



## What About Vietnam - Series 3 - 11 – Saigon's Covid recovery and tourism outlook 2022

[00:00:35] **Kerry Newsome:** *Xin chào.* Welcome to *What About Vietnam*. In today's episode, we're going to be talking to Michael Tatarski in Ho Chi Minh City. Michael is editor-in-chief of Saigoneer, the Vietnamese culture and history website, and author of the Vietnam weekly newsletter. Michael has been instrumental in keeping many of us informed about the COVID spread in Vietnam and just the devastation it has caused in Saigon in particular. I feel very privileged to have him on to give us some local insights but also to give us some insights into just how it has affected the population of Saigon. What the COVID lockdown restrictions have actually meant at a street level and what that's been like to not leave your building and things like that.

The other reason I'm really glad to have him on to talk about this in an authority way is because I think we're going to be drawing some comparisons in years to come from episodes like this, recording this in real-time. This is October 2021. I think we're going to be looking at Vietnam in new lights and new ways in years to come when we will be able, say, especially for people like myself who can draw history in various visits back and forth over the last 14 years, just to compare changes, new initiatives, things that have eventuated due to the pandemic, good and bad. It's great to have Michael on. I hope you enjoy this episode and can take on the information, knowing that the lockdown restrictions are going to be easing on the first of October. This episode will be going up that week. Let's hope. Let's cross fingers that Vietnam is starting to turn a corner and seeing some light on the other side for travelers. Please welcome Michael to the program.

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[00:02:59] **Kerry Newsome:** Michael, it's great to have you on the show.

[00:03:01] **Michael Tatarski:** Sure, no problem.

[00:03:02] **Kerry Newsome:** How are you doing?

[00:03:04] **Michael Tatarski:** Yes, doing all right. We're well over three months, I think, about three and a half months of hard lockdown here in Ho Chi Minh City. We'll get into this more. It looks like some relief is finally on the horizon on Friday. I don't know exactly when this will come out, but Friday, October 1st looks like there's going to be big changes finally.

[chuckles]

[00:03:23] **Kerry Newsome:** Maybe if you could be descriptive to my listeners. Just talking about what it's been like. You are living in Saigon, working in Saigon. You're right in the thick of it. Maybe talk to us a little bit about what the last 90 days and Saigon's been like.

**[00:03:43] Michael Tatarski:** Sure. With the COVID, I've been lucky now. I'm lucky. I've had steady work. I'm able to work from home comfortably, don't have to worry about how am I going to pay for my next meal and that kind of stuff. There are certainly those comforts, but it's been tough. There's no other way to put it. The strict lockdown began. I wouldn't say it was July 9th, but early July. These rules that are called Directive 16 **means** only being able to go out for essential items and things like that, which we had for a period in 2020 in March and April, really early in the pandemic. You were still able to exercise outside and that sort of thing. Granted, the case numbers were in the hundreds

**[00:04:30] Kerry Newsome:** Straight and low. Yes.

**[00:04:31] Michael Tatarski:** Yes. Here in Ho Chi Minh City, there was this outbreak really exploded. We were hitting 8,000, 9,000 cases a day, which for Vietnam is a lot, to put it mildly. That went into effect. They banned all food delivery as well and also all outdoor exercise, which caught a lot of people by surprise. That meant cooking every meal for about three months. They did relax food delivery a couple of weeks ago, which was really, really nice. It's good for businesses to finally get some income again and great for people to not have to cook all the time. [chuckles] Then, not being able to go outside. I know some of the international coverage has been a little maybe overdone a bit. A month ago, they did bring in the military or some elements of it to support the lockdown when the situation became really extreme in the public health sense. The hospital system was on the verge of collapse. Almost 300 deaths a day just in the city. They had to build almost 20 field hospitals to handle all the cases. It was an absolute crisis. I would have to say probably the worst situation to hit the city since the war ended at least in 30 years or something like that. There's no doubt about it. It was extremely serious even with the military coming in.

Soldiers at the corner of your street, making sure you didn't leave the house. You could, at least, walk outside your gate. There was nowhere to go. Everything was closed. You really shouldn't have been out on the streets. It wasn't safe. The virus was-- it remains really widespread. Vaccination rates are higher now, thankfully. It's less of a risk if you're vaccinated to be out. Yes, just week after week of just being at home, [chuckles] which [crosstalk] if you like me, and you can work from home, it is frustrating, but you'll get by. For a lot of people, which I know we'll get to, it's absolutely devastating to go that long without work.

**[00:06:35] Kerry Newsome:** Yes, absolutely.

**[00:06:37] Michael Tatarski:** Food supplies were a real issue for a lot of people. Especially, for a long time in lockdown, we couldn't even go grocery shopping. You had to get it delivered. Some of that was through a government system. Some of it was through privately-owned supermarkets that eventually got their own systems figured out. A lot of people are still going hungry. Food supply has been a real problem.

**[00:07:01] Kerry Newsome:** Yes. The government did step in there for a bit and was handing out small sums of money to the poor so that they could get a basic meal because, I guess, for people listening, Saigon is so densely populated. The food industry or the street food industry is huge. We, you and I, were laughing before about having to cook meals. It's a city where you don't cook yourself that often because it's often cheaper to eat out. All of those very small vendors lost their patronage. They packed up their stuff and had nowhere to go. They were trying to leave the city and, I think, take some comfort by heading home to the rural areas where the virus wasn't. Yes, just refuge at home, I think, until it all went away.

**[00:08:03] Michael Tatarski:** Yes, it's important. If people aren't familiar with the cities now that-- They say the population is around 9,000,000 or 10,000,000, but I think it's widely assumed that that's off by several million potentially. There's a huge population of migrant workers. People have moved here. This is the economic engine of the country, this and a

couple of neighboring provinces. A huge draw from provinces where there's a less economic activity and less development. A lot of these workers, you mentioned, cooking. It's not that they're not able to cook. They can't. They live in tiny shared homes or tenement buildings that don't have kitchens or very limited kitchens.

**[00:08:42] Kerry Newsome:** Facilities, yes, or gas. Yes

**[00:08:46] Michael Tatarski:** Their job is working at a construction site or something like that. When that all gets shut down, that's all there is for them.

[music]

I understood the hospital system, obviously, was not able to cope. I've got some other friends in Saigon. They were talking about that hotels were commissioned. Some officers were commissioned to put together makeshift hospital rooms to cater to some of the patients. They were selling oxygen and things like that. That was a priority for people. Did you hear similar?

**[00:09:36] Michael Tatarski:** Yes. From the start of the pandemic, as I'm sure you've discussed here, Vietnam took a really aggressive reaction. [crosstalk]

**[00:09:44] Kerry Newsome:** Yes, I was there in March 2020.

**[00:09:47] Michael Tatarski:** Oh right. For most of us-

**[00:09:48] Kerry Newsome:** Just better.

**[00:09:49] Michael Tatarski:** -that worked really well. For most of the first 18 months of the pandemic, we live life shockingly normally compared to a lot of other countries. One of the reasons, I think, or at least it's believed the government reacted like this is because they knew the health system couldn't handle a huge outbreak. We saw that in Ho Chi Minh City. Yes, they also converted a couple of huge empty apartment complexes into gigantic field hospitals with thousands of rooms. I do want to clarify not all of those rooms were really sick people. Some of them actually were asymptomatic. They eventually changed to letting those people stay at home, which took some pressure off. Yes, it was an all-hands-on-deck. Hanoi sent in a lot of doctors and medical workers. Other provinces did as well. The military sent in some doctors and health reinforcements for lack of a better word. Yes, it was a national effort and also showed that if something like this had happened in numerous provinces, it would have been a really, really terrible situation. It is already, but I don't even want to think about what that would have been like.

**[00:11:02] Kerry Newsome:** Yes. You're right. I think the industry and the manufacturing side of things was something that the government was particularly concerned about because some of those places have workers of tens of thousands. I hear also that for their safety, they put together makeshift tents and things like that to actually keep them on the premises to try and get them vaccinated. Slowly but surely, I think that's a strong government push, or that's what I'm hearing anyway, so that the wheels of the engine of the country can keep turning.

**[00:11:45] Michael Tatarski:** Yes. This was initially in the north because of this outbreak, we've almost forgotten it at this point, it first exploded into a few northern provinces way back in May, especially a couple next to Hanoi with a lot of Samsung factories and other major electronics manufacturers. Yes, they kind of started this. Not kind of, they did start this three on the spot system or also, some people call it, a bubble where factories would set up, yes, living quarters like tents and spare warehouses or whatever so that employees could live, work and also eat on-site without leaving. Then, they also did that down here, especially in Binh Duong and Dong Nai, which are huge industrial hubs. Yes, the idea was to keep manufacturing going. That worked for some places, but it didn't work for a lot. If a case got into a factory, that's like the perfect setting for Delta to spread. Hundreds or thousands of people close together. Also, it's expensive, the house. A lot of them would read half capacity or something. Still, if you need to feed 300 people three meals a day and also house them in addition to maintaining operations. That's a lot of money.

**[00:13:03] Kerry Newsome:** Yes. Absolutely.

**[00:13:04] Michael Tatarski:** I know factories that tried it and gave up. Others just didn't even try to do it because they knew it was going to be too difficult. Some of that is relaxing now because other provinces are also starting to come out of lockdown as well. Yes, it was an interesting system, worked for some, didn't work for others. [chuckles] Again, I think they obviously couldn't just shut everything down because that would have been economically disastrous.

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**[00:13:34] Kerry Newsome:** It also took a serious toll on the ex-pat population for a number of reasons around getting access to the vaccine or getting the vaccine or trying to get flights out. I know several Australians that have cost them much more than you would normally pay to actually get out and get back. Then, they were stuck in the lockdown so severely in Saigon that literally they had to get a PCR test to get on the plane. Then, they couldn't get past the police that had cordoned off the area to get them through. Then, they were worried about how they're going to get a Grab car or whatever to the actual airport. It's been quite stressful, I think, on lots of levels for the general population.

**[00:14:28] Michael Tatarski:** Yes. I know a lot of people who left, some permanently, some temporarily. My partner is American. We talked about it a lot. We have dogs. We would have wanted to bring them with us. It's really difficult to bring them into the US. It takes a few months of paperwork. We stayed. Granted, the US has gone downhill again. When it looked like things were getting better there, there was a lot of appeal, especially in the early days of this outbreak when the vaccine was almost not existed. National rates nationally are still extremely low. It's only around 8% of the entire country is fully vaccinated. Here in Ho Chi Minh City, they've funneled supply here because of the outbreak. It's just such an important economic and population center. That's a lot better. I'm fully vaccinated luckily. That fear of not being vaccinated has waned. Certainly, a lot of people left. If you could get out and go somewhere more comfortable, then it definitely made sense.

**[00:15:32] Kerry Newsome:** Sure. Just leading into now the weekend talk from the government of Vietnam about lessening the restrictions coming up to 1st October.

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**[00:15:53] Kerry Newsome:** For us, sitting in the travel industry and watching from the grandstands, we see this as a positive sign. We'll get on to talk about Phu Quoc in a bit. How do you see 1st October restrictions lessening? What will it mean for you?

**[00:16:14] Michael Tatarski:** Well, here in Ho Chi Minh City, much to my surprise, it seems like it's going to mean a lot. I've been given how conservative the restrictions have been thus far. I wasn't expecting anything too dramatic. It's not confirmed yet. They're still working on the final policy. It looks like for Ho Chi Minh City, they're going to allow if you're fully or partially vaccinated, or if you've recovered from COVID. Within the last six weeks, I think, you'll basically be able to move around the city as you wish. They're removing checkpoints in between districts and neighborhoods. You can go back to supermarkets, convenience stores. You can get a haircut. It sounds like you'll be able to exercise outside in quite large numbers if everyone is vaccinated. That really surprises me.

**[00:17:01] Kerry Newsome:** Affecting all districts?

**[00:17:02] Michael Tatarski:** Yes. I think there will still be some areas. Red zones are still going to be an issue potentially. As far as I know, this is city-wide. Weddings and funerals can happen again with set capacity. A lot of businesses will still be closed like no in-person dining, no cinemas, no karaoke, no massage parlors, that kind of thing.

**[00:17:25] Kerry Newsome:** No bars.

**[00:17:26] Michael Tatarski:** Yes, no bars. I think it also says street vendors are still going to be banned. That's a real shame. Again, those people are among the most impacted

[crosstalk]

**[00:17:35] Kerry Newsome:** Markets?

**[00:17:37] Michael Tatarski:** I think markets are supposed to reopen as well, but a lot of it is going to be probably just like see what the regulation is. Then, there's been a lot of regulations during this lockdown that have been really unclear initially. Then, they gradually get clarified. I'm very excited to be able to exercise out. I'm a pretty avid cyclist. I've got an indoor trainer luckily, but that's not the same as riding outside.

**[00:18:06] Kerry Newsome:** Absolutely.

**[00:18:07] Michael Tatarski:** Yes. It looks like a lot could change. Of course, the economic damage is still going to be immense. Fully vaccinated rates for the city are still relatively low. A lot of businesses are still-- it's still going to be expensive to go back to work. Food, ingredient prices are high because there's been a lot of shipping issues between provinces.

**[00:18:26] Kerry Newsome:** Yes. I was going to ask about that because food supply--

**[00:18:27] Michael Tatarski:** Also as we said, a lot of people left. We don't even know how many people left. Presumably, many tens of thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands. A lot of those individuals are the labor force of the city. Some of them can't come back yet because there are still travel restrictions or a lot might not want to. Unless they have a guaranteed job, maybe they would. It's going to be pretty interesting to see. Also, what business has survived? Being closed for three, four, five months. Not everyone obviously has the liquidity to just sit there with no business for that amount of time.

**[00:19:09] Kerry Newsome:** Yes, absolutely. I'll be interested to just see what the hotel industry does. All of those empty hotels with hotel staff, did those hotel staffs go back home, as I said, to those rural areas and wait it out? Are they going to have the manpower to put back into it?

**[00:19:33] Michael Tatarski:** Sure. Well, of course, even before this, obviously, as you know, there was no international tourism anyway. Certainly, the hotel is more focused on the international market. Everyone had to pivot by this point to some extent. This was obviously just more pain on top of that.

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**[00:19:54] Michael Tatarski:** For travel, honestly, it's going to be tough. I see that as being pretty low down the totem pole of priorities, certainly for here. We'll get to this, the discussions of Phu Quoc doing some sort of opening for internationally. I'm sure there are closed doors discussions. Publicly, there's still no discussion whatsoever presuming any normal inbound, international flights whether for business or even just citizens wanting to return to the country. It's still these, sometimes, government-arranged repatriation flights although those haven't happened in a while or these charter flights where it's everything's booked and approved in advance. It's really expensive. You have to do quarantine. In terms of travel, it still seems like that's going to be a long, long ways off. Domestic travel is going to be an issue as well just because the rest of the country is so unvaccinated, not by choice because [crosstalk]

**[00:20:53] Kerry Newsome:** Yes, that's what I was going to say.

**[00:20:57] Michael Tatarski:** There's definitely a push from domestic travel companies and domestic airlines and domestic hotels because everyone's flat on their back right now financially. They're really pushing to try to get some sort of green pass system set up for domestic travel which would help. That's, again, only 8% of the population right now. It's a pretty limited pool to work with. Yes. Just getting domestic because what happens if you're vaccinated, you can still be carrying the virus? What happens if a group of vaccinated visitors from Ho Chi Minh City go to Lao Cai province or something where it's much less vaccinated. Then, the outbreak starts there. Obviously, that's what officials are thinking about. This reopening is-- it's going to be really interesting to see what happens because presumably, cases here in the city will rise when they reopen just because there's going to be more

interaction between people. How do they react to that? It's interesting watching Singapore, which is very heavily vaccinated now. They're going back into some restrictions with their cases increasing. I don't know. We have to see. There's been a lot of talks recently about living with the virus. We don't know what that's going to mean in practice. There will be cases. What happens when that does happen?

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**[00:22:20] Kerry Newsome:** If I talk to people in the UK and some parts of Europe that are vagrantly traveling and getting about the world, they're still getting thousands of cases a day.

**[00:22:33] Michael Tatarski:** Sure, sure.

**[00:22:34] Kerry Newsome:** Freedom day for them wasn't freedom from the actual virus. It was just freedom to move around and take the risk. I was talking to one journalist the other day. He was saying that it doesn't even appear in the news in the UK anymore. They don't publish all the numbers, the caseload, or anything. He said, "Everything from my daughter's birthday party where someone rang us up afterward and said, "Oh, look. One kid tested positive after the party." We don't think it's going to be a problem. She's going to get a bit of a sniffle." They're just calling it a bad flu rather than a deadly disease now. I wonder whether or not in Australia is heading in the same direction, whether or not we'll see the same things because you've got major airlines that are sitting around, going broke if we don't get the domestic travel going again in Vietnam. I think Vietnam will need to test it internally to see how it goes before there's any sign of international. It's got to start somewhere. You're going to be coming up to the wet season in the north and the cold in January, February. These next three to six months are going to be really interesting to see.

**[00:24:11] Michael Tatarski:** Yes. It's going to be so regionally varied even within Vietnam because we're still averaging around 5,000 cases a day. The number of severe cases and deaths has dropped. Those are the really key indicators. By pure numbers, we're still having a ton of cases. I think most days, the city accounts for over half of all cases in the country, that detected cases. We don't always know what testing is going on in all the provinces. We're going to be living with quote "the virus" unquote, with that many cases. Hanoi had no cases in the last 24 hours. If they were to get to 5,000 cases, that would be unthinkable compared to where they're at right now. We don't even know what it's going to be like from region to region within the country.

**[00:24:55] Kerry Newsome:** Absolutely. It may mean that the travel regions will stay within-- In other words, you might fly from Hanoi to *Đông Hới* or somewhere like that, but you won't go any further south right, or you might fly to Danang and stay in central and north.

[music]

**[00:25:24] Kerry Newsome:** I don't know. Is there a big appetite for travel by people in Saigon? Do people want to get back out there and have a holiday?

**[00:25:37] Michael Tatarski:** Yes. People in my social circles certainly do. I'm pretty on the fence about it for the foreseeable future. Not that I'm worried about getting sick particularly, but just knowing that other provinces are far less vaccinated. Yes, certainly. I don't know about the average person. Of course, there's got to be some level of pent-up demand. We had a national holiday at the start of the month that we couldn't do anything for it. We have a limited number of national holidays. Usually, when they happen, people like to do some sort of-- even if it's just going to **[unintelligible 00:26:18]** from Ho Chi Minh City, just a couple hours away, something to get out of the city. Or if you're in Hanoi, the same thing. People aren't able to do that. There definitely will be some pent-up to me. Also, a lot of people are just going to want to go see their family.

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**[00:26:38] Kerry Newsome:** They're painting Phu Quoc island as the sandbox for Vietnam. I've had lots of different interviews with a range of different people. There's really a mixed bag on whether or not it's going to take off. It's already been pushed back from October to November. What I know about the island, it's about 160,000 people. I've only been twice for very short visits. Its medical situation is not expansive. I don't know. Do you think it's going to come off?

**[00:27:23] Michael Tatarski:** At this point, I think it will happen simply because they say it's going to happen. The prime minister himself has given it the green light. I think it has to happen just because the highest levels of government have said, "We need this. This is going to be a thing." This is not my area of expertise. I can't see it being a huge success. I've seen some articles where they say they're expecting tens of thousands of visitors a month. I don't know if that includes domestic because then maybe. I can't see this having a huge amount of appeal for a lot of international visitors having to do pay for a charter flight. I think the system is largely you just stay at the resort that you go to and don't leave.

**[00:28:10] Kerry Newsome:** Yes. That's right.

**[00:28:12] Michael Tatarski:** Of course, for some people, that kind of trip may have appeal, but I think a lot of westerners who come to Vietnam wants to see some of the countries as well or at least-- even if it's a tacky night market tour or something like that, is at least getting you out of the resort and eating some semblance of local food. If you can't do any of that, I don't really know who's going to be jumping out, really wanted to do that. Also, some of this seems to be pitched as a huge benefit for the local economy. If you're just staying at, whatever, **[unintelligible 00:28:47]** for seven days, that's not-- That'll help the people working for the resort, but the local economy is not really going to get much of a boost from that at all.

**[00:28:57] Kerry Newsome:** Yes. It's a difficult one. I think it's a test case that they want to exercise to just see the manpower handling. I heard some numbers posed that might start at maybe 2,000 to 3,000 coming in. Russia is a country, in particular, that is very keen on the island and fancy island, very popular. It's got great water sports with sailing and diving and things like that. The Vinpearl group is very big there. It's got a mini Venice with cable cars. It's nothing like Vietnam.

**[00:29:46] Michael Tatarski:** No.

**[00:29:48] Kerry Newsome:** It's out there. As you say, I think because the prime minister has put that out there, I think it's probably going to happen in a fashion. How well or how successful it is? It's time to come. I think there is an aim for the country to try and get on top of things for Tet because as you know, at Tet, the country just moves around in big numbers because they're all going home. I can see that there'll be a really big push. That's February. What have we got? October, November, December, January. We've got five months to for Vietnam to--

**[00:30:35] Michael Tatarski:** Yes. Tet's obviously going to be huge. Tet, this year or earlier this year, there were a couple of small flare-ups happening at the time. A lot of people still traveled, but a lot of people actually canceled their trips. If somebody goes two years without being able to do something for Tet, that's going to be a really big deal. Again, I don't mean, even traveling for fun, that's one time of the year that lots of families get together, multiple generations. It's really, really important. Yes, it's like missing Christmas or something like that in the West.

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**[00:31:16] Michael Tatarski:** Yes. Phu Quoc is interesting. You can definitely tell there's something of a regional-- arms race isn't a good phrase but just like tourism competition. Vietnam, Indonesia, everybody is now saying that Thailand has the Phuket Sandbox, which, I don't follow closely, but I believe, has been a bit of a mixed bag in terms of [crosstalk]

**[00:31:36] Kerry Newsome:** It hasn't gone well either. Yes, exactly.

**[00:31:39] Michael Tatarski:** But they all want to try. You see Bali, name a lot as well. I'm sure there are other places that I'm missing. Nobody wants to be last to get something like that off the ground I guess even if it has a pretty minimal impact. Yes.

Obviously, the main reason Phu Quoc was pushed back is because, again, vaccine supply and who knows if they'll be able to get there by November. You could definitely see that being pushed again. I do see it happening again just because there's been so much high-level discussion. Now, there's talk of Khanh Hoa province **[unintelligible 00:32:12]** is also starting to talk about this as well, similar coming in on shutter flights and just staying sequestered at a resort. You mentioned Russia. I guess that does make sense as a market because I think that's a-- probably has a lot of appeals go to the beach for seven days and just sit in one place.

[chuckles] Again, that can certainly be appealing, but a lot of people are also going to be put off by, you know what I mean, I can't leave the resort even to have a meal outside or something like that. Why would I spend, whatever, thousands of dollars [crosstalk]--

**[00:32:46] Kerry Newsome:** And not be able to go to the mainland to see the rest of Vietnam. The rest of Vietnam **[unintelligible 00:32:54]**. Yes.

**[00:32:54] Michael Tatarski:** Yes. Something will definitely happen. I will be curious to see what they do with domestic tourism at the same time. Yes, Phu Quoc-- two of the most powerful domestic tourism real estate companies have huge properties there as you mentioned. I'm sure they're pushing really hard because they have thousands of rooms that have been sitting empty.

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**[00:33:18] Kerry Newsome:** I have a feeling that Hoi An and Danang will also find themselves wanting to trial something because the Old Town is just a ghost town at the moment.

**[00:33:28] Michael Tatarski:** Yes. I like Danang a lot. It's an important, domestic tourism destination, but has really gotten big, I know, with Korean visitors and probably Japanese visitors as well in recent years so that that would make sense for them to want to try something similar as well. If they stick with the resort set up, there's a ton of huge resorts there so that that could work. Again, who's going to want to-- [chuckles] I can see them targeting individual-- [chuckles] I don't know, not to stereotype, but a lot of Koreans go to visit Danang to play golf. If it was like you can stay at their resort and just play golf and that's it. I'm sure a lot of people probably go for that actually. It's the pretty limited economic impact on the broader city that needs to be considered.

**[00:34:19] Kerry Newsome:** Yes. It might be dolly steps in the whole country opening up. It might be these little pockets of experiences that--

**[00:34:33] Michael Tatarski:** I can't really see just your average tourist being able to get on a plane, a normal flight to Vietnam, and then being able to travel as they please until the second half of 2022, maybe later in that time period. Again, we don't even know when people are going to be able to come back just to live here or to do business here. Yes, it's going to be a while I would think.

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**[00:35:02] Kerry Newsome:** You answered my last question, Michael. It was going to be [laughs] when do you think or you feel like Vietnam will be open to-- because I used to spend two or three months a year in Vietnam and in various times during the year. I was there in March. I got out just in time before Australia shut the doors. I haven't been back since 2020. It's very difficult. As you say, it's going to be a serious consideration for highly vaccinated countries to consider coming to a low vaccinated country. Then, Vietnam, will they review their visa requirements? There could be a whole change in just what boxes you've got a tick-

**[00:35:57] Michael Tatarski:** Yes. We don't know what--

**[00:35:58] Kerry Newsome:** -to get in.

**[00:36:00] Michael Tatarski:** Yes. I think the government has said that they're aiming to fully vaccinate 70% of the population by March or April of next year.

**[00:36:11] Kerry Newsome:** That's a big number.

**[00:36:12] Michael Tatarski:** Yes, which is a long ways off. It's a lot of people. There's not really vaccine. There's some vaccine hesitancy. It's not like you have in the US or somewhere like that. I think if they have the supply, they should be able to hit those numbers, but--

**[00:36:26] Kerry Newsome:** It'll be getting to some of them in the rural areas will be the tough, tough ones. Yes.

**[00:36:30] Michael Tatarski:** Yes. I don't think they're going to want anyone from elsewhere moving around the country freely before they at least said that. Of course, our understanding of the virus could change. The new variants could still break out for all we know. A lot can certainly happen. Given that timeline, I can't see any free travel happening until easily the second half of the next year.

**[00:36:59] Kerry Newsome:** Well, that wasn't the best note to finish on.

[laughter]

**[00:37:04] Michael Tatarski:** Yes, unfortunately.

**[00:37:05] Kerry Newsome:** But it might be the reality that we need to face in Vietnam at the moment. I certainly appreciate where you're sitting in the thick of it. When you're just going to be able to open up, take your dogs out and go for a run, it must be wonderful to be able to do that. I just think of all those restaurants and bars and just that the buzz of that city to be closed, just must be an eyesore. I just can't imagine it. I see the photo, just can't imagine it.

**[00:37:37] Michael Tatarski:** Yes. Well, to be honest, I've only seen photos recently. I haven't left my neighborhood in almost three months. I think on Friday or early next week, I'll probably just do a long drive assuming that that is allowed a long drive around the city just to see what it looks like because there's a lot of places I haven't seen in months, which is quite strange to say out loud.

**[00:38:01] Kerry Newsome:** Yes, sure. Look, Michael. I really appreciate you coming on the program and just great to get your insights into how things have been, where we're at and what the future holds for travelers. We do want to come back. It's a great country. There's so much to see and do. I think [crosstalk]-- Yes. We just want it to be a healthy country where it feels safe to do so.

**[00:38:29] Michael Tatarski:** Yes. We're all hoping for that [chuckles] at this stage.

**[00:38:33] Kerry Newsome:** Okay, Michael. Thanks again.

**[00:38:34] Michael Tatarski:** Thank you.

**[00:38:36] Outro:** Thank you for listening. Check out the episode notes for more information.

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