

## **Washington Post and Industry commentary**

### **July 2020 Travel update - Coronavirus and tourists Experts predict 11 ways the pandemic will change travel**

Unfortunately , unlike many of history's great tragedies, the coronavirus pandemic never stunned us with one catastrophic event. Instead, the deadly problem quietly snaked its way around the world, devastating millions as it grew into a global health crisis.

Travel agent Max Najar, director and manager of travel agency Axis Travel Center in Australia , who carries a wealth of experience from over four decades running a successful travel agency stated recently “ You can expect the worldwide travel industry to shrink in how many advisors are out there and I think there will be a new focus on consumers dealing with qualified and experienced travel agents who know the industry mechanics and can sift through these challenges” , adding “.....the good travel agents in Australia are using their expertise and experience ,linking with agency trusted industry contacts to help clients out of this complex Corona Virus phase , as many clients are finding out that they are being confused by many conditions , or not interpreting rules correctly or wasting time , with much drama , dealing with Airlines or other suppliers direct .....”

Our realities shifted slowly at first, and before we knew it, the coronavirus took over completely. As we closed borders, cancelled events and self-quarantined at home on a mass scale, the travel industry, as well as most other sectors, began to nosedive. The collective effort to save lives meant economic catastrophe for an industry that profits from people leaving their houses.

- The wound inflicted by the pandemic on the travel industry is deep, and it hasn't stopped bleeding yet.
- The complexities, or knowing the exact timing, to postpone or cancel travel components, or more importantly, understanding conditions and fees and then how best to cancel or resurrect travel arrangements has become painfully evident as being critically important.
- There needs to be more emphasis on dealing with a trusted travel advisor from a travel agency and not to rely on unstable variables like unclear Airline websites or overseas call centers or Cruise and hotel staff who want to hold onto their jobs rather than focus on a travelers overall needs .
- Well established travelers should consider- in the future , the acceptance of usually unbiased advice from a travel agent , giving deeper consideration to well-advised travel options , with suitable travel insurance protections to make sure the travel deal booked was the best to suit specific needs and not aimed at the cheapest "advertised" deals.

#### International travel: Fewer travellers could mean more expensive travel

While it can feel like airlines charge passengers for everything from choosing a seat to checking a bag, in reality, deregulation lowered the cost per mile for flying, making international travel more accessible than ever before.

But some worry that the impact of the pandemic on airlines may translate to less travellers flying abroad, and, as a result, will make other parts of international travel more expensive.

"If the airlines can only put half as many people on the plane, it's going to cost a whole double," says Rick Steves, the Washington-state-based European travel expert known for his guidebook series, public television and radio shows, and travel company that takes more than 30,000 people to Europe in a typical year. "I can afford it, but many travellers cannot. Then travel becomes an activity just for wealthy people."

Steves is confident those beloved aspects of going abroad will make a return after the pandemic subsides.

**"You go to an Irish pub to sit next to a stranger and drink beer. You go to France to have your cheeks kissed," he said. "I think that's going to come back, but it's gonna be a while."**

**Cruises: Buffets out, temperature checks in when ships return to sea**

Two big questions have been swirling around the cruise industry since operators halted sailings in mid-March: When will ships take passengers back to sea? And what will cruising look like in the future?

While the world's largest companies have not shared comprehensive details yet on what cruisers should expect, some things are clear: Cruise ships will not return to the sea all at once. When they do, they probably will not be as packed as they were in pre-coronavirus days. Temperature screenings, while incapable of catching asymptomatic travellers, will probably become the norm. The old-fashioned, dish-it-yourself buffet is expected to become a relic. Construction of new ships will almost certainly be delayed, and itineraries could be tweaked for a while.

"I think in the beginning, we are likely to see more focus on shorter cruises and on going to places where we can do more to control the environment," says Fain, the Royal Caribbean Cruises CEO.

Carnival Cruise Line and Norwegian Cruise Line have both said they intend to start sailing with a small portion of their fleets.

**"Our goal is to preserve the traditional elements of the cruise experience - the great value, the multiple destinations visited, the wide array of dining, entertainment offerings - modified as necessary as to the many changes we are becoming accustomed to in our daily lives," Norwegian Cruise Line Holdings chief executive Frank Del Rio said during a recent call with analysts.**

What is meant by "modified as necessary" isn't clear across the board, at least from the world's largest operators. Norwegian Cruise Line said recently that it would replace existing filters with what it called "medical-grade air filters" and institute touchless temperature checks, buffets with servers, reduced capacity, staggered embarkation times and enhanced cleaning, among other changes.

The Centres for Disease Control and Prevention has said cruise line plans must include temperature checks, medical screenings, testing for the coronavirus and social distancing protocols.

Several smaller lines - some of which are planning to sail again as soon as late June - provide a glimpse at what passengers could expect. Temperature checks will be mandatory, self-service buffets will be suspended, capacity on tour buses will be limited during shore excursions, and public surfaces will be sanitised more frequently.

Still unclear: How many people will be eager to set sail again, given the global toll of the virus and the high-profile outbreaks on ships. But cruise executives say they are optimistic based on bookings for 2021.

A simple dilemma noted by Najjar ".....is it be feasible that Cruise ships could be the safest vessel to travel in, as it is a closed space, with social distancing possible within segregated areas and if they maintain the highest sanitary, cleanliness and hygiene levels, with mandatory client procedures- they may be able to contain it better than busy shopping centres, airports and long-haul flights ?"

**Attractions: Expect fewer crowds and experiences at tourist magnets**

For now, travel may look different in a number of ways. People can expect to explore a world of face masks, physical distancing, closed businesses and two-week quarantines.

But what changes can travellers expect in both the short- and long-term? We spoke with experts to get their best predictions on an uncertain future.

**Theme parks, museums and iconic landmarks are known for drawing a crowd. But as they reopen and look to the future, those crowds are expected to be much smaller - and more controlled.**

**The scene: mandatory temperature checks; visitors and crew in masks; rides, lines and seats spaced to allow for social distancing; and characters that interact from afar, if at all.**

"In preparing to reopen during this unusual time, we have to manage our theme parks in a very different way from what we've known before," the Walt Disney Co said in a statement announcing plans for a phased reopening of its Florida parks starting July 11.

- At its Disney Springs shopping complex in central Florida, which started to reopen in May, Star Wars Stormtroopers keep watch from a balcony and issue warnings to visitors about wearing masks and staying distanced.
- SeaWorld Orlando said it would modify some animal interactions, one of the park's signature offerings. Universal Orlando Resort announced it would move to virtual lines for some attractions. Disney is doing away with fireworks shows and parades for now. Museums, too, are trying to envision a future where visitors will feel safe. The Smithsonian museums and the National Zoo in Washington, which drew more than 22 million visits last year, have not announced reopening dates, but plans call for only a few to open at first.

**Capacity will be limited, and there may be more staff on hand to keep people appropriately distanced from each other. Face masks for everyone and cleaning throughout the day are also expected.**

In Paris, the Louvre - which has struggled with overcrowding - will require all visitors to book a time slot

#### **Airlines: Airlines will have to balance safety and profits**

Unlike many travel companies, airlines have continued to operate throughout the pandemic, although at drastically reduced numbers. Practices they have adopted over the past few months are likely to shape the future of flying, though some are certainly short-term fixes.

Blocking off some seats on planes or limiting the number of tickets sold, for example, is unlikely to be the status quo as more people start to fly. Such measures aren't even guaranteed today across the board.

"You're going to definitely have to sit next to a stranger again, I'm afraid, on a plane," JetBlue chief executive Robin Hayes said during a Washington Post Live discussion last month. "Because [of] the economics of our industry, most airlines have a break-even load factor of 75 to 80 per cent, so clearly capping flights at 55 to 60 per cent, which is what we're doing right now through July 6, is not sustainable."

- **He said he believes airlines will need to make it easier in the future for travellers to change their flights - a decision that, before the pandemic, came with hefty fees at most carriers.**
- **"Because it's not ever really going to be acceptable, I don't think, for someone who is unwell to feel that they're being made to fly," he said.**

**Airlines are already requiring passengers and employees to wear masks, cutting food and beverage service during flights, and increasing how often they clean. Some have started asking travellers to fill out health questionnaires and checking passengers' temperatures, but there is a broader push to have federal authorities take over those checks.**

The International Civil Aviation Organisation, a UN agency, put out guidance recently that includes many of the changes already underway. But it also says that airlines should restrict access to lavatories and encourage passengers to only carry on luggage that fit under their seats.

Airports are also making changes, and the pandemic could force an overhaul of the way passengers move through the facilities, said Ty Osbaugh, the aviation leader at architecture firm Gensler.

**He said he would not be surprised to see significantly more biometric screening and touchless elements within the next six to eight months. He envisioned a system that could scan his face, direct him to a TSA lane and use biometrics to let him buy anything in the airport without taking his wallet out.**

"If I could go from curb to gate without physically touching anything, it kind of solves some of the pandemic issues," he said. "I think there's a lot of people who would prefer to do that."

#### **Domestic travel: Wary travellers will stay closer to home**

Before anyone starts hopping on long flights or jetting around the world, experts believe they will first start venturing out closer to home.

To create consistency across travel companies in the United States, the association released a set of guidelines last month that called for revamping public spaces to allow for physical distancing, installing barriers, moving toward touchless technology and stepping up sanitation.

"Part of re-opening and recovery means that destinations, attractions, hotels, airlines, etc. will need to demonstrate to potential visitors that they are doing everything they can to minimise the risk as they travel to and once they are in the destination by following best practices," Amir Eylon, the chief executive of tourism-focused consultancy Longwoods International, said in an email. "They will also need to demonstrate to the local residents, who may be wary, that they are asking visitors to 'play by the rules.'"

**Najar remarked about the new era of flight changes that are happening already in Australia " Airline flights can change at any time with new Airline equipment and loading changes stained by our state border protocols changing regularly which can affect ongoing transfers, car rentals, tour, cruise and hotel bookings, so surely a one-contact point, like a professional travel agent is a great contact to have as they are legally obliged to amend all flights and ongoing travel arrangements to merge together. Worth every cent !"**

#### **Home Sharing: Relocation will increase demand for home rentals**

"A lot of people have gotten comfortable that they don't have to squeeze a nine-day vacation into six. They can take the extra days and maybe work a couple half-days remotely," said vacation-rental company Vrbo president Jeff Hurst. "I do think we're going to start to see people be more creative on how they think about working from any house, as opposed to just their own house, or any destination as opposed [to] from just their office."

Another major change in the vacation rental market since the pandemic began has been an overhaul of cleaning protocols. Once upon a time, the cleanliness star rating on an Airbnb review was just another detail travellers checked before booking a vacation rental. Then coronavirus redefined the importance of cleanliness. **" Can Airbnb truly consistently trust owners and departing guests to truly abide by any unlicensed and voluntary , hygiene protocols whereas registered Hotels are required to do so by law ? It is a bit late "after the horse" has bolted and you get the Virus isn't it !!" stated Najar.**

Companies such as Airbnb and Vrbo created new cleaning procedures for hosts to follow in the pandemic. These enhanced sanitation steps were designed to not only keep travellers safe, but also to reassure them that it's OK to travel again. And unlike emergency cancellation policies put into place during the pandemic, some experts believe this new emphasis on sanitation will extend into the future.

"Covid-19 has heightened consumer awareness around cleanliness, which is why we released our cleanliness guidelines to educate vacation homeowners, property managers and travellers about how vacation rentals should be cleaned and disinfected," Hurst said. "As long as travellers are finding the information provided by our partners helpful, there's no reason for it to go away."

#### **Private: Interest in private travel is here to stay**

**The pandemic has created a greater demand for experiences away from crowds. Until a coronavirus vaccine is found, that preference for private travel will probably continue.**

Dow, of the US Travel Association, predicts the pandemic will renew interest in the Great American Road Trip, with a particular focus on the outdoors, where travellers are less likely to face crowds.

"Being able to bypass the traditional airport experience is a big piece of that," said Belles.

**Private jet company Sentient Jet has seen a spike of new customers during the pandemic. The company is bouncing back stronger than most travel brands, reporting almost 80 per cent of the business they had projected before the global crisis happened.**

"A lot of that is being fuelled by personal travel," said Andrew Collins, chief executive and president of Sentient Jet. And Collins believes the new leisure travel customers that have been drawn to private aviation will stay. "I passionately think that aviation has changed forever," he says.

**Restaurants: Small restaurants and bars may be decimated for good**

**Many independently owned restaurants and bars, hallmarks of having a local experience while travelling, will not be able to restart at all.** Investment bank UBS predicted in April that up to one in five restaurants in the United States may close permanently.

"I think the really fine dining restaurants will remain as is, the sort of middle ground of restaurants will shrink, and the fast-casual places like Shake Shack will stay afloat," said Kat Odell, a food and travel writer and author who eats at about 400 to 500 restaurants per year.

"The food that we do, we learned very quickly on the first day, is not very translatable to takeout," Hsing said. Dialogue has just 18 seats and serves an 18-to 22-course tasting menu by James Beard award-winning chef Dave Beran.

Hsing's brainstorming expanded beyond her own restaurants' needs to those in the community. She helped form the Independent Hospitality Coalition, a resource to support California's hospitality industry including representing the industry to local and state governments.

How tourism rebounds will also play a role in restaurants' recovery, particularly in cities such as New York and Los Angeles that rely on patronage from travellers as well as locals. Will the independent restaurant landscape remain vibrant, or become dominated by the chains that could afford to weather this storm?

"We will suffer greatly without the traffic from tourism," Amor y Amargo's Teague said. "Both in revenue flow as well as what it means to the space to have a mix of people in our house together enjoying what we offer."

**Hotels: Cleaning and contact-free technology will be top priorities**

Hotels are elevating a couple of key amenities these days: cleanliness and health-consciousness. That means the things that might have mattered before - restaurants, pools, gyms, bars, make-your-own-waffle stations - are taking a back seat.

**At the same time, experts say hotels have a difficult balancing act to pull off: While prioritising health and safety, they still need to make visitors feel comfortable and at home.**

"The challenge will be how do we make sure we're not conveying reminders of the virus," said Kate Walsh, the dean of Cornell University's School of Hotel Administration. "We want to convey that this is a sanitised and healthy place, but we don't want it to feel so clinical like you're entering a hospital."

- **Guests should expect to see more frequent cleaning, transparent shields, abundant hand sanitisers, reminders about distancing and lobbies reconfigured to create more space. They should also expect to interact with fewer workers as hotels encourage people to check in online and use their phones as room keys.**

"The use of technology to reduce direct contact with guests, lobby population and front desk queue is encouraged, where feasible," guidelines from the American Hotel & Lodging Association state. "In addition, contactless payment processes are encouraged, and when not available, employees should minimise contact as much as possible."

The association also recommends that housekeepers should not enter rooms during a stay unless they are asked to do so or get approval from guests. All that separation could make it difficult for hotels to deliver the welcoming atmosphere they promise.

- "We're distancing the staff from the guest, and the heart of hospitality is conveying warmth and being taken care of," Walsh said. "How do you do that in a distanced way?"
- She said she expects to see hotels adapt to the times by using outdoor space more creatively, removing loose items such as menus, minibar goods and pens from rooms, and either making workout equipment available in guest rooms or letting guests reserve private gym time. Room service will be of the knock-and-drop variety, while restaurants - which will need to abide by local and state capacity guidelines - are expected to offer more takeaways.

Frank Lavey, the senior vice president of global operations for Hyatt, said in an email that the company is listening to guests and loyalty members to get a sense of what matters most to them when they return. "Health and safety is a top priority, but there is also the need for connection, culture and new experiences," he said. "As the world begins to reopen, we are readying ourselves to help people do what they're longing to do - get back on the road to explore new places, feel the excitement of reconnecting with those they miss, destress and re-energize - once again experience the joy of travel, and do so safely."

#### **Loyalty: Programs will introduce new, temporary perks**

**When the pandemic struck, frequent travellers wondered what would happen to their loyalty program standings. The complicated system of miles, rewards programs, points and statuses relies on people travelling and spending money using travel credit cards. But with most people not travelling, does the system crumble? According to loyalty program experts, that answer is no.**

"Loyalty programs are huge cost centres for airlines and hotels," said Brian Kelly, the founder and chief executive of the Points Guy, a site that offers advice on those types of perks.

Airlines and hotels generate billions of dollars in revenue from selling miles and points to credit card companies. Some worry that because the status of travel is in limbo, travel perks won't be as powerful of an incentive for consumers to join and use branded travel credit cards. But that shouldn't be a major issue.

"They're trying to figure out ways to still get people to care about the miles, especially if they're not flying," said Rene de Lambert, founder of the travel blog, RenesPoints.

Kelly and Lambert say travel brands are sustaining consumer interest by offering new incentives, like

#### **Events: Large gatherings will creep back with caution - if at all**

**Travelling for the express purpose of interacting with other people - dozens, hundreds or even thousands - is especially fraught now. It's still not clear what conferences, trade shows, political and fan conventions, concerts and festivals will look like in the coming months and years, if they happen at all.**

Julius Solaris, the editor of EventMB, which focuses on business meetings and events, said the first of such gatherings will probably be geared toward local audiences in large cities, rather than events that draw national and international crowds.

Those early meetings, he said, should be shorter - a single day rather than several, with sessions that last no longer than 30 minutes. Solaris said attendance will need to be slashed so there's enough room to keep people distanced in meeting rooms. Those conditions could make traditional events too costly to put on .

**Festivals and outdoor events still face huge challenges as many states have limits on how many people can gather, as well as rules about social distancing. Events such as city art festivals, parades and community runs would be too difficult or pointless to operate under such rules.**

He wondered how it would be possible to do temperature checks along a parade route, or make sure that everyone watching stayed six feet apart.

"We don't have the answers to that," Schmader said. "We're all going through a master's class we didn't ask to sign up for."

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