



What About Vietnam - Series 3 - 14 – Travel to Vietnam opening up – The inside story

Kerry Newsome: 00:35

Xin Chào, and welcome to What About Vietnam. I'm really excited to invite you to a three part series with my special guest Miquel Angel. Miquel comes to the program as the head of the human resources and quality working group. Now this group works inside the Vietnam tourism advisory board. And this board is a private entity, advising the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism of Vietnam.

01:06

It's a 3 Part series, Part 1 today is actually going to talk about the very subject we're kind of dying to know about and that's around, when can tourists visit Vietnam again. What are the conditions going to be? With Miquel, I get to sort of unwrap some of those conditions. We talk visas, we talk travel insurance, we talk about what's going to be good for Vietnam, and just how things are going to roll in the next three or four months as those doors open and Vietnam gets to put all these new strategies in place.

01:44

He's a great guest. He's been in Vietnam for 22 years. He's been across a wide range of industry sectors. And he has a lot to offer. I know you're going to enjoy it, please stay tuned for part one, and part two and three, as they unfold in the coming weeks. Let's welcome Miquel to the program.

02:12

Miquel, Vietnam kind of fell off the radar a little bit this year because of the COVID pandemic, and how it struck so deeply. So late, Vietnam was doing so well. And then to have this tragedy, it is hard to watch. We are seeing some positives with the vaccination, and the program is definitely picking up. I know I shouldn't ask you to crystal ball or estimate when you think the doors would open. But I'm going to anyway.

Miquel Angel: 02:51

Well, you can show up there because, I'm sitting with the decision makers. Before we record the podcast, as I was talking to some of these key persons that they call me,

"Well, Miquel, some destinations are starting to open."

Now we are in November 2021 recording the podcast here. But maybe we can do an update in a couple of months to see if things are happening there. And more than a crystal ball or to see the future whatever is, what do we really want to see with our feet on the ground. What do we want to see happening in Vietnam, let's say in December, January, that the Lunar New Year and moving forward for, second quarter and rest of the year?

03:36

So, at this point in time, several provinces- and now at this moment we have five that was the recommendation that we gave to the government. There are five provinces they're calling for. Phu Quoc Island, Danang, Khanh Hoa Province the home to Nha Trang city, Ha Long Bay in Quang Ninh Province, and Hoi An in Quang Nam Province.

They are already opening their doors to national domestic and international arrivals, without quarantine, important because no one- I think no one from Australia, Europe, US is happy coming to Vietnam in two weeks program and stay one week, closed in any- doesn't matter how beautiful is that hotel, because it's not actually a hotel or a resort, it is your room. It is not that you are at the pool there, in an all-inclusive, dancing in the swimming pool and taking selfie pictures, sending them around the world. No, absolutely, a no go. So, these five provinces are now, today open to national and international arrivals without quarantine today.

Kerry Newsome: 04:41

Today, the fourth of November.

Miquel Angel: 04:43

Forth of November 2021.

Kerry Newsome: 04:46

So, flights are coming in from Europe, US.

Miquel Angel: 04:50

We are sitting in our tourism advisory board with the three major airlines here in Vietnam now operating international flights at the moment. Vietnam Airlines, VietJet and Bamboo Airways, Bamboo Airways, the latest to arrive. Now they're flying from the US, direct flight to Vietnam, which is a very good news.

So, these companies are already with some agreements signed with other countries, in order to bring people in and bring people back in a safe manner, without quarantine.

When I say a safe manner, that means that

- We all wear mask.
- We all are with our double jabbed or triple- some people do the triple vaccination, depending on where you're coming from. And with a health protocol.
- We have a lot of hand-soap on the planes.
- We will be keeping the distance.

- All the air hostesses and ground staff wear masks and taking good steps towards the pandemic.

05:56

They are requesting this 72 hours prior to your flight, PCR, or test, just to ensure that you are coming from a safe destination. We know Australia, handling quite well. In Europe, other countries handle it also better or worse, but they starting to recover. And this is actual situation of today. Other international flights are also starting to arrive to Vietnam, that since last 2020, they were only allowed to carry Vietnamese repatriated back home around the world. And experts, who were coming here to Vietnam, we bring some tourism experts during that time, some doctors also, from all the countries, to help us pass this pandemic and these bad months that we suffered.

Kerry Newsome: 06:50

Correct me if I've got this wrong, there's also a requirement around travel insurance. And travel insurance has to include the coverage for COVID up to the value of 50,000 US dollars.

Miquel Angel: 07:08

Well, that's interesting point. What we did, when we present all our documents and proposals to the minister or the vice minister and the team and we sit with them during this pandemic, we also give to them an annex, where we were showing to them what all the Southeast Asian neighbor countries were doing.

So, Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines, Cambodia, Singapore, Malaysia, all these were fully included in our report. So, as you know, of course, medical insurance, I think, during this 21st century is a must for wherever you travel, invest wisely, and put some dollars there in a travel insurance that can save you a lot of problems and is not only traveling to the US that many people say,

"Oh, if I go to the US, yes, I make a travel but rest of the world--"

08:00

I think it is worth it, it is a fantastic investment. And if something happened, saves you a lot. So, we decided to make this 50,000 COVID- I mean, nobody is looking if it is over 40 or over 60 there. But what we would like to see is that if in the past, they were travelers coming from around the world to Vietnam, without any insurance or coverage.

So, I think it's now time to improve after COVID, not to do the same mistakes we made in the past, let's suppose, people that come with a travel insurance. So, if you fall down during your trekking, or you go to the swimming pool, and unfortunately-- me, I see sometimes people at the pool that just fall down and knock their nose into the floor and keep bleeding there. And you need to go to a hospital.

08:43

Just think that some destinations here in Vietnam will not have an international hospital ready to attend. And you will probably need an airplane, or you will probably need a helicopter to come and bring you to Bangkok, or to Singapore, Vietnam we cannot give to you what you

deserve. So, these need to be covered. Just because if something happened to you in Ho Chi Minh City or in Hanoi, you easily go to the pharmacy, and they will give you the medicines there without any problem. They will cut them; they will give you whatever you want.

Or you need to go to International Hospital in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, not a problem. You pay, what you get. That's it. But if you are in the middle of a minority, doing the trekking, in the middle of the rice paddies, beautiful, nice pictures, and you twist your ankle. What's the problem? I'm a taxpayer in Vietnam. I don't want to pay for you to get an airport back to wherever, that's your responsibility.

Kerry Newsome: 09:41

Being in the travel industry for as long as I've been which is a long time. I have stressed to people all along and I don't want to be the devil of doom. But I do think travel insurance is essential for everyone. But I have a caveat with the travel insurance. And people when they take on an insurance policy, they need to read the fine print. Because even when the pandemic first hit, there, we had travelers that were stuck, who literally arrived in Hanoi. And we had to put them on a plane and send them back. They were very angry, they were irate. They said,

"Look, I have travel insurance that's going to cover us and everything."

And we went back to them and said,

"Once they declare it as a pandemic, the travel insurance will not be covered."

Pandemic, no cover. So, I just stress to everyone listening to make sure that you get ticks in those boxes, it is not going to be every travel insurance company that does offer it. So be very selective. And you probably will pay more than you have in the past. But peace of mind, there is no dollar value-

Miquel Angel: 10:57

It is worth it.

Kerry Newsome: 10:59

I've always travelled with travel insurance. And it's always done well, for me. I've got stuck in Prague, and I was really, really sick in Prague. And they were able to get a doctor to my hotel and all the rest of it. And I didn't pay anything for it. And in Vietnam, where the system is already at its kind of peak, and it's still recovering. And I'm hoping that down the track, there's going to be some more improvements in those areas to give people assurances. But you're right, if you needed to get airlifted to Bangkok, or something like that, that cost dollars.

11:37

So, I think that is something that everyone is going to have to consider moving forward into next year. And I'll be really interested to see what your board and what the Immigration Department does with the visas. I was glad to see in the last few years they brought the E-visa because most countries come into Vietnam visa free, except Australia, which I'm still trying to

figure out why. And that's probably another cause for another conversation. But with the E-visa, I'm wondering whether they will change, or they will be more discriminating against things. Will they ask more questions and things like that. So, I guess that's a wait and see what is going to be part of that.

Miquel Angel: 12:31

That point. I mean, we are sitting with the Department of Immigration there, with the police, Department of Interior, working on that, because the job we do involves several ministries to work together, and all of them are important. So, let's not forget on that. So, the issue here is that more and more, we keep adding more countries to these visa free two weeks. And what we achieved now is that these countries, that they sign agreements, and we put in that place, they will not be doing one month, because some people do not come to travel these two weeks, some people say will go 20 days, because I will do a little bit more, and I will make an extension, we still do not talk about Hạ Long Bay, for example, and this part that you cannot miss if you come to Vietnam.

Kerry Newsome: 13:17

Thank you so much for being on the program. I think we've covered a lot of ground, given a lot of things for people to think about. So just want to say, I'm just so grateful for your time and your insights.

Miquel Angel: 13:29

Well, thank you very much for having me here in the program. As I said, it's not the first time that I listen and hear because I think each story that you're sharing with us Kerry, is interesting in a way or another, doesn't matter where you are based, each one has a story. And for me, more than sometimes talking, because I like to explain and I like to transfer my knowledge to the new unknown generation and to everybody who wants to listen, I want to be an active listener and just stop, switch on your podcast there while I'm cycling here in Ho Chi Minh City, in the middle of rice paddies, buffaloes, and cows and listen to you Kerry, talking to people from wherever part of the world not only Australia, talking on how they see Vietnam. I also learn a lot from all these people sharing their experiences. And from there, I can bring them back into the table where we decision makers try to, of course do more good things and less bad things. So, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity.

OUTRO 14:35

Thank you for listening. Check out the episode notes for more information. What About Vietnam. Don't forget to subscribe, rate and review and stay tuned for more fun adventures in Vietnam. What about Vietnam!