



## **Out & About in Saigon – with What About Vietnam host Kerry Newsome**

**Kerry Newsome:** Xin chào and welcome to the What About Vietnam podcast. Today I'm inviting you to join me in what I'm calling a mini-series and that mini-series is actually going to be an invitation to you to join me while I'm out and about in Vietnam on my holiday. Now the reason I wanted to do this series was to I guess chronicle the experiences, the destinations and some of the people I get to meet in Vietnam and over the next about 60 days I'll be trying to record as I go different places, experiences and just activities and things that I want to share with you that I hope will help you with your planning and give you some guidance around coming to Vietnam and what to expect.

So, let me give you some context to the Out and About series. Firstly, every time you see Out and About as a title on my show, on the website, you'll know that that's what the basis of these are. So, we're going to kick off today with Out and About in Ho Chi Minh City. as this is the first city that I have arrived into and it actually kind of begins the show and the series. So we kick off with Ho Chi Minh City. Now I wanted to just give a little bit more context to this series in the sense that it's not going to be a series where I give you kind of a whole list of things to do and you know kind of send you off into various places. It's more about me trying to give you a sense of what to expect, what I have experienced personally and in each situation it's obviously going to be different but I'm hoping that you can take this information and then apply it to everything that you're doing as far as preparing for your trip because for me Vietnam is just not one of those countries that you to get the best out of it anyway, is that you can just kind of lob here and just hope it all goes merry well. It is a country that deserves some research. And one of the things that's come up over the nearly last four years of me doing this podcast has been the sense that you all are starting to go down that path of research to, you know, possibly plan a trip. And some of you reach out to me individually, which I love. But like, I think it's quite overwhelming. And I think what I'm hearing is that that overwhelm almost puts you off coming. So I'm trying to for one of a better description, kind of break through the chatter and clatter and all the rest of it

because there's a thousand websites out there. There's a thousand YouTube videos. I don't want to and nor am I trying to compete in that space. I'm trying to just, I don't know, help you decipher, help you have some insights so that when you look at things you can look at them with informed eyes and you can make some decisions.

So without further ado, let's kick off out and about in Saigon or Ho Chi Minh City as it's known. Now firstly I want to share with you my experience getting here. as it has a little bit of a good story to it and a not so good story. So firstly, the good story. So I'm on the plane and I'm traveling from Australia and Just as we're about to arrive, two lovely ladies sitting across the aisle from me, one of them reaches out and says, are you Kerry Newsome? And of course I say yes, and they say, look, we are on our trip to Vietnam because of your podcast called What About Vietnam? We're planning four weeks, we listened to this episode and that episode, and it kind of inspired us to do this trip. So, I just want to reach out to those ladies who I didn't get a chance to get their names, but I just want to say hello and I hope you're having a great time. And for me, that was just such a personally rich experience to have that, you know, my podcast is reaching your ears and you are being able to use it to help you put your trip together and make decisions to come. Then the other not so good news. So the gentleman sitting next to me on the plane for the whole trip kind of arrived into his seat and I could kind of tell he was agitated and I thought, gee, we've only just begun, I wonder what this is about. He'd actually been to Vietnam before and had a great experience and was coming back a second time with some friends. But as he went to check in at the check-in counter at Vietnam Airlines, he presented his visa. But unfortunately, the visa was one day out in matching up with his dates of arrival into the country. So, that was actually a barrier to entry and they were not going to permit him to check in and to take the flight. So, the advice he was given was to, the only advice really they had to offer, was to go to a flight centre shop at the airport and that they had a VIP emergency kind of service, e-visa service, that they could put together, but the cost of that service was \$500, \$500 Australian dollars. Now, if you know what the cost of a visa doing it normally through the immigration site for a 30-day visa, it's \$25 US, and for a 90-day visa, multiple entry, it's I think \$90 or \$100. So of course he was quite upset, he was quite irate. He couldn't believe that that small element of just the date not matching up exactly was going to be a problem and thus would mean that he couldn't join the flight with his wife and take this trip unless he did do that service. So, I know I go on and on about getting a visa and from the very first, I guess, thing that you put together as far as your planning is concerned, please spend the time necessary to get that e-visa and to get it right. It's something, even as many times as I've done it, I go through it religiously. The questions on the website have actually increased, so you do need to spend a bit of time in answering them. But as you can see, the impact that it has if it doesn't match up exactly to your passport and to your airline ticket can mean that you don't even get to come to Vietnam. So I just wanted to throw those in just to make sure that when you are thinking of getting out and about in Vietnam, you're not even going to get the chance to get here unless you get some of these pieces correct in the first instance.

Now, a little bit more about the episode. When I'm out and about and I'm doing this series, I'm going to be doing it with obviously a sense that I want to continue with the quality, but there's going to be times where you're going to hear roosters and taxi hooting. You're going

to hear some noises that I really can't control, but Guess what folks? These are definitely the sounds of Vietnam. So please forgive me if at times you do experience that. I'm hoping to keep that to a minimum. And of course I want to keep the program in such a way that I can be mobile with it and as I'm going to each place I can record. So over the next you know six to eight weeks we're going to be doing lots of recordings and they're going to be a bit shorter and a little bit sharper about the experiences that I'm having.

Now, when you enter into Ho Chi Minh City, you know, depending on where you've come from, so for myself, a flight from Australia is roughly about eight hours. Vietnam has three international airports, so you're going to come into either Ho Chi Minh or Hanoi or Da Nang, depending what country you're coming from. So you've already been in transit to get here from Australia, about eight hours plus three hours at the airport. If you're coming from the US, it's probably a minimum of 14 hours coming from San Francisco. But if you're coming

more from Southeast Asia or Singapore or Bangkok, it's only about five hours. But for me, when I arrive into Ho Chi Minh City, I'm tired so I've had a good night's sleep. I always make sure I try and get into a flight that will enable me to you know unpack, get a good night's sleep and get up on the next day. Now depending on what sort of flyer you are also you know I tend to on that first day if you have time Now time is a commodity we all know and for you, you may not have the chance to add in this day but if you do have the opportunity to make your first day a little bit of a free day so that you don't have something booked, you don't have something set or organized, I would really urge you to take that first day to just use it as a day of orientation. And I say that because when you're jet lagged, when you are a bit tired, when your body is readjusting to, you know, new temperatures, new smells, new environments, your hotel, your air conditioning, all of that kind of stuff, you can kind of experience things, but not really experience them. For me, I'm a bit of a space cadet that first day and certainly as I've got older, I'm more so. So I'm just saying that on that first day and possibly even the last day of your trip, if you have the chance to keep it free, do so. Take it up because there's some things you can still do to orientate yourself that I think give you a greater sense of where you are and is going to help you take in what you see. Now let me share with you Ho Chi Minh and what it means to me. Years and years ago, when I used to travel to Ho Chi Minh City, I kind of used it as a stepping stone. I came in and then I just went somewhere else. But over time, Ho Chi Minh City has really evolved. It's a very high energy city. It's a very busy city. And I speak of the busyness side of it in respect to not only the amount of motorbikes and traffic on the streets, but even on the sidewalks. The sidewalks of Vietnam streets, and in particular big cities, are not like controlled by councils or governments etc like they are in my country where you are not permitted to do anything on those or you have to get permissions to do that. On the sidewalks you've got people that are sitting on little red chairs and eating food. You've got street sellers selling their wares for everything from peanuts to fruit to, you know, small meals. You've got barmy vendors. So, whichever way you go, it's happening. So, getting back to what I'm saying about orientating yourself to the city, it's really good to get a handle on that just to begin with. If you're traveling in a group, if you're traveling with your partner or with a young family or whatever, everybody's kind of got to get their footing. And I speak of the footing side of it as well, as not all the streets are paved with gold. Most of the streets are in kind of poor condition. You're going to be stepping around people. You're going to be stepping over

broken streets and cement. There's a lot of construction going on. There's a lot of noise. There's a lot of tooting of horns. So when you are in that state of just trying to get to grips with everything as a newbie to the country, that first day can be quite confronting, can be quite in your face. and so it's good to ease yourself into it so that it can come alive for you in its various ways and give you the experience that I think you can have here. So for me there's three or four approaches to Ho Chi Minh City. Now the first one is you can decide to hit all the top attractions. So, the city itself has, you know, various, I guess, top must visit tourist destinations. So, in that first day, I wouldn't be doing that. I choose not to do that. What I choose to do is try to find just my bearings of where my hotel is, where it is in proximity to lots of things and you know from the get-go I start to assimilate or become attached to the country in getting to know it. And I start by putting on my phone certain things. We've talked about over the years about putting some certain apps on your phones. So firstly I would suggest setting up the Grab app. Now there's other forms of Grab. Grab is kind of relative to what is in my country an Uber. So this is a car, share car opportunity where they can pick you up and take you wherever you want and it's so easy to use. I use it with cash only and I make sure I give a small tip to the drivers. I like Grab because it gives me a way to communicate with the app, with the driver, even if the driver can't speak English. I can tell from their phone and mine matching that they have Kerry Newsome on their phone and they have the same destination. So I put the Grab app. I then have the Exe app. Why do I have that? Because that gives me a very quick way to work out money. So this is another part of your orientation to the country. you know you've got to get used to lots of zeros. You know a million zeros in any language sounds a lot, a million dong, wow is that a lot of money. In my country that's around about 60 something dollars. depending on your currency, the currency that you're bringing into the country, that Exe app is going to be able to tell you when you look to buy something, whether it's a cup of coffee or a meal or something that you want to purchase, whether or not you're getting a good price for it. You're happy to pay that price for it. Or you can kind of be comfortable with the price that you're paying and not feel like you're getting ripped off. Really, really important. I've seen people get quite upset about having to pay another \$10,000 for something when they find out later it was like \$0.60. As far as apps are concerned, I definitely think those two are the kind of the essentials. Obviously, Google Maps is another one and it's also part of this orientation. So again, I'm sitting in a coffee shop And I'm having a look at Google Maps and going, I really want to go and have one of my favorite coffees, which is a iced coconut coffee. And I'll work out where the nearest coffee shop to get that is from my hotel. And even before I'm going to use the Grab app, I'll use the Google Maps to find out roughly how long it's going to take me to get from A to B. So if it's 17 minutes or it's 20 minutes or whatever, I know then how much time to allow to do that. So, once again, Google is your friend in Vietnam, for sure. Google Translate is also another one.

I mean, the joy of Ho Chi Minh City is it's a very modern city, so in most of your tourist destinations and your hotels, and things like that. You know, the receptionist staff, et cetera, are really good at being able to speak good English in most cases. And certainly, as you're getting about in hospitality and in retail, et cetera, they'll have some basics. But on the street and street vendors, no, you're not going to be able to do that. So Google Translate is very handy there. The other thing is to decide how you're going to use Wi-Fi. You can buy a SIM card. You will need your passport for that. So you'll need to go to a Mobi phone or a phone shop, etc. to get the SIM card, replace it into your phone, etc. And that

will give you mobile data. And that will mean that on the go, while you're getting out and about, you can access that. However, I found it just as easy to go to a particular coffee shop or set myself down in a restaurant or whatever and I will use the free Wi-Fi that comes with literally 99% of places that you can get that on your phone and use these apps if you need to do them.

So options up to you however you want to do that. So getting back to our approaches, you can take yourself off onto the path of seeing all of these wonderful tourist destinations in Ho Chi Minh City. And that can be everything from the **Notre Dame Cathedral** through to Walking Street, and I want to get back to **Walking Street** in a minute, **Bui Vien**, the **Temple of the Jade Emperor**, **The City Post Office**, always great for photos. Turtle Lake. **Starlight Bridge** is a little bit further out. And of course, places like the **Pink Church**.

See link here to main attraction: <https://www.visithcmc.vn/en/news/10-diem-du-lich-mien-phi-o-tphcm-khong-the-bo-qua>

Now, the second approach you can take is actually moving a little bit out of Ho Chi Minh City. In this sense, you're going to be experiencing some of what the South of Vietnam has to offer in history and in nature and in the Mekong, I guess. So there's plenty of tourist desks around. Even your hotel can help you organize this. Or for many of you, if you've been asking me to put this together for you, I'm going to suggest a tour to the Cu chi Tunnels, or out to Ben Tre, or Cantho, or a visit to the **Mekong Delta** to experience that local region and that's going to help you immerse into what I would call is the essential Vietnam. The Vietnam you've probably read about and seen the images where you're getting through all of these sort of areas where there's jungle and there is that feeling of local, you know, very, very poor areas in some cases, but you're going to get the essential Vietnam and you're going to get that with a mixture of some history and especially in places like **Cu Chi Tunnels**. And then the third approach that you have in your first 24, 48 hours, whatever time you decide to spend in Ho Chi Minh City, is what I choose to do now because I've seen all these things and I've experienced them all. I tend to want to go out and just wander the streets, kind of get a bit lost. And I do that very easily I have to tell you. And I like getting lost in Ho Chi Minh City because I find different eateries, I find different vendors selling different types of goods. And every single time, depending on where I position myself as far as a hotel, even though it's in District 1 or it's in District 3 or District 5 or for that matter even District 2, there's going to be something new.

And getting back to me kind of saying about the research, before I come here, I will have done some research and said, yeah, I want to check that out. Now, this time I stayed in a little hotel. It was a three-star hotel called **La Opera**. And I love this little hotel as it's in a beautiful little area and I find it very easy to maneuver myself around wherever I want to go. So it's easy walking distance to most things. But also what comes with that is the experiences of that local area and your hotel reception staff is also going to be very good at being able to tell you what you can find close to the hotel. So really my first day just got taken up with experiencing different cafes, different shops. I still manage to get myself to the big shopping centers, so that's your **Vincom** and your **Saigon Centre**. And they're the ones that typically that you would acknowledge as being kind of the shopping mall. These are very modern, so they've got your H&M's and all of that. Or you can experience Ben Thanh Markets. And Ben Thanh Markets is prolific. It is iconic. It is one of the must-do's on that shopping experience. And you know, some people love it, some people hate it. It's an experience in itself and that

That whole shopping experience is something that you may talk about for years to come. And as I said, you either love it or you hate it. but it all happens in Ben Thanh Market and it's probably where you're going to get, you know, your copy products, you're going to be able to barter and you're going to be able to get some good deals. But be aware that you need to have your wits about yourself in there because you may enter in one door but then come out another and, you know, be quite disorientated with that. So, take that into consideration.

I have another market that I like called Saigon Square, and it's opposite one of the major shopping centers. And it's a smaller version of **Ben Thanh Markets**. And I think it's got a little bit of, I don't know, feeling that you can move around it a little bit easier. and a lot of the same stuff, but just a little bit more under control. You might pay a little bit more there than you would in Benton markets, but certainly it's got all the stuff that you need. As I said first approach is to go and visit all the major destinations in and around the city. Second is to you know just get lost in the city and then the third is to just relax. Just take in your hotel, take in just chilling out and as I said familiarizing yourself with the hotel experience. If it's got a nice pool, if it's got a nice bar and maybe save yourself up for the night time. Now for me, I love Ho Chi Minh City at night. While I've mentioned all these things about going out to the tunnels and and going shopping that's probably kind of stuff I would do during the day but once again it'll depend on the heat. But at night the city is just neon fizz, it is just It's electric, it really is. It's just got an energy about it that you will just be blown away from. And in particular, you can start seeing the city in this viewpoint from what they call Walking street. And walking street is really easy to spend time in because you don't have to kind of dodge traffic and and things like that like you do in some of the other areas. Plus what it has very close to it is some very eclectic, very kind of eccentric little cafes and it's just really lovely.

You've got rooftop bars, You've got the **Cafe Building** which I really urge you to go and check out. You'll go up stairs and stairs and then you'll just discover all these different cafes and it's just really easy to get around and you can spend hours just getting yourself lost in that region and at night there's lots of entertainment going on. Another favourite place of mine is the Acoustic Bar and you can go there any night of the week and they're going to have a different artist on to entertain you with some really great music. and there's also a small bar next door to that which is getting local artists coming on every night of the week as well. So you're not going to be short of entertainment.

You've also got **Bui Vien Street** which definitely comes alive at night. You've got all your big craft brewers in those streets. So you've got plenty of entertainment and that's just all in the first 24-48 hours. So you've got some culture if you've gone out of Ho Chi Minh City and you've got into the Mekong Delta and you've explored some of the countryside, or you've decided to stay in the city, get a little bit lost, have some beautiful cakes and explore the cafe culture, which is very, very rich, and do it that way. Or you've decided to relax or you've just gone shopping crazy.

I hope you're going to enjoy this series. I've certainly enjoyed Ho Chi Minh again this time. I got to experience some great music at **Acoustic Bar**. I had a fab night that night. I found a couple of new restaurants and the food was just sensational. Don't think that you are going

to be limited to just Vietnamese food. You'll just think about a cuisine and it will be here. So you've got your Korean, you've got your pizzas, you've got good Italian, you've got Thai, you've got fabulous Vietnamese food. And just go wild. Just try all the different kinds of new foods and foods that are particular to the South. And in particular, when you're looking at fur, there's a different flavour to fur in Ho Chi Minh City that you will be able to taste the difference here to how it is in the north. It's made totally differently. And of course, there are particular dishes that are exclusive to this area.

I hope you're going to enjoy my next Out and About which is to be in Hoi An. That's my next stop. So stay tuned for the Out and About series. These are all going to feature on your normal podcast channels and of course on the website [whataboutvietnam.com](http://whataboutvietnam.com). Thank you for joining and see you in Hoi An.

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