



## What About Vietnam - Series 2 - 7

### "An Expats guide to the "10 Must Do Things" in Hoi An

**Kerry Newsome:** Let's welcome Sharon Sweeney to the show. Hi Sharon how are you doing?

**Sharon Sweeney:** Really good thanks, Kerry very well. How are you?

**Kerry Newsome:** Yes, very good thank you. How is sunny Cairns? We are very lucky to catch you there at the moment.

**Sharon Sweeney:** Yes, look it's fantastic, I'd highly recommend it to everyone.

**Kerry Newsome:** You are certainly in the lucky state in Australia at the monument so stay put.

So, I am I'm feeling very lucky to have you on the show today to talk about, ....I think certainly yours but certainly my favorite place, as in Hoi An. And I'm delighted that we've decided on the subject around the ten most popular things to do, or the Ten must do things. Truly must do things.

**Sharon Sweeney:** Definitely, yes.

**Kerry Newsome:** Yes. Okay and I know you've got a Top Ten so.

**Sharon Sweeney:** Okay well you know the top ten moves around and it's very hard to pin it all down but let's hit it with top of the list is Hoi An old town and I mean.

#### **Number ONE**

I've never seen any place like Hoi An old town in all my travels basically. It's a heritage listed small town that used to have its own state. In history it's like a living museum.

If you like during the 1500's it was sort of the epicenter for merchants who were going along the Silk Road and so you had this amazing time. All these merchants from different parts of the world. Like Japan and China, Europe, France just everywhere and the architecture of the Hoi An old town is sort of reflecting, all that melting part of people and during the day. It is just incredible, because it is maintained so beautifully they've got some..... butter cup yellow buildings interspersed with pastel blue, sky blue, baby blue sort of paint works well and It's just incredible is just so well preserved and then.

At night it's like Disneyland, because Hoi An is known as the Lanterns town for good reason. Every shop front there has numerous lanterns. There are lanterns along, the street lanterns over passing the street. I think my favorite time in Hoi An old town is where it's twilight, that magical color. That twilight becomes, it's like pink and soft purple, and orange and happy gorgeous sunsets and when the lanterns light start coming on.... and oh my God. It's like this magical Disneyland experience and then you got the Thu Bon River. It just goes all the way through it and on that, you've got these little sampan boats. They are just all adorned with the same lanterns and all colors of every imaginable colour, really and to see Hoi An at night like that, and from the river is just I mean really amazing.

And just a couple of things, Hoi An is also a bicycle town and so you know there's no traffic as well that's allowed in the old town you can walk through it very nicely. But they have little traditions and one very close to my heart because I've got a lot of wishes in me.

**Kerry Newsome:** Let's not forget those wishes.

**Sharon Sweeney:** Yes, can take a little trip on these sampan boats and you set these little wish candles. You make a wish and you put them in a little cup, like a paper cup and you light your wish candle and you watch it bobbing away in the water. And hoping your wish will come true. I mean everybody should see Hoi An old town just once in their life.

**Kerry Newsome:** I think absolutely, and I think a lot of people I have referred it, as maybe the Venice on Vietnam. And they kind of know that, and then I was talking to someone just the other day. And I said you know if you didn't know better, you'd think it was a movie set, because everything is so beautifully preserved. As you say as in the old town buildings, old shop houses and things like that. I think you putting number one as a visit to the old town and during the day and experiencing the Markets only in the morning and the shop houses and having coffee somewhere really cute. Checking out all the alleys or as you say at twilight.

Coming into the evening, watching the town light up with the lanterns as you say, there's some areas that are lit by Lanterns, in other words, there's no light without the lanterns. And then of course there are the sampan boats and the wishes bobbing up and down and floating down the river. Number one totally supportive of that one.

I think it's a must do thing, so to the people listening, staying close to the old town is sometimes an idea so it's an easy walk into town. And I certainly would recommend that for first time visitors to Hoi An. Because whilst Hoi An has lovely beaches as well the feature of Hoi An is definitely that sixteenth century old town, so as close as you can get to it, I think is a good idea anyway Sharon what's your number two?

### **Number Two**

**Sharon Sweeney:** Well **number two**, is the other thing that I love very much about being in Hoi An is the close proximity of the countryside. There's something about being close to the land. But I think we all need it, and that five minutes on a bicycle will take you into rice fields, rice paddies or you can go a little bit further and you'll go into villages. I mean I have seen images of this, but I never really believe that Vietnam would have people wearing the conical hats, the normal hat. I had never really believed it, but they do. It is very much part of the headwear in Vietnam. And what I love about the rice paddies and the villages, it's like a game stepping back into another time. It's like going back a hundred years because they plant the field with water buffalo it's really sort of like the old world. And so there's nothing unusual about seeing a water buffalo just on the side of the road meandering across the road.

I mean it can actually be a main road and you'll have cows passing and the countryside element of Hoi An. It just fills my soul and one of the most wonderful sites. But still, it gets to my soul when the geese of all the ducks are going back to roost. And you'll see them coming along the main road. And this is about two hundred of them or more just waddling along, with the man hurling them along, and people just go round them, cars go around them

**Kerry Newsome:** Yes, that's the sweetness. I think it's absolutely the sweetness of all those simple things. And I should say just breath in that beautiful fresh air. I mean when you're riding through the paddy fields, it's kind of the only way you can get anywhere reasonably fast and I think that some people might even be you Sharon that has jumped on one of those electric bikes, I think.

**Sharon Sweeney:** You know what? I don't know what the world is thinking. I've never really come across an electric bike until I went to Vietnam. They're everywhere and why do we bother with cycling when you can sit on it and go zip off you go. It's a dream definitely

**Kerry Newsome:** Right definitely a way to get around so we got to say bicycle around town is number two.

**Sharon Sweeney:** Yes, for sure

**Kerry Newsome:** Okay where we are up now **number three.**

### **Number three**

**Sharon Sweeney:** Well, Hoi An is equally famous for the heritage old town, as it is for its tailoring. And no trip to Hoi An is complete without a trip to the tailor. You must get that! Where can a man get a suit made of high-quality wool. Made a bespoke suit, made just for him about, for around a hundred dollars, and you can get that in Hoi An. And you know the tailors are on every corner. I actually have them on the website. My favorite by the way, because what you can get the top end tailors do charge quite a lot and they're not all that different to many of the other tailors. So you're paying a lot more money. And then sometimes they are very hit and miss, but whatever the case is all great fun. And what I love most are going into a shop going into the cloth market and where there are reams and reams and bulk of all the colored fabrics, and types silks and linens, and choosing the fabric, and then you go to the tailor and they will copy something, they'll design something, or they'll give you a pattern and its addictive.... it's so addictive and it's very cheap.

**Kerry Newsome:** Very cheap and very quick. Well, I think you can get a suit made in two days

**Sharon Sweeney:** You can get a suit made overnight Kerry if you go to the right people.

**Kerry Newsome:** Well, I think those are a little bit more in the hit and miss variety. I mean there are some tailors there that would slap your hand for saying overnight. But yes, those you know might be a little bit more "select". We had talked about the zippers not working the right way and things like that in the past. But I'm addicted. I am definitely addicted to the tailoring as I told you every time, I literally take over my assortment of pictures from Pinterest or whatever that I like, and I just say I want that one and that one, then also as you say wandering around those fabric markets just picking the exact material fabric, and styles etc. I want dots, or I want stripes, its, whatever.

Then I have it made exactly to what my body shape is at the time. I actually started to forget whether I was a ten or twelve or fourteen. Thank goodness because every time I went I just kind of got it made to what I was. So that's a little bit tricky as well, but fun. As you say now definitely tailoring, and there are three thousand tailors in the old town.

You might like to check Sharon's website at HoianNow. I know she's got some good recommendations there. But let's not get stuck on tailoring. Let's move on to **number four** because we've got, we've got a list of ten to get through.

**Number four**

**Sharon Sweeney:** Yes, well look, I take my job very seriously and so while we have tailors on the side, we've got something far more important in terms of the best and that is the spa's massages and spa treatments, now come on!

**Kerry Newsome:** Yes, what a hard job you had to take so seriously Sharon to check those out.

**Sharon Sweeney:** And it means back to the same type place. It means that you're going to every place in Hoi An, just to see what they are like. And I do so. I know I'm a champion but I do it regularly. Yes, well look at some of the prices, you'd be mad not to.

I don't think anyone should go and have a one-hour massage when you could have a five-hour massage. I reckon it, you just book yourself in for the entire trip because I would.

About the massages, seriously you've got the high end, very high-class high hotels offering massages. Now they cost a fortune and I've sent writers, reviewers to the top really expensive hotels, and it's very hit and miss. One you know would surprise you. I wouldn't name it but it's one of the best hotels in Vietnam and the spa treatment was very hit and miss.

And then again seriously, we do put very much a recommendation of the ones you should go to. And whilst you can get fabulous ones on the street corners, and you can get massages in the night, it's a skill that while they train some just have the gift. The ones I highly recommend, are the day's spas. And then you've got trained masseuses they're premises are clean, and really tasteful. You've got the full sort of western spa with this wafting music the smells that you. Yes?

**Kerry Newsome:** Yes. Sending back there in a heartbeat.

**Sharon Sweeney:** Yes.

**Kerry Newsome:** That is one of the things as far as your trip planning is concerned. I would highly recommend people to include. I think people always think they're going to be "doing, ...doing" all the time, and I think sometimes that takes away some pleasure and enjoyment in the holiday. when you're just able to access things, like massage and be able to just "chill out" but not worrying this is costing a fortune.

**Sharon Sweeney:** Yes, that's right I totally agree. But there is one thing I was thinking of that surprised me actually, if not startled me, was that when you go to a massage on the street corners and sometimes in the mid range, and sometimes in the high range, the Vietnamese fascination, or they just don't really care. But they don't turn away nor leave the room. Sometimes when you're undressing and that took me a bit by surprise. I've never got too

fussy about it, but thinking that they will try to persecute me because I did eat a lot. They didn't. And while I felt fat and I didn't want anyone witnessing that. Just to be aware of it, they don't mean harm.

**Kerry Newsome:** I think they just want to check out that, you know our bits are white, not like them, as they are slightly toasted. Yeah, I think it's about the fascination. Yes, because I can remember actually the same thing happening to me when I first went. I actually pointed to my arm and I said yes, same, same. And she got it, like the girl really resonated with me right. Yes that's what it is all about. All right after a spa where we are up to?

### **Number five**

**Sharon Sweeney:** Well, this is,...as I'm saying this, I'm not really a person that likes to do cooking, but the cooking schools in Hoi An are a must. Because it's not really just about cooking. It's actually about the cultural learning you gain. I mean, I highly recommend a cooking school..

They have cooking school for all types. So if you're a professional chef and you don't want to look at some pieces of paraphernalia then you can do professional cooking school. You couldn't get a more culturally rich experience, where it's great for kids where they can go out and act like a farmer, dress you up as a farmer and...

**Kerry Newsome:** Oh yes.

**Sharon Sweeney:** And you pick the vegetables and carry them in those round baskets.

**Kerry Newsome:** And you wear those peasant clothes, that are like stinking hot linensacks... looks fabulous!!!

**Sharon Sweeney:** Then you will also get other ones, where you can get everything thrown in, and you can get a basket boat ride, followed by a water buffalo ride. You can even get a massage included....

**Kerry Newsome:** Just throwing it in!

**Sharon Sweeney:** The thing that is really good about the "hit and miss theory". I would put equally number five, you take in the markets.

As the market is the life blood of Vietnamese society. It's like we go to the shopping centre, they go to the market and it's a daily activity. It's not just to buy, it's to barter, they will barter even though they know each other. Because it's all part of the thing, and yes so I highly recommend people go to the market.

**Kerry Newsome:** Yes, definitely and I think it is a very immersive experience, and what better way to understand a country than to experience it through its food, so definitely as number five. Now what are we missing Sharon? What are we up to now? Well **number six.**

### **Number Six**

**Sharon Sweeney:** Well number six, that has to be one of my highest recommendations. It's in our top ten on the website. It is in the Marble Mountains. And it's set between Danang and Hoi An but twenty minutes from Hoi An. And during the fifteenth century, it was used by the champ people, as a sacred site of worship, and it really has got one of those energies. It's

amazing. There are five mountains, and each one represents an element. You've got fire, water, metal, wood and earth. It's just amazing. You know there is a pagoda, and all the temples and shrines. You've got caves. Massive caves you can go down into, through tunnels.

**Kerry Newsome:** by crawling in very small areas. I have seen some funny pictures where people are getting, their bum pushed through a crevice in the mountain...

**Sharon Sweeney:** I was scared, if they can, people will grab you, and they'll just shove you forward, and then the next thing is, you're climbing into things that you could easily break your neck on. So just be careful if you are claustrophobic.

**Kerry Newsome:** Good footwear very important.

**Sharon Sweeney:** Yes, and be aware of the heat. It's gets very hot there, so you just have to go early morning. It is the best time to go during the summertime and truly I mean it, because it's very hot. But when you get to the top the views of Danang, and all around it is just simply 360 views.

I mean it's going to lift your soul, breathtaking and that's so good. They look over what used to be known as China beach, where the troops used to congregate, and it's such a good bird's-eye view of the whole city of Danang. The Vietnamese used to actually use it as a watch tower. And it was also a hospital during that period well hidden from the enemy.

**Kerry Newsome:** Yes.

**Sharon Sweeney:** Incredible and I also love those marble statues at the bottom of the hill.

**Kerry Newsome:** Those marble statues are like the size of King Kong.

**Sharon Sweeney:** Yes, right like you're in the market for a couple twenty-foot lions that you want to put in your backyard.

**Kerry Newsome:** I remember when they used to have just a few show rooms. I think on the straight, but now they line the street. Who buys these? It's like you can put it in the back of your taxi or your Grab car on your way back to your hotel?? They are heavy, huge, white kind of stallions, but I always know when I'm nearly at Marble Mountain because those lines of shops appear.

**Sharon Sweeney:** The sightseeing tour is fantastic, but I see what you mean. But in saying that you might like to check out the amazing marble chess sets. You've got like beautiful, beautifully carved marble chess sets about six inches to seven inches tall each piece, on a marble chessboard and you get that shipped overseas. Back to your hometown or wherever, highly worth it. Three hundred bucks USD was the last price I saw.

**Kerry Newsome:** Okay so we've done marble mountain **number seven** we are up to. Where are we headed now?

### **Number Seven**

**Sharon Sweeney:** Something that came onto the scene about two three years ago. I can tell you it's a show, and it's outdoors and connected to the theme park, and it's called Hoi An, Memory shows. When I heard about it, and I said I am not going to that, it's not my sort of thing. But I covered it for the website, and my God, Kerry it costs about three hundred Dong.

Which is nothing. Its a world class presentation. People fly through the air, there is music, there's lights, dancers, and over 300 performers.

**Kerry Newsome: And it's all staged on water.**

**Sharon Sweeney:** It was a real recreational plan and so you've got the Thu Bon River in the background and you've got the Japanese bridge.

**Kerry Newsome:** Yes

**Sharon Sweeney:** Its folktales. Interspersed with the history of Hoi An and some parts are sad but also uplifting.

**Kerry Newsome:** Up lifts your spirit.

**Sharon Sweeney:** It has a mechanical elephant that would come on stage of the arena. But here is a tip. I covered it for HoiAnnow.com. We got VIP tickets,. which was great. I thought if I went again I would go for the peasant seats, which are right down the front.

Yes, that's where you should be. You are right on that amazing thing, and it's just hard to explain but it's also part of the theme park. Even the people who work in the theme park itself, all are actors who perform later. Some are sales assistants, and they do many shows. It will truly take you back how stunning it is.

**Kerry Newsome:** Yes, it's delightful. I took my sixteen year old grandson and I thought he is pretty hard to impress. A kid at that age. Is he going to think this is a bit out there?? He just said he was blown away because also it's the contrast; you've just come out of a sixteenth century old town, and then a little bit around the corner you're stepping into this amazing theme park with this fully professional choreographed stage on water, that is definitely up in the twentieth century kind of level of action, and the contrast from one to another is just, you can't help but just be blown away. He said it's like watching the opening stage of the Olympic Games.

**Sharon Sweeney:** Yes opening to the Olympics. Yes that's a very good analogy actually. That's exactly right. I just tell everybody you must go as everyone loves Hoi An. The people are lovely and to see a show like that you just feel. I don't know all warm and fuzzy. Okay.

**Kerry Newsome:** So you are all swept away.

**Kerry Newsome:** All right now you're getting me very nostalgic. And now all right let's travel on what. We are up to **number eight**, I think so. What's your number eight?

### **Number Eight**

**Sharon Sweeney:** You know it shouldn't be number eight but it's hard to put them in order because so many good things in Hoi An and the beaches and I mean Kerry those beaches.

Beautiful. I mean those beaches okay. What's so incredible with the beaches in Vietnam and I'm so surprised that you don't know what I expected, but you've got yellow expanses of sand, blue water, although we still get some waves. All you surfers out there, don't worry but I like it still and it's still and warm. And it is safe, no sharks or crocodiles.

And what is something that we don't have, and I haven't seen this in many parts of the world to be honest, is shade, there are beaches in Australia that are very beautiful, but there is no shade.

In Vietnam all along the beach front they're either thatch huts or you have a umbrellas, and little tables and chairs, and you know there's room for everybody. Then are not crowded. Everybody can use one, and you get a little "pozzy" as we say in Australia. You order a cocktail or a water. You order what you want, or you do whatever you want, and you can stay the whole day. FREE.

**Kerry Newsome:** Yes, all right I've literally plot my but down with a diet coke a under a umbrella and literally put my headphones on. I read my book for hours on end. I mean if you go to Italy or places like that, its going to cost you about 50 Euros just to sit down, just to have the umbrella. You are so right, the beaches are so divine and what I love is the access to restaurants. They are sitting right on that sand.

**Sharon Sweeney:** I'm leading to that. I am getting to that Kerry. Before we move on. To say that is what they offer is incredible. One of the things about Vietnam is that it is so cheap and never forget that it's really nice. Unimaginable until you experience it.

But the other thing is the ladies that come in on the beaches. I've seen some people get very aggressive with them. Try not to, because actually these people are really nice people and they just want to make a living and. People should just be aware because the Vietnamese are all lovely people.

**Kerry Newsome:** I know that.

**Sharon Sweeney:** I know they can get a little bit annoying..

**Kerry Newsome:** **But.** They're not aggressive in any way, but you know some tourists take umbrage to them coming around, but as you say there's very few of them. Some of them are very well known to the restaurant.

**Kerry Newsome:** Now are you up to **number nine** I think.

### **Number Nine**

**Sharon Sweeney:** And it's moving on from your restaurants because this is the other thing you told me and you're quite right that Hoi An has world class restaurants.

All types of cuisine. Beautiful Vietnamese. You've got Greek, Spanish, fantastic Italian and Indian restaurants. Everything you can imagine.

I'm not going to say that I shouldn't have this on the list, but the thing is it takes it out for me is having a meal in the evening with balmy weather and overlooking the beach. You have that beach. Beautiful still nights you can hear the waves just washing on to the beach, and you were there in one of the restaurants that lay on the beach and I've got a few different ones as favs, I'm just going to give some names which I don't normally do.

**Kerry Newsome:** Now do it..

**Sharon Sweeney:** But you know I don't like to because it's been used everywhere but I'm going to do this is, for types that I would recommend for me.

You and I would agree I think a stand out has got to be Soul kitchen. But I would recommend to a tourist to Soul kitchen as it's an iconic venue. It was one of a kind and many have sprung



up since, but Soul kitchen still retains its heart. It overlooks and backs onto the beach. Its got live music and these musicians are world class. You see you know you can hear fantastic music, have food overlooking the beach, and enjoy some drinks or whatever you fancy. It might be it's a sunset to die for and you've got these wonderful little thatched roofed huts, they are not quite little, but easily have a small group.

**Kerry Newsome:** Yes.

**Sharon Sweeney:** These little mini thatch houses with no walls, with breeze coming through.

**Kerry Newsome:** And the day beds!!!

**Sharon Sweeney:** We do love the day beds.

**Kerry Newsome:** We do. Who wouldn't? I mean you can just take off your shoes. I know it's a naughty thing to do, to take your shoes off, but to be able to snuggle up on one of those day beds and drink and eat tasty inexpensive food. I never felt any impetus by the staff to send me off. I can spend hours there. Never have I been pushed out the door, and I can stay there easily a full afternoon and once the evening comes on, as you say with the entertainment, you're not charged for that. It's free entry. It has a magical atmosphere. Divine.

**Sharon Sweeney:** And then you go other places as well if you're into nightlife like Kukun. Likewise its set on the beach, it starts at nine o'clock with a DJ. Goes to like whatever time...that's very popular in the younger real party set, as Hoi An is really not known as a party town.

**Kerry Newsome:** Yes, they shut the doors upstairs to cut the noise down.

**Sharon Sweeney:** And then if you are in a really wealthy demographic then you've got Shore Club which is very high class, which is run by Mr. Max Lambert. Basically, there is something for everyone.

**Kerry Newsome:** Yes, and they all offer as you just something slightly different to each other. But as you walk past you can pick a seafood restaurant, and pick your seafood straight out of a bucket. You can move on and you can go to Hmong sisters and have a meal there. You can have a pizza next door. It's got it all.

**Sharon Sweeney:** Yes, it's happening.

**Kerry Newsome:** It's definitely, Okay last but not least **number ten.**

### **Number Ten**

**Sharon Sweeney:** Well again you know I'm looking for the WOW factor and I was thinking of all my time in Vietnam, what was one of the things that gave me this, Wow. And that was, the Hai Van Pass.

**Sharon Sweeney:** And the Hai Van Pass is extraordinary.

It's known by the Vietnamese's as the "ocean cloud pass" and that should give you an idea of the kind of experience you can expect. You go up this mountain right into the clouds and it's a thrilling feeling.

You experience a steep drive up into the clouds, as the roads wind and you pass these jungle covered hills. While looking down on fishing villages. This view from the top is just extraordinary. So if you can go by bike motorbike it's the best way, but just beware, I recommend you go with a licensed bike driver because...

Why does Vietnam have the highest death toll in the world or accident toll in the world ?

Kerry, I don't know one expat me included, my husband included, that hasn't had a bike accident. Some of them were fatal, some of them have been nasty, and most say that they are okay, but don't take a chance if you're a tourist. You're more than likely not insured. If you're a tourist, take a car, that's what I did. Or take a jeep you can do that too.

**Kerry Newsome:** Yes, you can do a Jeep or a car. I definitely think so. But don't put that holiday at risk. I'm with you, I've known tourists who've got themselves into some sticky situations because of bike accidents, and you don't want that kind of trouble. With the jeep or car you will still get that pinnacle view and not expensive.

**Sharon Sweeney:** Just awesome yes.

**Kerry Newsome:** Absolutely Sharon I think we can go on to eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, eighty. And so on...as we agree Hoi An is really up there as a big favorite with the tourists.

I know that top ten are important, because you know sometimes the travelers, when they arrive, don't have all the time in the world, which means to narrow it down to the top ten things that they should do, must do, is very helpful.

I'm so grateful for you to share your top ten with us, and I am sure the travelers are going to be able to relate to a lot of them. Hopefully they can put that list together when they go.

**Sharon Sweeney:** Must do.

**Kerry Newsome:** Yes, must do.

**Sharon Sweeney:** Yes, Kerry it always great to talk.

**Kerry Newsome:** Okay. Look after yourself, stay safe and we will talk again.

**Sharon Sweeney:** See you later.

**Kerry Newsome:** Bye.