



What About Vietnam – S3- 6 – Diving in Vietnam - Everything you need to know 2021 & beyond

Kerry Newsome: [00:00:35] Xin Chao and welcome to what about Vietnam? Today, we take a deep dive literally into Vietnam with my guest, Jeremy Stein. Jeremy is an English guy who came to Vietnam about 25 years ago, and, kind of never left. He fell in love with Vietnam and set up originally in Nha Trang. He is an English-trained Padi course director, and in his twenty five years in Vietnam, he has set up over five dive centres and trained thousands of people in the skill of diving.

Kerry Newsome: [00:01:18] He has a lot to offer people who may consider coming to Vietnam as a destination to do diving; to learn, diving or to have diving as part of your holiday experience. Because, as he says, you can add to a diving holiday so many other things because just of what Vietnam has to offer. He has some tremendous information about what you're going to see in species under the water, coral and just, you know, best times of the year. It's a really informative session today. And I think for anyone who maybe hasn't ever thought about coming to Vietnam to dive, you're really going to be surprised at just what there is on offer. Please welcome Jeremy to the program.

Jeremy Stein: [00:02:20] It's great to be here

Kerry Newsome: [00:02:23] Now, Jeremy, tell us, just how did diving start as a sport in Vietnam? Talk to us a little bit about that.

Jeremy Stein: [00:02:32] Ok, well, 25 years ago, I was living in Saudi Arabia and decided to take a two-week holiday trip to Vietnam. Flying into central Vietnam reminded me a lot of flying into Cairns when I dived there a few years earlier. In Nha Trang, in Vietnam, there was no organized diving, but it did have a pretty laid-back hut on the beach, offering some infrequent daily diving. I convinced the people to take me diving every day and just loved it. And at the end of the two weeks, I decided not to return to Saudi and actually took over the beach huts and set up there. Then I became the first PADI dive centre in Vietnam. From there, I just continued exploring the rest of the country underwater and opened up five other centres over the years. So now, when it's rainy season in one part of the country, there is always somewhere else in the country with great diving conditions.

Kerry Newsome: [00:03:32] Ok, then, I mean, Nha Trang is a nice place to start from what I remember from my visits to Nha Trang three or four years ago, so very pretty spot.

Jeremy Stein: [00:03:45] Yeah, absolutely, yes, yeah.

Kerry Newsome: [00:03:48] Ok, so you said there's several other places around the country, I mean, my experience is pretty limited as far as diving is concerned. My experiences to Hoi An and was going out to the Cham Islands, that's as far as it extends. Talk to us a little bit about the expansiveness of the diving, like the marine life that you can expect to see, because I would think that would be of particular interest to a diver.

Jeremy Stein: [00:04:23] Yeah, absolutely. Sure. I mean, Vietnam diving will never compete with your Great Barrier Reef or places like SIPADAN OR GALAPAGOS But I guess what it does offer is some safe and fun diving in an amazing country. I've always promoted Vietnam as not just about the diving. But a complete cultural experience. For example, in Nha Trang, as you mentioned, We have over three hundred and fifty different species of corals, that's actually more species than you'll find on the Barrier Reef itself. However, we don't regularly have THE BIG PELAGICS but the marine life which abound on coral reefs here are awesome. The macro marine life here is excellent. So from frog fish to sea moths, ghost fish, gurnard lionfish, snake eels, as well as usual, suspects like cuttlefish, octopus, mantis shrimp and of course, lots of

NEMOS [00:05:19] nemos Nudibranch lovers will be in paradise here. We've got hundreds and hundreds of species and so many unrecorded [00:05:30]

Kerry Newsome: [00:05:31] So for the inexperienced diver, what would you suggest then as far as best locations? And would they be diving or would they be snorkeling to enjoy these dive sites? All these locations?

Jeremy Stein: [00:05:51] Both, of course, in between dives. If they are diving, they can snorkel as well. And most of the sites throughout Vietnam are perfect for all level of divers and snorkelers. If we just briefly look at each destination, Nha Trang, as we've said, is the home of diving in Vietnam and all diving takes place on HON MUN Island, which is a marine park. We established 15 years ago and there's about 10 different sites. So those of you who've read about Vietnam or been to Vietnam will remember some of the iconic names like

[00:06:25] Moray Beach, Tiger Wall, Debby's Beach, Madonna Rock. The Electric Nose is probably the only site in the Trang which Wall Dives down to about 40 metres. About two hours north of that Nha Trang, you've got a remote eco-resort, which is called Whale Island. It's definitely far from the madding crowd and total relaxation. We've actually dropped a couple of small wooden wrecks in the bay down in about 12, 14 metres. So the beach diving's really cool there as well. And you mentioned we got HOIAN with Cham Island and the surrounds. It's pretty much in the middle of Vietnam and offers very similar diving to that trying. CON DAO Island is about two hundred and fifty kms south of Saigon. It's remote and

Actually Last week, we're diving there around 30 metres. We found a wreck. So lots of exploring still to do there to find out what it is, ie what it did, how long it's been there? But fascinating stuff. Finally, Phu Quoc Island. This is three hundred and fifty kilometres west of Saigon. It's actually in the Gulf of Thailand, just off the Cambodian coastline, but still very much a Vietnamese island. It offers safe, easy diving.

Kerry Newsome: [00:07:59] Yeah. And just to go back on a couple of those places, was Whale Island originally only open to Vietnamese?

Jeremy Stein: [00:08:09] Originally Yes, I think that changed as part of the fame of the place. As this is where Jacques Cousteau actually moored his boat and did some diving, [00:08:21] though, from the Calypso. [00:08:22] But, yeah, initially it was very

much a Vietnamese island for Vietnamese, but that's very much changed now. And over the years, it's probably 60 percent foreigners and 40 percent Vietnamese. So it's a nice cultural mix.

Kerry Newsome: [00:08:40] Yeah, oh, that's good to know about Con Dao. My Vietnamese is shocking. I'm sure that's not even how you pronounce it, but they seem really nice resorts or beautiful hotels that are starting to spring up on that island. So that makes for a nice break in the afternoon.

Jeremy Stein: [00:09:02] Absolutely. The world-famous hotel chain of Six Senses. They've probably been there six, seven years ago. Pretty expensive, but pretty remote. Pretty exclusive, very nice. But it's a total mix of accommodation on the island. You've got the Six Senses, which is US Dollars about a thousand dollars a night out. But you have still got the backpacker places from \$20 bucks to 50 bucks a night. 4 * up to Hundred dollars a night. It's a good mix.

Kerry Newsome: [00:09:45] Traditionally, Vietnam hasn't been highlighted as a destination for water sports, but it's certainly coming of age, don't you think?

Jeremy Stein: [00:09:55] Yeah, indeed, it's a shame because one of the first things I did when I moved to Vietnam twenty five years ago was travelling to the world trade shows or the dive shows, putting up a big Vietnamese flag and talking about Vietnam as a new destination. I must admit, in the Americas, it did upset a few people having a big yellow and red flag there. But now, since then, we've had a lot of those people I've met at all these different exhibitions around the world visit Vietnam and been very surprised and very happy.

Kerry Newsome: [00:10:29] And for my listeners, I'm sure there's a mix amongst them that are serious divers, that are kind of leisure divers. And then there would be the total novices that would consider coming to Vietnam and maybe using Vietnam as an opportunity to learn diving. Can you talk to us a little bit about that, about the opportunity to learn? I mean?

Jeremy Stein: [00:10:57] Absolutely. We are the PADI flagship here in Vietnam, a lot for the complete range of [00:11:03] PADI courses from the initial TRY dive [00:11:06]

and the open water course right up to the divemaster, instructor, staff instructor courses. [00:11:12] The tri dives [00:11:13] can be done in one day, and [00:11:14] the open water course in three or four days. The advance course is two days. And the dive master and I'd see IDC that's the instructor course take from two to three weeks a popular option for the professional level courses like Divemaster. And an instructor is to take the courses as an internship and spend three to six months diving and learning on all the courses. PADI Now have the facility to learn online, which means that you can complete the theory before coming here and not, say, spending a day in the classroom while you're on holiday. [00:11:49]

Kerry Newsome: [00:11:50] Hmm, sounds like a good idea so that you can do the online part of it before you come, and then you take them out after that when they arrive here?

Jeremy Stein: [00:12:02] Absolutely. Yes.

Kerry Newsome: [00:12:05] Ok, so, you know, I've always thought diving was such a speciality and was only for the hearty and the fit swimmer. And so I kind of never went there. Not that I'm not fit per se, but I always felt that it was for the adventurer that was prepared to do that kind of thing. So explain for us just the person or type of person that best suits diving and diving in the locations that they're coming to in Vietnam. I guess where I'm coming from, Jeremy, with this is that I'm sure there's some sites around the world that would only be for your serious diehard Diver, where maybe Vietnam offers sites that aren't going to be for the diehard diver. They are more for a leisure diver or one that just wants to have a holiday, enjoy it, etc.. I'm trying to get that difference if you know what I mean.

Jeremy Stein: [00:13:16] So the leisure diver sums it up nicely. This can be the people who've made 10, 20 dives or a thousand dives plus and still enjoy the diving. As I said, all of the sites are suitable for both ends, from the novice up to the professional diver. For example, we actually get groups of photographers from the US, from Australia, who as a group, they'll be eight or 10 of them who will come armed with the photography equipment. And they've got a wish list of things they haven't seen, but they want to be able to photograph. They always leave with all of their list ticked and a few more added, which they didn't even know they wanted. So we can pretty much cater for whatever

people want. If you want shallow safe, easy diving, we can do that. Some of the more adventurous dives, like I said,

[00:14:18] the Electric Nose in NHA TRANG or the Three Kings and Whale Island.

[00:14:22] Yeah, these are a little bit more adventurous and therefore experience matters. But whenever we take anyone diving, we always check how many dives they've made. When was the last dive so that we can gauge what sort of experience they've got and we will plan dive sites suitable for them.

Kerry Newsome: [00:14:45] Oh, and that's a really good thing to know, because I know myself, if I was going out, I'd really want to know that people knew my skill level and what I was capable of so that I could confidently go out there to have a good time. It was going to be a good all-around experience. So that's good to know. Jeremy, talk to us a little bit about the safety side of things as far as diving is concerned.

Jeremy Stein: [00:15:12] Ok, as I say, PADI have very strict guidelines and standards that must be followed, mainly for the safety of the students. Of course, safety, for the staff also is one of my major concerns as well. All the staff are professionally trained. They know what they're doing. I have a full team of senior PADI instructors working with me. Also, over the twenty-five years I've trained quite a few Vietnamese up to instructor ratings.

[00:15:49] So everybody is aware of what they need to do at any given time, whether it's on the bus, on the way to the harbor, whether it's getting from the harbor onto the boat or on the boat, heading out to the dive sites. There are strict safety procedures in place. We like to take people diving, but it's also pretty important to bring them back as well,

Kerry Newsome: [00:16:15] Kind of in the same condition that they left.

Jeremy Stein: [00:16:18] Yeah -Hopefully in a happier condition.

Kerry Newsome: [00:16:23] Absolutely. I was thinking more about the

Kerry Newsome: [00:16:27] Equipment level, the kind of boat experience, because, you know, you look at some boats out there and you think, oh, would that get me out there very safely? And would it, get me back? I'm not sure about that. So I know under

the PADI flagship, obviously, to be qualified to do this, you'd have to tick all the boxes. But maybe you can just speak to people anecdotally about making sure that when they see that trip online, that they ask the right questions for sure.

Jeremy Stein: [00:17:04] Certainly for the first couple of years when I was organising diving from my laid back beach huts in Nha Trang, the boats were pretty much we had to do with what we could get. Which on some occasions there wasn't a suitable entry platform. So it was a back roll from a fairly high-end, high-sided, I suppose, you'd call them fishing boats.

Jeremy Stein: [00:17:30] However, over the years, with diving, directly and indirectly, being a multi,-million dollar tourist industry, the boats now are made in Vietnam still with the emphasis on looking like a fishing boat, but they are designed with dive safety in mind. So they all have dive platforms. They will have ladders, they have cages around the propellers. You've got state rooms on the boats, [00:18:04] you've got toilets, you've got showers. They'll take about twenty five to thirty customers at any one time and that includes about 10 to 15 staff. We always make sure that when we're teaching or when we're guiding, we have pretty strict ratios of maximum of four divers in a group with that dive guide or with their instructor. Now, this is well, well within any international standards, but it's something I felt was right 20 years ago. And I still feel it's right now that are we err on the side of caution. [00:18:40]

Kerry Newsome: [00:18:46] Who who's driving these days,

Jeremy Stein: [00:18:49] Traditionally over the last twenty, twenty five years? Foreigners with very few Vietnamese; the clientele were mainly backpackers looking quite surprised that they'd find somewhere in Vietnam to go diving. Now, I would say sixty five seventy percent of diving is all pre-booked online and the ratios have changed quite dramatically, I would say. Seventy five percent would be foreigners. That includes the resident expats here with twenty five percent being made up of the Vietnamese divers.

[00:19:35] That's partly down to us having trained the Vietnamese to dive master level and instructors. So they've now opened their own dive centres. They need to now do their own promotion and we all work fairly closely together on this.

Jeremy Stein: [00:19:51] But certainly, since COVID, where we've not had the luxury of seventy-five to eighty percent of tourists coming in. We've developed quite successfully the expat market here and the Vietnamese market, so we can still offer diving to them.

Jeremy Stein: [00:20:12] One of the centres I didn't mention we have and that's actually a city centre location is in Saigon or HCM city. Obviously, it is landlocked, apart from the river which runs through it. But we use it to teach CLASSROOM-WORK for all PADI courses. And we have swimming pools here so we can teach people the basics of diving. Then when they've got there, they can come down to an island location and spend two or three days finishing the course and getting certified.

[00:20:48] It's also a great excuse for the expats before they head off on their exotic holidays to the Barrier Reef or Sipadan Bay area. They can get in the pool here, spend a session, get refreshed, get comfortable with their skills again.

Kerry Newsome: [00:21:02] Oh, that's fantastic, and Jeremy, talk to me about the the cost to do these courses or to to go diving, I mean, there is sometimes a label that Vietnam gets that everything in Vietnam is cheap. It isn't quite right anymore, and I think you pay for what you get, but tell us just a little bit about how it compares. I mean, if you do diving, I mean, you can't even rent a surfboard in the Maldives without it costing you for fortune. So if we could just do some comparisons for people so they can know whether it's affordable.

Jeremy Stein: [00:21:44] Sure. I believe we offer value and safety for money. A great analogy I would use, first of all, is if you came to a third world Asian country and wanted to do a parachuting class, would you really choose the cheapest option? I don't think so.

Kerry Newsome: [00:22:06] So.

Jeremy Stein: [00:22:07] Scuba diving for certified divers, which is around seventy-five U.S. for two fun dives, including equipment compared to the rest of Asia. I think that's excellent value for money. And the good thing is a lot of divers are realistic about safety because when they see some of these smaller local dive centres offering the same same but different diving for half that price, they're not stupid. They realize that it's too cheap. Yeah, people don't want just cheap, as we've said a couple of times, they want

to go out to dive, enjoy the experience and come back in the same state as when they left.

Jeremy Stein: [00:22:53] A PADI open. water course over four days will cost you around four hundred to US Dollars. And an instructor course will cost you around Twelve hundred US Dollars, which is pretty much in line with the rest of Asia. But as I said, we've got maximum numbers in groups which make the experience also more realistic, safe, comfortable. I personally, I still hate going to places like SIPADAN where there's a young divemaster and there's twenty five people following him. Yeah, that's not right. So I tend to err on the side of caution and safety.

Kerry Newsome: [00:23:38] Yeah, they're my favorite words when it comes to things like that, and I'm sure it is for a lot of people listening. Talk to us a little bit, Jeremy, about the best time of the year to come to Vietnam. You mentioned you know, the various sites around the country. I mean, Vietnam's that long, skinny dragon. And, you know, top to bottom it is different as we go along. But maybe you could speak to some of those locations and give us the best time. In other words, if we want to go to Nha Trang. When would be the best time to go? Yeah. Talk to us a little bit about the best times for each region.

Jeremy Stein: [00:24:20] Ok, as you say, it's a long, skinny country. It's actually about 3200 kilometers of coastline and therefore it does have different seasons. Nha Trang, Hoi An, and Whale Island are best in February to October for that diving and for the weather conditions. Nha Trang is open and dives all year, but we're realistic if people are looking to book in the rainy or the quiet season we will advise them realistically what the conditions are.... What the water temperature is, what the visibility is. And for a lot of people, if they're coming from Europe, then the conditions, we're saying, well, you've only got a few metres visibility. That's luxury to them. They are used to diving in zero visibility where it's basically brail diving. The diving, you only know by what you feel. Con Dao is beautiful from March to September and then Phu Quoc comes into its own from September through to April. So as I said earlier, 12 months of the year, you can dive through Vietnam. And one of the things we find with people coming to Vietnam, if they're spending a week, 10 days diving, then in one location you're going to get a little bit bored with the options.

Jeremy Stein: [00:25:50] [00:25:50] I would always recommend a multi destination holiday. Yeah, Nha Trang and Whale island are the perfect combination. Nha Trang, Whale Island and Hoi An works very well. Now because of the rural location of Con Dao, it can make the trip a little bit longer because you need to add in a couple of days flights in between the islands. [00:26:22]

Jeremy Stein: 00:26:22] Nha Trang Whale Island is such a great combination because you can dive 2 Dive's in the morning in Nha Trang and have lunch.... Hop onto a bus, which takes two hours to get up to Whale Island. You can do an afternoon beach dive and a night dive in the same day, and then you stay there for a few days. And if you're really serious, you come back to Nha Trang and do a couple of dives again on the way back.

Kerry Newsome: [00:26:44] Good to know those combinations, because you're right, you could get bored just sitting in one spot, but to connect Nha Trang and Whale Island that's really interesting. And from what I understand also in Nha Trang they've developed, kitesurfing and some other watersports that you could add to your diving or your water sport kind of holiday, right?

Jeremy Stein: [00:27:13] Absolutely. Yes. So if you're looking at kitesurfing, jetskiing, that sort of stuff, it's all available from the beach. They've got regular hydrofoils going across. And you've got a big sort of fun park there with an aquarium. Yes. So you either love them or hate them, but tourists do flock there.

Kerry Newsome: [00:27:44] In Nha Trang, also, there's a really nice beach scene, isn't there, like beach bars in really nice kind of casual, you know, like this. There's a nice vibe there, I think, to absolutely.

Jeremy Stein: [00:28:02] It's a great metropolis. It's a busy seaside city destination with some stunning bars and restaurants. Hotels range from six star to the local backpacker dormitories. And certainly twenty five years ago, the skyline was very, very different to what it is now. Back then if you wanted to stay in a four star hotel, you had one choice, and a five star, one choice. Now, I think at the last look, and I haven't been diving there for a couple of weeks, there are probably close to one hundred, a hundred and fifty -four

and five star hotels there, not many of them full at the moment. So some great deals to be had.

Kerry Newsome: [00:28:45] Absolutely. Absolutely. Just before I forget, tell us about the night diving. That sounds intriguing!

Jeremy Stein: [00:28:55] It's something which after you've done it, you either love it or you're glad to have ticked the box. Yeah. Basically, you're diving. It's recommended the same site that you've been to in daylight. But of course, it's dark. So you're not going to see anything unless you have a pretty good light. So you're underwater with your underwater light, swimming around, looking at things that people say. Why do you want to dive at night? It's pretty much like Sydney in the in the daytime, you're going to see a certain type of person doing certain things. And then as soon as it gets dark, you've got a totally different type of person out on the streets of Sydney doing different things, exactly the same underwater.

Kerry Newsome: [00:29:53] Have you got any great tips that people should think about before they book their holiday. While everybody's doing everything online, just things people should look out for. I'm going to put all your links in the show notes, so people can deal with you directly. But maybe some questions that they need to ask themselves. If they're coming as a family, if they're coming as a couple or just solo travelers, just things that they should keep an eye out for while they're making decisions and trip planning.

Jeremy Stein: [00:30:25] Yeah, I mean, the list would be extensive. As with any trip, it's being realistic. With everyone having access to the Internet these days. Any questions you want to ask? Isn't the answers available on the Internet? And if you don't find the answer you want, you just keep asking the same question and then take the answer you want.

Jeremy Stein: [00:30:51] Personal feedback is invaluable. And as you say, you're going to put the links in the show notes. And I'm happy to talk to anyone at any time about the country itself, the diving here and also some of the surrounding Asian countries, which also have excellent diving. I've dived most of the Asian countries and quite a few of the other glamorous places around the world. But the personal contact being able to

actually email somebody who's there and say, hey, should I do this or what's a must do thing? It helps a lot. And as I say, the Internet is wonderful, but you can find the answer you're looking for if you ask the question often enough.

Kerry Newsome: [00:31:38] I agree totally. And I think that the personal aspect is a big thing. And talking to somebody that you can trust, that you feel has got a lot of history in the place and reputation. And that's why I was glad to have you on. Because you have had that experience and reputation. Look, great to have you on. Won't take up any more of your time. Thank you again for your time and information. Everyone that's listening, I'll be able to put Jeremy's information in the episode notes. You can go to the website at www.whataboutvietnam.com and a page will be there devoted to this episode. You can always reach out to me any time and I will put you in contact with the right people. Thanks again, Jeremy, for being on the show.

Jeremy Stein: [00:32:25] Ok, Kerry, lovely to see you and hope to meet up for a cold one in Vietnam soon.

Kerry Newsome: [00:32:30] Absolutely!!! Check out the episode notes. See the page on the website - www.whataboutvietnam.com

Speaker1: [00:32:32] Don't forget to subscribe, write and review and stay tuned for more fun adventures in Vietnam. What about Vietnam!