LESSONS LEARNT DURING COVID-19

The lessons learnt so far
and how these can be used
to prepare for future crises.

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LESSONS LEARNT

The lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures put in place to manage the spread of the virus are many. This crisis has already revealed strengths and weaknesses in our ways of working and showed just how well people can come together for the greater good. Here, we look at the lessons learnt so far and how these can be used to prepare for future crises.

WTTC has always advocated for collaboration, co-ordination and partnerships; with its **research on crisis readiness** highlighting that these are key factors in effective crisis management and recovery. While the lessons on these three factors may not be new, there are certain aspects which are specific to the COVID-19 crisis, and thus included among the other lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic.

1 COLLABORATION & CO-ORDINATION ARE INTEGRAL TO CRISIS MANAGEMENT

As decision-makers tried to contain the spread of COVID-19 they looked inward, to their own countries, to make decisions that would ultimately affect those within and outside of their borders. Unlike in previous crises, the policies that were implemented during COVID-19 led to the closure of international borders and risked an overly nationalised approach to crisis management that hinders global co-operation. The rise in isolationist policies and rapid knee-jerk reactions, hampered collaboration and co-ordination both in the initial efforts to repatriate citizens of other countries, and the broader re-opening of borders to support international mobility. As countries integrate learnings and build their resilience for future crises, the importance of global collaboration versus the risk of isolationism should be weighted and considered. Indeed, enhanced collaboration, across borders and between the public and private sectors, would have facilitated swift and effective crisis management responses.

In the European Union in 2020, countries sought to re-open for the summer tourism period to take advantage of a historically lucrative season. However, as travellers attempted to plan and book their European holidays, varying entry requirements and haphazard border closures made this difficult ahead of and throughout the summer season. Testing and quarantine requirements varied in each country and these measures were often implemented arbitrarily and without much notice. The EU provides an ideal forum to collaborate and co-ordinate on matters including border openings, testing requirements, quarantine measures and effective crisis management responses to maximise the benefits of tourism for all its members.

Preparing for the Future

As the sector looks to enhance its collaboration and coordination for future crises, the following lessons should be integrated in preparedness planning:

- Focus on risk-based approaches and avoid knee-jerk reactions.

- Collaborate and co-ordinate with as many related stakeholders as possible to the benefit of the people impacted by the crisis.

- Take a holistic view of the crisis and regularly update crisis response measures as information and situations change.

- Where possible, co-ordinate communication with relevant stakeholders, including neighbouring countries if applicable, to provide a better and more holistic crisis response.

2 PARTNERSHIPS ARE KEY

Partnerships have always been key to crisis management and recovery, however, the COVID-19 crisis further highlighted the necessity of partnering with the Travel & Tourism public and private sector when defining crisis management responses. The most effective partnerships look holistically at crisis management and include all relevant and influential voices from the public sector, the private sector, and the local community. Indeed, during COVID-19, having the tourism minister be part of the national crisis committee enabled a deeper prioritisation of the sector and often a swifter recovery. What's more, in the wake of a health crisis, partnerships with health and sanitisation experts can expedite the implementation of effective prevention measures.

The G20, under the leadership and presidency of Saudi Arabia in 2020, hosted the first-ever public-private tourism meeting to discuss and plan for the recovery of 100 million jobs. Such public-private efforts are key to recovery. Indeed, the UK Minister of Tourism, Nigel Huddleston, credits partnerships between the public and private sector and an easy flow of information between the two as being hugely beneficial to the UK government's decision-making process in the crisis. He said: "that co-operation between private sector and government has been really important because that real-time data flow has helped inform decision-making." This includes the government's decision to extend fiscal measures, such as the 15% VAT cut, for businesses in the sector. From a private sector perspective, Hilton partnered with RB, the Lysol and Dettol manufacturer, and the Mayo Clinic in as early as April 2020 to enhance its high standards of cleanliness and provide further health and hygiene training for staff. ▶

Preparing for the Future

As the sector looks to build stronger partnerships for future crises, the following lessons should be integrated in preparedness planning:

• Build partnerships and relationships with key stakeholders before a crisis occurs.

• Include all relevant government ministries and/or departments in crisis management decision-making. Include multiple government ministries if necessary.

• Nurture relationships with trust and common goals.

• Engage in regular communication that is open and helpful for all participants.

• Ensure every relevant stakeholder is actively involved in these partnerships and conversations to facilitate a holistic crisis response when it is needed.

• Where possible, leverage international relationships to share information and find common solutions.

3 FOCUS ON HUMANITY

There comes a time in crisis when "business as usual" does not work anymore. In a crisis that affects people, it is important to focus on the human element and offer support in any way possible. A health crisis has an immense impact on people who may, themselves, be infected or have loved ones who are. Fear over the threat and an increased level of risk can cause panic, underlining the need to come together to react with a human-centric approach.

The Travel & Tourism sector, which is all about people, stepped up when it was needed. For example, when there was a need for further accommodation for people sick with COVID-19, Madrid's IFEMA event space was one of many large venues that offered facilities for emergency hospitals; IFEMA transformed its many exhibition halls into Spain's largest field hospital. We also saw hotels offering their spaces as accommodation for key workers, sometimes even exclusively. This type of innovation and flexibility is important in a time of crisis and enables a response to human needs.

Preparing for the Future

As the sector focuses on people and humanity within a crisis, the following lessons should be integrated in preparedness planning:

• In crisis preparation, predefine possible emergency locations and roles of staff.

• While flexibility and quick thinking are useful, and indeed crucial in a crisis, preparing these types of moves ahead of time can save lives.

• Consider how best to make the crisis response about people and those most affected. Investigate ways to rally together to the benefit of all.

• It is critical for governments to coordinate, before a crisis, to determine how to allow ease of movement if repatriations are needed when borders are closed.

4 GOVERNMENT SUPPORT IS FUNDAMENTAL TO CRISIS MANAGEMENT & RECOVERY

Government support measures have been fundamental to crisis management as many businesses lost their ability to earn income. Besides the fiscal and other financial assistance for businesses, governments stepped up to provide necessary support for their citizens and residents. These measures have included wage schemes, tax breaks or deferrals, pay-outs and even skills programmes. Continued government support will remain critical as the sector moves towards recovery.

While many restrictions have hindered international travel, incentive schemes to stimulate domestic demand have aided the sector and supported local businesses as they attempted to stay afloat. In some countries, such as Iceland and Hong Kong, the governments issued vouchers to stimulate domestic travel while in others, such as Argentina and Thailand, governments subsidised travel spend or offered future discounts in exchange for current spend. Many governments also committed to promotional campaigns to market the destination when it is safe to do so.

Preparing for the Future

Supportive governmental policies have played a critical role in crisis management and recovery. As the sector looks to the future, the following lessons should be integrated in preparedness planning:

- Create crisis preparedness plans that include financial support for the most severely affected sectors.
- Collaborate with the private sector to determine what kind of assistance would be needed in different crisis scenarios and design the most effective policies for companies large and small.
- Understanding the effect of crises on Travel & Tourism, address how governments can enable the sector's future resilience.

5 FLEXIBLE SYSTEMS TEND TO BE MORE RESILIENT

Even businesses with the most robust crisis management procedures could not have prepared for the unique challenges caused by COVID-19 and its containment measures. However, some businesses had flexibility built into their operational structure which allowed them to pivot their business models and innovate to continue operations. Flexible systems allow for ways to create or strengthen alternate income streams and equip employees with additional skills whenever needed. This flexibility during COVID-19 is what enabled several Travel & Tourism businesses to stay afloat and to help their employees find new positions. For some businesses, these changes are temporary and for others they may be more permanent.

Uber pivoted its already diverse business offering by creating alternative earning opportunities such as grocery deliveries for users and a tailored recruitment portal where drivers can use their Uber Achievements Summary as a reference in job applications. Uber also provides additional protection, including financial assistance, for drivers who catch COVID-19 or must quarantine. In the USA in 2021, Uber is offering free rides to vaccination sites. Airlines like Virgin Atlantic and EasyJet in the UK redeployed their cabin crews to help the National Health Service (NHS), adding much-needed capacity to help manage the effects of COVID-19. With the lockdown, crews were at home or on furlough and unable to fly. Cabin crew are already skilled in CPR, among other emergency health measures; with some additional training, the crews were able to work on the front lines to aid the pandemic response.

Preparing for the Future

As the sector manages COVID-19 through agility, flexibility and resilience, the following lessons should be integrated in preparedness planning:

- Offer regular training for staff that can be scaled up or down as needed. ▶

- Foster a culture of flexibility and willingness to adapt to changing circumstances.

- Define a business strategy that involves regular skills assessments and appropriate training or recruitment to meet new and emerging needs.

- Consider how the business can transform in a crisis and how people can adapt in response to that.

6 BUILDING TRUST WITH ALL STAKEHOLDERS IS AN ONGOING ACTIVITY

Trust is an integral part of business longevity. Consumers need to have confidence in the businesses and brands they purchase from, and employees need to trust their employers. It is also an important factor for political regimes that need the conviction of their constituents to maintain their position and implement policies.

During COVID-19, businesses needed to be transparent about what was happening financially to help employees prepare for an uncertain future. Travel & Tourism businesses helped build and maintain trust with employees and the broader community by proving they could be trusted to provide vital aid to community members in times of need. During the first lockdown, IHG in London, among other hotels, worked with the government to provide temporary accommodation for the homeless.

Similarly, governments needed to be honest with citizens and residents about which virus management strategies would be implemented, as well as being open with the global community about infection rates, deaths and how quickly the virus was spreading. For example, the government of Ireland shared a roadmap on its website with detailed information on what measures would be in place during the various levels of restrictions. The website is updated regularly.

In the past year, media coverage of the pandemic included sensationalised headlines designed to stoke fear and panic in exchange for clicks and views. While dramatic headlines are the norm, and in many cases drive the media cycle, a time of crisis is not the norm. The public and private sector and media publications should work more closely with one another to share accurate information and actionable steps.

Preparing for the Future

As the sector further builds trust and creates a culture of openness and transparency, the following lessons should be integrated in preparedness planning:

- Foster a culture of transparency to build trust with employees and constituents.

- The private sector should think imaginatively about trust building and utilise appropriate opportunities to support communities, wherever possible.

- Share clear, accurate information timeously and consistently.

- Make the information easy to understand.

- Use the most effective tools to communicate important information, in real time where possible.

- Foster good relationships with local government and nurture relationships built on trust.

- The public & private sectors should enhance their partnerships with media outlets to help share balanced and truthful reporting of the crisis and avoid sensationalism.

- Governments should continue to build strong relationships of co-operation with neighbouring countries and others in the region.

7 HEALTH & HYGIENE ARE THE NEW NORMAL

The COVID-19 pandemic revolutionised how the world approaches health and hygiene. Some measures, such as additional sanitisation, are now expected and not an optional extra. However, measures like mask wearing and distancing will likely depend on individuals and their level of comfort. Socio-economic status and culture will also affect how many of these measures will remain in the long term. In the same way that global security changed in the wake of the September 11 attacks in the United States, health and hygiene has been changed permanently by this pandemic. The shift in health & hygiene will be key in building resilience to help mitigate the impact of future health crises.

Asia-Pacific was the fastest growing region in 2019 with 5.5% growth in Travel & Tourism GDP. A 2020 Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) report on the impact of COVID-19 health and hygiene measures on destination competitiveness found that many consumers in Asia-Pacific are prioritising health-related factors as key to their destination selection process. It reports that "compared to trips taken before COVID-19, clear health and safety precautions (72.8%) are more important now than price (36.8%), location (46.3%) or exclusive offers (34.8%) when selecting an accommodation." What is more, consumers in the region are concerned about the availability of hand sanitiser for staff and guests in public areas at their chosen accommodation.

Preparing for the Future

With health and hygiene front and centre, the following lessons should be considered in preparedness planning:

- Prepare to maintain new health & hygiene measures far into the future and adopt them as the new norm.
- Remain attuned to shifting public expectations and developments in virus management measures.
- Plan how to scale measures up or down as required by target groups.
- Include employee safety when making decisions about health and hygiene measures.

8 THE EXTENSIVE IMPACT OF TRAVEL & TOURISM

Travel & Tourism has always been an integral part of any economy, and no crisis demonstrated this better than COVID-19. Governments increasingly realised that Travel & Tourism must be given a seat at the table to ensure a full and swift recovery. Indeed, governments have witnessed how tourism affects more than just jobs in the sector; it affects people's livelihoods, community development, the environment, wildlife, and the overall economy. In more developed countries it became clearer just how precious freedom of movement is to our changing and globalised world, with people missing weddings and funerals and losing ease of access to essential cargo.

With women accounting around 50% of the sector's employment worldwide and small to medium-sized businesses accounting for 80% of the sector, Travel & Tourism has an important role to play in community upliftment. Inequality continues to grow on a global and local scale and the divide between developed and developing countries is becoming more and more clear through the lens of the vaccine roll out. While certain regions do depend more on tourism than others, the sector's impact on the global economy is noteworthy. In 2020, Travel & Tourism contributed US$ 4,671 billion to global GDP, down from US$ 9,170 billion in 2019. We can and should work together to ensure that countries and regions that most need tourists can get them back.

Preparing for the Future

Given the importance of Travel & Tourism, a holistic approach to the sector's management and crisis response is key. Looking ahead, the following lessons should be integrated in preparedness planning:

- Consider how to invest in infrastructure and experiences for residents, who are permanent customers.
- Create targeted support plans for marginalised and minority groups that are often the first and most impacted by crises.
- Prioritise Travel & Tourism in policy planning to ensure it maintains the same status as other key sectors.

9 SUSTAINABILITY IS OUR COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

Focus on sustainability and the natural environment has grown as the world witnessed smog disappearing over major cities and wildlife returning to formerly dense spaces. It reminded the global community and created a newfound consumer consciousness that we are all connected, and the future of our planet is our collective responsibility. The world's recovery, and specifically that of Travel & Tourism, needs to be both sustainable and inclusive. It is essential to help and include marginalised and vulnerable groups in recovery efforts, whilst focusing on environmental conservation to help the planet thrive. The new normal that is being created must provide for both people and planet, requiring a holistic and collective approach to sustainability.

The Paris Agreement, Climate Neutral Now and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, among others, show there is dedication to a more sustainable future. There is an opportunity to accelerate the movement toward these targets and commitments in how Travel & Tourism recovers.

Preparing for the Future

COVID-19 led to an enhanced focus on sustainability that should not be ignored. Looking ahead, the following lessons should be integrated in preparedness planning to ensure the sector's sustainable future:

- Continue to work together, as a global community, to address climate change and the environmental crisis.
- Include sustainability in all recovery initiatives to ensure a recovery that supports both people and planet.
- Keep sustainability at the core of all future planning.

10 MENTAL HEALTH IS VITAL TO A HEALTHY AND PROSPEROUS LIFE

Public understanding of the value of mental health escalated immensely during the pandemic as more people felt the detrimental effects of declining mental wellbeing. "Available evidence indicates that self-reported mental health and wellbeing worsened during the first national lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic," reports Public Health England. It also highlights an IFS study that found average mental distress was 8.1% higher in April 2020 than it was between 2017 and 2019.

Businesses, governments, and individuals now have a better understanding that good mental health is vital to leading a healthy life and, in response, have prioritised it and are investing in it. With this understanding came a reassessment of life and priorities with some choosing to relocate from dense cities to other areas. A 2021 Airbnb survey with Americans found that 41% of respondents said, "connecting with family and friends in person, will be much more important after the pandemic". People value mental health and human connections, and the lack of travel has highlighted just how much. What is more, this crisis highlighted the sector's ability to connect people and contribute to good mental wellbeing and, in turn, a healthy and prosperous life.

Preparing for the Future

With mental wellbeing front and centre, the sector will need to integrate the following lessons to become even more inclusive going forward:

- Champion mental health in the workplace.
- Make mental health awareness and support part of the organisational culture.
- Implement systems where employees and their managers can report declining mental health and access support.

11 HOME IS NOT ALWAYS A "SAFE SPACE"

For some, the orders to stay home exacerbated an already dangerous situation. Indeed, while the home is typically thought of as a "safe space", it is the exact opposite for victims of domestic abuse. "Globally, even before the COVID-19 pandemic began, 1 in 3 women experienced physical or sexual violence mostly by an intimate partner," reports UN Women. In some countries, during COVID-19, resources were redirected away from support centres to aid in the pandemic response, leaving victims of domestic abuse with little opportunities to access help.

Virtually, homes were also less secure as they did not have the cyber security most offices have. With increased time at home and online, predators had easier access to potential victims, including children. A 2009 UN report found that, worldwide "almost 20% of all trafficking victims are children" and that "most exploitation takes place close to home." A 2020 report, also by the UN, highlighted the role of technology. "The internet helps traffickers to operate in multiple locations simultaneously while physically exploiting the victims in just one location," it reports.

Preparing for the Future

While the world's attention focused on crisis management and recovery, domestic abuse and human trafficking remained. Looking ahead, the sector should consider the following lessons as it plans for its sustainable and inclusive growth:

- Make your home as safe as possible by protecting it from both physical and cyber attacks.
- Help each other in times of crisis; if you suspect someone you know is a victim of abuse, contact local care centres to find out how best to assist them.
- Invest in cyber security for the home and consider security and child safety filters to block access to certain sites.
- For businesses, offer support or access to support for any employees that may need a safe space away from home.
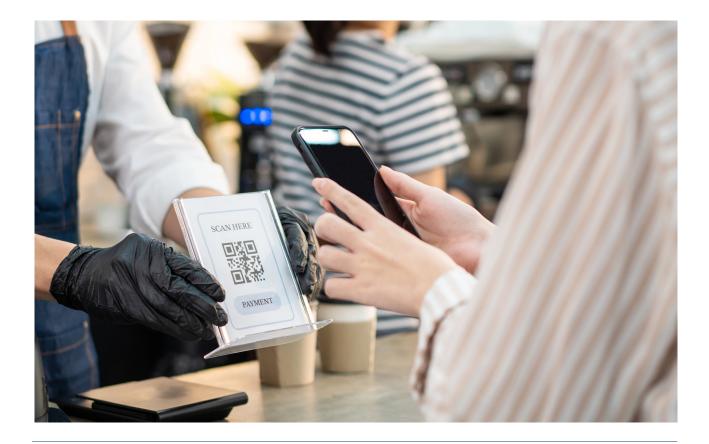
12 LARGE-SCALE DIGITAL ADOPTION IS POSSIBLE

Acceleration of digitisation has been a prominent feature of this crisis however, it will not replace the need for human interaction. Effective remote working was made possible through existing and new digital solutions and formerly adverse demographics have embraced more digital solutions. This large-scale digital adoption enabled the Travel & Tourism sector to accelerate a move to a safer and more seamless traveller journey. From the EU introducing a Digital COVID Certificate to hotels offering contactless check-ins, digital has changed the global landscape. Additionally, the move to remote work has inspired a cultural shift, with a survey in April 2020 showing that 30% of respondents were using video conferencing for the first time, and 69% suggested that they expected to continue using it post-pandemic. Furthermore, the adoption of web conferencing, using tools such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams, rose nearly 85% between January and April of 2020, and this was not just limited to younger generations, suggesting a broader shift. With this shift comes a responsibility to ensure we do not further the inequality divide so that no person, business, or destination is left behind. We should ensure workplaces remain accessible and continue to explore broad possibilities for accessibility.

The forced shift to digitisation also highlighted how much we value in-person human interaction. Human interaction has not lost its value and digitisation has the capacity to enrich human experiences.

Preparing for the Future

Given the acceleration of digitisation, the following lessons should be considered as businesses and governments look to the future:

- Implement digital technologies that make sense for the business and its consumers.

- Assess the value of a hybrid model and constantly review how this model can be modified to suit employee and customer needs.

- Consider how digital solutions can enrich human experiences instead of replacing them. Leverage the benefits of digitisation to meet health and safety needs.

CONCLUSION

Crisis preparedness is vital to crisis management and recovery as it provides the time needed to find risk-based solutions and create appropriate emergency plans. Trust-based partnerships, built before a crisis, are also key to successful crisis management and recovery. Human connections remain important and, as much as possible, crisis response measures should take a people-centric approach and help those most in need. People's desire to travel remains and was further strengthened by the various lockdowns and inability to see loved ones, with the pandemic ultimately highlighting the value of the Travel & Tourism sector to the global economy. As the sector recovers, it is important to learn from this crisis so it can be more resilient in the future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The World Travel & Tourism Council is the global authority on the economic and social contribution of Travel & Tourism.

WTTC promotes sustainable growth for the Travel & Tourism sector, working with governments and international institutions to create jobs, to drive exports and to generate prosperity. Council Members are the Chairs, Presidents and Chief Executives of the world's leading private sector Travel & Tourism businesses.

Together with Oxford Economics, WTTC produces annual research that shows Travel & Tourism to be one of the world's largest sectors, supporting 334 million jobs and generating 10.4% of global GDP in 2019. Comprehensive reports quantify, compare and forecast the economic impact of Travel & Tourism on 185 economies around the world. In addition to individual country fact sheets, and fuller country reports, WTTC produces a world report highlighting global trends and 25 further reports that focus on regions, sub-regions and economic and geographic groups.

For further information, please visit:
WTTC.org/COVID-19

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