



### Message from the Chairman

The global pandemic brought the entire world to a complete standstill. The Tourism Industry is facing unprecedented times with the outbreak of COVID-19 as it has imposed a massive burden on the industry. It has disturbed the industry's ecosystem unlike prior recessions that includes the 1991 savings and loan crisis, the dot-com bust aggravated by the 9/11 attack, or the financial crisis of 2008. The crisis triggered in the tourism economy due to the pandemic has left the industry immensely shocked like no other event in history before.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has estimated international tourism to decline by 60% in 2020. This impact could further worsen to 80% if the recovery from the pandemic is delayed until December. COVID-19 has placed 100 to 120 million direct tourism jobs at risk and paradoxically, potential repercussions and alternative solutions are yet volatile.

World travel has been banned to a great extent and airplanes have been grounded with the introduction of travel restrictions in almost all worldwide destinations. This has resulted in several airlines collapsing in many countries including the US and UK. Given the aforesaid, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) experts predict that the recovery of international demand will only rise in 2021 due to the unprecedented emergencies that have risen in global health, socially and economically. As per the OECD, the International Tourism within specific geographic-regions such as the European Union is expected to rebound first. However, the UNWTO experts predict that the domestic demand would recover faster than international demand worldwide.

Given the intensified uncertainty that has been caused in the sector, accurate and reliable information is of utmost importance in managing and mitigating the impact on the tourists and travel. Respective destinations could closely collaborate and cooperate with the World Health Organization (WHO) to acquire precise information as it is the lead agency for managing this outbreak. This will enable the destinations to properly implement the recommended health protocols and standards in such a way that will minimize the unnecessary impact on the industry.

Since, tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing industries globally; it is expected to play a significant role in regaining the socio-economic stability after Covid-19 pandemic. Tourism as an industry has proven resilience in the past. The industry could sustain its survival by adapting to the circumstance and converting the threats into opportunities. The Governments should also closely work with institutions to lift travel restrictions and to introduce safe travel. The businesses should also receive support and relief from their respective governments for liquidity.

With the new health protocols, even when the tourism supply chain starts functioning again the businesses could only operate within a limited capacity. Improvements to the demand in tourism will be prolonged as it will be directly impacted by traveller confidence.

Destinations should prepare tourism recovery plans to rebuild businesses by incorporating innovation and digitization. Fostering a culture and practices across the sector that encourages safety will definitely boost traveller confidence, which in result stimulate demand. Ensuring the safety of the guests and the staff should be the priority of the hospitality industry stakeholders. The Industry should look into adopting strategic tools such as flexi services that would help to attract potential customers. Offering flexible prices, cancellation policies, and flexi-work environment; would be beneficial in achieving long term sustainability of the hospitality industry.

As Saadia Zahidi, the Managing Director at the World Economic Forum, has stated "We are now presented with a unique opportunity to use this crisis to do things differently and build back better economies that are more sustainable, resilient and inclusive". We should go back to the drawing board and rewrite the next phase of our existence. The upcoming generation has to read about how we fought this pandemic with or without vaccines in order to overcome similar situations during their times."

My best wishes

Mr. Anura Lokuhetty  
Chairman, Asian Tourism Council



## Off the eaten trail: The growth of gastronomy tourism in Japan

By Claire Williamson



*Eat, drink and be merry: Arigato Japan Food Tours offers unique culinary experiences in five different areas across Japan. | CREATIVE COLLECTIVE*

**N**oodle Stand Tokyo's Golden Wagyu Ramen is not for the faint of heart.

It's presented in a shallow black bowl, easily big enough for two people. The custom-made noodles are completely buried under a whopping 300 grams of A5-grade wagyu — 200 grams of thinly sliced, rare Saga beef, 100 grams of Miyazaki beef *sukiyaki* — a jammy Okukuji egg from Hitachi Farm; sauteed asparagus; *honkatsuo* ("true dried" skipjack tuna flakes); truffle oil; and, as if that wasn't "extra" enough, flakes of gold leaf, which quiver gently in the heat of the wagyu tail broth. To the side, there's a spoon heaped with foie gras, *kabosu* citrus and a wooden *masu* box of fermented chili paste add-ins.

Offered exclusively via reservation through ByFood, a platform that offers food experiences to tourists across Japan, this extravagant bowl of ramen costs ¥12,000.

Seeking to develop a unique tourism experience in Tokyo, Serkan Toso, the founder of ByFood, came up with the idea of creating an expensive ramen in partnership with YouTuber Sonny Side, the personality behind the "Best Ever Food Review Show." The resulting video, which was released last November, compares ramen at three different price points, culminating with the Golden Wagyu Ramen developed by Noodle Stand representative and 22-year industry veteran Takeshi Nishimaki.

"First, I thought it would be good to have a ramen that embodied Japan," Nishimaki says. "So I made representative ingredients the focal point. Lots of ramen uses pork ... so I wanted to use wagyu, and made that my jumping-off point." The video has over 3 million views since it debuted and according to Nishimaki, Noodle Stand's sales have since increased about twofold.

"Although it's expensive, people don't mind because it's a once-in-a-lifetime experience," Toso says.



*Noodle Stand's 'Golden Wagyu Ramen' is topped with, among other luxuries, 300 grams of wagyu. One bowl costs ¥12,000. | RYUSEI TAKAHASHI*

“It becomes a reason to come to Japan.”

ByFood is intentionally capitalizing on an increasingly important motivation behind Japan’s growing inbound tourist numbers: food. According to a survey conducted by the Japan Tourism Agency (JTA) in 2018, 70.5 percent of tourists listed “eat Japanese food” as something they “wanted to do before (they come to) Japan”; 27.9 percent said it was the thing they “wanted to do most.”



*Tasting the best of Japan: Arigato Japan Food Tours participants hold up colorful, seafood-laden temaki (sushi hand roll).  
| CREATIVE COLLECTIVE*

Gastronomy tourism — visiting an area primarily to sample its local cuisine, and using food as a lens to explore a culture — has a surprisingly long history in Japan. Entire regions, if not individual towns, are known for their culinary *meibutsu* (literally “famous item”), while tourist-focused books about restaurants have been published since the Edo Period (1603-1868). Still, according to the World Tourism Organization’s “Second Global Report on Gastronomy Tourism,” it remains an underutilized resource in Japan, representing “a potentially major economic driver for regional communities.”

Lauren Shannon, the general manager at Arigato Japan Food Tours, which offers food tours and culinary experiences across five major Japanese cities, agrees. “Domestically, food is a natural connection to tourism, it’s very granular,” she says. “There’s a dawning revelation, slow to come, that it’s something to adapt for inbound (tourists).”

The Japanese government also recognizes the need to create sustainable regional development in its quest to become a “tourism-oriented country” by 2030. In 2016, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) began the Savor Japan program, which has since certified 21 areas with notable culinary history and experiences such as *heshiko* (fermented mackerel) from Obama, Fukui Prefecture, and *tenobe*

*sōmen* (hand-pulled noodles) from Shimabara, Nagasaki Prefecture. The government also consults with food tourism companies for other initiatives like the Eat! Meet! Japan! contest, which “(aims) to increase food expenses of tourists around Japan.”

Arigato Japan has also begun to partner with regional Japanese governments. “(Food tours) bridge the gap to showcase areas they have that are great, but also the things they might overlook as *futsū* (normal),” Shannon says. “We see a lot of potential if people invest in it.”

Mentioning that about 85 percent of tourists only visit the “golden triangle” of Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka, Toso says, “We aim to make interesting food experiences in local areas to attract tourists. Although we are promoting regional areas,” he continues, “we need to get people to those areas and to get people to (branch out to) local places, we need to increase repeat tourists.”

Across the board, customer demographics for such food tours skew English speaking and middle-class. Customers mainly come from the United States, Australia, Europe and Britain; most are couples or friends in their mid-30s who are willing to pay for experiences with more



*The road less eaten: ByFood founder Serkan Toso wants to get tourists to experience areas of Japan outside the 'golden triangle' of Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka.  
| RYUSEI TAKAHASHI*

communication and interaction with locals. At Arigato Japan, 90 percent of customers are first-time visitors to Japan, though Shannon does note the company has seen an uptick in repeat customers, which opens the door to expansion beyond Japan’s usual tourist destinations.

“We’re always trying to expand our knowledge about Japanese cuisine,” Shannon says. “(But) it’s a two-way street. If local communities are interested, they shouldn’t be shy about reaching out to tourism companies.”

*Japan Times*



# UNWTO Launches A Call For Action For Tourism's Covid-19 Mitigation And Recovery

*The UNWTO has released a set of recommendations calling for urgent and strong support to help the global tourism sector not only recover from the unprecedented challenge of COVID-19 but to 'grow back better'. The Recommendations are the first output of the Global Tourism Crisis Committee, established by UNWTO with high-level representatives from across the tourism sector and from within the wider United Nations system.*

Recognizing that tourism and transport has been among the hardest hit of all sectors, the Recommendations are designed to support governments, the private sector and the international community in navigating the unparalleled social and economic emergency that is COVID-19.

"These specific recommendations give countries a check-list of possible measures to help our sector sustain the jobs and support the companies at risk at this very moment. Mitigating the impact on employment and liquidity, protecting the most vulnerable and preparing for recovery, must be our key priorities," said UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili.

Recognising the diverse realities in each country as well as the evolving nature of this crisis, the document will continue to be updated.

## Preparing for recovery now

"We still do not know what the full impact of COVID-19 will be on global tourism. However, we must support the sector now while we prepare for it to come back stronger and more sustainable. Recovery plans and programmes for tourism will translate into jobs and economic growth," added the Secretary-General.

The Recommendations for Action are the first comprehensive set of actions governments and private sector actors can take now and in the challenging months ahead. Mr Pololikashvili stressed that "for tourism to fulfil its potential to help societies and whole countries recover from this crisis, our response needs to be quick, consistent, united and ambitious".

## Responding today and preparing for tomorrow

In all, this new guide provides 23 actionable recommendations, divided into three key areas:

- **Managing the Crisis and Mitigating the Impact:** Key recommendations relate to retaining jobs, supporting self-employed workers, ensuring liquidity, promoting skills development and reviewing taxes, charges and regulations relating to travel and tourism. The Recommendations are made as a global economic recession looks likely. Given its labor-intensive nature, tourism will be hard hit, with millions of jobs at risk, especially those held by women and youth as well as marginalised groups.
- **Providing Stimulus and Accelerating Recovery:** This set of Recommendations emphasises the importance of providing financial stimulus, including favourable tax policies, lifting travel restrictions as soon as the health emergency allows for it, promoting visa facilitation, boosting marketing and consumer confidence, in order to accelerate recovery. The Recommendations also call for tourism to be placed at the centre of national recovery policies and action plans.
- **Preparing for Tomorrow:** Emphasising tourism's unique ability to lead local and



**UNWTO**  
World Tourism Organization

national growth, the Recommendations call for greater emphasis to be placed on the sector's contribution to the Sustainable Development Agenda and to build resilience learning from the lessons of the current crisis. The Recommendations call on governments and private sector actors to become build preparedness plans, and to use this opportunity to transition to the circular economy.

*crisis and to build the foundations for future resilience and sustainable growth. The Committee comprises representatives of UNWTO's Member States and Affiliate Members, alongside the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), and the International Maritime Organization (IMO). The private sector is represented by Airports Council International (ACI), Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), International Air Transport Association (IATA) and World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) to ensure a coordinated and effective response.*

#### *About the Global Tourism Crisis Committee*

*UNWTO formed the Global Tourism Crisis Committee to guide the sector as it responds to the COVID-19*

*The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) News Release*

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## **Tapping the Muslim tourism market**

*Although Taiwan has much to offer Muslim visitors, those who wish to pray in mosques and observe Islamic dietary laws are often out of luck*

*By Steven Crook*



*Muslim tourists from Singapore interact with public art in Kaohsiung.*

*Photo courtesy of Have Halal, Will Travel*

**T**aiwan's tourism industry, it's fair to say, has pretty much conquered the Japanese market. Every year since 2014, Taiwan has been the no. 1 overseas destination for Japanese travelers. While

Chinese tourists have the money and inclination to come in droves, they lack the freedom to go wherever they want. If Taiwan is to attract more visitors from nearby

countries, Southeast Asia is thus an obvious region to focus on.

For decades, Southeast Asians with Chinese ancestry have been coming to Taiwan to study and do business. However, reaching beyond the Chinese diaspora is complicated by religion. Islam is the majority faith in Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei — yet visitors to Taiwan who wish to pray in mosques and observe Islamic dietary laws are often out of luck.

Just nine of Taiwan’s 15,000-plus registered houses of religion are devoted to Islam. Outside of restaurants that are explicitly vegetarian, finding meals that don’t include some amount of pork or lard can be difficult.

Official efforts to tap into the huge Muslim market — almost a quarter of the world’s population — began in 2008, when the Tourism Bureau and the Taiwan Visitors Association invited international Islamic tourism experts to visit Taiwan. The bureau recently established permanent offices in Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta. In the first half of this, a new office in Dubai will promote Taiwan throughout the Middle East.

### **MORE HALAL NEEDED**

In 2010, the bureau published a 104-page booklet titled *Traveling in Taiwan for Muslims*. An example of fine intentions but flawed execution, it mentions the availability of snake wine and snake meat at Taipei’s Huaxi Street Night Market, even though both are haram (forbidden for Muslims). It also introduces Yu Zhen Zhai, a traditional bakery in Lukang which, as of the end of last year, had yet to obtain halal certification. These blunders don’t appear in the 2012 edition of the booklet.

A lack of halal food around major tourist spots is one of the biggest obstacles preventing more Muslims from coming to Taiwan, says Elaine Tee of Have Halal, Will Travel (HHWT), a Singapore-based travel and lifestyle platform for Muslims. She describes Taiwan as “a pretty new destination for the Muslim segment. It has

lots of natural sights that can attract Muslims, coupled with lower costs compared to Japan and some other destinations.”

The HHWT team visited Taipei and Kaohsiung in 2018 at the invitation of Scoot, a budget airline.

“During our five-day trip, we visited sites like Jioufen, Ximending and Pier-2 Art Center,” Tee recalls. “We did a lot of research regarding Jioufen’s street food. In places like Houtong and Shifen, there wasn’t any halal food, and we had to plan our meals around this fact. We wanted to try traditional Taiwanese breakfast but weren’t sure which places were Muslim-friendly, as many places serve pork.”



*A pair of Muslim tourists at Lotus Pond in Kaohsiung.*

*Photo courtesy of Have Halal, Will Travel*

HHWT has worked with the Alishan and Tri-Mountain national scenic area administrations to promote those destinations.

“We definitely saw the effort they’ve made to educate homestays and restaurants to cater for the Muslim segment,” Tee says.

But potential visitors, she thinks, “are still concerned about the language barrier and getting around outside of Taipei. It’s also hard to get information on places like the Tri-Mountain area.”

Recognizing that people won’t come if they can’t find anything acceptable to eat, the Tourism Bureau has been working with local Islamic groups since 2012 to coach tourism businesses so as to improve the environment for Muslim visitors.

“Our short-term and medium-term goals are to improve the Muslim-friendly environment and make Taiwan a more popular destination among Muslim travelers,” the bureau says in answers provided by e-mail. “To encourage the industry to prepare for Muslim tourists, we’ve offered subsidies for the development of new itineraries, halal catering, Southeast Asian language tour guides and other improvements.”



The bureau says it has earmarked NT\$5 million per year for 2019 and 2020, and has been set aside to subsidize businesses seeking halal certification.

According to the bureau, by the end of 2019, the number of certified restaurants and accommodation providers had reached 252.

With the exceptions of Keelung and the outlying islands, Muslim tourists can now find suitable restaurants and accommodation in every city and county, the bureau says. Through cross-ministerial efforts, it has also promoted the establishment of Muslim prayer rooms and facilities for ritual ablutions in airports, TRA and HSR stations, and scenic area visitor service centers.

In September 2019, Taiwan's first "all halal" vending machine was unveiled in Taipei. There are plans to install others at tourist spots around the country.

The bureau says that Muslim visitors to Taiwan tend to come from Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, India, the Middle East, and China.

"The rapid economic growth of Malaysia and Indonesia, the proximity of those countries to Taiwan and the number of direct flights, means those two markets are our main focus."

## SOCIAL MEDIA

The Tourism Bureau has worked with Muslim social-media influencers such as Malaysian star Mira Filzah. She visited Taiwan with three other fashion/makeup Internet celebrities in 2018, to shoot a video promoting the country.

Between January and October of 2019, the bureau says, the number of Malaysian Muslim tourists visiting

Taiwan grew year-on-year by 29 percent. Meanwhile, "the number of arrivals from major [Muslim] markets... is growing at an average of more than 5 percent per year."



*Beef spare-rib noodle soup served in the halal-certified restaurant at amba Taipei Songshan hotel.*

*Photo courtesy of amba Hotels & Resorts*

Even so, Muslim tourists account for only about 2 percent of the 10-million-plus annual arrivals Taiwan has seen in recent years. The trend is upward, yet slow. In 2018, 49,597 of the Indonesian nationals entering Taiwan came for the purpose of leisure. For the first eleven months of 2019, the total was 49,739.

If the Global Muslim Index influences travel decisions, 2020 could turn out to be a good year for Muslim-friendly tourism businesses in Taiwan. The most recent index — announced in April last year and weighing transportation, communications, environment and services — ranked Taiwan, along with the UK and Japan, as the joint third-best destinations for Muslim travelers among countries outside the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

So far, being Muslim-friendly is no guarantee that business will flourish.

Flying Cow Ranch in Miaoli is one of 13 leisure farms in Taiwan that have obtained halal certification for its in-house restaurant.

"Not many Muslim tourists come here, no more than 1 percent of the total, but the number is slowly growing. Some book accommodation. Some are day-trippers. The average amount they spend is similar to that of other types of tourist," says a member of the ranch's marketing department surnamed Fang.

Two of the three amba hotels in Taipei have received Muslim-friendly certification.

“Both amba Taipei Songshan and amba Taipei Ximending feature halal-certified restaurants. amba Taipei Zhongshan, where each guestroom is already equipped with a washlet, hopes to welcome Muslim guests in the future,” says Dino Chiang, general manager of amba Hotels & Resorts.

Chiang says approximately 5 percent of those staying at Songshan and Ximending branches are Muslim, and that there’s been “steady growth” in the number of Muslim guests.

“To serve our Muslim guests, we’ve invested in washlets, prayer mats and Korans for guestrooms; utensils and halal ingredients for restaurants; and, of course, employee training,” he says.

Chiang says that obtaining and annually renewing Muslim-friendly and halal certificates isn’t easy, and that “the hotels didn’t receive any government subsidy for these investments. However, the Tourism Bureau and Taipei City Government have helped promote Taipei and the hotels to Muslim markets.”

Some Muslim residents are trying to narrow the information and catering gaps. One grassroots effort is taiwanhalal.com, launched in early 2016 by four Indonesian students at National Chiao Tung University (NCTU).

“The project started when we took a cloud computing class together, but we got the idea from Muslim students who’d previously studied at NCTU,” says Himmatur Rijal, one of the founders.

In 2017, taiwanhalal.com received a NT\$200,000 subsidy from the NCTU Seed Fund, and became part of NCTU’s Start Up Incubator for 2017-2018. The Web site has also won backing from the ministries of education and economic affairs.

Another of the founders, Faisal Fahmi — now a PhD student at NCTU — describes taiwanhalal.com as a financially self-sustaining business created and designed to address a social problem.

“In our case, the problem was the difficulties Muslims face finding what they need in Taiwan,” he says.

The number of Muslims helped by the Web site last year “increased about 50 percent” compared to 2018, says Rijal, who now works as a software programmer in Hsinchu.

“When Muslims travel, they’re most concerned about halal food and praying. Sometimes we arrange halal lunch boxes for our customers, and we try to find clean places where they can pray,” Rijal says.

Accommodation remains an issue, he adds: “Most of the certified Muslim-friendly hotels are expensive. Few of our customers can afford them.”

He thinks the Taiwan’s official approach to Muslim tourism is broadly positive.

“They’re trying to increase the number of Muslim-friendly places. Taiwan is a good destination and attractive to Muslims, yet there’s still a lack of halal restaurants in some areas Muslims would like to travel to. The government needs to make a greater effort to make traveling in Taiwan more convenient for Muslims, especially outside Taipei.”

*Taipei Times*



*Deep fried sweet-potato balls are one of the halal snacks available in certain parts of Taiwan.*

*Photo courtesy of Have Halal, Will Travel*





## Hot spring inns invite onsen lovers to go virtual as coronavirus halts tourism

KYODO



*A street in Arima hot spring in Kobe is deserted on April 29, during the Golden Week holiday season, amid the COVID-19 pandemic.*  
| KYODO

**D**elivering its own “stay-at-home” message aimed at containing the spread of COVID-19, one of the oldest hot springs in Japan is asking onsen lovers to go virtual as they take a breather and relax — in their own bathtubs.

Young hot spring inn owner Kazushige Kanai and like-minded colleagues in Arima Onsen in Hyogo Prefecture are offering a series of virtual reality videos, giving viewers the sense that they are at the famous tourist destination as they immerse themselves in hot water.

The first batch of videos, already released on YouTube, takes viewers wearing VR headsets to five inns, allowing them to enjoy various kinds of hot springs including the sound of the water and the breeze in surrounding nature.

“We’ve seen the number of visitors dwindling, but we can’t ask people to come under the current circumstances,” said the 39-year-old Kanai. “So we decided to change our message, to ‘stay home and relax,’” he added.

“We want people all over the world to enjoy Arima Onsen and ease their fatigue from the battle against the coronavirus,” Kanai said.

With about 30 inns in total, Arima is famous for brownish Kinsen hot spring water rich in iron and salt, and Ginsen, or colorless carbonated water. It became

known around the time of Emperor Jomei, who stayed there in 631, according to the local tourism association.

In normal times, Arima Onsen bustles with tourists from around the country and abroad, especially from China, South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong.

But as the new coronavirus spread, the number of visitors slumped due to imposed travel restrictions. The Hyogo Prefectural Government requested that hotels and hot spring inns shut during the Golden Week holidays until May 6.

Kanai’s group is hoping to expand its lineup of featured inns in coming weeks, with three more videos planned for release. “We want to invite people working in other hot springs in Japan to join as well,” Kanai said.

Under the nationwide state of emergency, people in the nation have been asked to refrain from going out, except for urgent and essential trips.

As the tourism industry has taken a severe hit from slumping travel demand, the government also has some ideas. It is planning to encourage more people to spend time — and work — in hot springs and campsites in national parks once the pandemic subsides.

The concept is called “workation,” or working remotely while on vacation, and the government has already allocated funds in the current fiscal year to improve wireless connectivity.

<http://onsenvr.com/>.

## Battered global tourism industry makes reopening plans

By Dee-Ann Durbin



*FILE - In this April 23, 2020 file photo, women wearing masks as a precaution against the new coronavirus, walk at the Gyeongbok Palace, in Seoul, South Korea. (AP Photo/Lee Jin-man, File)*

Six months ago, the global tourism industry was celebrating a record year for travel. Now, it's decimated and facing a recovery that could take years.

Tourism Economics, a data and consulting firm, predicts global travel demand won't resume its normal pace until 2023.

When tourists do finally return, they will face a changed landscape that incorporates social distancing and other measures to calm residual fears over COVID-19, the disease that has so far killed more than 244,000 people worldwide and infected millions more.

"It takes time to shake fear from the hearts of people, not to mention the economy," said Mahmoud Hadhoud, founder of Egypt Knight Tours, who doesn't expect foreign tourists to start trickling back into Egypt until September 2020.

In late April 2020, Hilton, Marriott and Airbnb all announced enhanced cleaning procedures worldwide to ease travelers' minds. In Egypt, Hadhoud is removing cruises and hot air balloon rides from his packages and replacing them with tours of Egypt's vast western deserts, where travelers can keep their distance from one another.

At Universal Studios in Orlando, Florida, multiple teams are working on scenarios, including putting more space between riders on roller coasters, said John Sprouls, the resort's chief administrative officer, at a recent virtual event for tourism officials.

Wynn Resorts CEO Matt Maddox said his company may sanitize dice between users, put fewer seats at blackjack tables and idle slot machines between players at its casinos in Las Vegas, Boston and Macau.

Gary Thulander, managing director of Chatham Bars Inn, a 106-year-old resort on Cape Cod, said the resort is planning many changes when it reopens this summer, including checking in guests via cell phones, letting them opt out of room service and lengthening dining hours so fewer guests will be eating at the same time.



*FILE - In this April 14, 2020 file photo, a motorcyclist drives past a poster calling people to take care of their health against the new coronavirus in Hanoi, Vietnam.  
(AP Photo/Hau Dinh, File)*

The road to recovery will be long and hard for the tourism industry. The United Nations World Tourism Organization predicts global tourist arrivals — or visits from tourists who come to their destinations and stay at least one night — will fall 30% this year from the record 1.5 billion in 2019. Airlines have grounded nearly two-thirds of their planes as passengers vanish.



*FILE - In this March 21, 2020 file photo, the streets of the Jordanian Capital are seen empty after the start of a nationwide curfew, amid concerns over the coronavirus pandemic, in Amman, Jordan.  
(AP Photo/Raad Adayleh, File)*

Cruise ships are docked; some won't sail again until November.

Millions of people who depend on tourism are laid off or furloughed. In the U.S. alone, an estimated 8 million tourism-related workers are jobless right now, or about one-third of total U.S. unemployment, said Roger Dow, the president and CEO of the U.S. Travel Association.

Alexandre de Juniac, CEO of the International Air Transport Association, the leading airline trade group, said carriers need to fill at least 70% of seats to break even on most flights. If they're required to block or remove many seats, they will either stop flying or raise prices 50%, he said.



*FILE - In this March 21, 2020 file photo, a sign advises people to practice social distancing to slow the spread of the coronavirus at the "Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas Nevada" sign amid a shutdown of casinos along the Las Vegas Strip in Las Vegas.  
(AP Photo/John Locher, File)*

That will delay recovery for places like Israel, which sees almost all of its tourists arrive by air. Diklah Cohen Sheinfeld, chief of staff of the Israeli Tourism Ministry's director general's office, said the tourism industry — which employs 250,000 Israelis — was the first to be impacted and will likely be the last to recover.

"There are no tourists and no entry to the country for tourists. The gates are totally closed," she said.

In some places, governments are stepping in to help the sector. Serge Cachan, president of the Astotel hotel chain in Paris, closed his 17 properties in March and expects to lose 70% of his business in 2020. But the French government will help the chain get through it, he said. The government is paying around 80% of furloughed hotel workers' salaries.



Many destinations anticipate travelers' behavior will change in the virus's wake. Pornthip Hirunkate, vice president of the Association of Thai Travel Agents,



*FILE - In this April 6, 2020 file photo, Air New Zealand planes sit idle on the tarmac at Christchurch Airport, New Zealand. (AP Photo/Mark Baker, File)*

thinks more people will come in small groups or seek personalized tours.

Ander Fuentes, who works as a tour guide in Spain's Granada province, thinks travelers will shift away from crowded beaches to the quieter interior mountains.

"It could be an opportunity to develop a new kind of tourism, which is going to be good for Spain, because in the last 10 years, the tourism boom has been in quantity but not in quality," Fuentes said. He hopes tourism there picks back up by mid-August.



*FILE - In this April 14, 2020 file photo, a man walks past a closed subway station during the lockdown to combat the spread of coronavirus in downtown Madrid, Spain. (AP Photo/Manu Fernandez, File)*

But not everyone is comfortable with reopening. Marco Michielli, who owns the 67-room San Marco

Hotel in Bibione, a beach resort east of Venice, Italy, said many hoteliers worry their businesses will be ruined if the virus spreads on their properties. Some would rather reopen next year than serve guests this summer with desk staff and bartenders wearing masks.

"If we have rules approved by the ministry, some hotel owners would be convinced to start to open. But if the hotel must look like a COVID ward, many will refuse to open to guests," he said.

Others say they need reassurance from science — not just tourist sites — before they travel.

Ema Barnes visited a dozen countries last year, including Serbia, Vietnam and Chile. This year, she had planned trips to Jordan and South Korea.

But right now, Barnes is working remotely in a tiny town in her native New Zealand. Airports near her are closed, so she's not sure when she'll get back to New York, where she works in publishing.

Barnes said she needs some peace of mind — a COVID-19 vaccine, or testing to make sure she isn't a carrier — before she resumes her travels.



*FILE - In this April 17, 2020 file photo, a couple wearing face masks to help protect against the spread of the new coronavirus walks in the rain at the Gyeongbok Palace, the main royal palace during the Joseon Dynasty, in Seoul, South Korea. (AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon, File)*

"I don't think my desire to travel and explore other places is worth my risking the health of people in those places," Barnes said.

Others remain optimistic. Dedy Sulistiyanto, the owner of a tour and adventure provider in Bali, Indonesia, has been promoting his business on social media while it's closed. He has received so many positive responses that he thinks tourism will resume

quickly when restrictions are lifted. Most of his clients are domestic tourists from Indonesia.

“There are so many people out there very eager to do traveling,” Sulistiyanto said.

AP Writers Colleen Barry in Soave, Italy; Edna Tarigan in Jakarta; Ken Ritter in Las Vegas; Tassanee Vejpongsa in Bangkok; Angela Charlton in Paris; Ilan Ben Zion in Jerusalem; Isabel DeBre in Los Angeles; Aritz Parra in Madrid; and David Koenig in Dallas contributed.

Associated Press (AP)

## Georgia will be one of the first to open tourist corridors, Economy minister vows



Georgia’s Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development Natia Turnava pledged that Georgia would be one of the first countries to open safe tourist corridors with other countries. The Ministry of Economy is working on a specific anti-crisis plan for tourism, because tourism needs special support due to the current situation. Natia Turnava singled out tourism as one of the vital sectors of the Georgian economy saying that “industry should be prepared for demands of the post-pandemic period.”

“Tourism has been a great benefactor in our economy, a very big employer, it has supported Georgia and now it needs our support and assistance” – she said at the presentation of the plan aiming soften the economic damage from the ongoing coronavirus outbreak. “We are preparing a specific anti-crisis plan for tourism, a different anti-crisis plan. The new tourism will no longer be as traditional as it used to be so far, we must do everything we can to prepare our tourism industry for the demands of the post-coronavirus period.

This plan is being developed and will soon be introduced to our tourism sector.”

The Minister said that Georgia could restore regular flights in certain directions.

International organizations have already started working on the establishment of safe flight principles.

“International organizations are working to establish safe flight principles, and we will be one of the first countries to take this into account and support it in a bilateral manner. We already think that we can restore regular flights in certain directions, with strict adherence to guidelines, but it depends on the desire of the countries we are negotiating with and the situation in these countries” – she said.

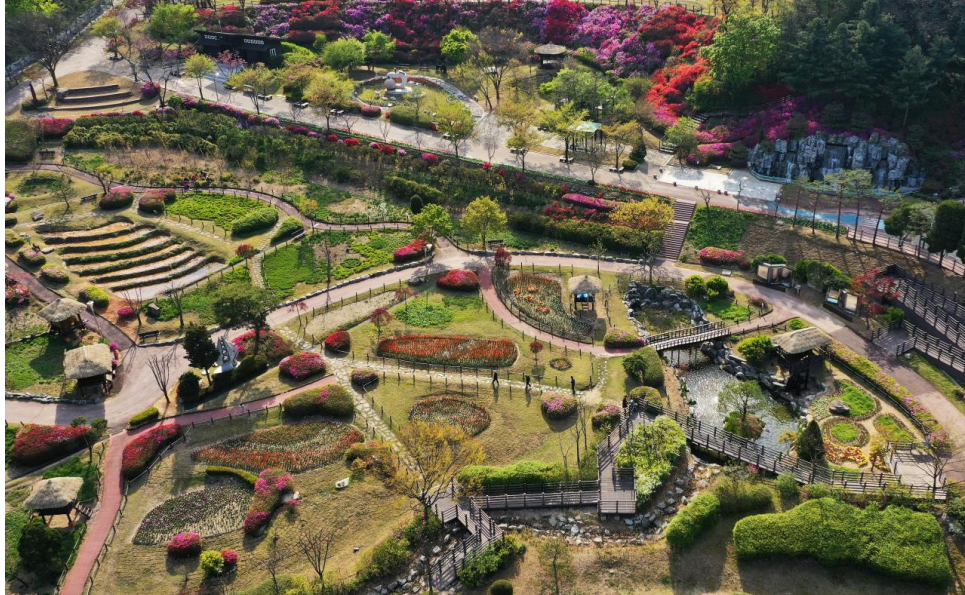
The Minister also forecasted that Georgia’s economy would lose 4% in 2020.

Georgian Journal



# ‘Untact’ tourist sites gain attention amid pandemic

By Kim Tae-eun



(Yonhap)

“Untact” tourism has become a new trend amid the protracted spread of the novel coronavirus.

The new style of traveling -- the name being a Korean contraction of “undoing contact” -- refers to avoiding crowded places or indoor activities, and instead turning to outdoor attractions with plenty of space.

Targeting forthcoming holidays, operators of several tourist sites popular among South Koreans, including Busan and South Gyeongsang Province, have been promoting a list of tourist attractions suitable for families and friends to enjoy while distancing. They consist mostly of wide-open outdoor areas like

mountain trails and botanic gardens.

Although the number of new virus cases has been staying low in Korea, local health authorities remain alert over possible cluster infections that may occur during the holidays. As overseas travel has been largely suspended or unavailable due to various restrictions, it is expected that many people will stay home or make short trips locally.

The long holiday period that kicked off with Buddha’s Birthday on April 30 extends through May 5, Children’s Day.

*Korea Herald*





# Sri Lanka eyes post-Coronavirus tourism with tighter visa, health rules

By Tania Madies



*Tourism is the third highest source of foreign exchange for Sri Lanka, but the industry has faced a downturn following the Easter Sunday terror attacks.*

**S**ri Lanka is making plans draw tourists after a Coronavirus crisis, with a raft of new operating rules for hotels, transport and visa to cut changes of the virus being transmitted and protect workers and their families, a tourism official said.

“The visa process will be changed. When you turn up you will not be able to have visa,” Kimarli Fernando, Chairperson, Sri Lanka Tourism told an online forum organized by Advocata Institute, a Colombo-based think tank.

“Everyone will need to apply for visa two weeks before arrival and all will be requested to undergo a test which will be selected at the discretion of the Health Ministry.

“We will ask the tourists’ to book their accommodations. It has not been finalized yet but we are suggesting that all tourists adhere to this.”

Sri Lanka’s tourist arrivals had dropped 70.8 percent from a year earlier to 71,370 in March 2020, amid a Coronavirus crisis, with borders closed for arrivals from March 19.

Industry officials said it may take about a year to recover but they are already getting bookings for January.

## Digital Track

An app is being developed to track and provide situational information on Sri Lanka’s Covid-19 situation to tourists.

This app would be available for download at the Sri Lanka tourism official website. Fernando said that the software would not be used to reference or market any hotel or service provider but to simply act as a mode of getting information.

“When tourists arrive in the airport we will know all the information about them, where they have traveled and so on and so forth,” Fernando said. “And then on arrival they will be subjected to enter the medical tests which will happen at our cost.”

“After this process, tourists who are tested healthy will proceed onto immigration where all normal procedures will take place and they will be given an app which when registered in gives all the information on Sri Lanka and all the certified hotels in regard to Covid-19.”

“We will also have certified transport too which we will look into and after that when they enter their hotels there will be a detailed protocol to be followed,” she said.

“There will be strict guidelines given to hotels on how housekeeping should be done while adhering to all Covid-19 preventive methods.

“If in any case we are not happy with the health status of a guest we will have army commanded 4-star or 5-star quarantine hotels which would charge whatever the dollar price you would charge and get them quarantined.”

Any tourist who tests negative to Coronavirus can develop the disease within the next 14 days.

**Premium Quarantine**

Until Vietnam closed borders to take the pressure off contact tracers in the current Coronavirus crisis, tourist who arrived in the country could choose between military run free quarantine centres or ‘premium’ private quarantine from budget to 5-star.

Around 270 hotels signed up for the scheme, though not all were approved at the time inbound arrivals were halted. At some hotels food was served by robot waiters.

Of the 268 Coronavirus cases discovered up to April 17 and treated about 160 were foreigners. Many have been released from hospital.

Meanwhile Fernando said hotel staff will be quarantined prior to returning to their villages in order to prevent any risks.



“A separate guideline for hotel staff is being drawn up, where we will specify whether there should be an approved doctor present and other processes like full quarantine process before the staff go back home,” she said.

“The last thing we need is a hotel staff returning to their villages and infecting the entire area,” she said.

Fernando said that the tourist board has looked at Singapore models on this regard.

Singapore however has some community transmission and had 9,125 cases so far and 11 deaths.

Vietnam, which had aggressive contact tracing and completely eradicated the disease during the Wave I influx from China in January and February. In the last five days zero new cases had been found and 216 are in hospital. None had died.

Vietnam’s neighbour, Cambodia, is also contact tracing.

*Economy Next*

**PATA: Asia to Drive Early Visitor Recovery in 2021**

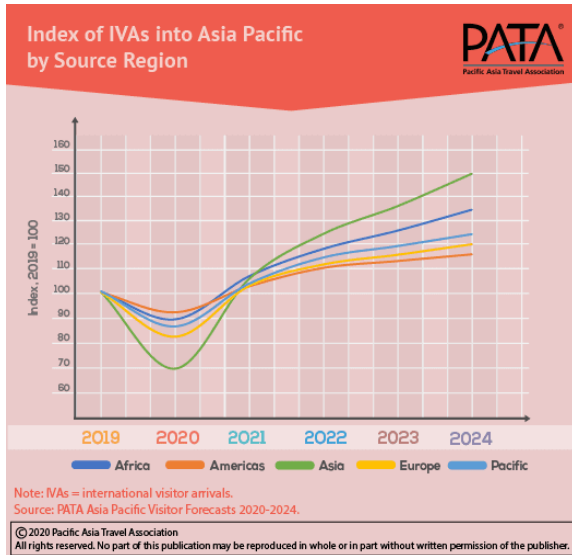
Asia is predicted to spearhead a return to visitor growth across Asia Pacific in 2021 according to the newly updated forecasts released in late April 2020 by the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA). Taking into account the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the volume of arrivals under a most likely scenario is now expected to return to over 610 million in 2021, barring any other unforeseen interventions. This initial recovery is expected to see growth of around three percent above 2019 levels and



herald a return to the initial forecast levels shortly thereafter.

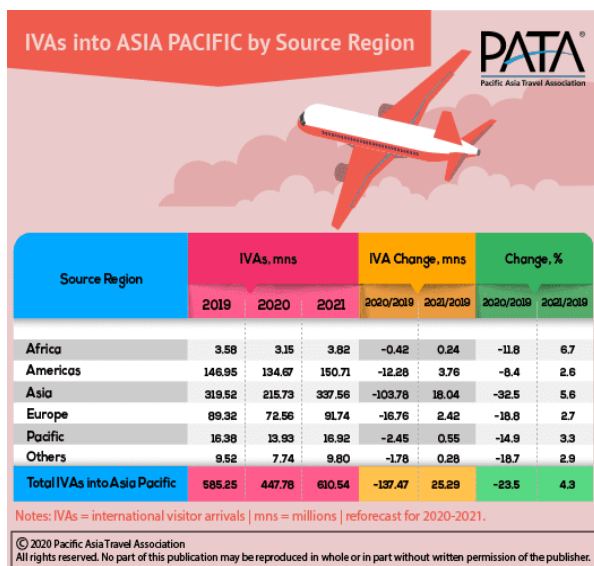
This growth in international visitor arrivals (IVAs) is likely to vary by source regions, with Asia expected to rebound with the fastest growth rates relative to 2019, as shown below. The Americas, which is expected to show the lowest contraction in its rate of growth in 2020, is forecast to continue with much weaker growth rates over the years to 2024.

During the expected recovery phase in 2021, Asia is expected to generate significantly improved arrival



numbers, rebounding from a loss of almost 104 million visitors between 2019 and 2020 to growth of 5.6% in 2021 relative to 2019, delivering more than 18 million more arrivals over that period.

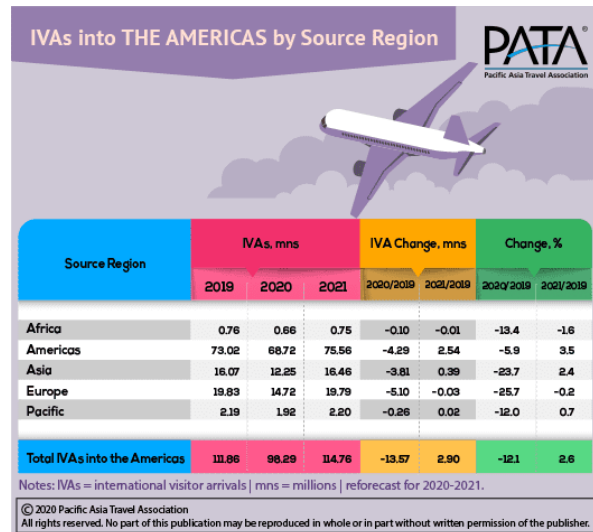
Arrivals into the Americas are expected to be relatively strong in 2021, with a net increase of 2.9 million visitors relative to the volume generated in 2019.



This is expected to be driven largely by intra-regional flows (Americas-to-Americas) which, after a decline of 4.3 million arrivals between 2019 and 2020, are

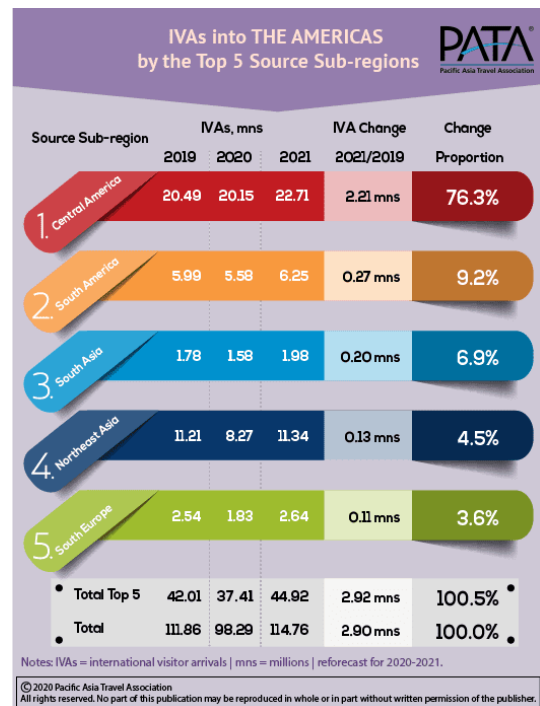
expected to recover rapidly and generate more than 2.5 million arrivals into the Americas relative to 2019.

By the end of 2021, total IVAs into the Americas



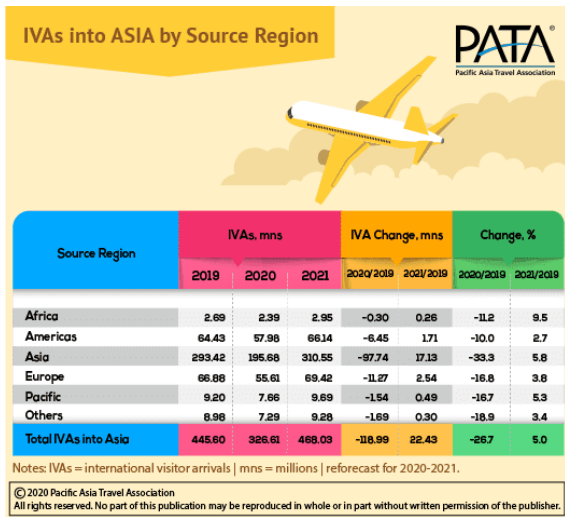
Note: The category of 'Other Source Regions' has been omitted as the volume is too small to register

are projected to be close to three percent above the volume received in 2019. Central America is clearly the strongest generator of arrivals between 2019 and 2021, with more than three-quarters of the additional IVAs coming from that source sub-region alone.



The top five source sub-regions for the Americas between 2019 and 2021 generate a sufficient volume of arrivals into the region to offset continued losses from other source sub-regions and markets.

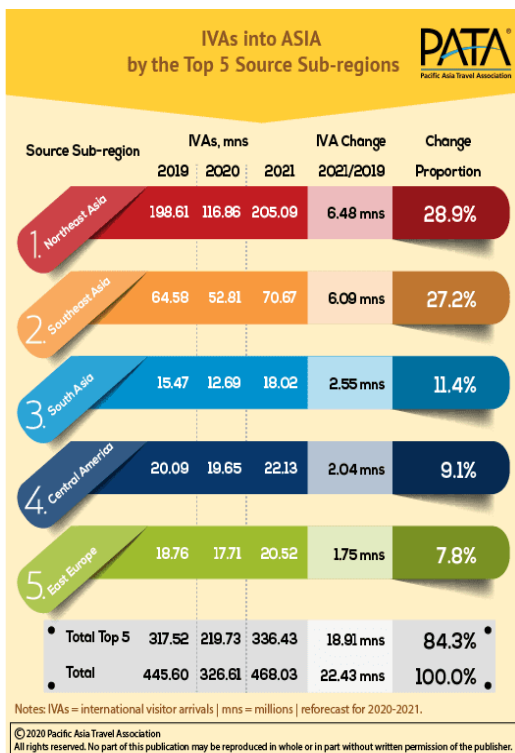




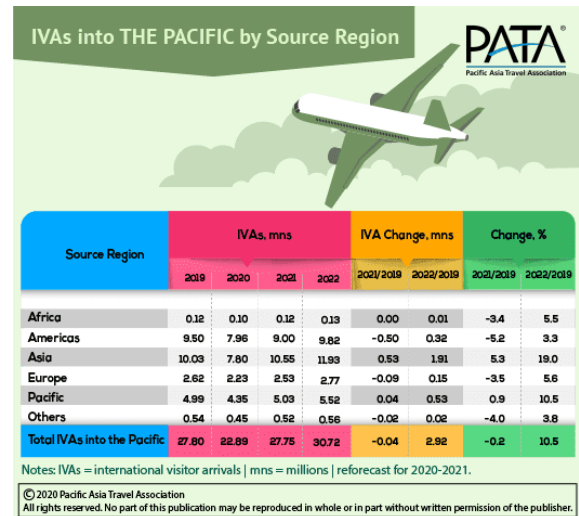
Into and across Asia, the largest volume increases between 2019 and 2021 are also predicted to be intra-regional (Asia-to-Asia) for the most part, with a rebound from a loss of almost 98 million arrivals between 2019 and 2020 to an increase of over 17 million between 2019 and 2021.

All the source regions of Asia are projected to show growth between 2019 and 2021, with Europe and the Americas in particular, adding increases in arrivals of 2.5 million and 1.7 million, respectively over that period. By the end of 2021, Asia is predicted to have visitor arrivals numbering five percent more than in 2019.

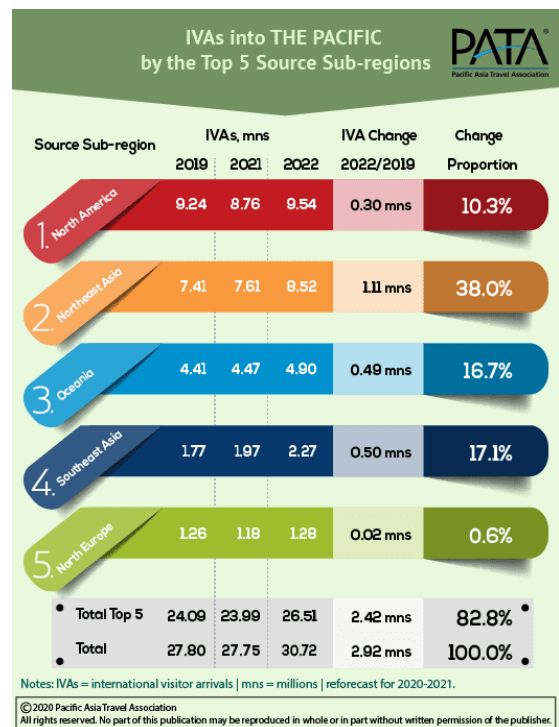
The strongest growth in visitor arrivals into Asia is largely out of the Asian source sub-regions, with



strong assistance from Central America and East Europe. Together, these top five source sub-regions are predicted to account for 84% of the overall growth in arrivals into Asia between 2019 and 2021. Over three-quarters of that growth volume is projected to come from three of the five Asian source sub-regions.



The Pacific, as a destination region, is likely to have more subdued growth between 2019 and 2021, almost reaching the same volume of IVAs into the region as in 2019. It is not expected to return to growth beyond that however until 2022 when visitor arrivals are expected to increase by 10.5% above those of 2019.



While arrivals out of Asia are expected to be substantial in 2021 relative to 2019, they are not expected to be substantial enough to offset losses from other source regions, especially the Americas. In 2022, however, all source regions are predicted to deliver substantial growth in IVAs, adding an aggregate increase of a little under three million over the volume received in 2019. At that time, Asia will be the primary source region, delivering 32% of the expected 30.7 million visitor arrivals into the region.

While North America is expected to deliver the most IVAs into the Pacific in 2022, the strongest incremental growth in arrivals between 2019 and 2022 is predicted to come from Northeast Asia, followed by Southeast Asia and then Oceania. The top five source sub-regions into the Pacific in 2022 are expected to deliver close to 83% of the additional IVAs over that period.

“While we can expect to see severely reduced visitor arrivals into Asia Pacific in 2020, and for some through 2021 as well, there is hope going forward. The travel and tourism sector as we have seen during past

calamities, is nothing if not resilient, and we expect to see growth beginning in 2021 and continuing on thereafter. That makes the assumption of course that this pandemic and its associated negative effects are contained and over by then,” said PATA CEO Dr. Mario Hardy. “As we rebuild the travel and tourism sector into the future, it is worth considering whether we want it to be ‘business as usual’ or whether we can initiate new policies, procedures and practices that will enable us to see beyond the vision of growth at all costs. Perhaps now we can give real meaning to the oft quoted mantra of ‘people before profit’ and create a sector that generates employment and business opportunities first that can then deliver memorable experiences to visitors across Asia Pacific and indeed the world.”

“Millions of people have lost their jobs as a result of this pandemic and we need to ensure that as the travel and tourism industry recovers, we create opportunities for their re-employment as a precursor to growing a more sustainable visitor base,” he added.

*Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) Press Release*

## Spring in Seoul: share pictures of beautiful scenery

*By Jun Ji-hye*



*Cherry trees bloom at Yujung-no near the Han River, April 5. The Seoul Tourism Organization launched its "Seoul Now" event, calling on citizens to take pictures of Seoul's spring scenery from their windows and share them online as a means to give others stuck at home due to COVID-19 outbreak the chance to feel spring.*

*Korea Times photo by Seo Jae-hoon*

**T**he Seoul Tourism Organization (STO) has launched its "Seoul Now" event, encouraging people to share photos or videos of the capital city's beautiful scenery during springtime through video-sharing platform TikTok.

The event was designed to delight the eyes of people in and outside the country who have been forced to stay indoors during lockdown to help control the spread of the new coronavirus.

The STO joined hands with TikTok, calling on users of the video-sharing social networking service to participate in the event to give those who have been unable to travel around Seoul a chance for vicarious satisfaction.

The organization said the event is not asking people to go outside to take pictures or film videos in accordance with the ongoing social distancing campaign, but asking them to look outside the window at their places and capture beautiful scenes of springtime.

Those who want to participate in the event can simply upload their photos or videos on their TikTok accounts with hashtags like #SEOULNOW and #StayStrongSeoul.

The organization will select 40 of the participants to win prizes that include five-star hotel vouchers, meal vouchers and tourist vouchers.

The vouchers will be valid until the end of the year so people can use them after the COVID-19 situation comes to an end.

"We hope people within and outside the country who are unable to travel around Seoul will be able to experience Seoul's spring online through the Seoul Now event," said Lee Hye-jin who heads the smart tourism department at the STO.

"We also hope the event that will show the beautiful scenery of Seoul will be a small comfort to citizens who have felt mental fatigue due to the prolonged public health crisis."

The STO has also offered spring scenery of five tourist attractions in Seoul via livestream on its official TikTok account (@visitseoul), beginning on April 14, 2020.

The five sites are Seokchon Lake, Namdaemun, Mount Nam, Han River and Gyeongbok Palace.

Seoul's Songpa District canceled its annual Seokchon Lake Cherry Blossom Festival, shutting down

entrances to the lake amid concerns over the spread of the new coronavirus.

It marked the first time that the lake became off-limits to visitors since the festival began in the early 2000s.

The organization said it prepared the live streaming showing scenery of the lake for the citizens who missed lock-up.

On April 18, 2020, scenery of Gyeongbok Palace was being aired live through the online streaming platform twice a day — from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., and from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. — to deliver the old palace's images of day and night.

The STO, together with the Seoul Metropolitan Government, has redoubled its efforts to support travel companies based in the capital city as the tourism industry has been hit the hardest since the outbreak of the contagious disease.

The organization and the Seoul government launched a task force to offer an emergency aid of 5 million won (\$4,100) each to 1,000 small travel companies suffering deepening financial difficulties.

The STO also carried out a donation campaign in which its employees have donated part of their wages to help small companies.

Sixty-nine employees have participated in the campaign so far, collecting 28 million won.

"Employees at the STO have pushed for a variety of support programs as we feel great responsibility to help travel companies during tough times," said Noh Joon-sik who heads the budget and planning department.

"We hope our donation campaign will serve as a momentum for other public institutions to participate in more social contribution programs."

For its part, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and



*The Seoul Tourism Organization offers spring scenery of the five tourist attractions in Seoul via live stream on TikTok.*

*/ Courtesy of Seoul Tourism Organization*



Tourism has offered 21 kinds of support measures including loan programs for travel firms nationwide since February.

The ministry said a special loan of 100 billion won is expected to be executed by the middle of May, noting that it has reinforced relevant manpower and increased the number of counters throughout the nation so the loan can be executed promptly.

The ministry is also cooperating with local governments to reduce property taxes paid by hotels, tourist facilities and international conference facilities.

The ministry has distributed 21,000 hand sanitizers and 5,000 face masks to hotels and tourist attractions, as well as supporting their disinfection activities.

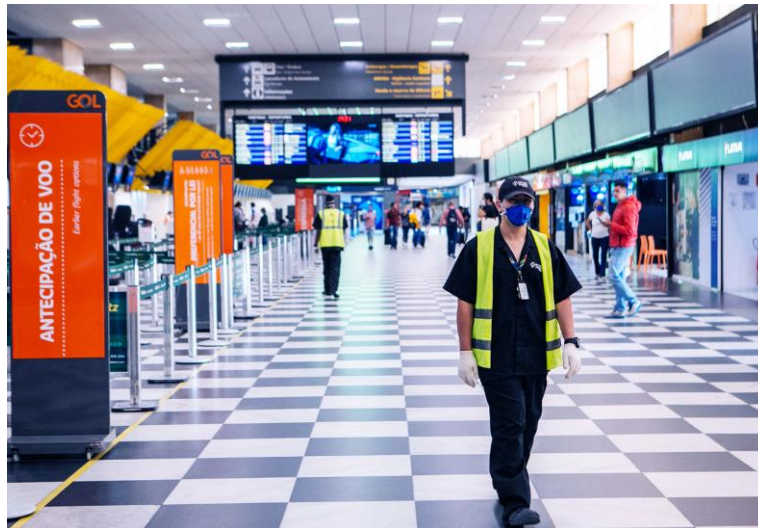
*The Korea Times*

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## How the Tourism Industry Can Preserve Jobs Without Travel

*By Caroline Freund*

*Global Director of Trade, Investment and Competitiveness at the World Bank*



*Governments and private companies are implementing crisis measures to protect the tourism industry as it continues to get affected by COVID-19.*

*Photo: Rebeca Figueiredo Amorim/Getty Images*

**T**he tourism industry is at a standstill. Even as policymakers around the world seek ways to mitigate the economic impact of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, recovery can't begin until the health emergency is under control and travel restrictions can be lifted safely. The longer the health crisis lasts, the more difficult for companies to survive — especially the small- and medium-sized enterprises that make up a big share of the tourism ecosystem — and greater the distress for workers.

Governments are rightly worried. The latest figures from the World Travel and Tourism Council show that 50 million jobs are at risk in the sector globally, a reduction of between 12% and 14%. In many countries, tourism is the largest contributor to GDP, forex and employment — particularly for vulnerable groups, women and youth. For developing countries strongly dependent on tourism for gross domestic

product — 20% for 37 countries — the health crisis is already a national economic crisis.

Early on, many unaffected destinations invested in marketing campaigns to attract those who still wished to travel. It is now clear that marketing any kind of travel, even domestic, is irresponsible. In line with WHO guidance, we all have a responsibility to do our part to “flatten the curve” and curb the transmission of the disease. This means restricting movement and reducing all forms of interaction — including travel.

The most forward-thinking industry and destination brands aim to show sensitivity and build trust: Estonia adapted their campaign on Twitter from “Visit Estonia” to “Visit Estonia, later” #stayhome.

It is difficult to know when the recovery will come. But in the immediate term, governments and private

companies are implementing crisis measures to protect the tourism industry as much as possible. Where various actions can be coordinated and integrated together, the recovery is likely to be quicker. Below are some interesting examples.

- **Generating alternative revenues.** The industry at large and destinations are considering innovative ways to maintain some revenue while discouraging travel. These include pay-it-forward voucher schemes — such as in Manchester and “consume-at-home” content like virtual tours, destination audio-guides, restaurant- or hotel-branded online cooking, yoga classes, spa classes, and restaurant delivery services.
- **Minimizing revenue loss.** Many in the travel industry are waiving rebooking charges and incentivizing guests to postpone instead of cancel.
- **Planning and communication.** Destination communities and associations are forming virtual emergency response groups, with objectives, including uniting on closing all attractions and monitoring and communicating with trade buyers and consumers through social media. The best communications should focus transparently on the health risks, cases and mitigation measures, like Visit Copenhagen and Salzburg, Austria. Joint agreement on the most important asks from government, financial sector, industry associations and employee unions may also speed action.
- **Informing the industry.** Governments and associations can prepare advice and updates on all measures being taken for the industry and/or its members — and how to access support. The National Federation of Self-employed and Small Businesses in the United Kingdom has a comprehensive breakdown of all the assistance measures.
- **Reducing tax burden.** Governments are suspending or reducing income tax payments, business rates, VAT and other fees applicable to business, including PAYE deferral and paid sick leave to provide relief to staff on reduced incomes. New Zealand announced large-scale tax relief packages, and Myanmar has waived 2% advanced income tax on exports.
- **Contamination support.** Public financial support and/or supplies to businesses to manage the costs of physically dealing with the effects of the virus, such as through deep cleaning services supported by the Singapore Cleaning Support fund for hotels.

- **Providing liquidity.** Governments, financial institutions and other bodies are offering grants, funds or alternative capital for those most at risk (SMEs). For example, see the U.S. Small Business Administration response, as well as extended lines of credit or working capital. Debt-reduction banks are extending mortgage relief and deferrals in loan repayments.
- **Redeploying assets.** Destinations are examining opportunities to redeploy staff or tourism assets to support public health agendas, such as retraining flight attendants to support testing facilities or using hotels as health care facilities for low-risk patients.

The World Bank Group is working with partners to provide reliable information and data on what to expect and what we can learn from past crises that affected tourism — the global financial crisis — H1N1, SARS, tsunamis, Ebola. Where we have existing tourism programs with destination clients, we will look to redirect program resources to help address the immediate crisis and support client governments as they take measures to make tourism more resilient and ready for the recovery that will eventually come.

*A version of this article was originally published on the World Bank Voices blog.*

**About the Author:**



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*Caroline Freund is the global director of trade, investment and competitiveness at the World Bank. Previously, she was a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics. She has also worked as a chief economist for the Middle East and North Africa at the World Bank, after working for nearly a decade in the international trade unit of the research department.*

*Brink*

# No tourism income, but this Philippine community still guards its environment

By Keith Anthony Fabro

- *Communities in the biodiversity haven of Palawan in the Philippines earn millions in tourism-related services annually, but the industry has been paralyzed due to a lockdown aimed at suppressing the spread of COVID-19.*
- *The lockdown, in effect since March 17, has forced close tourist sites in the province, which has affected thousands of families dependent on tourism.*
- *Despite this, these communities continue to look after their protected areas, making sure that illegal logging and fishing activities do not proliferate during the lockdown period.*
- *Owing to proper handling of finances, these community organizations can sustain themselves and the areas they look after for a year, but interventions and support are necessary to keep these areas protected in the long run.*

**O**n a sweltering morning in April, park manager Jose Mazo mans a motorized patrol boat that glides through the turquoise waters of Siete Pecados, a 52-hectare (128-acre) marine protected area (MPA) off the town of Coron in northern Palawan province.

A world-famous tourist destination in the Philippines, Palawan receives more than a million tourists annually; Siete Pecados' vibrant coral reefs, part of the 36% of the country's total coral cover, welcomed 51,000 visitors in 2019 alone.

The months of March up to May are Siete Pecados' busiest of the year, and the daily monitoring routine isn't new to Mazo, who has been at the MPA's helm for more than 15 years. Except that this time around, not a single tourist has come to snorkel in the park's 52 hectares (128.5 acres) municipal waters.

Since March 17, Siete Pecados has been temporarily closed to visitors after the national government imposed a lockdown to stem the surge of positive coronavirus

cases in the country, which have reached 8,488 with 568 deaths as of April 30.

The closure hurts the province's economy, which is largely dependent on tourism; tourism receipts amounted to 83 billion pesos (\$1.6 billion) in 2018 alone. "Supposedly, now's the best time for us to earn more," Mazo tells Mongabay. "But we're forced to close the

park, following the government's community quarantine directive."

The site earned 5.1 million pesos (\$100,000) from entrance and environmental fees in 2019. In 2020, Mazo says they expect to lose 1.5 million pesos (\$30,000) for the months of March to May. But beyond the earnings, the closure has also impacted the 92 members of their association and their



*On prime tourist months, the Puerto Princesa Underground River easily fills in its 1,200 daily carry-in capacity. Image by Haya Benitez via Flickr (CC BY 2.0)*

families.

"Each of them earns at least 8,000 to 15,000 pesos [\$160 to \$300] monthly for their outrigger boats that bring tourists to the marine park," Mazo says. "Now, that sure income is gone."



Thousands of families who depend on community-based sustainable tourism has been affected by the pandemic and lockdown policy in the province.

In the provincial capital Puerto Princesa, some 420 kilometers (260 miles) from Siete Pecados, 400 families who work in the Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park (PPSRNP), a 22,202-hectare (54,862-acre) UNESCO World Heritage Site renowned for its 8.2-km (5.1-mi) underground river, have lost their livelihood.

During the prime tourist months, the site hits its daily maximum of 1,200 visitors. In 2019, it earned 108 million pesos (\$2.1 million) in entrance fees from its 331,356 visitors. “For this peak season, our collective income loss is 6 million pesos,” about \$119,000, boat owners’ association representative Teresita Austria tells Mongabay.

Like in Siete Pecados’ case, it’s the boat operators who have suffered the most: 314 of them have been left in limbo as their boats lay idle due to the lockdown. They used to earn 10,000 to 15,000 pesos (\$200 to \$300) monthly.

While the government is expected to ease the lockdown by May 1, the halt to tourism activities will linger for the duration of the pandemic and cut off the main income source for thousands of tourism-dependent families here, Mazo says. Palawan is considered a low-risk area for COVID-19 infections, with only two positive cases as of April 26.

But as the pandemic paralyzes Palawan’s tourism industry, resilient ecotourism communities embedded in biodiversity hotspots like Siete Pecados and PPSRNP have found sustainable ways to survive through the crisis, all while not having to abandon their environmental conservation initiatives.

### Monitoring work continues

One morning in April, Mazo and his rangers check coral reefs for signs of bleaching and crown of thorns infestation in their MPA. Despite the drastic cut in daily income from tourism, the group continues to regularly patrol the park to ensure that it’s free from illegal fishing activities.

“Locals lost their tourism jobs due to the lockdown,” Mazo says. “There’s a possibility that some may turn to illegal fishing.” Even the body that manages the MPA isn’t immune; it’s had to let go of five of its 15 employees, retaining mostly rangers and garbage pickers.

In Siete Pecados, marine species such as the critically endangered hawksbill sea turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) thrive alongside 74 species of reef fish, including the endangered humphead wrasse (*Cheilinus undulatus*). Other species of high conservation value previously seen here are the dugong (*Dugong dugon*), spotted eagle ray (*Aetobatus narinari*), and whale shark (*Rhincodon typus*).



*Coron, part of the Calamianes group of islands, is famous for its well-preserved underwater shipwrecks surrounded with coral reefs in good condition.*

*Image by Ray via Flickr (CC BY 2.0)*

Before its designation as an MPA in 2005, Siete Pecados suffered from rampant illegal fishing activities, particularly the heavy use of cyanide, dynamite and trawling, from the 1980s up to the late 1990s. This led to widespread coral reef destruction and fish stock depletion.

But ecotourism and massive information campaigns halted this, Mazo says.

“Since opening this area to tourists in 2004, those damaging activities were stopped and the impending fisheries collapse was averted,” says Mazo, who has been at the forefront of mobilizing the community to combat illegal fishing in the area since the early 2000s. “The majority of fishers have migrated to tourism.”

It's the same in the PPSRNP, where boat operators, organized since 1991, are taking their part in safeguarding their seas. PPSRNP's 7,000-hectare (17,300-acre) marine zone also suffered from the impact of illegal fishing in the 1990s, despite having been declared a protected area since 1971.

"Our task remains the same: report illegal fishers to enforcement authorities," Austria says. "Within our association, as most go back to their fishing job, we discourage them from using banned fishing methods."

A model for balancing conservation and sustainable tourism, the national park is home to at least 1,024 terrestrial and marine wildlife species, some of which are endangered, rare or endemic. But they're more at risk of vanishing if the plunder of habitats driven by food scarcity caused by the pandemic is left unchecked, says PPSRNP protected area superintendent Elizabeth Maclang.

Park rangers also continue to monitor the forested areas in the park during the lockdown, Maclang says. "The same monitoring is being done in marine zones because we've assumed some may also engage in destructive fishing," she says. "We're addressing locals' needs by distributing relief goods and vegetable seedlings so they can plant and sell for their subsistence."

### Back to basics

For coastal ecotourism associations in Palawan, the coronavirus pandemic has hit the reset button, pushing them to return to fishing and farming — their bread-and-butter livelihoods prior to the province's tourism boom. "It's kind of going back to basics," Mazo says.

Locals near Siete Pecados haul in an average daily fish catch of 10 kilograms (22 pounds) each, almost triple the national average of 3.5 kg (8 lb) for small-scale

fishers. Mazo attributes the robust fish catch to the declaration of the area as a marine protected area, which helps them ride through the lockdown.

"Imagine if there are no tourism activities during the pandemic and the fish populations are depleted, we won't survive," he says.



*Siete Pecados is one of the most well-managed marine protected areas in the Philippines. Underwater image by Gerald R. Mondala via Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 4.0)*

"MPAs are there for the long gain," Rene Abesamis, a marine biology expert, tells Mongabay. Well-managed MPAs serve as safe areas for fish where they spawn and grow and eventually move out, Abesamis says. Combined with sustainable fishing methods outside the MPA, fish biomass improves and

marine food security stabilizes.

"The biomass that took many years to accrue" inside MPAs, Abesamis warns, can be substantially reduced by illegal fishing and poaching activities. That's why "it's really important to continue protecting the protected areas even in trying circumstances like the current pandemic," he says. "If the communities stop being vigilant, the effect will be very big in the long run."

Decades of conserving PPSRNP's vast marine zone has also paid off, yielding bountiful fish harvests for locals in these trying times.

"Fishing boats here are brimming that you can buy high-valued fish species like *lapu-lapu* [grouper] for as low as 100 pesos [\$2] per kilo," Austria says, adding they've asked commercial markets in the city to buy their catch so it won't spoil and members will have an alternative cash source.

Austria has also rekindled her subsistence organic farm during the lockdown, planting fast-growing vegetables in her 1-hectare (2.5-acre) property located at the foot of the park's iconic karst mountains. "The adjustment is difficult because we're now used to earning more from tourism than farming and fishing combined," she says.

Tourism’s “easy money” drove numerous locals away from farming and fishing, Austria adds. “The pandemic has forced many to realize how equally important those forgotten and underappreciated sectors are, especially now that the tourism industry has slumped.”

Community-based tourism has improved the once economically deprived villages in the province, but many believe that regaining the economic momentum remains a challenge in the age of COVID-19.

Locals, nonetheless, are hoping against hope that the tourism industry will rebound soon, or at least in time for the next peak season, which begins in the fourth quarter of the year. If not, they look forward to the same period next year. “Once the situation improves, we expect tourism here to bounce back by 2021,” Mazo says.

While the restrictions continue, Mazo says the management of Siete Pecados has 2 million pesos (\$40,000) in reserves to support its 10 employees until 2021, and another 4 million pesos (\$80,000) for coastal

resources management. But despite this, the situation remains uncertain.

The provincial tourism office is preparing a recovery plan to help tourism-dependent workers, but no concrete details have been released as of the time this article was published.

“Will tourists come back after the Philippine lockdown lifts? That’s our concern,” Mazo says, adding that the majority of the site’s foreign visitors come from European countries like Spain and France, which are still grappling with the pandemic.

Austria, meanwhile, is pinning her hopes on the discovery of a vaccine for the virus. The provincial office has earlier said that without a vaccine, inbound and outbound travel is banned in the province. “If we find a cure to coronavirus,” Austria says, “then there’s a fighting chance we can revive the dying tourism industry that gives life to everyone here.”

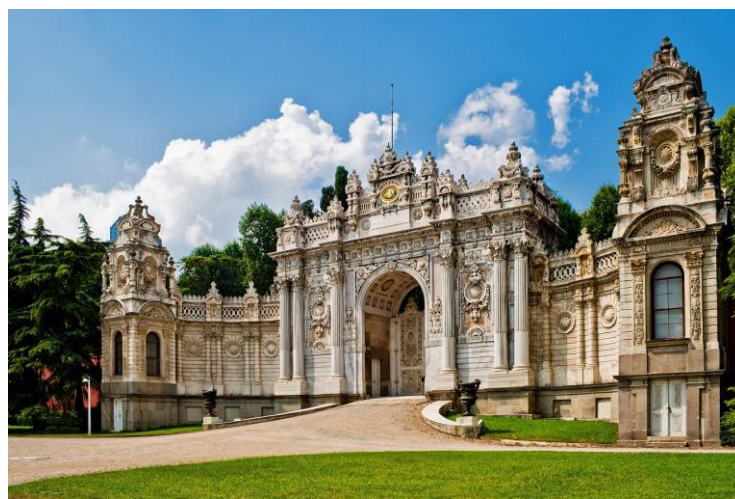
*Mongabay*

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## **Taking a virtual tour of Turkey from the comfort of your couch**

*Instead of binging endlessly on Netflix shows, the answer to your boredom in quarantine could lie in virtual travel, with online tours of museums and festivals across the country waiting to be discovered*

*By Leyla Yvonne Ergil*



*Built between 1843 and 1856 on the European coast of the Bosphorus, Dolmabahçe Palace has been a touristic favorite for years. (iStock Photo)*



As the days go by, there have been a number of new websites and programming adapted to accommodate the coronavirus crisis and thus there are now lots of ways to while away the day as we wait for the time in self-isolation to pass. From websites offering virtual tours of sights from all over the country to catching up on those films on your watchlist or watching performances by Turkey's up-and-coming musicians, check out these great online resources to make sure your life and discovery of Turkey continue to thrive.



See beautiful ancient mosaics like this one depicting gods Oceanus and Tethys at the Zeugma Museum in Gaziantep. (iStock Photo)

### Touring Turkey's virtual museums

Established by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism at the end of March 2020 to enable the opportunity to tour these cultural heritage sites while the nation self-isolates, Sanal Muze is a government website that offers a 3D experience of some of the most well-known state-run archaeology and ethnographic museums, including the site of Göbeklitepe in Şanlıurfa, the Ephesus Museum in Izmir, the Troya Museum in Çanakkale and the Gaziantep Archaeology Museum to name a few. There are online tours of 16 museums available at the moment to peruse online, giving viewers the opportunity to experience what the museums' architecture, format and exhibitions are like. A wonderful opportunity to check out these excellent museums you may not have yet visited – as they are located throughout Turkey – there are some that are admittedly more thorough than others and even offer descriptions of exhibitions, albeit in Turkish. Visit the website [www.sanalmuze.gov.tr](http://www.sanalmuze.gov.tr) to take a tour for yourself. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism website itself, [www.ktb.gov.tr](http://www.ktb.gov.tr), also offers a wealth of information on the country and its culture and traditions with English and Turkish language options and also operates virtual tours of a number of historical

sites and museums such as the Sumela Monastery, Topkapı Palace, Dolmabahçe and the Gallipoli peninsula not yet included in the aforementioned "virtual museums website."

### Get inspired to travel in Turkey

Go Turkey, which is the Ministry of Culture and Tourism's branch promoting tourism in Turkey, recently launched "liveTurkey," a website which offers a variety of options to experience Turkey through live broadcasts and videos. The website contains a variety of videos on topics such as culture and arts, extreme sports, gastronomy, meditative and even Turkish soap operas. Some of the highlights of the website include historical tours led by Saffet Emre Tonguç with English subtitles, traditional and innovative recipes of Turkish culinary favorites presented by well-known chefs and interviews with adventure sports and tour experts.

Dubbed "Turkey's Travel Muse," you can visit the website at [www.liveturkey.com](http://www.liveturkey.com) to check out all the country has to offer and to make your own travel bucket list for when the coronavirus era is over. For even more travel inspiration, visit the Go Turkey website itself at [www.goturkey.com](http://www.goturkey.com) as it has a wealth of information on traditions and destinations in the country.

### Watch the Istanbul Film Festival online

While unfortunately the Istanbul Film Festival, organized by the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (IKSV) during the dates of April 10 to 21, had to be postponed due to the preventative measures in place to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus, there is still an opportunity for film-lovers to watch a selection of the most highly acclaimed films that have been screened over the past decade. MUBI, which is an online platform that screens carefully curated films for one month is offering a special promotional free trial and has selected 12 of the festival's favorites from countries all over the world that will continue to be accessible for the next fortnight.

### Sustainable living films online

The Sustainable Living Film Festival (Sürdürülebilir Yaşam Film Festivali), which has been held for well over a decade annually and in different cities throughout Turkey, has an online television channel from where you can watch dozens of films from Turkey and beyond in their original language with subtitles on a wide variety of topics. The plethora of short and feature-length films are divided into dozens of categories ranging from climate change, zero-waste, tourism, urban renewal, nature conservation and so much more and are accessible free of charge on [www.surdurulebiliryasam.tv](http://www.surdurulebiliryasam.tv).

### Children's Film Festival online

Turkey's Cinema and Audiovisual Cultural Foundation (Türsak Vakfı) kicked off their annual Children's Film Festival online on National Children's Day and will continue to screen children's films weekly from their YouTube Channel, such as the upcoming screening of the 2013 Turkish film Arkadaşım Max, which is a family comedy centered on a young boy and his dog.

### Attending concerts on the couch

There are a wide variety of ways to be inspired and enriched during our days in quarantine, especially when it comes to listening to quality music from the comforts of home. Luckily, the live music programs of Akustikhane, Zorlu PSM and İşSanat are offering a wide variety of music and performance arts programming to help you pass the time. Akustikhane

holds live radio-like programs with guest musicians commenting and performing, İşSanat has been presenting performances from their archives, while Zorlu PSM has been putting up a variety of



*Istanbul's famed Topkapı Palace, the court of the Ottoman sultans, is available for a virtual tour. (iStock Photo)*

programming, such as podcasts and musical and theatrical performances accessible from their social media accounts and geared to adults and children. The Zorlu PSM YouTube channel also hosts the Late Night show "İbrahim Selim ile Bu Gece," which for the past few weeks has been broadcasted with guest stars appearing from their homes.

*Daily Sabah*

## Dinosaurs: Restoring Mongolia's fossil heritage

*By Beth Timmins*



*Bolortseteg Minjin is on a mission to protect and celebrate the Gobi's fossil treasures. Photo credit: Beth Timmins.*



**E**ighty million years ago, during the Cretaceous Period, Mongolia's Gobi Desert was a dinosaur's paradise of vast valleys, freshwater lakes and a humid climate.



*The American Roy Chapman Andrews worked in the region in the early 20th Century. Photo credit: Science Photo Library.*

Mammal-eating velociraptors, lizard-hipped sauropods and spike-armoured ankylosaurs could have been spotted roaming in what are now the Martian red sandstone spires of Bayanzag's Flaming Cliffs.

These prehistorically favourable conditions make the Gobi Desert the largest dinosaur fossil reservoir in the world.

Over almost 100 years of palaeontological research in the Gobi, more than 80 genera have been found. But for many people living there, this scientific heritage remains unknown.

"Putting a fence up is not protection; protection is people's knowledge," Mongolian palaeontologist Bolortsetseg Minjin explains as we wind through the Flaming Cliffs in search of signs of fossil poaching.

It was here, nearly a hundred years ago, that the world's first dinosaur egg nests were found by American scientist Roy Chapman Andrews - the whip-wielding, trilby-wearing inspiration for Indiana Jones.

This discovery was a turning point in the palaeontological history of the world - the first proof that dinosaurs laid eggs.

In the space of just two years, his expedition team unearthed over 100 dinosaurs and took them home to the American Museum of Natural History where many stand today.

And in Bayanzag, renamed the Flaming Cliffs by Chapman-Andrews, little remains to mark this history.

There are no signs, maps or museums to give visitors information about these creatures. Fossil-poaching is rife and as we explored the site, motorcycle scramblers zigzagged over its prize excavation opportunities.

Unlike in America and the UK, where a finders keepers law applies if you happen to discover a *T. rex* lurking in your flower beds, in Mongolia, as with Brazil and China, any fossils found are state-owned and exports are strictly forbidden.

Yet, dinosaurs from fossil-rich sites like the Flaming Cliffs are still smuggled and find their way into premier auctions.



*Efforts are now being made to bring back fossils that were taken abroad. Photo credit: Science Photo Library.*

Among the 30 stolen Mongolian fossils Bolortsetseg has worked to repatriate to date was a *Tarbosaurus bataar*, a rare cousin of the *T. Rex*. It had been bought by Hollywood actor Nicolas Cage.

And an earlier BBC investigation found that US Immigration and Customs Enforcement has seized \$44m worth of smuggled dinosaur fossils in the last five years.

Bolortsetseg says the solution is education and dinosaur-based tourism.



It can be achieved, she believes, by inspiring the next generation of Mongolia's palaeontologists and teaching children in the communities local to these significant sites about their scientific importance.



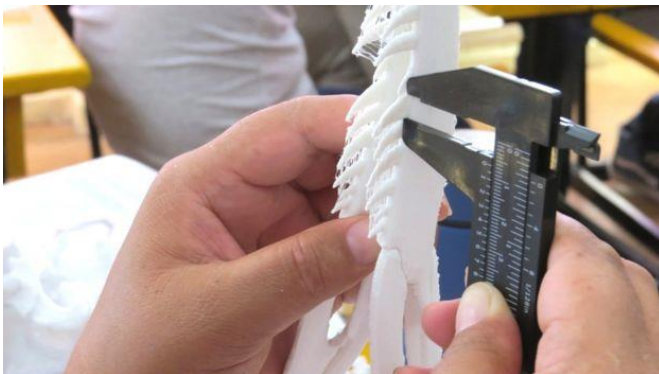
*Like all good palaeontologists, Bolortsetseg has a sharp eye for fossils. Photo credit: Beth Timmins.*

She has excavated in the Gobi Desert for decades, starting professionally when the American Museum of Natural History had invited her palaeontologist father for a dig and allowed her to join too - but as a cook.

"After the first morning making them breakfast, they headed out to excavate so I just thought, I'll go too," she explains. Already with a masters in palaeontology in her early twenties and a prospector's knowledge of her local area - she was immediately spotting all manner of fossils and got invited back as a palaeontologist in her own right.

And now, through communities separated by thousands of miles of desert, Bolortsetseg has been driving a 37ft bus brimming with replica fossils - the originals never before seen by most Mongolians.

"Even the kids who live right by the Flaming Cliffs often have no idea about the dinosaurs that have been found here, most can't name any dinosaurs and the



*The mobile museum's 250-sq-ft exhibit space has displays such as teeth replicas. Photo credit: Battur Janchiv.*

bus is the first museum they've ever seen," Bolortsetseg explains.

Bolortsetseg founded the Institute for the Study of Mongolian Dinosaurs in 2007 and crowd-funded \$46,000 for the museum's workshops across different regions.

Now the mobile museum stops off along dusty, bumpy off-roads through 11 provinces of the most remote parts of Mongolia.

"Before this, I didn't know anything about dinosaurs and now these things make me really proud," says 15-year-old Nyambayar Purevdorj, who lives next to the Tugrugin Shiree site where the famous "fighting dinosaurs" (entwined fossils of a *Velociraptor* and a *Protoceratops*) were found.



*Bolortsetseg asked the American Museum of Natural History to donate the bus. Photo credit: Bolorsetseg Minjin.*

Her classmate Badmaa Monhochir agreed: "I'd seen a little bit on TV but didn't know that they really lived millions of years ago. I thought it was just a legend or a children's story.

"In order to protect these fossils, we need to start from ourselves. People who are selling fossils have no knowledge and that's why we are learning now," she adds.

Gabriel Santos, collections manager at California's Alf Museum of Paleontology, has been working on the moveable museum and says adults also benefit from this education.

"Most, if not all, of the teachers we train had no idea that some dinosaurs had feathers, so the people who live so close to where *Velociraptor* was first found had no idea what it looked like."

Another palaeontologist leading the workshops, Michael Ziegler from the Florida Museum of Natural History, says the aim is to train local people to give dinosaur tours themselves. "Exposure is the biggest thing, starting from the ground up. In the bus, we interacted with every student and then coming back, they brought their parents along to teach them, too."

The prospective tourism benefits generated by dinosaur knowledge are a focus for Bulgan mayor, Munkh-Aldar Tumurbat.



*An augmented reality app can overlay Mongolian translations on English signage. Photo credit: Battur Janchiv.*

"Our strategy is a nature friendly tourism development without mining activities and licences in our territory," he tells the BBC.

"Eight-year-olds to their 80-year-old grandparents in our town should know about palaeontology and when and how dinosaurs lived."

Mayor Tumurbat says that annually 90% of Mongolia's tourists visit the Gobi Desert and Bayanzag's Flaming Cliffs.

Twelve years ago, there were three tourist camps and 13 mining licences granted in Bayanzag, but Mayor Tumurbat says that he has changed this to only one mining licence, which is due to be cancelled, and now 10 tourist camps. This he hopes will boost local palaeontological tourism.

"Currently, the citizens are getting very small benefits directly to their pockets by running small cafés, stores and a gas station - we need to create opportunities for our community to benefit from tourism," he adds.

The next step for the institute is building a museum at the site and teaching local people to use drones to undo the legacy of fossil poaching.

"Then they can monitor fossils at their fossil sites so they can do the protection and document the illegal activity," Bolortsetseg explains.

"We're waiting for the western part of Mongolia to have paved roads to take the bus museum to the mountains," she adds. And with half of the country's population under 35 years old, Bolortsetseg is working to introduce palaeontology on to the national curriculum within the next three years.

"We want to reach every single child in the country and spread the message that Mongolia's scientific history is part of its heritage and should not be smuggled out of its borders," she says.

Eleventh-grader Nyambayar agrees: "We need to start from ourselves by protecting dinosaurs. Then other people will follow us.

"If we have knowledge on dinosaur fossils and share this knowledge with others, then things can change."



*A Protoceratops skull in Ulaanbaatar's Central Museum of Mongolian Dinosaurs. Photo credit: Beth Timmins.*

*BBC News*

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