



## What About Vietnam – S5-E3 – Heritage and discovery in Saigon, The Mekong Delta and Dalat

**00:00 Kerry Newsome** Xin chào and welcome to the What About Vietnam podcast. Today I'm talking to Vicky Thai from Utah, USA. Hello to all my listeners in Utah. I have heaps actually, it's quite surprising, but really lovely and hello to everyone.

Now Vicky is a very special lady with a history that I feel sure will come to bare during the show. And it speaks to her reason for going to Vietnam in the first place, and it calls to attention a little bit more about her heritage. But that's for Vicky to tell and reveal in this show. Vicky and I have become quite close over the past six months as she engaged my trip planning services through What About Vietnam to create her trip to Vietnam with her mum. As part of What About Vietnam, or WAV as we call it, I offer trip planning services, which is loads of fun and something I get really involved with as I get to create wonderful trips for people using my knowledge and accessing quality tour operators I know in Vietnam that will deliver exceptional services. The delight is hearing afterwards how the trips went and what were the highlights. You find detail that you just can't get in a guidebook. You find insights from people and I think the value in that is knowing that it sounds real, it sounds true, it sounds correct, and obviously it's got some bias from the people that give up their stories on the show, but at least you can be sure it's real and true. The What About Vietnam website features these travel services. I do charge a small fee to do that, but please feel free to reach out to me any time. So before we jump into the show, I'd just like to tell you a little bit more about Vicky. As I said, Vicky lives in Sandy, Utah, USA. She is in the healthcare technology industry in sales for a global company. The platform is Android and they have 55% of the global Android enterprise market share. Outside of healthcare, her company targets Fortune 500 companies and within healthcare. They target the larger hospital networks to provide clinicians with technology that improves patient care and satisfaction. Wahoo for that. She is a former runner, however, more recently she has got into the practice of hot yoga. Three cheers to you Vicky for hot yoga. She loves to travel and each year she will take off with a close friend picking a city, an area they haven't been to, and

then they just go for it enjoying local food and spas as they traverse through the city. She describes herself as a definite foodie, an adventurous eater, but not to any bugs. Totally with you there. Vicky is ethnically Chinese but born in Vietnam. Now this is where her story and that of her mom becomes even more interesting. She immigrated to the States when she was four years old. In the past she said she never really had an interest in Vietnam. It wasn't until her mom had both of her knees replaced and witnessed some vulnerabilities there that she saw the opportunity to travel with her may not come up and wouldn't offer any guarantees. So she better make an effort to put it on the bucket list and get on and do it. So thus she reached out to me through What About Vietnam to help her create the trip. And the trip was to have some very special places of interest that it had to be included in the itinerary. These included Saigon, the Mekong Delta and Dalat which we will focus as a main city in this episode. Vicky's going to be able to give us some insights that I think you wouldn't get from anyone else. So I'm really, really happy that she's coming on to do that. It's been a delight to deal with Vicky. She says after completing the trip end of May just gone, that's 2023, it was a decision she will never regret or forget. I think we're going to find out more about how this trip evoked some emotions and some understanding of her heritage. She said when I've thought about my heritage in the past it was basically just in passing, just facts, no emotions. After visiting Vietnam in May, interacting with the people, the landscape and their commerce, it made me feel very proud of my heritage. I hope to be back within the next couple of years. So I think this is going to be a very special episode. It's one I've been looking forward to doing. I think we're going to hear some reflections from Vicky as how it opened her eyes to this country, her country of birth, and just how her perceptions maybe had been shaped and what she and her mom found on the other side. So Vicky, welcome to the What About Vietnam podcast. It's lovely to have you on the show.

**05:42 Vicki Thai** Thank you so much, Harry, and thank you so much for the invite. I'm really excited to talk about our experience in Vietnam and how it really broadened my views of it. Like you mentioned in the past, I really never gave it second thought, but this trip has changed everything and how I view Vietnam. It was so amazing. As you know, my brother and his family has booked a trip with you for December. So clearly my mom and I were that convincing after coming back from our trip. And so I have another brother who is going to reach out a little bit later. His wife had unexpected brain surgery a few weeks ago. And so I think that's, you know, like with my mom's experience, that's really opened his eyes as well. And so it was just an amazing experience.

**06:28 Kerry Newsome** I'm excited to talk to you about it. And like, you know, not everybody has your interesting background. So I'm wondering if you can share with us just a little bit of a story, maybe starting with your mom and that trip that took her to settle in the U.S. You as a four-year-old, you know, like any memories that you have of arriving into the States and just how you were assimilated into the U.S.?

**07:00 Vicki Thai** Sure, absolutely. So I'm going to take it a step further and talk about my grandparents. So my grandparents on both sides actually are from China and immigrated to Vietnam to start businesses. My grandparents on my dad's side, they were cobblers or they made shoes. And then on my mom's side, they were bakers. And apparently their baker became so famous. And then they opened aquariums. And so they were very established within the Vietnam community. And then, you know, of course, then that's where my mom was born in Bailup, which is the suburb of Dalat, and why we went back there specifically on

the trip in May. And then I was actually my, so I'm the youngest of four. So and then we were actually born in Saigon. And I believe we lived in District 5. And, you know, the pictures I showed you, they were District 5. And then, you know, during the Vietnam War, interesting story, my dad was an accountant for the U.S. Embassy. And so during communist regime, they have a tendency to kidnap anyone associated with Americans because there's this belief that America is paid with gold, everyone has money, right? And so they would hold the kids for ransom. And so my last name, Ty, is actually my mom's family's last name. So they could not connect us kids to my dad. Wow. And so yeah. And so because my grandparents on my mom's side was so established, we were pretty safe with the last name, Ty, right? And so during the war, what ended up happening is everyone was leaving, right? You hear both people all the time and you hear the stories. Well, they're all true, right? And some of the stories are horrendous. Ours was not great, but compared to others that I've heard, you know, it's a walk in the park. So my grandparents, my mom's side being established, they actually rented a boat for the family and friends. And my dad was actually asked to join them. And the thought was you leave the country, you go to a refugee camp, you go to your final destination, right? Ours is the U.S. And then he would sponsor the rest of the family over. So my mom and my four, and the four kids over. Well, along the Thailand coast, and you hear about pirates all the time, right? So at nighttime, the boat's dock and the pirates come out. And so our boat was targeted and all the men are thrown overboard. All the women were tied up and they ransacked and stole, right? Because when you leave the country, we can take with you, you're gonna take money, you're gonna take jewelry, you're gonna take all of that stuff. They ransacked and took all of that stuff. My dad was thrown overboard. And so, and then my uncles heard him screaming, they swam over and he was gone. So we lost my dad on his way to the, you know, to leave Vietnam. And so a telegram, my grandpa sent a telegram to my grandma. My grandma went and talked to my mom. And so we've lost our dad. And so within six months we were leaving again. My grandma said to my mom, you and your kids need to live. You don't have a life here, right? And so we left. We were on a refugee camp for, I think in Indonesia, for like six months. And then we immigrated to the U.S. And so I was four when we got here, you know, your language is developed, but not to the point where you're fluent. And so English was my language. I always spoke to my mom in English and just basically assimilated. And that's why I think when you're talking about my bio, I didn't really have a connection to Vietnam because I was so young, right? And my language, right? And I can tell you, I understand Vietnamese and I can order off the menu, right? And I speak broken Cantonese, but that's basically it, right? And so, you know, if you were to talk to people here, they're like, oh, you're just American, right? And it was funny when we were in Vietnam, our tour guide in Mekong Delta is like, and I was saying, like, thank you in Vietnamese. He's like, oh, you have an English accent. You have an American accent. And so you never think of that. And so, you know, and that's just, just, you know, I think it was just we came over and we're so young. So I was four, the oldest was nine, right? And so we basically have spent the bulk of our lives here. And, you know, I tell you, I'm 49. So I've been here basically my whole life, right? And so you really, you know, growing up, I think you hear more of that, what are you? Right? And then you hear like the racist, like little jokes that little kids do, you know, and it's very common. I know within the US and I'm sure within the rest of the world where your Asian name is different. And so it's harder to pronounce. So you change it. So I change, I picked Vicky in third grade, right? Don't ask why my ethnic name is Thanh, like Tanya, but it's spelled T-H-A-N-H, right? And I'm sure you see that name when you're in Vietnam, right? In

America, it's harder to pronounce. And so you change that. What year was it when you got out of Indonesia? Was it, do you know what year that was? It was in the 80s. So we got to the US early 81. All right. And how old would your mom have been at that time? My dad died when she was 31. And so not long after she took us and the, you know, my dad's aunt who was basically our nanny, then we left Vietnam to come to the, well, and here's the thing. When you go to a refugee camp, you really don't know where your final destination is, right? It could be Australia. It could be, it's just wherever your sponsors are. But yeah, but we landed in Utah in early 81. Is there a big community of Vietnamese in Utah? Yeah. Well, supposedly there is because we are getting Asian supermarkets. We're getting Asian bakeries. We're getting Asian drink shops all over the Salt Lake Valley. And so I remember my sister-in-law and I, who's also Asian, were saying, I didn't know there were so many Asians here, right? But if you were to talk to people who are very vested in the Asian community, they will tell you our Asian community is blowing up. That's why so many, you know, are coming here. When we say Asians, are you talking about the broad spectrum of Asians, like from all countries? So we're talking all of Southeast Asia kind of. Yeah. Yeah. Including China. If you think about it, including China. And you know, even though we're all very different, we eat a lot of the same food.

**13:28 Kerry Newsome** I have such a huge percentage of listeners. So like I have over 60,000 listens of the show and it grows at around about a thousand a week. And what became unusual for me was to think, why would people in Utah be listening to this podcast about Vietnam? And I did a little bit of digging and the more I dug away and, you know, thank God for Google, to find out that in 1975 onwards, that Utah as a state was one of the few in America that did take and was willing to accept a lot of Vietnam refugees. The community, I think, stemmed from, and that's why I was intrigued with your story when we first got together, was, and particularly when you were mentioning about your mum wanting to come back, I had that thought, I was thinking, gee, I wonder whether in the mix of things, this is how this has come about. But this was also where American GIs had, you know, formed relationships with Vietnamese women and they wanted to bring them as their partners back and their families, et cetera. So there was a few particular states that kind of welcomed with open arms the Vietnamese into the US at that time. So that's kind of what I know to add to this little equation. Interest. There you go. You go to Vietnam in 2023, the first time you've been back since you were four and since she was 30. So you're going in almost, not blind, but a really open mind. Or did your mum say, oh, look, this is something I really need to do, or this is something I really want to find out about? Because I know we talked a little bit about it when we did the trip plan, so I know it, but my listeners don't. So let's go down that path a little bit. So share some of the things that she wanted to see and do and that you wanted to make sure happened.

**15:41 Vicki Thai** Sure. Absolutely. So for clarification, my mum has gone back to Vietnam, I believe, twice in our 40 something years within the US, but it's been a very long time ago. And in the past, she went with her friends. And, you know, as you know, with a lot of Asians, right, they are very good with their money. So when they go back, they stay with family. And even the best accommodations, possibly in Vietnam, is very different from what we have in the Western side, right? And so did she enjoy it? You know, I'm not sure. But, you know, she was always happy to come home, right? Let's just say that. And so for my mum, it was to, you know, she's 75, right? And you don't, you know, at a certain age, you don't have that

many more opportunities ahead of you, because after a while, maybe, you know, your health breaks down a little bit and sitting on a flight for 20 plus hours is going to be very difficult, right? And then also, she just had her knees replaced. And for me, it was spending time with my mum, right? Because it's an experience, right? We could go around town here, but it's very normal. This is different. Yeah, it's bonding. This is something I can share with her. And I can see her where she grew up, so I can better understand sometimes. You know, we don't always mess well. She would say things, I'm like, that doesn't make sense. And she's like, well, if you understood how I grew up, you know, you would be more sympathetic or understanding about it. And here's the thing, because I didn't grow up that way, I'm not going to understand. And so it was just an opportunity. And then also, after, you know, with my mum, it'd be nice to really know where I came from, right? Because all I know is the US. I'm all American, right? That's all I know, right? And so that was the deciding point. And that was when the ball got rolling with contacting you.

**17:33 Kerry Newsome** There was really specific locations. And I want to now start to talk about those locations, because I think, you know, everyone listening is going to be fascinated about these locations. Now, let's start with Saigon. Did Saigon blow your hair back when you got there?

**17:51 Vicki Thai** I loved it. I loved it. I loved the hustle and bustle. I love city life, right? And then like, I would go to the more remote for quote unquote, a vacation or a break. But I love city life. I love the sounds. I love the smell. I love the people. It was it blew my mind. And I think all the scooters at one time blew my mind. And I remember saying to our tour guide, I said, I can never drive here because I would kill, you know, two or three scooter people at every drive. And she's like, oh, you'll get used to it when you live here. But I just loved it. I loved how everything was so close. And I loved how if you want to eat a certain food, there is a street and there's all these restaurants that just sells that. I'm going to be honest, I loved it. That is a city that's close to my heart. I can tell you, you know, anytime I go back, that is I will never miss that city. It just felt so at home to me.

**18:34 Kerry Newsome** Look, I'm really glad you've said that about Saigon, because a lot of people skip Saigon. It's like a little bit too overwhelming or whatever. I think it's got over the years better. I mean, it's embraced commercialism to the absolute max, but it's got a vibe. It's got an energy. I agree with you. I get a grab bike and I, you know, I'm on that bike in two seconds flat around the corner, you know, the best coffee, coffee houses everywhere. Yeah, I'm really glad that you had that experience because I wasn't sure because I have such a mix in my suite of people who want to visit Vietnam. And some just go, oh, you know, the bikes, the pollution, the rubbish, you know, all of those things. And they're all there. They're all definitely there. But you either are a type of person and you go, I'm going to just embrace this and go with it.

**19:40 Vicki Thai** And I was really glad to hear that you did. Right. And it was funny because we had a couple when we were going to the Mekong Delta. So the shuttle picked us up. Right. And so they picked us up first and then we went to their hotel. They're a British couple. And every year they take, you know, global trips. And one of the things that they said to us, and I will never forget it, just because we were just talking about how much I love the hustle and bustle of Saigon. And they said Saigon is exactly where Singapore was 10

years ago. And then we all hear about Singapore now. Right. And so I'm really excited, you know, to each time I go back to see how Saigon transforms. Right. And then maybe eventually 10 years, they will be, you know, the Singapore of, you know, Asia. But it was just really interesting. And I just, I just loved it. I just, I love the hustle and bustle. I just loved all of them.

**20:29 Kerry Newsome** . No, I can remember where there was a time where there was no malls. There was, the shopping was very, very limited to Ben Thanh markets. And that whole experience was just at a really basic level, but it's so sophisticated. Now I've had, I've been to fine dining restaurants that would rival any restaurant that you would find in the US or here in Australia. Like the food was just absolutely fabulous. The service, I get blown away. I think you also had a really good guide in Saigon.

**21:02 Vicki Thai** . Oh, yes. Thuy was phenomenal. My mom and I are just like, who is like that? Right. It's like, I believe I'm a pretty nice person, but she blows me. I'm mediocre compared to her. You know, she's just so thorough. She is so caring. You know, I tell you what, I can't speak enough of her. And as you know, I requested specifically that with my brother's family, you know, if they should have Tui as their tour guide. Yeah, she is phenomenal. She is, my mom, I think considers her as her fifth child, you know, just because the hospitality there is one of the things that I think one of the highlights of the trip, and I think I mentioned to you, is our tour guides. You know, Tui was exceptional, you know, on any respect, right? But, you know, even our tour guide on the Mekong Delta, he was phenomenal. Our tour guides and their drivers. It was just, I just could not believe these people, the hospitality, the kindness, right? And I really feel like, you know, we could all talk about tour guides and then we've, I think we've all experienced tour guides who clearly don't want to be there. It's a job. None of our tour guides, yeah, yeah, none of our tour guides like that. And I just think to myself, if I just had people after people coming day after day, could I keep this up? I'm not sure I can, right? And so I, and that's one of the things that I love. And I mentioned it to my family and my part of it, that's made me so proud of my heritage is that just the kindness of the people, right? Because growing up, we always hear about how poor Vietnam is and how uneducated the people are, right? And all that stuff. And just being there in May, it blew me away because they were educated, they were kind, they were well spoken. And, you know, here's the thing, they spoke English to me and they spoke Vietnamese to my mom, you know, without a hitch. And so I will tell you that the people there are so kind, are so good. It was, it would not, you would not consider people in a developing country like Vietnam to be as, I don't want to say classy, but I'm going to use that term because I can't think of another, as classy and thoughtful as the people and the tour guides that we had in Vietnam. And Tuy was, I mean, they were all phenomenal, but Thuy is at the top.

**23:22 Kerry Newsome** When you go to a foreign country, the people and how you are treated to me, uh, says a lot about the country itself. Now, I mean, we both know the history of Vietnam and just how the country has been through so much, and yet they can still welcome us so warmly, so friendly, so openly, so generously. I feel the Vietnamese have a generous spirit and they, you know, they will, nothing, nothing is too much trouble. Service is just.

**24:13 Vicki Thai** Yeah. Well, it's like what we're talking about. It's for, you know, for maybe in Australia and the West, you know, and the U S it's a, it's a job, right? And where I just, you know, I never felt like we were imposing. I never felt that, um, you know, we were asking for too much. I never, they never made us feel that way. And it was so welcoming. I remember we stepped off the plane, right? It was a 24 hour flight. Tuy picked us up and it was like 10 30 at night. And she just waved and I was just like, you know, and then the first thing she says is happy birthday. And I looked at her. I was like, how did you know? She was like, it was on your passport. And it was like, it's just the little things, right? And I think, you know, it being in sales and for you working with the public so much, it's, it's always accumulation of little things that adds up to a really big thing. Definitely. And I think Vietnam exemplifies that with their people. I'm keen to hear what you thought of the Mekong Delta and what story and history you got around that area. So we did the Mekong Delta cruise, right? On Mekong ice.

And I tell you, um, you know, our tour guide was Jonathan there. He was phenomenal. He was just phenomenal. So friendly, so educated on everything. And the thing I love about the Mekong Delta, what it was, you know, we're on the cruise and we're just going by and then you see so many homes, you know, on, on the coast of it. And so many are just so very run down, right? And some of it breaks your heart because you realize, you know, he actually lived this way, right? And then, but we went to, you know, we stopped and we did this walking tour and it's all these tropical fruits. And we went to this house and they have this huge, oh my God, I can't even imagine this garden with fruits, vegetables, everything. And the people were just so kind. I'm not sure I can sit and cut fruit for people every day, multiple times and have a smile on my face. You know, strangers coming to your house, eating your fruit, right? And it was, I tell you, it was just phenomenal. And, you know, and there's just, there was something about Jonathan that he was just so kind. And I just remember he liked talking to my mom because my mom's a jokester. She's not that way with her kids, but she's that way with others, right? You know, I was just talking to him and he is just like, you know, I love talking to your mom because it reminds me of this and I said, oh, that's nice, right? And one of the things that, and it really like, it really, you know, touched me. He was like, she reminds me of my mom. And I said, oh, how nice, right? And then he was just like, and here's the thing, his mom died in 2017. And here my mom is, and he was like, her voice sounds like her, the way she jokes sounds like her, everything. And after I heard that, I'm like, talk to her all you want, you know, because it was like, and I could tell my mom was enjoying it because she's in her element, right? Because English, she understands a lot of it, but not as much as Vietnamese. And so it was, I loved it. We went to the floating market, which I, you know, just watching the people and you think to yourself, oh my God, how do you make a life out of it? Right. And Jonathan was saying, so when the kids, I said, well, when the kids, where do they go to school? And he was like, well, they don't go to school. Right. And I said, well, where do they bait? You know, he's like, well, they'll jump in the Delta. I'm like, it was like, if you and I were to jump in, we would come out, I'll itch you, right? But they're so accustomed to it. And then I was just like, you learn all this stuff. And I said, well, these boats, like the pineapple couple boat, I said, is there a bathroom in there? And he was like, no, he was like, do you see these ladies with their boats? They're like taxis. And so if you need to use a restroom, they build it, you know, at a certain area and they take them there. And I just thought to myself, oh my God, what a tough life, but they're choosing it. And you just have to think to yourself, God, props to you

for, you know, he said a lot of the pineapple, they actually have a home on the mainland, right? But they choose to live on the boat because it's more simple. I don't know about you, Carrie, but I would not be, you know, choosing to leave my home to live on a boat where I have to take a taxi to use the restroom. You know what I mean? A water taxi. And you just have to think to yourself, number one, how tough they are. And the love for living a simple life, they're willing to give up modern necessities or modern conveniences to this life. So for people like us, touring can climb on their boat to have some pineapple. You know, you just have to give them props for that because they're choosing to live a life that's far more difficult than a life that you and I would ever choose.

**28:52 Kerry Newsome** You've got to also think that it's kind of in their DNA. You know, they have come from that heritage. So they intrinsically know it so well. Like you and I, we'd be falling out of the boats. We'd be, you know, wanting to go to the toilet every 10 minutes. So we'd be getting, we would be an absolute pain in the neck. I know I would be. So I think also where it's challenging for the future, when I've talked to various guides and I've been a couple of times now, is that it is a dying industry per se because the children that they're having are getting better educated as obviously they want them to be. So they don't want to come back and earn a living on those boats. They don't want to have those inconveniences of life. They want, you know, they want the modern future. And so there's probably only about a hundred or so families that now choose that and continue that. So, you know, it's not going to be there for much longer, which is a little bit sad, but you can, that's progress, I guess, in its most basic form. But it's fascinating, isn't it, to see it and to realize that this is happening. This is not a show. This is not like put on just for tourists. This goes on whether I come and visit it or see it anyway. It's day to day existence and livelihood for a lot of people. So I'm glad you got to see that because it's just even a good measurement back for yourself when you come back to your own country and you've got all the mod cons and you've got, you know, your life, you go, oh my God.

**30:44 Vicki Thai** Well, it certainly makes you appreciate what you have in your life, right? Because I don't have to call a water taxi to use the restroom, you know?

**30:52 Kerry Newsome** All right. So then we moved you to Dalat and I really want you to go all out on Dalat because it's the one city amongst all my podcasts that I haven't really found the right person to talk about. I've been myself, but I really wanted someone that had a reason to go there and had some history about the place. And guess what? That's you. So tell us about Dalat.

**31:21 Vicki Thai** Yeah. So Dalat is a city my mom grew up in with her family. And so, I mean, not only did her family start the bakery and their business in Saigon, but they actually started in Dalat, then moved to the larger city. And so they were successful in Dalat as well. And so I wanted to go back to see where my mom grew up. Right. And, you know, it's like, maybe it could explain something. Right. And I tell you what, it was nothing that I expected. It was first off, amazingly beautiful. It was, I mean, I remember our driver and tour guide. I'm like, where are we going? Right. Because it was like, we're on the freeways and also we exit and we're like in this forest. And I said, I thought we're going to Dalat and they're like, yeah, we are. And I was like, what are you guys talking about? And so I'm thinking, oh my God, we're going to this, you know, one horse town, one stoplight, you know, we're going to



have to dig our own place to use the restroom. And so we're just driving through the, you know, driving through and it's just beautiful. It was just, and then you see some, you know, some farmers on the side and I was just like, oh my God, this is so beautiful. And then before you know it, you drive in, you take a curve and this, this city just rises up to meet you, you know? And I was just like, okay, this is not what I expected. And we're driving through and it's this bustling city. It's not like Saigon, right?

There, I mean, there are scooters, but it's, it's, it's, it's a slower pace, but it's not slow, right? Don't think it's country. It's not. And then there's still the food, the markets, everything, but it's just a different feel. I, you know, I was thinking about this the other day and it was maybe it's more of a calming city where, and you know, and I think I mentioned it, you could see the difference, right? In our tour guides, like Thuy is very high energy and our Dalat tour guide, he's very high energy too, but there's also a calmness about him. And I, and you can actually relate that to Dalat because that's how it is.

It's this bustling city, but there's this underlying calmness about it as well, you know? And it was, I have to say it was beautiful. It was very lush. There's commerce, but not like you see in Saigon where it's just hustle, bustle. You know, the streets are cleaner, I believe. And the people are friendlier, I think, right? They're less city because I live in the city. I get it, right? They were just, you know, it was an amazing experience. And then there's this fog that I just, it's probably one of the most peaceful things I've ever seen. You have this hustle and bustle of the city and then you see like this layer of fog, just kind of like, and it's just, it's such a contrast, I think, the city is because there's this calmness about it, but then there's also a lot of activity going on. I loved it and the climate was different. Saigon was hot. Yeah, Saigon is just hot. I mean, I remember I just continually sweat. And, but Dalat, it's warm, right? They call it cold. Our tour guides wearing a jacket. It was kind of funny, right? And here I am in shorts and a tank top, you know. But there is just, there's a difference humanity about the city that's different from the larger, more hustle and bustle. I agree. You know, and, and it's beautiful. And there's a lot more colonial architecture, I believe is, is the right way to say it, right? Well, colonial and there's also a lot of French, there's more European influence. Yes. Yeah.

**34:52 Kerry Newsome** And it's very pretty. It's, it's a pretty city. Did you see the purple? Very hilly.

**35:00 Vicki Thai** Yeah, it's very hilly, right? And I just, I tell you what, and it was just a different feel. It's a city. Don't get me wrong. It's not country. There's nothing country about it, right? It was beautiful. And I think it's like Saigon, you have to really hustle and get to where you need to be. I think Dalat, you could really dilly dally and linger and just, you know, walk and enjoy the scenery. I think that is more expected and accepted in Dalat than you would have in Saigon.

**35:26 Kerry Newsome** I'll tell you what I know about it and see whether it matches up with you. It's, it's very well known to be a romantic city. So a lot of Vietnamese go there. And if it's got the vibe that you're talking about, they go there for the honeymoons. So, it's chosen for a lot of Vietnamese as their honeymoon resort place to visit. And I think that's also because it's cooler. So that kind of helps. And it's very pretty. And they've got the beautiful lake and they've got that purple restaurant there. I don't know whether you remember that. I remember that. Yeah. But the other things that I noticed about it was its fruit and the size

of the fruit. And they do a lot of things like jams and things like that, which is really unusual for Vietnam, but it's one of the very few places. There was strawberries the size of apples. They would just, I couldn't believe them. Like one strawberry would consume me like one apple. It was just, and you know how you love the pineapple in the Mekong Delta? Well, to me, those strawberries, if I could have taken them home with me, I would have. And then they have beautiful gardens and they have beautiful flowers and they have what they call their "Everlastings. And these are flowers that are said to never die. Now I thought like someone's pulling my leg here, like seriously, but these flowers are real flowers. They're not imitations, but they are said to never die. Why or how? There's a mystery behind it. I never got to the bottom of it, but you're right. In the hills, the beautiful scenery, beautiful scenery, and I got to visit some of the waterfalls. And my favorite waterfall was Pongour. That's P-O-N-G-O-U-R. If I was sending people to Dalat, I would definitely be sending them into the hills. So talk a little bit about your stay.

**37:43 Vicki Thai** Yeah. So we stayed, I forget the name. You're going to jump in and tell me what that accommodation was in Dalat. Ana Mandara. It was a dream. I tell you what, if you think of a, number one, the service was impeccable and they have their reception center. It's actually a built out. There are no doors. You just walk in there, seating with pillows. It is, I tell you what, it is when you think about where you go to relax. And I could really see this be a honeymoon place, like you mentioned, just because there's this romantic feel about it. Everything is just serene. It's calm and the decor was impeccable. And the people were just unfathomably nice. I just could not believe it. I mean, talk about service. And so there are, this is actually where French soldiers, I believe, during the war, they built it for them. And so there are these individual cottages throughout the resort. And that's where your accommodations are. Right. And so they actually have someone who drives a golf cart, who takes you to where you're staying. And then you walk up these stairs where ours were upstairs. And then you walk in, you go up to your room and you walk in. And it's like this paradise, dreamy. There's this king size bed. The furnishing was impeccable. There are these, what are they called? The little curtains above your bed? The netting for the mosquitoes. Yeah, the netting. And it was, I would, I tell you what, whoever redid it and designed it, props to them because, and it was just so comforting. It was so serene. And then they give you, like you mentioned, the fruit, a plate of fruit, local fruit there, the wax apples, which we don't have a lot in the U.S. And I opened up the balcony door and then you just see the whole resort. And it was, I tell you what, if anyone's going to Latt, that is a good accommodation to really feel that you're in the middle of it, the culture. Right. Because I sent you the videos, I woke up at six in the morning, opened my balcony, walked out and there was like, it was, you see the beautiful trees and everything, but there's this, there's this fog that moves around and the smell, the sound, everything. And it was because of my mom's knee surgery, we had to ask them to bring the golf cart. I tell you what, I call front desk and I said, Hey, listen, we're heading to the dining hall for breakfast. She's like, okay, we'll be there. They are there literally in like three minutes, three minutes. I mean, talk about service, right? In the U.S. we're like, if they get here in 10, we're good. But three minutes, so how else? Yeah. And then like after dinner, we had the staff at the restaurants, I mean, after breakfast, Hey, will you call them? We need right back. Two minutes. It was impeccable service. The accommodations were impeccable. The food was amazing. And the room size. Oh, the room size. Massive, isn't it? Like I lived in places that size. Yes. Yes. And here's the thing too. It is very, it is not what you, it's not the developing country luxury. It is

modern Western, what you would expect luxury. And so I think if any of your guests want somewhere where it's romantic, because here's the thing, I think no matter what time of day it is in Dalat, it's going to be romantic, right? Just because it's that kind of city. You should stay there just because, and there's a lot of privacy too. And it's just, I just imagine walking through the side box that they have that's so paved and in the morning with the fog, I mean, how much more romantic could that get, right? And the food, I mean, everything that we ate is very local. They had a jam, a mulberry jam that they actually, I think, picked not far from where. That's so I was saying to you about the jams. Like, yeah, who would think of Vietnam and jam? Like, yeah, yeah. And mulberry jam, right? And so yeah, but it's, it is just one of those accommodations. I loved it. I thought it was beautiful. I, and everything was mull weight. And I think one of the things I want to throw out there, I purchased plug converters, power converters, two of them, just to take every accommodation that we went to had the the US accommodation, the two prongs. So I never had to use it, which was a huge surprise to me. And it kind of tells you how developed Vietnam is becoming.

**42:22 Kerry Newsome** That's really good to note. It's something I haven't thought to mention, because I have to take converters from Australia, because ours is different. Yeah, now that's really good to mention. When I think of Dalat I think of that lushness and that, and the fog and the architecture and the lake and the purple.

But the other thing to share with you about Dalat which I don't know whether you went to, the markets are specialised in fabrics. So people often go just to Dalat to the markets because they are well known in all of Vietnam to specialise in fabric. So I have bought fabric there to have made, to have something made in Hoi An. And in Hoi An, they told me, oh, if you want this and you want that kind of fabric, and you've got to go to Dalat for that. So it was one of the things that I did was to investigate. And in these markets, there was just like flaws and flaws of all this fabric. It was overwhelming, the different I didn't even know that many variances existed of different types of fabric. And then they also have, because the traditional dress, the alzai, which I've got a few of, because I love them. I think they're a beautiful garment, really elegant, really lovely. Well, they have some of the materials that are used for the alzai, where you know how the top part might be plain, but then the bottom part will have some kind of image or decoration or just on the flow embroidery. So they have lots and lots and lots of that. So I was buying all this stuff and I was with a Vietnamese girlfriend of mine. She said, how many alzais are you going to have made? For God's sake, you're never going to wear that many of them. And I found it hard to kind of resist because it was so beautiful. And so I only bought two to have made, but yes, it was charming. I went up into the hills and I stayed at a chalet and it was called Zen Chalet. And get this Vicky, you will laugh at this. The situation with the chalet was the guy that owned it was from Europe, came to De Laet fell in love obviously with that architecture. And he just wanted to have this chalet overlooking this beautiful forest area like just, and the air was so sweet and so beautifully clean. And he didn't fill out a piece of paper because it was called Zen. So I said, but how do you know what I'm going to have? He said, all the girls will remember. And I said, yeah, but I had a massage as well. Yeah, it'll be fine. Like they never took any anything. It was crazy. That's amazing. Because they wanted you to Zen out. That was the whole idea of you stay there to Zen out, take in the environment, go for a walk, rest. We had a massage person come to our room and do the massage. And you know, the

curtains opened out into this beautiful thing. I'm going, I'm in heaven. I just want to die right now because it was so good

**45:59 Vicki Thai** .. Yeah. Yeah. Well, we at the resort, we went and got massages as well. And here's the thing. I get massages here all the time. It's a different, you know, feel, but we're getting a massage there. Can you hear the birds? You know, and it's just like, literally, am I in heaven? Right? Where it's like, you're getting a massage, which is a luxury. And then you're in this, you know, the smell, and then you just hear nature where, you know, I love the city life, but what I hear is cars zooming by. And so it's just, I would say, and I also, our tour guide in Saigon says that when they go on vacation, her family goes on vacation. They actually go to the lab. She said they sleep better there. Yeah. And, and here's the thing too. And it rained overnight when we stayed there. And I tell you what, there was just something so beautiful about it because you're in this environment. You smell the air. Like you said, it's sweet. And then you just hear this rain. It's like, it's like what you feel that, and then people advertise as relaxing, you know, that this is what you want to do to, you know, de-stress to, you know, unplug all of that stuff. And I have to say the food in the lot was a little bit different. It's a little bit sweeter. I don't know if you noticed that. So they, they seasoned their food a little bit sweeter than you would get in Saigon.

**47:19 Kerry Newsome** Yes. So talk to me now about how your mom related to being back in Dalat and what did she notice were the most significant changes, you know, how, how did she react to the Dalat of 2023?

**47:45 Vicki Thai** It's so funny. She was in awe because everywhere she lived, they took us around the city because the goal was to find where she, where she grew up, the house where she grew up. And that Dalat and Vietnam is so developed now. We literally, and I say props to the driver. God bless him. He just drove us around and around hoping my mom recognizes where she lives, but she doesn't because everything is so new now. I mean, you have to admit she was 31 then she's 75 now, right? And so a lot's going to change then. And we kind of find it, but I tell you what, just she was in awe and she was just like, Oh, is that where it was? Like the open market where she went when she was little, she loved it. And all I was thinking is like, where is your house? Cause we've been around the circle like five times, right? She loved it. It brought back so many memories. And then just driving the street and she was an odd too, right? Because when she was growing up, it was a completely different city. And now there's just so much going on and she's my mom and I've seen her happy, but this was a different kind of happy and almost a peaceful happy, you know, just because it's back to where she was, you know, grew up and, and just seeing, I don't know, I can't explain it, but the city has grown and I just love watching, there were people selling raw meat, you know, on the side of the road. I even said to, he said to Dr. Torga, I said, when you eat that, do you get sick? Right? Because in the U S and Western culture, there are a lot of, you know, food, you know, there's a lot of different, uh, thresholds that you have to for your, for your meat and stuff. And he was like, well, when I eat it, I'm fine. I'm not sure if you eat it, you're going to be fine. Right. She says, because the U S has different standards and it was just seeing that. And here's the thing. What I wouldn't have done if we had the time to just walk around, you know, to walk past the style that's selling raw meat, right out in the open, right? Not in a refrigerated case to, to look at the fruit. So then, and it was, so I tell you what, my mom was so happy. She, I just remember on

our last day, we were sitting and eating and she looked right at me. She's like, I want to come back. I'm like, well, hell me too. Right!

**49:55 Kerry Newsome** . You know, I kind of felt for your mom in the sense that it's kind of life affirming to go back to your roots, to, you know, see where you came from. It kind of, I think everyone in their life kind of has to do a full circle at some point to, to relate to why you are, how you are, where you come from. And you know, her saying to you during the time, you know, well, you, if you knew where I came from, you would better understand something. So that's kind of the older, wiser woman kind of giving you that advice. I think, you know, I think it was a lovely, and the thing I loved about you, that you wanted to do that with her, you wanted that bond and that closeness. Because as you say, in the ordinariness of every day, you know, come say, come sah! You don't do it. But when you're doing something purposeful like that, you know, and that's going back to something that she relates to, and she's got that comfort with her own language. She's with her own people. Like, you can totally get it, can't you?

**50:54 Vicki Thai** Like, Right. Well, it's kind of funny. I came back and I said, you know, if we were in Vietnam, mom would be the cool mom. Yeah, she would be the mom where all the kids would come to, you know, and it was just like, just because it was just the way everyone, our tour guides gravitated towards her, like Tui gravitated towards her, you know, Jonathan and, um, Hi from the Latin art driver. And I was just like, it was the side that I've never seen, right in the US. And so it was just like, it was, she was in her element. There were some things that I wanted to buy, like some jam, right? Some, some, a lot of coffee, right? Some tea, right? Cause the last

**51:38 Kerry Newsome** no for tea. So we did a lot of shopping, but we didn't do a lot of slicing. Oh, okay. So, cause I had you down, you were going to go into the Zen monastery and you were going to do the summer palace. Did you do any of that? Or did the shopping take over?

**51:51 Vicki Thai** Is that the one, is that the one where the last king? Yes, we did go there. Yes. Yes. All right. We did. It was impressive. And this is a history and here's the thing. It was impressive because all of this is surrounded just one man, right? And it was like, are you kidding me? Right. And, and I've actually, I think the story was a little bit sad. I really felt sad for his wife. Right. I remember the story. There's so many stories. Yeah. There's so many stories that he apparently very handsome. When I looked at the picture, she remembered him. She's like, isn't he handsome? I'm like, not my type, but it was cute who was so handsome. And, you know, he was a king or so powerful that he attracted a lot of women. And he had an affair and his wife, of course, is broken hearted. And there was just this room that she just stayed in because she was so broken hearted. And I just thought to myself, holy cow, you know, this day and age, we're like, we're getting divorced, right? It's over. But she just stuck with him because she just loved him so much. But then she had a room where  
**53:02 Kerry Newsome** she grieved in and it's like, God bless her. You know what I mean? And so she had all these children that she had to keep up with and put on the show. But yet she was broken hearted through this whole thing. As we kind of getting close to literally when you're about to fly back to Saigon to meet up with your flight back home, we took you to Baloch and that was kind of, let's put it, let's put it out there, Vicki. That was kind of where things fell off the rails a little bit. We had you down to stay in a bungalow resort. I

wouldn't call it a resort particularly, but it was supposed to be okay. But as it turned out, it wasn't okay, was it? So that kind of put it down on things. And that was the bit I was kind of most disappointed about. But maybe tell a little bit about that story because there's been so much good things. I don't want this one to be the last thing that people remember, if you know what I mean, because that was- Yeah, absolutely. And for the record, this was the only- Glitch.

**54:08 Vicki Thai** Let's say glitch. It was only glitch. And when I look back, this is not what I think of when I look back at our trip. And so we went to a little city in the suburb of Dalat named [Bao Loc](#) because my mom actually was born there. And so we wanted to see what it's all about, right? And it's an opportunity for her to go see where she grew up in her city and the main city part, where the commerce is, she remembers that very well. Where we stayed at, it's called the **Danbury and- It's remote**. It's an hour drive and it's through the forest, right? It's a beautiful drive, don't get me wrong, but it was very, very remote. And in its better days, it was actually kind of an amusement park, and there's a pond in it and so forth. So we get in, so we have two accommodations. My mom and I have separate rooms as normal. It was very basic. And when I say basic, I mean basic. It was a bed, an old blanket. And so we walked in and I was in my mom's room, thank God was in better condition than mine. I walked in, there was just this old blanket on this flat bed and there were these, there's stains on it. They were kind of sticky stains, which of course you avoid. And after coming from the accommodations in Saigon, our luxury cabin on the cruise in Mekong Delta and Dalat this was really an eyesore and it's drastically different. I don't think it was well-kept, maybe during COVID, as we spoke about, everything shut down and things got overlooked or fell through the cracks. But the bathroom, it was nothing I've ever seen before. And I hope I won't ever see again. I text one of our contacts at the travel agency and said, we want to get out of here as soon as possible, right? Because our tour guide and driver were expected to pick us up around 10 the next morning. They were there at 5.30. I said, still get out of here the better. Yeah. So I packed up my stuff at five in the morning, moved to my mom's bungalow and then our tour guides came around seven, which is perfect, right? And then we just got the hell out of Dodge. But would I recommend a Danbury? Probably not, right?

**56:26 Kerry Newsome** No, I won't be recommending it either. But it speaks to the contrast in Vietnam from the areas that are developed and obviously have more stringent controls around how they appear to tourists. But in some of these remote areas, it can be a bit of a lucky dip. And unfortunately, I guess to everyone listening, it's fair to say that some things are just out of your control. And thankfully, Vicki was able to handle it as best as you could. And I'm grateful for that. I just wish it didn't happen. I think it's something for people to double check when they're talking to their travel agents or they're questioning with me if they're talking about a particular area. I learned from it to be double checking these remote areas more so. I mean, you love the hotel, the new world you stayed at in Saigon. So I probably did the wrong thing. I set it up badly. See, I gave you all those beautiful places. And then you got there and you got to the flushing toilet place and you went what happened here? She steered me in the wrong direction. So let's not do that detour again. We will if we take you back to Dalat ever again, we'll keep you in Dalat and probably at Anna Mandara. So you'll have to do that hour drive. But that's funny talking about places out of Dalat. They are quite long drives to get the full benefit of being in that region. And it is hard to find places.

That's why me stumbling on that Zen cafe chalet place was like, holy, this is like a little oasis in the middle of it all. And because there's just not that many of them that can sustain themselves that far out. So that's why everybody's in the city. And Dalat has grown exponentially in the last few years. It really wasn't even on the tourist maps for most people.

**58:37 Vicki Thai** They didn't even know about Dalat four years ago. We wouldn't have ever done it if my mom didn't grow up there. Because I would probably pick the bigger cities. But yeah, it was our first trip. And I remember all I told you is this is where we definitely want to go because my mom grew up there. And you put the rest of the trip together, which was phenomenal. Because I would never have said, let's do the Mekong Delta. Because I've  
**59:04 Kerry Newsome** never been there. I don't know. But the whole trip was phenomenal. If you had some tips for my listeners, like for their first time trip to Vietnam, what would they be and we can finish

**59:18 Vicki Thai** up on those? Sure. I would say do not overpack. Because I tend to always overpack. Just because like when we stay at a New World Hotel in Saigon, which was that is the hotel we'll stay at every single time because the service, the food, everything, it was beautiful, it was clean. It was central. They have cheap laundry. Like, you know, Kara, you and I discussed before our trip, I said, is there laundry service? And you even said, don't overpack, right? Because it's really easy. It's really cheap. And of course I overpacked. And you know, the laundry service was incredible. And it was very inexpensive. And even if you rush it, it's still inexpensive. And they bring it to your room, all folded and nice. It was amazing. Secondly, try everything. You want the experience, right? If you're coming from the US, you know, don't go to a KFC, even though I'm sure KFC is a little bit different, you know, in Vietnam, try the local foods. Go with what your tour guide recommends as you know, what we did is we asked our tour guide Tui, I said, I really wanted this, you know, congee, right? This jiupe, this rice soup. And I said, where is, where should we go? She took us to the one that she and her family always goes to. And it was delicious. It was amazing. And so, you know, trust your tour guides, right? And you know, something that and one of things that everyone talks about is, oh, it's a developing country. I hope I don't get sick, right? I eat something wrong. I hope I don't get sick. I tell you what, I didn't get sick once while we were there. And I basically ate everything I could get my hands on, just because I wanted to try everything. And so, you know, my thing is, don't be afraid to try new foods. Don't be afraid to go to different places. Because I remember when we went to the, where the VKONG, the war, I'm just like, I'm not a history buff. I don't even know where we're going. But it was an amazing experience, because that's part of the heritage. It's like, this is what they did to defend the country, right? They lived underground for years in these cramped little places, right? And then with this heat and everything. And so it's be open minded. Try everything. Trust your tour guides, right? Because I don't care what you say, you know, we talk about people who it's just a job with every single one of our tour guides and drivers. It was not that for them. They wanted to make sure that you were taken care of. You enjoy your time and you were safe, right? And, and you know, thirdly, go to Vietnam, you will not regret it. And since I've been back, everyone that I've spoken to, I have said, if you get a chance, go to Vietnam. And I know exactly who you could, you know, help book your trips. And then also the beauty of it. Yeah, exactly. And also the beauty of it too. Even if you don't know the language, your tour guide speaks English. So you're not, I would say go to Vietnam, try everything. And next time I go, I think, because I've seen so many

beautiful dresses in the window, I'm going to go in and try on some dresses and find dress. But did you feel safe? Did you feel safe? Oh, I absolutely felt safe. Not for an instant. Regardless of where we're at, Mekong Delta, the lot fallout, right? Or Saigon. I never felt unsafe. Never. And, and, you know, it's just, you know, and like I said, the tour guides are there to take you around and to love their city, not to take you a place where you feel unsafe and you get robbed. Right? And so I say, trust it. I trust the process. Trust. This is what I'll tell you. If you took a trip to Vietnam, you will never regret it. And I'm 100% sure that you'd want to go back because there's so much more to see.

**01:02:44 Kerry Newsome** Vicki, thank you so much for coming on the show. Thank you for being my client. Thank you for being understanding about our glitch. I'm just glad you had a good time. I'm glad your mum enjoyed it as well. And I just feel very lucky to have met you. If I didn't do this podcast and I wouldn't have got to meet you. So just want to thank you and, and for your time today.

**01:03:05 Vicki Thai** say thank you and, and for your time today. Thank you so much. Thank you for being so understanding with everything.