



What About Vietnam – S3-3 – Saigon / HCMC's best districts to visit in 2021 and beyond

[00:00:35] **Kerry Newsome:** Xin chào. Welcome to *What About Vietnam*. Today, we take a wander around the districts of Ho Chi Minh City, otherwise known as Saigon, to bring you the most up-to-date areas to visit when the borders open up post the pandemic. For those of my listeners in Vietnam, I'm hoping that's going to be very soon.

We cover some of the lesser-known local neighborhoods and introduce you to what I think is, I don't know, a little bit more of an authentic view of Saigon-ish life with great cafes, local eateries, pagodas, temples, and more. Look, like most busy cities, it's all about knowing where to go. You can waste so much time trying to find places. While some of the best experiences I've had have been when I've got lost, it's always best to get lost in a happening neighborhood. I'm delighted to have Samantha Coomber on the show, a British-Australian lady, who's currently living in Ho Chi Minh City. I caught up with her there. She was able to start the episode by just sharing with us the latest on what's happening with social distancing in Ho Chi Minh City as it's June 21. I thought it was important for context to include that. Thankfully, it sounds like it's mostly under control. Thankfully, we were able to get into the really good stuff, which is to talk about the districts of Saigon that she's fallen in love with.

Samantha comes to the show with a library of knowledge and a passion for this city, developed over 12 years of traveling around as a freelance travel and lifestyle writer, including guidebook writing. Samantha's respect in the travel industry was earned very early in her days employed as a foreigner and editorial consultant, full-time by the state-run V.N.A.T - Vietnam National Administration of Tourism in the years 2002 to 2004. She went on to co-author the first edition *Insight guides: Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City Smart Guide*, covering the Ho Chi Minh City, Southern Vietnam sections and published in 2009. Beyond that, she has written for a myriad of travel publications around the world. She really walks the talk. Some of these publications include *The Wall Street Journal Asia*, *National Geographic Traveler*, *Condé Nast Traveler UK and India*, and many, many more. She has her own blog called *The Jaded Empress Chronicles*. You will be able to catch up with all her writings from the links in the episode notes. For all the detail that she shares with us on this show, that's going to be included in the transcription notes. You'll be able to download and print that and use that when you come to this amazing city. I know you're going to love this episode. Samantha is going to really give us some insights that you couldn't get anywhere else. Please welcome her to the program.

[music]

Hi, Samantha. Lovely to have you on the show. How are things tracking in Saigon at the moment?

[00:03:46] Samantha Coomber: Hi, Kerry. Lovely to be here. Yes, at the moment in Saigon, we have, what is called, "A social distancing two weeks" We had this last April. After a year, we've got that again. It's basically because we got some spikes in cases in Saigon. The government wants to keep everything in hand. It's basically I can go out of my house and do what I want, go for walk. I see plenty of people on their motorbikes. People going out to get delivery or takeouts, but non-essential services are closed, which means things like cafes, restaurants, gyms, salons, bars. It's only for two weeks. I just want to put this in context, Kerry, that the past year or so, compared to other people, I've had complete freedom, virtually complete freedom to go out, do what I want, take a flight down to Phu Quoc Island, socialize with my friends in bars, squashed into restaurants and cafes with all the locals. It has been a great year, but I think the government's just trying to keep everything under wraps, before any explosions happened, being on the safe side.

[00:05:04] Kerry Newsome: I agree. I think the attitude that the Vietnam government took right from the very beginning with being very aggressive and assertive in closing areas down, and closing airports was the best thing they could have done. The numbers have been so low in comparison to other countries. I'm glad you did that by putting it into perspective.

Look, we're going to be talking districts today. I'm really thrilled to do this with you. You're a travel writer, a very seasoned professional in the area of the travel industry with your own blog, etc and writing for international publications, and the fact that you live in Saigon. You can give us both perspectives as a tourist once yourself and writing for those magazines, as I said, but also as a local. I always think the locals know the great places. You and I got together before today. We decided to pick out the best districts to focus on, but we need to start with number 1 I think. District 1, for me, certainly has been where I've spent most time. It's only really been in my last couple of trips that I've ventured further. There is a lot more in the other districts, but I think this is where most people find themselves from the very beginning and for very good reasons because it's got a lot to offer. Now, over to you, Samantha. Tell us what you know about District 1.

[00:06:38] Samantha Coomber: Well, District 1 is obviously the main tourist area, but it's where the French actually came over in the late 19th century and set up their own little city as such. They started building a lot of the buildings in the style of French Colonial architecture. A lot of those remnants are legacies of what you see today. It's a lovely area. Central District 1 is quite compact. It's easily walkable. A lot of the sites are down a main artery called Dong Khoi Street. You can just walk, or take a cyclo ride is nice, or perhaps take a Vespa scooter ride in the evening. It's quite manageable. The landmarks are pretty impressive. You've got the **People's Committee Building, Hôtel de Ville, the Central Post Office, Notre-Dame Cathedral**, which was modeled on the Notre-Dame of Paris, the beautiful **Saigon Opera House**. Then, you've got a couple of lovely colonial hotels, which are the **Majestic** and the **Continental**. As you walk around here, there are other sites, of course, things I must point out to your **listeners**.

There's a big boulevard, which is now pedestrianized, just by Dong Khoi. Nguyen Hue. That's lovely at nighttime to walk down. All the high rises around. The boulevard is all lit up. It goes down towards the river, but everyone's out, all the locals around, families and tourists. It's lined with cafes. Then, you've got quite a few war remnants, as you know, in war legacies that are in the city. One of them is the **Independence Palace**. That's where the reunification all started. That's in the center of town, but then you've got all these modern buildings, like the **Bitexco Financial Tower**. I think that's about 59 floors with a helipad.

[00:08:48] **Kerry Newsome:** Yes. [chuckles]

[00:08:49] **Samantha Coomber:** I'm scared of heights, Kerry. I haven't had the bottle to go up there, but if you do go to the top, it's fantastic views across the city. That's recommended. Then, you've got real favorites. I'm sure you've been there Ben Thanh Market, which is another--

[00:09:09] **Kerry Newsome:** Absolutely.

[00:09:10] **Samantha Coomber:** Yes. It's another old colonial building. Looks a bit dilapidated, but it's actually a fun place. That's one thing I want to point out about Vietnam and Saigon, that they are quite fun people with a good sense of humor. When you go into **Ben Thanh Market**, you can do a bit of haggling. Everything on sale. There are souvenirs. There's a wet market and **you can** get your coffee beans there. That's lovely, but as you were pointing out, Kerry, there are other places in District 1, which are worth visiting as well.

[00:09:44] **Kerry Newsome:** Yes. I think the district also offers up a lot of rooftop bars. It's got quite a nightlife vicinity where you can enjoy all sorts of food, etc. There are lots of bars and clubs and cafes. We talked about on another episode, I was talking to a girl, just where there are artists and bars and dj's playing all different kinds of music. You've got coffee shops. You've got craft beers. It's quite an eclectic mix in some areas, isn't it? It's got a vibe. It definitely has a vibe.

[00:10:29] **Samantha Coomber:** Absolutely, yes. I must point out one of my favorite things in Saigon is the cafes and coffee houses. There are too many to mention, but there are lots of them, obviously, around this area. You pointed out the other rooftop bars. That's really progressed in the last few years. Look up when you're walking around because there are some wonderful ones. Two of the ones actually that are my favorites at the **Majestic Hotel** overlooking the river and the **Caravelle Hotel**, which is actually where all the war correspondents used to congregate for that sundowners. I don't think they did much work, but that's a big, popular bar. That's lovely. Obviously, rooftop bars, they've got great cocktails, but fabulous views for the sunset. A lot of them have great deejays now. It's quite a party atmosphere. Of course, there are also clubs **and artisan bars**. Yes, the last few years, it's really quite the cool cosmopolitan city now.

[00:11:36] **Kerry Newsome:** Absolutely.

[00:11:37] **Samantha Coomber:** Also, Kerry, I'd like to point out to your listeners about an area then we don't know much about. It's in the very northeast corner of District 1. It's called **Tan Dinh neighborhood**. It's actually that they have wards in Ho Chi Minh City, but it's a small little neighborhood, right in the pocket of Northeastern District 1. People might know it because it's where that beautiful **pink Catholic church** is the home of. Tan Dinh Church, a Catholic church, but there's so much in this area. It's packed into a compact area. You just wander around. One of the great things about Tan Dinh neighborhood is they've got fantastic street food, which is everywhere on the street. It was originally an old Chinese ghetto centuries ago. You've still got traces of the Chinese there. You've got a wonderful marketplace called Tan Dinh Market. If you find Ben Thanh a bit commercialized, then this one is a very local one. They've got things like a martial arts center. You can watch them practice their martial arts at a temple in the evening. You can just wander around cafes and street food in the marketplace. It's a wonderful-- it's an authentic slice of Saigon, but it's still in District 1.

[00:13:11] **Kerry Newsome:** Okay. If I'm staying at a hotel in the primary area of District 1, say, at **The Rex** or something like that-- In that vicinity, if I go to the receptionist, and I say, "I need a grab car or a taxi to go to the Tan Dinh area." They're going to know what I'm talking about?

[00:13:35] **Samantha Coomber:** Oh, yes, definitely. They'll know. You can say it's the Pink Church and Tan Dinh Market. They all know that. It's quite well-known, but it's not so well-known for tourists and travelers. I think it's a real treat for people to have a wander around.

[00:13:57] **Kerry Newsome:** Samantha, if we're going to, head to District 2, that does come up as there's a lot of ex-pats in the area. We've talked about that. I did find some shopping there last time. There are a few venues like **The Deck and Mia Saigon Hotel**. Can you tell us a little bit more just to give my listeners your take on District 2?

[00:14:24] **Samantha Coomber:** Yes. District 2, I joke, it's called "The Republic of District 2" because it's across the river. It's a bit of a drive-out. It is where all the ex-pats tend to congregate to live. I don't think, in terms of the history and the ambiance, it's so good, but what's so wonderful about District 2 is that it's right along the Saigon River. There are lots of new developments there to really enjoy the river life. As you mentioned, there's **The Deck** with a-- there's a few bars as well. Now, **The Deck** has been voted recently, "One of the top 50 bars in the world." It's obviously a great place. It's a deck along the river, as the name suggests. Great cocktails. They have brunches, lunch, and dinner there. It's very, very popular, but there are others as well. You're basically sitting out with the cool river breeze, surrounded by coconut trees, and you watch the boats go past. There are great places for sundowners, but I want to point out to your listeners that there are also three hotels that I know along the riverbank, which are great places. If you want to get out today-- Much as we love Saigon, it can be a bit frenetic and energetic. Motorbike traffic. If you want to have a **couple of nights, where you're waking up** beside the river. There's the An Lam, the Mia Saigon, and the Villa Song. These are beautiful boutique hotels. You can **dine**, have your breakfast by the river, or **as such**, a candlelit dinner. Wonderful places to just retreat a bit at the beginning or the end of your holiday.

[00:16:09] **Kerry Newsome:** Sounds lovely. I think sometimes if you can allow yourself a few extra days in Saigon, you can tend to get into its rhythm a bit more. I think when you just arrive, it is kind of overwhelming. I can remember my sister coming on a visit with me. She was just struck by millions and millions of motorbikes and Ben Thanh Market. I found her gasping standing outside.

[00:16:42] **Samantha Coomber:** [chuckles]

[00:16:43] **Kerry Newsome:** [unintelligible 00:16:43] because of the tight alleyways. Sometimes, as you say, a district like District 2 is a little bit of a reprieve. It is a little bit more civilized and a little bit, I guess, catering to the Westerner, but with some lovely little gems in there, like you described, with those hotels. I think it's one to still put on everyone's list to check out. Of course, I'm going to have a transcription in this podcast. You're going to be able to look up these places. Also, you're going to be able to contact Samantha for any more information that she can share. Obviously, she's got some blogs on this as well.

[00:17:23] **Samantha Coomber:** I just want to tell your listeners as well that the hidden beauty of this is a lot of them provide free speedboat, transfer shuttles from the center of town, which is the **Bach Dang Wharf**. You actually get this James-Bond-style speedboat trip along the Saigon River.

[00:17:41] **Kerry Newsome:** [chuckles]

[00:17:44] **Samantha Coomber:** You can live the Champagne lifestyle on a shoestring budget. It's quite interesting because you're **passing a lot of the new Saigon**, a lot of new developments. Then, you get the cargo boats going past and some fishermen or local people on a sunny day. It takes, usually, about 15 to 20 minutes to get to these places. It's such a treat. As I said, a lot of these places do throw it in for free, but you have to book up in advance because they've only got eight seats on the speedboat or something. A wonderful treat. I really enjoy it.

[00:18:24] **Kerry Newsome:** Absolutely. I think it's good to mention the river. It took me a couple of visits before I got onto the river. I think when you're on the river and there are some lovely cruises, dinner cruises that you can do also.

[00:18:37] **Samantha Coomber:** Absolutely, yes.

[00:18:39] **Kerry Newsome:** Absolutely. I think from the dinner cruise or from a boat, you actually get to look back at the city. Certainly, at night, it looks absolutely stunning. It gives you another perspective. Sometimes, when you're in the thick of it, you think, "Oh, gosh." You're getting swallowed up, but from the river, you get a chance to reflect back on it, to see it as a city from a different perspective. I just thought that was also worth mentioning as we're talking about that area. now, I'm going to move you on to District 3. The reason I want you to touch on that is that it rarely gets mentioned, in my experience, District 3. Maybe you can give us a little bit more detail about what District 3 offers up.

[00:19:28] **Samantha Coomber:** Well, Kerry, if you've got all day.

[00:19:31] **Kerry Newsome:** [chuckles]

[00:19:32] **Samantha Coomber:** I'm such a huge fan of District 3. I always wanted to live here, actually. Then, I got my wish came true. just to point out, it's probably the oldest part of the Saigon proper and that the French were actually developing this bit before the actual downtown District 1. What I want to point out as well is that it's such a pretty area. They've still got the remnants of the beautiful tree-lined boulevards, quite a few of those. I think Pasteur and Truong Dinh are some of the prettiest, but this quite a few. They're lovely places to wander around. as I mentioned, there are sites in District 1. There's a whole list of them, but there's a lot going on in District 3 as well. For example, one of the top tourist attractions in Saigon is actually the War Remnants Museum, which is in District 3, and a very prominent pagoda called Xa Loi, which was the scene of a lot of Buddhist monk activity before the Vietnam War. There are lots of other lovely sites. There's a place called Turtle Lake that your listeners should go to. This is just above the Notre-Dame Cathedral. It's where all the young lovers in Saigon go to. It's a big intersection with the lake. It's full of cafes and street food places. a wonderful atmosphere. Then, what District 3 is really known for is one of the best places in the city for Saigon's wonderful street food. Street food is everywhere in Saigon, but this is a particular note. My Vietnamese isn't that good.

[00:21:21] **Kerry Newsome:** [laughs] We have that in common.

[00:21:25] **Samantha Coomber:** As you said, they can read on the transcript, but I'll just say it's **Nguyen Thuong Hien. It's designated as street food. It's in lots of guidebooks and magazines. It's packed with street food stalls and eateries. There's another one called Nguyen Dinh Chieu, which is another place which is excellent for street food.** Then, there's Saigon's oldest building, which is here, which is this **Tan Xa Palace**, which is built about 1790. There are also some very interesting wartime legacies here from the Vietnam War. One of them is a secret weapon cellar, where they stashed away weapons during the Vietnam War, which is on **Nguyen Dinh Chieu**. There's another place maybe-- some people know about it, some don't. It's a noodle shop, which is your Pho ga, which is the chicken noodles. There's a place called **Pho Binh**. When you go away and you just have your-- which is one of Vietnam's iconic dishes, the Pho ga, the noodle soup. You're eating your noodle soup, but it was actually a secret HQ of the Viet Cong during the Vietnam War. They actually used to congregate up in the mezzanine level to plan the Tet Offensive during the Vietnam War, but no one knew about this. People were just eating their soup. When you go in nowadays, the owner will give you photographs and talk through about this. You have these wonderful wartime legacies. It's definitely worth wandering around. just soaking up the atmosphere and eating yourself crazy with the street food.

[00:23:18] Kerry Newsome: I'm sure people that have an interest in Vietnam and Vietnam history and certainly war history, whilst some of that isn't for all of us, but people that were involved in the Vietnam War and sometimes go back to visit. There are lots of tours that do take you around some of those places that featured strongly during that period. I think that was really good to mention, Samantha. Very good. I think one of the other things I think we talked about was, wasn't it voted one of the world's top 50 coolest neighborhoods or something?

[00:24:00] Samantha Coomber: Yes. Of course, I have to live in one of the world's coolest neighborhoods. [crosstalk]

[00:24:04] Kerry Newsome: Of course you do.

[00:24:05] Samantha Coomber: Of course I do. This is actually **'Time Out' London**. I'm actually from London. That was great. They did a list of the world's coolest neighborhoods. It was amongst the top 50, but I think they recognize the historical buildings. There are lots of French colonial villas. Obviously, some have been pulled down, but actually, there are quite a few still standing, which the people at the consulates now are housed in. There's another thing I wanted to discuss with you and the listeners. Where I live in District 3, there's a wonderful canal area. Again, my Vietnamese is not the best. **It's called Nhieu Loc - Thi Nghe Canal**. To be fair, it does go through five districts, including District 1. There are a few others, but in **District 3**, I think it's the poshest bit. It's the most scenic part. That's why I wanted to discuss it in **District 3**. Kerry, shall I tell your listeners about what's going on along this canal area?

I stumbled across it by accident. Judging by how few foreigners are walking around this canal, I think people should maybe know about this because it's one of Ho Chi Minh City's biggest urban redevelopment projects. It was finished redevelopment in about 2012. Today, when you're walking along, it's a wide, broad canal, which is lined with trees, hibiscus flowers, bamboo, frangipani trees. This is right in the center of the city. It's got a lovely walkway. You can do your exercise or have a lovely evening stroll along. That's packed with locals all out, doing their exercising and gossiping, just getting together, walking the dog, and whatever. Another thing which is wonderful about this. It's lined with the most gorgeous little cafes, very atmospheric, very artsy, which a lot of people don't know, packed with locals, some of the most beautiful pagodas, which I didn't expect to find along the canal, which I have written about on my blog, posting quite a lot of detail, some fantastic old pagodas which have been here for centuries. It's a wonderful place to soak up the local atmosphere, have a coffee, have some street food. The street food is delicious here. If you don't want to have a stroll along-- you were mentioning river cruises. What I find fascinating is now, they run sunset cruises along this canal, from District 1 through District 3 at Sunset Cruises. I've been doing my exercise for five o'clock in the afternoon and I-- on Sunset Cruises with deejays for the tourists go past. They have dinner cruises lit with fairy lights and gondola rides like little [crosstalk].

[00:27:23] Kerry Newsome: Oh, gondolas.

[00:27:24] Samantha Coomber: **Gondolas**. For that romantic-- maybe you want to drop a proposal or something, but for me, this is like--

[00:27:33] Kerry Newsome: [laughs]

[00:27:34] Samantha Coomber: When I first came to Saigon, this was what I class as a stinky, black canal years ago. Now, it's a happening area. Like I said, it does go down into District 1, It runs past the Saigon Zoo, but you can actually do a boat ride. I've even seen standup paddleboarders along there and kayaks.

[00:27:58] Kerry Newsome: Oh my God.

[00:27:59] **Samantha Coomber:** A lot of people go fishing there. Well, I think people should know about is a real slice of local life. Everyone is out doing their thing, but you get authentic cafes and street foods and beautiful little pagodas. They're not crowded. They're just virtually empty. It's a wonderful place to just stroll around, explore or maybe take a boat cruise through.

[00:28:26] **Kerry Newsome:** Samantha, I think that's a good thing to just cover off for everyone listening is that the things that we're talking about aren't totally reliant on the overseas tourist because we're talking about a population of-- what? Is it 8,000,000 or something like that?

[00:28:44] **Samantha Coomber:** Yes. Maybe 9,000,000. Yes, that's in the metro area. It's one of those--

[00:28:50] **Kerry Newsome:** **We're talking about places that are going to be here beyond COVID because let's face it. We're probably not looking for the country to open its borders, maybe, till 2022.** I thought it was a good thing to just mention for everyone listening that we don't have an expiry date on this episode. We're trying to talk and keep the focus for everyone who's listening that these are the things that you're still going to be able to experience and be able to wander around and explore after COVID, when COVID is a thing of the past.

[00:29:27] **Samantha Coomber:** Exactly. This place is buzzing all the time. Even during the social distancing, you still got people whizzing around and everything. It's a wonderful, wonderful energy here. That's the same for the Tan Dinh neighborhood in District 1. That's such a buzzy local area. Whatever happens in Vietnam, they just keep rolling on with their energy at their local communities.

[00:29:58] **Kerry Newsome:** Absolutely. Now, I think almost every major city in the world has one of these. I'm referring now to Chinatown, which sits in District 5. I hear from you, also, that this is a favorite one as well. Tell us more about Chinatown, Saigon.

[00:30:19] **Samantha Coomber:** Yes, I love Chinatowns around the world. As you said, everyone's got one, but Chinatown, in a sense, in Ho Chi Minh City, it's to the West, quite to the West. It takes about 25 minutes in a taxi ride to get there. a lot of visitors tend to go on tour buses and just do this quick, in and out, do all the main sites, and then going out, which is fine. I think it's a very underrated area. Why I really love the Chinatown here is that it hasn't been commercialized. It's not like the Singapore one. I love that one, but it's almost like Disneyfied in terms of a big tourist area. Whereas the Chinatown here, which is called Cho Lon, is very much a working local area. Of course, you've got the main pagodas, which I'll discuss in a few sites, but it's not laid out for tourists. It's a big working area. The name Cho Lon is actually translated as "Big market" That's the thing about this. It's all about trading and wholesale and retail and a hive of activity. When you go to Chinatown, you're seeing a really local area, but very different from the ones I've described because it's the local Chinese-Vietnamese community. It hasn't got a sign. When you actually getting into Chinatown territory, you know you're getting in that because you've got all these Chinese characters on the buildings and signs. It doesn't say, "Welcome to Cho Lon, Chinatown."

[00:32:05] **Kerry Newsome:** [laughs] Yes, I get you.

[00:32:07] **Samantha Coomber:** Yes, you know because you've got the Chinese characters. It's got a very distinct feel to it compared to other parts. I've been going there for years. I wrote a walking tour for a Wall Street Journal Asia. I'm obsessed with the place. Every time I go down there, I see very few foreigners. people don't speak English, but I must say people have been so friendly to me. You just point at stuff if you can't communicate with each other. People have been very welcoming and friendly to me. Perfectly safe to just wander around. I just want to point out there's going to be, obviously, the main landmark areas, which a lot of tours will go to. They are worth the visit. **The main things in Chinatown are the pagodas.**

They are not only the oldest ones in Ho Chi Minh City, but they are also, I'd say, the loveliest. They're just so exquisite, beautifully decorated. They are working pagodas and temples. When you go in there, it's not for show. It's packed with people worshipping. You're almost crying because the incense is so strong in that. They preserve them very well. They are absolutely stunning. The main one is **Quan Am Pagoda**. This is the oldest. It was built in 1740, but you've also got the other one, which is very well-known, **Thien Hau Pagoda**, that 1760 built. Then, there are a few others. This is the beauty of Chinatown. It's a vast area and actually spills out into District 6 and District 10, but the main area that you want to visit is actually quite walkable. The only site that is a little bit further out is the famous **Binh Tay Market**, which you must go to. It's the biggest market in Chinatown. It dwarfs the size of Ben Thanh Market. It's just into District 6, but it's a wholesale market, but it's absolutely fascinating. Then, you just jump in a taxi back to the main concentration of the pagodas. Also, there are two other sites I want to point out. There's a **street called the Luong Nhu Hoc**, which is where you want to buy your **Lion Dance masks**. It's a **ritual costume street**. It's where everyone buys their things to worship in the pagodas and the temples. It's also called Lanterns Street because of the Mid-Autumn Festival, the end of September. It's all beautifully lit up with lanterns.

[00:35:16] Kerry Newsome: Oh, beautiful. Love that.

[00:35:18] Samantha Coomber: If you've got any energy left because there's a lot to see. It's still worth visiting is the **traditional Chinese medicine street**. I'm not even going to pronounce the name, but it's very well-known. That's when you wander along, you see all the bags of Chinese herbal medicine and roots and bags. That was very important before. It's dwindled a bit, but it's still quite visible. That said, all this is quite walkable. Then, when you've had enough, if you're not on a tour bus, you can get a taxi back into the center of town again. It's very manageable, but **I do recommend having a wander around District 5 Chinatown.**

[00:36:06] Kerry Newsome: That's on the top of my list when I'm back. I haven't had a chance to experience Chinatown in Saigon. That's definitely on my list. I think some of the things that you've mentioned, which ring some bells for me in the sense of some of these districts are about 25 minutes out of town. by the sounds of what you're saying, you need to allow yourself at least a few hours to walk around to discover everything. I think people have got to be prepared for that. There's a little bit of smooching and musing. some of the sights and smells and things are going to be strange and probably taking some people out of their comfort zone to experience, but definitely worth being curious and sticking your nose into places. Being mindful. However, when you are walking around, you've just got your bag that you're carrying, etc., well sealed, so that you can't have any experience like bag-snatching or anything like that happen in any of these districts or anywhere in Saigon. I know some people have had that happen. That's marred their experience of Saigon. I would hate that to be the case. I'm mentioning it just to be aware and holding phones out and taking photographs. By all means, do that, but just be mindful that a driver could just whiz past and grab that phone very quickly. It's just a matter of common sense.

[00:37:45] Samantha Coomber: Yes, it's common sense. I must say I've been here for a total of eight years. I personally have found it myself, I've used common sense, etc, but I found it very safe to wander around on my own as a single female. Wandering around the city, as long as you use your common sense and not dress ostentatiously, and as you said, stick your hand out and taking lots of photos and everything, but I find it very safe and very welcoming.

It's a great place to just-- people are very friendly. If you wander down an alleyway-- I think when the borders are open again, I think people are going to be more welcoming because they'll be so happy to see tourists back again. how I've done a lot of my discoveries in this city is just sticking my nose down an alleyway or-- being curious and looking up. I found a fantastic cafe at the end of Dong Khoi in District 1, which is wonderful river views. I didn't know it existed, but I looked up and I saw, "Oh, this is a great rooftop cafe." It's a case of-- being careful, but having a good look around because you'll find, on the whole, people are very friendly and welcoming here.

[00:39:04] Kerry Newsome: Yes. One thing I want to mention is definitely keeping that curious and open mind and keeping a positive attitude, because I know sometimes you'll be taking some, "Oh, I'll be taking a friend. I'll say, oh, we're just going to go down this alley." Now, a Westerner doesn't really think that that's a good idea in a lot of cities around the world going down small, dingy alleys, etc.. You can go down a small alley in any city in Vietnam, in fact, and find yourself then into an oasis or then open a door, and then, you're walking up some steps. I'm even in the Caravelle Hotel. I don't think it's changed, but you get the elevator to level 9 or 10. I think it is. Then, you go up these crappy old steps. Then, you on this amazing rooftop bar that overlooks the city. There's got to be a little bit of trust. I think that goes into some of your travels and other trusting the guidance that you're getting. I think people, I'm hoping, listening to this podcast are going to get from yourself and myself that, we've had good experiences because we have been curious and been willing to just step out of our comfort zone a little bit. being mindful of not being, as you say, ostentatious or flippant and being respectful.

I think the Vietnamese are very open to being friendly if you are friendly to them and courteous and being respectful. I think you get more from the Vietnamese out of that, even if you fail to be able to pronounce their language. I think if you try, and I think if you endeavor to be show politeness, they will do anything for you. This podcast's given me a great opportunity to talk to people who have traveled in Vietnam and people sharing their stories, telling me that people have opened their homes to them, to heal from an injury. They've lost something in the street. Someone's running after them with their key card because they dropped it or something like that. There are really good stories to be told, but it takes two to tango. I think you're right. I think coming back after COVID, the country will be very welcoming for tourists. It is what motivates me to do this podcast. I think the fact that we've been able to talk to you, Samantha, today to share your insights is just going to be gold for people coming back. Samantha, it's been absolutely fabulous having you on the show. I'm going to have to say farewell now, but I hope everything continues to go well in Vietnam. Maybe we'll see you in Australia very soon.

[00:42:04] Samantha Coomber: Thanks so much, Kerry, for this wonderful opportunity to chat with you. Thanks so much. All the best.

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