



What About Vietnam - Series 3 - 10 – Top 5 Vietnam Travel Podcasts 2021

[00:00:36] Kerry Newsome: *Xin chào.* Welcome to *What About Vietnam*. In today's episode, we're going to explore the Top 5 episodes in the *What About Vietnam* series. I've been recording these episodes since May 2020. As you can imagine, with the news that is coming out at the moment about Vietnam, there's a lot going on. I'm certainly doing my best to try and keep everyone updated through my social pages, the website, and obviously, with my guests as we go through the program. These top 5 obviously resonated with you. I thought I would bring some of the highlights of those episodes out. We would play them again for you. Just so that you can keep inspired to travel to Vietnam even though in your trip planning process, maybe at this stage we can't put in a date.

Vietnam is doing its best to overcome the COVID Delta spread. Ho Chi Minh City is certainly experiencing some great hardships. Across the country as a whole, the death toll is quite in epic proportions. I have absolute faith in the country. I know that they will be doing everything they can to get on top of it. I am certainly keeping abreast of news as it is coming forth. There's a lot in place, sandboxes in Phu Quoc. All sorts of things are in development in regard to infrastructure and changes in Vietnam. We're going to be exploring those with future guests as they come on.

For today, we're going to revisit the top 5. I'm delighted to introduce the number one episode, which just happens to be the very first episode I recorded back in May 2020. It was the beginning of the story of the *What About Vietnam* series. It was my entry point, an open door for you to have a look at Vietnam and consider it as a destination to travel in the future.

Because I concentrated a lot on the key areas of what I fell in love with about Vietnam, being its food, its people, its culture, its cities, its scenery, but in particular, its food. Let's jump in and explore some of the foodie highlights in Vietnam to get you inspired again to travel to Vietnam.

[music]

No 1 – Top 5 Vietnam Travel Podcasts

[00:03:29] Kerry Newsome: I've always believed that one way to know a country is to immerse yourself in its food. If your palate and your digestive system allow it, try and be open to exploration. Check out the local markets. While the smells and views of food, vagrantly sitting out on the benches may be overwhelming at first. Try and put your, when in Rome, do as the Romans do, hat and try some of the traditional dishes.

A little tip here for your tummy. It is going to get hit with some flavors. I do suggest to my travelers to maybe look at taking a probiotic before leaving maybe for a few days ahead. I know I do. It really helps get our tummies to be used to the different flavors that are going to experience. Definitely, do take some anti-diarrhea medication. I hate to bring that up right in this. I'd be remiss if I didn't.

I want to cover the five main dishes that is Vietnam renowned for.

That would be *bánh mì*. [chuckles] I laugh when I think about *bánh mì* because everybody knows, it's my first go-to thing. I love it. The baguettes are absolutely delicious, light, and not so full of that thickening bread that we all hate. They sometimes put butter or mayonnaise as the base. Then, they'll add a pâté and slices of the pork roll. Then, they'll put sometimes the pork meat. You can have them with chicken, or you can have them with beef. Then, they'll add basil, mint, spring onions, and chili if you like. If you're like me, you're going to have the-- Yes, I'll have it all. Thanks. Because it's just a bite to behold.

Phở is pretty well known. It is a beautiful broth soup. It's all in the broth. The aniseed flavors, the beautiful mint, and basil with a little bit of sugar. It's just so delicious. Of course, you can have that in beef, chicken, or pork.

Bánh xèo is a pancake. It's my number three go-to. It's a delicious breakfast option. It's usually very crunchy. It's got spring onions. Sometimes they put prawns in it. You fold it over. Amongst it, you're going to put the mint and the basil and the extra bits of salad into it to add to the flavors. Definitely, my go-to for breakfast.

Cao lầu are familiar to people who visit Hoi An. It is a very flavorsome noodle dish. It's got cute, crunchy little bits of pork on the top. Oh look, there are lots of stories that it's made from the [unintelligible 00:06:26] waters. I don't know how true that is, maybe in the past. Certainly, the broth is what makes it. It's a tasty lunch option and very common in Hoi An.

Bún chả is a traditional Vietnamese pork dish. It's got pork patties that are squished up. It also has caramelized pork belly slices. It's served in a broth alongside rice noodles, fresh vegetables, and herbs. You're really going to love the noodles in Vietnam. They are so different from the noodles that we know. I will tell you that there is definitely a difference in flavors and cooking between the north and the south. Even their spring rolls are different. Distinct to some regions will be dishes like white roast dumplings, famous in Hoi An as is the *cao lầu*.

As I said, it's a very simple noodle dish. Try to find it in Ho Chi Minh City or Hanoi. You're going to find that very difficult. As a rule of thumb, okay, with very blurred lines, the north does tend to be more meaty. They have a cooler climate that lasts longer. In the south and in the center, you're going to find sweeter and certainly a concentration more on seafood. A word of warning, if you think your kids are starting to get a bit hyper, and you don't know why, mind the sugar as you will find they put sugar in almost everything. I found that out from a cooking class. Even fruit juices, pineapple, watermelon, etc. You can say no to sugar, which I do. Obviously, beach locations like Nha Trang, Danang, Hoi An, Ha Long Bay, and the Mekong Delta are rich in seafood, which they regularly sell the day's catch to local restaurants. They will offer them in these buckets out the front, yes, these buckets. They're displayed in the front of the restaurants. You can then pick what you want. They'll weigh them. Then, they will pretty much cook them the way that you want to. It's cheap. It's cheerful. It's delicious. You can't beat the freshness.

No, I cannot speak about Vietnam without talking about the little red chairs. The little red chairs are quite famous. You'll see them as standard seating in very local places that are frequented by the locals. They're also part of what I call the pop-up restaurant. You can be

walking along a street maybe in Hoi An. All of a sudden, the chairs come out. People will start grilling tasty sticks of pork or skewered prawns, etc. Simply, very quickly, you can grab a chair. You can grab one of those sticks and sit down and make an afternoon of having some delicious snacks. It's definitely the aromas and the relaxed state of being that draws you in.

There's no fuss, no parking to organize, no booking to be made yet.

In the same street that you're going to have the street food, you can walk further down. You'll see lovely restaurants side by side touting their daily specials. Like any country, Vietnam has morphed into a multicultural society. Amongst the craziness is some amazing chefs are merging with new restaurants and bringing their culture to the table in Australian, Japanese, Korean barbecue, and Asian fusion. I can honestly say I don't think I've had a bad meal in Vietnam. For the most, I am with people that know what I like. I still do food tours. I still do cooking lessons because you never stop learning about Vietnam. It's just one of those countries. That's the delicious part about it.

[music]

No 2 – Top 5 Vietnam Travel Podcasts

[00:10:22] Kerry Newsome: I can totally understand why S2-09 discover Phong Nha and the largest cave on the planet featured as the second most popular episode in the series. Phong Nha caves is a fascinating area that's really been developing since about 2014. We're talking with Ben Mitchell. He's a local. He runs his own farmstay there, Phong Nha Farmstay. He's really been part of that region. It's developing. It certainly is getting plenty of media attention. I think will be extremely popular post-COVID. He breaks down the cave system into three categories. I think that was really advantageous for people deciding whether or not it was going to be at their level and that they could go there and enjoy it because of the national park, because you can go bike riding. You can even surf there believe it or not.

There's a really good town community scene, where they've got local restaurants and that, Ben tells me. It's just an all-round really great episode. I've grabbed a couple of highlights out of it to feature in this episode. I hope you're going to enjoy them. Let's have a chat with Ben.

[music]

[00:11:56] Kerry Newsome: Tell us about the caves that you'd suggest would be meeting the average person's ability to explore, to spend time in, and really enjoy their stay there. What caves would you suggest?

[00:12:11] Ben Mitchell: Well, the caves could be divided into three categories if you like. One would be the Show caves, the Paradise cave, the Dark cave, the Phong Nha cave, the *Tiên Sơn* cave. These caves are set up to accept mass tourism. Buses can pull up in car parks. They're set up with infrastructure that can move people either by boat or zip line or up and down staircases and walkways into and out of the caves. That would be one category. Another category would be the more adventure caves that are for doing day trips to and maybe overnight trips to. They would be what I would consider great for tourists to go and have a really adventurous experience of trekking in the jungle and visiting a cave, as I say, maybe for a day trip and then coming back and having a swim in a pool and a gin and tonic, watching the sunset from there, from a bar somewhere around Phong Nha. Maybe they do an overnight trip where they camp in the cave. They have cooked dinner by the local jungle man.

The third category that I would suggest would be the multi-night caves. They can go into the two-lung system for many, many nights of camping and trekking and adventure for the *Hang Sơn Đoòng* cave, which is a four-day trip at the moment. You're actually trekking to a

different location every night in either, well, *Hang Sơn Đoòng*, in the same cave. On some of the other trips, you'd be going to different caves and different campsites every day. They would be the more adventurous ones that I would consider would be not probably for everyone, but definitely for people who want to do something that's going to be outside the box. There are 15 trips per month and 10 people can go per trip. You're looking at about 150 people a month going through from January till September, excluding Tet. They'll close down for a little while over Tet in February.

[00:14:53] Kerry Newsome: Yes. It's interesting. I really appreciate you breaking up the caves into categories as in that one category being the Show caves. They're the ones where I see all the, as you say, bulk tourists cramming themselves into buses and vehicles, etc. Flooding those caves. Then, you've got the adventurous other day or not. Then, you're going to get people that are going to spend two or three days in Phong Nha. Then, you've got the really experienced trekker, who's going to take on that quite strenuous caving through *Sơn Đoòng* as you say, etc. Because that's not just for your average bear. Let's face it. I don't know about you, but I certainly know about me. That would be beyond my-- [laughs]

[00:15:54] Ben Mitchell: I'm not sure. I reckon [crosstalk] myself.

[00:15:58] Kerry Newsome: Yes. No, no, no. My husband--

[00:16:01] Ben Mitchell: It's mainly for walking. If you can walk a few kilometers a day, you'd be right to do the world's biggest cave. When you walk through it, it feels like you're in Notre-Dame Cathedral but you're a **lego man**. Very good, yes.

[00:16:17] Kerry Newsome: Yes. Wow. God.

[00:16:18] Ben Mitchell: Yes, my mother's done it. I've done it. I have a lot of different people come through. Long as you keep yourself physically moving for a few days, you can do it. There's a little bit of rope work in that. Where people don't have the experience to do it, the company Oxalis has its staff who are very experienced. They're not just experienced in what they do, but they're also experienced in getting people who are not experienced in what they do through the cave.

[music]

No 3 – Top 5 Vietnam Travel Podcasts

[00:17:07] Kerry Newsome: Switching now from Phong Nha, we now have a look at Hoi An. We couldn't have done Hoi An without my guest Sharon Sweeney as she gave us the episode talking about the top 10 things to do. It was a fantastic episode because she'd been a local there for 12 years. She and her partner run a business called Hoi An Now, which you can see at hoiannow.com. She knows the area so well, and her descriptions, and just the way she can paint that city so that you could close your eyes and imagine yourself there. I am not surprised at all that it's rated as the number three in the top 5. I think you're going to see in the highlights that I have brought out just to feature in this episode. Let's say hello to Sharon again as she talks to us about Hoi An and the top 10 things to do.

[music]

[00:18:21] Sharon Sweeney: I've never seen any place like Hoi An Old Town in all my travels. Basically, it's a heritage-listed small town that used to have-- It's absolutely steeped in history. It's like a living museum if you like. During the 1500s, it was the epicenter for merchants who were going along the silk road. You had all these amazing times, all these merchants from different parts of the world like Japan, China, Europe, France, just everywhere. The architecture of the Hoi An Old Town is reflecting all that melting pot of people.

During the day, it's just incredible because they've just maintained it so beautifully. They've got buttercup yellow buildings interspersed with pastel blue, sky blue, baby blue paintwork as

well. It's just incredible. It's just so well preserved. Then, at night, it's like Disneyland because Hoi An is known as the Lantern town, and for good reason – out of every shopfront, there are numerous lanterns. There are lanterns along the street. There are lanterns over passing the street. My favorite time in Hoi An Old Town is where it's twilight. That magical color, that twilight becomes-- it's like pink and soft purple and orange and has these gorgeous sunsets. Anyway, and then the lights, the lanterns start coming on. Oh my God. It's like this magical Disneyland experience. [chuckles]

Then, you've got this *Thu Bồn* river that just floats, that just goes all the way through it. They have little traditions. One that is very close to my heart because I've got a lot of wishes in me is--

[laughter]

[00:20:51] Kerry Newsome: Let's say--

[00:20:52] Sharon Sweeney: I'm on that.

[00:20:53] Kerry Newsome: [chuckles] You can't forget those wishes.

[00:20:55] Sharon Sweeney: Yes. You can take a little trip on these sampan boats. You set these little wish candles. You make a wish. You put them in a little cup if you like, a little paper cup. You light your wish candle. You watch it bobbing away in the water and hope your wish will come true. Everybody should see Hoi An Old Town just once in their life.

[sound cut]

The spas massages and spa treatments, come on.

[laughter]

[00:21:34] Kerry Newsome: Oh yes. What a hard job. You had to take so seriously

[00:21:38] Sharon Sweeney: You need...

[00:21:40] Kerry Newsome: -to check those out.

[00:21:40] Sharon Sweeney: You'll be [unintelligible 00:21:40]. It means going back to the same place. It means actually going to every place in Hoi An just to see what they're like. I do, so I know, I know. I'm a champion. I do it regularly. [chuckles] Yes, well, look at the prices. You'd be mad not to. I don't think anyone should go and have a one-hour massage when you can have a five-hour massage. [chuckles] I reckon you should just book yourself in for the entire trip because I would.

[laughter]

Oh, look on the map seriously. You've got the high-end, very high-class hotels offering massages. Now, they cost a fortune. I've sent writers, reviewers to the top, really expensive hotels. It's very hit-and-miss. One would surprise you. I won't name it. It's one of the best hotels in Vietnam and the spa treatment was very hit-and-miss.

Again, no seriously, we do put very much a recommendation of the ones you should go to. Whilst you can get fabulous ones on the street corners, you can because massage is an innate thing. It's not often something you can train for a good masseur. The ones I highly recommend are the day spas. There you've got train masters. They're cheap. The premises are clean. They're really, really tasteful. The decor is tasteful. You've got the full Western spa with the wafting music. The smells actually-- Oh, oh. [chuckles] Yes. Oh.

[00:23:30] Kerry Newsome: You're sending me back there in a heartbeat seriously. That is one of the things as far as your trip planning is concerned. I would highly recommend it to people to include. I think people always think they've got to be doing all the time. I think sometimes there is some pleasure and enjoyment in a holiday when you're just able to access things like massage and be able to just chill out but not thinking, "This is costing me a fortune."

[00:24:06] Sharon Sweeney: Highest recommendations. It's in our top 10 on the website. It's Marble Mountains. It's set between Danang and Hoi An, about 20 minutes from Hoi An.

During the second to 15th centuries, it was used by the *Chăm*. It's during the *Chăm* period. It was used by the people there as a sacred site of worship. It's really got one of those energies. It's amazing. There are five mountains. Each one represents an element. You've got fire, water, metal, wood, and earth. It's just amazing. There are pagodas there, which are like temples and shrines. You've got caves, massive caves that you can go down into. There are tunnels or crawling [crosstalk] in very small areas.

[00:25:05] Kerry Newsome: I've seen some funny pictures where people are getting their [crosstalk] bums through. [laughs]

[00:25:09] Sharon Sweeney: Me, me. I really got, "Oh my god. I was scared." Be careful. Guys will grab you. They'll just shove you forward. Then, the next thing is you're climbing into things that you could easily break your neck on. Just be careful of that.

[sound cut]

[00:25:27] Kerry Newsome: Good footwear.

[00:25:29] Sharon Sweeney: Yes, and beware of the heat.
music]

No 4 – Top 5 Vietnam Travel Podcasts

[00:25:38] Kerry Newsome: Still in Hoi An, I take you to the fourth top episode in the *What About Vietnam* series where we talk to Paul Simpson. Now, Paul's got a wonderful length and breadth of history about the Old Town. He actually has been working there for the last few years and has grown to love it. He has some really great stories to tell about things to do in the Old Town and some great knowledge to share. Not at all surprised why you love this episode as Paul really shares from the heart. You can really appreciate the things that you should do. He gives some insights into how long you should maybe consider including in a stay there, maybe three to five days. That is a minimum to really cover the Old Town and the beaches and all the things that there are to do from Hoi An as a base. A family-friendly place, a place for a solid traveler, great food spots. You've got the beach and the Old Town to explore. I've plucked a few highlights out from this episode just to remind you what's such a good one it is. [chuckles] I know exactly why you picked it in your top 4. Let's have a chat with Paul Simpson again as he talks to us about Hoi An, stepping back in time.

[music]

[00:27:07] Paul Simpson: It's picturesque. If you're a photography buff, you can come and see all the places and discover new ones, where to take photos, different times a day, different lighting like Monet. You can come to Hoi An and ride in a basket boat. They may-- giant baskets and turn them into boats, very creative, use bamboo reeds and palm fronds.

You can go to the *Trà Quế* village to learn about local farming techniques and how they still do things by hand. The foods that you eat in the local restaurants and in your hotels are all farmed here. It's wonderful, very fresh. You're eating literally from farm to table.

You can see how they make silk where the industry really hasn't changed in the last 500 years. The only thing that's changed is they've mechanized it, but you can still see them using a loom, hand-weaving things. They're for sale. They're still here. You can learn that.

Pottery. The pottery village here still uses a giant earthen oven they feed it full of wood and charcoal to heat it up. Then, they handmake all of the ceramics and put them in using what looks like a pizza. What do they call it? A pizza peel. It's called a peel, a pizza peel. They put it in using a pizza peel. A few hours later, they take it out. It's ceramic.

Hoi An was known for its lanterns. Everyone in Southeast Asia going back four, five, six hundred years. They knew about the silk lanterns hanging in the streets of Hoi An. They're beautiful. They're decorative. They're everywhere. Anyone who comes to Hoi An takes a silk

lantern home. You can learn to make them. You hang them in your house. They're beautiful, softly lit.

You can come to Hoi An and get the best of pretty much all vacations you can get, all of those. You can go golfing at one of four premier golf courses. You can take cooking classes and learn how to cook amazing Vietnamese cuisine, the fusion of flavors. You can come to Hoi An and go to the beach. We have beautiful beaches here.

You can enjoy strolling through the Old Town and see the history. You're walking down a street that was laid out 500 years ago. The houses really haven't changed. It is an earthen ceramic structure made with ceramic bricks and hand-carved and hand-turned wood accents on the doors. The doors aren't really doors. They're wood slats that they stack up on top of each other. They're still using those. The windows are the same. They have shutters. There's no glass. They're all open. This little town is the United Nations World Heritage site because they haven't changed it. They've preserved it for centuries.

No 5 – Top 5 Vietnam Travel Podcasts

[00:30:53] Kerry Newsome: Who would have thought that the number five in the top 5 of the *What About Vietnam* series would be about shopping? Who would have thought? Ah me. I would have thought because I know what shopping can be as an experience in Vietnam.

There was only one person I thought of first to do this with. It was Judith Treanor.

Judith Treanor comes to the program with a long history of traveling back and forth. She has a fantastic knowledge base of ethical and sustainable products across the countryside. I can totally understand why you love the episode as she shares her knowledge across Hanoi, Hoi An, Saigon. She talks about various districts. She talks about various brands that you might look for. It's a really entertaining episode. I've actually done one trip with her and thoroughly enjoyed myself and learned so much more about Vietnam, a lot more than just markets, which is what you probably originally think about Vietnam. It's got fashion. It's got designers. It's got talent that is just starting to ooze out of that country and really needs to be embraced. I'm sure post-COVID, we're going to really see a lot more of that.

Please have another look at some of the highlights here in this episode. Please listen to the full episode. You can always go to her web her website, which is templesandmarkets.com.au, where she features some of the products that she's actually bought there. If you want to get them, you can get them online from her online store. A lot to share in the episode. I've just **[unintelligible 00:32:42]** out some highlights that I think might resonate with you, and you'll enjoy. Let's dive in and let's go shopping.

[music]

[00:32:56] Judith Treanor: Local designer, boutiques, and cafes that you'd never know existed. You just got to wander if you've got time. [crosstalk]

[00:33:01] Kerry Newsome: Yes. Sometimes those, as you say, are quite hard to find. They're hidden. They're very small doorways. I would have walked right past that. I would not have seen that. Then, all of a sudden, you said, "No. Oh, this is where we're going." All of a sudden, we're up those stairs. I've gone, "Wow." There's just this amazing store with this amazing stuff. Yes.

[00:33:23] Judith Treanor: Yes. You can suddenly lose a few hours of your day. [laughs]

[00:33:27] Kerry Newsome: Oh. A few hours.

[00:33:29] Judith Treanor: Add some days in. I think we've got to give us a tip and add some extra days in for shopping on your trip. It might not be something you do think about when you're going to Vietnam, but seriously, it's a shopping paradise. We're going to get into it. One of my favorite streets in the center of Saigon is *Lê Lợi*. It's quite a major road on the

other side of Ben Thanh Market. In one short stretch of road, you'll find Ipanema Bags, Gingko, L'Usine, Duy Tan, and Mekong Plus. These are all shops selling locally handmade, ethical, and fashion homewares and gifts. That's something else we're going to talk about as we go on. There's a big emphasis on these locally handmade and ethical and wonderful creations all over Vietnam. I guess those are the tips if you've got a short time in the country. If you've got time, just delve a little bit deeper. To discover the best of Vietnam shopping, I think you'll need to venture a short taxi distance away from the center of each city. In Hanoi, grab a taxi, go to *Tây Hồ* Lake, which is also known as West Lake. If you're in Saigon, head to District 2. Now, interestingly enough, these are both areas where the ex-pats shop and live and where you'll find the best representation of Vietnamese artisan-made fashion and homewares.

[00:34:54] Kerry Newsome: Yes. They're the areas where I think they're not the mainstream. If you've just arrived in Vietnam, got off the plane, in Ho Chi Minh City, in particular, you smack bang into District 1, aren't you?

[00:35:11] Judith Treanor: Yes, exactly. [chuckles] [crosstalk]

[00:35:13] Kerry Newsome: You go to District 2, all those other areas. You've got to think a bit wider but also get some tips like we're talking about now about going to those districts and what to look for because wow, I was just blown away.

[00:35:28] Judith Treanor: That's it. I think Vietnamese, they're really known for artisan crafts and the way they use traditional methods to create modern designs. I think first-timers might be surprised to know there really is a flourishing fashion scene in Vietnam. They even have their own annual fashion show each year featuring local designers. If you have got extra time, it may be an extra day, go and find that out.

[music]

[00:35:58] Kerry Newsome: I hope you've enjoyed the journey we've taken today through the Top 5 episodes of the *What About Vietnam* series. It's been an absolute delight to bring those highlights and just relive some of the thoughts, aspirations, advice, insights, etc. That my wonderful guests who come on the show share with us. I hope you'll take the opportunity to maybe look further into the series at whataboutvietnam.com. You can always reach me at whataboutvietnam@gmail.com. I'm always happy to answer any queries that you have. Obviously, at the moment for a tourist, the country isn't open for us to visit, but that doesn't stop any of us doing trip planning. The good thing about trip planning is it can be fun when it is matched up with people that have had those experiences that can share them with you as they do on the show. We can have a laugh about them. We can find out all the crazy things that some people do and just walk away with that knowledge that is going to help make you have a fabulous trip in Vietnam when those doors do come open.

[music]

[00:37:17] Outro: Thank you for listening. Check out the episode notes for more information.

What About Vietnam.

Don't forget to subscribe, rate and review. Stay tuned for more fun adventures in Vietnam.

What About Vietnam.

[00:37:55] [END]