



What About Vietnam – S4- E11- Revisiting Vietnam post Covid – First Impressions

Introduction: [00:00:02] What about Vietnam? A podcast with Kerry Newsome, the series where Kerry talks with travelers about their experiences and adventures. Find out more about Vietnam from the people who have actually been there. What about Vietnam? Whether it's an adventure, exploring the culture and cuisine, shopping or just soaking up the sun, let Kerry and her travelers pave the way for a magical holiday in Vietnam.

Kerry Newsome: [00:00:38] Xin chao and welcome to What About Vietnam? I'm delighted to be recording this show from Vietnam. I'm sitting in Hoi An and I've been one week in the country. Boy, oh, boy. Have things changed! I feel like I'm almost in a little bit of a time warp, as in it feels like about 2016. I just wanted to do this very short episode as a bit of a revisit to help you with your trip planning. With thinking about Vietnam, post-COVID because, you know, there's so much in the media and it's very hard to get a really good fix on what it's like to travel here again. I'm happy to say it's easy. There's just a lot of things that have happened to make it more seamless, certainly in the months since May of this year. So let's start right at the very beginning and we talk about the visa situation. So where it was in 2019, two types of main visas in the sense that there are a list of countries that are visa free and you could go to the website. There's actually a [blog on my What about Vietnam website](#), and you can go there and you'll see the list of countries. So you may fit into that category where you can stay visa free, stay for 15 days. Then there is the opportunity for those countries that are requiring a visa and I'm sitting in Australia, of course, I do have to have a visa. I get up to 30 days with that visa and the fee for that is 25 USD. You should allow about 2 to 3 business days for processing.

Kerry Newsome: [00:02:43] Once you get that letter, which I suggest, you really do need to print that off, take that with your passport and your ticket. It's a very simple

process now to check in. You don't need to or I haven't been asked anywhere during my travels in Vietnam for my status, for vaccination or anything like that. So that's all pretty much put to bed. Nor did I get asked anywhere about my status with travel insurance. Now, even though that wasn't asked, I would still suggest there are still serious numbers of COVID in Vietnam. While it's pretty much the same in Australia, everybody is looking forward and not looking backward. I would still suggest that you check with your travel insurance company to make sure that you have got coverage, which includes anything to do with COVID. Just, to make sure, I'm just the kind of girl that wants to make sure you tick all the boxes. When you're looking to plan your trip and certainly if you're a long haul traveler, you want to have a look now at airlines that are offering you direct flights from Australia. You can fly direct into Ho Chi Minh or Hanoi with Vietnam Airlines, but also you might want to check Bamboo Airways as they are also offering you direct flights.

Kerry Newsome: [00:04:24] So, you know, it's a nice easy eight hour flight. I did a daytime flight, so I left Australia at 10 a.m. and I got into Vietnam at 4:00 in the afternoon, which was just "easy peasy". I think the most staggering difference for me on coming back into Vietnam was getting out of my country and getting into Vietnam, just the absolute contrast. Getting out of Australia there's been lots in the news about staff shortages in the travel industry that certainly seemed reflected in Sydney Airport in Australia. The queues to get through, check in the queues to get through immigration and then the queues to get through security took at least 3 hours. Maybe just check depending on the country that you are departing that things have caught up, they've got the right staff technologies in place and saving time, etc. At least allow your 3 hours to get through the queues because I was marching pretty sprightly to my gate in the end to get there on time. Allowing about three and a half hours to do that and then getting into Vietnam. Similarly there used to be long queues, but I looked over at immigration and there were six or seven people ahead of me in each queue. It was super, super quick and I was just staggered, having left my country with those long queues and then coming into Vietnam where I was kind of thinking I'd be up against the same thing, that just wasn't the case.

Kerry Newsome: [00:06:17] Now when you start to move around the country and you're going into domestic airports, one thing you are really going to notice is a difference in the amount of domestic tourism. That's probably been the most staggering change I've seen. There definitely is a growing upper middle class in Vietnam, a more educated, more business, more enterprising Vietnam. Uh, industry growth! So you're seeing a lot more well-heeled travelers, I guess, travelers that are traveling for specific regions that they've never been to. I was talking to some people the other day, and Vietnam is really opening up in the sense that their own countrymen are wanting to

discover more about their country. I mean, there's some people that have lived all their life in Saigon but never ventured any further than Saigon. Those people are now changing up and going to Dalat or going to Mui Ne or going to the northern regions. It's quite staggering. When you're standing in the queues where, you know, 2019, I'd be standing in a queue with a lot of Westerners standing with me. I'm now standing abreast with a lot of Vietnamese. That was just an observation, I guess I made very, very quickly that there was certainly less of me and much more of them. Now coming into Vietnam, your main ports are going to be one of three.

Kerry Newsome: [00:08:03] Ho Chi Minh City, Danang or Hanoi. For me, it was coming into Ho Chi Minh City. Now, Ho Chi Minh City has been traditionally, for me, a leapfrog city. I would come in and I would just think, oh no, I don't want to be here for too long because of the chaos. It's just the buzz of a city, but it's certainly one for me, traditionally just too busy because I'm here for a holiday. I want to relax. Well, I decided to take a longer period of time in Ho Chi Minh City this time, because I really wanted to experience it. Post-covid, I mean, in 2021, there were some serious lockdowns here in Ho Chi Minh City. I wanted to see what were the signs post that era, what had changed? The last time I'd been there was a lot of construction and there still is. There's definitely been some upgrades and just a few different things that I wanted to share with you that may influence you to maybe stay a little bit longer and discover the city. Some of the things for me that really hit home was the easier way to get around. Now, traditionally walking around and, you know, you've probably also heard that getting around crossing roads and the amount of bikes was really quite difficult and people got quite overwhelmed with it. Well, for me this time I found it quite easy.

Kerry Newsome: [00:09:52] On a lot of the tourist kind of streets, etc. they've made walkways. They've added one way streets. So where there was that crazy mix where people were on bikes and kind of converging and you were trying to walk through those. There's not as many of those anymore. There's a lot more one-way streets. So at least you're only having to look either left or right to cross the road if it's a wide road. That's just one of the things. The other thing is the amount of traffic lights. There's many, many more traffic lights, and I think Vietnamese are getting used to that. That's also helping guide the whole traffic scene and making it easier for us to maneuver the city and get around. Then thirdly, the difference is there's many more cars now. That's both good and bad, certainly. You know, cars have the ability to transport more than one person. If you're in a small group or you've got a family or you'd like to travel together, you know, the four seater, six seater, that car, there's definitely more of those on the road. I'm a bit of a fan of the [GRAB App](#) (Download to your phone) and while you can order a grab car or a grab bike if you're going a longer distance and obviously the weather plays a role in

this as well. You might want to do the car, but if you've got to be there at a specific time, allow more time for the car.

Kerry Newsome: [00:11:41] The car obviously doesn't have quite the same maneuverability as the bike. Just getting around the traffic is going to take longer. Like every country in the world, every city has their peak hours and Ho Chi Minh City is no different. So definitely with a Grab bike and a Grab car, the car will get to you quicker. I was able to because I was going kind of short distances and mainly moving within District one, District two, District five and District three, etc.. I was using the bike and I found the bike very effective, very quick and with the app. The thing I love about the app is that with the cash situation, you are able to know up front how much money it's going to cost. You never at any point or any time had the feeling that you're going to get ripped off or anything like that. You've got easy identification. They can see your name on their app, on their phone, you can see it on the map, and you've got a registration that you can match up. It gives you, I think, another layer of confidence to get around the city and discover it because it's also changing. I found some fascinating places. I really want you to **stay tuned** to Ho Chi Minh City and the show, because I am putting together some interesting tours within that city, and I'll be telling you more about those in the coming months.

Kerry Newsome: [00:13:27] I think Saigon is a city where you're definitely going to get your fix of street food, but then you're going to also experience some fabulous coffee shops on all levels. You can eat good quality food, get great coffee. I don't know whether you follow me on my [Instagram](#), but my new favorite coffee is an iced coke [Vietnamese coconut coffee](#). My God, it is just to die for and certainly on a warm day, it is the perfect refreshment. You're also paying a very small amount for a very luscious drink. Just in these really natty interesting coffee shops and they're everywhere all over Saigon. I think the other thing is dining out has changed. Where before, Ho Chi Minh City in particular, was really just about street food and experiencing the markets and doing that kind of thing. It is now evolving into a very sophisticated city, and it's been doing that just by osmosis, really just organically in the last few years. I got to experience [Tung Restaurant](#), which is the flagship restaurant for Chef Tung. I did an episode on [Fine Dining with Raj Taneja](#), and we hooked up on this trip to go and experience it. Oh, my God, 19 Courses of a Degustation menu - it was just amazing!

Kerry Newsome: [00:15:22] I just don't know whether I'm going to do it justice here in this show, but I'll definitely put a link to it in the [show notes](#). So think about Ho Chi Minh City as an experience that you might want to spend a few more days and discover it from a different angle and from the level. I can confidently say that you can get around more one way straight streets, easy walking paths, or more so than there used to be

anyway. Some of that construction is now converting itself into some really lovely districts, and beautiful bars overlooking the river. I got to have a look at the deck, which is an absolutely gorgeous place. Then there are a couple of others, which I'll let you know in due course. Coming into Danang and now arriving in Hoi An, that's been crazy for me as well because it's quiet, and I feel like I'm in a bit of a time warp here. I was saying to someone this morning, I feel like I'm in 2016 when Vietnam was really wanting to grow its tourism market. The city of Hoi An, in particular being a UNESCO World Heritage site, was really targeted as the city that would bring the foreign tourists to it. At the moment, I'm definitely in the minority, I think Vietnamese and certainly there's a high percentage of Koreans here at the moment. You know, tourism is here, but it's not to the extent that it was when I left in 2019, 2020, actually, just as COVID was hitting. It's still a beautiful city!

Kerry Newsome: [00:17:33] It's got that lovely Thu Bon river, the lanterns are still there, and beautiful cafes. They're starting to open up again, the shops, etc. My beautiful tailor, she's back working. She hadn't been working for two years, and it's just remarkable how they've survived and how well they've survived just attitudinally. How beautiful and how gracious they are about welcoming everybody back. It's just fabulous to be back and experience the Vietnam that I love! I'm going to keep this episode pretty short because I'm going to be moving on to some other places in Vietnam during my stay. I want to try and cram in as much as I can in my 30 day visa and have as much as I can to share with you as I go. The show notes will include as much as I can and have been covered in today's show. Bear with me! I've got a fantastic episode coming up next on Art in Vietnam and we're going to focus on that in Hanoi. So stay tuned for that and always feel like you can go to the website, search for a subject, search for a destination, and if I haven't got it, I haven't covered, please reach out to me directly at whataboutvietnam@gmail.com.

Thanks for staying with me. Stay tuned for more stories and more shows on the What About Vietnam podcast?

Outtro: [00:19:21] Thank you for listening. Check out the episode notes for more information. Love What about Vietnam? Don't forget to subscribe, write and review and stay tuned for more fun adventures in Vietnam.

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