



What About Vietnam S4-4 –Planning a wedding in Vietnam – Everything you need to know

Kerry Newsome: 00:01

Xin Chào and welcome to "What about Vietnam!" So, I always want to make sure that I deliver something different on this show. One of the things that I feel is really coming up for Vietnam, and that is it becoming a wedding destination. Now, I know not all of us are getting married tomorrow, but sometimes amongst our friends and families, etc. We know people who are thinking of their future wedding. They're in their planning mode, looking for ideas, and something I wanted to share with you is that Vietnam is becoming a very idealistic wedding destination.

00:44

I've asked this lovely girl named Jenny. She is a wedding planner, based in Hà Nội in Vietnam. She has been involved with weddings for over 10 years now. As a wedding planner, she started off her career really behind the camera and putting together some of the photography sessions for the bride and groom to make sure that their albums look absolutely fantastic. So, that was her humble beginnings. That's kind of when she decided that she was good at organization, and she had good event planning skills. So, she would take it to the next level.

01:25

She started her career in beautiful places like Koh Samui, Bali, Jakarta, and other places in Southeast Asia, but came back to really build it in Vietnam. She's going to talk to you very openly and honestly about some of the aspects, some of the crazy things she gets asked. As she says, "The crazier, the better." They are always the most memorable. Managing people's expectations, of course, is a very big part of this role. So having a good team behind her, and a good team that understands some of the nuances of Vietnam and its destinations. The time of year, some of the legalities around that, and then travel arrangements. Obviously, with a wedding party, you've got at least two people coming, possibly more, as in family, and then you may have guests that you want to include, so it can be managing a bigger event.

02:28

She's got some great stories to share, I know you're going to love it. Please share with your friends and family who are thinking about getting married, because I'm sure a wedding in Vietnam would be

something super-duper, and something wonderful to remember for the rest of your life. So, please welcome Jenny to the program.

02:49

Whilst I think being a wedding planner must be a super fun thing to do, I can imagine there's a lot to that job, like you have to cover a lot of people. I mean, people are a bit emotional about weddings, and they have very particular ideas in their heads about what they think they want it to be like and there's all of that going on, and you have to manage that. So what got you interested in becoming a wedding planner?

Jenny Hoang: 03:30

I think that it wasn't easy at first. I think it went all the way back to 2010 when I was working part time in a wedding video and photography studio. My job was to take care of the client requests regarding the decoration, the attire, the flower setup, the poses, before and during the shooting day. So, in short, I made sure that everything looked good in the picture. It was this one wedding where the bride specifically asked me to monitor her wedding venue the night before her wedding.

04:15

I feel the need to add in right here that I wasn't a wedding planner. I was a student working part time in the studio and the studio back then did mostly engagement photo shoots. So, my job was very simple. That was the first time ever that I had to take care of a wedding venue. The situation was that her wedding happened the next morning while the venue was fully occupied the night before by another wedding. So, we had to wait for the party to be over.

04:53

Then clean up everything so the decoration team could bring her flowers, and all of this happened after midnight. I think it wasn't a good idea for a bride who came all the way to the wedding venue at midnight, the night before her wedding day to check on it. So, I agreed to do it for her. But by midnight or by 2am she appeared anyway because she couldn't rest her head, she couldn't sleep, she had to come by and see for herself. And because I was just a photograph assistant, she knew that she couldn't just hand over the wedding to me. Remember that it was in 2010, a decade ago right, when wedding planner didn't even exist in Vietnam, event planner or a wedding planner wasn't a popular profession.

05:50

That's the moment when I realized that her nails weren't done, her hair was messy, and her eyes were puffy. It came to my mind that there must be someone who worked through the planning process with them in their shoes, who understands why they do things where they want in a specific way. What needs to be done in what way on time, is like catching sheep. I hadn't even heard of the word, wedding planner before. And thanks to J Lo. I couldn't say that it was a good movie, but it was the first movie ever talking about the wedding planner. Every wedding planner can relate.

Kerry Newsome: 06:48

There's a couple of things that I got out of what you've said in the fact that sometimes your chosen profession, in some ways, chooses you rather than you choosing it. You find yourself having a moment where you go, "Well, I'm good at organizing, I'm good at putting things together, I care about people,

and I like to see them have a good experience." So, when people that I've met in the travel industry are event planners, some of those event management companies have then decided to specialize in weddings, because it's a major event.

07:38

What adds an extra level of complexity to being a wedding planner, in Vietnam, when you are selling your skills or offering your skills to foreigners is you are not only planning their wedding. As in the two persons that are key, the groom and bride, but you are also managing the travel aspects of the wedding. And all the people in the wedding party, and sometimes many of the guests. So, it has a couple of extra layers of complexity to it.

08:19

And why I wanted to have you on the show, Jenny is I believe Vietnam is growing in this area of becoming a wedding destination. I think it deserves some exposure to the rest of the world and my audience for this show is global. So, I've got people in my audience that are sitting in Canada, in the US, Europe, Australia, and Vietnam, I might add. But I don't know whether or not they would initially think of Vietnam as a destination for a wedding.

09:00

So, having you on and talking about your experiences, I think is going to give people some extra insight into Vietnam, getting on the radar for people as a destination for a wedding. So, in that vein, why do you think Vietnam is an ideal destination? Now, you and I talked before the show about Bali and Thailand and all those other countries that are possibly 20 years ahead. Why is Vietnam a really great place to come to for a wedding?

Jenny Hoàng: 09:42

I will not oversell my country right here. I love Vietnam so much. I'm very proud to be Vietnamese in every way. I have to add it here that I started my career as a destination wedding planner in Thailand, Koh Samui to be exact, and everyone who listens to the podcast knows about Koh Samui that it's a wedding heaven. Where 1000s of couples travel to the island every year to get married, to party, to have the honeymoon. So, I've been in one of the busiest wedding destinations in all of Southeast Asia. I've been to Bali as well, I traveled to Korea to see how the wedding industry is developed, how developed it is over there. Also, Jakarta, where the biggest wedding fair happens every year. I can see there are several elements for couples to choose a destination for their weddings.

10:52

Vietnam has the advantage of having three UNESCO heritage sites. Since we are very long in shape, we have very different landscapes, and we have different climates. Up in the north, you can have mountains with European- like weather, if you don't want to get your guests to sweat over their dress, you can bring them to the north where the mountain is beautiful. If you love the beach, and your spa lovers and all your guests really like to have a warm bath every day, besides the wedding days, you can just travel to the south of Vietnam. One thing about having a very diverse topography is that you have a very diverse cuisine as well. So that's the first thing.

11:48

The second thing is about the flavor climate where you can save and sow, have your wedding out for at least nine months, our 12 months of the year. I think the third element would be availability. So, no matter how beautiful or famous the landscaping is, the lack of services needed for the wedding will be a big obstacle in the organizing process. Vietnam is one of the 10 fastest growing economies in the world. So, service availability is guaranteed in this year, or the next 5-10 year. We have connectivity to put on the table as well, it is about how easy you and your loved one can travel to the place.

12:43

Normally in a city wedding, you don't have to figure out how you get there. For destination weddings, I think connectivity is very important. Of course, there will be the popularity of the place. I know that Vietnam is not that popular, like in Thailand or Bali. We couldn't say for now that Vietnam is the top choice of wedding destination. I really wish that I could invite Leonardo DiCaprio to star in the beach remake movie in Vietnam because even though he's old now he's still got his charm. We actually have the King Kong: Skull Island movie shot in the north of Vietnam a few years ago. But compared to 20 years old Leonardo, I think that Thailand has the advantage of 20 years ahead because they have the beach and Leonardo starred in those movies. The Gulf of Thailand was so famous two decades ago. If you can hear me, Leonardo, please come to Vietnam.

13:55

And then, I think the competitive costs in terms of the beneficial rates for foreigners to have their weddings in Vietnam, the stability of the currency, and the average cost of the service will be one very important element for couples to look at when they compare destinations.

Kerry Newsome: 14:23

So, Jenny, where do most of your guests come from? Where do your brides and grooms originally come to you? Do they come to you more locally or are they coming from overseas countries?

Jenny Hoàng: 14:42

So, before COVID 60% of my clients came from Australia, the US and Russia. Mostly, they are a mixed couple who are Vietnamese married to a foreigner or people with Western background. People who live abroad, or maybe they study abroad, get very close to the Western wedding traditions, and they want to do things differently in Vietnam. That is something about the people who choose to wed the non-traditional way.

15:23

Most of the couples who choose Vietnam, because they have seen their friends posting their wedding or honeymoon pictures in wedding heavens, like Phuket, Samui, Bali before, and they want to keep an eye out for a novel tropical wedding destination. They think that Vietnam is really worth exploring. I want them to know that it should be easy to bring your families and your friends here, from halfway around the world to a tropical country and have your celebration there.

Kerry Newsome: 15:59

I think that's a really good thing. When you're talking about a couple and then sitting down together to plan a wedding, obviously, they're going to be tossing around lots of different options. I think, if they are creative people, if they're people that want to do something a little bit different. I know, I have spoken to another wedding planner that was doing some work. This was before COVID, and I think

you know her, Nadine. She was saying that people who do decide to have a wedding in another country, are very open to new ideas. They're very creative. They're looking for something special and something unique. They also want to make it very special for their guests.

16:53

Sometimes, families are meeting each other for the first time. Sometimes, the husband's friends don't know all the bride's friends. So, there's a really big coming together. And I think that opens up lots of different experiences to have in Vietnam, as you said, on the beach, in the highlands of North Vietnam, there's just so many different experiences. In my time traveling back and forth to Vietnam, I have very often run into a group of guys that are celebrating the pre-wedding, bachelor party, and they're having a lot of fun. I've caught up with some girls that are over there the week before, and they're getting their dresses finished and being made and tailored in Vietnam, as the bridesmaids. Talk to us a little bit about some of the strange requests that you get from these brides and grooms. If anything stands out like wacky ideas?

Jenny Hoàng: 18:05

They'll question, "Are we bringing back good memories?" And since you have mentioned Nadine, I just really missed the time. Nadine was actually one of the first foreign wedding planners in Vietnam, who did weddings for foreigner couples. She's a pioneer in inserting Vietnamese wedding features into foreigner weddings that make it a mixed wedding where your guests travel 1000 miles to the wedding and then see and experience a new culture. So, I think it's very unique. That's the thing that I learned from Nadine as well. That's the philosophy that I try to work with my destination wedding clients too.

19:05

And going back to your questions, do I have any strange requests? I have strange requests all the time. I've had couples who paraglide from a cliff to their ceremony. I've had a couple who rock climbed to their ceremony on top of a mountain in Bali. And I also just did a cruise wedding in Hạ Long Bay, one of the three UNESCO heritage sites that I mentioned before. I just did a cruise wedding there. And every wedding is uniquely designed for the couples, and I try to guarantee a novel firsthand experience because a wedding is a social event. It's somehow a social event where you still have to impress and take care of your guests. It's so personal on so many levels we make it very distinctive from other types of events.

20:07

I have been doing weddings for 10 years now. And it's safe to say that nothing actually can surprise me anymore unless our beloved audience right here who are listening to these podcasts, and maybe come up with a more wacky, crazy idea. I would love to hear them, because there's so many possibilities that we can do together in Vietnam.

Kerry Newsome: 20:29

And I think you're right. I think there are so many different possibilities. When I interviewed Nadine, and this is all early stages of COVID. She was still getting inquiries, because at that stage, we didn't really know what COVID was going to do, or how long it was going to last. If you were to talk about actual destinations, as in, what are some of the best wedding destinations in Vietnam? You mentioned

in the highlands, we've talked about Hội An. I've seen people that had weddings in caves in Vietnam, like all sorts of places. What's your thoughts there?

Jenny Hoàng: 21:21

I would love to share with you a cave wedding that I did, come by with a cruise wedding. So, they have a cruise wedding, and we have a cave that can be registered and used for weddings during sunset time. So, the idea was to bring the whole family onto a cruise. Then by the sunset time, we have smaller boats, bringing them to this island. So, they walk 500 meters through a beautiful natural cave to a very white powder beach. When the flower art is set up, and the couple is waiting for them it's very beautiful and emotional for the guests, because even in Vietnam, they don't even know that they can experience something like that.

22:21

So, to say the best places in Vietnam to have the actual wedding, I have so many names in my head right now. It really depends on which elements you prioritize. If you look for something super fun, a beach city that gives you the Thailand vibe, you can go to Phú Quốc Island, the very South Island of Vietnam. Where it is getting promoted to be the tourists' heaven. And thinking about the Genting Highlands in Malaysia, Phú Quốc is developed in the same way.

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If you look for something more natural, more relaxed and laid back, we have big cities and islands to choose from. If you are very keen on having something unique, there's so many places that we can actually do it. Like Nadine was so smart when she picked Hội An because the lovely old town gives you everything you need, and is just near the beach. It had a very diverse cultural background.

Kerry Newsome: 23:43

You're right. I think Hội An, I know from just my limited experience, because you've got the old town. It's just such a beautiful place for your photography. And you've also got the beach at An Bàng, you can do something on the beach there. So, you can really mix it up in your photos. That's where I've actually bumped into most of the pre-wedding or post-wedding celebrations. Do you want to tell your story now about the hangover story? I thought that was hilarious. You should add that now.

Jenny Hoàng: 24:27

That's crazy. That's hilarious. So, as a wedding planner, and then a destination wedding planner. I believe that 50% of a destination wedding is the destination where I take care of the travels of the guests, of the accommodation, transportation and all the activity before and after the weddings with families and friends coming together.

25:01

This is one story that I will remember for the rest of my life because reality is stranger than fiction. And I watch movies like Hangover all the time. In the movie, we have bachelor parties that went crazy, someone's missing, lost their tooth, having a baby in the bathroom. We think that it shows movies. But it was from my experience that I have a groom that disappeared the morning before the wedding day, they went to a bachelor party the night before, and got reported that they went back to the hotel by 4am. But by 10am, when the bride came into the room, and looked for the groom, he wasn't there.

Nobody knew where he went, the groomsmen confirmed that they all left the bar together, even the bar confirmed through CCTV that they left, and he'd just gone.

26:16

Everyone's just freaked out, we rushed to the beach, we filed a police report, and you can tell that it's chaos. It's not like runaway bride movies, they love each other, and he can't wait to get married to her. So, it couldn't be a chance that he ran away. Then I think just half an hour later when one of the resort's staff found him on the beach, around a few 100 meter away from the resort. In the condition that he was half naked, and he was wearing a tutu, as in a ballet dancer skirt. He was sleeping like a baby and safe and sound next to a beach dock. And nobody had a clue how he got there; he didn't have a clue why he got there. Then he suffers from the heat of the sun. Just like the Hangover movies.

27:24

That's where I got the idea that reality is sometimes stranger than fiction, because it's just out of my mind that a junior wedding planner, like me, would have encountered a situation like that. But every wedding has its grain of craziness in it. If you look at it as memories, it is going to be beautiful, you can laugh about it for the rest of your life. If you look at it as a flaw, or the pressure of perfection, if you think that your wedding is going to be the way you wanted it, I can confirm that you are going to be very shocked, that is not going to happen.

Kerry Newsome: 28:14

And you're right, that's just being human. I know some brides turn into bridezillas. I had this conversation with Nadine as well. And I think, there is that level that everybody wants it to be absolutely perfect. Actually, some of the gems to come out of a wedding is when things don't go exactly as they should. They're the memories that everybody can relate to and laughs about, they pick up the photos later. They're the ones that take you into the future, and you'll never get that time back again, and nor should you. So, just in wrapping up, Jenny, do you have any hints or tips or anything you'd like to share with my guests who are thinking about Vietnam as a wedding destination? Do you have anything you'd like to share to them that can help them plan and make this decision?

Jenny Hoàng: 29:16

Even if I say to you now that Vietnam is on the rise as a new wedding destination, we still have some disadvantages. I wouldn't say disadvantage, but then compared to other wedding heavens, where you have to do everything very novelly. So, the first thing that you should watch out for is that Vietnam is a very cost-effective destination. But cost effective is not equal to cheap. We have to look at your destination wedding as a travel holiday experience. If you can compare the price to having a holiday in your country and in Vietnam, then it would be more competitive than if you compare the cost in Vietnam to other well established wedding heavens in the same area, then it might not look that inviting to you. I can guarantee you that with the services developing in Vietnam right now, the image of Vietnam will be way promoted into a developing, more modern and well established one with a great sound service in the future.

Kerry Newsome: 30:41

I think where we're going with this is that countries like Thailand, and Indonesia and Bali, etc., have been marketing those destinations for many, many years. So, they're way ahead in the marketing of those countries as wedding destinations, they're featured in travel magazines around the world, etc.

So, with that comes some knowledge, obviously, that they really know their stuff, they really have set venues, and they really downplay it. That also means that when you're looking at those destinations, you're probably looking at those destinations with thousands of others. So, you've got the disadvantage of, maybe having to book way more in advance, and you've got to queue up. And there's applicable prices, etc.

31:31

What I like about Vietnam, and what I'm delighted to talk to you about is that Vietnam is in the developmental stage of this, so you can get to be a little bit more creative. I think, you're going to get a little bit more originality, maybe there will be some things that are not exactly perfect. Planning for the unexpected, I think should be part of any wedding plan that I've ever been involved in. They are the star moments that you get to hold on and share down the track and have a good laugh about.

32:06

I think cost wise, it's a really good thing to bring up. Sometimes I think Vietnam gets thought about, or there's the perspective that everything's cheap. That everything you buy in Vietnam is cheap, or it's a copy, or it's a fake. This comes up on my podcast a lot. And I really want to try and dispel that everything is cheap. Sure, you get great value, that's a different way of saying cheap, it's not cheap. I'm saying you get really good value for your money. I think it is very competitive. So, in the Southeast Asian region, Vietnam is coming up as a wedding destination, because of all of those factors. You've got 3800 kilometers of beach side; you've got the variance of weather. And see, that's another thing people don't even think about because Vietnam is having cold weather. Let me assure you in the north, it's freezing in January.

Jenny Hoàng: 33:10

Yeah, it's freezing.

Kerry Newsome: 33:12

Absolutely, January, February, you could be wearing a fur coat to your wedding. So, I think, the variables available make it extremely attractive. I mean, who would have thought that you'd be skydiving or landing on your wedding destination that way? Well, that's where the originality comes in. I think, when you take that care, and I really love hearing that you want to make that experience really special for them. Because I think Vietnamese have a really great way of showing, you know, really good service.

33:51

I can't think of too many places that would be running around beaches, trying to find the guy that was asleep with the dog on the beach. A lot of us would just say, he'll have to just find his way to the wedding where I know that there would be staff at the hotel, you and your staff would be also running around trying to find him to get him back in time for the actual event.

Jenny Hoàng: 34:22

Thank you for putting the word in, I really appreciate it. For me, Vietnam is a novel experience and to pay for experience is not cheap. But then due to all the advantages that Vietnam is having, we are a growing economy, we are learning from Thailand and other tourism destinations. We try to promote our country. There are possibilities where you can have your experience here at a very affordable

cost. You will be one of the many first ones who see Vietnam and have your wedding in Vietnam, amongst your friends, and have a very novel taste of it.

Kerry Newsome: 35:19
Absolutely.

Jenny Hoàng: 35:21
Can I add one more option?

Kerry Newsome: 35:22
Yes, sure.

Jenny Hoàng: 35:23
Since travel to Vietnam is a bit more complex than in Thailand, or in Bali, make sure that if you are planning your wedding in Vietnam, you get in touch with a wedding planner who has experience in travel. Or at least have the experience of marrying couples or foreigner couples in Vietnam, because the transportation will be a little bit more complex than others. So, you want to make sure that you and your guests will be comfortable and relaxed when they come to the wedding. Make sure that you book a wedding planner with experience in this criterion. Or if your wedding planner doesn't have it, then try to find a tour agency that takes care of the travel for you. That way it helps you take the loss of your shoulder, and then 100% just enjoy the wedding in our beautiful country.

Kerry Newsome: 36:27
I totally agree with having the travel experience and knowledge, just simple things like meeting the person at the airport for pickups and drop offs at the hotel. Just so that those kinds of things go smoothly because they can easily go off the rails. Okay, Jenny, thank you for being on the program. I'm really glad you're able to come and talk about weddings and hope to be talking again soon.

Jenny Hoàng: 36:55
Thank you, Kerry for inviting me and I really hope that we can see more and more couples hearing this podcast. I'm sharing it with their friends and family, since Kerry's podcast channel is very helpful for not people who want to get married in Vietnam, but people who are curious about our country and our culture or planning their holiday here. It also could be very useful for you too. So, thank you Kerry for that as well.

Kerry Newsome: 37:26
That's my absolute pleasure.

Kerry – Let me help plan your travel arrangements along with Jenny -
<https://itsvietnam.com/blog/vietnam-perfect-wedding-destination/>
We are here to help make this special day one you and your friends will remember forever.

LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/in/hoang-anh-duong-vu>
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Other projects that Jenny works on

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/kinhnghiemweddingplanner>
<https://wsen-vietnam.org/>

Press and Media:

<https://dantri.com.vn/nhip-song-tre/co-dau-chu-re-dap-du-luon-toi-dam-cuoi-tren-canh-dong-ha-noi-20161214073425709.htm>

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