



What About Vietnam S4-3 –Vietnam Travel Outlook 2022/23

Interview with Conor Kelly & Kerry Newsome (Podswap) – ComebaCK Podcast #317

Kerry Newsome

: [00:00:01] Xin Chau and welcome to the What About Vietnam podcast. Today we have a bonus edition. I'm calling it a bonus because I get to sit on the other side of the microphone with Conor Kelly.

This is a wonderfully executed interview by Conor Kelly as he is the host of his own podcast called The [Comeback](#). And it's a great podcast where he talks to all kinds of people associated with Vietnam. And I think he's done like nearly, I don't know, 300 or something interviews. So he's really in their boots and all in podcasting in Vietnam.

In the interview with me, he took the opportunity to ask some probing questions about my personal background to Vietnam. We discussed some of the things that I think will impact on tourism in the coming months, towards the end of 2022, and how I see things shaping up into 2023. I'm very, very appreciative of this opportunity. I think it's going to give you some insights into just how I'm tracking Vietnam and how I see it, you know, really coming back into vogue for travellers in the future. My thanks to Conor again as it was really great to sit on the other side of the microphone just for this once. Please enjoy. Stay tuned and we'll bring you the show.

Conor Kelly

: [00:01:34] Hello and welcome back to the **Comeback Podcast**. As usual, I am your host, Conor, and today I am delighted to welcome - What about Vietnam's - Kerry Newsome currently based in Australia, where we are going to talk about life in Vietnam.

"What about Vietnam" and more of what Vietnam has to offer going forward? I'm looking forward to this one. How are you? Kerry Welcome.

Kerry Newsome

: [00:01:58] Thanks very much, Conor. I'm really looking forward to the show, especially being on this side of the fence rather than on the other as per normal.

Conor Kelly

: [00:02:06] Yeah, it's quite weird, isn't it, when you get interviewed and you think, Oh, I'm not directing the conversation here, it almost feels slightly, I don't know, slightly odd. I'm still adjusting to it myself when I go on the other side.

Kerry Newsome

: [00:02:18] Yeah, well, you know, give me a score at the end and let me know how I go.

Conor Kelly

: [00:02:23] I'm sure it'll be great. I'm sure it'll be great. You get nine so far. What is your relationship with Vietnam? Kerry Just to get a brief overview, when did you first come to Vietnam?

Kerry Newsome

: [00:02:34] Okay. So I came in 2007 and I was part of like one of the very early kind of travellers to Vietnam. In fact, people my family and friends said, Gosh, you're going to Vietnam. Like I was going to some war zone still, you know. So I was a real pioneer. But there was a lady called Maeve O'Meara, and she was running tours to Vietnam food tours in particular because she ran a show called Food Safaris. You might have seen it or heard of it, and yes, so I went with that. And that was just your typical top to bottom, start in Hanoi, finish in Ho Chi Minh City kind of story. But I just fell in love with it. It just got to me.

Conor Kelly

: [00:03:24] Yeah, I see. And I love the fact you've mentioned that back in, say, 2007, there would be the connotation of Vietnam as this completely random location or a war zone, because I feel like back then and you can obviously clarify, it's absolutely nothing like this vibrant, cosmopolitan place, especially Saigon, that we see currently.

Kerry Newsome

: [00:03:45] Oh, absolutely. In fact, I can give you an example. In the in the city of Hoi An there is the tube on river that runs through the main town. Well, the the other side of the river there was just shanties. There was there was no restaurants, there was no night markets, there was no hotels, there was nothing. There was just like I felt like, why do they have a bridge? Because it actually goes nowhere and there's nothing there. Of course, that's changed dramatically as there is a whole new life over the other side of the bridge. And it's just a totally different old town now.

Conor Kelly

: [00:04:27] Yeah, and I've almost got two questions in one. The first one I'll ask and then I'll move to the second. The first being, what exactly was it about Vietnam that made you fall in love with it?

Kerry Newsome

: [00:04:40] Look, a couple of things happened for me during that first trip. I met an Australian expat and she was starting up or in the very early stages of a charity or an NGO in Vietnam looking to assist or sponsor young girls in their education in Vietnam. And her name is **Linda Burn** and the foundation is called the [Children's Education Foundation](#). I just 'jelled' with her and because she was Australian, there was just so much she could sort of relate to me so that I could kind of better understand and see it and see Vietnam through her eyes. So she was kind of pointing things out to me that that just helped with a little bit of relativity. So, you know, meeting expats over, over there was kind of one thing. And then just the Vietnamese themselves. I met another girl that I've also stayed friends with since that time, and just over that time I've just grown further in love. So it was probably the people. And up until then, I'd done a fair bit of travel through Asia, you know, Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore, Hong Kong, etc. And I just never got the same vibe and feeling of welcome and warmth and caring that I did in Vietnam. So I thought, no, this, this is more me, this. I feel safer. And I was certainly doing a lot more travel solo at that time. So yeah, that, that kind of kept me coming back.

Conor Kelly

: [00:06:23] I can imagine so. And the second part of that question was, now that it has changed so dramatically from 2007 to 2022, where you have all these new things such as the Hoi An Bridge we referenced Phu Quoc has taken off in that time we have my Mui Ne, which is very popular, Ho Chi Minh, completely different ball game, I can imagine Hanoi is similar. How has your relationship with Vietnam changed from perhaps 2007 to now, based on all of the changes it's gone through? Has it been impacted in any way?

Kerry Newsome

: [00:06:56] That's a really big question, Conor, because there's kind of life up to COVID and then there's life after COVID. I mean, my relationship changed with Vietnam probably most predominantly in 2016. And one of the trips that I did back, I did a long stay. I stayed for a month, and I actually moved into a situation where I got offered a job and I was offered the job to sell a major hotel group, a Vietnamese hotel group that was literally building from the ground up at the time in Hawaiian. And they had on their drawing board to build five hotels, which they did. And because I had a flight centre background, I'd kept all my contacts in flight centre over the years. I mean, it's a pretty cliquey industry, the tourist tourism industry and working with some pretty influential people. I was able to win the flight centre account, so I kind of went from a, a travel tourist, you know, just explorer to a little bit more of a business relationship. So I'm not answering your question directly, but I guess I started to view Vietnam through different eyes from a more tourism and tourist aspect, and that changed the way I looked at the landscape and what was happening in travel and how the travel boom was about to take off.

Kerry Newsome

: [00:08:34] And just to give you some relationship to the travel boom, so in 2019 there, the Vietnamese government reports that they would receive something like 18.3 million tourists

into Vietnam. And the rate from 2007 to 2018 was dramatic. It was just exponential. There were buses on buses. They couldn't even fit the buses into places like Hoi An and they had to park them outside the town and ferry people in on like golf carts, etc., and cyclos. And then COVID hit and COVID hit and it dropped to 3.8 over two years. And that was only due to business development and of course, diplomats and government officials, etc., that made up that small amount of 3.8. Now we're at 2022. The doors are open as of March. So, you know, it's it's a new it's a new landscape again, because not everything survived COVID. And I, I don't know, I'm I'm back in September. I have to see it from my own eyes now.

Conor Kelly

: [00:09:53] Yeah, absolutely. And we're all going to talk more later in the conversation about what that means for tourism going forward in Vietnam 2022. But can I get your reaction to COVID? Where were you based in Australia when COVID hit back early 2020, and how was your reaction to the developments?

Kerry Newsome

: [00:10:13] Well, it was funny. I was actually in Vietnam up until the 19th of March 2020, so I was over there on a trip I used. I was doing 2 to 3 trips per year up until that point between 2016 and 2020. And I was due to leave on the 29th to come back to Australia. But my husband was saying to me, look, I think this thing called this COVID thing, I think it's going to take over the world and they're going to name it as a pandemic. And the country is going to shut you out if you don't come home. Now, by that stage in 2020, I had been working and I still do work for what they call a Vietnam inbound tour operator. So that's a Vietnam destination management company. And my boss in Hanoi was saying, Kerry, look, I know things are kind of a little bit nervous here in Vietnam at the moment, but I think they're going to shut the doors and I think Australia is going to shut you out as well. So we need to get you home.

Kerry Newsome

: [00:11:29] So I literally got on one of the last few flights to get back to Australia and I've got to admit to you, I was in denial. I was like, I don't believe this, I, I just cannot believe that this is happening. And while it was the 19th of March on the way to the airport, to Danang Airport, you know, my driver got. Pulled over and I got tested for temperature test, etc. and I'd heard some gossip that there were people and backpackers, etc., that they'd kind of put in some hotel or some kind of Vietnam establishment and were kind of ferrying food into them because they were worried that they were transmitting. I mean, there was real like feeling that the tourists had brought the disease to Vietnam. So if you weren't wearing a mask walking around in those days and thankfully between the hotel group and my boss, I was taken very good care of. But, you know, there was there was a lot of nervousness in the air, so to speak. It was it was quite scary.

Conor Kelly

: [00:12:48] I can imagine. And from what happened then, you flew back to Australia, you were able to get through that, I guess ordeal in the initial stages. What happened next as in obviously tourism was hugely affected your industry due to COVID. So what happened for you? I guess from a personal and professional sense once you were back and say April 2020.

Kerry Newsome

: [00:13:10] Yeah. So I got back and of course Australia did close the doors and Vietnam at that stage really for most of 2020 was in a good place. The numbers were very low. The country was really dealing with it very, very strictly. But certainly life pretty much as normal. You know, expats were being asked to go home to leave the country if there was any confusion as far as their visa status was concerned. But for the most part, Vietnam was okay. It was just that the rest of the world wasn't. So my boss, you know, I have a very good relationship with my boss. And I just said, well, I don't think I'm going to be selling any tours into Vietnam from Australia in the foreseeable future. What do you want me to do? And she said, Well, because you've got a marketing background, would you be open to move your headspace into marketing so we can keep our brand and our messaging and our communications up during this time? We wait and see what happens. So that's what I've been doing for the last two years.

Conor Kelly

: [00:14:26] I see. And what does that actually entail? Say, for somebody who isn't familiar with marketing or can't quite understand how you would be able to do that when you don't have access to Vietnam unless in special circumstances? What sort of things have your job entailed since 2020, up until this point that we speak currently?

Kerry Newsome

: [00:14:48] Okay. So the main part of my job is to keep our communications with our current database. So that would involve creating newsletters, updating covered reports so that we keep our customers informed so that they are aware of the status and just how the country was performing in that way. So that if there was any groups or if there was any plans or anything already in vogue that they knew how to advise their clients because, you know, it didn't kind of go 'snap, crackle pop' all in one day. It kind of crept up on everybody. And every country was in varying stages of COVID until probably late 2020, when it was apparent that it was all over the world. And it was pretty serious. And, and until we got the the vaccination status and things like that. So it was really important for me to keep communication. So that was the first thing. So communicating with our customers, creating newsletters, creating blogs and working with operators still in the country dealing with it. In addition to that, we have social media platforms, so making sure our branding and our messaging there was still strong because, you know, there was a lot of companies over the ensuing months that have just kind of dropped off the earth. You know, they they weren't able to survive for varying different reasons. And it's been really tragic, really tragic. And while we have been able to maintain a very small business as we support Vietnam Airlines, the company I work for, that, you know, it was important that we stayed on the radar, so to speak.

Kerry Newsome

: [00:16:44] So social media was a very big part of that. And then, of course, in addition to that, there was just creating the right messaging. So on our website, making sure that the information on there was up to date. And if we were looking at developing new plans and new tools, etc., we got into working what those new tours would look like and designing those. So we did a lot in the technological background because for the first time we actually had time to

work on the business and on the business model. So we were able to improve that as well. So, you know, very broad spectrum, but it kept my hand in and it was also the time, it was actually May 11th, 2020, that I decided a good way for me to keep my personal profile in the Vietnam space would be to create a podcast, and by doing the podcast I would be able to keep connected and have a really good reason to stay connected. If I was to connect with previous travellers, operators and guides, etc. in the country so that people could keep Vietnam on their radar, I guess, so to speak, for the future when we were over the COVID situation.

Conor Kelly

: [00:18:06] Absolutely. And talk to me a bit more about the podcast, please. Kerry, 'What about Vietnam' ? How has it developed since you began on May 11, 2020?

Kerry Newsome

: [00:18:16] Well, it's it's really developed some legs, to be honest. It's gone much further than I thought it would. I must admit, in the beginning there was a huge learning curve for me in the sense of learning some new technology. I knew that I was going to be up against the situation where 99% of my guests were going to be remote. So I was going to be talking to somebody who would travel to Vietnam that either was still in Vietnam or had been to Vietnam and had since gone back to their country. I mean, I've spoken to people who have done river cruises up the Mekong, but it's you know, I was talking to them in Portugal because they'd just got home. I was talking to one guy who took some fabulous photos of Ha Giang and had a fabulous trip and just spoke about that area so eloquently. But he was back in the US as well.

[00:19:16] So the challenge around technology was there. But I really wanted to create a very polished product and I wanted it to be informative. And I'm sure you're up against this as well, is that you want it to be interesting, but you know, you don't want it too serious and you want it to be fun and just relatable so people can kind of relate to it, I guess, and could say, Oh yeah, I could see myself doing that. Or No, maybe not going to a snake restaurant for lunch with a bottle of champagne and that no, I don't think that's me, that sort of thing, if you know what I mean?

Conor Kelly

: [00:19:58] No, I do. Yeah. Making it relatable for the listeners and also connecting with the guests. Does it change from guest to guest? For example, you might get a couple who've gone up along the Mekong, then you'll have someone from Hanoi, some more from Danang. Does it differ from people across the country in different areas, or would you say there's a typical profile of someone you would interview?

Kerry Newsome

: [00:20:21] No, there's no typical. Absolutely no typical. Like and that's. I think one of the or I'm hoping one of the joys of the program is that each program is unique. Each each show is different and people are not going to know what to expect. I have kind of purposely done that. I've wanted to surprise and and bring new aspects of Vietnam to the the show. As in I didn't want to just talk about destinations. You know, they can go to a guidebook and they can go to Google for that, you know,... Type in Sapa, type in Hanoi. It'll give you all the stats, the

population and, you know, Ho Kiem Lake. So I wanted to add in experiences, I wanted to talk about what, what had people done that was interesting??? Or what should people look out for or you know. Yeah, just maybe the "must do list". Is it kid friendly? You know, is it good for solo people? What about that river cruise? Did that feel safe? You know, like I really wanted to kind of mix up the destination, the guest and the experience all in the one show.

Conor Kelly

: [00:21:35] Absolutely. No, I definitely understand the variety aspect. I tried the exact same with [Comeback](#) because I don't want the listener coming to the episode thinking that they know who's going to be on or they can tell what's going to come up. Rather, the mystery aspect and an element of surprise. However, do you see any patterns emerging with your guests? As in, do people say similar things alongside the concept of Vietnam and what to experience? If you're in a certain place, are there any patterns that you spot or is it quite difficult to gauge with such a variety?

Kerry Newsome

: [00:22:10] Good question, Conor. That's a really good question. I might be accused of a pattern that I see developing in the sense that most people have got good things to say about Vietnam. I mean, there's a few that have had a few grimaces about things, and I certainly want to keep it real. You know, I don't want people to go, oh, like it was fantastic when it really wasn't, you know,.... They were a bit disappointed because there was a lot of rubbish and there was a lot of that sort of feeling. But it's different because my guests vary from age from their relationship to Vietnam. Some might be guides, some might be previous travellers, some might work for a Wellness company, some might be a massage therapists. Some might run cooking schools. Some might decide to live there because they went to visit and found that they love the place. I mean, a recent guest of mine is talking about art in Vietnam. I mean, when you go to a gallery, do you really know what you're looking at when you're looking at some of the the art in that gallery? What is some of the symbolism, you know, aspects like that? So I can't really say there's a trend, but if there is a certain appetite for the typical guest, it's probably the ones that have got, you know, positive things or uplifting or good things to say about Vietnam, for sure.

Conor Kelly

: [00:23:48] And this might bring me to ask about your personal experience, Kerry, your personal experience on Vietnam. What have been some highlights for you in terms of living and working here?

Kerry Newsome

: [00:24:03] Look, I've had so many lovely experiences. As I said, I've been travelling back and forth two or three times a year. I do long stays each time, so I'm there probably 2 to 3 months a year. So I'm almost like the part time expat and I get accused of that in places and they go, Oh, are you back? But I probably think I just live down the road, but I haven't seen them for a couple of couple of months. But I, i. I loved a place called Ba Be Lake. I don't know. Have you been?

Conor Kelly

: [00:24:37] I haven't been there, no.

Kerry Newsome

: [00:24:39] Well, that was a small trip I did in 2017. And it's such a beautiful place. It's almost like this. It's a challenge to get there. It's about a five hour trip from Hanoi, but the Ba Be Lake area is just so special. It's got caves where you're there's probably only you and four people there. The lake itself and the area is so untouched, it's just hard to believe that time has happened and it somehow missed that place. So Ba be Lake is probably one of my most beautiful, serene, tranquil experiences. I mean, I've had a fabulous time in Hoi An and watching Hoi An grow. It's certainly developed over time and and become richer with experiences, but I'd say Ba Be Lake is probably one of my best so far but yeah a lot still to go.

Conor Kelly

: [00:25:53] For sure and going towards the comeback theme and almost the opposite of that question. Living abroad, especially in Vietnam, has so many positive aspects to it, but it also brings its challenges. What have been some of the most difficult parts for you about living in Vietnam for the period that you have?

Kerry Newsome

: [00:26:13] Well, remembering that I only travelled on a tourist visa, so I'm essentially not living in Vietnam, be it that I go for a month each time, you know, I might go in March, I might go again in July, August, and then I might come back in October. So I haven't kind of had that living experience because I'm mostly staying in hotels, resorts, etc., home stays. So I'm not actually living and having to do the living experience because as I'm sure you would have a lot to share on that corner.

Conor Kelly

: [00:26:52] Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. It's been three years now and there is definitely it's trials and tribulations, but overall it's good, but it can be quite tricky, perhaps making the sacrifices of living away from home and being involved in a community where there's still that different mindset on so many different areas, where I'll speak to my Vietnamese friends and they won't ever criticise their government whilst back in the UK it's very common to criticise the government and just little things like that, to be honest with you, can make it slightly tricky at times, but overall it's a worthwhile experience.

Kerry Newsome

: [00:27:26] Yeah. But big. I'm sure its life changing for you on a lot of levels.

Conor Kelly

: [00:27:32] Yeah. No, I can definitely say that, especially coming here as I turn 22 and being 25 in August, spending your early twenties in Saigon. It's a yeah, it's an interesting one to be honest. I probably would recommend. Yeah, but there's definitely things to look out for. I find a lot of the time it can be, and I don't mean to hijack the podcast here. It can be opportunity versus escapism, where Saigon can offer so many different things for good or for bad. The opportunity or escapism comes up as a huge theme for me when I associate with the hundreds

and hundreds of people I've met here as the two primary reasons for people to move and then make their avenues throughout here.

Kerry Newsome

: [00:28:13] Yeah, but you're right about the mindset, too. You can't expect them to think like a Westerner to relate to any of those things. So, you know, just because of their history, because of the way they act, you know, it would be an eternal learning experience. I know. Even working with Vietnamese. And even though they can speak English, they they can't they can't really comprehend what what other what what is the meaning between the lines, if you know what I mean.

Conor Kelly

: [00:28:44] Yeah. No.

Kerry Newsome

: [00:28:45] And they can't do those kinds of interpretations. And you know, when I might say, oh, you know, they don't like this accommodation and they'll go, oh, why? You know, well, does it really matter? They don't like it.

Conor Kelly

: [00:28:58] Yeah.

Kerry Newsome

: [00:28:59] So we have to find them a new hotel because they have said this and this and this Oh, but we think it's really nice. I know, but we have to change it.

Conor Kelly

: [00:29:10] So yeah, that's fine.

Kerry Newsome

: [00:29:12] One of the hundred that are out there.

Conor Kelly

: [00:29:15] Yeah. you do have to ppen your mind a bit more and recognize that it might frustrate you, that example. But you know, that type of thinking does work in Australia or England, but this is Vietnam, and we've chosen to be here. So you have to play by their rules.

Kerry Newsome

: [00:29:31] Yes.

Conor Kelly

: [00:29:32] Absolutely. And what I'm thinking here, Kerry, is tourism 2022, I think it was last month or two months ago. Now we're recording this early May in March 2022, when borders

started to open. Open. And I've seen hints of tourism. I've not really been to say the boybands of this world so much so far, but I know tourism has restarted.

Conor Kelly

: [00:29:54] What do you see? This might be tricky to answer the future of tourism in Vietnam from 2022 onwards.

Kerry Newsome

: [00:30:03] Look, I think there's an appetite definitely for recovery. I think the recovery will still be a little bit slow or cautious. I'm already talking to travel agents again, and there's definitely enthusiasm. However, no one's putting their money on the booking, if you can understand. So people are definitely expressing interest and I think it's a little bit about their wanting to kind of see the transition manifest itself. So they're wanting to see the traffic, they wanting to see the increase in airline frequency and flights. They're wanting to judge just how the accommodation is looking, you know, what is still open. So once again, marketing is a very important part and even what I'm doing with the podcast, "What about Vietnam" is kind of a statement and a question as in. People used to say, you know, Oh, you know, we go to Bali, we go to here, we go to the Philippines, we go to Thailand. And I used to say, "what about Vietnam?" So, you know, when I say that now, I say, "what about Vietnam?" As in the borders have opened again. And I think I think Vietnam is very keen to bring back a healthy level of tourism. I do think it went a little bit nuts, like leading up to the pandemic. I think there is an interest in getting the country to a sustainable level of tourism better managed. I mean, we may not be seeing in Vietnam as many Chinese tourists as we have.

Kerry Newsome

: [00:31:47] We may not even be seeing any Russians or many Russians. I'm talking to somebody just next week about Nha Trang, which has been traditionally a very attractive resort area for the Russians. I mean, I don't know. So there's there's still a lot of questions on the table. And certainly what's happening in Ukraine is, you know, is affecting all of us. But as far as resuming travel and how travel moves forward, I'm positive. I'm feeling very positive. I'm booked to come back in September. Some of my guests that I've got lined up in the next few weeks are talking about some of the aspects of recovery that is certainly enticing and attractive, as in, you know, restaurants that have come back on board in the area of fine dining. I'm keen to see this new gallery that is opened up in Hue, which Bridget March shared with me on a show last week. So even just from my guests and I'm trying to talk to more that are in Vietnam at the moment. And I'm going to be talking to you, Connor, about Con Dao, remember? We you know, I feel the I feel the positivity in the air. And I feel even back here in Australia, talking to travel agents, there is very much an eagerness for them to start selling Vietnam and open the doors back because everybody that, you know, that comes to Vietnam, you know, nine times out of ten has a great experience.

Conor Kelly

: [00:33:25] Right. I see. And that's the prediction for going forwards in 2022 and beyond. Do you think there can be some downsides to this? For example, if you are Russian and there won't be as many or Chinese or any other, I guess cons to increase tourism. It's great to get people back in Vietnam, of course, to visit and to see. But can there be some downsides?

Kerry Newsome

: [00:33:47] Downsides as into too many or not enough or particular areas or?

Conor Kelly

: [00:33:54] Yeah, my thoughts were initially too many because now it's been two years, I would assume, and you might be able to tell me more. The people would be dying to get into Vietnam and that would cause a boom. But is that the case or how would you see it?

Kerry Newsome

: [00:34:09] Uh, look, I think there's some people that think that I'm probably not one of them. I don't think it'll be fast and furious. I think it will be more it will be slower and deliberate. I think I think the whole world has changed just totally philosophically about travel. You know, there's much more thought we were we were getting on and off planes. Let's face it, pre-COVID, like on and off the bus, it was you know, the whole world was almost visa free. Now we've got much more complications about travel. There's certain age groups that are probably a little bit more fragile than they used to be. So you, baby boomers, etc., that are a bit more nervous. I mean, I know people that were avid travellers beforehand, before COVID and now are much more hesitant, and I think it's going to take a little while for those to settle down. I mean, the die hards like me and the others I think will definitely be out there again and very keen, but it has got more complicated. So I think that complication has to get a little bit more rationalised. And I think there's some talk in Vietnam at the moment that by June some of the levels of entry to the country will be even taken further away. So it'll be so much easier to enter the country. So I think the easier it gets, the more settled that will happen. Now to your question about is that going to be bad for Vietnam, as in we're going to get too many tourists? Look, I hope that's going to get better managed.

Kerry Newsome

: [00:36:01] I think there was over tourism definitely leading up to the pandemic. And, you know, I hear that there's been some great areas of improvement as far as cleaning up the country and areas that have flourished, you know, forests and and rivers, etc., that have kind of been brought back to life because, you know, there hasn't been the treading of the tourist. So I hope there's going to be some more sustainability on that on that level so that there can be a positive imprint. And there's certainly levels within Vietnam, tourism and the government talking about that. And I've even been speaking to some of those working groups and people that are steering those committees. So, you know, I'm hoping there's going to be more thought all round, but I don't want people to miss out on Vietnam. I just I do think it's a country to discover, but it's a country also that people kind of tend to hit the main three or four spots and then they go. And I think there's a lot more to Vietnam than those three main destinations. So, you know, if we could maybe encourage in our trip planning and our tour advice, you know,

talking about Vietnam, we might kind of broaden the brush so that people come back several times and not just to the same places.

Conor Kelly

: [00:37:27] Absolutely. No. I love the fact that you've mentioned that about the broadness and the vast amount of areas in Vietnam that can be explored instead of just, say, Danang, Ho Chi Minh, Hanoi, for example. There are so many. And it brings me to, I suppose, a hidden gems kind of question. Are there any places that perhaps aren't as popular for tourists that you would expect or that deserve more recognition in Vietnam? And if so, what are they?

Kerry Newsome

: [00:37:57] Yeah. Like, it's it's funny. You know, there definitely is those main destinations that have really had extreme exposure on your Instagrams and your Google sites are just full of images of those places. And yet there's some and I know you and I just talked briefly about Con Dau, like it is a hidden gem.

[00:38:26] There's a place called Da Lat, and not many people think to go to Da Lat. And if you went to Da lat and you saw Everlasting flowers, like flowers that actually never die, I've seen strawberries the size of apples almost there. You go into the hills and you'd swear to God you're in some European country. The waterfalls, you know, there's no gating around them. You can put your hands out and you can actually touch the water. It's that accessible and it's that beautiful and it's that untouched. But they're not they're not destinations that have been big in promotion and social media. I mean, places like Ha Giang, places like Sapa, places like I'm thinking of Ninh Binh now. A lot of people talk about how Ha Long bay but then they don't talk about Lan Ha bay and they don't talk about Ninh Binh as much, where I think Nin Binh is even probably more interesting than Ha Long bay. Gosh I could go on and on. I mean Phong Na now Phong the caves came up when they discovered the largest cave in the planet, on the planet, believe it or not, in 2009. And you know, that's only 2009, Conor.

Kerry Newsome

: [00:39:52] That's kind of in our lifetime, you know. And I got to talk on the podcast, would you believe, with one of the guys, British guy, who was actually part of the group that stumbled like they literally stumbled on this cave? It's like about seven kilometers. You can fit Big Ben in the cave. So, you know, it takes four days to go from one end to the other. And, you know, it's it's starting to capture great interest, but it's for your, you know, your real intrepid adventure caving kind of person. But it's opened the world up to there's more to Vietnam than just, as you say, you know, the bustling city of Saigon, Hanoi, Hoi An and possibly Danang. I mean, people never think about Vietnam, about kite flying. I mean, kite flying.(Correction should be Kite surfing) The kite Surfing capital is, I think, in South East Asia. One of them is Mui Ne. Nobody told me about that. Nobody told me about. There was deserts in Mui Ne... Hello. I mean, it's it's just a world discovery tour!!!! And that's what I love about it, is that I haven't been back to Vietnam once and done everything the same. I managed to go somewhere else. I mean, Quy Nhon is a place that has only just come up on the roadmap. There's now a new ferry system to go to Ly Son Island. Now, I've been meaning to go to that island for, I think the last five years, but it was such an awkward trip and you had to get this bus.

Kerry Newsome

: [00:41:38] And it only ran on certain times and then you had to kind of connect up with the ferry. And if you missed the ferry, then you didn't get it. So now there's this straight ferry, straight to the island. Guess where I'll also be going and I'll be able to go to that from Hoi An. An SO like my podcast is kind of a discovery tour for me as well. So I'm learning about new destinations as the new destinations are coming on and I'm trying to expose them and give them, you know, the benefit of insights so that people that have been there or people that are in the process of developing, I'm talking to them. So my listeners kind of get the the real insights. So I don't have to wait for a Lonely Planet guide to come out each year and hope to God it's got the most up to date information. And of course you can Google everything, but it's not the same as someone telling you, Look, we went there, look, don't do that. Forget going at that time of the year because it just rains all the time and you're missing the best parts. And, you know, so it's it's, you know, it's like going to Ireland, isn't it? And going to Cliffs of Moher my hair. Sometimes you see nothing. And then the fog lifts and other times it looks fabulous. So it's all the benefit of insight.

Conor Kelly

: [00:42:51] Absolutely.

Kerry Newsome

: [00:42:52] And Cliffs of Moher, I meant.

Conor Kelly

: [00:42:54] Okay, one thing we. And at the beginning was perhaps leading up to the pandemic over tourism and how it then can be managed from now on. Now, tourism is a thing again. How can tourism be managed, in your view, Kerry to be the most effective possible for Vietnam and avoid, say, over tourism or under tourism or any complications? What do you think are the most effective ways for Vietnam to tackle tourism going forward now?

Kerry Newsome

: [00:43:24] Geepers. You know, I need a job on the Vietnam Tourism Board after this because I'm sure it's coming up on their agenda similarly. How do they do that? Look, one of the ways where they were starting to stem the traffic, I guess, of over tourism was in the freedom of giving out licenses for "homestays." I think at one stage in Hoi An alone and probably I have I've had more to do with the Quang Nam area than anywhere else, so I can speak more proficiently about that area. So they were I think they stopped at 318 licenses to have a homestay. And what they learnt from stopping that was that they had to put some limit on how many hotels and how many home stays, you know, how many beds were they going to allow in a vicinity? Now, if you look at the township of Hoi An and the Old Town itself, it's only about two and a half kilometers in size. And then if you build all of these accommodations of course you're going to get into trouble, as in the city is not going to be able to cope with that traffic. You're going to have a trodden city where you're starting to damage it and you're going to ruin that UNESCO's World Heritage site. So I think there's a look at accommodation and there will be some input or there's going to be some checking on just how many they're going to allow, how many beds and how many tourists they're going to allow.

Kerry Newsome

: [00:45:12] So there's going to be also, you know, how many flights they're going to let in to certain areas. So, you know, the frequency of flights and the size, I think that's going to be another element because they're that's where the numbers come accommodation and people into hotels, into airports. So we have to sleep them somewhere so that's probably where it starts. And then they'll look at, you know, eateries and things like that to to manage that. I mean, overtourism is definitely a, a problem to the environment. I mean, there's enough studies around the world to verify that. But how each government manages it around the world is, is very different, is very unique. And even within Vietnam, because there's so many provinces, each province tends to manage their own tourism, their own way under their own guidance or jurisdiction as they see fit. So there's not, you know, anything particularly consistent, but there is working parties and groups and thankfully, I've got some good ears into those. And I am hearing some good, some good noise out of those that they are going to be looking at, at licensing and just how they can manage, you know, the footsteps around Vietnam.

Conor Kelly

: [00:46:35] Absolutely. And I suppose coming towards the end of the conversation, Kerry, this might be tricky again. And I feel like we have alluded to it at points, but what would your ideal scenario be in Vietnam, say, 2022, 2023 and 2024 ? What ideally would you like to see happen?

Kerry Newsome

: [00:46:55] In respect to?

Conor Kelly

: [00:46:57] In respect to the tourism reopening and what that would mean for the country.

Kerry Newsome

: [00:47:02] Look, I think they're not even going to have to work very hard at a slow intake of tourism. I think that's just going to happen organically. I think the making it easy for people to enter the country but keeping the visa level under some jurisdiction, I mean, you'll notice that they pretty much put it back to what it was prior to COVID. So for those 80 countries, you can come for 15 days. But for the other countries, you're maximum stay under a visa application is 30 days. So during COVID, there was a lot of expats that had to leave the country because they weren't there kind of essentially legally. And there was a lot of workers that were working there and taking Vietnamese jobs. So they've also had to leave. So in some ways, covid's been a bit of a godsend for Vietnam to clean up Vietnam. I mean, Vietnam's got 96 plus million population. So it's got a thriving domestic tourism aspect to it, and it's also a thriving country. So even its own domestic travel is on a boom and there are more Vietnamese travelling even just this holiday. I think you even said recently I heard you talk to somebody and saying, you know, you want to go where everywhere everyone else isn't going because it's going to be that crowded.

Kerry Newsome

: [00:48:45] Yeah. So I'm hoping that, there is a push on trying to broaden the scope of travel experiences for people and for operators to take a very sustainable approach. So in other words, instead of before them having a group of 30 or 35 people, their maximum might be 20 so that they will take smaller groups. I'd like to see that happen in the future so that the people in the groups are getting a better experience and we're not bringing too many in at the same time,

[00:49:22] I think I'd like to see a growth in the development of the hospitality industry in the training area, and I think that's also going to happen of its own accord because it's by demand. I mean, I'm hearing in Ho Chi Minh City there's a lot of hotels that just can't get manpower back because a lot of people lost their jobs. They went home to their families and villages to kind of wait it out. And so I think the you know, there's going to have to be an investment and certain hotel groups, I think, are going to step up to that because they'll see the opportunity.

Kerry Newsome

: [00:49:58] So we we've got some good things in quality coming back. I'd like to see that. I would like to see the growth in social enterprise as well because I really like wherever I can see the growth in the minority groups and the support of those minority groups in a very healthy, wholesome and supportive way. So it gives back to those communities. I'd like to see more of that, but once again, that won't be throngs of people. That'll be a group of six, that'll be a maximum of 12, that kind of thing. We won't I don't think there's going to be the big bus loads. And you know, a lot of those busloads were coming from China. So I'm kind of on a watch wait and see whether or not we will get the Chinese back in as they were the number one tourist group to Vietnam. So yeah, I mean, I can sit in that roundtable Conor, with those working party groups in tourism any day of the week with all my wish list. But I think there's a lot of players in the field, there's a lot of money that's that's being kind of discussed as far as development is concerned. So it's a little bit wait and see.

Conor Kelly

: [00:51:15] Right. I see. And a new tradition I have on this podcast, Kerry is asking the guest a question which is, has that been a question that I've not asked you that you would have liked me to. Um.

Kerry Newsome

: [00:51:35] Well, I thought we were going to talk a little bit more about podcasting. And I thought we were going to kind of share some of the aspects of, you know, what do you what do you know about Vietnam travel from a podcast?

Conor Kelly

: [00:51:51] Right. I see. And we did allude to that briefly where we spoke about people from different avenues doing different topics based on their experiences. But what have you found out specifically about Vietnam from your podcast then? Kerry what about Vietnam? What have you discovered?

Kerry Newsome

: [00:52:08] Well, obviously I've discovered a lot of new places and new experiences, but what I've also discovered is more about how people are consuming information. You know, like, is everybody totally dependent on the one source? Does everybody just Google the place? Or would you think to go to a podcast that was about travel, specifically about Vietnam? Because there's not many travel podcasts and there's not many just about Vietnam. In fact, I think I'm one of the rare few. There is Southeast Asian travel podcasts and there's very mixed, mixed travel podcast across lots of destinations, but there's not many just about Vietnam. Did you notice that?

Conor Kelly

: [00:52:59] Yeah, I only saw -7 million bikes of Vietnam podcast, because that's what it's called. There's your own, there's Vietcetra, Yeah, I can't think of any more.

Kerry Newsome

: [00:53:10] But they're not travel specific.

Conor Kelly

: [00:53:12] No, that's true. That is true. Yeah.

Kerry Newsome

: [00:53:14] They are broad. Yeah. Broad based and they are certainly talking about stories about people related, but they are not about travel experiences. And that I found kind of amazing. I mean, I'm glad I've got that niche, but you know, is that because people, you know, don't relate to a podcast to be informative about travel or they want to see things or I don't know. What are your thoughts about that? I'd be keen to know.

Conor Kelly

: [00:53:44] Yeah, I would think it's because people would probably rather Google or rather look at Instagram. This is just what's coming to me on the top of my head rather than listening to a podcast about it. Unless I would say friends or I knew the podcast host, for example, or I was aware of guests who'd been on. So, you know, I would probably say that's the reason why people aren't quite going to podcast for this information or they probably look for YouTube. I mean, you can type in visiting Vietnam on YouTube and there'll be thousands of videos with lots and lots of hits compared to podcasts. That's my current opinion.

Kerry Newsome

: [00:54:21] Yeah. And I think it's an interesting one because, you know, you're right, if you type in Google to visiting Vietnam or travel from Vietnam, there's blogs, there's Vlogs, there's, you know, You Tubes, but they're all kind of, you know, just someone either selling a tour or there is somebody just done a holiday video of their trip to Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh or the Mekong Delta or something like that. So it's 2 minutes and back, so there's not much in this space. So I wondered whether it was good to kind of inform your listeners that that's why I've kind of expanded the podcast situation so that I also included a transcript. So if you'd prefer to read

about a place, there's a full transcript which is in a PDF format so that you can print it off, so you can read about the place or the experience, you can highlight it, you can do whatever. And also I do small like teaser elements, so audio grams so the person I'll grab something and I got card that was really interesting and I'll just grab a two minute snippet. I do a full episode on YouTube and I'm also moving to curate special kind of experiences, etc., which will have visual aspects on the site. So hopefully I'm going to fill the visual gap because I think the visual gaps about the only gap I can see in this channel, for want of a better word.

Conor Kelly

: [00:56:01] What do you think? And, and where can we find out more about what you do Kerry? How can we access your work?

Kerry Newsome

: [00:56:08] Well, obviously, you can go to the website. www.whataboutvietnam.com You can certainly find me on LinkedIn under my name, Kerry Newsome

. And also the what about Vietnam podcast page on the LinkedIn site? You can also check me out on Instagram and Facebook and You Tube.

Conor Kelly

: [00:56:29] Excellent.

Kerry Newsome

: [00:56:30] So I would love feedback from people because, you know, my audience is growing dramatically. I've got nearly 20,000 listeners already just in two years. I do publish fortnightly, but I'm really keen to get people to give me their feedback. What do they want to know? What do they want me to get someone to talk about because they're interested in going to Vietnam and they want to have a particular experience?

Conor Kelly

: [00:56:58] Absolutely. Have you any final thoughts, Kerry, before we wrap up?

Kerry Newsome

: [00:57:03] No, I just want to say fantastic what you're doing. Conor, really love your episodes. I really wish you well. And maybe we can catch up when I'm there in September.

Conor Kelly

: [00:57:14] Absolutely. I'd love nothing more. Definitely explore some of Ho Chi Minh. See what has to offer and see how you find coming back after a long break. Kerry, I've really enjoyed. Keep up the good work and thank you very much for your time.

Kerry Newsome

: [00:57:26] Thanks, Conor.

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