



### *Message from the Chairman*

Tourism was perceived to be one of the fastest growing and an imperative economic sectors in the world. It provided livelihoods for millions of people and paved the way for millions of others to appreciate different cultures and witness the beauty of the natural world. Tourism embodied the third largest export sector of the global economy and it contributed to over 20 per cent of the GDP of certain countries such as Maldives (38.92%), Macao (28.5%), and Seychelles (25.7%). The growth of the sector was unstoppable and resilient.

This entire phenomenon reversed with the advent of the coronavirus pandemic. Tourism has been one of the hardest hit sectors by the global pandemic. The outlook for the Industry is still indeterminate even after a complete year of uncertainty and living the new normal.

The recurring surges of the virus and the impacts caused by its mutations continue to hit hard on the Industry and has made whatever the opportunities of resuming to normalcy very lean. The fear of being exposed to another wave of the virus or any spikes in a region, has kept the travelers at edge, prompting them to check for government travel advisories constantly prior to making any travel plans. The trepidation casted by the virus in the mindsets of the travelers could be considered as one of the main contributors for tourism to be halted.

The tourism statistics published by the World Tourism Organization of the United nations (UNWTO) depicted an 87% fall in international tourist arrivals alone in January 2021 as compared with 2020 since the shocking impacts of the virus have been carried on to 2021 as well.

Furthermore, the UNWTO report stated that the year 2021 started with a substantial decline in the tourist arrivals. Mandatory testing, quarantine requirements, and in some regions the complete closure of borders, have hindered the resumption of international travel.

The revival of tourism has also been deferred by the slower-than-expected roll-out of the vaccination. Tourist arrivals were expected to decline by 85% in the first quarter of 2021 alone as against the same period of 2019. As per UNWTO, this represents a loss of 260 million international arrivals when compared with the pre-pandemic periods.

World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) estimated the contribution of the sector alone in the region of the South Asia to be USD234 Billion in 2019, or 6.6% of the GDP of the region. The pandemic could have not struck at a much worse time, when the region was achieving steady and fast growth.

Even though domestic tourism contributed to sustain the industry to some extent throughout the year of 2020, it was unable to soften the blow that was created by the virus. Also in spite of the Governments having taken immediate action to protect the livelihoods of the people who are engaged in the sector and extending its cooperation to protect the businesses.

It was required by the Industry and its operators to leverage innovation to sustain its survival in these unprecedented times. Thus, staycations, safe and secure travel options and most importantly travel bubble concepts emerged as the latest trends that encouraged travel which also renewed interest in domestic holiday locations. Harmonized protocols such as the Digital Green Certificate planned by the European Commission is also expected to enhance international travel.

Spain has opened its borders to all vaccinated travelers, as has Greece. In the meantime, the rest of Europe prepares to receive tourists cautiously by the beginning of the month of July 2021.

A significant boost in tourism and the services industries could also be expected in South Asia following the simplification of travel restrictions and the accelerated nationwide vaccination programmes throughout the region. But the rebound in international travel is mainly dependent on the success of these vaccination programmes and the harmonization of protocols between regions. If these prove to be successful, the industry could restart by the second half of 2021 as per the predictions made by UNWTO.

Overcoming and battling the virus finally rests upon each individual and individual's sense of responsibility. The surges and



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spikes of the virus has signified the importance of personal responsibility, as the battle against the virus has finally filtered down to personal obligation towards ourselves and towards society.

As individuals, we all should act with responsibility as well-informed persons, abiding by health restrictions, maintaining the mandatory social distancing and by being vaccinated. Constant wearing of a mask, washing of hands and maintaining distance could be perceived as tiresome and insignificant efforts to one. But these simple acts empower us to battle this infectious agent invisible to the naked eye that has caused rapid destruction in such a short span of time.

Governments should make protocols and take steps to educate citizens on the importance of the Vaccination Programme and should encourage individuals to safeguard themselves and the society by being vaccinated. It is our collective efforts which will enable us to defeat this virus and to restore normalcy to life.

Sri Lanka, where tourism was in the verge of becoming the third largest foreign exchange earner of the country, has placed its economy in a very fragile state. Being heavily dependent on the Industry, Sri Lanka has experienced immense hardships among all the stakeholders of the industry. Despite the measures that have been in place to curb the spread of the virus, stakeholders could not engage in even domestic tourism activities due to the strict travel restrictions that are imposed island-wide. Recurring outbreaks of the virus has created a highly volatile market which is not favorable.

Even though Sri Lanka is blessed with all the natural vistas and the natural resources that provide the ideal platform for tourism, the tourism Industry of the island nation has been battered and bruised repeatedly by several unfortunate events. These included the terrorism acts that prevailed for than 25 years that tore the country's industry apart, the Easter Sunday attacks in 2019, and now the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The policy makers in partnership with the stakeholders of the Country has to devise a strong Tourism Relief and Recovery Plan which is sustainable to restart Sri Lanka tourism with the world resuming to normalcy.

In this context, amidst all the threats it has imposed, the onset of the novel corona virus pandemic has also given us the opportunity to rethink our way forward in the industry.

It is time that we revisit our national and regional tourism strategies and align the same with the sustainable development goals and our national commitments.

This has presented us the opportunity to innovate and exploit new technologies, implement green recovery strategies, and move towards more sustainable practices that have a better balance between the environmental, social and economic aspects of tourism.

Policy makers should work towards converting this threat imposed by the pandemic into an opportunity to reboot the tourism economy on a stronger, impartial and more sustainable footing. The health crisis, and the recovery plans that are being put in place, are a once in a lifetime opportunity to move towards more sustainable and resilient models of tourism development.

The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us to return to our basic values and its importance. Post-COVID tourists will be looking for authentic experiences, mostly for untouched destinations to ensure safety. We should leverage the experience gained and move away from the conventional tourism to provide experiences to the travelers in a more sustainable manner which in return will safeguard the host country.

Anura Lokuhetty  
Chairman of Asian Council on Tourism

# Airline Recovery May Depend on Leisure Travel

By Tom Stalnaker, Partner at Oliver Wyman, and  
Khalid Usman, Partner at Oliver Wyman



Aircraft grounded due to the COVID-19 pandemic at Manchester Airport in northwest England on May 1, 2020. Because of COVID-19, almost three-quarters of companies worldwide canceled or suspended domestic travel, and 93% canceled or suspended international travel. Photo: Oli Scarff/AFP via Getty Images

Thanks to an almost complete shutdown of both business and international travel, the airline industry faced substantial losses in 2020, and this trend will continue for much, if not all, of 2021.

It is fair to say that no crisis in modern times has shattered the aviation business model as much as the coronavirus pandemic: The pandemic has managed to wipe out two decades of demand growth in a few months.

## Business or Leisure?

Because of COVID-19, almost three-quarters of companies worldwide canceled or suspended domestic travel, and 93% canceled or suspended international travel, according to the Global Business Travel Association. Corporate bookings plummeted 85% in 2020 and have remained at that level in 2021, based on Airlines Reporting Corp. data, which has been particularly painful for airlines as corporate fliers are their most profitable market segment.

Typically, business travel accounts for more than half of airline earnings and nearly a third of total airline revenue in major economies like the United States. Yet high-yield passengers such as executives account for only 9% of the total flying public. The average high-yield booking produces 4.3 times more revenue than a typical leisure booking.

As a result, the industry has become dependent on leisure travelers who, despite the pandemic, began to take trips again in the second half of 2020. With these lower-yielding travelers making up a higher portion of a decimated demand, airlines were doomed to see a drop in revenue and substantial losses.

## Getting Out of the Red

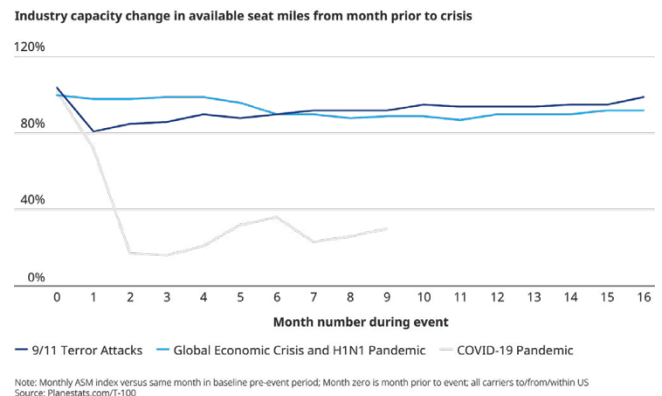
The International Air Transport Association (IATA) predicts that the global aviation industry would not be cash-positive until 2022, despite indications from a few airlines that their core operations could be cash positive sometime this year. In November, the association said it expects carrier losses to be an additional \$38.7 billion cumulatively in 2021. That's after losing \$118.5 billion in 2020.

In the U.S., except for spikes at major holidays, passenger traffic stayed around 40% of 2019 levels through most of the second half of 2020, based on TSA data. It was still only a little over 49% for the first four months of 2021.

## The COVID Impact Compared to Past Crises

This tepid demand for air travel also affected fares. We found fares in heavily business-oriented markets dropped 33% in the pandemic year of 2020 versus 12% during the 2007-2009 U.S. recession and H1N1 flu pandemic. Leisure fares, on the other hand, fell 16% by the end of last year versus 13% during 2009. This disparity underscores the disproportionate impact the absence of higher-paying business travelers has had.

In event-triggered downturns of the past, such as 9/11 and the global financial crisis of 2008-2009, low-cost airlines had an advantage because of their lower operating costs. For those crises, there were similar declines in revenue per available seat mile, a benchmark metric used to compare airline revenue performance.



That wasn't true for COVID-19. Where in the past, low-cost carriers only had an operating cost advantage during crises, they now also have a revenue advantage because their primary market — leisure customers — has recovered faster than the business travel market.

The second quarter of 2020 was probably the darkest period for U.S. carriers, as revenue per available seat mile for full-service airlines fell 50% year-over-year, according to U.S. Department of Transportation data. Meanwhile, low-cost airlines saw just a 23% drop in the same three months.

The third quarter's revenue (per available seat mile) brought the performance of the two airline groups closer together, with full-service carriers declining 45% and low-cost carriers down 38%.

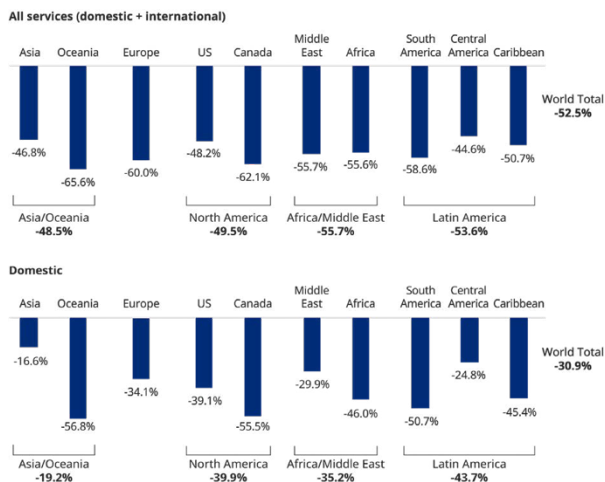
## Domestic Versus International Travel

Like business travel, the international market dried up because of the restrictions preventing or discouraging cross-border trips and consumers' fears of having trips canceled or getting stuck in a foreign country. Respondents in two Oliver Wyman surveys involving nine countries said their first trips once pandemic restrictions lifted would still most likely be domestic to



see family and friends.

The evaporation of international travel hit some regions very hard. In Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, only 10% of air travel is domestic.



Notes: Domestic stands for aviation capacity within individual countries; Latin America includes Mexico  
 Source: OAG schedule data via PlaneStats.com  
 Capacity Reductions by Region in Available Seat Miles, 2020 Versus 2019

Even in Asia, where nations, such as China, South Korea and Vietnam, managed to contain the virus in a matter of a few months, international traffic is down more than 70%, primarily because of regulations prohibiting cross-border travel. Despite the fact that airlines in these three countries saw domestic demand recover to 2019 levels in 2020, they felt the loss of international traffic. In China, for instance, international travel makes up 45% of its aviation market.

For the second half of 2020, global domestic capacity was down 34% while international was down a stunning 75%. Despite the loss of international traffic killing tourism in numerous economies, the international leisure segment is likely to recover faster than business, as other countries catch up with the U.S. on vaccinations.

### Vaccine and Stimulus Support

Of course, with increased availability of vaccines and passage of the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act, the outlooks for aviation and the national economy are gradually brightening. Herd immunity could be reached in most of the U.S. by early summer — the second half of June or the beginning of July. That’s three to six weeks sooner than we were predicting in January.

The Northeast will be one of the regions that emerges earliest, which is fitting as it was the region to be hit hardest in the early days of the pandemic. If the progression toward herd immunity unfolds as expected, then the U.S. could see a relatively rapid pickup in demand for domestic travel sometime this summer. Of course, our calculations assume no big surprises, such as the emergence of variants resistant to the vaccines or a short-lived immunity from the vaccines, which could cause COVID-19 to linger.

### Looking Forward

China and a few other nations in Asia already saw that trend, even without a vaccine, thanks to aggressive COVID-19

containment efforts. For example, China’s domestic air travel recovered to 2019 levels in November. The return of international travel is also a question mark. The sector will take longer to recover than domestic and may look different as “vaccine passports” and other protocols are likely to be adopted in some places. We may also see the development of bilateral agreements to permit travel between nations where there has been mass vaccination or infection rates are minimal.

While still in the thick of the pandemic, it’s hard to assess which impacts will leave permanent scars. The disruption in business travel isn’t expected to fully reverse anytime soon, given the existence of mobility substitutes like videoconferencing. As long as these substitutes persist to any substantial degree, the business travel market will constitute the biggest drag on airline earnings for the foreseeable future — one that will force airlines to keep tweaking their business model to compensate. But even beyond corporate travel, this kind of shock will not be forgotten soon.

*Andy Buchanan, Grant Alport, Aaron Taylor and Rory Heilakka also contributed to this piece.*

*Brink*

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## The Future of Travel This Year: Are We There Yet?

*An Altamar podcast interview with:  
 Céline Fornaro*

*Managing Director and Head of European Industrials Equity Research at UBS Securities*

In 2020, the world of travel came to a dramatic halt. Empty airports, deserted roads and grounded airplanes were the story of 2020 and the beginning of 2021. Now, as COVID vaccines



A person watches a Delta plane as it approaches DCA in Arlington, Virginia. Leisure travel will likely see an uptick relatively soon, but corporate travel will stay on the back burner for some time.

Photo: Daniel Slim/AFP via Getty Images

become more readily available around the world, we ask the same question that any child would: “Are we there yet?”

Countries are making moves toward reopening, and U.S. domestic and European airlines are seeing a dramatic increase in summer ticket sales. Should the travel industry begin to cheer, or is it a little too soon to call this a “win”?

Céline Fornaro, managing director, head of the European Industrials team at UBS Securities, joins hosts Peter Schechter and Muni Jensen on Altamar’s latest podcast episode to discuss the future of post-pandemic travel. Fornaro was a former managing director and head of Aerospace and Defense Equity Research at Bank of America Merrill Lynch and is a frequent commentator on industry topics.

In 2019, the global travel and tourism industry contributed a huge \$9.25 trillion to the global economy. With shutdowns, closed borders and grounded planes, the travel industry’s shortfalls could amount to 2.8% of the world’s GDP or even more. A full recovery is not expected until 2023, according to estimates of the relatively conservative UN Conference on Trade and Development. Tourism is one of the leading sources of income for many countries. But all nations — big and small — have felt the negative economic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic generated by the shortage of travelers.

For example, Japan, expecting a huge influx of tourists for the Olympics, or smaller Caribbean nations that are totally dependent on tourism, have seen their GDP numbers continue to plummet with no end in sight — or is there? With vaccinations up in certain parts of the world, most notably the United States, could there be a light at the end of this seemingly everlasting tunnel?

### What Will Travel Look Like This Time Next Year?

Fornaro predicts that leisure travel could be very different in 2022 as people are desperate to get out of their house. “I think there is an element of the taste of freedom. ... That’s the feeling that people will have when we come out of [the pandemic],” says Fornaro.

But don’t start packing your bags just yet.

The first step to getting back to both domestic and international travel lies in people’s access to the vaccine. But the second step is about reassuring others on an airplane, a cruise or a

rail car that everybody else on board is vaccinated.

Indeed, vaccine passports are becoming an increasingly controversial issue as governments and companies debate how to make the workplace — and travel — safer.

### Vaccine Passports

Here again, U.S. and European countries differ — with Europe actively considering government-sanctioned vaccine passports.

“I think one of the first things clearly needs to be a vaccination program that reassures everyone. And if you need to update the vaccination every year and whatever else it takes, it’s important to have communication [and transparency]. [The pandemic has] created anxiety even going into an airport, where you say, ‘Okay, how am I going to go with all these people around me? And how do I know that they’re all safe?’” explains Fornaro.

The U.S. is providing some insight into the near-term future of travel. “Even over the last couple of weeks, [we have seen that] once you have higher levels of vaccinations, we can give back passengers the confidence to travel. And in the U.S., we have seen significant positive developments in terms of travel and travel demands for domestic travel, which is now basically [back up to] two-thirds of pre-COVID levels. So, it’s going back pretty fast,” says Fornaro.

### Corporate Travel Will Take Longer to Recover

It’s clear that health safety is key to returning back to normal travel. After the CDC recently announced that fully vaccinated individuals can travel with low risk, many flocked to travel sites and began booking their summer plans.

Not all travel is equal, however. Leisure travel will likely see an uptick relatively soon, but corporate travel will stay on the backburner for some time. “We will definitely not lose some of these habits that we’ve gained through Zoom or online calls ... we see that there are some places that will never fully go back to being physically in the office, whereas others are looking at three days a week,” notes Fornaro.

However, there is one aspect of the travel industry that is quickly changing. “UBS shared a report that the use of high-speed trains could lead to zero growth in air traffic between European destinations from 2018 to 2028. Governments should be keen to invest in high-speed rail in Europe given their commitments to net-zero-carbon emissions.

### How Do the Green Issue and the Travel Issue Intersect?

“With COVID, the European commission has actually used that in a way to maintain a clear focus on the green deal and investment in other things: green transport and green energy. ... COVID has not been used as an excuse to step back for probably the first time in an economic downturn,” observes Fornaro.

The link between climate change and travel is not new. Young activists like Greta Thunberg brought up the issue of “responsible travel” and a new trend called “travel shaming” that criticized those traveling by airplane. But Fornaro believes that, after the pandemic, “passengers will consider air travel as a necessity and not as an extra trip, because you’re really going back to visiting your family, your core friends and probably [also taking some time for] mental health.”

*Altamar is a global politics podcast hosted by former Atlantic Council senior vice president Peter Schechter and award-winning journalist Muni Jensen.*

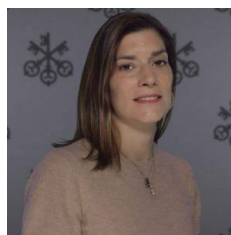
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*European Industrials Equity Research at UBS Securities. She spent 12 years at Bank of America Merrill Lynch where she was also a managing director and head of aerospace and defense equity research. She is a trained aeronautical engineer, a member of Chatham House and the Royal Aeronautical Society, and a frequent commentator on the travel industry.*

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## **Creating Value for Airlines Through Retailing**

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a catastrophic downturn in air travel, revenues, and profitability that has continued through the 2021 first quarter. Perhaps surprisingly, over the same period, the industry's drive toward airline retailing, enabled by initiatives such as the New Distribution Capability (NDC), has accelerated.

"There was strong momentum toward NDC across the entire value chain before COVID-19," says Yanik Hoyles, IATA's Director Distribution. "Since then, many airlines, technology providers, and travel sellers have intensified this drive and maintained retailing as part of their core strategic priorities."

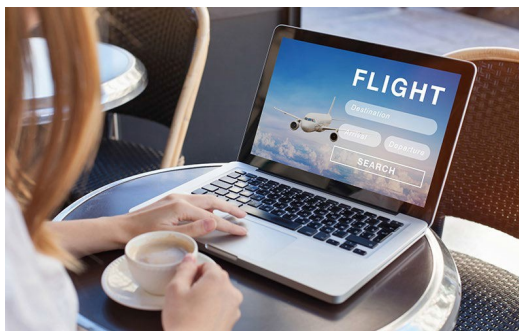
In the early days of the crisis, the Distribution Advisory Council (DAC), one of nine Councils that are part of IATA's governance structure, recognized the importance that airline retailing would play in the industry's post-COVID recovery, says Hoyles. In April 2020, the DAC strongly agreed that NDC needed to continue to be supported and moved forward, even as IATA rapidly shifted priorities and resources to focus on the industry's survival.

Based on developments over the past 12 months, the wisdom of the DAC's decision is clear. For example:

- Between March 2020 and April 2021, the number of NDC certifications (airlines, IT providers, sellers) grew to 193 players, an increase of 18%
- In June 2020, the NDC Leaderboard airlines collectively hit the target of having 20% of their indirect sales coming from their NDC API, albeit on a very low number of bookings and with a favorable passenger mix (short haul & leisure).
- Several third-party distribution agreements have been announced among airlines, GDSs, and IT providers, some of which incorporate new commercial models reflecting landmark changes facilitated by NDC.

"The post-Covid19 world will be different," says Hoyles. "It will take a while for travel volumes to get back to 2019 levels and in the meantime, value creation will be critical to profitability, and that's driving airline retailing."

He continues: "You will see us putting more focus on aspects around value creation, rather than on transaction volumes and individual programs."



As part of this new approach, the Leaderboard strategy will be coming to an end. "The intent of the Leaderboard was to support the drive toward a critical mass of NDC transactions and to serve as a kind of pathfinder for the industry. Now that NDC is mainstream, we are focused on moving to an inclusive approach that encompasses all IATA members, and that focuses not only on volume but also on value creation."

It also means embracing a more recent standard as the industry's baseline. Hoyles explains that most implementers of enhanced distribution standards are on the 17.2 release of the NDC standard. The significant improvements in capability that the later releases contain (particularly servicing capabilities) are therefore not being widely adopted.

The industry governance groups around NDC, comprised of airlines and value chain partners, agreed on the need to identify a new version to which the industry could migrate. On 10 March 2021, the Shop Order Standards Board (composed of airlines) selected the 21.3 release as the version around which the industry can converge. Further, releases subsequent to 21.3 will be backwards compatible to 21.3. This means that implementers may now choose to upgrade to this version knowing that future releases can be implemented in a simpler and more cost-effective way. The 21.3 release will be published in September 2021.

The NDC Certification program also will be evolving, says Hoyles, with an added component of value creation guidance and tracking. The new model which, will be called the Airline Retailing Maturity Index looks to the broader scope of airline retailing with an increased focus on value chain partnerships and value creation. It will be rolled out during 2021.

The stakes are enormous. According to a report from McKinsey, airline retailing has an industry average value creation potential of up to \$7 per passenger, the equivalent of approximately 4% of revenue.

"In a digital world, airline customers' expectations for personalized offers, real-time information, and seamless transactions are growing," says Hoyles. "Retailing can move airline distribution to the future through de-commoditization, selling new products in new ways, and being closer to the customers. It will enable richer customer engagement and dynamic offer creation."

*Airlines. Magazine, International Air Transport Association (IATA)*



# UNWTO and IATA Collaborate on Destination Tracker to Restore Confidence in Travel

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the International Air Transport Association (IATA) announce a Destination Tracker in preparation for the restart of international travel. It is the result of both organizations joining efforts to boost confidence and accelerate recovery of the tourism sector when borders reopen. The UNWTO-IATA Destination Tracker is a new free online tool for governments to provide information on COVID-19 requirements for travel and the measures in place at the destination.



The tool is available through the websites of both organizations and will provide information on:

- COVID-19 Indicators, including infection rates, positivity rates, and vaccination roll out by destination/country.
- Air Travel Regulations, including test and quarantine requirements, provided by IATA's Timatic solution.
- Destination Measures, including general health and safety requirements such as use of masks, transit through a country, curfew, or regulations related to restaurants and attractions, provided by national tourism organizations.

The Destination Tracker will fulfill a key need by providing clarity on COVID-19 measures affecting tourism. The situation for travelers is complex with UNWTO data showing that one in three destinations remains closed to tourists. Moreover, restrictions and in-country measures are continuously being revised.

Governments can use the Destination Tracker to post COVID-19 travel information so that potential travelers will know what to expect at their destination. When fully populated with updated destination information, travel stakeholders including Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) and travel agencies, will be able to obtain the latest destination information, enabling travelers to make informed decisions when borders reopen and travel resumes.

The development of the Tracker framework is completed. Up-to-date information on COVID-19 indicators and air travel regulations is available and systematically updated. Destination information is being progressively uploaded, expanded and updated with official sources as the COVID-19 situation evolves.

UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili says: "UNWTO is pleased to reinforce its partnership with IATA, a UNWTO Affiliate Member, to provide this important tool. Travelers and companies will be able to check requirements in place for air travel, as well as what measures will be in place at the visited destination. We trust this tool is also critical for governments to track existing travel restrictions and support the safe restart of our sector."

"It has been more than a year since the freedom to travel was lost as COVID-19 measures saw borders close. When governments have the confidence to re-open borders people will

be eager to travel. And they will need accurate information to guide them. With the support of national tourism organizations, the UNWTO-IATA Destination Tracker will help travelers and travel companies obtain the latest information for travel planning," said Willie Walsh, IATA's Director-General.

The UNWTO-IATA Destination Tracker builds on the existing partnership between the two parties. In October 2020, UNWTO and IATA signed a Memorandum of Understanding to work together to restore confidence in international air travel. The agreement will also see the two agencies partner to foster innovation to drive the restart of tourism, promote greater public-private collaboration in the field of aviation and the tourism sector in general, and advance progress already made towards achieving greater sustainability and resilience.

*Press release of International Air Transport Association (IATA)*

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## Cycling Tours Beckon Post-Pandemic Tourism Era

*By Hsiao Yu-hsin*



People cycle in the Cisingtan area in Hualien County's Sincheng Township on December 13, 2020.

Photo: Wang Chun-chi, Taipei Times

More than 1,000 hotels are expected to be certified as cyclist-friendly accommodation by the end of 2021 as they eye business opportunities brought by the "Year of Cycling Tourism," the Tourism Bureau said on April 27, 2021.

The bureau said it has designated 2021 the "Year of Cycling Tourism" as the government focuses on creating innovative domestic tours in the post-COVID-19 era.

"We are promoting the concept of 'cyclist-friendly accommodation' to 3,000 hotels along 16 main biking routes. Hoteliers can apply for certification if they have parking spaces

for bicycles, as well as cleaning and maintenance facilities,” the bureau said.

As of April 27, 2021, 700 hotels had obtained the certification, it added.

The L’Hotel de Chine has worked with Giant Manufacturing to train 14 “butlers” for cyclists, who would be in charge of the safety of hotel guests, check their brakes and tires, and adjust their seats during cycling tours.

The hotel chain also offers several unique cycling tours. A “low-carbon”

cycling tour to Hualien County’s Heping Township, for example, would take cyclists to a small village along the Suhua Highway and Heping Eco-Industry Harbor.

Fullon Hotels & Resort, which has seven hotels across the nation, has upgraded its facilities to prepare for the cycling tourism year.

Each facility is equipped with bicycle maintenance facilities, parking spaces, bike-cleaning areas and spin dryers, as well as bike rental and bike tour

services, it said.

The hotel chain offers special deals combining cycling tours with hotel stays, with more than 100 rooms being booked through the promotion, it added.

Fullon Hotel Fulong in New Taipei City’s Gongliao District is offering one-day cycling tours from April 30 to August 31 for less than NT\$1,000, where people can go cycling, have tea in the afternoon and bathe in ocean hot springs on Taiwan’s northeast coast.

*Taipei Times*

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## Japan Tourism Teams Up with Sumo Star for #GoodnessofJapan

Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) has recently collaborated with Japanese Sumo wrestler Yoshinori Tashiro to further widen the scope and reach of the #GoodnessofJapan campaign.

The new #GoodnessofJapan campaign highlights the brand value of safety, cleanliness, and sanitisation that are very vital in the current scenario.

As a part of the campaign, JNTO tailored made an itinerary for Yoshinori Tashiro who visited Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto and Okinawa.

It offers glimpse of his journey to some of the popular food joints and attractions like TOKYO SKYTREE, Ryosoku-in Temple, A Taste Of India – Ganesha Restaurant, Kyoto, Tower of the Sun Museum, Osaka Castle, Okinawa Churaumi Aquarium, Kouri Ohashi Bridge while highlighting safety, cleanliness, and



sanitisation.

The campaign also promotes several popular Indian restaurants in Japan, serving the authentic taste of India. Varied vegetarian options are easily available at close to 2100+ Indian restaurants spread across Japan.

JNTO said in an official release, “Through this latest association with Yoshinori Tashiro, JNTO wants to aspire Indian travellers to visit the destination

once the travel resumes. Yoshinori Tashiro was also a lead role in a Tamil film and during his stay in India, he became aware of the Indian traditions and culture that he finds a bit similar to Japan. These findings were thus incorporated in this campaign for the messaging to resonate with the Indians travellers.”

*Business Traveller*

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## City of Seoul Opens New Hub to Promote Tourism Industry



This photo, provided by the Seoul metropolitan government, shows the tourism information center on the first floor of Seoul Tourism Plaza in the nation's capital. (PHOTO NOT FOR SALE) (Yonhap)

The Seoul metropolitan government opened a new tourism hub in the nation’s capital on April 29, 2021,

saying it will support the growth and development of the tourism industry.

Seoul Tourism Plaza, located

inside Samil Building in the central Jongno Ward, is spread across floors one and four to 11, with a tourism information center and souvenir shop on the first floor and the offices of various tourism organizations, associations and startups on the upper levels.

The city government said the plaza aims to help local tourism businesses overcome the COVID-19 crisis and lead the fast-changing trends in the industry.

“Tourism in the post-COVID-19 era will focus on safety, localization, and going virtual or digital,” Seoul Mayor Oh Se-hoon said at the plaza’s opening ceremony. “The city of Seoul is actively pursuing projects to support, restore and advance the city’s tourism sector in order



to secure a top place in terms of demand in the global tourism market.”

The city government said the plaza’s three core areas of focus will be providing assistance to tourism businesses hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, strengthening cooperation between relevant associations and the public and

private sectors, and expanding tourism opportunities for citizens.

The plaza’s tenants include the Seoul Tourism Organization, which is affiliated with the municipal government, the Seoul Tourism Association, the Asia Inbound Tourism Association, and a local marketing company representing Tourism

Australia, the country’s state tourism agency.

The city government said the plaza was formed in response to industry calls for a tourism hub in the capital, after the state Korea Tourism Organization relocated to Wonju, Gangwon Province, in 2015.

*Yonhap News Agency*

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## New ‘Agro-Tourism’ Themed Resort to Open in Sri Lanka

*By Nisha Shroff*



Image Credit: Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority

Sri Lanka has announced to open up its first-ever agro-tourism-themed floating resort in Katana.

Located close to the Negombo tourism hub, the Bolagala Floating Agro Tourism Resort will feature 50 floating cabanas, including ten GPS tracker-equipped cabanas. It will also include a floating swimming pool, a floating restaurant along with the main restaurant, a pub and karaoke lounge, an underwater spa, and a gym.

A wide range of activities and unique tour experiences

will be offered to visitors, including water sports expeditions, visiting organic greenhouses, bicycle, and jogging tracks, fishing, tennis court, and experiencing an electric car.

The resort will also offer an organic farming experience where visitors will get insights into farming activity in Sri Lanka.

The Bolagala Floating Agro Tourism Resort is still under construction and is set to be completed in two phases.

The first phase of the resort is already completed and will be opening in June 2021. The first phase involves three suite rooms, 27 deluxe rooms, three GPS movable rooms, a floating swimming pool, and a restaurant. Other remaining rooms and functioning of the resort will be completed in the second phase.

Commenting on the news, Kimarli Fernando, chairperson of Sri Lanka Tourism said:

“Sustainable and eco-friendly products are the future for tourism particularly post Covid-19 and we look to the industry to be innovative and create unique experiences such as this project.

“I thank all the government agencies for their collaboration in granting approvals for a challenging project of this nature understanding the value of the project for the tourism industry in Sri Lanka.”

*Business Traveller*

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## Philippine Province Builds on Lessons Learned to Grow Ecotourism Industry

*By Jun Aguirre*

- *Antique province in the central Philippines is looking to boost local revenues through ecotourism, after the COVID-19 pandemic put the brakes on a thriving tourism industry.*
- *The province is home to a rich biodiversity, including the critically endangered writhed-billed hornbill, giant rafflesia “corpse flower,” and rare bowl corals.*
- *Taking a leaf from the experience of nearby Boracay, the resort*

*island where a tourism boom led to severe environmental damage, local officials face the challenge of balancing tourism-driven development and environmental protection.*

- *A prominent lawmaker is pushing for seascapes and coastal zones in the province to be given national protection.*

Although it lies less than 20 kilometers (12 miles) from the globally famous resort island of Boracay, the

province of Antique in the central Philippines remains primarily an agricultural and fishing province. Today, provincial government leaders are working to lure more tourists to Antique, an endeavor for which Boracay — where the boom in tourism has often come at the expense of the ecosystem — has proved both inspirational and instructive.

Tourism numbers in Antique had started ramping up before COVID-19 hit. In 2017, the local tourism office recorded about 500,000 tourist arrivals. By 2019, that had tripled to 1.3 million. The number,



Panay Island, Antique Province. The province of Antique in the central Philippines remains primarily an agricultural and fishing province. Image by Gary Todd via Flickr.



Panay Island, Antique Province. Antique is known as a haven for flora and fauna. Image by Gary Todd via Flickr.



Divers exploring the seas off Antique discovered several colonies of the rare bowl corals. Image courtesy of Sabadd Samurai Extreme.

however, dropped in 2020 to just 10,706 due to pandemic-related travel restrictions.

But as tourism promotion efforts grow, officials and conservationists are grappling with the challenge of how to balance tourism development with conservation of the environment.

Antique is known as a haven for flora and fauna, which officials are banking on to draw in the tourists.

Loren Legarda, a congresswoman who represents the province, says Antique offers opportunities to explore and experience marine and terrestrial biodiversity that complements the world-class tourism in Boracay.

These include giant *Rafflesia* “corpse flowers” in Sibalom Natural Park and in the neighboring municipality of San Remigio, as well as critically endangered writhed-billed hornbills (*Rhabdotorrhinus waldeni*) and endangered Visayan tarictic hornbills in Pandan municipality in Antique’s north. Writhed-billed hornbills have been named the provincial bird to raise importance of their conservation.

And as recently as October 2020, divers exploring the seas off Antique discovered several colonies of bowl corals (*Halomitra pileus*), a rare species whose dome-like structures can reach 60 centimeters (2 feet) in diameter. The group also sighted manta rays at least three times during their explorations, which were supported by the provincial tourism department.

Legarda has sought the help of the national Department of Tourism and Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to conduct a full inventory of the biodiversity that she says can lure tourists to Antique.

However, there are already signs of trouble for the province’s biodiversity.

Aldwin Alojipan and Jude Dionela Sanchez, members of the dive team that spotted the bowl coral colonies, said several of the sites already showed signs of damage, suspected to have been caused by illegal fishing in 1980s. “We are now coordinating with the local governments in LIPASECU Council” comprising representatives from the municipalities of Libertad, Pandan, Sebaste and Culasi — “and the DENR including the office of Congresswoman Legarda for the protection of our environment,” they said.

Some of the emerging problems appear to be directly linked to rising tourism numbers.

From January to June 2019, when tourism in Antique reached its pre-pandemic peak, the DENR’s Environmental Management Bureau detected a high presence of fecal coliform

in the Pandan River. The river flows down through the Malumpati Cold Spring and Bugang River, a rising tourism destination.

In 2009, the Bugang River was ranked as the cleanest inland body of water in the entire Philippines.

Local and provincial officials say they plan to act to prevent further contamination of the environment.

After the DENR survey, the Pandan municipal government formed a task force to clean up the Pandan River. “We have learned a lesson and right now we are strict in imposing environmental safety to my town especially in Pandan Bay where the rare bowl corals have been found,” said Pandan Mayor Plaridel Sanchez.

Andre Untal, chief of the Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Office (PENRO) in Antique, said the 300-hectare (740-acre) Pandan Bay is being proposed as a protected area under national legislation.

Congresswoman Legarda was the one who proposed the move, citing the area’s “unique physical and biological significance,” Untal said.

If the bill is approved, the DENR would work with stakeholders like local governments and national government agencies, NGOs, and academics to craft a development framework that aims to balance conservation and livelihood concerns in the face of an anticipated influx of tourism.

Legarda also filed another bill in Congress to create the Northern Antique Protected Seascape and Landscape (NAPSL), which would protect the area as a designated ecotourism zone.

*Mongabay*

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## Tourism New Zealand Announces ‘Recharge Season’ To Combat Fatigue

Press Release: Tourism New Zealand

- Tourism New Zealand has officially launched a new holiday season – Recharge Season – and is encouraging Kiwis to book a recharging holiday
- The decision to launch a new season is in response to the exceptional level of fatigue facing the nation – with 42% of New Zealanders saying 2020 has made them wearier than ever\*

- Leading psychologist Jacqui Maguire says meaningful recharge involves both passive (rest) and active recovery. To optimise your downtime, it's helpful to plan how you'll engage in meaningful activities

Tourism New Zealand has officially launched a new holiday season – Recharge Season – and is encouraging Kiwis to book a holiday that will leave them feeling refreshed and ready for the year ahead.

The new season is in response to a recent survey commissioned by Tourism New Zealand that revealed almost half of Kiwis feel that 2020 has impacted their levels of fatigue more than any year in recent memory, and almost a third of New Zealanders finished their summer holidays still feeling worn out.

As a nation, we're more weary than ever given the events of 2020, and at this time of year, people tend to take a 'flop and drop' break where they do nothing, when in actual fact, it is widely acknowledged that an 'active' break will leave you feeling more recharged.

Leading psychologist Jacqui Maguire says that when we are fatigued and feeling like we've exhausted our mental and physical capacity, a 'drop and sloth' holiday is often what we are drawn too. Whilst there is no doubt rest is an important component of recovery, it's by no means the complete answer to a recharging holiday.

"Research indicates that to recover from fatigue and stress, people need to engage in activities which produce positive emotions and boost their sense of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. This includes participating in creative, physical, social and intellectual activities," says Maguire.

Furthermore, Jacqui notes that travel holidays are known to boost overall wellbeing. Visiting new places and engaging in local cultural activities decreases stress, boosts life satisfaction and enhances people's perspectives on their life, resilience and creativity.

Finally, Jacqui says the possibility that active recovery may also prevent future fatigue and stress.

Building wellbeing toolsthrough meaningful activities with others can be used in the future to problem solve and navigate life's overwhelm and challenges.

\* Dynata research of 1000 New Zealanders, commissioned for Tourism New Zealand in 2021

Recharge season will run from April 27 to June 6th to encourage all New Zealanders to book a short break and recharge. Doing something new, whether it's physical, cultural, or creative will leave Kiwis feeling refreshed for the year ahead.

Bjoern Spreitzer, Tourism New Zealand General Manager Domestic, commented, "New Zealand is one of the world's top tourism destinations, and we're thankful that so many New Zealanders have taken the opportunity to explore more of their own backyard in recent months."

"The launch of Recharge Season is another timely reminder to any Kiwis feeling weary or fatigued to get out



Active Recharge at OAMARU STEAMPUNK

and about. Doing something new by connecting with culture or seeking out those awe-inspiring landscapes can leave us feeling refreshed and recharged for the year ahead."

Tips for planning a recharging holiday:

1. Physical activity can recharge you mentally and physically: Numerous studies have supported the idea of physical activity acting as an anti-inflammatory and anti-oxidative treatment – try challenging activities such as surfing, mountain biking or hiking.
2. Seek out new and extraordinary experiences: Trying something new, or seeing something that inspires awe, can improve your psychological outlook and improve your feelings of optimism, gratitude and love. Try stargazing, seek out scenic views from a mountain-top or visit a Kauri forest for the first time.
3. Partake in a new or challenging activity: Research from Harvard Medical School has indicated that learning new experiences helps maintain cognitive skills and alertness. Activities such as cross-country orienteering, sailing or even kiteboarding are good examples.
4. Creativity can recharge you: Non-work-related creative activity can help recharge you – improving your overall productivity and performance levels. Look at indulging in museums, art exhibitions or theatre for some creative inspiration.
5. Sharing experiences can improve your sense of wellbeing: Sharing new experiences with those we love and being more open to new experiences, can help improve imagination, creativity, curiosity and even IQ. Try getting a friend or family member to surprise you with a shared experience.

*Scoop*

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## Indonesia tourism players take stronger technology approach to customer engagement

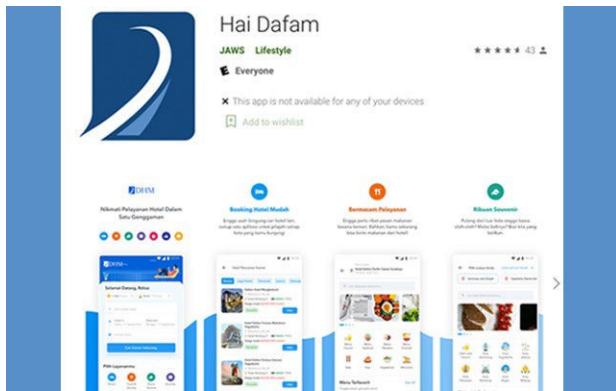
*By Tiara Maharani*

Travel trade stakeholders in Indonesia are increasing their online presence and app capabilities to better engage domestic customers and secure new sales in an increasingly challenging travel landscape.

Traveloka recently conducted live hotel tours, during which discounted rooms were sold. The initiative, according to John Safenson, vice president market management, helps to demonstrate the health and safety measures taken by industry players and rid fear of travel in a pandemic era.

Recognising that travellers today are more price-conscious, Traveloka has intensified its marketing work, throwing out special offers and door prizes to entice consumers.





The new HAI Dafam will facilitate improved guest servicing

Safenson told TTG Asia that travellers on April 13 seek promotions and discounts, and look for assurance in the form of flexible booking and payment terms.

Over at Dafam Hotel Management (DHM), an improved mobile app has been created to facilitate better communications with in-house guests and expand service offerings.

Andhy Irawan, CEO of DHM, said hotels must do more than sell rooms and services on property; they should also have the capability to bring external experiences to in-house guests. With

that in mind, DHM worked with Jawara Solusi Nusantara (JAWS), a web and mobile application system provider, to launch the HAI Dafam mobile app.

Rizki Susetiadi, CEO of JAWS, said the new app allows in-house guests to make room and restaurant reservations as well as order room service. In the future, the app will include online shopping features, allowing hotel guests to order local cuisine or souvenirs and have their purchases delivered to their room.

Another industry partnership has surfaced to benefit the travelling community, this time between Indonesia AirAsia and the Indonesia Hotel and Restaurant Association (IHRA). Both entities have come together to create travel packages for both individual and group travellers through the new Super AirAsia app. Supporting this effort is the SNAP promotion, which dangles affordable travel deals to Medan and Lombok, with prices starting from 699,000 rupiah (US\$48.35). These deals include round-trip airfares from Jakarta and two-night stay at IHRA participating member hotels.

While the promotion was initially aimed at boosting traffic to priority Indonesian destinations the airline operates in, Veranita Yosephine Sinaga, CEO of Air Asia Indonesia, soon found opportunities to expand it to other destinations.

*Additional reporting by Mimi Hudoyo*

TTG Asia

## The Foundations of Georgia's Tourism Sector Remain Strong

By George Ramishvili

*Covid-19 has been a major setback for travel across much of the world, but Georgia is optimistic that the unprecedented growth of its tourism industry will soon be back on track, with winter sports a key driver.*

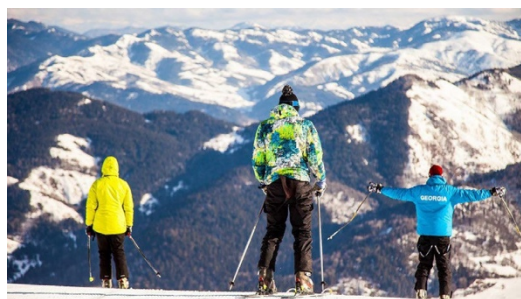
As the world edges towards the light provided by vaccination, with my country of Georgia's programme getting underway in March 2021, the tourism and hospitality sectors are eagerly anticipating a grand reopening.

Amidst the continuing pandemic depression, it is hoped that once international travel fully resumes, there is significant pent-up demand from tourists who have had to put global travel on hold. In Georgia, the first glimmers of hope for these industries are emerging, following an unimaginably difficult year.

Prior to the emergence of Covid 19, Georgia's tourism industry was on the up and up. In 2019, the country broke all previous records for hosting international travellers, with nearly 10 million foreign visitors to our beautiful country. Income from tourists alone exceeded three billion US dollars in the same year and Georgia rightly has the ambitious goal of seeing 11 million annual international visitors adding 6.6 billion US dollars to the economy by the middle of this decade.

Despite the major setback the pandemic has presented, I remain confident of our ability to not only meet but exceed these targets.

My confidence is based on the remarkable transformations



that have taken place within Georgia's hospitality industry in recent years, of which I am proud Silk Road Group has been at the forefront.

### International confidence

The industry has expanded at a phenomenal rate. It was virtually non-existent in the 1990s, as the country emerged from the collapse of the Soviet Union. International visitors were rare and

accounted for a fraction of the country's income. However, the decade up to the emergence of the pandemic has been a story of sustained success. It is the hallmark of a broader narrative around Georgia as a country that is an increasingly attractive place to do business from investors across the globe.

Despite the difficulties of the pandemic, it's been heartening to see international confidence in Georgia's long-term tourism potential remain strong. In our own business, our project to develop architectural landmarks, such as Tbilisi's modernist Telegraph Hotel, currently being developed to a blueprint from by the world famous designers Neri&Hu, has been backed by 15 million US dollars of investment from Denmark's IFU. This is just one example of how the world recognises Georgia as a major tourism hub in the making.

We have been at the forefront of bringing international brands such as Radisson to the country and delivering hotels across the country built to international design standards by world class designers such as Graft Architects, Michele de Lucci and Ingo

Maurer. I am especially proud of our active role in the restoration of historic treasures like the Tsinandali Estate, with its growing international music festival. This part of a wider trend across the country in response to huge tourism growth, with the number of international travellers increasing nearly fivefold in the last 10 years, while the number of people employed by the industry grew to 158,000.

### 2023 Ski World Cup

Recent developments also offer optimism. Flights between Tbilisi and Dubai, a major source of international visitors, have now resumed. More recently, the Georgian government announced the opening of its borders to vaccinated Israeli and European Union visitors, of whom there are more each and every day. Furthermore, airlines are offering PCR

testing at reasonable rates, as are we in all Silk Hospitality hotels which return results the same day.

Further to this, we have recently seen the return of competitive international sport to Georgia with the first stage of World Cup Ski Cross being held at the resort of Bakuriani, despite the ongoing pandemic. This has helped provide some much welcome profile raising for the relatively new Georgia ski industry, which is well placed to take advantage of skiers increasing desire for alternative, relatively untouched winter sports destinations.

I have been involved with the Georgian Ski Federation and National Alpine Team of Georgia for decades now, acting as the main sponsor for over 20 years. To see our efforts to build a winter sports industry in the country culminate in such a high-profile event is immensely

rewarding. The efforts taken to develop and improve the Georgian ski industry are a key reason for why the FIS have entrusted us to host the 2023 Ski World Cup, a huge milestone for the country's winter sports sector.

It is also demonstrative of a smart, cautious but proactive approach that favourably positions Georgia in the global tourism race that will inevitably ensue as global vaccination efforts continue. Despite the light offered by vaccination, the priority remains to ensure visitors' feel safe and in as Covid-secure an environment as possible. By taking sensible precautions and proactively communicating Georgia's increasing openness, I am confident that the country's tourism industry has cause for optimism for the year ahead.

*Emerging Europe*

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## Vietnam's MICE tourism expected to explode after COVID-19

*MICE, a type of tourism combining meetings, incentives, conferences, and events, is evaluated as a solution to revitalise the domestic tourism market.*

Many tourism establishments and some destinations in Vietnam are also implementing promotional campaigns as well as policies to attract new partners and guests for the local MICE segment.

Vietnam has emerged as a MICE tourism hub thanks to its advantages of

natural landscapes and many attractive destinations and accommodation

facilities that can facilitate many tourists, including some 5-star luxury resorts with beautiful beaches, suitable for events and teambuilding.

According to the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, the revenue from MICE tourism is about six times higher than from other types of tourism. Pre-pandemic, MICE tourists often have a 3-4 times longer stay than ordinary travellers and higher spending as well. On average, each European MICE tourist to Vietnam spends between \$700-1,000 per day, while Asian visitors spend more than \$400 per day. The number of MICE tourists coming to travel agencies were increasing from 10 per cent to 15 per cent per year up to 2019.

Dr. Nguyen Anh Tuan, director of the Institute for Tourism Development Research said, "Many international organisations predict that when all economic sectors are restored, MICE tourism will be one of the most developed tourism forms. Because companies, after a long period of inactivity due to the pandemic, will need to meet, exchange experiences, and promote investment."



Vietnam's MICE tourism expected to explode after COVID-19

MICE groups at this time with a scale of several tens of thousands of tourists will bring a great source of income and promise to open a brighter future for Vietnamese tourism.

Nguyen Duc Anh, chairman of Vietnam MICE Club under the Vietnam Tourism Association (VTA), said that the plus point of MICE tourism compared to many other types is that it is less seasonal and can be exploited continuously during the year.

"MICE tours depend on business programmes and activities, which can take

place continuously by month and quarter. In addition, for every event or conference held, there are additional tours for delegates," he said.

According to Do Van Thuc, business director of Dat Viet Tour, many businesses often organise tours in the early months of the year to launch new operations and projects, while the end-year tours are mostly meant for commendation. Most foreign businesses in Vietnam also associate MICE tourism with team building to tighten internal solidarity and motivate and convey corporate culture.

Although the tourism industry is still facing difficulties as it cannot welcome international visitors, the potential of the MICE tourism market has stimulated local businesses to prepare new products and services for MICE guests.

Ngo Thi Nga, director of Postum Travel, said that in 2021, the company will build high-end service packages with comfortable resorts and private spaces to organise MICE tourism. However, programmes will be shorter and combined with online meetings.

Meanwhile, the members of the Vietnam MICE Club are also designing more activities and experiences to stimulate tourism demand, such as tourism organisation associated with sports activities such as jogging, cycling, rowing, and others.

### Seizing opportunities

Vu The Binh, deputy chairman of the VTA, said that MICE tourism has been serving large groups of tourists and requires high-quality services, so not all localities and accommodation establishments can meet the demand. "To develop this type of tourism, localities and business units need to have a strategic vision, invest in facilities, infrastructure, and upgrade services more professionally," Binh said.

Moreover, to stimulate MICE tourism, most travel and hotel businesses are offering incentives and discounts for these target groups. Some localities have also issued special policies to attract tourists.

Danang is a model city when it comes to piloting such policies. The city has supported a budget of VND300 billion (\$13 million) to attract 100 MICE delegations to visit in 2021.

The leaders of the Danang People's Committee will issue welcome and thank you letters, as well as arrange cars for groups of visitors.

### Plentiful options

A series of venues such as Ariyana, Furama, Naman Retreat, Sheraton Grand, and Grand Mercure Danang are also offering discounts and specials on facilities such as meeting rooms, accommodation rates, and free admission tickets, as well as transportation costs and reduced tour fees.

Some other localities with outstanding utility systems have gradually become favourite destinations selected by delegations.

In the north, Quang Ninh is considered a highlight of MICE tourism thanks to its heritage of Halong Bay and synchronous development of infrastructure with international-class resorts and hotels such as FLC Halong, Vinpearl Halong, Muong Thanh, Wyndham Halong, and Sun Group's Quang Hanh Onsen.

In the central region, besides the traditional MICE tourist centre of Danang, Nha Trang, many other localities such as Thanh Hoa, Quang Binh, and Quy Nhon are also becoming prominent destinations for events and exhibitions.

This breakthrough comes from the synchronous infrastructure system, the beautiful natural landscape, and the system of high-end hotels and resorts that meet the rigorous standards of MICE customers.

In the south, Phu Quoc is the meeting point of many delegations thanks to its pristine natural scenery and diverse services, especially after the development of high-end hotels and resorts with conference rooms accommodating 500-1000 people.

MICE tourism could thus be a great opportunity to help travel units get out of the difficulties and finally recover from the pandemic. However, for this type of tourism to develop professionally and attract many tourists, localities and businesses not only need to modernise accommodation facilities but also train their human resources to be capable of organising events professionally – especially as Vietnam aims to welcome

international tourists when the pandemic is globally under control.  
VietNamNet

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## Pandemic Stymies Travel Aspirations



Women in traditional outfits visit Sensoji temple in Tokyo on April 25, 2021, during the first day of a new Covid-19 state of emergency covering the Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto and Hyogo regions. (AFP photo)

*Volatility generated by Covid-19 means it is unlikely Thais and Japanese will be visiting each other's countries any time soon*

Thailand and Japan have had a strong bond in tourism exchange for years -- in 2019, 1.3 million Thais travelled to Japan and 1.8 million Japanese tourists visited Thailand -- but due to the volatility generated by the pandemic in both countries, there are good reasons to believe those good old days will not likely return within 2021.

Japan declared a third state of emergency from April 25-May 11 in Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto and Hyogo prefectures to deal with a fourth wave, while Thailand has imposed stricter controls with lockdown-like measures in many provinces, including Bangkok -- the epicentre of the third wave.

Chanyuth Sawetsuwan, director at the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) office in Osaka, said the Covid-19 situation in Japan has fluctuated over 2020. This was seen as one of the biggest obstacles for tourism as Japanese travellers are usually sensitive to health-related issues.

As Osaka reported a record number of new cases late April, that situation has definitely impacted upon the tourism sentiment among residents, not only for outbound travel but also for domestic travel in Japan.

"We monitored online activities across our digital channels and social networks and found that the data searching rate went down by 50% since the pandemic emerged in 2020," he said.

A survey from JTB tourism research & consulting revealed Thailand still ranked in the top five of desired destinations among Japanese people. And while 40% of respondents said they are ready to take a trip overseas, the volatile pandemic situation means people may change their mind at any time.

Meanwhile, Seksan Sripraiwan, director of the TAT's Tokyo office, said Japanese travellers' primary concern is safety when travelling.

It is also hard to reliably gauge tourism sentiment in Japan when the country's mass vaccination programme has moved





Tokyo tower, Japan's second-tallest structure at 332.9 metres. (Photo: AFP)



in the fourth quarter as the country is preparing for the world's biggest and most important sporting event, the Olympic Games 2020, which will take place in July 2021.

Moreover, the 49th general election of members of the House of Representatives is set to take place on or before Oct 22, 2021. It is unlikely the government will make any major decisions such as reopening borders to foreign visitors any time soon, as it may impact the whole country in the build-up to its major events.

"The virus spread in Japan currently is quite close to what Thailand is experiencing now with over 2,000 new cases daily. We have to monitor the situation closely," said Mr Onuma.

He said Japan should reopen borders for tourists when two crucial factors are ready.

The first priority is to wait until local cases are under control. Then it has to listen to the Japanese people on whether they agree with that plan.

"In Japan, the situation is not different from Thailand at all. We have both groups who agree to welcome tourists and those who are not comfortable with embracing foreigners as the fear of virus is still looming," he said. "However, in the long run, the Japanese government is still committed to the goal of achieving 60 million international travellers in 2030. This pandemic will just create a short-term impact for us, we hope," said Mr Onuma.

*Bangkok Post*

slowly with only 1 million of the country's population of 127 million having received complete doses of a vaccine. Moreover, younger generations, who are the target of Thai tourism, will be the last group to be administered with a jab at the end of 2021, underlining the challenge facing Thailand to win back this market as soon as the borders reopen.

"Thailand has committed to the reopening plan in Phuket this July, but to reach the Japanese market remains a challenge. The practical way to build up confidence among older people, the only group that has already been inoculated and may become potential customers, is to introduce a sealed-route to them. The two countries must manage direct flights from their cities to Phuket with a special immigration lane and clear pathway ensuring there won't be any risk exposure," he said.

One more obstacle lying within this market is vaccine certificates. While TAT has explored the opportunity for this travel tool, the Japanese government may not introduce this scheme to their people any time soon as long as the potential for discrimination against those who have not been vaccinated is a concern.

"The country also cares about equality. They're afraid that enacting that certificate will discriminate against those who haven't received a vaccination. As people in Japan also have a low level of confidence in Covid-19 vaccines, there is only a slim chance that vaccine passports will enable outbound trips to take place soon," said Mr Seksan.

#### THAIS MUST WAIT

When asking Thai people about the first destination that springs to mind, Japan always sits in top spot, particularly when compared with other short-haul destinations.

But, unfortunately, any hopes of returning to their beloved overseas destination are unlikely to be fulfilled within 2021 as Japan still does not have a reopening policy for the return of international tourists.

Moreover, with only 1.2% of Japan's population having received a vaccination, which is quite similar to the pace of vaccination in Thailand, international tourism in Japan will resume at full speed only once the country achieves herd immunity.

Eigo Onuma, executive director at Japan National Tourism Organization's Bangkok Office, said Japan's reopening plan is uncertain for many reasons. International tourists, including Thai travellers, may have to patiently wait for further announcements

## Turkey maintains 30M tourist goal, eyes June to resume arrivals

*By Reuters*

Turkey maintains its tourism goals for 2021 and hopes to allow tourist arrivals by June 1 amid decreasing COVID-19 cases due to the ongoing 17-day lockdown, Culture and Tourism Minister Mehmet Nuri Ersoy said on May 3, 2021.

The country's tourism sector faces another lost season after the worst rise in COVID-19 cases during the entire pandemic wiped out many early foreign bookings and prompted Russia, its top source of visitors, to halt flights and warn against travel this summer.

In a bid to cut infections and save the season, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in late April imposed a lockdown through mid-May in part, he said, so that European countries do not leave Turkey behind as they reopen beaches, restaurants and travel.

The foreign cash that tourists spend is critical to offset Turkey's heavy foreign debt, but revenues plunged 65% in 2020 when the pandemic first hit.

Ersoy told Reuters that 30 million foreigners could arrive this year, twice as many as last, if the lockdown succeeds in lowering daily COVID-19 cases to below 5,000 from near 30,000



The renowned Konyaaltı Beach of Antalya, southern Turkish city dubbed as the country's tourism capital, is seen empty during a 17-day lockdown to reduce COVID-19 cases, Antalya, Turkey, May 3, 2021. (AA Photo)

in recent days.

But travel agents, associations and hotels said they fear this year will be little better than last after the virus wave briefly ranked Turkey second globally in new cases just as the season kicked off, before it dropped back to fourth.

Some Turkish and Russian agents see a difficult few months until August, when they say the Mediterranean and Aegean hot spots and historic sites in Istanbul and elsewhere could fill up again. Much will depend on last-minute bookings, they said.

“The lockdown decision will probably not be able to save the season” because it was taken too late, said Cem Polatoğlu, general manager at Istanbul-based Andiamo Tour.

Even if the lockdown cuts daily coronavirus cases to below 5,000 by the end of May, as the government hopes, he said it takes time for countries to remove travel warnings “which means probably losing July too.”

Coronavirus cases topped 60,000 last month, leaving Turkey's top five tourist sources – Russia, Germany, Britain, Bulgaria and Iran – with travel warnings in place.

Ankara said Moscow's decision to halt most flights until June 1 blocked 500,000 tourists, compared to a total of 2.1 million Russians who came last year and some 6 million before the pandemic.

The flight ban could be extended, Deputy Prime Minister Tatiana Golikova said in late April Russian operators should not sell tours even after June 1 until authorities decide.

Yana Starostina, manager at Travelland agency in

Moscow, said clients still want to go to Turkey but added she expects it won't be possible until August.

Turkey's foreign and health ministers are set to visit Moscow on May 12 to discuss travel.

Mediterranean tourist hubs are trying to lock in bookings despite a shifting map of travel warnings, local restrictions and vaccine rollouts.

In late April, neighboring Greece lifted quarantine restrictions on more virus-free visitors, while Turkey will ditch virus test requirements for travelers from Britain, China, Ukraine and some others by mid-May.

Tourism accounts for some 12% of Turkey's economy and was the hardest hit sector in 2020, even though virus-related curbs had been lifted by June.

Turkey's current account deficit ballooned to \$37 billion (TL 306 billion) in 2020 when tourists brought in only \$12 billion, down from a record \$35 billion in 2019.

Though arrivals were down 54% year-on-year in the first quarter, Ersoy said a sharp drop in coronavirus infections since April 21 was a hopeful sign that “drastic” lockdown measures were working.

“As of June 1, we will open the tourist season and if we can reduce the number of daily cases below 5,000, we maintain our target of 30 million tourists this year,” he told Reuters. That sounds optimistic to others.

Polatoğlu expects only 6 million arrivals this year and said roughly half of Turkey's 12,000 tour agents are already closed, many unable to repay government loans meant to ease pandemic fallout.

Bora Kök, sales manager at Bora Bora Boutique Hotel in Antalya on the Mediterranean, where tourism season usually starts in April, said the lockdown was overdue but welcome.

“If Russian tourists do not come, there will be serious bankruptcies and potential layoffs,” he said.

Erdoğan's government hopes the lockdown, a drive that has so far vaccinated 16% of the population, and a safe hotel certification program will propel last-minute bookings.

Aegean-based Peninsula Tours has had no more than 20 early reservations per day through March and April in its Dalaman region, compared to about 300 in 2020, said regional manager Ali Kirli. “Early booking has almost come to a halt.”

Turkish Hoteliers Federation (TÜROFED) Chairperson Sururi Çorabatır told Reuters: “We had hopes for 2021. But unfortunately the case numbers have not been at the desired levels.”

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