



What About Vietnam – S5- E4 - Exploring the Case for Living and Working in Vietnam

00:01 Kerry Newsome

Xin chào and welcome to What About Vietnam?

Becoming an expert and traveling and working abroad, I think most of us would appreciate can be a life-changing decision with numerous benefits and I guess some challenges along the way. I'm delighted today to be talking with Kate Boardman and we're going to explore the case for becoming an expat in Vietnam. Now, Kate's very qualified to speak on this topic, having lived in Vietnam twice for extensive periods of time. A little bit about Kate before we kick off. Kate's almost 36 years old, from a small town in Western Massachusetts. She's lived abroad in 10 different countries, including the US, Germany, France, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Bahrain, Australia, Bali and Guatemala for a total of 14 years. It's staggering to note she's traveled to 53 countries. Kate, as I mentioned, lived in Vietnam twice for two and a half years. six months in 2012 and two years in 2014 to 2016. She's traveled back to visit several times, most recently in November. She says in no uncertain terms, Vietnam is one of her favorite countries of all time. She's worked as a teacher at international schools and as a gap year instructor. She's now back home growing a dynamic travel content creation business under the name Wildcat Wanders. Links to that and for you to contact her directly will be provided in the show notes. As one of the aspects of coming on this show, she really hopes to inspire others to live, study, work and travel overseas. Kate, it's a delight to have you on the show. And I look forward to chatting with you. Welcome to What About Vietnam

02:05 Kate Boardman

Thank you so much, Kerry, for having me. I'm delighted to be here. This is really exciting.

02:10 Kerry Newsome

You know, Kate, I'm sure my listeners are keen to know just what makes Vietnam a good choice for an extended working stay. So let's start there.

02:22 Kate Boardman

So I'm actually hesitant to recommend Vietnam so much for fear of over-tourism, because it's really such a special and unique place. And I just hope that what I've seen in other countries around the world where over-tourism has become a thing won't happen to Vietnam because it is so unique. But at the same time, it's one of the most amazing places that I've been. And I also feel that everyone should see it. So it's kind of this I don't know how much to recommend it but there are so many amazing things and I think For me, what stands out the most about it is that there's no place like it, especially in Southeast Asia. A lot of the countries, of course, they have their own personalities and aspects that make them amazing. But a lot of them can be a little bit same, same, but different as the saying in Southeast Asia goes. But Vietnam is truly its own place. And I think what makes it so special is the people. They're super friendly, but also ruthless, and they know what they want and how they want it. And they're very direct. Obviously, culturally, the country has been through a lot, a lot of wars, a lot of situations in the past. And so they kind of just do what they want and say what they want. And I really admire that about the people. I think what also makes it special is that life really takes place on the streets. And so you're just surrounded by this fascinating culture and vibrancy all the time. You look outside and there's the ladies with the conical hats and their matching pajamas and the honking of the motorbikes and all of the smells from the food and this organized chaos of the motorbikes and traffic. So it's just, you can't escape it. So when you're traveling there, you just really feel that you're somewhere different. The food is amazing, you know, both local food and Western food. I've got loads of friends who have lived there long term from other countries and they've opened up restaurants that have been really successful with really delicious Western food for an affordable price. And then obviously, you know, you can eat for two to three dollars a delicious bowl of pho or banh mi. And there's so many amazing types of food that change with each region of Vietnam that you visit, too.

04:46 Kerry Newsome

I think what fascinates me, which I think is in line with what you're saying, is that the street life is so dynamic in the sense that there is old and new residing alongside each other. As you say, conical hats next to you know, very well established buildings and fancy coffee shops and, you know, boutiques and things. But then, you know, a little bit further down the street, there's a little bit more of history that you can see still alive and well and happening. And the smells, for some people, Kate, I've got to say those smells are a little bit overwhelming. And, you know, you've got to tune your nose. But I think you and I have both visited a fair few places in Southeast Asia, and I don't find Vietnam as bad as some others. So, maybe my nose is just tuned to it. But yeah, for some, I think it's a little bit overwhelming. And then, of course, there's the motorbikes. which I think everybody gets a little bit overwhelmed by and a little bit taken back by how to cross the streets and all of that kind of stuff gets talked about and people become quite nervous about it. So, talk to us a little bit about that frenetic life. I mean, you've spent most of your time, as I understand, I think in Hanoi?

06:19 Kate Boardman

Yeah, so I lived there for two and a half years. I've travelled the country from top to bottom. Obviously, there's so many places that I haven't been to explore yet, but I've been to all the main ones, you know, like Hoi An and Sapa and Saigon. But yeah, I think what makes Hanoi special as well is that there's this love-hate relationship. And like you said, the honking, the motorbike traffic, those are all things that are super frustrating. And it's funny because each day living there, you might die like five times a day just trying to cross the street or get yourself to work. You know,

and people will always joke about that, but it's like if you can't beat them, join them. And so, having a motorbike as frustrating as it can be in the traffic is also one of the funniest things about living there and cruising around on your motorbike. amazing sense of freedom. And it's really fun once you kind of get to know the rules or lack thereof of the traffic. And, you know, if you want to go through a stoplight, you just got to beep. If you want to drive down a one-way street going the opposite way, you just got to beep. If you want to drive up on a sidewalk, you can, you just have to beep. And so it's kind of fun once you feel confident enough to do all of those things.

.07:37Kerry Newsome

Yeah, and then you can pull up right at the front door of the shop or the restaurant or the cafe or wherever and you can park your bike and get off your bike and either someone will kind of park it for you for, you know, a few dong or you can just, you know, put the pedal down and take your helmet off and off you go, you know. I haven't seen you know, as yet, the parking stations that absolutely take over my cities here in Australia, and I'm sure you're the same in the US. So, you know, those little nuances, those little differences, I think also keep that spark alive, keep that kind of difference alive, which is quite energizing in itself. Kate, I want to take you down the route now of talking about getting a job and doing some research and just looking at the option to have an extended stay in Vietnam and working in Vietnam. Talk to us a little bit about how that was for you.

08:47Kate Boardman

So the first time I moved there was 2012. So things have obviously changed a lot since then. And for whoever's looking to move there, it would obviously be important to research the ever-changing visa laws and regulations. I know that they're making new changes and that those do change a lot. Oftentimes, depending on who you're going to be working for, if it's an international school or an organization, they would most likely sponsor your visa. So if that's not going to happen, you need to be aware of if you're going to need to be doing visa runs or anything like that. I went there having a job lined up. So that was a little bit easier because I knew exactly where I was going. So the first time that I moved there, I was teaching at a bilingual school. A lot of the expats that are there are teachers, most are working in language centers teaching English as a foreign language, but there are also international schools where you can teach, you know, whatever subject you would teach back home, but over there, which is what I did as well. you've just got to be careful with finding a reputable organization or school. I think the problem with Southeast Asia in general and even in the world is that education has become such a business and there's a lot of schools that are popping up, you know, with the buzzwords that are popular in education at the moment, whether that's Montessori or Reggio Emilia or Waldorf, but it's really just a business or a marketing buzzword to attract parents, but the school doesn't actually embody that concept. So you've got to be really careful with who you're working for and how they're conducting business. So there's a lot of Facebook groups for expats that are moving there, especially for teaching English to find out and to, you know, do a little bit of research, ask for feedback from other teachers who've worked there. So that's a great way to get insight. If you're working at international schools, there are websites like International School Review, where you can do a little bit of research ahead of time to make sure that the school is legit. So I definitely recommend doing your due diligence. and also making sure that you have the right qualifications to be able to work legally in the country and for

those places. But now with the digital nomad kind of popularity happening, there's a lot of other ways that you could work and live there. So if you are able to work, you know, from home on your laptop, then I think it's a great place to be able to go. And, you know, living in Hoi An by the beach is an amazing option, you know. So and I think that there's a lot of co-working spaces that are opening up to be able to provide the right kind of internet connection that you need. So I know that the whole expat scene is definitely going to be changing over the next few years of people being able to do more than just teaching or working for an embassy, which is kind of what the past was like.

11:44 Kerry Newsome

Yes, and I think it's a developing economy and I see a lot of trade and relationships between countries growing and certainly since things have changed with China. I think, you know, there's more opportunities in the industry sector and working with different chambers of commerce that I get the chance to do, I see a lot more of that. So, I totally agree with you. In fact, I've just done a podcast talking about becoming a digital nomad in Hoi An and talking to a guy who runs the hub in Hoi An, which as you say, if you're going to pick a nice place to set up your laptop and operate digitally for work, and that pays you a salary, well, all the better. So, as you say, I think since 2012, and because I also have a lot of contact with expats over there, the opportunities for jobs has increased, but doing your due diligence is absolutely imperative. There was a time there where there was a lot of people that were going there to retire, and they took up the majority of expat kind of locations and, you know, but COVID kind of unfortunately stripped a lot of those people out and it has become much stricter for people to get the right sponsorship and get things like, you know, a temporary residency card which they need to have for the certain benefits to live in the country. So, you know, as you say, there's a lot going on in that space and doing your research, talking to other expats and hearing from you, I know is going to really help.

13:45 Kate Boardman

Now they're being much more specific on the qualifications and certifications you need. You know, you should have a TEFL, potentially a college degree. So there's definitely, they're upping the calibre for teachers that they're allowing to teach their students. And I think that that's important because a lot goes into teaching. So you should kind of have a little bit of background if you're putting someone else's education in your hands.

14:10 Kerry Newsome

And it's a good point. And you're right. And I think there was a lot of opportunities for people that, yes, had good conversational English skills and could get away with it. But as you say, unless you've got a TEFL or you've got some kind of degree in, you know, dip ed or, you know, educational degree, you're just not going to make the grade now. So that's good. I'm glad you mentioned that. Kate, I want to take you down the path of just how it was for you and talking about just immersing yourself into Vietnamese day-to-day life as it is so very different from, you know, us Westerners and, you know, how we start and finish our days. So, can you talk to us a little bit about just, you know, was it easy for you to kind of immerse yourself in Vietnamese day-to-day life?

15:05 Kate Boardman

So I think the thing, the most important thing is, if you're an expat, you're always going to be a foreigner. And we kind of live in this in between place of never really ever fitting in again in our own home because we've seen the world and broadened our perspective in ways that people from home might not be able to really relate to. But then we're also never going to fully fit in in the culture where we're moving. We can do our best to learn the language and learn about the culture as much as we can and have as many local friends as we want. But I'm 5'11 and a tall, curvy white girl, so I'm clearly not going to blend in. to the streets of Hanoi. So you're always going to maybe get some inquisitive looks. A lot of the shopkeepers, I'd go into stores to look at clothes.

15:58 Kerry Newsome

I know what you're going to say.

16:01 Kate Boardman

Oh, yeah, the amount of times that they'll like, grab your arm and literally, like, shake it and be like, No, no, no, like, you too fat, you're too fat, like, and I'm like, No, but I wear a medium, like, I know that this is gonna fit me. And they would refuse to even let me try it on. And it would be like an H&M shirt that's immediate, you know, I buy this back home, I know it's gonna fit, no They won't let you. So you've got to have a bit of a thick skin to get by. And also, if you are single and you are past the age of 28, you are expired milk. So I would constantly get asked on a daily basis from my Vietnamese co-workers, are you married? Do you have a boyfriend? Why not? Like, what's wrong with you? And now like 10 years later, I'm still single. So they're really going to wonder what's wrong with me. But no, I think as far as immersing yourself, it's a really easy place to kind of get adjusted. You know, you can move there on a Monday and by the weekend have friends, a place to live, a motorbike. You know, I think the expat scene is extremely welcoming and the Vietnamese as well. So it takes Moving anywhere takes time to adjust. There's always that initial culture shock that you have to go through, figuring out where to buy things. And luckily, that has changed drastically in the 10 years. So in 2012, you know, finding contact solution, For example, you couldn't just go to the grocery store, which is where I would buy contact solution from back home, or the pharmacy. You had to go to Glasses Street in the old quarter to find the street that sells glasses, and then there was maybe one contact shop, and those contact shops sold the contact lens solution. It was a mission to find something that you would think would just be an easy enough thing to find. But now, there's so much convenience there. you know, loads of Facebook groups like Hanoi Massive, where, you know, if you need to know where to find something, there's answers, there's grab delivery. So basically, anything that you want, you can have delivered, you know, at the snap of a finger. So that has definitely changed and made things a lot more convenient and easy to navigate. And like I said, with all the Facebook groups, there's groups such as Hanoi Beautiful. So if you're moving there and wondering, you know, where can I go get a haircut? Where can I get my nails done? Where can I, you know, what's a reputable doctor, there's all of that information there, which wasn't necessarily there before. So I think that definitely makes a huge difference. Language is definitely challenging. Obviously, it's tonal. So I think even if you're able to learn a lot, you know, you could still be saying the wrong thing. You know, you could be saying penis or pomelo. They mean the same or it's the same word, but if you say it wrong, you could be ordering the wrong thing at the market.

18:57Kerry Newsome

Yeah, but I know exactly what you're saying. And I know I got warned. My boss at the time, her name was spelt T-H-U-Y, which is pronounced "twee". But if you say "tui" it actually means poop. So, you want to be really careful how you say that then. I'm not surprised that you're mentioning a lot about Facebook groups. For a time there, I really thought that Vietnam was run by Facebook. Like everything, every place, seems to have a Facebook page. And the beautiful part about that is, even though it may be in Vietnamese, you can still message it in English and then you get someone at the other end that messages you back in English and responds. I can, you know, book a hair appointment, Talk to my tailor. I can do a hundred things through Facebook. It's just amazing, isn't it?

20:08Kate Boardman

Right. And I think as far as countries in South East Asia go, the level of English in Vietnam is definitely up there. especially now compared to a few years ago, there's such a push for young Vietnamese students to go to bilingual or international schools, to go to all these language centers. There's a huge push in the country for them to study abroad as well, which has its flaws, you know, even though as an international teacher, have obviously benefited from working at these schools. I hope that it doesn't take over their own culture by becoming so Western and so capitalistic that they're trying to, you know, be like the US or other countries in the West where they lose their own identity.

20:57Kerry Newsome

Mm, it's a good point. And I'm right with you, I don't really want it to change, yet I know in my heart of hearts it's going to, it's all ready. I mean, I've been going back and forth for 14 years, and even in that time, each time I go back, and I go back twice or three times a year, and even in between visits, things have happened, things have changed. So, it's a bit scary and it's growing fast, really, really fast. Let's get on to accommodation because as you say, that's gone through some drastic changes too. So, did you find anything more about that when you visited in November in contrast to what it was for you back in 2016? Yeah.

21:42Kate Boardman

So, when I first lived there, I was paying... One of the cool things was that a lot of people live in house shares. So you get these big, beautiful villas, especially where I was living in the Tejo, Westlake area, which is kind of the more expat neighborhood of Hanoi. There's a lot more now that are popular, but that was definitely the most popular when I was there. And it still is. And so a lot of us would live in a shared house with about five people in a house. I met some of my best friends in the world that way. And it was really great to have that kind of family away from home. If you are moving to another country, it's a great way to live with other people, have a group of friends that we would have holiday dinners together and Monday nights. So it was really special. But we would pay about 250 US dollars for a room often with an en suite and a balcony. And like I said, that would have been in a big five bedroom house. I then lived in a Lakeview apartment with a beautiful balcony overlooking Tay Ho and the two bedroom would have been about 600

US dollars. A month. I think that now, a month. And I think that now that would easily be well over 1000. So I've just spoken to my one of my best friends just moved to Saigon. So she's going to be teaching at an international school. They've given her about 700 US dollars to find a two bedroom apartment. But she said that when she was looking the other day for the amenities that she would want, which would be a pool and a gym, she's looking about at about \$1,000. So A lot. Those are definitely Western prices, but obviously you're not going to get a pool and a gym in your building for \$1,000 in New York City. So it's comparable to what you're getting, but it's still really expensive to think that you could be paying that much in Vietnam compared to what we paid years ago.

23:42 Kerry Newsome

Yeah, absolutely. And I think the interesting thing that I've learned from expats too is, you know, in that shared house and in the accommodations that you have, your style of living is so different to Western, you know, like, you know, you don't have ovens and you're not there cooking and baking like you would be at home. You're mostly eating out because it's just so affordable and, you know, you've got maybe somebody to come in and do the cleaning and, as you say, access to the pool, to the gym. So, it's still quite comparable, isn't it? Western life, but how does it compare to the salary? Like, do you go there to save money, or do you go there as an expat to just be an expat and live in another country to experience another country, or do you actually come home with savings, or I don't know. I'm not quite sure what I want out of this answer, but yeah.

24:42 Kate Boardman

No, so this is a big thing to consider when you're looking to move abroad. So, especially having been a teacher in so many different countries, you kind of get to know the countries that pay really well, or that you're mostly living in for an experience. And it's often supply and demand. You think of the countries where people really often want to live, the pay is obviously going to be a little bit less because they know that you're going to want to move there, even if the salary is low, whereas countries that might not be as enticing are often going to pay you more because they want to attract people to get there, which is why at a time the Middle East was paying a ton of money. Now, obviously, people want to go and live there. so the salaries have kind of dropped to reflect that. But Vietnam, when I first, so my first job there, I was earning about \$2,000 a month. And after paying for rent, a motorbike every month, or no, I think I bought my motorbike, but paying for a motorbike, eating out, essentially every single day, partying and going out every weekend, traveling on every holiday, I would easily save half of my salary without even thinking about it. So I think the most important thing to think about is your earning to savings ratio. It's not necessarily how much money you're making, but the quality of life you can live with that and the amount of money that you can save. So I definitely was able to save half of my salary. So Even though \$2,000 a month is not a lot by Western standards, I would never have been able to save \$12,000 in the US working a job that paid more just because of the cost of living. That would just not be possible. Now, obviously, with the cost of living having gone up in Vietnam, I think that that would be much more challenging. But I think the jobs also reflect that in their pay. So you can, and again, it's up to how you live, you know, if you are eating at a Western restaurant, every single day, you're going to be paying about seven to \$10 for a meal. But if you're eating a bowl of pho, you're going to be paying about two to three So it depends on what you spend your money

on. You can obviously get a cafe soda from a local cafe for a dollar, or you could go and have a latte at Starbucks for six. So it's how you choose to live your life. And I think the great thing about Vietnam is that you have that balance and you have those options to be able to live as cheaply and inexpensively as you want or to be as lavish as you want as well.

27:25 Kerry Newsome

Yeah, I mean, you're totally right. It's definitely a lifestyle choice and how you live because, you know, I know even myself, if I stay, you know, a couple of months, if I have an extended stay, I find myself totally flipping on the way I live over there to how I live back home. How I eat, what I do, where I go, and where my money doesn't go. So, it's not going on parking fees or tolls or, you know, the eating out is nowhere near as expensive as it is over there. I adore Vietnamese food. So, you know, I can get fed very well. I can get a grab bike for you know, so cheap to get where I want to go. So, you know, you're right. You've got to really weigh up those pros and cons and what the experience of travel and immersing yourself in that kind of culture is going to do for you.

28:25 Kate Boardman

Also, just one thing to add to that, like the price of being beautiful. I joke around with my friends all the time. I'm like, oh, you're so lucky. You can be, you can afford to be so much more beautiful there because, you know, I always just felt so much I don't know, you're able to afford, you know, getting your nails done, getting your hair done, getting massages, you know, on a weekly basis, whereas back in the States, I can't do that on a regular basis. So I joke with my friends, you know, because they've all got their lashes done and their eyebrows and everything is done all the time, you know, whereas I'm lucky if I go to get my nails done, you know, every couple of months.

29:06 Kerry Newsome

I'm totally with you. I reckon I lose 10 years in a trip to Vietnam. I always come back feeling absolutely refreshed. And I feel like a foreigner back in my own country. It's terrible.

29:19 Kate Boardman

Oh, yeah. Whenever I go, I get all the things done. I'm making appointments at all the places to do all the things.

29:26 Kerry Newsome

And I'd be having a massage after dinner two or three times a week. Right. You'd be rude not to. It's vagrant. I know. It's totally vagrant. I want to move on. I want to get into what did you struggle with the most? What were some of the biggest challenges you found?

29:48 Kate Boardman

Well, obviously this is going back a long time, so these wouldn't necessarily be struggles now, but the struggle of trying to figure out where to get things, which is obviously not an issue anymore. Hanoi specifically, when I first moved there, it was January and I do not recommend doing that. No. God no. No. And I had come from, so my initial plan when I moved to Asia was to stay in Thailand. That was the whole plan. I had a wardrobe packed for Thailand and then I randomly

ended up getting a job that paid twice as much in Hanoi. So I moved there without any plan of actually moving there. and did not have the clothes, did not have the shoes, could not find the shoes that fit me. I wear a size US 10. So those didn't exist then. But um, it was freezing. And I'm from Massachusetts, which is in the northeast of the US, which we get a lot of snow here. And I've never

been so cold in my life. Because The humidity is so high, it's about 75% to 80% humidity. And so that means that it is a wet cold that soaks you through to the bone. And you're not driving in your heated car to work, you're driving on your motorbike. So once you're cold, you are cold. And oftentimes the houses are not insulated. So it's actually colder inside of your home than outside on the streets. So I definitely battled with this. And then you go into Mouldy March. So all your clothes start to grow mould on them. That's really fun. Anything black. So all my black leather jackets and my black leather shoes were covered in mould. There's ways around this. You can get things like cedar chips for your closet or try to take care of your things if you know that Mouldy March is coming. But the weather was definitely challenging. So I actually hated Hanoi when I first lived there. I hated it so much because I was like, why did I leave? Why am I here? I was going through a really bad breakup at the time. And I'm just like, what have I done? I've left my relationship. And now I'm in this freezing cold place that didn't see the sun because it's cloudy. And it rained a lot at that time and was freezing. So I was like, OK, great. I've, you know, left sunny Thailand and now I'm here. And that really took a toll on me. But then when the weather is nice, you understand the magic and you realize why people love the place so much, which makes going through the winters way more bearable because you know, you've already fallen in love with the place. So when I moved back, it was a totally different experience because you know, the fall is absolutely gorgeous. The weather is perfect. The summer, you know, you can chill out in a pool and spend a lot of time outside. So there's, there's a lot of different times of year, but it's worth it. It's worth the cold rainy season.

32:55 Kerry Newsome

And, you know, people, they don't want to listen to me when I tell them about when to go and when not to go places. You know, and people say, oh, you know, we want to, we definitely want to see, we want to go to Halong Bay at the beginning of January. And I go, no, that would not be a good idea. You won't be able to go on deck. You'll be freezing. There's just not a puffer jacket built to sustain that cold in Hanoi and places like that. But everybody just has this perception that Vietnam is just this you know, hot country. It's just hot all year round. And it's just not, is it? And... Right. No, not in the North. No. And the weather in the North is very different to the weather in the South. So, when I'm crossing seasons, I either spend more time in the North, depending on what time of year, or more time in the south or the central area, just to meet the best weather, conditional to the experiences that I want to have. Because you can't do much when, you know, there's no use going to Hoi An in October, for instance, and you want to go snorkeling on the Cham Islands. because the boats don't run, the water's too cloudy, the weather's too crap. So, you know, it's really an important thing. And when I trip plan for people, I hate to have to down their aspirations, but I do want to keep it real for them because I don't want them to get there and go, oh, wow, this is terrible, you know. Kate, I want to just step into things like safety. You know, you're a gorgeous looking girl, you're there traveling on your own, working on your own, looking after yourself, sounding like very extremely well, but do you feel safe? Do you feel like you've got

good either access to good people and systems and medical care and, you know, things like that to in regard to walking around at night, you know, all of that kind of stuff. Because there's some cities in the world, I would say, I wouldn't feel safe doing those kinds of things. I just wondered how it was for you.

35:19Kate Boardman

No, absolutely. And that's definitely something to consider when you're moving abroad. So first of all, things can happen anywhere. And I have to tell this to my parents all the time. My mom is always worrying about me, like, oh, my God, be careful. You know, and it's like, yeah, everywhere you go, something can happen. You just have to have your wits about you and understand the culture of where you're going, first of all. So I, Vietnam is a very safe country and Southeast Asia in general is extremely safe for solo female travelers. It's one of the best places that you can travel as a woman alone, I would say. you've got such a prevalence of like the Buddhist culture and it's a very peaceful culture and peaceful people. I've been in situations, I remember I dropped like \$50 out of my pocket in Seoul in Korea and somebody came running up to pick it up and hand it to me. Whereas in other countries in the world, that wouldn't happen. And the same thing would happen in Vietnam. If you left your wallet in a place, you know, oftentimes the shopkeeper would run after you to get you. That's not to say that things don't happen. You know, I've had situations and I actually got robbed in Saigon. I was coming home late at night. This would have been years ago when I was backpacking and was coming home late at night. I was walking with a couple of guys but somebody came up on a motorbike behind us and I had a crossbody bag on and they just snatched it and took off my camera, my money, everything. So you definitely have to be careful and I've heard certain areas of Saigon that you want to be careful not to wear a lot of gold flashy jewellery because they've got people that will ride around on the motorbikes and they'll pull them off of you, but you just have to know where you're going. And I wouldn't say that that's the overall energy of the city. You might find that in more of the backpacker places, but once you live there, it's kind of, you know what areas to avoid. So, for example, I had a friend that when she lived in Saigon, if she was going out to the district one backpacker area, she might just not wear her flashy gold or valuable jewellery, you know, or make sure that she has a bag that's secure on her. There are also situations where house robberies could happen. This did happen to several of my friends where people would actually climb up from the outside and could break into your house. But again, this is not the norm. These, of course, happen. And I think it's important for people to know that they are possibilities. But it's definitely not the rule. There are more exceptions to the rule. And overall, I always felt very safe in Vietnam. There are great medical facilities. Obviously, you want to do your research and know where to go. But I've had friends that have, you know, delivered babies. I've had friends that have gotten surgeries. You know, there are good medical facilities there if you need. And again, just do your research. So if you're moving to a place, get a feel for what are the best hospitals to go to if something should happen so that you know and are ready for should anything happen. With motorbike safety, it's extremely important to know how to drive a motorbike, I would suggest that you really feel confident knowing how to ride a motorbike. I learned in Thailand, which prepared me for Vietnam. I think if you've never driven a motorbike before, Vietnam might be a little bit of an intense place to try. So obviously finding a quiet area where you can practice is important because the traffic is crazy and it takes some getting used to, but it's an organized chaos and it does flow. Once you get the hang of it, you'll understand it. But it's also important to make sure that your insurance is going to cover you if you're in a motorbike accident. So this is really important. I think a lot of insurance companies, travel insurance

companies will only cover you if you have a license. So you would need to figure out if you're going to stay there a long time how to get a Vietnam motorbike license. And if you don't have a license that you are driving a motorbike, that's no more than a 50 CC. So I actually own a Honda Cub. Those are my favorite motorbikes. They're adorable. They're vintage. They're super cute. Mine was named Penny Lane, and she was adorable, turquoise, and I loved her. But she was a 50 CC. And so that meant that if anything happened, it would have been covered under my insurance. And, um, I use a safety wing, so I've actually sent you a link. So if you want to share that, um, so safety wing is great for digital nomads for insurance, but yeah, those are definitely some things to be aware of, but no, overall the Vietnamese are extremely friendly. I feel safe there and, and the men are not creepy. I think this is important to, of course, you know, you might get some looks, but I've definitely been to other parts of the world where you feel uncomfortable because you're getting stared at, or even in Egypt, the guys would chase you down the streets. In Guatemala, whenever they drive by, they're whistling or yelling something out the window. But Vietnam, you don't really feel that from the men there, which is really refreshing. So I think for women, that's important, and you don't feel that you're being stalked or perverted on by these men.

41:09 Kerry Newsome

Yeah, and that's been my experience as well. I think, you know, it's a lot of common sense, I think, a lot of times, don't you think? That, you know, if you want to be flashy, if you want to kind of, you know, act like you haven't got your wits about you, you're in the wrong place at the wrong time kind of thing, you're either too drunk to know what you're doing, well, you know, anything can happen. And as you say, that could happen in any country. I think that it's important to note that. And, you know, like I travel like you on my own most of the time. I'm blonde. I'm short. So, the short aspect helps me a lot. because I don't stand out, but my blonde hair does stick out like the proverbial. But, you know, I'm a bit older, so I often get a lot of respect from the Vietnamese, and they are very cordial and very sweet to me. So, you know, I always feel quite special the way they treat me when I'm over there. I mean, just common courtesies that, you know, you don't get in Western society as much.

42:24 Kate Boardman

No, they're extremely friendly and welcoming and helpful as well. You know, if I've been in situations where my motorbike is broken down on the side of the street and someone, you know, because I've run out of petrol or something and someone stops to help me and gone and gotten me some petrol or whatever. So They'll go out of their way to help you if they can.

42:44 Kerry Newsome

Absolutely. Kate, just to finish up, do you have any kind of last minute tips for people, things that they should definitely do?

42:56 Kate Boardman

I mean, so many, but I think try all the food, really explore the cafe culture, it's unlike anywhere else in the world, the local coffee, the beautiful cafes that they have, they're so fun to explore. For me, I love going down all the little hidden alleyways, that's where all the hidden gems are. So I think back home, what we would see as a sketchy looking alleyway, it's kind of dirty, or, you

know, it's not maybe the most hygienic place to eat, those are the best spots. So don't let, don't judge a book by its cover, that's where the magic is. And my favorite places are the places that are down what might look like a sketchy alleyway, but it's a culinary heaven and you just got to go and get lost and try it. My favorite trips have been, one of my favorite trips of all time was a motorbike trip that I did up to Ha Giang, the Ha Giang Loop, which is on the border of China. So my girlfriend and I rode motorbikes for about six days, and it was the most stunning countryside I've ever seen. So definitely do a motorbike trip if you can. I know that that trip has become a lot more popular over the years. When I went, it was definitely off the beaten track. It's incredible. Hoi An is such a magical place and will forever be one of my favorite places. But yeah, I think just try to experience as much as you can. And I think that's what makes Vietnam so amazing is that you've got literally everything. You've got incredible beaches, deserts, jungle. thriving, bustling cities, cute ancient towns. There's tons of history and architecture and charm. And so there's really something for everyone to see there.

44:50 Kerry Newsome

Kate, thank you very much for being on the program. It's been really great to talk to you.

45.20 Kate Boardman

Thank you so much for having me.