



WHAT ABOUT VIETNAM

What About Vietnam – S5-E1- Vietnam Visa Update and Land Travel Tips taking in Phan Thiet, Hue, and Quy Nhon

Before I jump straight into the show, I just wanted to bring to everyone's attention that there's been some really big news, really big exciting news about the visa situation to enter Vietnam. As of the 15th of August, you will be able to extend your stays quite dramatically. So the typical e-visa up until this point has been for those countries that it applies to, you would only be allowed 30 days. That will be extended to 90 days as of the 15th of August. I'm going to put detail of the website that you need to go to, which is the regular, the most authoritative website to use. And I use that sincerely in the sense that it's not a service provided website. It is in fact the immigration website to apply directly to the Vietnam Immigration Department for your visa. So you pay the minimal fee and you know, I've been doing that for years and I recommend all my clients to use that website. So that's where the information will be at present on my last check, just the last couple of days. It's not been updated to reflect this new change, but there's also significant changes to the countries that have been outlined as being waiver free. So the e-visa up until this point, those countries would have 15 days in the country that they could come and visit and not have to pay any visa or apply for any visa status at all. That has now been extended to 45 days. But all the detail will be on the website. The news has really just only come out of the last five days and you know, I'm talking to you on the 30th of June. So please check out the website, whataboutvietnam.com. As soon as the full information has been released, Vietnam, I will make sure I put that on our website.

But today, I'm very excited to have Simon White on. Now, Simon's been doing business and visiting Vietnam over the last 15 years and certainly has a similar love of Vietnam. He's been going back and forth. I think he said he had something like 60 trips over 15 years. He says that he's traveled extensively across the country by car, by rail, by bus, by boat. And he just

loves the experience of the country, its food and immersing himself in local culture and local traditions and just, you know, musing through the country and really meeting people and doing all sorts of fun things. He's a fun guest. He's got some great insights into some places I've wanted to talk to you about. And they're places like Phan Thiep, which is very close to Muna. We have discussed Muna before on the program, but we're doing this show really with a big focus on land transport. And so we're going to be talking about train travel primarily. That's using the reunification train from top to bottom and looking at places to visit by train. And some of those are Phan Thiep. Some of those others are like Hue, like Quynh On, like Da Nang, Hanoi, and of course Ho Chi Minh City. So Sit Tight. It's a really jam packed episode.

Simon is wonderful at just giving his insights and experiences at a very street level, a very immersive level where he likes to, you know, get out and mix with the locals in the cities, in the country areas and really enjoy the street food, enjoy the different traditions and the nuances between the North and the South. And I think he's going to give you some insights that might help you make up your mind as far as whether you want to do your hops around the country or even mix up your hops around the country between train or whether you go by plane to visit some of these places as they're all interesting. But how you get there is, you know, all part of that journey experience as well. Without further ado, let's bring on the very learned, very talented, very interesting, very fun guest, Simon White. Simon White, welcome to the What About Vietnam podcast. Look, we've got a lot to talk about in our program today, but maybe just for everyone listening, you could tell us a little bit about your relationship to Vietnam. You know, what keeps you coming back over 15 years and 60 trips I hear?

05:52 Simon White Yes, thanks Kerry. Look, I've got a bit of a long-term love affair with Vietnam, mostly around business aspects because I'm the president of the Australia Vietnam Business Council in Queensland and also I was chairing Vietnam's representative in Queensland and I'm on the advisory board of the Australia Vietnam Leadership Dialogue. And I spend a lot of time in the business aspect of Vietnam. But like most people that go to a new destination, you know, over 15, 20 years ago, I've spent a lot of time also exploring Vietnam and getting to know the country, what there is to do and the people and the excitement of visiting just different destinations around the country. I think the reason I keep going back is there's always something new to explore. There's new flavors. I say, don't just say that from a food point of view because we all know Vietnam is a food destination. But there's new flavors in what's happening with Vietnam and how it's growing up as a country. 100 million people as of a couple of weeks ago. And also the differences between the metropolis of Ho Chi Minh City and the differences between that and Hanoi and what happens all the way in between and all those amazing places and destinations and the amazing country areas where you're back to feeling like you're in the Vietnam of 30 or 40 years ago. Talk to us about your most liked land based transportation and why you would favor one over the other. I think the beauty of land based travel, you know, when you're an airplane and we know this also domestically in Australia, you fly over and look down at things and you have that bird's eye view. But you're not immersed in what's happening on the ground and you're not immersed in the people and their day to day lives. And, you know, we talked a little bit earlier about taking other people to Vietnam and I quite often think when you land in the airport in Ho Chi Minh or Hanoi, it is sometimes confronting if

you're not used to it. And I always refer to it as being like a deer in headlights when I take people over there. And I also always meet everybody at the airport and they walk out into that throng of people hanging around and that chatter and noise and down south the heat and the smells and the aromas of an Asian city. And I think that, you know, that can be quite challenging to people. So I think that when you want to immerse yourself in culture, and this also depends on how much time you've got, because if you've got a quick trip and it's seven to 10 days, you need to jump a plane to see a bit of the country and get to know the differences around what happens from the difference between the south to the north and in between. But I think if you've got a bit of time, you know, getting down and getting on some sort of land based travel and we can talk about the options in a moment, really immerses you in the culture and allows you to look out the window, sit back and relax and compare Vietnam as a country and how it's uniquely different to a lot of countries, but also the same in some ways as well. And to watch people go about their day to day lives and to go through, you know, when you're on the train, for instance, you go through the backyards, not the front yards. So you don't see the shiny front of the shops and the places, but you see the backyards and the chickens and the pigs and the washing hanging out and the kids playing along the place. And, you know, it gives you a different experience to what Vietnam is from the perspective of a Vietnamese person.

09:28 Kerry Newsome And I think that's a really good point to mention is that, you know, I think Vietnam has become very much a location that's big on the Instagram set in the sense and social media sense. Everybody's taking the front yard photos and the perfect views and, you know, the rice paddy fields are in there perfectly in bloom and, you know, all the colors are perfect and all the rest of it. Whereas you and I agreed that you can experience a Vietnam that is still steeped in a lot of history. You know, the minority groups aren't just dressed up for fun. They wear those clothes as their normal day to day wear, their traditional costumes. And I think you're right. I think seeing the backyard does give you that immersion in a greater, greater sense. So, I mean, I've done very limited train travel, but in the case that you have got some time and you want this kind of experience, where would you base your train travel?

10:37 Simon White I think you either go south to north or north to south and you do the whole country if you've got time. You know, the reunification train line, which was basically rebuilt after 1975 to reunify the north and the south goes from Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh. Goes all over the country through all the major central towns. It's an amazing trip. You know, you can get a sleeper. It's cheap. I won't say it's luxurious, but it's air conditioned and it's presentable and it's clean. So I think if I was to choose any mode of ground travel, as though I love getting on a motorbike and I love getting amongst it in Vietnam, because then you feel the energy and those sorts of things. Unless you're experienced on motorbikes and you don't have kids, it's not safe mode of transport. Especially on the highways. Unlike Australia, where we sort of, although motorbike riders will tell you otherwise, we're fairly observant of the rules. The smaller you are in Vietnam on the roads, the less important you are. And therefore motorbikes aren't very important. So if I was in a city area, I wouldn't ride a motorbike. But in the country areas off the main roads and highways, I love getting on a bike and going for a ride. And I'll put my son on there with me and we'll ride around the regional roads because the traffic isn't an issue. Land-based options are motorbike, probably not safe and not comfortable. Unless you're an experienced rider and you want to get on a

bigger bike and do the whole country. Buses, there's regional buses, which I wouldn't get on at night time because they'll take a 20 seater and put 40 people in it. And it's terrible. And it's not safe. They have the sleeping buses that are OK if you're a five foot Asian frame. But I'm a six foot three Australian frame. So the sleeping bus, my feet are hanging over in someone's head and I can never get comfortable. But also they're not to me, they don't feel safe. And that's just a personal thing. Especially, you know, they're built for overnight travel and overnight. They just don't feel hygienic to me. So you've got private car and cars. Cars are becoming very popular. I won't say that driving ability is becoming better with the volume of traffic on the road. So, you know, private cars are great. And, you know, their Uber equivalent, which is great, is great to get around the cities or regional cities. Yeah, but longer trips. It's you know, it just isn't practical. So it comes down to flying. So I think the train is, you know, it's a great way to see the country. You can sit there and look out the window, see everything happening as I say, see the backyards rather than the front yards. Watch yourself go through, you know, rice paddies and mountains and mountain trails along the coast and back in through little towns and cities. And just just look at the country that's growing up around you. And it's an amazing way in any country to travel, but certainly Vietnam. And I think the other thing with trains is I think they're pretty safe. They don't go that fast. So, you know, so anything that does go wrong, there's not a lot that can go that's going to happen. Not a bullet train. And I think that there's a comfort and a personal space. We quite the three of us will travel and what I'll do is I'll book, I should pay the extra, the extra bed and a sleeper when to make it's four. So you have your own cabin. It costs about twenty dollars for a trip. So it's not expensive. And then you've got your own space and you can do your own thing. And my my advice would be buy some food before you leave your destination. Go to the shop, buy some snacks, buy some food. I would take a few beers because I'm an Aussie. Take some things you want to eat and take it all with you. No one cares. And then you've got all your supplies and you can look at the view. You can read a book. You can watch you can watch something you've downloaded. And it's a really relaxing way to sort of sit back and see the place. And if you get a bit tired, just close your eyes and have a bit of a bit of a rest. So I think it allows you to go from Ho Chi Minh City in the south to Hanoi in the north, for instance, and have a look. And a bit like, you know, Canada or Europe, you can have a time based ticket you can buy where you can get on and off as many times as you like. So you can buy what would be a U-rail type pass. Oh, I didn't know that. That's good to know. And you can buy that and you can basically jump on and off the trains. I mean, you've got to book each leg from a seat perspective when you get when you want to get back on again. But you can jump off at all these small destinations and, you know, ask the ask the people in the in the train station. Or, you know, I find when you ask taxi drivers and people where to stay, you know, 90 percent of the time you're going to get somebody who's going to be pretty straight up with you and say, look, there's a great hotel in town. What are you looking for? What is place to go? So I usually think the advice of the locals is really good. So if you went, for instance, from Ho Chi Minh City going north, I would recommend the people to stop in places like Phan Thiet, which is also Munai, which is the famous kite surfing beach of days gone by. The Ferry Creek or whatever. The Ferry Stream. Yep. Ferry Stream, which you get to the top and you find it just comes out as rice paddies, but it's a beautiful walk. Clean thing, but it actually comes off the runoff from the rice paddies and the farms. But it is a nice little walk. And, you know, Phan Thiet is a seafood town. If you've ever watched Luke Nguyen's series, he cooks on the streets of Phan Thiet quite often because he's got family there. So, you know, it's a seafood town. So you always

find a really good seafood meal there. You know, I went to actually went to a seafood buffet there last when I was there in December last year. It was \$10 or you can eat seafood.

16:34 Kerry Newsome Oh my God. I'm in heaven. But the interesting thing is whatever you wasted, they weighed and you had to pay them for every 100 grams of waste you had. Oh, you're kidding. That's amazing. I mean, that's an interesting concept.

16:48 Simon White But the food was amazing. It was just so much fresh seafood and, you know, \$10 you could sit there all night and eat as much as you want to. So, you know, those sorts of things in Phan Thiet are great. What's the accommodation like in Phan Thiet? Well, I usually stay there with family. So for me, it's easy. But if you know, there's a lot of hotels there. But if you look at Munais Beach for interest, there's resorts.

17:11 Kerry Newsome Oh, yeah, there's resorts in Mui ne for sure. And there's lots of them.

17:15 Simon White And again, look, you know, along the beachfront, I can picture but I can't give you names of four or five. There's a couple of really good resorts there. You know, I'm not a five star resort golfing resort traveler. So they're not the pick for me. I'm more of a get down amongst it, you know, sort of person. So for me, I'm more of a sort of three star as long as I've got a clean bathroom of my own, I'm happy. So for me, it's about sort of casting around and looking at what options there are and what's interesting. And places like Phan Thiet have just a good feel about them. And again, it's a safe town if you like to if you like to ride a motorbike. You know, just be careful if you're not licensed in riding a motorbike in Vietnam. You don't have a license there. Then you are going to have insurance issues. And I would never recommend that everybody go there without having a license to ride a bike. Because I do know of a guy, a European guy who had a with his girlfriend had a motorbike accident. She was killed and he was put in jail for seven years because he hadn't seen this many years ago. So, you know, it's one of those places. But Phan Thiet is a beautiful place to stop. It's on the train line. It's, you know, it's hot, but it's near the beach. And, you know, it's a great, lesser known destination. And Runeau Beach was very, very popular, of course, with the Russians for a long time, but not as much these days. But the money going into the resorts there from an investment perspective means that the opportunities to stay there.

18:42 Kerry Newsome you know, the opportunities of accommodation are increasing all the time. I'm really glad that you've covered off Phan Thiet because it's an area I don't know as much about. I've got a girlfriend, Vietnamese girlfriend of mine who's just moved back there with her family because her family own farmland there and they're doing farming in dragon fruit. So, it's a place I want to go to when I visit next time.

19:10 Simon White The other train trip I've heard is very nice that maybe you can speak to about for everyone is the trip from Da Nang to Hue? Da Nang to Hue? Well, I've done Da Nang to Dong Hui to go up to Phong Nga to the caves and mountains areas that we talked about earlier. But that trip from Da Nang to Hue, it goes along the coastline of the mountains. So you go up through the pass and through the tunnels north of Da Nang and it's just actually a beautiful trip. Unfortunately, with the configuration, if you've got a sleeper, the sleeper is actually on the mountainside. So you've got to keep your sort of room door open to look out to the aisle side. Oh, it's on the wrong side. The port of Da Nang is on the wrong side. Most people just stand in the aisle and look at the view for half an hour to an

hour as you go through there. Are you better to do it the other way then? Are you better to do it from the way to Da Nang? I've never done that. I'm assuming if you go south, I don't know whether they turn the train around or they just have an engine at the other end and then the carriage is the same way. Because quite often with train carriages, they just hook up an engine to the other end and go back. The train doesn't turn around itself. So the carriage is still going to have the same configuration. But that's it. If you get a day train that leaves, there's a few of them, but there's one that leaves about 10 am from Da Nang to go north. So if you're doing that Da Nang to Hue trip and you're going to the north, you're going to have to go north. So if you're doing that Da Nang to Hue trip and you go through there, the view is absolutely amazing. And it's just a great way to spend a sort of the day. And it's only about three hours. So if you leave at 10, you're going to get in just after lunch and really nice, really relaxing, beautiful view. And then does it go Da Nang, Hue and then Dong Hoi? Is that the way it goes? Yeah, it goes all the way, Dong Ha, Dong Hui and all the way up. So it just goes all the way up through Ninh Binh and up into Hanoi from there.

21:19 Kerry Newsome So just right. Have you done it all the way to Ninh Binh? No, no, I've done. I've only done Ninh Binh to I've done Hanoi to Ninh Binh and then I've gone as far as Dong Hui. Dong Hui. Well, there's two trains that go to Quynh On now, isn't there? The new Vietage through the Anantara Group. They are running that and that's kind of like from what I can gather is like the Orient Express version with the bar and the and it's very swish. And you can do that trip. And then, as you say, there's the reunification train that goes to Quynh On. Now, can you talk to us a little bit about Quynh On? Because for everyone listening, Quynh On is an area that was a bit of a best kept secret really for Vietnamese, as in the locals knew how beautiful it was. But it's now becoming very much a tourist destination and there's a lot of resorts been built over the last few years and it's really coming of age, so to speak. So, yes, Simon would love you to touch on that trip from Da Nang to Quynh On and tell us a little bit about Quy Nhon.

22:39 Simon White Well, yes, so, you know, Quy Nhon, as you said, great, secret for travelers, but is becoming quite commercialized now. I think, you know, the first time, as I think I said to you earlier, the first time I ever went to Vietnam 15, 17 years ago, I went to a business networking function in the very early days. So it was a very, very, very basic networking in those days. And I won a door prize and the door prize was a weekend at a brand new eco resort south of Quy Nhon.

So, of course, the next time I went back, I flew up there and that would have been my first ever experience out of Ho Chi Minh City, except for the usual things, which is Mekong or Cu Chi tunnels and things like that. So it was my first sort of outside of Ho Chi Minh experience. And it was quite, it was a very, very high level resort, but it was quite a remote destination. I remember getting in this, getting met at the airport in this beautiful brand new land cruiser with white leather upholstery, which I didn't fit in there. And taking a drive about an hour south of Quynh On into out on this peninsula on these dirt roads where there was this brand new eco resort, where there was six villas and personal butlers in each room and your own little pool and your own beach hut with personal staff. And you pick up the phone and the butler came running. I remember saying, it's lunchtime, can we get something to eat? And the butler brought the chef down to the room. And he said, he said, oh, we've got some, overnight we've bought some, I think it was sea bass or something off the fishermen

out the front, because you can see a little fishing boats, around fishing boats out in the bay. And then next thing this whole fish arrives that's been done with rice paper and vegetables and herbs and things to roll with rice paper. So it was an amazing resort. It was being run by a young 25 year old Swiss graduate American guy graduating. Absolutely amazing young guy, growing all their own vegetables and herbs. Just a beautiful resort. And they had their own fish farm as well across the hill. And I remember going over for lunch and sitting on the dock at the fish farm, choosing your fish out of the fish farm. I don't know what happened. I'm assuming it's still there, but I had never heard about that resort again. And everyone keeps saying, oh, it must be a sixth sense, but it's not. It was independent. But, you know, going on the area is absolutely gorgeous to look at. It's a beautiful beach area. There's, it's quite remote. And I went back there again about a year ago, just just under a year ago, and for a different reason and stayed in town and had a look around. And it's it's it's like a mini-denouncement like the thing was 15 to 20 years ago. Okay. Where, you know, before the masses of beach resorts and, you know, explosion of tourism. So it's a beautiful place to go a little bit off the beaten track. Is there a lot to do there? Oh, there's heaps to do. Look, it's like everything. There's islands off there too. So you can explore that. You know, you can go to the beach, there's snorkeling, there's some there's just beaches you can go to. You know, when I go over there, I quite often take my own mask and snorkel. I don't take flippers and things, it's too much. But I take my own sort of bit of snorkeling stuff to have a look around. You know, as you know, Kerry, a lot of places in Vietnam, you know, you might see one fish and it's scared because it's, you know, there is issues with fishing out the place a bit. And there's not yet a realization about ecological tourism or ecological management of tourism in Vietnam and other areas. And how long the bay would be an example, you know, beautiful place, but you go in the water and you won't see a fish. So, you know, it's one of those things that needs to be worked on in Vietnam is the management of the environment alongside tourism and business. Yes. And I know there's a lot of work being done on that space and a lot of environmental management in corporate business around other things like packaging and things that the rest of the world are working on. But I think when you go to those places, you know, one of the detractors that needs to be worked on, if we can talk to some of the little quirky things, is just the amount of floating rubbish and things like that. And how that detracts from those beautiful places. I saw one recently on a Facebook group around Vietnam. It was this beautiful place with all these beautiful seaweed beds and people taking selfies standing on the seaweed beds. And my comment was this is a beautiful place, but it won't remain beautiful if people don't preserve it. If they keep standing on the seaweed beds taking selfies, they're not going to be any beauty for anybody else to share. So, you know, you get these amazing places, but I guess the, you know, how are they going to be managed and maintained as from an eco perspective? The challenge between fish farms and tourism and the understanding of, you know, maintaining beaches and dealing with rubbish and packaging and things is still a challenge in a lot of areas, unfortunately.

27:42 *Kerry Newsome* And I think it's a point that we need to raise. And, you know, it comes up intermittently when I'm talking to various guests about rubbish management, around waste, around seeing it. I guess the tourist footprint and the impact it is making on the environment with plastics and all the rest. It is some circles that I mix in and in Vietnam tourism, etc. Do tell me that they're aware of it, they know about it, and there's a lot of working group parties that are trying to engage with professionals and people that are specialized in this to come up with solutions. I think the sad part for me and for everyone listening about this is that some people will then kind of dismiss Vietnam in the sense

because that they haven't addressed it at this point and it doesn't look great and it can put them off the whole scene. But I guess if we could kind of put it in the context that, you know, Vietnam is growing at such a rate and speed that I think it's having trouble keeping up with itself. And, you know, certainly with, you know, 60 or 70 million people in the domestic travel market, I'm feeling their footprint just as much as my own as a foreigner. And I think there's going to be a lot more said about this and done about this in the future. But I just hope people can say, look, yeah, it's not great. It needs to be addressed, but don't dismiss Vietnam because in some of these locations, it isn't well managed at this point. So it's kind of a work in progress for one of a better description.

29:32 *Simon White* You know, I had some interaction with one of the municipal councils in a major city during COVID to introduce them to the head of the UN Environmental Waste Council and things like that to help them. You know, they're looking, they're seriously looking at these things. I think there's not yet a societal awareness of, you know, I'll just chuck that plastic bag down into the area at the back and it doesn't really matter, you know. And I think that's also about, you know, we're still talking about an emerging economy. And I think we're seeing that in people's attitudes are still such that they're not, you know, still focusing on how do I make a dollar, put food on the table, not necessarily what I worry about. Just one of the other areas that I wanted to talk about was Hue. Hue is amazing. I mean, you know, a thousand year old citadel that was the capital of Vietnam at the time. You know, you can still see sort of bullet marks across some of the facades from, you know, previous conflicts from, you know, in the late 60s and early 70s. It's an amazing place to go historically. It's a bit of a place to go and it's still, there's still cheap accommodation available in Hue. There's good food, like any tourist destination, and has challenges around the commercialization aspect. But I think and the volume of people, you know, pre-COVID, when I went through there, it was crazy, the number of buses and the number of people trying to get in and out of the citadel to have a look at it. But that said, you know, I think if you're on holiday, you tend to forget a little about those things. You know, you just said, look, I'm on a holiday and I'm going to enjoy myself and I know I need to stand there some queues and I know there's going to be other people on a holiday too. So I think if you put that aside and you're not trying to rush, you can have a great time wandering around in Hue. And, you know, we talked a little bit earlier about the different, you know, the different empires that have been through Vietnam or what is now Vietnam over the years. And there is, you know, there is history across Vietnam where in places like Hue and in My Son, which is south of, you know, South of Da Nang, where there's history there that's being worked on and explored to look at how that has developed the culture of the people and their belief systems and their family cultural values that you can experience when you go to these places. And you get a feel for why the people of Vietnam are what they are because you go and experience some of the history of the hardship or of the different, different sort of ruling people that have been through. And when you look at the history of Vietnam, you know, pre, pre the 20th century, it's quite interesting to look at those sorts of things. And you see that in, you see that in Hoi An with the Japanese influence, you know, 600 year old Japanese fishing town. You see it in Ninh Binh with the, you know, the 10th century capital city when the river was obviously a lot bigger and things like that. So, you know, there's those sorts of historical things if you've got a bent towards that sort of tourism where you can get in and really explore some of the history of what makes Vietnam, you know, the country it is today. Yeah. And the people that is today and the influences from north to

south, just how different they are, how it influences the food, clothing, you know, their farming styles, their eating styles, their... So socially they're different people. People used to say to me, you know, everyone says, what do you prefer? Do you prefer HCMC or Hanoi? And I used to prefer HCMC in because the people were a lot more relaxed in the south. I'm finding that the people in Hanoi now are becoming more relaxed because they're becoming more used to Westerners, you know, tourists and what they need to do. We're certainly talking about the old town who can area in that conversation. But and Ho Chi Minh is becoming now a major high rise sort of city with developments and there's a swing, although, you know, a lot of people in the south will tell you otherwise. But I do feel there's a lot more embracing of tourism and people in the north now and more acceptance and more openness and more smiles, more friendliness than there was 10 plus years ago.

34:09 Kerry Newsome Absolutely. Simon, I'm aware of time, so I'm just wanting to wrap up if we may. Do you have any last kind of comments that you'd like to talk to, you know, just around our main focus at land based travel?

34:27 Simon White Sure. I think the first thing is don't be scared to land in, you know, most international flights embark into An Ooi or Ho Chi Minh. Don't be scared just to say, look, I've got a couple of days of accommodation booked in a hotel or Airbnb or whatever it might be. Don't be scared not to do that. When you go to those cities, you will find every type of global food that you'd find anywhere else. You can have Thai food, Indian food, American hamburgers, steak houses, pasta, Italian, French, all those influences of food in there. So don't be scared if you've got dietary beliefs and you think you're going to land in Vietnam and have to eat just Vietnamese food for 30 days straight. Sometimes our Western bellies can't do that. So I think we've got to be cognizant that they are international cities. Everything you need is there. You know, you've probably touched before in other podcasts around things like, you know, medical services and insurance and all those things. But, you know, all those services you need are going to be there. My recommendation to people is also get yourself a local SIM card. I always have a Vietnamese SIM card I put in my main phone. So I've got all my data based stuff. And then I put my Australian SIM card in a secondary phone so I can still receive texts and phone calls from Australia if I need to from a business perspective. But I have a local SIM card. I put it in my Australian phone. And then I'm internet connected to all the apps and all the travel apps and all the things like that. Get on to, you know, without advertising, get on to Grab before you go and set up your Grab account because Grab is the way people get around if they're not using taxi. Absolutely. Swear by it. It's just your Uber equivalent. It's the same thing. It's a fantastic service. And don't be scared to, you know, to grab your water bottle and go for a walk. I spend a lot of time in Vietnam when I'm between work engagements, walking around the places I'm in. It doesn't matter where I am, but certainly in the cities. And I just say, look, you know, especially post COVID when I was there last year in May and then again in June, you know, September and October and December, I'd spend a lot of time just walking around, not in the middle of the day when it's 36 degrees, but in the evening.

And I just put a shorts, t-shirt and a pair of joggers on. And I just walk up and down the streets and say, what's new? What's closed? What's not there anymore? And get a feel for

what's going on in the city. Get into the vibe. Walk down the back alleyways, you know, the best places that you're ever going to find in those places, the back alleyways of the cities.

34:09 *Kerry Newsome* Absolutely. Absolutely. Simon, I'm aware of time, so I'm just wanting to wrap up if we may. Do you have any last kind of comments that you'd like to talk to, you know, just around our main focus at land based travel?

34:27 *Simon White* Sure. I think the first thing is don't be scared to land in, you know, most international flights embark into An Ooi or Ho Chi Minh. Don't be scared just to say, look, I've got a couple of days of accommodation booked in a hotel or Airbnb or whatever it might be. Don't be scared not to do that. When you go to those cities, you will find every type of global food that you'd find anywhere else. You can have Thai food, Indian food, American hamburgers, steak houses, pasta, Italian, French, all those influences of food in there. So don't be scared if you've got dietary beliefs and you think you're going to land in Vietnam and have to eat just Vietnamese food for 30 days straight. Sometimes our Western bellies can't do that. So I think we've got to be cognizant that they are international cities. Everything you need is there. You know, you've probably touched before in other podcasts around things like, you know, medical services and insurance and all those things. But, you know, all those services you need are going to be there. My recommendation to people is also get yourself a local SIM card. I always have a Vietnamese SIM card I put in my main phone. So I've got all my data based stuff. And then I put my Australian SIM card in a secondary phone so I can still receive texts and phone calls from Australia if I need to from a business perspective. But I have a local SIM card. I put it in my Australian phone. And then I'm internet connected to all the apps and all the travel apps and all the things like that. Get on to, you know, without advertising, get on to Grab before you go and set up your Grab account because Grab is the way people get around if they're not using taxi. Absolutely. Swear by it. It's just your Uber equivalent. It's the same thing. It's a fantastic service. And don't be scared to, you know, to grab your water bottle and go for a walk. I spend a lot of time in Vietnam when I'm between work engagements, walking around the places I'm in. It doesn't matter where I am, but certainly in the cities. And I just say, look, you know, especially post COVID when I was there last year in May and then again in June, you know, September and October and December, I'd spend a lot of time just walking around, not in the middle of the day when it's 36 degrees, but in the evening.

36:34 *Kerry Newsome* And I just put a shorts, t-shirt and a pair of joggers on. And I just walk up and down the streets and say, what's new? What's closed? What's not there anymore? And get a feel for what's going on in the city. Get into the vibe. Walk down the back alleyways, you know, the best places that you're ever going to find in those places, the back alleyways of the cities. And, you know, once again, that's another good point that you brought up. You know, I think Westerners have been trained or from a societal perspective, you don't go down alleys, you know, like, you know, alleys are dangerous and on that. Because I know just recently in Ho Chi Minh City, I was taking my sisters down this alley and they're going, Kerry, do you really know where you're going? Like, you know, we love you and all the rest of it, but seriously. And I go, now look, just trust me. And sure enough, we'd go down this alley and the next thing we're going up these stairs. And then, you know, we're in the cat in that building and there's beautiful boutiques and coffee shops and all of this.

37:37 Simon White Little coffee, little courtyards with trees and light food. Absolutely. Absolutely. And I think, you know, I know time constraints, but look, the other thing is get out of Ho Chi Minh is district based like Paris, District 1. Yes.

You know, get out of District 1. Go to, you know, don't go to Nestle District 5 for the backpack area is not the only place to go. But you get out of those places. Go out into District 3, District 10, whatever it might be. Have a little bit of a wander around, start in the daytime to make yourself feel comfortable. And, you know, you'll find things like a whole street of plumbing supplies and a whole street of coffee and a whole street of kitchen supplies. And it's amazing to get into those places. And that's why I say again, grab because you can get grab a motorbike. Yes. If you want to put, put your, they have a second helmet, whack it on, sit in the motorbike and say, I did this in Hanoi with some friends one year. I had 10 friends with me. We got, we just walked down the road. We got 10 grab guys. We said, how much for four hours? Take us around town. And they took us all over town. Ended up being six hours. We went to an amazing restaurant that you'd never find unless you're a local for lunch. Yeah.

We, you know, you just saw all these things that you wouldn't see by going down all the back alleys and they ain't stopping. And the experience, that's the experience of Vietnam. It's not sit in my international hotel and talk to other travelers while I have an air conditioned buffet breakfast. You know, it's, it's, you know, when I stay in Vietnam, we're staying in Hichimin now. I stay in an Airbnb apartment where I now know the guys that runs it. So I talked to him directly. It's a two bedroom apartment. It's in an old alleyway. I have ladies who have got five or six different choices of dish all day, every day down downstairs as I walk out with braziers. I've got a coffee shop on the same floor. I've got a Japanese restaurant downstairs. I've got a pizza place downstairs. I've got, you know, noodle place around the corner. I've got anything I want within a hundred meters, but I'm a part of Vietnam's ecosystem. I'm not sitting in international hotel in a dog box room that's decorated like every other hotel in the world.

39:38 Kerry Newsome And I walk out of my room and I've got 50 stairs up and down. So that's okay. But I'm walking up and down with the locals who live in that apartment block. Yeah. And I think if you want to feel like you've been to Vietnam, that's what you've got to do. I think a lot of people do stick with their favorite brands in hotels and they want that luxury experience. And, you know, that sensory overload for some is just a little bit too much to take on. But I think and one thing I really want to encourage people is that you probably most likely not 100% not going to see or feel all of Vietnam in one visit. It's just kind of impossible to get to everywhere in one visit, in my opinion. I think if you can kind of stage it and say, look, let's let's just do the north and have a look at the north or, you know, let's have a look at some of the main areas in the south or maybe concentrate just in a region, maybe the center and the north.

40:44 Simon White And look, you know, the other thing is we've got we've now got, you know, three three direct airline flights in and out of Australia. We've got three three brands now flying directly. And as of as of June, Vietjet flies directly from Brisbane to Ho Chi Minh City, which is great. Correct. But we've got in Sydney and Melbourne, we've got Vietjet, Bamboo and Vietnam Airlines flying direct flights. So there's lots of choices at lots of prices, lots of different travel levels there. And I think you've got to get you've got to walk past

those alleyways and look at them and walk. No one's going to have a gauge. No one's going to no one's going to mug you walking down an alley in the daytime in Vietnam. I often say, look, you know, sometimes I used to say to my my friends and family, I feel like my spaceship just landed because I must have to look at you. But that doesn't matter. You know, I just smile and I walk down and I find the best places. I found some amazing little bars, amazing coffee shops and the restaurants. There's one place I go to in off past and Ho Chi Minh City. And I walk up four flights of stairs past people's washing and apartments and outdoor kitchens to get to this. To find it. Yeah. Yeah. It's amazing. The feel of those places is, you know, look at the steps and people have been walking up and down those steps for 100 years. Yeah. You know, with their lifestyles and you look out across the rooftops and the chimney stacks and the hot water systems and the cats. And, you know, I remember being in a panoramic one, roosters crowing next door next to the hotel on the rooftop. And there's a cat on the other side of two dogs barking. You know, it's being amongst that stuff that makes Vietnam different than Australia. Even if the rooster's waiting at 5.30, get up, go out, yell at it, get up and enjoy it and walk around the town. Vietnam has different times of day that it opens up. Five o'clock in the morning, four o'clock, five o'clock, six o'clock in the morning, all the people go off to work for the early day. And you walk outside and it's a different world. But then you hit the middle of the day and all the 10 or 11 o'clock and all the shops and all the shutters go up and everything started to open up from a point of view of commerce. And then, of course, as you go into the evening and Vietnamese people will come back out again because there's no sun because they don't like the sun. So therefore the whole new world, the lights, the motorbikes, the young people, the bars, the coffee shops. I've been on the street sitting on the little kids tables and chairs on streets in towns and cities eating and suddenly a motorbike pulls up and two or three young girls get off the back with a boombox and they start dancing on the street promoting a nightclub somewhere. And they get back on again and they ride off. Just totally random stuff happens. And you sit, don't be scared to go into those little cafes and sit on the kids tables and chairs because you'll eat the best food. I was going to say, I've only ever been sick once in Vietnam in almost 20 years in 60 plus trips. And it was an international five star hotel breakfast buffet where the capsicum for the omelette was off. I've never been sick with street food. I've never had a bad, you know, never, ever had a bad meal in Vietnam. I've had a couple of average ones, but never had a bad meal. And those little cafes on the street, they put the tables and chairs out at night time and you sit down and you don't go in the kitchen. You don't know about it. But look at the food and you will find some of the most amazing fresh food. And, you know, pre-Vietnam, I would never have eaten snails. I would never have eaten duck egg embryos. I would never have eaten goats, goat meat, barbecued and all these other amazing things.

But when you start into those sorts of food in Vietnam, right now, I'm salivating in my mouth thinking of going back to Vietnam. And every time I get on the plane here to go, I start thinking about what am I going to eat each day and what flavor is going to be. And I start getting hungry because there's, you know, you get the most unsuspecting meals in the most unsuspecting places by just sitting down in some little cafe and trying to work out. I've got a bit of Vietnamese, but, you know, work out what is on the menu. Do some sign language about what it is you're about to eat and say, look, I'll just have that. And then don't worry about what it is. Dip it in whatever's with it. And it's just amazing. Every time it's just amazing. Oh, no. And that's the experience of Vietnam. And ask that the young kids will

come up and I say, you know, go get me a beer, will you? And they'll go across to the shop and buy beer. Come back. You know, I remember sitting on the beach in Nha Trang years ago. Lady came up with, you know, the stick across the shoulders with two pots. She had lobster with her son. You know, I was at the sailing club on the on the on the Lilo's out there. And she came up and she put down the grass, the reed mat, sat down, pulled it out, pulled out a fresh lobster. She just bought it from markets that day, marinated it, put the brazier down, cooked the lobster. And someone up and bought some beers at the shop and brought them back. And I sat there and had fresh cooked lobster with rice vegetables, corn on the brazier, sweet potato on the brazier and beer on the beach. And it cost me like \$5.

45:45 *Kerry Newsome* I was going to say it cost you about \$5. Yeah, I was going to say.

45:50 *Simon White* Don't be scared. Don't be scared to get involved. No one's trying to rip you off. You know, even the guys who even the guys who walk around polish your shoes just because they run off of the shoes. But, you know, they're just trying to make a living. They're just trying to make a living. They're not there to scam you. They're just trying to make a living. Stay away from offers of drugs. Stay away from offers of, you know, pool parlors and young girls and karaoke and that sort of thing. When people go past on motorbikes. But don't be scared of the old guys that say, do you want a motorbike? Because those old guys are made everything that moves in that town.

46:22 *Kerry Newsome* You're in everywhere. Simon, I'm so glad to have you on because you kind of support and speak of with a passion and love of Vietnam as I feel. So I feel like I'm vindicated just by having you on. So that's really terrific.

46:41 *Simon White* I have to say, you know, I really appreciate the conversation. It teases out. You know, I visualize these experiences. I talk about them and, you know, I'm just sitting here saying I better get on my next trip. I want to experience those things, you know, and I want to go and go and do those things again. And look, every my son will come in from the other room and listening to the end of our conversation here. And he always says, you know, what are we going back when we go back? Because he's always thinking about what the next experience is.

47:11 *Kerry Newsome* Yes. And, you know, I have a bit of withdrawal when I come back because, you know, I bit like you. I get out and about and I experience these things. So, you know, life back here sometimes feels a little bit vanilla after, you know, time in Vietnam. So it takes a little bit of reconditioning when you get back because the experiences and the energy and the people, the openness or all of that just is it gets under your skin.

47:42 *Simon White* The French used to call it Indochina Malad, which is, you know, the Indochina sickness that you catch and never want to go home. Yeah. Yeah, they used to call it Indochina sickness. And, you know, with Cambodia and Vietnam, you know, as parts of France many years ago. But and French people have disappeared and just never come back, you know. But I think that, you know, my advice is when you're coming back and you go, I'm going to miss that, is book the next trip before you come back. Yeah, I do. I sit in Vietnam. I do too. Because I start to look forward to what happens on the next one.

48:17 *Kerry Newsome* Simon, thank you so much for coming on the show. We'll leave it there. But I look forward to talking with you again and just thank you for your time and sharing some of your experiences. It's been wonderful.

49.00 *Simon White* - Thank you so much. What about Vietnam.