



What About Vietnam - S3-24- Phu Quoc – An unbelievably scenic island paradise

Kerry Newsome: 00:01

Xin Chào and welcome to "[What About Vietnam](#)". I'm very excited because we're now going to be talking on this show in the present tense of being able to travel to Vietnam. Yes, I'm talking to you as of the 22nd of March. And we are just over a week into the country opening up to general tourism, I put a special document together for you to go to on my website: just hop on the website, go to this [link](#). And it'll give you all the details that you need to know to understand just what the process is to enter the country. Some countries are exempt, and some are non-exempt. And pretty much the country's entry processes have gone back to really as they were prior to COVID, mainly.

00:58

Obviously, there's a few items that need to be ticked in the sense of:

- Having a PCR test 72 hours prior to your flight.
- Or a rapid antigen test 24 hours.

And as long as they're negative, then you can enter the country with no quarantine required, you just need to monitor it for 10 days and download the app. So that's pretty much the basics of it. But I would hop on to get that guide. It's a PDF so you can print it off. And just make sure if you do need to get an E-visa that you go to the [Vietnam's official site](#) for Visa Applications -, which I've listed for you.

01:41

Now, today, I'm excited also, because we're going to be talking about an island, which I'm not sure everybody kind of associates with Vietnam, but it is part of Vietnam. And that's the island of Phu Quoc. It is a very short plane ride from Ho Chi Minh City, in fact, only 45 minutes flight. And it actually is located in the Gulf of Thailand. So, in fact, it's really closer to Cambodia than it is to Vietnam. It's a beautiful island very well known for its beaches, for its beautiful corals and the opportunity to snorkel and etcetera, as far as activities are concerned, and it's also got some beautiful resorts that have come up in the last few years.

02:33

My guest today is Patricia Marques, and Patricia, I managed to catch just a week ago, before she was embarking on a trip to Phu Quoc, it's one of her favorite places to escape. She's got a very demanding job. She's the general manager for Starbucks in Vietnam. And she's been in that role for the last 10 years. So, when she does manage to get away, this is the place that she will jump on a plane and go to as her R&R vacation.

03:07

So, we've got lots to cover in the show she's going to share with you some of the things to watch out for. There's an absolute myriad of things to do or not do, as you choose. She's a seasoned traveler. So, she's got really good comparisons to know, just what to look out for and what's good to focus on. And we just got a lot to share. And I think you're going to love it.

And I'm hoping this is helpful for people both in Vietnam, and for people who are planning their trip, and maybe want to consider coming into Ho Chi Minh and just slipping across to Phu Quoc as a couple of days in R&R for possibly a long-haul flight home. Please welcome Patricia to the program as we talk about Phu Quoc.

04:03

Good morning, Patricia. How are you?

Patricia Marques: 04:06

Good morning, Kerry. Doing great.

Kerry Newsome: 04:09

That's terrific. Patricia, I think today we're going to get to explore one of your favorite destinations, if I may be so bold to say. It's definitely a beach destination, which I know is something that you're very keen on, and there's lots to explore in Vietnam of that nature. But we're going to focus on Phu Quoc, and I'm delighted to talk to you today because I know that you've just visited there. So, for my listeners, this is going to be super-duper up to date. So, I am talking to you, and it is the 17th of March 2022. The borders have just opened, so it couldn't be a better time to be talking Interview about this island. So firstly, tell us a little bit about why you love Phu Quoc so much, maybe over other beach destinations. So, talk to us a little bit about your love of Phu Quoc.

Patricia Marques: 05:18

Sure, you are exactly right. I just came back from Phu Quoc on Sunday. And after a very nice two and a half days of a very short, but well-deserved holiday. We were working very hard like everybody and very excited about the reopening of Vietnam. So yes, I think it's a perfect timing.

1. The reason I love Phu Quoc, probably more than other places, other beaches in Vietnam, is how simple it is, fast, and the number of options I have in this island. So, it is 45 minutes away from Ho Chi Minh City, it is a super-fast flight, you have plenty of choices at what time of the day you want to fly. So that's my biggest, my first reason, probably because I just sneak out of my office, go to the airport, jump into a plane and get there. Super simple.
2. The second reason, as I said, because you have plenty of options. It is a well, good sized island, where the North is very different from the South, and so is the East from the West. So, you have different opportunities.
3. And the third reason is because of the ocean itself. It's a wonderful white sand beach.

Kerry Newsome: 07:16

And it's interesting to talk about the position of the island and obviously when you see those sunsets and sunrises, etc., because the island actually lies off the coast of Cambodia, in the Gulf of Thailand. So, I guess getting your head around, just where the island is in relation to Vietnam because it's actually closer to Cambodia than it is to Vietnam.

And it's a very small island, from what I understand, it's kind of made up of separate pieces, I think there's something like about 28 pieces of land. And it's roughly about 600 square kilometers. So, for a very small compact island as you say. 45 minutes in an aeroplane to get there. I think the other thing I liked about it was that the airport to your resort or wherever you're going is a very short drive. So, it's not kind of complex, getting out of the plane to the resort that's all very quick. So, I agree with you, I think that handy aspect, that if you're coming into Ho Chi Minh, in and you're looking for somewhere to either begin your travel or end travel in a very relaxing way, it's got a lot to offer. So, on that aspect, it does have a lot to offer. What are some of the to-do's that you would put up there as "must-dos?"

Patricia Marques: 08:51

Let me clarify that the hotel where I usually go, I choose that because of convenience. It is 7 kilometers distance from the airport and makes it super easy to land on a Friday afternoon and get back on a Sunday evening. However, there are an enormous array of choices for hotels and resorts. So let me answer your question about different choices. If you go north-east of the island, there are a couple of big resorts known to accommodate families.

They have recreational parks and a lot of activities for children, which makes it the best destination for families. If you go north-west of the island, that will probably take you a little bit over an hour on a taxi. You can visit a very large national park. Very interesting, very jungle-like, because, of course, of the weather that the island offers. There are other locations on the west side, meaning if you were in the west side of Phu Quoc, you would be looking at the ocean. And further. It will be Vietnam on the southern tip of your eyes and Cambodia right in front of you, to your point of how close it is to Cambodia. As a matter of fact, there are ferries to Cambodia. So, you can take a ferry and go to Cambodia.

Kerry Newsome: 11:01

Is that a long trip too on that ferry? Do you know?

Patricia Marques: 11:04

Yes, yes, it is five and a half hours something. Just because of where the port is. So, the port is located in the little bit south-west of the island. So convenient wise, if there was a port on the north-western side of the island, it would probably be a four-hour trip to Cambodia. There are two ports on the west side of the island. That makes it interesting to visit. There is also a factory where they produce fish sauce is very famous. Fish sauce, pepper and pearls come from Phu Quoc, and there are different tours to visit all of those. To visit the fish sauce factory, you have to really be willing to visit because it's a very smelly place.

Kerry Newsome: 12:17

I've been, yes.

Patricia Marques: 12:19

Yes. And then if you go towards the southern tip of the island, you will encounter small islands in the very bottom south of the island. Very interesting. And for those who visit the islands for diving purposes, this is the best location for that.

Kerry Newsome: 12:45

Okay, so that's in the South because I know I've been talking to some people around some of the watersports in Phu Quoc, and yes, definitely diving and snorkeling and I think there's some nice boating trips, where they take you out for lunch for the day and things like that. The water looks absolutely beautiful.

Patricia Marques: 13:07

Yes, there are plenty of those four- or five-hour tours that take you on a boat for snorkeling after, that makes it very interesting.

Kerry Newsome: 13:21

Also note, you are mentioning the National Park. I understand that is very interesting as it features lots of like hiking trails and things like that. So, I think for the adventure traveler who's looking for some exercise, but then a lie on the beach later in the afternoon. That's definitely the go-to place for that. And I understand that there's also some waterfalls up in park or area, Suối. S U O I--

Patricia Marques: 13:54

Suối Tranh.

Kerry Newsome: 13:56

Suối Tranh? Yes, that has a waterfall, I believe. Is that nice?

Patricia Marques: 14:02

Yes, I actually have been there taking some friends. It's a nice hike to get to the waterfalls and is located not far away from the airport. So, if you plan your trip, to do some stops, it can make it very convenient to do those and then head to the airport. So, it's very easy to enjoy a weekend in Phu Quoc. Those are very highlights of why I particularly choose to Phu Quoc. When I want to get away from the hustle and bustle of Ho Chi Minh.

Kerry Newsome: 14:45

I think the one thing I did note, when I went in, and I went back in like 2018. So, a while back and at that point in time. It was undergoing a lot of construction. So, there were cranes, and heaps of trucks and just a lot going on at that time. So, I wasn't particularly drawn to it at that point, because it just looked kind of a bit messy. And the other thing that struck me was I couldn't get a fix on the township side of it. Can you talk to us a little bit-- Vietnam is very well known for their towns and their markets, and things like that, but I couldn't get it-- I kind of didn't know where it started, or where it finished? Or is there really a township? What's your thoughts on that?

Patricia Marques: 15:46

Yes, there is one. It is actually just north of where I stay. I stay in Long Beach. So Long Beach would be straight east from the airport. And it runs probably around 12 to 15 kilometers on the eastern side of the island, that piece of Phu Quoc is called Long Beach. And it ends in the town, in what we call Downtown Phu Quoc, if we might use very freely, that title of downtown. There is a small township where you will see the typical night market. You can head there for fresh seafood. At the very similar style than any night market food, night market of Vietnam or Southeast Asia for that matter, very similar.

Kerry Newsome: 17:05

Do most people choose to go to these restaurants in the downtown area, or do they tend to move amongst resorts and try the resorts restaurants? Because one thing I got out of Phu Quoc from recent investigation was that there are some amazing five-star resorts that feature kind of signature restaurants and there's some Chefs moving into these areas as well, that are highly skilled. And so, I wasn't kind of sure, that's why I was glad to talk to you. Because:

- Would you go to downtown?
- Would you choose a particular restaurant, you might want to mention one if there is one or two there?
- Would you eat in your resort? Because it's just convenient. And it's just lovely, and you're overlooking the water?
- Or you might go to another resort? Because you've heard of that restaurant all that way.

Patricia Marques: 18:06

That's an interesting question. I don't want to steer anybody away from visiting the night market, perhaps once, but there are no restaurants in that area, there are more like stalls, that get together for the market service.

Kerry Newsome: 18:25

So, it's street food.

Patricia Marques: 18:26

Yes, very much, street food. The seafood is alive. So, you can see like in Thailand, like many places in Southeast Asia, you can choose what you want to eat, and you know it's fresh.

However, two things will probably steer me away from doing that often. One is you might be staying in the northern tip of the island or in the south. And then it would be very inconvenient to head there only for a dinner, because you would be in a car or on a motorbike for over an hour perhaps. And it's not worth it. You have so much, with regards to food choices that I wouldn't recommend anybody to go out of their way just to visit. You're absolutely right. Not only the hotels have amazing restaurants and many choices, but most likely outside your resort, you will find street food that is readily available within walking distance from your resort.

Kerry Newsome: 19:48

Yes, and that's exactly what I got from my last investigation because, why would you go all that way. And the most ideal transport, I'm told, is a bike. And you might not choose to want to do that, or you're in a group and things like that, it's a bit harder to manage. So then if you're getting a taxi, it's an hour there and not that the taxis are expensive. But I just think for the effort when most everything you will want is at your doorstep of your resort or a walk along the beach not far from, because the resort is in some areas go back-to-back along the beach. So, I just thought that was an important point to note for everyone.

Because people when they're trying to think about things, they'll think of it in a logical sense, and think they'll go to downtown to a restaurant where, in this situation in Phu Quoc, it is not possibly the most ideal, yet, you probably should go and have a sticky beak once, depending on the length of your stay. For me, the most interesting was a couple of day activities I did, which was going to the pepper farms. And I came away with pepper. In fact, I've only just run out, so I really want to go back. But the pepper is amazing. As they have various mixes of it. They put it in chocolate. It's truly amazing. And I believe that as an exporter of pepper, Phu Quoc is quite famous.

Patricia Marques: 21:37

Yes. And the plantations are very interesting. Aren't they? Very unique. The way pepper grows, and people don't necessarily know and why would they know? And they probably never been in a pepper plantation. But it's really beautiful. I agree. And that tour is very sought-after. Because of weather they have pepper year around.

Kerry Newsome: 22:09

Yes. And I had a guest on my show, jumping from pepper back to fish sauce. She's a foodie, and she runs her own chef programs. And she's just so into Vietnamese cooking. And she was saying that the fish sauce from Phu Quoc is the premium fish sauce apparently. So, she was taking bottles of that away God, you wouldn't want that to break in your luggage? Would you- on your way home? So, in talking about your average stay on the island now, as you said; for a weekend, for two, it's ideal. Do you think that is the best amount of stay, two-three nights? Or should you allow more time?

Patricia Marques: 22:58

I think it depends on what kind of traveler you are. If you're a solo or a couple, I think three days, two nights is probably perfect. And you don't have to go out of your way to make it longer. However, if you're with children, then you're probably have to go to the northern tip or the southern, where you have several hotels or resorts that cater to them. And that'll probably be worth staying a couple more days.

Kerry Newsome: 23:38

Absolutely. And we can't not talk about [Vinpearl Amusement Park](#). as a "wonderland" it's been referred to as Disneyland almost. So, for children for a family, you can definitely chew up a couple of days just going through that location.

Another question I wanted to pose to you is just value for money. Do you think it is good value for money? Do you think the hotel stays; nights are well priced? Its food, alcohol, that kind of thing? Can you talk about that?

Patricia Marques: 24:18

Sure. I consider it to be very, very reasonable. Once again, I'm going to go back to state how many choices you have. There's really an abundance of choices. Whether you go you're decide which part of the island you're going to visit. I am sure you can go from a five-star hotel all the way to renting a little studio or a one-bedroom Airbnb and be very close to the beach or close to the national park or the waterfalls. It depends on what is your liking, but I certainly consider it to be very reasonable. Considering the choices, you have, the choices in food, how fresh everything comes. I also wanted to add to one of your questions that, in my last couple of trips, I've noticed that there is an abundance of activity happening in front of the beaches. So, if you were to just come out of your beachfront hotel, and walk north or south on the beach site, you will run into little cute bars and barbecue, little stalls. So, you can literally have different experiences while not venturing far from your hotel.

Kerry Newsome: 25:58

And that I think, is ideal. I think that's perfect. And to me that's getting very stylized to Nha Trang, where you really- you're not wearing shoes, you're walking on the sand and you just keep walking and then all of a sudden, pop up! there is some locals that have put something together there that you can eat or whatever. And the food's always delicious and fresh. And yeah, that's sort of kind of where I was leading to where you don't necessarily have to go to downtown. For me, there wasn't a lot there. I've been to night markets. And I didn't really, I bought some pepper, more pepper there. But you know, it didn't really- wasn't a draw card for me. Can we just let everyone know about the weather? Now it's March now. So, you went just last weekend. So, do you have some like. "best times" of the year that you choose to home in and say,

"I really want to go those times, because they're the best", and you try and sneak your weekend there.

Patricia Marques: 27:06

So, Vietnam in general has- the southern part of Vietnam has the very hot weather, very hot and humid the rainy season. Phu Quoc is similar, and until April, you can be sure that you will have nice long hours of sun without being interrupted by scattered storms or rain.

However, in probably April, if the weather continues the way it's supposed to be, April, May, you will start with a rainy season, all the way to October, November. It doesn't mean that you don't have the opportunity to enjoy the beaches. The rain in Vietnam is different than in other countries of Southeast Asia, we don't have continuous rain. It rains every day, maybe a couple of hours. But we don't have days of rain. So, your holiday will not be ruined by one of those, unless there is a specific storm coming.

But I wouldn't doubt going to Phu Quoc any month of the year, considering that during some months you will encounter rain.

Kerry Newsome: 28:43

And I think that's a reality check for everyone. I think you're right. I think sometimes, you will choose not to go to a place because you think, it's going to ruin your whole stay. But it usually, means you can stand in a restaurant, you see the rain coming down, you finish your coffee and it's all over. So, you can get those kind of flash downpours and then you can go on your merry way. Just another question Patricia, I wanted to add, which I think is relevant to is, you're an attractive woman traveling, possibly solo on this trip, what's the safety aspect for people moving around the island? Do people have to be really on their guard or how did you find it? I'll share with you how it was for me.

Patricia Marques: 29:41

I have never encountered a problem. Literally never. Probably, because I'm here for such a long time. Pretty comfortable and I know my way around. So, I know where to venture and

where probably not to. However, you mentioned before how much construction was going on when you visited in 2018. Which means, of course, that there is a large number of new developments that have happened recently, and some are done beautifully. Others probably encroaching a little bit too much on the water side- on the seaside. But this promotes, of course, people relocating to the island, there some permanent residents, much more than 10 years ago, definitely. So, it has changed. However, I have not been in a situation where I would say, I felt threatened or I was robbed, or no.

Kerry Newsome: 31:09

Yes, and that was my experience as well, I had to go through quite a few hotel inspections to have a look at some various properties and obviously go out and have some certain experiences, so that I could say that I've been there and, could speak to it with some attention to detail. So, you're right, I found the staff very helpful, the guidance, very helpful, the tour was very knowledgeable. So, I can only imagine that has improved, although there has been some talk in hospitality industry circles, that it's been hard to find the manpower back into Phu Quoc, and to ramp things up, because as you would be aware, Phu Quoc was the island that Vietnam designated, it would open up as a sandbox entry to Vietnam for foreigners back last year. And I think that maybe helped it expand and grow and increase the manpower to meet new tourism. But I just wondered, what was your experience with staff and the quality of service, just the care factor, I guess.

Patricia Marques: 32:32

Sure. I happen to think that has improved throughout the years, my first visits to Phu Quoc, 11 years ago, I can say that it was very basic, and catered probably to a very basic tourism in general. Things have improved, and you still have those choices. Not all hotels, for example, have TVs, or they actually cater to a more natural and more organic traveler. But nowadays, there is an abundance of good choices. 3, 4, 5-star hotels, you don't have to be the most expensive. And I think that maybe because of that demand and the number of hotels, hotel owners and operators do take very good care of their people. Because there is enormous competition. So, you actually see, and you can talk to them. And they will be very chatty and share with you that-- kids in my hotel have been there for three, four years. And they would not go because they were very well taken care of during the pandemic, for example, when most lost their jobs, I think Phu Quoc was very smart in keeping them. I understand many hotels gave them room in-board. So, they felt safe and protected. So those hotels are now reaping the benefits of loyal employees.

Kerry Newsome: 34:36

That's really great to hear Patricia because you're right. I think there was a lot of confidence lost in the industry with hospitality where many people were laid off because, if you can imagine pre the pandemic, I think Vietnam was receiving over 18 million tourists to the country. Where- it's been less than 3 million over the last two years. So just one last thing I wanted to talk about was, the dogs. Can you talk-- I'm not going to say anything else, I'll let you talk about the dogs.

Patricia Marques: 35:19

Yeah, there is the famous Phu Quoc breed that is originally from Phu Quoc, and very sought-after. I love dogs, and I happen to have a couple of friends that own Phu Quoc dogs. It's a beautiful animal. It's supposed to be a big guardian. It is a guard dog, and it can be threatening just to look at them. But they're beautiful.

Kerry Newsome: 35:56

I also love dogs, but I found the quantity of them and their unique physique, having the ridged back. So, it's kind of a distended spine almost, that runs down the middle of their back. So, you're right, they can look quite fierce and intimidating, but as you say, with their owners, and with the people, they can act as a little bit of a guard dog, but you'll find them roaming around

and they are treated with great respect. So, it was just something I wanted to mention. I can remember saying to my boss on the trip, I said,

"Gosh, where are all the dogs coming from? And how unusual are they?"

And so that was just kind of a story I thought was worth mentioning. Any things we should really watch out for? Do, OR not do?

Patricia Marques: 37:00

Maybe consider that, because it's an island. Most of the ingredients are seaworthy, you will be eating lots of fish and seafood. So, to those that do not consume seafood or fish, I guess my recommendation would be to steer towards the four- and five-star hotels, that they probably have an assortment of other dishes. Definitely, what you will see and find in street food will be seafood base. The fruit is wonderful in general, and Vietnam has plenty of fruits and vegetables, and they are delicious, fresh, they might not look as pretty as other countries, where they probably cater more to the visual. But the fruit and vegetables in Vietnam are absolutely delicious.

Kerry Newsome: 38:13

Yeah, and I've never tasted fruit like it is in Vietnam, you can actually taste the flavor. I feel like in my country, the supermarkets and the fruit stalls, etc. Here, you can have a tomato, or you can have another piece of fruit and you're struggling to get flavor out of it, it's just got so many chemicals on it. So, I think people will love the fresh fruit. And I think you're right, I think five-star hotels would offer more variety and probably more Western food options. If you're traveling with a family. And they don't like this, but guess what, they do chips, so as long as they do chips, we are all good.

Patricia Marques: 38:59

They do chips and they do pasta everywhere, so, kids are safe.

Kerry Newsome: 39:05

Exactly. Okay. Patricia, thank you so much for coming on. I was glad I caught you just at the right time just before your trip and your photos look fantastic. So, I'll make sure that I share those on the website. And hopefully I look forward to maybe catching up with you later in the year at Starbucks.

Patricia Marques: 39:28

I hope so Kerry, I look forward to everybody coming back to Vietnam. We certainly miss all that hustle and bustle that the tourists bring, and I hope everybody enjoys beautiful Phu Quoc and wonderful Vietnam.

Kerry Newsome: 39:50

Thanks a lot.

Patricia Marques: 39:51

Thank you.