to come back home in one piece. You know, this is an alarm.

[00:15:22] So you have to put your hands on the gears firmly and stay focused. I mean, we really hope that the visitors will spread information about the peninsula more and more people. So, you know, one person can teach others.

Kerry Newsome: I get it. So are the monkeys friendly?

[00:16:02] Or do you need to be careful around the monkeys?

Thanh: [00:16:07] So in southern China, there are several other kinds of parks and recreation, duck, langurs, lush vegetation. So they are nice and kind. They are usually camera shy. So when we see them, we should keep a distance so that they won't run away from us.

[00:16:40] We want to take great pictures of their shining coat, the adorable families or their interesting daily life activities. They will be cautious. The fathers make some noises to his family, like, oh, some strangers around, everybody watch out.

[00:17:13] But as long as we hold our camera or take pictures with our phones and we don't show any harmful gestures, then we are OK. They can give us several minutes and they leave or some will like us and stay with us for a while by the time we are safe with our friend. OK, Langurs.

The attacks, on the other hand, should get some of your attention. Macaques are very smart, but you can think about them as the witches. They like to take your belongings, they wait for your food or they want to scare you. They can scare you to death? Yeah.

There are two kinds of macaques, the wild ones and the ones which used to be pets. So the wild ones are really protective. They see you coming and they will make the loud, alarming sound and she will want up play along. They think you are ready to fight back and they call the other members of the flocks and come and start the fight. Or if they see you pulling something out of your pocket, they think that, aha, you are prepared and they like to take your belongings first. You know, like now you are not armed and you cannot cause any harm to them.

The second kind which used to be pets, they would be the pain in your neck because they lose the ability to find food on their own. They would rather gather along the main road, especially the parts in front of Intercontinental Hotel. They make the drivers sit on a lot of nerve. The drivers do not want to hit and run away. Right. But it can be unavoidable in certain circumstances. And can you believe you lock the car, you lock your bike and you stand on the pavement, take pictures of flowers and the landscape.

And when you come back, they sit on your bikes or under your car looking at you like trick or treat, you know, like give me food or I'm not gonna leave!

Kerry Newsome: [00:20:45] How do they attack you? Are they vicious?

[00:20:51] Yeah, especially if they see you carrying some food and not willing to give them in their country. And also in India, China, Thailand, Macacs have cost tremendous problems.

Everybody love the cute babies and they think, oh, I just want to do him a favour. I cannot resist this cuteness and people have changed their natural instinctive behaviors. Instead of trying to find the food and feeding themselves in the life they have become “sport pets”. You know, in the life market, a baby monkey is asking for one thousand five hundred US dollar, but the owner only wants to keep him for a few months or maybe a year or two later on. The baby monkey grows up and loses the cuteness. He will start to expose the wild characteristics, you know, cranky, fighting or wrecking family. You don't want to have something sitting in your house, right? So the owners will take them back to the forest and say, off you go, let them go.

[00:22:44] That time, you know, they have no skill and they have no skills needed to survive. And it is crazy.

[00:22:57] But for a tourist, I'm thinking, gee, I'm not sure where I would feel comfortable going there knowing that as you call them, the MACKA could possibly attack me or put me in a position that I was frightened.

Kerry Newsome: [00:23:21] So how do you protect yourself from that?

Thanh: [00:23:24] Oh, honestly, I would give people advices regarding on which time frame would work.

[00:23:38] For example, tell us that if you want to go to Lady Buddha or Intercontinental Hotel and the adjacent areas, you should definitely avoid the late afternoon show from three pm. The local people would love to visit the mansion places because the breeze, the sun, everything is just perfect. And the local people have been blinded by their emotion. They do not care about the warning signs. They carry the food and they even make fun of the macaques. So from three p.m. and onwards, you see my car sitting on the road fighting for food and local visitors are laughing ridiculously.

[00:24:46] And I would recommend visitors, foreign visitors to check out those places earlier in the day. And of course, I will be willing to share with you the few map roads you can drive up there and see the last known part of the peninsula where you will be able to see the wild macaques. But keep in mind, there are safety instruction because it's not pleasant being bothered by many shouting noise, you know?

[00:25:32] Oh, I'm taking picture.... of why are you trying to make me go away. Please understand that we are intruders. We invade their privacy.

[00:25:47] But yes, if they get mad at us, we should feel like it's a part of the experience.

Kerry Newsome: [00:25:58] Yes, I know I have been to Son Tra a couple of times, but more to the area where they are developing some small areas where resorts and beautiful beaches and things. And I've also been to the top of the hill, which has got an amazing view of the city and the coastline. But I had been warned about the monkeys in the in the forest. And when I went to visit Lady Buddha, my friend who took me on a motorbike, she said, we go early, very early in the morning so that we will avoid most of the harassment of the monkeys that you mention.

And we still get the sunrise so that we can capture the beautiful photography, which we did. And it was an amazing experience for me. I just loved it. But it's good to know from you just a little bit more about the aspect of it being a nature reserve that we need to protect. We need to protect the plant species and the animal species that is their home. It is what is their land, their space and their part of the planet. So, as you say, we are the intruder. So we need to be aware of this. And something I want for the people listening is to still have a look at the options available to visit this area, get a better understanding from your education centre.

[00:27:47] I'm going to put all the links in the episode notes that people can jump on and find out more information and then people can use that as a bit of a guide. I want people to go there with some having done some research into this area because it's still worth going. But go into it with your eyes wide open and with some knowledge to make the visit pleasant as possible. Keeping in mind that there is some elements that may not be always easy to manage. Which you have really done well to explain to us that, you know, being mindful of food and the precarious nature of some of these monkeys is not always they tease you and they screech and they can be a menace to you in your experience.

The red necked monkeys, they are a little bit different in their nature. And we need to be respectful of that. As you say, talking about taking selfies. Yeah, we want to try to minimize the selfies and take more of the flora and fauna and the area as such and hopefully some beautiful vistas and views.

Kerry Newsome:[00:29:19] Just to finish up.

[00:29:22] I want to just cover off if we can, what a visitor or a person that has an interest in this area in biodiversity and would like to support Green, what can they do to help support this, your organization.

Thank: [00:29:45] Kerry, that is so nice of you. Of course, my NGO needs a lot of that. And as I mentioned earlier, being a non-profit organization is not easy. So the founders of the NGO have always done our consulting work or extra words so that they can sustain the NGO and do the good things for the peninsular and the local people. We need to protect the primates, including the Clangers and the macaques, because they are considered our ancestors. Let's say the restaurant at languorously they share 98 percent of 80 and similar to with human and the premise they have family structures, they have the similar eyes to us. We caught monocular eyes that can observe different colors and they are really smart. Thanks to the big brains. They take care of each other. They use tools. I mean, there's so much for us to learn from them. They play another role in pollination. Or can you believe that a kidney of Russia's mopac, one species in southern China can be extracted for a few hundred kinds of vaccines that save people's life? So we need to protect them because if they are gone, they are gone forever.

[00:31:54] And it's really sad that in the past my country suffered poverty and hunger. People would eat everything. Nowadays, the situation is not the same. But people are using wild animal products, including primates, medicines and makeup, whatever you can name into my NGO founders think that is unfair for the environment. Why the animals have to suffer. They have the right to live their life as we do so they have to try enormously to code for the participation of local people and foreigners.

So we need to protect the peninsula. We don't want hotels and resort to be built there because where the sewage will go, how the trash will be handled and if someone is capable of. Controlling the place, we won't be able to go there without paying a fee, you should relate to Ba Na Hills Hills like once upon a time you could go to the nature reserve there. But nowadays you have to pay for the US dollar for a cable car ticket. And it is compulsory. We want to save the place for everybody for this generation and the future to come.

[00:33:55] So the most important message would be as individuals or groups, please. Stop taking the peninsula for granted. Primates are not our pets, not our meals or medication. For example, we always need volunteers to help us with giving lectures in English lessons for all ages and our translating documents. Or you can make donations so that you can join us in this long and tiring journey.

Kerry Newsome: [00:34:54] Ok, I. I know you have a busy day ahead of you, so we will finish up now.

[00:35:01] I just want to say thank you very much. I will put the links to the education centre in the episode notes. And of course, we will share this, so one person or another person will share with another person, hopefully. I hope that you have been able to learn a little bit more about this area, as I have. And I think going into it with your eyes wide open is the best way to do it so that you can have a very pleasant experience of this beautiful area. Thanks, Thank.

Thanh: [00:35:39] Oh, it is my honor. And I really hope that I will be able to welcome you. Together, we can make the place become better and well protected.

Kerry Newsome: [00:36:04] Thanks, Thank