



What About Vietnam - Series 2 - 2

Shopping Vietnam | Tailoring | Designer | Sustainable

Kerry Newsome: Hello, Judith, and welcome to what about Vietnam, this is where we get to talk about shopping in Vietnam. Yay! I can't wait to talk about shopping in Vietnam. Fantastic. I've been really looking forward to this episode as we get to, I don't know, pick your brains, delve into that bucket of knowledge you have about Vietnamese designers. And, I don't know, just the general shopping experience.

Kerry Newsome: You certainly opened my eyes to Vietnam last time in shopping. So how about we kick things off with talking about a new traveler to Vietnam?

Judith Treanor: If you were to steer them to a destination in Vietnam or destinations, where we may start,you're going to be a bit surprised to hear me say this, but the first place I would go would be to check out the souvenir shops and resort shops all over the country.

Judith Treanor: That way you'll get a feel for the ubiquitous takeaways from Vietnam. The fact that we always take home one clinical and wellness cushion covers lacquered basket wear. These are the things you will find all over Vietnam. And you really do need to, you know, slip into the souvenir shops and see what's around. And once you've done that, then we can delve a bit deeper. And this is what I really want to talk about with you from there.

Judith Treanor: So the three major shopping cities, of course, Hanoi, Saigon and Danang and in all three cities, what you're going to want to do is literally just walk around and explore, because there are so many hidden gems that you have to discover by walking, walking, walking in Hanoi. You could spend a couple of days just browsing the boutiques and gift shops that line the streets of the French Quarter. So excuse my pronunciation.

Judith Treanor: But look the roads are all very short distances from Ho Kiem lake and the cathedral, which is basically where the main hotels are located at.

Kerry Newsome: Isn't there shops with like funny names as well? Like what was that women's one was called women power or something?

Judith Treanor: Ok, "Women Rock" women, minorities, women right there. That was nice.

Judith Treanor: So that's Hanoi and in the center, if you're staying inside Saigon District one, it's almost compulsory to visit the massive Ben Thanh market as a first off, I guess it really is an important symbol of the city and it's just vast. You'll find hundreds of store holders. Amazing food with the pop up in there. Bit of a tip. Do take some water because it can get super hot and can get a little bit phobic. Let's face it. And it can be a bit daunting. But just a short walk from the market and you'll find many hidden gem boutiques and gift stores in the roads around the famous Walking Street, and along Dong Khoi. One of my favourite streets for shopping in Saigon is Le Loi, across a busy road from Ben Thanh – in one short stretch of road you'll find Ipanema Bags, Gingko, L'Usine, Duy Tan and Mekong Plus. If you're not short on time in Vietnam I really urge you to delve deeper into what makes Vietnam the shoppers paradise it is.

Judith Treanor: Remember, we found that old regenerated building that you would have no idea what you're going to find. And you walk up the steps and lots of steps look in, and just little local designers, boutiques and cafes that you'd never know existed.

Kerry Newsome: You just go to one of those, as you say, which are quite hard to find, kind of hidden in very small doorways. And like, I would have walked right past that. I would not have seen that. And then all of a sudden you said no, that's not where we're going? And all of a sudden we're up those stairs and I've gone. Wow. There's just this amazing store with this amazing stuff. Yeah.

Kerry Newsome: And you can easily lose a few hours of your day. And some days, I think what we've got to give here is some expertise about shopping on your trip, because it might not be something you do think about when you go to Vietnam.

Judith Treanor: But it's a shopping paradise as we're going to get into. So one of my favorite strips/ streets in the center of Saigon is Le loi, which is just across. It's quite a major road on the other side of Benh Thanh Market. And 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. And that's something else we're going to talk about as we go on. But there's a big emphasis on this locally have made an ethical and wonderful creations all over Vietnam. And so that's I guess those are the tips if you've got a short time in the country. But if you've got time just to delve a little bit deeper.

Judith Treanor: I think you'll need to venture a short distance away from the center of each city. So in Hanoi, grab a taxi, go to the lake, which is also known as Westlake. Or if you're in Saigon go to the district 2, interestingly enough, these are both areas where the expats shop and live and where you'll find the best representation of Vietnamese artisan fashion and homewares.

Kerry Newsome: Yeah, one of the areas where I think is not in mainstream. If you're you've just arrived into Vietnam, got off the plane, you know, in HCMC in particular, you just you land smack bang kind of, into District one, aren't you? Exactly. And so to go through to all those other areas. You've got to think a bit wider, and plan ahead. But also get some tips like we're talking about now about going to those districts and what to look for because, well, I was just blown away.

Judith Treanor: That's it.

Kerry Newsome: And I think the Vietnamese I mean, they're really known for artisanal crafts and the way they use traditional methods to create modern designs. I think first-timers might be surprised to know that there really is a flourishing fashion scene in Vietnam. And they even have their own annual fashion show each year featuring local designers. So if you have extra time, it might be an extra day. Go and find that out.

Kerry Newsome: Ok, so, I mean, when I talk to travelers, you know, their first thoughts are, oh, it's going to be cheap. They want to get tailoring done. They want to you know, they definitely want to head off to the markets. But as you say, or we just started to touch on, there is definitely a design aspect to shopping now in Vietnam. It has kind of morphed a bit more, I think. So tell us a little bit more about that as far as actual products that travelers should be seeking out rather than you just, you know, the cheap, cheap stuff.

Judith Treanor: But I mean, I go for the tailoring. No, that's not quite true. And going back and saying, yeah, OK, so I'm definitely into the tailoring, but there's more than just the time we're going to get to that.

Judith Treanor: But what I'm going to say, I know you love tailoring and I know I'm going to say I'm a big fan of tailoring to, I particularly enjoy it.

Kerry Newsome: And everyone has a favorite tailor that they can recommend. And let's not underestimate the sheer joy of having a design. You've seen an amazing design being made to measure for you at an affordable price within a couple of days. So here's a tip. If you go into high end, you do need a few days in your itinerary because you're going to need to go to the tailor to pick your designs and then have enough time to go back for your fittings and then. Exactly grab your goodies.

Kerry Newsome: You need extra time. And I do recommend that for travelers to add a couple of days for that.

Kerry Newsome: Yes. And the other thing we have to think about, though, totally concur.

Judith Treanor: If you are having something made up by Tailor on holidays, please think about it.

Judith Treanor: Is it something you are gonna wear when you get home? It's just a tip. We've all done it. We've gone on holiday and thought, that looks great. It's really hot. So it's a beautiful, cool fabric. You get how you make it. What was I thinking? So, you know, take some time, don't rush into it. Just a little tip there. But could we go on from tailors's just to buy something else in Hoi An as well. You'll have to tell us. What do I love. I love the shoe makers.

Judith Treanor: You do love the shoes that all that goes with that.

But I have to talk to my kids like me.

Kerry Newsome: My because I mean,.. Shoe lovers like me.

Kerry Newsome: Oh yeah. Oh yeah

Judith Treanor: Hoi An's got about as many shoemakers as it does tailors. And the reason being is anyone knows that. And it's the centre of artisans, people and artists it has been for hundreds of years. That's what's attracted people to it. So these shoemakers and leather shops dotted all over. And here's my top top tip. If you take away one thing from this conversation today. If you've got a pair of shoes or boots that you love and you can't imagine ever not having them, but they on their way out because you've over worn them, put them in a your suitcase and you can get them copied.

Judith Treanor: Should we be encouraging them to show up anyway? We're going to get them copied. And you could even have the other colours. Right now. It is winter in Sydney. And so my favorite season, but I have a pair of knee-high boots. I originally bought in cream but I've had them made up in blue and grey. So that's just, you know, take your favourite boots and shoes and get them copied. And the other thing is jewellery. But we're talking about. The shoemakers in the lac Viets jewelry make those in hand if I'm feeling the pain already. Yes, I again find them and find a design that you love or maybe something that you've had that's broken or you've lost. And you can have them remodeled Yep. And again, look, at a fraction of the price of what it would cost, even if you could find someone to do it at home because their labor cost is so low.

Kerry Newsome: You're right.

Judith Treanor: I know you want me to talk about that, and that is on an ethical side to shopping in Vietnam and that's what I really want to go into now. So there is so much in the way of distinctly Vietnamese fashion gifts and homewares that I really would never want to see if you have the time. What struck me first on my first visit to Vietnam years ago was just the abundance of color. Sheer color design is not sensible enough to use color in homewares and fashion. And there's also this pride in their history and culture that really comes through when you go to the shops. It comes through in designs of cushion covers that might have lanterns or the beautiful art deco tiles you see all over the place, cushion covers or tote bags. And also you see women in the traditional Ao Dai's represented on so much art and bags. And so where would you go to find that kind of thing? I'd say if you're on a "whistle-stop" tour of Vietnam of the city sorry, Vietnam, Saigon, Hanoi, look out for the concept stores that offer a sort of a capsule collection of local creations, one that you can go.

Kerry Newsome: Can I just jump in on concept stores just to explain to our listeners just what is a concept store? Just to explain that.

Judith Treanor: Sure. So it's almost like a capsule collection of something in a store that might have little sections of homewares and fashion accessories and gifts. It's like almost like a mini department store that's showcasing your local design to see local creations. So it's like a one-stop shop.

Kerry Newsome: Ok, but different designers. So they're not all from the same company. They're all kind of individuals.

Judith Treanor: Yeah, different brands. And we'll find in Vietnam that the concept stores are really supporting their local artisans, local designers and giving them a bit of a showcase.

Kerry Newsome: And would you say.... Just sorry to interrupt just to talk about sustainability and that kind of curve in terms of fashion and homewares? You know,.... Is Vietnam staying ahead of that curve in the system? Is it coming through in that concept store kind of thing or. You know, I don't know. Tell us a bit more about that sustainability side of Vietnam in-depth and so on. We went to some places, where do you remember that handbag I bought that I think was made out of bottle tops, you've got one too I think, and you sell through your online store Temples and Markets.

Kerry Newsome: And it was just the most fabulous bag. And it was all handmade and hand-stitched together. And when I wear it, you know people, people go "Oh that's just a fabulous bag." And then they look really closely and then they say that it's made of bottle tops and they just freak out.

Judith Treanor: So interesting materials, recycled material, repurposed materials. And you're going to find that all over. You've got things like washable paper bags which I sell in my own online store. I've got a big collection of washable paper bags, I think because of Vietnam's shared resources in biodiversity it puts you in a unique position to easily source these eco-friendly materials. And they're really being used throughout as an emphasis on slow fashion and ethical production, which I've mentioned. So I think about something like bamboo. I mean, what an amazing resource. The Vietnamese, use it for clothing and furniture and then homewares and my favorite spun bamboo bowls and trays. And then you've got beautiful organic cottons and natural resources like the mulberry silks. So one little store that you'll find a few branches of in Saigon called Metiseko there is this divine mulberry silk collections that they says again that show the emphasis on sustainable and ethical production. Water hyacinth. Another thing which, you know, you'll see an awful lot of spun bamboo bowls across the country have been made ethically. They would have been made from water hyacinth, which is like a prolific root that goes through the waterways across the country, actually chokes some of the waterways. So that gets picked and dried out of traditional methods of handweaving. So, you know, when we were shopping in Saigon's district to really looking out for a couple of stores, that the emphasis on eco friendly. Remember the shop going around the corner, that was one that, again, they showcased as a little concept store showcasing kind of washable paper bags and sort of flower pots, recycled jewelry, and scarves.

Judith Treanor: And then another one of your favorites was that Laiday Refill station where it had all kinds of personal care products, shampoos, conditioners, perfumes. And you can take it if you're local, you can take your bottles along and have them refilled with your favorite liquids. But actually, I was doing some research. What they also do is they are now recycling bottles from a nearby restaurant to the kids in the bottles and then you can go and refill your bottles with whatever you want to buy and stick with Yes, they are very resourceful. And I guess we can't mention recycling without talking about Future Traditions. Future Traditions is a fashion and accessories brand in Hanoi. If you have time to go and visit their beautiful showroom. They have this amazing colonial-style building, and they have a collection called Treasures from the Shipwreck Coast, which is the jewelry that's been made from broken bits of ceramics and glass that's been picked up, washed up on the beaches, washed up on it and then made in into jewelry. Yeah, well, one offs. That's the other thing. You know, when you talk about handmade, unique items, it's amazing to have your own one of kind of creation that yours.

Kerry Newsome: But it's like, would you agree, Judith? It's a bit of a head shift for people because, you know, I'm thinking of 'knock offs' And, you know, I can remember, like 10, 12 years ago that the big thrill was to go to a store that did knockoff CDs and then they'd put them in the plastic sleeve folders.

Judith Treanor: Do you remember that? And then one out of 10 worked. You had to get a certain kind of quality.

Kerry Newsome: So like, you know, moving along the path from that kind of initial taste of Vietnam and shopping to what it is now is, is quite a stretch. And I think if people do go to Vietnam and think, oh, yes, sure, there are the bargains and there are the cheap knockoffs that are still there, very much so. But I think to close your mind, if you're going to Vietnam and just thinking that, you would be doing Vietnam and yourself a disfavor because it's much wider. As Judith is sort of talking about. And I think to look into some of the quality, you are going to have to pay for it. You know, it's definitely not cheap, it's not the copy stuff. It's one-offs and it's handcrafted. And I think that's something to mention.

Kerry Newsome: And, you know, you might want to also talk about Chula.

Judith Treanor: Yes, it's not cheap, but if you're talking about taking home memories here.

Judith Treanor: And so, yes, if you take home a knockoff DVD we've all done in the past or even a copy, T-shirts that they love?

Judith Treanor: The daddy, the puffy jackets that the people get, the copper. That's great. That's what you go to. The thing is, it's not going to remind you of Vietnam, though, is it? So, this is what I want to kind of emphasize. When I first went to Chula many, many years ago, I didn't have time. I was on one of those "top to bottom" tours and seeing a lot of the country in 60 days. I didn't have time for shopping. I didn't have the budget for shopping either. And but there was a couple of places that I managed to see and I couldn't get these prices out of my mind. So I think if you go anywhere when you go to Vietnam, you've got like an extra day, at least in Hanoi. To we're going to have to leave in a minute, but Tan My Design is something I really do want to mention.

Tan My Design It's like a treasure trove. Let me talk about concept stores earlier. It's on three levels and it's got like this high quality jewelry, all in the one place. They've got a little cafe downstairs where if you get tired from all the shopping, you go down, have a coffee. We generally go back up. But there is so much representative of all the designers and everything that's going on across the country in that one shop. And it's Chula does have a collection there. A quick mention of Chula. And when I first saw them years ago, I couldn't get the elegance and the color out my head and I've become a huge fan. If you take home a piece of Chula. So, they are Spanish designers that made Vietnam their home years ago. They've got a beautiful ethical workshop where 75 percent of the workers are disabled. I've been lucky enough to go to that showroom. Everything's cut and sewn by hand and they call it wearable happiness. I think we want to take this away, actually, a take-home piece of wearable happiness. Treat yourself and then you'll have a piece of Vietnam. I'm with you. There is wonderful memories.

Kerry Newsome: And you're right, I mean, sometimes you know, maybe I've got to be careful when I say this, but, you know, in the male audience, they don't kind of rate the

shopping experience so much. But I think when we think about this a little bit wider and as we're talking about "wearable happiness", memories of Vietnam shopping, you know, it is a way to invest back into the country to support locals and local industries. And as a developing country, I think for me personally, and I know you're the same Judith, that is sort of something that we want to do because we love Vietnam so much. And so to just talk about shopping as in like we're going to go to Myers in Australia, or we're going to go to a major shopping center. It's not like that. It's not like that at all. No. It's your entry into the culture of Vietnam. I mean, some of these stores are also fixed price that you're talking about. They are not stores where you're going to be bargaining like you would in a street stall or in a market. So they're fixed price items, they are high quality, you know, one-offs. And I know with Chula and then it's the experience of the actual store. I mean, that Chula store that you talk about is just so beautifully laid out. It's like you walk into it and you go, oh, my God, I could almost sit down, have dinner here or a glass of wine or sangria and take it all in.

Judith Treanor: Yeah, it's that explosion of color that hits you, that's what it is. And I think also, maybe I shouldn't have emphasized fashion so much because I think that the vast majority of shopping in Vietnam to me is actually about the homewares, to be honest. And it's not the lacquerware for travel. Well, let's talk about art for a second. I think taking home a piece of art, there's nothing else that you can. What are the better ways there to remember a trip overseas? Have you taken something from a local artist? And you're going to find small galleries all over the country. You can get to speak to the artists and meet interesting people, find out their stories.

Judith Treanor: And you know that that's for men and women. Exactly.

Kerry Newsome: And the photography, there's some beautiful photography by Rehahn in Hoi An I've got it all over my walls in my house.

Judith Treanor: I think we need to make special mention of art in Vietnam, and particularly Hoi An. For a travel lover, I think bringing home a piece of art is one of the best ways to keep memories of holidays alive.

Small galleries are prolific in all the major tourist centres and most will ship your art back home for you. In Hoi An particularly there are countless galleries showcasing paintings, drawings, prints and lacquered art.

Seek out the authentic lacquered art galleries where the artists use the traditional techniques and real lacquer on wood as a medium

(Ngàn Xưa Gallery). A lot of the lacquered art is mass produced and some use plastic instead of wood.

March Gallery and HaHa curate work from local artists and are both a good place to start your Vietnam art journey.

Also, you absolutely have to go to French Photographer Rehahn's museum and gallery Precious Heritage where you can purchase prints of his incredible photos taken from around Vietnam.

I just want to touch on something that might also surprise visitors to Vietnam and that is the growth of the sustainability movement which you can't help but notice once you veer off the tourist track on your Vietnam shopping journey.

Vietnam's biodiversity puts her in a unique position to easily source *eco-friendly* materials for [slow fashion](#) and ethical production.

One to watch is - Future Traditions clothing blends the stunning textiles of Vietnam's many ethnic minority communities with contemporary designs. Sourcing textiles from the remote mountain communities in Northern Vietnam, Future Traditions seeks to encourage an appreciation for the skill involved in creating the fabrics produced in these areas. The long term goal of Future Traditions is to make the continued production of these increasingly rare textiles financially viable for local communities

Kerry Newsome; Judith we could talk forever on this subject. I thank you most sincerely for coming on and sharing your knowledge.